Liberal Beacon

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Before NAUA could truly exist, we needed two things, a website and a newsletter. A community that can't communicate, after all, is not really a community. That's why the words share the same root, *commune,* originally from a Latin word meaning "to impart" or "to share." Communities communicate. Communication is community.

We received our official Articles of Incorporation on February 17, 2023, but our real beginning was a few weeks later in March, when our first website went online, followed by our first issue of *Liberal Beacon* in April, our two primary means of communicating with each other. Our Articles of Incorporation could have been framed and hung on a wall for months, but without the means for us to communicate, it would have been meaningless.

As a community of souls spread out across the world, these tools, as well as others, remain vital to our continued success because they allow us to connect with each other from our many corners of the Earth. For the volunteers involved in their routine maintenance and publication, it has been a labor of love, but a labor, nonetheless. Our intention is to someday have the resources to hire staff members to help manage these crucial responsibilities, but, for now, we volunteers will continue to do what's necessary to make the magic happen.

We are currently looking for a new Editor of *Liberal Beacon* who has the time, desire, and some experience with layout, design, and editing. The volunteer position includes working with our current Editorial Board and other contributors to help put together this bimonthly publication in a timely fashion. If you are interested, please let us know a bit about your interest, skills and background by emailing us at nauaedboard@gmail.com.

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy the many fascinating articles, regular features, and other offerings in Issue #9 of *Liberal Beacon*.

Todd F.Eklof
Guest Editor

Featured Articles

Moral Injury

What Happens When We Lose Our Way?

Candace Schmidt, Ph.D & Lynn Jinishian

Sometime back around 2005 I (Candace) happened to sit next to a young man in military garb who was on the same plane flight as me. During our conversation about his military service he shared, in a quiet and troubled voice, that he had done some things he was not proud of, things he never thought he would ever do. I could see the distress he felt and tried to find encouraging words to say as I continued listening. I didn't know it then, but what this young soldier was trying to describe was a moral injury. Moral injuries result from a severe disconnect between the moral principles people live by and the reality of what is happening or has happened, according to Elizabeth Svoboda, author of "What Makes a Hero?"

In a seminal paper by Litz et al., (2009), moral injuries are described as occurring in the follow-up of events that violate a person's moral or ethical code. Unlike post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that can develop after a trauma involving threat to life, morally injurious events do not necessarily include threats to life but instead violate one's deeply held beliefs and trust. These acts of transgression can create dissonance and internal conflict because they go against core beliefs about right and wrong and personal goodness. A person may have engaged in unethical actions during very stressful and constraining circumstances, or witnessed leaders or comrades/coworkers engage in unethical ways, that lead to feelings of shame, remorse and self-condemnation.

People from all walks of life can experience moral injury. Soldiers in wartime face risk for physical injury and death almost daily and can return home only to develop debilitating PTSD symptoms that prevent a healthy adjustment to civilian life. The concept of moral injury as a distinct syndrome from PTSD began to emerge over a decade ago to describe the anguish experienced by veterans who in wartime were confronted with events that challenged their basic sense of humanity. These experiences can include engaging in violent acts that are expected of soldiers as well as not acting to prevent harm to other soldiers or civilians. They may witness fellow soldiers perpetrate harm, witness the suffering of fellow human beings, and observe the consequences of violence and injustice in areas where they serve. Many returning veterans identify morally injurious experiences as the most traumatic out of all the myriad events soldiers are confronted with. These can include different kinds of betrayals by peers, leaders, trusted civilians, and oneself.

Witnessing or participating in violence that is disproportionate to the situation (acts of revenge, unnecessary destruction of civilian property) can challenge a soldier's sense of being a good person. Incidents involving harm or death to civilians, friendly fire incidents, and the inability to prevent harm and suffering can cause remorse and questions about one's basic sense of humanity. When a veteran is not able to integrate these realities into their global meaning system, or conversely adjust their core beliefs to the realities they faced, these discrepancies often result in depression, isolation, suicidality, a sense of betrayal, an inability to trust, and spiritual/existential issues.

Although exposure to morally injurious experiences and the moral injuries that followed were initially researched in military settings, moral injury is not limited by occupation. People working in many types of settings can confront events that can potentially compromise their core beliefs. Physicians, nurses, and other medical professionals faced difficult choices during the Covid pandemic as they grappled with a shortage of beds for patients, lack of personal protective equipment, and initially a lack of viable treatments for those hospitalized. Medical professionals often faced the need to abandon their own standard of care and having to watch people suffer and die without their families. Also disorienting were experiences of Covid patients coming into exam rooms unmasked and unvaccinated, with some becoming angry when they received their diagnoses.

Other occupations that carry a risk for morally injurious experiences include journalists covering events associated with human suffering such as wars, famines, shootings, and population dislocation. Police officers face situations daily involving people in distress as they deal with accidents, shootings, and violence. Teachers also can face very difficult situations as they try to meet the needs of their classes while also trying to support the needs of individual at-risk students. Social workers, educators and lawyers are additional professionals that often have to grapple with dire situations and struggle with guilt, anger, and a consuming feeling that they cannot forgive themselves or others.

According to Litz and his colleagues, not all potentially morally injurious events cause moral injury. For example, if a person kills someone who poses a serious threat, that person might feel totally justified in having done so, and not experience a moral injury at all. Moral injury tends to manifest when an individual's vision of the world as fundamentally fair and good is crushed when something that is done or witnessed destroys that vision.Treatments for moral injury include secular therapies such as

adaptive disclosure, which involves discussing and processing relevant memories and at the same time challenging dysfunctional thoughts and attributions related to the trauma. Various cognitive processing and cognitive behavioral therapies have been shown to be effective, as well as "healing through forgiveness" programs. Spiritual/religious treatments can be very helpful as often the moral values that have been transgressed are based on religious beliefs of the individual or the cultural environment in which the individual has been raised. Some therapists think that approaches that focus on acceptance, self-compassion and (if possible) making amends might be effective in helping relieve patients' depressive symptoms and help them recover a sense of meaning in their lives.

Ahhh yes…This makes such sense to me (Lynn). My goodness, it is beneficial to have friends with psychology expertise to describe a phenomenon that then helps us clarify our feelings related to events or experiences in our lives. Moral injury. Let's look more closely at this from the perspective of what many of us are attempting to cope with as Unitarian Universalism is morphing right before our eyes.

Rest assured I understand that witnessing fellow church members and some leaders in the UUA behaving unethically pales in comparison to the inhumanity and suffering witnessed in wars, shootings, or pandemics. Still, an assumption that trusted church leaders and friends, both local and at the national level, were moving through our world with shared cultural values and the capacity and interest to work through our differences with tolerance and respect has been proven false, leaving many UU's bewildered, frustrated, angry, sad, and yes…morally injured.

In her article entitled "Losing my Religion" (Liberal Beacon Issue #8, November/December 2023) author Judy Robbins shares the raw feelings associated with the changes we are seeing in Unitarian Universalism at the national level impacting our local congregations: "In the midst of heartbreak…." "An invaluable trust has been broken." "I am to submit to an external authority that presumably knows what's best." "Did I misplace my faith and trust….?" and "I am shaken to my core to watch my religion morph into an entity that I can no longer entrust with my faith."

In his essay "Different Responses to the Current State of Unitarian Universalism" (Liberal Beacon Issue #7, October 2023), Stephen Polmar likens these unwelcome changes in Unitarian Universalism to the dying process of our religion and the responses of individual UU's as navigating their way through the Five Stages of Grief from the work of Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross.

How does all of this apply to moral injury? I spent a lot of time and precious limited headspace in 2020 asking myself what the heck just happened when our splinter group left UUCS to begin their own local church. Though I found it difficult to understand why we could not live under one roof as people who quote repeatedly "We need not think alike to love alike"—I had no objection to people leaving to seek truth and meaning in their lives elsewhere if UUCS was not meeting that need.

The problems arose for me when several of those people with significant influence and/or *in elected leadership roles* (and quietly backed by the UUA) attempted to destroy the church, our reputation in the community, and the career and livelihood of our minister on their way out. The lyrics to Randy Vanwarmer's heartbreaking song still play in my head "You left in the rain without closing the door. I didn't stand in your way … You left me, just when I needed you most."

We were in crisis. We were in the midst of a pandemic. We needed guidance, transparency, truth, compassion, forgiveness, and courage from our leaders. We needed people brave enough to weather that storm and to remind us *who we are*. Instead, we got personal agendas and encouragement to drop our pledges until this small, vocal group was victorious in ousting Todd. We got secret meetings, false information about ministerial contracts, and a whole lotta labeling and name-calling. Letters and social media comments were written with such vitriol by people I used to call "friend," that I literally drove over to Rev. Eklof's home to ask him where on earth he was hiding the bodies! (I found them… Turns out they're all tucked safely in the basement—Charlie McCarthy, Avery Mann, Mickey Mouse, Eleonora Klunk, Professor Marty Pantz, everyone's favorite, Purple, and many others from his collection of puppets waiting their turn to join us on Sunday mornings for the Story for All Ages.)

What did we *not* get from our "leaders?" To this day there has never been an acknowledgement of any wrongdoing, no opportunity to reconcile our differences, and certainly no apologies. We received no response at all from the UUA to a written resolution stating our beliefs about the whole situation and signed by more than 200 of our members. This entire experience has fundamentally changed the way I view liberalism, leadership, governance, "expertise," authority, and most definitely to whom I will bestow the term role model.

Was I morally injured? Maybe. Are you? I don't know. What I do know is that all injuries take time to heal and that most do, especially when cared for properly. If I was morally injured, I can say with full confidence that being a part of building NAUA and striving to stay committed to a truly liberal religious home with fellow UUCS congregants has not only been healing, it's also been instrumental for me in becoming a better thinker, a better liberal, and a better human being. I'll close with two of my favorite Rev. Eklof quotes from recent sermons: "Let your values take you away from your religion before you let your religion take you away from your values." And, of course, "No one can take your principles away from you, except you."

The Other Voices of '63

Rev. Terry Cummings

About twelve years ago, during a hot and humid July, I had to travel to Memphis for my work.

There's a hotel in downtown Memphis, called the *Peabody Hotel*. It's famous for the ducks that live on its roof, who make an appearance in the hotel lobby twice a day to entertain tourists and guests.

A couple of blocks from the *Peabody* is the Mississippi river, which divides Tennessee from Arkansas. You can see the river from some of the rooms in the hotel. The river is very wide in Memphis, and you can barely make out what's on the other side with the naked eye.

One afternoon while I was on a break from my meetings, I decided to take a walk. My mind was focused on work, and so I was oblivious at the time to the significance of where I was.

I walked south from the hotel for about a half mile, maybe less. I came to a sign for the National Civil Rights Museum. Curious, I walked a couple more blocks until I encountered some very old automobiles, from the 1960s, right in front of me. They were parked in front of an old motel.

That was the moment I realized that this was the museum on the sign, the Lorraine Motel where Dr. King had been assassinated. I was looking up at the balcony where he was shot. Less than a mile from a mighty river that may have been the inspiration for King's borrowing the words of the prophet Amos about justice and righteousness flowing like water.

The museum was closed that day, and so I was almost alone on the street. It was very quiet. And it was a very powerful moment. I felt as though Dr. King and I were each in the presence of the other.

If he had lived, Martin Luthor King., Jr., would have turned 95 this past month. For eight years in a row, now, I have led a Sunday service that celebrated his life, to coincide with the federal holiday. I always include a reference in my sermon that weekend to Dr. King's famous *I have a dream* speech.

Dr. King delivered that speech at the 1963 *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom*. Although he stole the show that day, for good reason, there were other voices as well. This year, I decided to do some research about them and their stories, lest they be lost in the shadow of Dr. King.

In addition to the speeches on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on that hot August afternoon, there were musical performances by Joan Baez, Bob Dylan and Peter, Paul & Mary. Back in the day we used to call their music folk music, I guess to distinguish it from rock 'n roll. Theirs were the musical voices of protest, against the Vietnam War and against racial injustice. (I've been musing of late that we could use some 21st century folk songs as a salve for the current state of the world.)

The amazingly gifted and inspirational Gospel singer, Mahalia Jackson, also sang on that day. Someone once told me that she was standing near Dr. King and that halfway through she called out to him, "Martin, tell them about your dream."

The first speaker that day, however, was Daisy Bates, who filled in for the widow of murdered civil rights leader, Medgar Evers. Daisy Bates spoke as part of the March's tribute to black women who had fought for justice for African Americans. She had been an activist in the integration of the public schools in Little Rock, Arkansas in the late 1950s.

Then came John Lewis, at the time chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He had previously shared a draft of his speech with some of the other organizers,

who found it too inflammatory and provocative. They prevailed upon him to tone it down.

The official program also lists Walter Ruether, Chairman of the AFL-CIO, James Farmer, Director of the Congress of Racial Equality, Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, and several other speakers, including two prominent rabbis, on the list of speakers that day. There were also some Unitarian Universalist ministers and other UUs among the marchers that day.

Although her name wasn't listed on the official program, the other woman who got to address the marchers that day was Josephine Baker. She was the speaker immediately before Dr. King.

Not many people have heard of Josephine Baker nowadays, and even 60 years ago most people who were young back then didn't know who she was. But their parents did.

Josephine Baker was born into extreme poverty in St. Louis in 1906. For a time, she lived on the streets. She got married for the first time at 13, and again when she was 15.

In 1925 at the tender age of 19, she left the racial segregation of America behind and moved to France. It's hard to imagine how much courage that took, a young uneducated person, alone and with no money, heading across an ocean to a country where people spoke a different language. It speaks volumes about how hard her life in America must have been to decide to make that leap.

Josephine became a very popular and financially successful singer, dancer and movie star in France between the two world wars. She didn't experience any of the racial prejudice there that she had experienced at home. She became a naturalized French citizen.

In the late 1930s, as war with Hitler's Germany loomed, she was recruited as a spy by the French equivalent of the CIA. During the war she used her role as an entertainer who traveled throughout Europe to gather intelligence for the Americans, the British and the French resistance. She was later recognized as a war hero for her work. Her exploits as a spy are described in a recent excellent book by historian Damien Lewis entitled "*Agent Josephine*", which I highly recommend.

In addition to being a spy for the Allies, Josephine was relentless in her pursuit of racial justice. Back then the US military was segregated. After the Allied landings in North Africa in 1942 Josephine performed as a singer and dancer for the American troops, but only on condition that racial barriers were removed for her performances.

After the war, in the 1950s, Josephine toured the United States, always insisting that she perform in front of non-segregated audiences. On one occasion, she was successful in getting the City of Las Vegas to desegregate attendance at variety shows because of her refusal to perform before a segregated audience.

During her tours in the U.S., she, and her husband, who was white, were frequently refused rooms in hotels because she was black. She later became a staunch supporter of Dr. King and supported the civil rights movement in America from her home in France.

During her speech at the March On Washington, she said "You know, friends, that I do not lie to you when I tell you I have walked into the palaces of kings and queens and into the houses of presidents. And much more. But I could not walk into a hotel in America and get a cup of coffee, and that made me mad."

After Dr. King was assassinated in 1968, Coretta Scott King asked Josephine to be part of the leadership in the civil rights movement. By that time in her life, though, Josephine had adopted twelve children from different countries all over

the world. They lived with her and her husband in France, and she didn't want to be away from them.

After Dr King spoke, Bayard Rustin asked the marchers to voice their support for the demands that were going to be presented to President Kennedy that day.

Bayard Rustin does not get mentioned much these days, although he was the subject of a recent movie on Netflix entitled "*Rustin*", which was also excellent and is still available to watch at the time of writing.

Bayard was raised by his maternal grandparents just outside of Philadelphia. His family belonged to the AME church, but historically they were Quakers. Bayard's Quaker grandmother instilled in him the principle of non-violence that he practiced throughout his whole life. His grandparents were also leaders in the local chapter of the NAACP with connections to many of its national leaders. Bayard became acquainted with the likes of W.E.B. DuBois and others in his youth, and they made a profound impression on him.

He devoted his career to working for various organizations that promoted peace and racial justice, always espousing non-violence as the means to achieve the objective. Bayard was imprisoned for his refusal to be drafted during World War Two. In 1949 he was sentenced to work for 30 days on a chain gang in North Carolina for refusing to sit at the back of a bus.

Bayard had come out to his family as gay in his early 20s and had been accepted by them. But in 1953 he was arrested and imprisoned in California for public homosexual behavior, which was a crime back then. He already had a black mark on his reputation for his earlier support of communism in the 1930s.

His career in the peace movement took a nosedive after his conviction in California. From then on, his sexual orientation, which he had never hidden in private, was public and he faced resistance to his involvement in the civil rights movement because of it.

Sometime during the mid-1950s Bayard's path crossed with Dr. King's and he became a mentor to him for using non-violent resistance. Bayard was a devoted follower of Gandhi and helped King to formulate his strategy for using non-violent resistance to bring about social change. Bayard Rustin deserves some of the credit for Dr. King being awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1964.

Josephine Baker, John Lewis, Bayard Rustin, are just a few of the thousands of people who devoted much of their lives to the cause of civil rights in America. In so doing they helped to make the world better for everyone, not just people of color.

Just as we keep alive the memory of Dr. King, it is to be hoped that we can also continue to honor the other voices of the march on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963.

A Review of Thomas Sowell's *Social Justice Fallacies*

Bob Simoni

At age 93, Thomas Sowell is still going strong. He received his PhD in 1968 from the University of Chicago where he studied under Milton Friedman and has been a senior fellow at the Hoover Institute at Stanford since 1980. He is the author of more than 45 books on a variety of subjects including politics, economics, education and race, and has

been a syndicated columnist in more than 150 newspapers.

His latest book, *Social Justice Fallacies*, [Basic Books, 2023] is very timely and is similar in tone to James McWhorter's *Woke Racism*. It's relatively short in length, at 130 pages divided into 5 chapters, and has extensive end notes totaling 58 pages. In the first chapter entitled "Equal Chances Fallacies," he examines the reasons why unequal outcomes might be expected even in a society with equal opportunity, stating that "people from different backgrounds do not necessarily even want to do the same things, much less invest their time and energies into developing the same kinds of skills and talents." He uses the example of the National Hockey League where there are more players from Canada than from the US, even though most of the teams are in the US and there are 9 times more people in the US than in Canada. The preponderance of Canadian hockey players in the NHL is not proof of discrimination against American hockey players but can be easily explained by the preference of Canadians to start playing hockey at an early age.

The second chapter entitled "Racial Fallacies" is where his insistence of having factual data has the most impact and it's here that he denounces "the extent to which people who present empirical evidence counter to prevailing beliefs are met with ad hominem denunciations and efforts to suppress their evidence by means ranging from censorship to violence". Anyone who has spoken up against the current mindset in the UUA can certainly identify with that comment. One example he gives for the importance of having facts is two counties in eastern Kentucky where the population is more than 90% white and the average income is half that of the average white family and is several thousand less than that of the average black family. There are many reasons why different people are in poverty and they're not limited to the terms currently in vogue such as "white supremacy culture" and "legacy of slavery".

In his third chapter "Chess Pieces Fallacies", Sowell makes the point that people and policies are not like pieces on a chess board that can be easily moved around to achieve desired goals because pushback from drastic changes can lead to such resistance that any such effort fails. As he states "the exaltation of desirability and neglect of feasibility is today a major ingredient in the fundamental fallacies of the social justice vision." Reading this chapter made me think of the current push for reparations. While it may be desirable for some who stand to benefit from it, it is not likely to have enough support to be implementable.

His fourth chapter "Knowledge Fallacies" was my least favorite as he used it to rant against the elites he thinks caused some of the social problems we have in the country. As an example, he focused on Chief Justice Earl Warren in Supreme Court rulings like Miranda v. Arizona (1966) which led to the requirement to read the Miranda rights to all suspected criminals. He says that the homicide rate had been going down for 3 decades before the Supreme Court's creation of "sweeping new rights for criminals" and then homicide rate doubled from 1963 to 1973. I think there were a lot of other potential causes of this increase during that time period such as the unrest from civil rights and Vietnam war protests. For a usually astute observer, Sowell surprisingly doesn't seem to realize that he may be considered to be like one of the elites he is criticizing.

In the fifth and final chapter "Words, Deeds and Dangers", Sowell returns to his usual form. Here he discusses the dangers of false assumptions. As an example, he mentions those that say it's absurd that billionaires can exist in

this world when there is so much poverty, as if there is a finite amount of wealth in the world, and if someone makes $1 billion creating a company that invents a product like the iPhone that has sold in the billions, it results in impoverishing these billions. There are a lot of good quotes I could highlight in this chapter, but my favorite is one he used from his mentor Milton Friedman:

> A society that puts equality—in the sense of equality of outcomes – ahead of freedom will end up with neither equality nor freedom. The use of force to achieve equality will destroy freedom, and the force, introduced for good purposes, will end up in the hands of people who use it to promote their own interests.

To sum up, *Social Justice Fallacies* is well worth the read because the subject matter is so relevant to the issues currently causing so much friction in UU churches, and it will arm you with the facts you'll need to talk about them intelligently.

A Review of Francis Fukuyama's *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*

Candace Schmidt, PhD

In Francis Fukuyama's writings concerning the problems and future of democratic societies, he stated neither nationalism nor religion were about to disappear as forces in western democracies. In the 2018 book, "Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment," Fukuyama continues to explore themes of dignity, identity, and recognition. He delves into the history of and the current concept of identity and how it affects the politics of liberal democracies and totalitarian countries alike. The term "identity" is described as growing out of the differentiation between the outer world of social expectations and a person's authentic inner self; the outer world of rules and norms does not consider the worth and dignity of the individual. Historically, there has always been a disconnect between what many individuals value and what they are taught to value, but only in modern times has this inner self been elevated to something considered inherently worthy. As Fukuyama explains, "In many early cultures, dignity is attributed only to a few people, often warriors who are willing to risk their lives in battle. In other societies, dignity is an attribute of all human beings, based on their intrinsic worth as people with agency. And in other cases, dignity is due to one's membership in a larger group of shared memory and experience."

The main thesis of "Identity" centers around the concept of *thymos,* which is described as human beings' desire and need for recognition from others. According to the author, *thymos* is the part of our psyche, our soul, that craves recognition of dignity. *Isothymia* is the need to be respected as equal to others, while *megalothymia* desires to be noted as being superior to others. Individuals can either feel respected or not, and entire countries can either feel respected or disrespected, the latter which has fueled aggressive nationalism in the past and in current times. Followers of certain religions can experience the sting of scorn and ridicule when their faiths and religious practices are denigrated. Because liberal democracies have not fully come to terms with the "problem of *thymos*" they continue to see factions promoting extreme nationalism and groups of people seeking recognition of their specialness and in some cases, their superiority over other groups.

Fukuyama states that *megalothymia* thrives on taking big risks, being exceptional, and involvement in monumental struggles, because all of these actions lead to the recognition of oneself as being superior to other people. "In some cases, it can lead to a heroic leader like a Lincoln or a Churchill or a Nelson Mandela. But in other cases, it can lead to tyrants like Caesar or Hitler or Mao who lead their societies into dictatorships and disasters." While *megalothymia* cannot ever be overcome, it can be channeled and moderated. Fukuyama suggests in a free-market economy there are plenty of outlets for *megalothymia*. A successful businessperson could become very wealthy while still contributing to his or her community; a person could create a personal brand that becomes an avenue for success; and one could excel in the arts or sports and go on to experience wealth and fame. However, threats to democracy can come from megalothymic leaders who stoke the resentments of ordinary citizens, who feel their way of life has been disrespected and left behind. The author states this scenario is the main problem of *thymos* in a liberal democracy.

The portion of this book, "Identity," that I found most fascinating was Fukuyama's tracing of the historical arc in Western countries, from medieval theology to current conceptions of individuality. He discusses Martin Luther's struggle with developing an idea of a religious self that was at odds with the Catholic church, which led to the Protestant reformation and the conception an inner self that was sinful but also capable of overcoming sin through faith and the moral choice to obey the laws of God. This one-dimensional view of a person's inner life was expanded upon by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who thought freedom was the natural and universal ability to experience life "free of the layers of accumulated social conventions." For Immanuel Kant, dignity rested on the ability to base moral choices on abstract rules of reason; because persons are capable of making moral choices, they should be treated not as means to an end, but as ends in themselves. This thinking eventually led to the recognition not only of individuals' freedom to self-reflect about their inner selves, but also that this freedom should be enshrined in rights and law.

In the chapter "Expressive Individualism," Rousseau's ideas of what it means to be free are expanded upon. He thought the dignity of individuals rested not only on having the choice to follow moral rules, but also people should be free to share their authentic selves with the world by fully expressing their feelings and emotions. The question then arose of whether people should be able to create their own rules, leading to a widespread sense of confusion in society. By the early nineteenth century, according to Fukuyama, it was apparent there were two ways of thinking about human dignity. One embraced the universal recognition of individual rights, while the other spoke to a collective identity, typically seen in nationalist movements and politicized religion.

Thus, the seeds of modern identity politics were sown, from the sense that the particular group one belongs to is deserving of recognition and respect. Instead of an emphasis on the recognition of the universal dignity and worth of every person, enshrined today in the constitutions of many liberal democracies, the focus became centered on "the recognition of the dignity of particular peoples who had been oppressed or held in bondage by others." Fukuyama goes on to say identity politics in liberal democracies started to converge with the collective and illiberal conceptions of identity, since individuals frequently wanted not recognition of their own individuality, but rather recognition of the group they belonged to and felt an association with.

Fukuyama states that various marginalized groups had a choice of viewing themselves in

broader or narrower identity terms. “It could demand that society treat its members identically to the way that the dominant groups in society were treated, or it could assert a separate identity for its members and demand respect for them as different from mainstream society. Over time, the latter strategy tended to win out.” While the author says there is nothing wrong with identity politics as such, being a natural response to injustice, he argues that for some progressives it has become “a cheap substitute for serious thinking about how to reverse the thirty-year trend in most liberal democracies toward greater socioeconomic inequality.” Another problem is that it has shifted the focus away from older and larger groups (e.g. the white working class) whose serious problems have fallen out of consideration. In addition, the preoccupation with identity has run up against the need for thoughtful conversation and deliberation. In doing so, free speech is threatened as various groups can claim to be harmed by the free exchange of ideas necessary to a liberal democracy.

Even though societies such the United States and Canada have diverse populations, diversity cannot be the basis for identity by itself, otherwise it would be like saying a nation’s identity is to have no identity. The solution, Fukuyama advocates, is to define a larger and more integrative national identity that acknowledges the diversity of its population. While there will always be different ways for citizens to define their personal identities, the author believes we can redirect the prevailing thought back to broader forms of mutual respect for dignity, with recognition and respect for all groups of peoples, that will allow liberal democracy to flourish. People can be encouraged to think about identity not only as a particular quality or experience one has in common with others, but also as a sense of responsibility to the larger whole. Promoting the ideals of rule of law, human equality, and responsible citizenship would hopefully ease some of the fragmentation that societies have experienced in recent decades.

NAUA Circles

Introducing a Fresh Approach of Interacting with Fellow NAUA Members

Many among us are seeking fellowship and friendship and we hope our new Circles program can help. Beginning this month, NAUA members can connect through web conference and even in person if their locations permit, by meeting with a small group of others on a regular basis.

Our first conversational Circles are scheduled for the first and third Tuesdays at 4 pm PST, as well as the first and third Saturdays at 11 am PST. Each CIRCLE will consist of approximately twelve members and develop its own activities and ways of connecting. The initial round of meetings will continue for six months. If successful, the program will expand over time.

Since these circles consists of small groups, they are dependent upon some commitment from participants to regularly attend, and are, thus, different from the casual "drop in" nature of other gatherings.

If you'd like to participate, please email us at circles@naunitarians.org. Let us know a little about your why your interested and if you prefer a Tuesday or Saturday circle, and we will promptly reply with your Zoom access link.

NAUA Treasurer's Report

Lynn Jinishian

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the establishment of NAUA, I'm pleased to present an overview of our financial journey in this inaugural Treasurer's report. First, speaking on behalf of the entire provisional Board of Trustees, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of our generous donors. Your financial support has been instrumental in laying the foundation for our endeavors and a source of motivation to keep forging a path forward to fulfill our mission: fostering the principles of individual freedom, moral integrity, human dignity, reason, and tolerance; to respect freedom of conscience for all individuals; and to maintain a supportive presence to all who cherish the rich heritage of Unitarianism's emphasis on the inherent worth and dignity of all peoples.

The need for this organization became evident following Rev. Eklof's announcement from the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane pulpit in December 2022 about the intention to establish NAUA. You got ahead of us! And in response to the announcement, a surge of donations flooded in, totaling more than $6,000 in contributions, both large and small. It quickly became necessary for these funds to be temporarily held in trust by UUCS until NAUA could complete the necessary documentation to establish itself as a non-profit organization and officially open its own bank account.

Our inaugural budget, encompassing financial planning, resource allocation, and priority setting, lies ahead and will involve input and approval from our members. Currently, the provisional Board of Trustees is dedicated to transparency and accountability in managing the resources entrusted to us. Every expenditure is discussed and approved in a Board meeting before payments are made. Here is a summary of contributions and expenditures during the initial setup phase of our organization:

To date we have received almost $51,000 dollars in donations. Our expenditures are all related to necessary outside technology expertise or legal/business costs related to establishing a non-profit organization. Board members, guest speakers in the Academy, Liberal Beacon editors and contributors, as well as Ministers who have delivered sermons for our monthly worship services have all generously volunteered time, talents, and their own financial contributions.

EXPENDITURES:

Web Development, website hosting, and problem solving as needed (to date): $18,099.38

Legal fees (Mainly US Patent and Trademark filings, to date): $4,200.00

Church Mutual Insurance (annually): $674.04

YouTube Premium subscription (monthly; allows our Academy recordings to be shown without ads): $10.53

Your generosity has already made a significant impact helping in the development of NAUA. We invite you to continue your generous

support and to actively engage with and benefit from the diverse offerings NAUA provides. Whether participating in Academy events and Worship services, reading and promoting the *Liberal Beacon*, or contributing your unique talents in another way, your involvement enriches our community! We look forward to setting budgetary goals and priorities with you as we continue to grow. Together, we will shape a future for liberal religion where our shared values of freedom, reason, and tolerance can truly thrive.

How to Opt-Out of Contact Info Sharing

In our continuing efforts to help members connect with NAUA members in their local communities, we may provide your contact information to those who ask for legitimate NAUA purposes. If you do NOT want your contact information to be shared for such purposes, please send an email to info@naunitarians.org stating your wish to Opt Out of contact sharing.

Coming Up at a Glance

Feb 6 @ 4 PM PST | NAUA Tuesday Circle

Feb 7 @ 4:30 PM PST | Anything Goes

Feb 10 @ 10 AM PST | NAUA Saturday Circle

Feb 13 @ 4:30 PM PST | NAUA Academy

Feb 20 @ 4 PM PST | NAUA Tuesday Circle

Feb 22 @ 10 AM PST | Clergy Support Meeting

Feb 24 @ 10 AM PST | NAUA Saturday Circle

For information and updates about specific NAUA events please visit our website at www.naunitarian.org

Letters to the Editor

We welcome letters from our readers for potential publication in *Liberal Beacon*. Letters should address matters of interest to Unitarians and Universalists and other religious liberals, including current news and events.

Please email your submission no less than five business days before the end of the calendar month in order for publication in our next issue. Letters are shorter than opinion pieces and should be no more than 250 words. Form letters and letters considered libelous, obscene or in bad taste will not be printed. Anonymous letters will not be printed. NAUA reserves the right to edit all letters for length. The decision to print any submission is completely at the discretion of the editors.

Please write "Letter to the Editor" in the subject line and email your submissions to nauaedboard@gmail.com or mail them to:

North American Unitarian Association
Letters to the Editor
4340 W. Whistalks Way
Spokane, WA 99224

Letters must include the writer's name, full address, and phone number for verification purposes. Only the name and town will be published.