

# Ethical Record

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Robert Ingersoll –  
"The Great Agnostic" see page 3

## EDITORIAL – NO VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA YET

Last week, the House of Lords, bolstered by its bench of bishops, once again defeated a member's bill to allow doctors to assist the terminally ill who wished to end their lives to do so.

The usual arguments were aired – palliative care would solve the problem; the 'vulnerable' would 'feel a duty to cease being a burden'. Anecdotes flowed in all directions.

A significant fact to emerge was that there are numerous occasions where doctors prescribe a dose *they* know will cause death, without their having the

currently *illegal* chance to consult the patient beforehand. Thus non-voluntary euthanasia is today's practice.

When will the Establishment have the courage to enact the non-patronising solution – that when one's demise is imminent, one should be accorded the power to determine its nature and timing? This fundamental need must trump all others.

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## SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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### New Members

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Dr Michael Irwin – Cranleigh, Surrey; Chris Purnell – Orpington, Kent;

Andrew Stavri – Harlesden, London

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### RETIREMENT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY, MARINA INGHAM

On 9 May SPES bade *au revoir* to its long-serving Administrative Secretary after over nine years service. Can SPES survive without her? we hear you ask. Yes, but SPES will not be the same. No dull administrator this; commitment to the welfare of the Society and its members dominated her thoughts (says MI). Prepared to tackle anything and anyone, she *was* SPES for many people (she says).

“Will there be another *A La Recherche* to recall life at the top, the trials and triumphs, the saints and the sinners, for all human life found its way into my Admin. office, some just to see the person behind the voice on the phone?”

SPES's loss will be other people's gain; somewhere, across the channel, for Marina has gone continental for four months. The Trustees and members of the Ethical Society wish Marina every happiness in her retirement.

### SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Reg. Charity No. 251396

Founded in 1793, the Society is a progressive movement whose aims are:

- the study and dissemination of ethical principles based on humanism,
- the cultivation of a rational and humane way of life, and
- the advancement of research and education in relevant fields.

We invite to membership those who reject supernatural creeds and are in sympathy with our aims. At Conway Hall the programme includes Sunday lectures, discussions, evening courses and the renowned South Place Sunday Concerts of chamber music. The Society maintains a Humanist Reference Library. The Society's journal, *Ethical Record*, is issued ten times a year. Funerals and Memorial meetings may be arranged.

The annual subscription is £18 (£12 if a full-time student, unwaged or over 65).

# ROBERT INGERSOLL – IDEAS AND IDEALS

Robert Stovold

*Lecture to the Ethical Society, 5 March 2005*

Robert Ingersoll was an American politician. Known also as “The Great Agnostic”, he popularized the higher criticism of the Bible, a humanistic philosophy and scientific rationalism. He is well known in the States, and was one of the best orators the country has produced. In this country, he is known primarily through his freethought writings. Freethinkers are those who form opinions on the basis of reason, independently of authority. Ingersoll published literally hundreds of talks, and what follows is based on the few that I have read. Although he was born in 1833 and died in 1899, most of his thinking remains very relevant today.

Ingersoll was adept at expressing profound truths in a clear, yet poetic manner, and also had a humorous approach to life. “No man with a sense of humour ever founded a religion”, he observed. “I believe in the medicine of mirth, and in what I shall call the longevity of laughter”. His opponents may not have believed in it, but they were made to swallow the medicine all the same.

Robert Ingersoll’s early experiences of the Christian religion will probably ring bells with many:

**When I was a boy, Sunday was considered altogether too holy to be happy in.... The minister asked us if we knew that we all deserved to go to hell, and we all answered, ‘Yes.’ Then we were asked if we would be willing to go to hell if it was God’s will, and every little liar shouted, ‘Yes.’.....**

Ingersoll worked as a teacher. He was a great believer in education, but not in traditional teaching methods. He had little formal education himself, and wryly observed, “For the most part, colleges are places where pebbles are polished and diamonds are dimmed”. “It is a thousand times better to have common sense without education than to have education without common sense”. His unorthodox views on religion were probed by a curious adult, and Ingersoll’s reply was to earn him the sack. “What do you think of baptism, Mr. Ingersoll?” “With soap, baptism is a good thing”.

## **Real Blasphemy**

Ingersoll went on to become a lawyer, and, in the state of Illinois, won 99% of his cases. In the United States, he became the most famous lawyer of his day. When a man called C.B.Reynolds stood trial for blasphemy, Ingersoll gave his own thought-provoking definitions of the term. With the ill-conceived religious hatred law only narrowly defeated, these words are as relevant now as they ever were:

**What is real blasphemy? To enslave the minds of men, to put manacles on the mind; that is blasphemy. To deny what you believe to be true, to admit to be true what you believe to be a lie; that is blasphemy. To strike the weak and unprotected, in order that you may gain the applause of the ignorant and superstitious mob; that is blasphemy. To persecute the intelligent few at the command of the ignorant many; that is blasphemy. To forge chains, to build dungeons, for your honest fellow-men; that is**

blasphemy. To pollute the souls of children with the dogma of eternal pain; that is blasphemy. To violate your conscience, that is blasphemy. The jury that gives an unjust verdict, and the judge who pronounces an unjust sentence, are blasphemers. The man who bows to public opinion and against his honest conviction, is a blasphemer.

I deny the right of any man, of any number of men, of any Church, of any State, to put a padlock on the lips – to make the tongue a convict. I passionately deny the right of the Herod of authority to kill the children of the brain....

For thousands of years, people have been trying to force other people to think their way. Did they succeed? No. Will they succeed? No. Why? Because brute force is no argument. You can stand with the lash over a man, or you can stand by the prison door, or beneath the gallows, or by the stake.... And so the man recants. Is he convinced? Not at all. Have you produced a new argument? Not the slightest. And yet the ignorant bigots of this world have been trying for thousands of years to rule the minds of men by brute force....

Suppose we put Mr. Reynolds in gaol. The argument has not been sent to gaol. That is still doing the rounds, free as the winds. Suppose you kept him at hard labour for a year; all the time that he is there, hundreds and thousands of people will be reading some account, or some fragment of this trial. There is the trouble. If you could only imprison an argument, then intellectual tyranny might succeed. If you could only take an argument, and put a striped suit of clothes upon it; if you could only take a good, splendid, shining fact, and lock it up in some dungeon of ignorance so that its light would never again enter the mind of man, then you might succeed in stopping human progress.....

In spite of his eloquence, Ingersoll lost the case. It was, after all, primarily about whether the blasphemy law had been broken, and not about whether the blasphemy law was a good one. There were few blasphemy trials after that one, however, and Ingersoll is generally reckoned to have discredited the blasphemy law. Reynolds was ordered to pay a \$25 fine and \$50 costs, but it was Reynolds who had the last laugh. Ingersoll paid the money for him, and \$75 hardly broke the bank. Ingersoll's law practice and lecturing earned him a large income – he could receive as much as \$3,500 for a single evening's performance. He gave most of his money away, observing, "Few rich men own their property; their property owns them".

Robert Ingersoll was a Republican politician. He was an effective party spokesman in presidential campaigns, but his unorthodox views on religion deterred Republican administrations from appointing him to the Cabinet, or to the diplomatic posts that he desired. When it was suggested that he would have done better had he concealed his agnosticism, Ingersoll replied, "He who dishonours himself [by lying about his opinions] for the sake of being honoured by others will find that two mistakes have been made - one by himself, and the other, by the people."

Ingersoll was a happily married man, and his writings frequently emphasized the importance of family life.

**You cannot show real respect to your parents by perpetuating their**

errors.... Do you consider that the inventor of a steel plough cast a slur upon his father who scratched the ground with a wooden one? I do not consider that an invention by the son is a slander upon the father; I regard each invention simply as an improvement; and every father should be exceedingly proud of an ingenious son.

I do not believe that it is showing real respect to our parents to believe something simply because they did. Every good father and every good mother wish their children to find out more than they knew. Every good father wants his son to overcome some obstacle that he could not grapple with, and if you wish to reflect credit on your father and mother, do it by accomplishing more than they did, because you live in a better time.

### Rome Or Reason

In his *Rome or Reason*, Ingersoll responded to many claims made for the Catholic Church, including the claim that the Church was responsible for creating the "purity and peace of domestic life".

The Church degraded woman - made her the property of the husband, and trampled her beneath its brutal feet. The 'fathers' denounced woman as a perpetual temptation, as the cause of all evil. The Church worshipped a God who had upheld polygamy, and had pronounced his curse on woman, and had declared that she should be the serf of the husband. This church followed the teachings of St. Paul. It taught the uncleanness of marriage, and insisted that all children were conceived in sin. This church pretended to have been founded by one who offered a reward in this world, and eternal joy in the next, to husbands who would forsake their wives and children and follow him. Did this tend to the elevation of woman? Did this detestable doctrine 'create the purity and peace of domestic life?' Is it true that a monk is purer than a good and noble father - that a nun is holier than a loving mother?

....The good man is useful, the best man is the most useful. Those who fill the nights with barren prayers and holy hunger torture themselves for their own good, and not for the benefit of others. They are earning eternal glory for themselves - they do not fast for their fellow-men - their selfishness is only equalled by their foolishness. Compare the monk in his selfish cell, counting beads and saying prayers for the purpose of saving his barren soul, with a husband and father sitting by his fireside with wife and children. Compare the nun with the mother and her babe.

### Religion In Society

As an atheist today, I go to Alpha Courses and argue with Christians, and invite unsuspecting Jehovah's Witnesses in off the doorstep for a cup of tea. I'm often asked why I bother to talk to believers, and Ingersoll gave an answer that struck a few chords:

Now and then, someone asks me why I am endeavouring to interfere with the religious faith of others, and why I try to take from the world the consolation naturally arising from a belief in eternal fire. And I answer, I want to do what little I can to make my country truly free. I want to broaden the intellectual horizon of our people. I want it so that we can differ upon all those questions, and yet grasp each other's hands in genuine friendship. I want in the first place to free the clergy. I am a

great friend of theirs, but they don't seem to have found it out generally. I want it so that every minister will be not a parrot, not an owl sitting upon the limb of the tree of knowledge and hooting the hoots that have been hooted for eighteen hundred years. But I want it so that each one can be an investigator, a thinker; and I want to make his congregation grand enough so that they will not only allow him to think, but will demand that he shall think, and give to them the honest truth of his thought.

I want to free the schools of our country. I want it so that when a professor in a college finds some fact inconsistent with Moses, he will not hide the fact. I wish to see an eternal divorce and separation between church and schools. The common school is the bread of life, but there should be nothing taught except what somebody knows; and anything else should not be maintained by a system of general taxation. I want its professors so that they will tell everything they find; that they will be free to investigate in every direction, and will not be trammelled by the superstitions of our day. What has religion to do with facts? Nothing. Is there any such thing as Methodist mathematics, Presbyterian botany, Catholic astronomy or Baptist biology? What has any form of superstition or religion to do with a fact or with any science? Nothing but to hinder, delay or embarrass. I want, then, to free the schools; and I want to free the politicians, so that a man will not have to pretend he is a Methodist, or his wife a Baptist, or his grandmother a Catholic; so that he can go through a campaign, and when he gets through will find none of the dust of hypocrisy on his knees.

We are satisfied that there can be but little liberty on earth while men worship a tyrant in heaven.

Honest investigation is utterly impossible within the pale of any church, for the reason that if you think the church is right you will not investigate, and if you think it wrong, the church will investigate you.

### **Agnosticism And Atheism**

Ingersoll, "The Great Agnostic", described his views in the following way:

Standing in the presence of the Unknown, all have the same right to think, and all are equally interested in the great questions of origin and destiny. All I claim, all I plead for, is liberty. Liberty of thought and expression. That is all. I do not pretend to tell what is absolutely true, but what I think is true. I do not pretend to tell all the truth.

The agnostic does not simply say, 'I do not know.' He goes another step, and he says, with great emphasis, that *you* do not know. He insists that you are trading on the ignorance of others, and on the fear of others. He is not satisfied with saying that you do not know - he *demonstrates* that you do not know, and he drives you from the field of fact - he drives you from the realm of reason - he drives you from the light, into the darkness of conjecture - into the world of dreams and shadows, and he compels you to say, at last, that your faith has no foundation in fact.

The distinction between agnosticism and atheism can come down to a difference between "You don't know that God exists" and "It's not reasonable to

suppose that God does exist". The two philosophies overlap. Ingersoll's brand of agnosticism seems also to have been a form of atheism, as he said,

To me, it seems easy to account for these ideas concerning gods and devils. They are a perfectly natural production. Man has created them all, and under the same circumstances would create them again. Man has not only created all these gods, but he has created them out of the materials by which he has been surrounded. Generally he has modelled them after himself, and has given them hands, heads, feet, eyes, ears, and organs of speech. Each nation made its gods and devils speak its language not only, but put in their mouths the same mistakes in history, geography, astronomy, and in all matters of fact, generally made by the people. No god was ever in advance of the nation that created him.

Few nations have been so poor as to have but one god. Gods were made so easily, and the raw material cost so little, that generally the god market was fairly glutted and heaven crammed with these phantoms.

A few years ago the Deists denied the inspiration of the Bible on account of its cruelty. At the same time they worshipped what they were pleased to call the God of Nature. Now we are convinced that Nature is as cruel as the Bible; so that, if the God of Nature did not write the Bible, this God at least has caused earthquakes and pestilence and famine, and this God has allowed millions of his children to destroy one another. So that now we have arrived at the question – not as to whether the Bible is inspired and not as to whether Jehovah is the real God, but whether there is a God or not.

A being who has the power to prevent it and yet allows thousands and millions of his children to starve, who devours them with earthquakes, who allows whole nations to be enslaved, cannot -- in my judgment -- be implicitly depended upon to do justice in another world.

They tell us now that all is good; that evil is but blessing in disguise, that pain makes strong and virtuous men – makes character - while pleasure enfeebles and degrades. If this be so, the souls in hell should grow to greatness, while those in heaven should shrink and shrivel.

There are in nature neither rewards nor punishments, there are consequences.

With regards to the commandment that we should love God, Ingersoll asked:

Can it be our duty to love anybody? It is our duty to act justly, honestly, but it cannot be our duty to love. We cannot be under obligation to admire a painting - to be charmed with a poem - or thrilled with music. Admiration cannot be controlled. Taste and love are not the servants of the will. Love is, and must be free. It rises from the heart like perfume from a flower.

### **The Conflict Between Religion And Science**

Robert Ingersoll's consistent use of scientific rationalism put him on a collision course with religion. He explained the difference between the two ways of thinking:

The instant we admit that a book is too sacred to be doubted, or even reasoned about, we are mental serfs. It is infinitely absurd to suppose that a god would address a communication to intelligent beings, and yet make it a crime, to be punished in eternal flames, for them to use their intelligence for the purpose of understanding his communication. If we have the right to use our reason, we certainly have the right to act in accordance with it, and no god can have the right to punish us for such action.

The doctrine that future happiness depends upon belief is monstrous. It is the infamy of infamies. The notion that faith in Christ is to be rewarded by an eternity of bliss, while a dependence upon reason, observation and experience merits everlasting pain, is too absurd for refutation, and can be relieved only by that unhappy mixture of insanity and ignorance, called "faith".

The Church still faithfully guards the dangerous tree of knowledge, and has exerted in all ages her utmost power to keep mankind from eating the fruit thereof. The priests have never ceased repeating the old falsehood and the old threat: "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." From every pulpit comes the same cry, born of the same fear: "Lest they eat and become as gods, knowing good and evil." For this reason, religion hates science, faith detests reason, theology is the sworn enemy of philosophy, and the church with its flaming sword still guards the hated tree, and like its supposed founder, curses to the lowest depths the brave thinkers who eat and become as gods.

As long as every question is answered by the word "God," scientific inquiry is simply impossible.

### The Gift Of Reason

The man who invented the telescope found out more about heaven than the closed eyes of prayer ever discovered.

The ministers who are answering me are turning their guns in the wrong direction. These reverend gentlemen should attack the astronomers. They should malign and vilify Kepler, Copernicus, Newton, Herschel and Laplace. These men were the real destroyers of the sacred story. Then, after having disposed of them, they can wage a war against the stars, and against Jehovah himself for having furnished evidence against the truthfulness of his book.

You know the watch argument was Paley's greatest effort. A man finds a watch and it is so wonderful that he concludes that it must have had a maker. He finds the maker, and he is so much more wonderful than the watch that he says he must have had a maker. Then he finds God, the maker of the man, and he is so much more wonderful than the man that he could not have had a maker. This is what the lawyers call a departure in pleading. According to Paley there can be no design without a designer - but there can be a designer without a design. The wonder of the watch suggested the watchmaker, and the wonder of the watchmaker, suggested the creator, and the wonder of the creator demonstrated that he was not created - but was uncaused and eternal.

I read Paley's *Evidences* and found that the evidence of ingenuity in

producing the evil, in contriving the hurtful, was at least equal to the evidence tending to show the use of intelligence in the creation of what we call good.

This century will be called Darwin's century. He was one of the greatest men who ever touched this globe. He has explained more of the phenomena of life than all of the religious teachers. Write the name of Charles Darwin on the one hand and the name of every theologian who ever lived on the other, and from that name has come more light to the world than from all of those. His doctrine of evolution, his doctrine of the survival of the fittest, his doctrine of the origin of species, has removed in every thinking mind the last vestige of orthodox Christianity. He has not only stated, but he has demonstrated, that the inspired writer knew nothing of this world, nothing of the origin of man, nothing of geology, nothing of astronomy, nothing of nature; that the Bible is a book written by ignorance - at the instigation of fear. Charles Darwin conquered the intellectual world, and his doctrines are now accepted facts.

A fact never went into partnership with a miracle. Truth scorns the assistance of wonders. A fact will fit every other fact in the universe, and that is how you can tell whether it is or is not a fact. A lie will not fit anything except another lie.

Robert Ingersoll had great admiration for science, referring to "Reason, observation, and experience; the holy trinity of science". But he was no intellectual snob. As you can deduce from this address to farmers, he believed that everyone could play a valuable role in society: I'll close now with a summary of Ingersoll's philosophy, in his own words:

**Happiness is the only good. The place to be happy is here. The time to be happy is now. The way to be happy is to make others so.**

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## **IF A LION COULD TALK, WE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND HIM**

**Richard Baron**

*Lecture to the Ethical Society, 4 December 2005*

Ludwig Wittgenstein was born in Vienna in 1889, and died in Cambridge in 1951. He had a varied career. He started by studying aeronautical engineering, but soon turned to philosophy. In the First World War he fought in the Austrian army, and while he was a prisoner of war he wrote the *Tractatus*. It is a short book that presents a ruthlessly logical view of the world. Then in the 1920s he gave up philosophy, because he thought that all philosophical problems had been solved. He worked as a schoolteacher and as a gardener. By 1929, he realised that life and the world were more subtle and complex than he had thought. He returned to Cambridge and to philosophy. At his death he left a large collection of material, which his colleagues assembled into books.

## The Philosophical Investigations

The first book to appear was the *Philosophical Investigations*. This book contains the remark that if a lion could talk, we could not understand him (in part II, section xi). The book ranges over many topics. It is a collection of thoughts that help us to understand why language and the world can puzzle us, but it does not set out a complete theory. It lacks the clear structure and driving logic of the *Tractatus*.

In particular, when language puzzles us we need to look at how it is used. Wittgenstein wrote about language games, meaning the ways in which we use language. For example, we can use language to tell stories or to give orders. We cannot understand what is being said unless we know this context. Speaking is part of a way of life, not something detached from life. Therefore in order to understand speakers, we need to have a way of life in common with them. Someone from a community which had no practice of storytelling would simply not understand what was going on if he heard a mother say to her children "Once upon a time".

Wittgenstein claims that we understand an unknown language by reference to the common behaviour of mankind (*Philosophical Investigations*, part I, paragraph 206). This seems to be right. For example, any human language is likely to have ways of talking about eating, about the family and about giving advice. Because we are human we eat food, have families and give and receive advice. Therefore we can make sense of talk about such things. But if lions could talk, this common way of life would not be there. Lions do eat. They live in prides, which might be analogous to our families. But they probably do not give or receive advice. And they may do things that would be just as foreign to us as giving advice would be to them. This is why Wittgenstein thinks that we could not understand a talking lion. His point is not just about lions. We would face the same difficulty in trying to understand any rational beings with a way of life that was very different from our own.

However, we should not just accept this claim. We can ask whether it is true that we could not understand other rational beings. We can also ask precisely what differences might impede our understanding and how we might gain as much understanding as possible. I will explore these questions with the help of three different lions.

### The Basic Lion

The basic lion can talk, but otherwise he has the mental talents that we could expect a real lion to have. He has a very straightforward consciousness, in which one event follows another. He has no sense of himself as an individual in the world, and he cannot think through alternatives so as to choose a plan. The basic lion can think "hungry – antelope – attack – eat", but not "I will feel hungrier later and the antelope will stay by the pool until sunset, so perhaps it would be better to come back and attack then".

One argument against Wittgenstein's claim is that if the lion said "Ludwig, I am going to eat you", Wittgenstein could easily understand what the lion meant, and would hope that the lion was joking. The basic lion could indeed say this, and Wittgenstein could understand him, but he could not be joking. He could say it because it would simply be a read-out of the processes in his brain before pouncing. Wittgenstein could understand him because those brain processes could be captured in simple concepts like pouncing and eating. We can have concepts

like those in common with lions, because they are defined entirely in terms of bodily actions. We can therefore understand those concepts without having any idea about the lion's inner thoughts or his view of the world. But the basic lion could not be joking. He would not have the intellectual sophistication to pretend to be planning an attack, while actually planning not to attack.

The fact that the basic lion's thought processes are very bland, and can be described using concepts that are defined in terms of bodily actions, means that we could understand him. But it also means that he would be very uninteresting. However, the price of making lions more interesting is that our chances of understanding them will fall.

### **The Enhanced Lion**

The enhanced lion has our mental capacities. He has a sense of himself as an individual in the world, he can consider alternatives and choose plans, and he has a sense that other beings are also individuals who make their own plans. This means that, just like us, he can have thoughts that are not spelt out in bodily actions. So there would be no guarantee that we could understand him.

If the enhanced lion threatened to eat Wittgenstein, he could be joking. He would be able to hold in his head the twin possibilities of eating and not eating. He might also see the situation from Wittgenstein's point of view, anticipating the relief that Wittgenstein would feel when he realised that the threat was only a joke. A lion like that, who was similar enough to us to realise what we would find funny, would be a counter-example to Wittgenstein's claim. We could understand such a lion.

However, the enhanced lion's sophistication could take him in a very different direction, making him impossible to understand. He could use his talents to build social structures and a personal view of the world that would be very different from ours. They could be so different that we could not understand what he was talking about. I cannot give examples that we would not understand, because I cannot describe the indescribable. But we can get some idea if we imagine that there has never been any religion in human society. Then a lion comes along and explains to us the Church of Lions, in which they all worship the God Leo and selected lions, the priests, formulate doctrine about this unseen god. If we had never come across religion in human society, we would not understand what the lion was telling us.

### **Understanding The Enhanced Lion**

We might or might not be able to understand the enhanced lion. How could we do as well as possible in making him comprehensible, without fooling ourselves into thinking that we understood when in fact we did not understand?

If the lion spoke a human language, over a long conversation, and it all made sense, we could be confident that we had understood him. But it is more likely that the lion would speak a strange language, which we would have to interpret from scratch. We would engage in radical interpretation, a concept formulated by the American philosopher Donald Davidson (1917 – 2003). The idea is to observe the sounds made by the lion, his actions and the surrounding circumstances and to make

sense of all of these things as a package. At the most basic level, if the lion always made a certain sound when there was an antelope around, but never when there was not, that sound would probably mean "antelope". We would however need to go a lot further than that, given the lion's intellectual sophistication. We would, for example, need to distinguish between his statements of fact, his expressions of desire and his commands.

The trouble with radical interpretation is that it is very hard to get started without some guidance. One piece of guidance is the principle of charity. This principle says that we should assume that speakers mostly tell the truth and get things right. However, it is not clear that we could safely apply this principle to lions, because what they counted as getting things right might be very different from what we thought was getting things right. For example, we think that an obvious thing to get right is to recognise the animals around, so we would look for a word that meant "antelope" and a different word that meant "wildebeest". Lions, on the other hand, might think that what you need to get right is the quantity of food. So they might use the same word for one wildebeest or two antelopes. Their word would not be a word for an animal at all. It would mean "a meal for six lions". If we usually observed lions with wildebeest, and only rarely observed them with antelopes, we could easily make the mistake of thinking that the word meant "one wildebeest".

Another piece of guidance in radical interpretation is the principle of humanity. This says that when trying to interpret an alien language, we should assume that the speakers are like us, so far as we can. We assume that they have the thoughts that we would have, if we lived like them, and then we look for speech to fit those thoughts. It really would be cheating to apply the principle of humanity to lions. We know that they are not like us. If we applied the principle, we would be at great risk of fooling ourselves into thinking that we had understood them, when we had not done so.

The fact is that we could never be quite certain that we had understood the enhanced lion. However, if what he said all made sense, and we had not cheated by using the principle of humanity, it would be fair to assume that we were getting it right.

### **The Radical Lion**

The radical lion is potentially the most interesting lion of all, but we will never understand him. He has the sophistication of the enhanced lion. He has the same brain-power as a lion who has a sense of himself and others as individuals, who can contemplate the world and who can choose plans. However, he does not use that brain-power in the same way. He has some other way of living, not thinking in terms of himself, other selves and the external world. I have no idea how he could do this. The idea of overturning the standard picture of ourselves as beings in the world is too radical for us to comprehend. But we cannot rule out the possibility of truly radical alternative points of view. At the end of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein wrote "What we cannot speak of, we must pass over in silence". So we must be silent about the radical lion.

**Note:** Richard Baron is an independent philosopher living in London. His website is at [www.rbphilo.com](http://www.rbphilo.com)

**WHEN ETHICISTS LED THE WAY:  
THE ETHICAL MOVEMENT AND THE FIRST UNIVERSAL RACES  
CONGRESS<sup>1</sup>**

**Leah Khaghani,  
University of Yale**

*Lecture to the Ethical Society, 19 February 2006*

I came to the South Place Ethical Society library in January 2006 to undertake research on my dissertation entitled, *Citizens of the World: Black Americans' and Middle Eastern Americans' Transnational Anti-Imperial Radicalism in the Twentieth Century*. The SPES's archive contained materials related to a chapter of my dissertation concerning the First Universal Races Congress held in London in 1911, an event that has been largely overlooked by historians of the period. In this piece, I trace the history and significance of the Races Congress, the central role of the Ethical Society in organizing the event (concentrating my discussion on the work of the Races Congress President, Felix Adler, and the Congress Secretary, Gustav Spiller) and the continuing relevance of the Congress to today's anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles.

Several questions have guided my research and frame the outline for my discussion here. What prompted the First Universal Races Congress and why is it worthy of analysis? Why did leaders from the Ethical Society Movement organize this event? Finally, given the lack of historiography on this event, did the Races Congress have any meaningful historical impact, or was it a moment whose potential was lost? My research is intended to encourage a rethinking of the history of anti-imperialism of the twentieth century through this rich and underappreciated historical moment.<sup>2</sup>

**The First Universal Races Congress**

The Races Congress took place over three days in late July 1911 to an audience of approximately 2,000 people. Held at the Imperial Institute, its stated goals – according to the published Congress papers sent to delegates in the weeks ahead of the event – were:

**to discuss, in light of science and the modern conscience, the general relations subsisting between the peoples of the West and those of the East, between so-called white and so-called coloured peoples, with a view to encouraging between them a fuller understanding, the most friendly feelings, and a heartier cooperation.<sup>3</sup>**

Some attendees and speakers of note who gathered at the Imperial Institute in 1911 included J.A. Hobson of the SPES, Jane Addams, African American scholar and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, American anthropologist Franz Boas, anti-imperial and anti-racist journalist Duse Mohamed Ali, as well as various other dignitaries and intellectuals from across the colonized and colonizing world. Over often heated discussion, Congress attendees heard and presented papers in a series of seven sessions covering issues that Congress organizers had determined were critical to producing solutions to problems facing the planet. Exploring the content of these sessions, with emphasis on the

presentations by leading Ethical Society members, provides us a clearer appreciation for Ethical Societies' involvement in the Races Congress, and underscores the continuing relevance of this historical event. The sessions were categorized as follows:

First Session, "Fundamental Considerations;"

Second and Third Session, "Conditions of Progress;"

Fourth Session, Part I, "Special Problems in Inter-Racial Economics;"

Fourth Session, Part II, "Peaceful Contact Between Civilizations;"

Fifth/Sixth Session, "The Modern Conscience in Relation to Racial Questions;"

Seventh Session, "Positive Suggestions for Promoting Inter-Racial Friendliness."

### **Gustav Spiller: No Fixed Racial Characteristics**

Gustav Spiller's paper entitled, "The Problems of Racial Equality," was included in the opening session of the Races Congress, alongside presentations on "The Meaning of Race, Tribe and Nation," and on the anthropological and sociological perspectives of race. As the Races Congress secretary and an important leader of the Ethical Society Movement in the United Kingdom (as well as in continental Europe), Spiller's paper conveys both his political and social motives for organizing the Congress as well as the broader goals of the event.

Spiller's paper focused primarily on racism and suggests social scientific and educational methods for addressing the problem. He writes:

**The deepest cause of race misunderstandings is perhaps the tacit assumption that the present characteristics of a race are the expression of fixed and permanent racial characteristics...If so, anthropologists, sociologist, and scientific thinkers as a class, could powerfully assist the movement for a juster appreciation of races by persistently pointing out in their lectures and in their works the fundamental fallacy involved in taking a static instead of a dynamic, a momentary instead of a historic, a local instead of a general, point of view of race characteristics...And such dynamic teaching could be conveniently introduced into schools, more especially in the geography and history lessons; also into colleges for the training of teachers, diplomats, colonial administrators, and missionaries.<sup>4</sup>**

Anti-racist comments such as these articulate both a global and local vision for the Congress. Spiller, Adler and others at the Races Congress saw the event as a hub where intellectuals and activists of some prominence who shared anti-racist and anti-imperialist views could come together and exchange ideas, and then put these ideas into practice in their respective locales. While the Races Congress was an important event in itself, Spiller and others planning the Congress saw it as the first in a series of such events that would encourage and produce a radically different vision of the world than the one they inhabited. Activists like Spiller and Adler were not dependent on national or imperial governments to effectuate their planetary vision. While public and colonial officials were key players in bringing forward this new world vision, for the radicals organizing (and many gathered at) the Races Congress,

this global change was not limited to state or colonial actors; it included them yes, but, as explained below, it both preceded and transcended them.

### **Felix Adler's New Vision For Humanity**

Felix Adler's paper, "The Fundamental Principle of Interracial Ethics, and Some Practical Applications of It" began the Fifth Session of the Congress. As with Spiller's work, Adler's paper warrants a deeper consideration. Adler began by noting:

**The first thought to be mentioned is the indispensableness of more explicit conceptions of the ideal to be realized in international relations. This Congress is devoted to the promotion of right international relations. Right relations are essentially ideal relations. The unethical conditions now prevailing between the different national and racial groups are due, in no small degree, to false ideals. False ideals can only be met and overcome by true ideals. But what are the true ideals? Looking forward to the future of humanity, what sort of relations between its different components should we consider unsatisfactory? This question, surely, cannot be evaded...<sup>5</sup>**

Here, Adler identifies a primary goal of this Congress as offering suggestions for how best to approach international relations and the "future of humanity" at the start of the twentieth century. These suggestions are steeped in ideals (what he terms "true" ideals) and promote ethical conditions – or a new vision for the world and for handling its diversity.

In considering this vision, Adler first questions whether a world parliament is the answer for fostering international progress. The formation of a world parliament was a paramount concern at the Race Congress, as numerous members of the newly formed Hague were in attendance, and many spoke extensively on how international law and an international court could better manage the "inter-racial problems" facing the planet. Yet, Adler refused to see the establishment of a world parliament alone as the path to resolving the myriad problems at the time. Adler notes:

**It is forgotten that no parliament ever yet existed which has learned to do justice even to the narrower set of interests confided to it; that no parliament has as yet been free from the taint of class legislation and favoritism. And whether a parliament having for its constituency all the populations of the earth would be a manageable institution, and whether, if it could be set to work, it would operate more equably for the benefit of all than the present national parliaments, is, at least, an open question.<sup>6</sup>**

While Adler was open to the idea of a world parliament, even if the world parliament were to be enacted in an equitable and just fashion, he believed such a body would only remain a means to a greater end. Adler spends the remainder of his essay expounding on his conception of this end, which ultimately represents a new vision for humanity, the planetary vision that lay behind the Race Congress itself. This was not simply a matter of practical steps or quick fixes; to Adler and other attendees, the Races Congress offered (and, today, represents) a truly universal anti-racist and anti-imperialist vision for the future of humanity.

### **Adler: The International Situation Is Full Of Menace**

When considering the historical moment in 1911, we see two recurring themes both in Adler's paper and throughout the Congress. Most apparent was an overwhelming sense of a looming global crisis (which was to become the First World War). Alongside this critical moment and the sense of urgency that fueled the grand plans and visions that the men and women carried with them to and from the Congress, however, stood a hope for the future, a sense of possibility at what could be accomplished if those gathered at the Congress – representing the farthest reaches of the world – acted both quickly, boldly and rightly. Adler continues:

**The international situation is full of menace and cause for the gravest anxiety. What are we coming to, with all these incessant warlike preparations, this strain upon the economic resources of the civilized nations, the new peril due to the closer approach – with all the possibilities of friction involved – of the Occidental and Oriental peoples? The human race has run into a kind of blind alley, from which, by merely going on as heretofore, there is no escape. It must in some fashion retrace its steps and proceed in a new direction. We have plunged into a kind of morass. Should it not be our first and exclusive concern, it is said – our next step – to try to extricate ourselves from this marsh; to put terra firma under our feet; in other words, by means of arbitration treaties, international courts, and the like, to secure peace?**

Adler's words rang true then with the industrial mass death of World War I on the horizon, just as they speak to the historical moment that we occupy in 2006. Further parallels can be drawn between Adler's subsequent assertion that "false ideals — false military ideals, false ideals of national prestige and of material aggrandizement" have brought us to this impasse.<sup>8</sup> He believed that the only way to change course was through "better and sounder ideals."<sup>9</sup> For Adler, the appeal to "peace" or "sympathy" alone did not go far enough in explicating these ideals or ends, as he identified them. Instead, Adler concludes with a call for entirely different type of operational discourse for governing society. This ideal principle "is that of the organization of humanity...the goal to be kept in view, the directive principle, is that of the progressive organization of the relations between peoples and racial groups."<sup>10</sup>

### **Adler: Imperialism Fostered Animosity & Brutality**

What did this progressive organization of the relations between people and racial groups look like? Adler and others at the First Universal Races Congress referred to this organization through the metaphor of a garden, explaining, "The garden of humanity should present the spectacle of flowers infinitely varied in hue and fragrance."<sup>11</sup> Just as a garden consists of various plants – not just one type – adding to the garden's beauty and enriching it through different but ultimately complementary ways, so too these thinkers conceived their own vision of the diversity of humanity. Adler recognized, however, that the racist and imperialist policies operating at the time were destroying this vision, fostering animosity, brutality, oppression and violence that would eventually erupt and engulf the planet. As Adler explains, "It has often been said that greed and lust of domination are the principal causes of strife among nations. But it is certain that conceit in regard to one's own type of culture is equally one of the great

contributing causes of war... whatever the cause, it is certain that pride of culture — i.e., of one's own specific culture, as superior to every other — is one of the chief elements of danger in the international situation."<sup>12</sup> Thus, Adler identifies how wrong ideals, as opposed to right ones, can unravel a society and threaten to destroy it, whereas a new vision that embodies a "progressive organization of the relations between peoples" can usher in a wholly new set of human relationships that can bring about a more just society for all, establishing a place where all people can potentially bloom in what he termed a "garden of humanity."

### Could World War I Have Been Averted?



*Felix Adler*

Looking back now, Adler may seem naïve for daring to imagine a different course and a better future for the planet. At this moment in 1911, however, the massive destruction of human life that we now know as World War I did not have to happen. In the moment when Adler spoke there was still time to set the world and humanity on a better path through the right ideals that Adler puts forth. Adler wrote these words from the space of hope and from the firm belief that the destructive course he saw the world taking could be changed if people across the planet joined together and set this new vision of humanity as their guide. Adler continues,

The thought I am aiming to express is that the give-and-take relations between the culture-types (and the more numerous and varied they are, the better) not only serves the purpose of enrichment, not only serves to prevent ossification and decay, but also serves to expose the weak points at which radical efforts at recuperation and improvement are requisites.

If humanity is ever to become a *corpus organicum spirituale* — and that is the aim — then a conception based on reciprocity of cultural influence, favourable to the greatest possible variety of types, and assuring to the different groups of mankind their integrity as distinct members, in order that they may make manifest the distinctive gifts with which Nature has endowed them, seems unavoidable.<sup>13</sup>

Adler, therefore, is not merely calling for diversity for the sake of some anthropological "preservation of culture," but because it is the only real way to create radical change and progress. Instead of focusing on the binary way of comparing and contrasting ourselves with the other (which is at the heart of "the clash of civilizations" notion of history), Adler embraces difference and sees this embrace as integral to a way of moving humanity toward a new vision of the world that was under attack both in that historical moment leading up to World War I and in our current moment of imperialism, racism and global crisis.

## **The Conclusion of the First Universal Races Congress**

As noted earlier, the “first” in the “First Universal Races Congress” indicated this event as a starting point, a beginning of what were to be a series of conversations and concrete actions to find a way to relate across the differences that mark us all. People possess different ideas, different political, religious and cultural traditions and different perspectives on life and their places in it. Therefore, the “universal” in the title of this Congress was not the same universal dominant, unyielding and full of a sense of superiority and condescension (and brutality) that was at the heart of the “universal” humanism championed by imperial powers then and now. One of the points that rendered the Races Congress unique among international conferences at the time was that organizers of the Congress actively sought not just “representations of difference” translated or presented by those hailing from the predominant white bourgeois male group in the past. Instead, the Races Congress sought representatives who lived and inhabited that difference. Rather than speaking for those deemed different yet from a place of sameness and superiority, as had conferences predating the Races Congress, the Congress sought to foment a dialogue through difference as a way to express a new understanding and a new appreciation of humanity that would not only avert a disastrous war, but institute a more just, inclusive and humane vision of a global society.

Delegates leaving the Races Congress did not see the closing of the event as an ending, but rather a beginning from which to institute a new vision of society. Accordingly, subsequent organizing meetings were held and Congresses planned first in 1913 in Honolulu, Hawaii. When that Congress did not materialize, the next Congress was planned for 1915 in Paris. Of course, the ensuing world war made such international “World Congresses,” as they were envisioned, impossible. So, the question remains: does the failure of these subsequent congresses to meet and the gradual withering away of the momentum to hold these world congresses, matched by the lack of historical knowledge of the Races Congress today, render this event and the vision surrounding it moot? Is the First Universal Races Congress nothing more today than an obscure historical event with little importance except to Ivory Tower academics and perhaps members of Ethical Societies interested in their organizational history?

## **The First Universal Races Congress’ Significance Today**

Briefly, I do not believe that the failure to hold subsequent conferences renders the First Universal Races Congress a meaningless and “failed” or “wasted” moment. Rather than focusing on the breaks and disjunctions that render struggles to effectuate a new vision for the world unique, as anti-imperialist and anti-racist historians and activists, we need to concentrate more of our energies on linkages and connections between struggles then and now, just as we must connect movements against oppression that are presently taking place in different regions of the world. Returning to the parallel between the historical moment of the Races Congress with today, both moments are marked by a sense of urgency and uncertainty with regard to the looming global crisis. Today, we too, have the option to divert our energies into shortsighted manoeuvres that concentrate attention only on a means of averting (or perhaps simply postponing) the difficult questions and concerns at hand. Such shortsightedness

marked attempts to resolve planetary problems after both World Wars, as the history of the failed League of Nations and now largely defunct United Nations attest. Alternatively, we can heed Adler's words and focus on an end – a new vision of the world that fosters a “progressive organization of humanity,” and seeks to appreciate rather than destroy the difference that we all embody.

For, while the subsequent congresses were never held, the vision that motivated organizers and attendees to join together in 1911 was sustained. That vision lives on in the tremendously influential body of work of W.E.B. Du Bois, in reams of anti-imperial articles and commentary held in archives across the First and Third Worlds, and in the writings of Felix Adler and Gustav Spiller. These individuals were not Pollyannas who viewed the world through rose-coloured spectacles. These individuals knew the extent of the brutality and oppression that lay at the heart of the imperial project. Activists gathered in London, writing, speaking and agitating for a new vision for organizing society, not because they were naïve, but because they were realists. Seeing the world as it was allowed them to see the world as it could be.

This vision is further sustained today through activists influenced by these ideals and perspectives on humanity, who continue to fight against the oppressive forces of imperialism, racism, classism and sexism that have plagued the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries. Thus, this vision did not end with the last delegate's departure from London at the end of July 1911, rather it remains an ongoing vision that fuels global resistance to the racist and sexist imperialist project, and reminds us again that “another world is possible” and the “world can't wait” so we must act now.<sup>14</sup>

Global crisis looms on the horizon from ongoing imperialism, racism, sexism, homophobia and classism to ecological catastrophes the likes of which this earth has never seen. In this time of urgency, let us remember and reconsider the hope and the potential that can co-exist in this moment and foster a new vision for a fuller understanding and appreciation of humanity across and through difference, rather than in spite of it.

## References

<sup>1</sup> This is a modified version of the talk I gave at the South Place Ethical Society on 19 February, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Jennifer Jeynes and Malcolm Rees for their tremendous assistance with my dissertation research and to South Place Ethical Society for inviting me to speak. I am especially indebted to the ideas expressed in Paul Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) which frames much of my thinking here.

<sup>3</sup> G. Spiller, ed., *Papers on Inter-racial Problems Communicated to the First Universal Races Congress held at the University of London, July 26-29, 1911* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1911), xiii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 261. <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 262. <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-64.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 264. <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 265. <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>14</sup> “Another World Is Possible” is a phrase that is championed by the World Social Forum, and has been taken up by a variety of activist groups and films that seek to build upon the tremendous energy to effectuate a new vision of the world that was nurtured then.

## JEAN VERONICA BAYLISS, 1929 – 2006



*Jean Bayliss*

Jean Bayliss, long time member of SPES, supporter of the Sunday Concerts, Secretary/Deputy Hall Manager in the 1980s and more recently member of the General Committee and Vice-Chairman, received a Humanist Funeral, followed by cremation, at Golders Green Crematorium on 21 April 2006. The Officiant was Barbara Smoker and she spoke in her tribute as a longstanding personal friend.

Jean was born in 1929 in Archway, North London to working class parents. She outlived her two older brothers and one older sister. Jean had no children of her own but enjoyed her nephews, nieces, great-nephews and great-nieces. John Lepper, Jean's nephew, attended the ceremony with his niece and great-niece and he spoke warmly about his aunt. He said Jean had suffered various medical ailments from childhood including a leg disability. John characterised Jean as strong willed and never afraid to give people her forthright opinions.

Barbara Smoker admired the fact that she remained cheerful, even if she were in pain, with a fund of droll anecdotes and a ready laugh. She was a lifelong socialist and furthered her elementary education through visits to libraries, museums, art galleries, theatres and concerts. Barbara had found Jean to be most conscientious; I have seen in the files of the very pleasant letters she wrote to speakers, first to invite and then to thank them when they had spoken. Jean was also an active peace campaigner and represented the Society on the National Peace Council for many years; she also attended Lewisham Humanists each month.

Geoffrey Austin, the Hall Manager, paid his own Tribute. They had worked together in the Library when the offices were located there, looking out over Red Lion Square. Geoffrey noted how business-like Jean was – she would enquire whether he had performed such and such a task. If he confessed it was yet to be completed, she would exclaim peremptorily, 'You had better get on with it then!'

Terry Mullins then spoke very positively as Chairman of the GC about her recent life on it. Miranda Perfitt paid her own Tribute. Miranda will remember Jean at SPES meetings making 'off-beat jocular comments with a grin' and as an effective Chair of sub-committees. When Jean was injured crossing the road a few months ago, Miranda was a most assiduous visitor in the hospital; she was impressed with Jean's wide knowledge about SPES. Soon after discharge Jean suffered a severe stroke, never regaining consciousness.

As Barbara commented, bravely as Jean dealt with all the adversities that life dealt her, this was the sort of painless death, without the distress of a prolonged terminal illness, that most of us wish for ourselves. Barbara continued that Jean was not a religious believer but in the ethos of honesty, compassion, justice, fortitude, reliability and generosity of spirit - she certainly was a believer.

**Jennifer R. Jaynes**

## VIEWPOINTS

### No Big Bang

Felix Pirani (in *ER* March 06) has excellently summarised the state of cosmological theory as being “in a mess”. When he tells us that, according to Guth’s inflation theory, the Universe expanded from virtually a point to its present size in  $10^{-35}$  of a second, that we are now supposed to be living in a 10-dimensional space-time and that the matter of the Universe is composed of infinitesimally thin strings, which have not been found, then truly one can doubt that cosmologists will ever get themselves out of this mess.

The important question is how and why they have got themselves into it and what can be done to get out of it? At the risk of trying to summarise a very complex situation in a short contribution, I would say that

- (i) cosmologists have unconsciously adopted a deterministic philosophy,
- (ii) this means that they believe they can know the whole Universe completely,\*
- (iii) they have deterministically and wrongly concluded from the astronomical data that the ‘Universe’ began in a ‘big bang’ some 13 thousand million years ago, and
- (iv) it is expanding steadily, although they are unsure to what end.

Now this is scientific and philosophical mechanism at its uttermost. By (philosophical) mechanism I mean that they regard the Universe as a machine that can, like a car engine, be analysed into parts and put together again. But the Universe is illimitable in space and time and is infinitely complex and we can never know all of it in any sense, only partially. The great U.S. physicist and cosmologist, R.C. Tolman, put this pragmatically back in the early nineteen-thirties (1) when he urged that cosmologists realise that they and the astronomers are only observing our region of the limitless Universe, which he called our ‘cosmos’ (the Russian, A.Linde, put this in a distorted form when he suggested that our universe is only one of any number, none of which apart from our own, we can ever know.)

But, deeper than this is the thinking behind or beneath it all. We live in very troubled times, when people are searching for answers or *an* answer. What easier than to give them a religious or quasi-religious one? The Universe was created (by some mysterious Intelligence/ physicist?) and is steadily growing according to pre-set rules or laws, some of which may be strange but make sense to that Intelligence/God (?); and all ordinary folk need do is accept it all and make the best of it, because these laws are unalterable. (2)

(1) R.C.Tolman: *Relativity, Thermodynamics and Cosmology* (1934)

(2) Readers who may wish to follow the above analysis in more detail may do so in my book, *Out Of This World: an examination of modern physics and cosmology*. (2003).

**Hyman Frankel - Clapham, SW4**

\* **Editor’s note:** A *deterministic* system is simply one in which each state always generates a unique successor state in the next instant, so that there are no random or arbitrary events. Each “replay” of the history of the system would therefore be identical.

One may legitimately propose that a system is deterministic after inspecting the laws it seems to obey; one can do this even if one is unable to predict its future states or is without knowledge of its “complete” nature. [NB].

**Correction:** In the article by Felix Pirani in the March *ER*, page 5, the figure for the age of the universe should be 13.7 billion, not 13.7 million years. [Ed].

## **The Cartoons Should Have Been Published**

The survey of visual satire in Martin Rowson's article (*ER*, April 06) was excellent, and the exposure of his own experiences of British press censorship in the wake of the Danish cartoons furore was illuminating – and, to me, very disturbing. However, I am strongly opposed to his conclusion that those Mohammed cartoons should never have been published. To back that up, I would refer readers to my own article in the same issue (page 9 to 10).

Of course the violent repercussions of publication of the cartoons have been appalling, but that cannot be blamed on a few drawings. Guilt rests with Islam itself. Though those responsible for the atrocities were a minority of fundamentalist Muslim extremists, it is ultimately their religion that is to blame – just as Christianity is to blame for atrocities carried out in enforcing its doctrines. Those are fortunately less pernicious today than in the “ages of faith”, but Islam has been slower to reflect modern humanistic influence.

Rowson, together with many other misguided humanists, seems to have yielded to the prevalent PC idea that religion, above everything else, should be respected. (I intend to counter this in my SPES talk on 28 May 06.)

**Barbara Smoker - Catford**

## **Iran - War Impending - Stand By For Action!**

Surely there is no mistaking the message? All our diplomats have invented a new language (reminiscent of medieval scholasticism) that gives the appearance of dialogue but says nothing. They go round in circles. The US hawks have recently extended the vocabulary to include the lethal word ‘deadline’.

Then what? What happens when the deadline is time-expired? The British delegate has said “Chapter 7” - and that is what the Americans want to hear. For the Security Council to invoke Chapter 7 means war, a mandate for the activation of Conplan 8022 - a massive air attack on Iran. It's coming. The appalling thing is that there is nothing we can do about it. So can we start to face the facts?

We shall have a new major war on our hands sometime this year - sooner rather than later. Starting with a massive air attack in Iran it will escalate almost overnight to Iraq, Syria, the Lebanon, Israel and Palestine. The White House and the US Strategic Command seem to have no idea of the horrors they are about to set loose. America will split down the middle and there can be no waiting for the Congressional elections scheduled for the autumn. The situation will be of the insurrectional order - in Britain likewise. Blair will support the US – he has already made that clear. He will have to go – instantly.

We face a nameless horror – made that much worse by the apparent intention of the US to use battlefield nuclear weapons, round which its armed forces have been revamped since 1995 when the deterrent was abandoned.

**Peter Cadogan - London NW6**

The views expressed in this Journal are not necessarily those of the Society.

## Kollontai Versus Trotsky

In her article on Aleksandra Kollontai (*ER*, April 06) Ellen Ramsay writes that Kollontai was challenging Lenin over party discipline and factionalism along with Trotsky and others at the time of Kronstadt. In fact in 1921 Trotsky supported Lenin's ban on factions in the Bolshevik Party and attacked the Workers' Opposition for having made a fetish of democratic principles.

Trotsky was also instrumental in suppressing the Kronstadt mutineers who had revolted against the Party dictatorship in favour of the power of the Soviets on the basis of freely elected representatives of the toiling-masses. Trotsky threatened to shoot them like partridges. Red Army officer cadets and delegates to the Bolshevik Congress marched across the ice of the Gulf of Finland to storm the naval base. Over 500 were killed and many fell victim to the Bolsheviks' tribunals.

Later some of the Bolsheviks who had fought against Kronstadt, such as Kollontai's lover Dybenko, were shot in the purges of the 1930s. History is indeed full of bloody ironies.

Terry Liddle - Eltham, London

SPES 6 Week Evening Course

### Visions of the Present

Tutor: David Murray

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn WC1

Tuesdays 30th of May - 4th July 7pm-9pm

Tea/Coffee Served From 6:30pm

We will look at the following novels:

- 1) 30 May - William Morris's *News from Nowhere*
- 2) 6 June - Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*
- 3) 13 June - George Orwell's *Nineteen Eight Four*
- 4) 20 June - Frederick Pohl and C M Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants*
- 5) 27 June - Stephen Fry's *Making History*
- 6) 4 July - Retrospective

A reading list of secondary material will be available before the first class. Hand-outs for each class will be available the previous week. These will be in paper form at Conway Hall, and will also be available on the web:

[www.livejournal.com/users/presentvisions](http://www.livejournal.com/users/presentvisions)

Each class will begin with an introduction by David Murray, followed by discussion. Participants are strongly recommended to read, or to re-read each novel.

**PROGRAMME OF EVENTS AT THE ETHICAL SOCIETY**  
The Library, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn, WC1R 4RL.  
Tel: 020 7242 8037/8034 Registered Charity No. 251396  
Website: [www.ethicalsoc.org.uk](http://www.ethicalsoc.org.uk) email: [library@ethicalsoc.org.uk](mailto:library@ethicalsoc.org.uk)  
No charge unless stated

**MAY 2006**

**Sunday 14**

1100 **POPULATION & THE ENVIRONMENT:**

**The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number?**

Rosamund McDougall, Advisory Council, Optimum Population Trust

1500 **EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS & CHILD ABUSE** (video)

**Sunday 21**

1100 **THE RELIGIOUS CONVULSIONS FROM THE 1755**

**LISBON EARTHQUAKE**

Dr Rebecca Spang, History Dept. UCL

1500 **WHY ARE FEMINISTS AGAINST CENSORSHIP?**

Avedon Carol, Feminists Against Censorship

**Sunday 28**

1100 **WHY SHOULD WE RESPECT RELIGION?**

Barbara Smoker

1500 Bank Holiday ***SOCIAL*** – Please bring food & drink to share

**Tuesday 30**

1830 **EVENING CLASS – VISIONS OF THE PRESENT**

for 1900 *News from Nowhere* by William Morris. David Murray

**JUNE**

**Sunday 4 WHY ON EARTH DO THEY BELIEVE THAT?**

Chris Bratcher discusses the latest ideas from D. Dennett & L. Wolpert on the evolution of religion.

**Tuesday 6**

1830 **EVENING CLASS – VISIONS OF THE PRESENT**

for 1900 *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. David Murray

**Sunday 11**

1100 **THE (1925) SCOPES 'MONKEY' TRIAL** Its continuing relevance & the 'Intelligent' Design debate. Dr Tim Madigan

1500 **WHY DO STREET GANGS ARISE?** With particular reference to American and international gangs.

Tim Delaney, author of *American Street Gangs*, (Prentice Hall, 2005)

**Tuesday 13**

1830 **EVENING CLASS – VISIONS OF THE PRESENT**

for 1900 *Nineteen Eight Four* by George Orwell. David Murray