

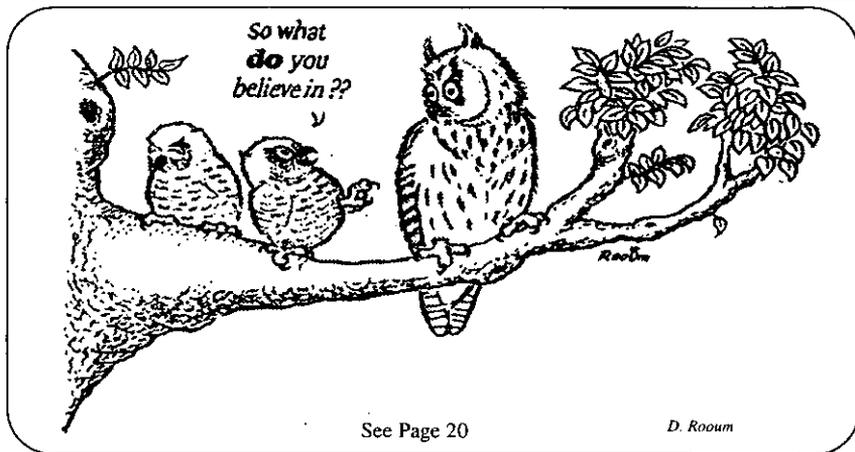
Ethical Record

The Proceedings of the South Place Ethical Society

Vol. 102 No. 11

£1

December 1997



THE FUTURE OF HUMANISM	<i>Babu Gogineni</i>	3
THE INTERNET & HOLOCAUST REVISIONISM	<i>Rae West</i>	9
THE ETHICS OF TAXATION	<i>Fred Harrison</i>	14
DO WE EVER SEE THE WORLD ?	<i>Nick McAdoo</i>	20
ETHICAL SOCIETY EVENTS		24

EDITORIAL - TRUTH? YES; RECONCILIATION? MAYBE

A nature film showed three grim-faced chimpanzees striding, in file and almost erect, through the forest in pursuit of a deviant member of the troupe who was subsequently killed. Adjacent chimp clans were seen to battle for territory. *Homo* retains the capacity to destroy members of his own species. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that what amounts to ethnic cleansing has, on occasion, been ordered by those projections of human wish-fulfilment, the Gods (*Gita; Sam.*).

Although history has recorded instances of genocide (the Tasmanians were wiped out), this century has been notably disfigured by them. The litany of killing fields and victims includes the Turkish Empire (Armenians); Nazi controlled areas ('contragenics'*); Cambodia under Pol Pot (the urban, literate class); Rwanda (Hutus and Tutsis) and Yugoslavia (segments 'cleansed' by other segments). That's nearly ten million murders.

*Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Conway Hall Humanist Centre

25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Tel: 0171 242 8034 Fax: 0171 242 8036

Officers

Hon. Representative: Terry Mullins. *General Committee Chair:* Diane Murray.
Vice-Chair: Barbara Ward. *Hon. Treasurer:* Graham Lyons.
Hon. Registrar: Ian Ray-Todd

Editor, *Ethical Record*: Norman Bacrac.

SPES Staff

Administrative Secretary to the Society: Marina Ingham: Tel: 0171 242 8034
Librarian & Programme Coordinator: Jennifer Jeynes: Tel: 0171 242 8037
Hall Manager: Stephen Norley. For Hall bookings: Tel: 0171 242 8032
Assistant Manager: Peter Vlachos. *Steward:* David Wright.

Editorial continued

All the above qualify as examples of genocide: the victims were classes of harmless civilians whose extermination was decreed or officially sanctioned by those in national or local power. Bordering on genocide was Stalin's and Mao's overseeing the destruction of millions of 'class enemies' in harsh labour camps. There is little point in calling the behaviour of the numerous actual killers 'inhuman' because this precisely is human behaviour at its cruel and stupid limits.

If we are to see no more such episodes, society's learning ability must also be stretched to its limit. In the first place, the basic facts about what happened, the mechanics of the genocide, need to be established so that it is not possible to deny or minimise past horrors. Eighty years after the massacres of Armenians, Turkey still resists full disclosure. (The January 1998 ER will contain an article on the Amritsar massacre.)

A most effective teaching aid here would be the full and frank confessions of the 'ordinary' killers themselves. In return for not facing a trial, they would reveal exactly what they did. South Africa's unprecedented Truth and Reconciliation Commission represents a valid way for a society scarred by ethnic feuds to heal itself. But by side-stepping the courts and apparently letting those who acted brutally during the apartheid era off the hook, have the claims of justice been recklessly disregarded?

When we note the efforts (see page 9) to deny the war aim closest to Hitler's paranoid heart (to destroy the Jews of Europe) - announced by him on 30/1/39 - the answer must be no. It might serve the cause of justice better if those presently facing prosecution for their war-time activities were instead induced to spend the rest of their lives telling the truth on the Internet.

THE FUTURE OF HUMANISM

Babu R. R. Gogineni

Executive Director, International Humanist and Ethical Union

Keynote Address to the Ethical Society's Annual Reunion, 21 September 1997

I would like to thank you for inviting me to participate in this Annual Reunion, and to share with you some thoughts on *The Future of Humanism*.

Our humanism is secular, and we derive our ancient inspiration from the freethinking intellectual and rationalist traditions of India, China, Greece and Rome - a tradition whose spirit found strong and renewed expression in the *Age of Reason* and Enlightenment. However, while mentioning our roots, we may want to note that we do not have unqualified admiration for those who preceded us on humanity's quest for freedom. Let us consider as an example the American *Declaration of Independence*: a fine humanist achievement for its age. But today when we look back, we see that however loudly the American *Declaration of Independence* might have proclaimed the *self evident* truth that all men were created equal, or may have said that they were endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, the authors of the document did not believe in it themselves: these rights were not extended to their brothers of African origin... We have further quarrels with the text: men and women are not created equal; in fact, you may want to join in, and point out that they were not created at all...

We are not assembled here to denigrate humanity's achievements on its way here, but to note that we have come a long way since, and to realise that the journey is far from complete - there are more milestones ahead of us!

Today's Consensus on Humanism

In a general sense, humanism for us is a cultural achievement of mankind, and its most sophisticated, advanced and articulate expression is in today's time. Despite our minor quibbles about whether humanism should be capitalised as in the names of religions, whether it should be summarised into a minimum statement with which humanists around the world agree, or whether it should be described by the word *life stance* or not, there is a broad consensus today as to what humanism means to all of us assembled here: that it is a philosophy of life which asserts the centrality of the human being.

For us, humanism is concerned with achieving responsible freedom and happiness in this world. We believe that the purpose of life is that which each of us gives it, and recognise the right of each of us to do so. We understand that moral values are derived from human experience; we refuse to substitute custom for conscience, advocate unconditional freedom of thought and dissent, and work for the translation of these convictions into civilised law which guarantees everyone's right to be able to do so.

We are interested in truth, and in knowing the ultimate nature of reality. But we recognise that *'truth is but the content of knowledge'*, and that it is not the exclusivity of its possession, but its pursuit which is fundamental to human progress. We look upon science and its self-correcting approach as the means of getting closer to truth, and therefore insist that any account of nature must pass the tests of scientific evidence.

We are sceptics, not cynics - and we believe that our lot can be bettered by our own efforts. We are advocates of the use of reason and reasonableness in any approach to solving human problems.

As humanists we promote the creation of a planetary society, and propose humanism and humanist values as its basis. We offer the conception of our common humanity, the realisation of humanity's shared destiny, the moral obligations that stem from this understanding, and the visions and prospects of joint progress as the solvent of contemporary human divisions and conflicts.

IHEU and the Perilous 21st Century

The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), which moved its headquarters to London in February 1997, was founded in 1952 in Amsterdam, to federate humanist groups around the world and to promote internationally this concept of humanism.

One of the important activities of IHEU is focusing global humanist attention on specific issues through organising International Humanist Congresses. It was at one such IHEU World Humanist Congress in 1974 (Amsterdam) that the Congress participants pledged general support to *Humanist Manifesto II*, which starts with the sentence: "The next century can be and should be the humanistic century..."

25 years later, as we stand at the edge of this perilous century, what we see is a world that is undergoing an uneven moulting; a world where the confederacy of authoritarian values, irrationalism and racial prejudice is gaining ground. A world where the active collusion of oppressive economies, third world kleptocracies and first world military-business interests is causing increasing alienation among all its peoples. A world where the chilling world-wide alliance of religion with tribal and cultural nationalism is successfully sponsoring our regress into humanity's social memory of intolerance and terror.

Much that humanism advocates - or has already achieved - is once again under attack. So what can humanism and organised humanists do in this situation? Will humanism turn its other cheek, or devise ways of tackling the problem head on? Will the next century be ours? Or, let us ask the question differently: *Will humanism have a future?*

Indeed, *The Future of Humanism* will be what we make it to be, and I believe that on a global scale humanists have much to do to ensure its future. It takes time to reconcile the '*pessimism of thought to the optimism of the will*', but maybe there will some time be a humanist century... But for us to be effective - and to be more relevant - we need to stop marginalising ourselves, we ought to get back into the mainstream of human activity and we should try to put back the adventure that there once was in humanism - when humanists contributed to creating society with the human being as its archetype.

Humanists need to reach out further, to help expand the frontiers of human freedoms, and to increase the possibilities of human achievements by linking our liberating attitudes to contemporary concerns. While it is true that our inspiration comes from the free-thinking, rationalist and secular traditions, by definition, the domain and focus of humanism is the human being, and we need not limit our critical attention to the religious world view.

However, in practice, the vast majority of our valuable efforts are directed against religion alone and not against the general authoritarian and unjust attitudes of which religion partakes - attitudes that are present in human society in abundant measure. I believe that the greatest challenge before organised humanists today is whether they can embrace larger fields of human activity where they will seek to apply humanism's universal principles, and with the aid of the disinfecting power of reason, formulate appropriate responses and solutions to today's crises. The challenge for us humanists is to get back in touch with reality, and to prove that we are part of an ongoing humanist tradition, rather than a fossilised body of thought.

Western Europe, where vanquished religion testifies to humanist success, is the ideal setting where humanists can take the lead in this effort and help make humanism more relevant to humanity. Undoubtedly, even in this part of the world, some battles still need to be fought and won, but we need not be pessimistic about the final outcome of the struggle against religion.

At the heart of this victory lie adoption of the scientific temper and the useful application of technology, accompanied by the increasing secularisation of society - all of which are humanist contributions. One must perhaps clarify here that by science and technology the appreciative reference is to the creative use of science for human welfare - not its subversive use in creating weapons of mass destruction, and their sale to foolish and poor countries; by secularisation, we mean not the simple separation of religion and state which ironically is far from achieved in Western Europe, but rather the complex, yet steady, weaning away of society from religion and the religious mode of thinking.

Realities Which Divide the World

Yet, from outside the Western world, one would be amazed to see how closely these achievements of humanism: democracies, free opportunity, secular societies and modern science are unambiguously linked with their own domestic misery by non-westerners. The West, which is synonymous with the conceptions of democracy, science and secularism - and hence synonymous with what humanism stands for - is also linked with the world order that has been prevailing for some time now on the planet.

To call it a world order is rather misleading: today humanity lives in fragmented societies, constantly trying to reconcile its loyalties divided among ideologies, religions, nationalities and even football clubs. Apart from these, there are also cruel and depressing economic and political realities in the world - realities that divide us more than they unite.

These realities are curiously *linked to latitude*: the world is divided into the industrialised North (mostly Western nations, but also Japan, Australia and South Africa), and the raw material-producing, technology-deficient South (mostly the third world countries of Asia, Africa and South America; the ex-communist block countries which were formerly called the second world are also today reduced to third world plight, but are not officially defined as the South).

The North has about one-fifth of the world's population, but accounts for nearly four-fifths of its income: of the world's 23 trillion US\$ - Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1993, the share of the Northern countries was over 18 trillion dollars, compared to the barely 5 trillion dollars for developing countries. The South accounts for about 70% of the world's people, most of them poor, deprived and

oppressed. To gauge the inequalities of our world, it is enough to know that the bottom 20% of the world's population contributes to only 1.4% of the global GNP, a mere 1% share of world trade and receives a miserable 0.2% share of global commercial lending.

This gap and disparity between the North and the South has been growing. If one compares the figures for 1960 and 1993, the gap in per capita income between the North and the South has tripled, from 5700 US\$ in 1960 to 15400 US\$ in 1993. It is interesting to know that the assets of the world's 358 billionaires - most of these live in the North - exceed the combined annual incomes of countries with 45% of the world's people.

Aid Negated by Trade Barriers

The lack of proportionate distribution of wealth naturally results in unequal enjoyment of world resources: though at present they produce 2.5 times as much minerals as developing countries, countries in the North consume 16 times as much, with the result that about 70% of the world exports of fuel and non-fuel minerals go to the North. For example, annually an American uses the energy used by 1053 Nepalese!

The so-called post-Second-World-War period led at one level to a vastly improved economic relationship between the North and the earlier colonised South, but in essence the relation remains the same. The South still survives on its exports of primary raw material and the industrially advanced North processes it, piously puts it in biodegradable packaging and markets it. The developing countries have neither the incentive nor the opportunity - either because of lack of technology or tariff barriers - to participate in the processing and marketing of their produce.

Very often it is felt that the first world (The North) makes up for this inequity by giving aid to the third world countries. Attitudes to domestic poverty being what they are in the developed countries, it seems also natural to their citizens that some of their own national wealth be sent to the poorer peoples: a quarter of the world's five billion and above live in absolute poverty. But how many are aware that the 50-odd billion US\$ that the poor nations receive as aid is a mere ninth of the 500 billion US\$-worth of trade opportunities that they are denied because of barriers to the movement of goods and people? In addition, how many citizens in the Western countries would approve of the pattern of aid distribution if they knew that twice as much aid per capita is given to high military spenders in the third world than to moderate spenders? (And where do these countries purchase their weapons from? And whose industries and jobs are maintained by this seeming generosity?) The sad fact is that only a quarter of Northern aid is earmarked for the ten countries which contain three fourths of the world's absolute poor.

But if we are looking at the aid gift horse in the mouth, is there any other way in which the South can develop? The late Pakistani physicist-Nobel laureate, Prof. Abdus Salam, had the answer; an answer that even the *North-South Report* of Willy Brandt did not deem worthy of consideration. Prof. Salam wrote "*in the final analysis, creation, mastery and utilisation of modern science and technology is basically what distinguishes the South from the North. On science and technology depend the standards of living of a nation*".

Knowledge Supplied at a Cost

Historically, all parts of the world have played important roles in the acquisition -

and sharing - of knowledge. However, at this present stage of human development, it is the West that is the leader in plumbing the depths of the universe - and the West refuses to effect any significant transfer of technology on a non-commercial basis. As knowledge is held in chains, the majority of humanity is deprived of the fruits of human achievements.

This attitude remained unshaken even when at one point the very question of humanity's survival was being discussed. Until not very long ago, the Western nations retained the right to *manufacture and export* ozone-layer-endangering CFCs, even while maintaining that third world countries could not manufacture them! Further, until the London Agreement of 1989, the West which manufactured 88% of the CFCs in the world did not transfer CFC-replacement technology on a non-commercial basis! Is it perhaps too much to expect the rich countries to look beyond their economic noses even if the environment is at stake.

The environment is another issue which deserves our critical attention, though not for this occasion. It brings up fundamental questions of man's deteriorating relation with nature. Let us recall what the Spanish Prime Minister Filipe Gonzalez pointed out, referring to the explorers of the 14th and the 15th centuries "Five hundred years ago man discovered the earth's dimensions, and in Rio he has discovered its limits..."

One can continue looking at other things which are rotten in the state of the world -specially in the third world where Mobutus, Kabilas and Marcos's abound; one can point out that the South is deficient not just in technology, but also in scientific temper, we could despair at the failing democracies in the South and the lack of visionary leadership, at the commissions and omissions of some national and other notional governments, be baffled at the futile idolatry of geography which leads to countless conflicts carried on by Western arms, pity the plight of women and the state of the world's children...but let me bring you back to the important question for today: in this context, can we make humanism a coherent actor in national and international affairs? Can we offer humanist perspectives to the problems that haunt us, and show the world that adopting the humanist philosophy will lead to a better world?

The Task of the Humanist Intellectual

I believe that there is indeed a humanist perspective to offer, but that will be a task for the humanist intellectual, not the organisation. By the humanist intellectual, we refer here not to the academic employee, but the *vertical individual* of Sib Narayan Ray, the intellectual that Edward Said says should be able to '*speak truth to power*', act as a gadfly, raise embarrassing questions to confront orthodoxy and dogma. An intellectual who, by his universal orientation, bound neither by national boundaries nor by ethnic considerations, would work for changing attitudes in the world. It is such intellectuals and leaders of men, who will help re-establish the spirit of human solidarity that today is obscured in the dust raised by ideological and religious differences, arms trade and the mad consumerist scramble.

So how would a humanist who would embrace no category smaller than humanity react to the present situation? This humanist would have to start by rejecting the economic and political definition of the human being that is being imposed on all of us. Advocating that people from the second and the third worlds cannot be looked upon as mere emerging markets, this humanist would point out that we are in quest of a people-oriented global development; not one measured in GNP

and per capita income alone - for us, not just the rate, but the quality of growth is important. We would then have to agree with him that we are more concerned about well-being of all the people, rather than with the traditional means of accounting wealth. Health and education and the investment in social services is very important to us. That for us, rather than being placed at the receiving end of charity, people from poor societies should be enabled to act out their economic betterment and emancipation by being given their rightful opportunities. That while we welcome the fact that trade around the world is becoming free, we insist that it should also become fair. That globalisation must not stop with the economy, but that what interests us is the globalisation of the mind.

Both in the North and the South, we live in societies where consent is manufactured, where both economic and political power is concentrated in a few hands: this is a threat to the humanist enterprise. As pointed out by Justice Tarkunde, recipient of the IHEU International Humanist Award, the humanist attitude provides the sub-soil on which any democracy can flourish. In fact, even the roots of the ecological crisis today lie in the historical taking away of the right of the local community to participate in environmental decision-making. We must therefore favour the creation of local communities equipped with rights and obligations.

We stand for democratisation of social opportunity, but also for democratisation of technology. And by technology we mean appropriate technology, involving cheaper sources of energy, simpler processes more suited to the people who handle it. To enable this to happen, the countries of the North need to liberalise the transfer of essential technology, freeing it from the shackles of unreasonable intellectual property régimes. In the process we want modernisation of the world, not its westernisation.

By coming to the aid of the deprived and the exploited, humanists of our kind will come into contact with the pro-democracy, environmental and emancipation struggles and be able to influence them with more secular values. It is only then that we can answer spurious arguments about regional or religious concepts of cultural values - be they Asian, African, Christian, Islamic or Hindu. The humanist must first demonstrate that our values in theory as well as translated into practice are a cultural accomplishment of mankind. In this way, our influence will far outnumber the membership of our groups.

It is in this enlarging of the concerns of humanism that will lie the future appeal of humanism, and therefore it is this that shall hold the key to the future of our hopes, and the answer to the problem of *The Future of Humanism*. □



SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL HUMANISM! **SUPPORT IHEU!**

As an IHEU Supporter you help promote humanism throughout the world. All supporters receive free copies of IHEU quarterly International Humanist News and also discounts at IHEU World Congresses.

- Your annual contributions will help support IHEU's own activities.
- Your contributions to the IHEU Development Fund go to support humanist projects in the third world. Annual Supporter fee £30.

Application form from: IHEU, 47 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8SP, UK.
Tel: 44 171 831 4817 Fax: 44171 404 8641 Email: babu@iheu.org

THE INTERNET AND HOLOCAUST REVISIONISM

Rae West

Summary of a Report to the Ethical Society, 12 October 1997

A Quotation

'According to the New York Times of October 3, 1965 there have been 170,000 civilians killed; 800,000 maimed by torture; 5,000 burnt alive, disembowelled or beheaded; 100,000 killed or maimed by chemical poisons; 400,000 detained and tortured savagely. One method of torture used by the American troops is partial electrocution or 'frying' as one United States Adviser called it - by attaching live wires to male genital organs or the breasts of Vietnamese women prisoners.'

The Internet and Free Speech

Christopher Hitchens said the Internet is oversold; John Pilger warned of control by the American government and multinationals. Internet is hard to use - promotional campaigns of the BBC type are misleading; it's possible to lose all one's work. Most users are students or employees. The quality is in fact quite good - there's no way to get across except by well-chosen words. (There's a part called Usenet, made of thousands of interest groups, one of which is alt.revisionism.)

The amazing thing is that such an ideology as free speech exists at all. You might expect any group having achieved dominance to oppose free speech and this usually happens. Established people generally agree with George V, 'people who write books ought to be shut up'. But the pragmatic argument for free speech is that something useful might come of it. In practice, free speech is something of a dead letter - e.g. nobody at South Place has ever spoken on the finances of the Church of England*. With critics like that, establishments can rest easy. 'Free speech' (cf. 'free trade') may just mean pushing pornography or Hollywood tripe.

Theoreticians are more restrictive than is generally realised; Milton's *Areopagitica* looks at licensing rather than freedom. J. S. Mill would not allow freedom for the view that Queen Victoria should be assassinated. Free speech is conceived vaguely; nobody has a theory to deal with it. In practice censors cut out anything tricky.

Technological change is important; the Levellers broke up the Stationers Company monopoly as printing cheapened; The Dutch in the 17th century printed books banned in Britain, no doubt to make money. Something similar applies with Internet; providers want to make money - or lose less. The most up-to-date type looks best, which can be dangerous. With radio, the attitude persists in some elderly people who imagine (e.g.) the 1 o'clock BBC news to be the apex of accuracy.

Revisionism as a Concept

The word perhaps originated with Marxists, Lenin being the first 'revisionist'. There are religious revisionists. The second world war has its revisionists: Tony Benn said, 'the British government didn't appease Hitler. They backed Hitler.' Robert Blake wrote 'It would be nice to say that Britain fought for the ideals of democracy, freedom, the rule of law etc. But it would be untrue'

* To verify this, one would need to peruse the over 100 volumes of the Society's journals. [Ed.]

However, on the Internet now, the word 'revisionism' applies almost solely to holocaust revisionism. Let's look at what you find if you search for 'holocaust revisionism'.

Holocaust Revisionists' Beliefs

I'll summarise the beliefs that unite most revisionists. These are simple: that a deliberate extermination policy of Jews didn't exist, that gas chambers are a myth, and that although many Jews died, so did many others - Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, etc.

Those are key beliefs, but many other issues get brought in, e.g. (i) whether Jews actually are a race, (ii) whether Jews took a special part in Bolshevism, (iii) whether Judaism is a fundamentalist ideology. Many of these taboos are firmly established; e.g. E H Carr's serious books on the Bolshevik Revolution, (1950 onwards), have virtually no mention of Jews.

Types of Holocaust Revisionist

First let's try to see the motivations. There are about ten categories: Some seem purely antisemitic, for example posting lists of famous peoples' views on Jews. Some are anti-Zionist and/or pro-Palestinian. Some are German-extraction Americans; I've read that a third of Americans claim German ancestry. There seem to be white Russians or Poles or Catholics (cf Belloc) who consider Bolsheviks were Jewish. There are anti-Communists stressing Stalin's crimes rather than Hitler's. There are Protestant fundamentalists, blacks like Louis Farrakhan, and American whites who feel their power has slipped since the days when Detroit's cars led the world and blacks were kept down. Polish or Hungarian or South African groups might be on Internet, but, if so, they're hard to find.

Many of the things I found came as a surprise to me; I'll indicate these during my talk. Here we come to my first surprise: how old all this is. The first revisionists appeared with Nuremberg, between 1945 and 1949. My second surprise was how industrious some revisionists are. The Swede Felderer has 30,000 slides of the concentration camps. The Frenchman Faurisson spent years interviewing people. David Irving, the document historian, is said to have a card index of 10,000 items, arranged by date. Irving is not, strictly, a holocaust revisionist; the holocaust appears as a by-product in his work. However he is obviously relevant. He is looked down on by some revisionists because, as late as 1977, he believed in the holocaust.

My third surprise was the obscurity of most of the people involved, on both sides; very few are official historians. You might guess that supposedly heavyweight historians such as Bullock or Trevor-Roper or Hobsbawm would descend from their Olympian heights with a few well-chosen words of dismissal. You might imagine this, but they don't.

Internet Revisionists: Survey by Countries

Professor Paul Rassinier, a Frenchman, now dead, was in concentration camps for much of the war. Depending on your taste, he was a socialist who turned fascist, or a socialist who didn't believe accusations against the Germans. I think his first book was the post-Nuremberg *Le Mensonge d'Ulysse* (1949); the only one translated into English is *The Drama of the European Jews*, translated in 1975 by Harry Elmer Barnes, of Chicago University. Rassinier also wrote on the Eichmann trial. With Bardèche, he started what might be called the French school, including Robert Faurisson - whose book's preface, on free speech, signed by 100 people, including Noam Chomsky, led to endless criticism of Chomsky, who said he didn't know

anything in detail about the subject. Faurisson is a literature professor who pays minute attention to documentary oddities. I think he claims to be the first person to assert that gas chambers were a myth. Another Frenchman is Roger Garaudy (described as an ex-Marxist theoretician, now a Catholic). Incidentally in France under the Gayssot-Fabius law, 1990, it is a criminal offence "to contest by any means the existence of one or more of the crimes against humanity".

In Germany and Austria the entire topic is banned under a law passed, apparently, by Hitler, which I gather prohibits any discussion of the holocaust, which is stated to be a historical fact. However, there are isolated German revisionists including Wilhelm Staeglich (a judge who published *The Auschwitz Myth* in 1979), Ugo Walendy and several historians of the second world war.

English holocaust revisionists seem unimportant as regards original work; *Did Six Million Really Die?* (1974), pseudonymous but by a London university graduate called Verrall, (and other authors) is mostly from French sources, I think. Colin Wilson reviewed it in *Books & Bookmen*, causing months of controversy. Dr Russell Burton, a medical doctor who was in Belsen in 1945, wrote an article in which he stated the deaths were caused by typhus and overcrowding - 53,000 people in a camp for 3,000. Burton strictly speaking seems not a revisionist.

The USA had an important part at Nuremberg, and doubts emerged very early on. The most detailed book known to me is by Arthur Butz, a chemical engineer, who published *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* in 1975. His methodology was to order original documents through US inter-library loan systems and examine them, having polished up his German. Much of his material involves American in-fighting. To my amazement, my local public library found a copy. (By the way, on checking a typical university library, I found no revisionist books). Butz's background enabled him to assess the technical side of Auschwitz as a hydrocarbon manufacturing plant, the sort of thing historians generally seem unable to do. No legal action seems to have been taken in the U.S. over Butz.

Trial Transcripts on the Internet

Canada has one of the largest internet sites, because Ernst Zündel, a naturalised German (b. 1939), who lives in Toronto, distributed *Did Six Million Really Die?* in book form in 1980. Legal action was brought mainly by a private individual. The site has a trial transcript of the second of two trials, (first 1985, 7 weeks; second 1988, four months). The major testimonies are each about 100 pages long. The two main prosecution witnesses were Christopher Browning, an American history professor, and Raul Hilberg, who however declined to appear in 1988, his 1985 testimony being read into the record instead. The three main defence witnesses (judging by length) were Faurisson and Mark Weber and David Irving. Another witness was Fred A. Leuchter, an American designer of gas chambers, for which there seems buoyant demand in the US. I register surprise number 4: amazingly, there seems never to have been any official technical examination, or even description, of the gas chambers. Under cross-examination Hilberg (author of *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 1961 and subsequent editions) admitted he'd visited concentration camps only on a couple of day trips, and was generally unimpressive.

The trial seemed to twist wrongly for the prosecution but Zündel was found guilty. He is provocative; his site has a logo unmistakably resembling half a swastika in perspective. Since he's a commercial artist, I presume he designed this himself.

A large site is 'Radio Islam', I think based in Sweden. It includes the full text of Koestler's *Thirteenth Tribe*, which popularised the idea that Khazars converted to Judaism in about 750 AD. Radio Islam has Roger Garaudy's *Founding Myths of Israeli Politics*, 1996, more or less banned in France, which mentions the Deir Yassin massacre of 1948 and other massacres, and has unflattering things on the Talmud and Zionism. It says the Wannsee Conference of 1942 is a fabrication. It has the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (the basis of Norman Cohn's disappointing 1967 book *Warrant for Genocide*).

Other sites include: CODOH (Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust), the Institute for Historical Review (both California). The Campaign for Radical Truth in History (Michael A. Hoffmann) examines other neglected aspects of history, also someone called Greg Raven. Another group is called the Adelaide Institute, I think from Australia. There seems to be backbiting in these organisations. I haven't been able to find out how they are funded.

Anti-Revisionists

These represent current average opinion. Their opponents call them 'exterminists'. By far the main site is 'Nizkor'. Others include skeptics groups, of the CSICOP type. One such is Michael Shermer, who attacked David Irving.

A typical Nizkor site is 'Hatewatch'. It has three essays: Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *Assassins of Memory* (1987); he's mainly a classicist and looks at Sparta, Thucydides, Algeria, and so on. Nadine Fresco's *The denial of the Dead: On the Faurisson Affair* (1990) discusses Chomsky. Both authors quote J P Kremer, a doctor at Auschwitz, who seems to have testified to Nuremberg and Polish courts, and partially retracted, before being hanged. Lin Colette's *Encountering Holocaust Denial* (1995) deals with advertising in student newspapers, and discusses the Ku Klux Klan. None of these essays, in my view, addressed the issues.

The main qualified historian is Deborah Lipstadt (Dorot chair in Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies, Emory University, Atlanta). She wrote *Denying the Holocaust: the Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (1993). David Irving is involved in a libel case against her.

Several names appear relating to Nizkor: e.g. Daniel Keren, Jamie McCarthy, Ken McKay. McKay posted that the 'Institute for Historical Review' was founded by 'Lewis Brandon', who founded Britain's National Party. McKay says someone called Willis Carto, by far the most influential American antisemite of the 1970s, funds it. There's a suggestion of John Birchness about some revisionists.

On printed matter:

UK magazine *Searchlight*. (A riposte to Liberty Lobby's *Spotlight*?)
The Scourge of the Swastika (1954), Lord Russell of Liverpool
The Nuremberg Trial (1983) Ann & John Tusa
The Battle for History (1993) John Keegan
Martin Gilbert's new booklet (with 1978 figures).

There are countless books based on the Nuremberg trials, e.g. by George Steiner and Bruno Bettelheim. Memoirs (revisionists claim 'so-called') e.g. by Elie Weisel and Primo Levi. Many have been published years after the event: *Mèdecin Auschwitz* (1952) by one Miklos Nyszli, *Kommandant at Auschwitz* (1958) supposedly by Rudolf Hoess, and *Five Chimneys* (1959) by Olga Lengyel.

Five Revisionist Disputes

1. Final Solution

What does 'final solution' mean? It's a translation of 'endlösung'. This word was indisputably used in many German documents and speeches. Unfortunately its meaning seems to be ambiguous, like 'ausrotten' (or uprooting). The revisionists say 'final solution' meant expulsion; for example to Madagascar, or to Palestine, where Eichmann went in 1939 to negotiate with Zionists, according to Irving. Revisionists say that throughout the war Germany was willing to do deals sending Jews out. Irving seems to have been the first definitely to assert that Hitler never issued a command with an explicit word like 'kill'. However, when the Nazis invaded Russia in 1941, the Einsatzgruppen had explicit instructions to kill 'commissars and Jewish Bolshevik chieftains'.

2. Problems with the Nuremberg and International Military Trials

Briefly, revisionists say Nuremberg was rigged: (A) the prosecution controlled all documents; (B) no cross examination of witnesses was permitted, so any written statement whatever could be submitted without ever being checked; (C) torture was applied to witnesses. In 1983 a book by Rupert Butler, *Legions of Death*, alleged that his confession was obtained after torture. I found three early references, by Judge E L Van Roden, (1949); M W Kolander, April (1947) and R T Paget's book on Manstein (1951). Another revisionist allegation is that the American prosecution team consisted mainly of recent-European Jews.

3. Fake Documents and Photographs

On fake documents, I'll list a small set alleged by David Irving:- Several works hitherto accepted as 'standard' sources - Konrad Heiden, the Abwehr/OSS double agent Hans Bernd Gisevius, Erich Kordt, Hitler's dismissed adjutant Fritz Widemann, Professor CarlJakob Burckhardt's diary, Fritz Thyssen's 'Memoirs,' *I Paid Hitler* (London, 1943).

Martin Bormann's alleged notes on Hitler's final bunker conversations, published with an introduction by Professor Hugh Trevor Roper in 1961 as *The Testament of Adolf Hitler* are in my view quite spurious. Two different men claimed to possess the entire diaries of Vice Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the legendary Abwehr chief hanged by Hitler in April 1945. The genuine Kersten diaries in Sweden were never published, perhaps because of the political dynamite they contained on Sweden's élite. On photos, Internet has Ugo Walendy. His book (which I haven't seen) allegedly has examples of photos misattributed, with their backgrounds changed.

4. Population Figures

These are a problem to both sides. There was wartime chaos, vast migrations and border changes; the Nazis defined 'Judaism' their way. On the other hand, most states still retained passport systems. Revisionist estimates of Jewish victims are much lower than six million. No authoritative demographic survey seems to have been made.

5. Gas Chambers

Technique and Operation of the Gas Chambers (1989) by J. C. Pressac seems to be regarded on all sides as not very good, but I haven't seen a copy. In *British Way and Purpose*, the brief mentions of atrocities during 1942-44 seem to confirm the claims made weren't taken seriously. This is often interpreted as deliberate evasion of responsibility. □

THE ETHICS OF TAXATION

Fred Harrison

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 2 November 1997

Taxation: Determines the Character of Culture

We cannot claim that society is based on morality if our system of public finance fails the fundamental tests of ethics. If the way in which we raise money to finance the public sector is exploitative, abusive, destructive - well, it would be surprising if the general fabric of society were based on morality. I do, indeed, claim that taxation is all these three things:

- exploitative
- abusive, and
- destructive.

Taxation makes the administration of society possible. It also shapes the kind of society in which we live. The money spent by the State is a major determinant of the character of our society. By studying the way in which public finance is raised, we see how political power is distributed. By studying the way in which finance is spent, we learn about the texture of society itself.

Taxation extracts money predominantly on the basis of people's

- earned incomes - their wages and salaries;
- their savings; and
- when they consume goods and services.

Practically the only issue on which there is debate relates to the principle of *progressivity*. We deem it correct to levy more from people who are said to be rich. We implicitly claim that this is ethically correct. This view is self-deluding. It allows the State to employ a system of collecting revenue that is *exploitative, abusive and destructive*.

Taxation and Morality

Public debate about taxation tends to be limited to narrow questions of whether to raise or reduce existing rates by a penny or two. We rarely discuss the efficiency of our tax system.

People dislike taxes for the impact they have on their private welfare. And yet people want more of it to be spent on public activities. This tension in attitudes tells us something important. People *are* realistic. They know that resources have to be devoted to the public sphere of life. If the public sector is not vibrant, we all lose, in some way. But the at same time, *people intuitively know that there is something fundamentally wrong with the tax system*. They ought to trust their instincts and demand that the people who collect and spend their money engage in a debate about the character of the tax system itself, just in case there really is something fundamentally wrong with it.

There is.

Taxes penalise people who work and save by deterring them from producing goods and services. *Every year, we lose something like £115 billion from tax-induced constraints*. Such wastage is all the evidence that we need that taxation is destructive.

Is it right that government should exercise the power to destroy people's capacity to produce wealth? By being the principal agent blocking people from meeting their everyday needs - the full provision of education, medical and recreational amenities, together with decent housing and the setting aside of a portion of one's income for old age - government promotes a system of organised abuse.

But on the charge that taxation is *exploitative*: if government has no other way in which to raise revenue, is that not mitigation? If we have no choice but to raise money by:

- taxing people who want to be free to work to earn their incomes;
 - penalising people when they buy clothes to put on their backs;
 - charging them for putting some money aside for their old age
- then it may not seem fair to brand the system as exploitative.

Is there an alternative policy that does not destroy people's creative powers and which is also ethically fair?

An Alternative Source of Tax Revenue

Such a policy does exist. It is the traditional one: in which public activities are financed out of the rent of land and natural resources. For centuries - indeed, from the Dawn of civilisation - the net income (what we today call the rent of land) was the source of public expenditure. It could not have been otherwise: rent is the net income, the surplus that is left after meeting all costs of production (of wealth) and reproduction (of families). The additional spending to fund all that we classify as features of civilisation HAD to come out of the net income. Unfortunately, that system of finance was progressively abandoned. Abandoned not for reasons of public welfare, or from ethical considerations; but for the private enrichment of a minority of people. They believed they were entitled to live outside the realms of everyday life. For example, they did not want to work for a living: *they were the original scroungers*.

Furthermore, they did not want to participate in civil society on an equal basis: *they were the original élites*, the people who governed by arbitrary rule, by abusing the notion that each and every person has equal right to love and labour without hindrance from others. The original scroungers who stole the public value had to substitute an alternative public finance. This could not have been anything other than one built on exploitation, abuse, destruction. It is necessary to make an important point about the democratic process, further to illuminate the exploitative character of taxation. The fair system of public finance is one that our politics, which we call democracy, *actively prevents us from adopting*.

There is something fundamentally wrong, morally speaking, if those who exercise political power prevent people from exercising their birthright. That birthright is the right of each of us to enjoy the resources of nature, which are given free by God or by nature (depending on your theological persuasion), to all of us, equally.

Political philosophy takes it as axiomatic that the nation-state is sovereign. The State has the power to do whatever it wishes *providing it can justify its actions in terms of the public will*. There is no acceptance of superior systems of natural law or theological law to constrain Parliament.¹

Positive law, as it is called, requires no more than a one-vote majority in the House of Commons. That is sufficient to override the systems of law that formerly guided social behaviour. We saw what happened with the Poll Tax. Mrs. Thatcher could steamroller the tax into law despite popular animosity. People had to become law-breakers and riot in the streets to demonstrate the unacceptability of this tax. Only then would Parliament repeal the law.

In other words, when it comes to taxation, parliament is not bound by any system of ethics, let alone norms of efficiency.

Apart from the personal impact on our incomes, should we care about all this? I believe so. The deep-seated public animosity towards taxation has a corrosive effect on the fabric of society. By encouraging law-breaking in one sphere - by

- encouraging corporations to dodge taxes; by
- encouraging people to lie about how they work; by
- condoning slick legal tactics for concealing one's legitimately earned wealth - government makes it easier for people to justify ethically lax behaviour in other spheres of life. Negative forces emerge.

The Unique Public Value of Land

Is there a public value which is not created by individuals but rather by people collectively, in the community? If there is, this is the legitimate revenue to support public expenditure.

Or, to put it another way: can we identify and measure a value that has to be attributed exclusively to the efforts of individuals? If so, this would seem to be private income which ought not to be arbitrarily appropriated by anyone else. Our discussion of public finance has driven us into the realm of property rights. These issues were addressed by the philosopher John Locke. He pointed out that people were entitled to the property which they created with their labour. What was implicit - *natural* - in the behaviour of our primordial ancestors was now consciously explicit.

But Locke noted that a portion of the value that circulated in the community was not attributable to private effort. This value, therefore, could not be the legitimate subject of private ownership. Locke acknowledged that this value was attributable to land. Land was uniquely different from labour and capital.

Ethically, it was wrong to take people's earned incomes.

Ethically it was also wrong of the community not to take the rent of land for social use.

Ethically it is wrong for society to permit the private appropriation of the rent of land.

Thus, here we have an ethical rule for determining the character of our system of public finance. You keep what you produce. You yield what you do not produce. This rule also sets the rates of revenue: the net income of society is the natural fund for public expenditure.

On ethical grounds alone a society that wishes to be moral needs to restructure its public finance to one that relies on rent, to be shared equally among us all through the use of public services.

Such a reform would wipe out the tradable value of land. Land would continue to have an annual rental value, but if this rent was paid to the state there would be

nothing left to capitalise into a selling price. This raises the question of whether compensation should be paid to owners for the loss of asset value.

The Dilemma of Compensation

We have seen that it is ethically wrong to claim sole proprietary rights to the value of land and natural resources. In the past, radical reformers like Thomas Paine pointed out that land ownership stemmed from thievery by monarchs and their henchmen. We do not compensate thieves today who steal other people's property and are then caught and are required to return the property to their rightful owners. In the case of land, the rightful owners are the community in general. Yet the law says that the rent can be privately owned and traded. So if a person paid in good faith for a piece of land, should he now be deprived of that value just because society has suddenly aroused its moral sensitivities? Here we have a serious problem, and the precedents are confusing.

This problem confronted parliament early in the last century when it decided to outlaw the trade in human beings. Slavery was abolished; a valuable asset was eliminated - people were private property. According to the law, they were legitimately acquired for purposes of trade. Compensation was paid by our Parliament to those who lost the value they acquired through that trade - £20 million, if I recall correctly.

One assumes that it would be an injustice now to socialise the rent of land without compensation. Unfortunately, this posits a further ethical dilemma. From where do we draw the resources to compensate the landowner? Surely we cannot force people to pay compensation out of the incomes which they earn and which rightfully belongs to no-one else? But if not, then how do we raise the money to reimburse those who have paid previous owners for the rights to land?

This ethical dilemma, obliges us to consider anew the status of our Constitutions and Laws.

One commentator has pointed out that the US Constitution 'protects an owner against the desire of those who want to utilise the power of government without providing compensation. Is this not ethically admirable?' Well, our problem is this. The US Constitution was written by land speculators. They were willing to abuse the natural rights of the settlers, the landless labourers of Europe. Despite the fine-sounding rhetoric, on this one issue of land, no ethical consideration was allowed to intrude in the shaping of the edicts in the Constitution.

The chicanery of the Constitution writers was barefaced. They claimed to base their notions of freedom on the philosophy of John Locke. Locke had affirmed every person's natural right to 'life, liberty and estate' - estate being the word then used for land. The American speculators who were carving up the New World in their private Old World interest would have nothing to do with the word estate as a natural right. Instead, they substituted the right to happiness.

Now, given these antecedents, are American citizens bound to uphold that Constitution when it comes to correcting the ills which it endorsed, nay caused? We have a precedent to guide us. The US Federal Government did not compensate the southern slave owners when the rights to own human beings were abolished after the Civil War.

If we are pressed on the question of compensation for landowners, we also have to consider whether anyone else has a claim to restitution.

For as long as rents have been privatised, people's private incomes have been socialised: that is the nature of the tax system. For centuries people have been subjected to arbitrary exactions which have

- diminished their standard of living, and
- impoverished many of them to the level of degradation.

These people - the vast majority of us and our ancestors, who did not own land - were denied the opportunity to accumulate an asset value in their labour. Without the imposition of exploitative taxes, they would have built up private stocks of capital to enable them to live a longer and better life than was (and is) the case.

Consider, for example, the claim by Henry George in *Progress and Poverty* (1879), that land speculation was at the source of economic recessions. The private pursuit of capital gains from land causes recessions. These dislocations destroy a large part of the value that people have accumulated in stocks and shares. Employees are also deprived of a significant part of their lifetime's earnings when they are rendered unemployed. The speculators in the rent of land are directly responsible for causing these losses. Who compensates the losers of value when the stock market crashes? Who compensates people who lose their incomes when they lose their jobs?

The beneficiaries of the fiscal exploitation have been the landowners: first, the aristocracy and their hangers-on; now, of course, we have democratised that exploitation through our pension funds. So, who pays compensation to the people against whom such a grievous injustice has been inflicted? Their losses far exceeded the gains that were achieved by the owners of land.

The Benefits - Received Principle

Is there an ethically correct way to resolve these dilemmas? A practical principle does exist. It applies to all transactions in the labour and capital markets. We comply with that principle when we enter a shop and do a deal over the cash till. It is a principle which guides every transaction between two or more people. And if that principle is forcefully excluded from a transaction, the deal is tainted by such words as theft or insider dealing. But here is further evidence of the exploitative character of our tax system: *this principle is excluded from the land market*. I refer to the Principle of Paying for the Benefits that one Receives.

When people hire out their labour or their savings they expect to be rewarded to the full value of what they contribute to the productive process. When people go into shops they hand over money which they assess to be equivalent to the value they will receive from the product they are buying.

An Historic Fraud

The institutionalised exception to this arrangement relates to deals involving land. These are not ethically equal transactions

The buyer or renter of a piece of land pays a sum equal to the services which he expects to receive as a result of using the site. We see this in the case of the family that needs a home. It is not the land itself that is purchased but the right to occupy a piece of land (one of the 'bundle of rights'). The location of the land matters. The husband and wife assess whether they need access to particular schools, hospital,

recreational or transport amenities - all the things that are directly relevant to their lives. They determine how much they are willing to pay for the location that meets their needs. They are thus able to offer a rent, or price, for the land. So the *paying side* of the transaction is ethically fair.

The seller, on the other hand, occupies a quite different situation. What is he giving to the deal? We have just listed what he is giving! He is not selling a piece of land, *per se*. He is selling access to public amenities. But what right does he have to charge people for access to public services? The answer, of course, is none. This is an ethically indefensible transaction on the seller's side.

We can, of course, argue that the buyer is also behaving in an ethically improper way. He pays money to an individual, the landowner, who has no right to act as gatekeeper to the locally available public services. That money, the rental value of land, is a measure of part of the cost of providing the public services that are accessible to that location. The money ought to be given to the provider of the services - the community, through its various public agencies.

As citizens of a nominally democratic country we have the responsibility to challenge those who make decisions on our behalf. We have a duty to insist that they calculate the costs, as well as the benefits, of choosing one tax rather than another; one fiscal structure rather than another. We should insist that Parliament provide a full accounting of why it prefers to continue with this taxation, rather than shift to the system that does not destroy people's jobs.

For how much longer are we going to tolerate the historic fraud that we call taxation? For so long as we do, we cannot claim to be living in an ethical society.

¹ Kenneth Jupp, *Stealing our Land*, London: Othila Press, 1997. □

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Registered 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 all those who reject supernatural creeds and find themselves in sympathy with our views. At Conway Hall there are opportunities for participation in cultural activities including discussions, lectures, concerts and socials. The Sunday Evening Chamber Music Concerts founded in 1887 are renowned. We have an interesting reference library. All members receive the Society's journal, *Ethical Record*, eleven times a year. Funerals and Memorial Meetings are available.

Please apply to the Registrar for membership, £10 p.a.

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

DO WE EVER SEE THE WORLD OR ONLY A PICTURE OF THE WORLD IN OUR HEADS?

Nick McAdoo
Open University

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 16 November 1997

It is common-sense to think that we are *in the world* - surrounded by other people, buildings, landscape and so on, of which we are a part. But there is another view that has haunted philosophy since around the beginning of the seventeenth century, which is that the world might actually be *in us*, in the sense that all we can ever know of the world including other people, is the picture that we have of it 'in our heads' - rather as if we were all of us plugged into some state-of-the-art virtual reality machine that could simulate every aspect of the external world with total fidelity. This second view leads on only too easily to the familiar concept of the lonely, isolated individual, trapped inside their own consciousness, which is known in philosophy by the name of *solipsism*.

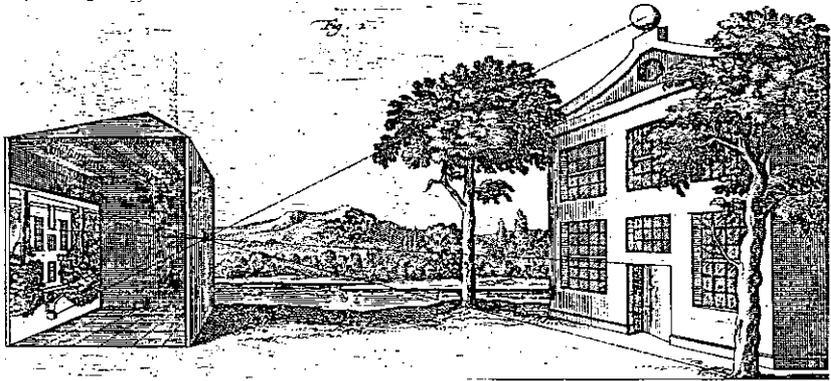
Although it seems to run directly counter to common-sense, solipsism has preoccupied philosophers and not only philosophers for a long time. In fact there can be few people who have not occasionally wondered, along with the seventeenth century French philosopher Descartes, whether the whole idea of an externally existing world is not simply something that we have dreamed up and that the only thing we can ever really know is how the world appears and feels to each individual alone. This depressing view that human existence is ultimately a very private, lonely affair has not gone unchallenged and an incredible amount of philosophical ink has been spent over the years trying, in the words of the 20th century philosopher Wittgenstein, 'to show the fly the way out of the bottle'. But how did the fly come to be in the bottle in the first place? After all, it was never a problem for the early Greek philosophers who took the view that human existence was fundamentally *social* rather than individual.

The Camera Obscura Model of Perception

Paradoxically, solipsism first appears at a point in history where one might least expect it, with the rise of modern science in the sixteenth century - the age of Copernicus, Galileo and Da Vinci. By the end of this period the most important philosophers of the day, such as Descartes on the continent and Bacon and Locke in Britain, saw their main purpose as being to defend the new science against religious obscurantism. Since modern science aimed to found knowledge primarily on careful observation of the external world one of the most important tasks for these philosophers was therefore to clarify the nature of *perception*. Not surprisingly, they took as their model for this the *camera obscura* - the origin of the modern camera. Thus they thought, not unreasonably, that just as light enters through the pin hole in the wall of the darkened chamber and projects an image on the opposite wall, so in a similar fashion, light, sound, taste, touch and smell enter into the human mind via our sense organs and project an image of the world onto a kind of 'inner screen' which they called the 'mental image'.

The mental image, they thought, mirrored the world. Of course it could be distorted by figments of the imagination - e.g. seeming to see ghosts and goblins - but what ultimately distinguished perceptual images from the products of our fantasy was that the former were not subject to our will. Thus, while I could easily

imagine turning someone that I did not like into a frog I could not bring this about *perceptually* because the world on the whole presents to us a stable, objective appearance to which perception must submit.



Camera Obscura from s'Gravesande's Physics textbook of 1720

Now in many ways such an account does seem eminently reasonable given our knowledge of such phenomena as light and sound waves and the mechanisms by which the eye, ear and other senses decode incoming signals. However whereas with a camera we can always check the accuracy of our picture against the original subject matter ('does this passport photograph *really* look like me?'), it quickly became apparent that if we construe *human* perception on the model of the *camera obscura* we can never step outside our own head and compare our 'inner picture' with the external world. Suddenly solipsism seemed to become a reality! The camera obscura model of perception traps each one of us in the private world of our own consciousness so that we can never know the world and other human beings directly but only our *subjective* image of them and we have no way of checking whether this inner world corresponds in any way with a posited outer one!

Wittgenstein: No Private Meaning to Experience

So is there a way out? Largely as a result of the pioneering efforts of the great 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant to show that our concept of 'perception' would be unintelligible if we were not situated in a world of free-standing objects of which we were one, solipsism came, by the middle of the 20th century, to be seen as a somewhat discredited philosophical position. Much of this was due to the pioneering work of Ludwig Wittgenstein who pointed out that the language in which we characterize our own experience of the world cannot be of our own subjective making because *meaning* is something which is fundamentally public and shared. The idea of giving a private meaning to our experiences is therefore unintelligible because we could not then make sense of it even to ourselves, let alone to other people.

Since much has been written on Wittgenstein however, I want mainly to focus in this paper on another pioneering but lesser known 20th century anti-solipsist thinker, the German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl who starts, like Kant, from trying to see what conditions must hold in order to make sense of the world that we perceive (*phenomenology* is the philosophy of how the world *appears* to us).

Husserl does not deny that there is a *causal* mechanism at work in perception - the light waves entering through the retina, activating the rods and cones, sending off neural messages etc, but as he points out, *that* is not what we mean by 'perception'. What we actually perceive when we look at the world is not some brain mechanism. Still less is it the obscure notion of a *picture* of the world 'in the head' because, quite apart from anything else, where *is* this mysterious inner film show? Rather what we *actually* see is the familiar everyday furniture of the world in which we live - the tree over there, the child running towards us, the hills in the distance etc. There really is a world "out there" at which our powers of perception are directed. I don't sit on my mental image of a chair but on *this* chair supporting my weight right now!

Husserl: We Always Have a Point of View

However, and this is the most important part of Husserl's argument, it is also a necessary condition of any kind of perception that it is *is always from a point of view*. Thus while the tree really is over there, I can only see it at any one time from over here or over there, and naturally its appearance will change as I walk around it.

Furthermore, such points of view are situated not only in space and time, but may also include emotional points of view as well as our 'situatedness' within a culture, class, sex and so on. The world does actually tend to *look* different according to whether I am e.g. in a cheerful or miserable state of mind! Of course we *aim* to see the world as objectively as possible and to escape the limitations of a particular point of view, as when, to take a very straightforward example, we walk around the tree to see it from all sides. But to restate the problem, however much we 'walk round it' trying to see it from different viewpoints our perception of the object can only ever be from one point of view at a time.

However while it is a necessary truth of perception that I can only perceive anything from one viewpoint at a time, it is equally true that what perception

necessarily aims at is *the object as a whole*, liberated from the partiality of the single viewpoint. What makes this possible according to Husserl is that *all acts of perception are supplemented by further acts of the imagination*, based on our knowledge of the world. For example, although I cannot see the other side of the tree from where I am standing I certainly don't imagine for one moment that it does not have another side! Rather, I automatically imagine as best I can all the missing viewpoints that fill out my one-sided view. To take a more interesting example, I cannot see the contents of the letter at which the young girl is gazing in the Vermeer painting, but given the intensity of her gaze, I cannot imagine that she is staring at a blank sheet and still less a shopping



list! It is clearly something very serious. Similarly in the case of aural perception, as when I listen to a piece of music, although I only ever hear one brief snatch at a time, for Husserl, my imagination must be aiming at the sound of the piece in its entirety or we could not make sense of how we are able to hear a melody. In all these cases, the imagination functions to try and supply what is missing in perception however difficult this may be at times.

Husserl's Brilliant Answer

But now for the final problem. If Husserl can only explain our perception of the world by allotting the imagination a fundamental supporting role then hasn't he reintroduced the solipsistic notion of mental imagery through the back door? Husserl's brilliant answer to this is to treat mental imagery as he treats perception, namely as something which always points beyond itself to the object - in the case of imagination, this being the object of which it is an image. Thus for example, I might try to imagine the time on holiday a few years ago when I and the children climbed Hellvellyn. Right now I seem to have a mental image of the mountain bathed in bright sunlight, the children bounding ahead like mountain goats and my own sickening feelings of vertigo, just as you might try to conjure up such a scene 'in your mind's eye', although perhaps less vividly, on the basis of my description. But for Husserl the *real* object of both our thoughts here cannot be a mental-picture mountain, for what kind of a thing could *that* be? It certainly would be small and unclimbable! Rather it is the *real Hellvellyn and the real events of that day* which the mental image tries to evoke.

As one of Husserl's followers, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre succinctly put it: 'the mental image is a certain way an object has of being present in its absence'. The mental image therefore, as much as the act of perception, is directed *outwards* towards the world rather than *inwards* towards the discredited solipsistic notion of the world as a picture in our head. The world then, is not in us. We are in the world!

Further reading:

Edmund Husserl *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness* (Nijhoff).

Jean-Paul Sartre *The Psychology of the Imagination* (Methuen).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty *The Phenomenology of Perception* (Doubleday).

Frazer Cowley *A Critique of British Empiricism* (MacMillan).

Nick McAdoo 'Hearing Musical Works in their Entirety' in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, January 1997. □

British Humanist Association Holidays

Escape to Warwick at Easter!

Four nights' dinner, bed & breakfast at the Warwick Arms Hotel

Friday 10 April (dinner) - Tuesday 14 April (breakfast)

£150 inc VAT

We also aim to organise visits and talks, which will incur a small extra charge.

Full details and booking form from Jon Buttolph, BHA, 47 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8SP.
Please book early, as places are limited. Double, twin and single rooms available.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS AT THE ETHICAL SOCIETY

The Library, Conway Hall Humanist Centre, 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn, WC1

Tel: 0171 242 8037

No charge unless stated

DECEMBER 1997

Sunday 7

11.00 am **THE EQUALITY OF BODIES.** Noel Parry.
Animal exploitation and human welfare.

3.00 pm **TOPICAL TOPICS** with Terry Mullins
Bring your ethical concerns for discussion.

Sunday 14

11.00 am **FROM MRS SIMPSON TO LADY DI or
CONTROVERSIAL CONSORTS:** T. F. Evans followed by...

* * *

Music & Yuletide Party

* * *

Mulled Wine & Mince Pies and more. £1.50

Lionel Elton's Gentle Entertainment on Clarinet and Recorder.

Musical & Literary Quiz

Tea and Chocolate Mousse

JANUARY 1998

Sunday 11

11.00 am **PSYCHO-ANALYSIS:**
Science or Commonsense? Dr David Snelling

3.00 pm **MARGARET GILLIES:** Unitarian, painter and friend of W.J. Fox and the
Flower sisters Dr Charlotte Yeldham.

72nd Conway Memorial Lecture

7.00 pm Thursday 15 January, 1998

MINDS, BRAINS and CONSCIOUSNESS

by

Professor Colin Blakemore PhD, ScD, FRS

Wayneffete Professor of Physiology, University of Oxford, Reith Lecturer

Apply to Librarian for free tickets.

SOUTH PLACE SUNDAY CONCERTS AT CONWAY HALL - 6.30 pm Tickets £4

- DECEMBER 14 VANBRUGH STRING QUARTET & HUGH TINNEY (piano)
Dvorák: Op. 96, Bartók: Quartet No. 3, Dvorák: Op. 81
- 21 DANTE STRING QUARTET
Belaiev: Les Vendredis from both sets. Rimsky Korsakov, Glazounov,
Borodin, Liadov: Op. 59 No. 1
- JANUARY 4 BELCEA STRING QUARTET
Hayden: Opus 76/4, Gorecki: No. 1, Beethoven: Opus 59/3.

For full programme, send S.A.E. to: David Morris, PO Box 17635, London N12 8WN

Published by the South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 4RL

Printed by J.G. Bryson (Printer) Ltd. 156-162 High Road, London N2 9AS ISSN 0014 - 1690