

Ethical Record

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REUNION 2000

In a tradition now more than 100 years old, the beginning of the Ethical Society's educational programme is marked by the Annual Reunion of the Kindred Societies. This year's event, though enjoyed by all, was marked by a sense of sadness that our last Keynote Speaker, Nicolas Walter, had died in the meantime, as Jim Herrick, speaking for the R.P.A. noted. Nicolas spoke of the sometimes friendly, sometimes fraught, interrelationships of the various Humanist groups. However we hope our Reunion symbolises the basic unity of Humanists in this country. The Chair, Norman Bacrac, who also spoke for the Society, stressed this in his opening remarks: this afternoon we would 'accentuate the positive' in our exchange of greetings and news.

As this year's Keynote Speaker we were delighted to welcome Marilyn Mason, the education specialist of the British Humanist Association. Her illuminating talk discussed *Humanism in Schools - Is it Already There?* Marilyn was surprisingly optimistic about the situation. Although the Church of England is established and Religious Education compulsory, the recent Guidance on RE advises that pupils should learn about 'ethical life stances' and six major world religions are taught, not just Christianity. The text follows on p. 10.

Keith Wood for the NSS also touched on the vexed question of religious schools and the way church leaders are trying to claim privileges for religion against the new Human Rights legislation. Terry Sanderson for GALHA was concerned that churches were trying to gain legal sanction to indulge their biblical prejudices against homosexuals, in (non)employment. Anne Toy speaking for the BHA network of ceremony officiants brought good news about the increasing popularity of non-religious funerals, if not weddings. Malcolm Rees told us about the growth of SOS, the international secular alternative for all forms of addiction, which promotes self reliance as opposed to the 'Higher Power' the Anonymous organisations find necessary. Dr Ian King was also enthusiastic about the Sonnenberg Association, formed after the war to encourage European amity. About the Progressive League, Dorothy Forsyth had the sad news that as many of its members were now elderly, their activities were perforce increasingly curtailed if not their zest for PL principles.

To help allay the general suspicion that we cannot enjoy ourselves, Jazz R & D, i.e. Roy Core (Guitar) and Dave Toy (Piano) gave two rousing sessions of old favourites. We ended with mouthwatering refreshments and thank the volunteers. JRJ.

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SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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GENERAL MEETINGS, SUNDAY 1 OCTOBER 2000

Member Ian Ray-Todd alleged in the High Court on 29 September 2000 that the General Meetings scheduled for 1 October could not take place because the Agendas had been posted only 10 (not 11) days previously, on 21 September. However, the Judge refused to grant the sought-for injunction, although stipulating that the irregularity be brought to the attention of the members attending on 1 October. (Our rules specify that, to allow time for the receipt of amendments to motions, the Agenda be in the hands of the membership 8 days before the meeting - the extra 3 days is delivery time - and this requirement was in fact satisfied.) By an overwhelming majority, the members present decided to proceed with the Special and Annual General Meetings:-

SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING, 2.15pm, 1 October 2000

It was resolved to relax the obsolete rule requiring the Society's AGM to be held in April. Various motions and amendments seeking to change the name of the Society were not passed. A motion to secure the right of retiring GC members to seek immediate re-election was also defeated (thus invalidating the nominations of two retiring GC members, Michael Newman and Ian Ray-Todd).

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 2.45 pm, 1 October 2000

It was resolved to support the boycott of Nestlé products (inc. Nescafé) owing to its violation of W.H.O.'s marketing code in the 'third world'.

The following member (the only new candidate) was elected to the General Committee for 3 years: Neil Nathaniel Collins. The other members of the GC are: Norman Bacrac, Christopher Bratcher, Don Liversedge, Edmund McArthur, Victor Monger, Terry Mullins, Diane Murray, Steven Norley, John Rayner, Donald Room. Note: Diane Murray has since resigned from the GC. The Society owes Diane a debt of gratitude for the expenditure of much thought, time and effort on its behalf.

MEETING of the GENERAL COMMITTEE, 4 OCTOBER 2000

The following Officers, who together form the Executive Committee, were elected at the above meeting to serve for the coming year:

Chairman of the GC:	John Rayner.	Hon. Rep. of the GC:	Don Liversedge.
Vice Chairman:	Terry Mullins.	Registrar:	Donald Room.
Editor:	Norman Bacrac.	Treasurer:	Vacancy.

Subcommittee membership (Convenors underlined):

Employment & Personnel: D.Liversedge, T.Mullins, J.Rayner, co-opted; Nina Khare, with the Admin. Sec. (Marina Ingham) in attendance.

Finance & Hall: N.Bacrac, D.Liversedge, V.Monger, T.Mullins, S.Norley, J.Rayner, with the Admin. Sec., Frances Hanlon & Peter Vlachos in attendance.

Programme, Library & Editorial: N.Bacrac, Neil Collins, D.Liversedge, E.McArthur, D.Room, with Jennifer Jeynes in attendance.

Rules & Standing Orders: N.Bacrac, T.Mullins, J.Rayner.

Sunday Concerts: The Executive Committee, with the Admin. Sec. in attendance.

MONCURE CONWAY AND THE 'WOMAN QUESTION'*

Virginia Clark

The Fawcett Library

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 16 April 2000

Moncure Daniel Conway (1832-1907), for whom this building is named, is described on the historical panels displayed downstairs as an American Unitarian minister who came to England to campaign against slavery during the American Civil War. He became minister of South Place Unitarian Chapel (or South Place Religious Society, the predecessor of South Place Ethical society) and is credited in the Society's leaflet *Conway Hall and the South Place Ethical Society* as having led them 'through theism towards Humanism'. That journey was completed under Stanton Coit, who oversaw the final name change. Conway served as minister - the last person to bear that title - from September 1863 until 1885, and again from 1892 to 1897. In the seven years of his absence he returned to the United States, travelled to Europe, wrote his two-volume biography of Thomas Paine (1892), and edited a four-volume compilation of Paine's writings (1894-1896).

Conway was born in Virginia into a slave-owning family, was educated at Dickinson College (Carlisle, Pennsylvania) and at Harvard Divinity School (Cambridge, Massachusetts), where he was converted from Methodism to Unitarianism. His anti-slavery views have been mentioned, and in 1856 those outspoken views lost him his first Unitarian pulpit, in Washington, DC, then as now a very 'southern' city. From Washington he went to Cincinnati, in southwestern Ohio; where he preached and, 1860 to 1861, edited *The Dial*, a distinguished liberal journal. In 1862 he left Cincinnati for Boston and the editorship of *Commonwealth*, an anti-slavery magazine. In 1863 he accepted the suggestion of a group of abolitionists that he travel to England to speak on behalf of the Northern (federal) side of the American Civil War. England had abolished slavery some thirty years earlier, led by figures like Wilberforce, but American abolitionists were concerned about the Southern (confederate) sympathies both among England's upper classes, who admired the Southern plantation way of life, and among the cotton industrialists, who worried about supplies of their raw material. In his autobiography Conway writes just after his arrival in England, 'The efforts made by the Confederates in England at this time were desperate. They had as their organ the London *Times*, which was selecting with great pains every American item which might irritate English pride.'

Moncure Conway A Pioneer In Women's Suffrage

Conway's anti-slavery efforts are, as I have said, well known. However, some research I was doing last year in the Fawcett Library (in connection with a long-standing voluntary job there) revealed another facet of Conway's social-reform thought and activities - his involvement in the early women's rights movement, indeed in what was probably the first public meeting in England for women's suffrage. (The Fawcett Library, for those of you who may not know of it, is Britain's national research library in women's history, named for Millicent Garrett Fawcett, leader of the non-militant wing of the suffrage campaign. The library has since the late 1970s been housed at London Guildhall University.)

*A phrase widely used in the 19th century for general consideration of women's status and condition.

This early suffrage meeting came to light as I was indexing *Shafts*, a quirky, short-lived self-described feminist/socialist periodical of the 1890s, which also had an evident if unannounced Unitarian/freethought agenda. A long interview with Robert Spears (1825-1899), a colourful and controversial Unitarian minister who was a contemporary of Conway's, contained Spears's claim that he had hosted in his chapel the first-ever meeting for women's suffrage. He described the meeting, named the man who chaired it - Henry Fawcett, husband of Millicent, and identified the place: Stamford Street Unitarian Chapel, a large Doric Greek-revival temple, rivalling South Place (Ionic Greek-revival) both in its architecture and in its reputation for social radicalism. Spears did not name the other speakers or give any date; but the location did not match the 'received' history of the suffrage movement, so further investigation was called for.

For almost a century 'received' suffrage chronology has come from a 1902 book by Helen Blackburn: the first public suffrage meeting in England was in the Assembly Room of the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, 14 April 1868; the first in London, 17 July 1869, in the Gallery of the Architectural Society, Conduit Street Mayfair - just the sort of location and historical image the early, mostly middle-class women's movement would have favoured over a south-of-the-Thames Unitarian chapel.² But a search of the Unitarian news magazine *The Inquirer* (in Dr. Williams's Library) proved Spears right and 'received' history wrong. An earlier London meeting had preceded even the Manchester meeting by a week and the 1869 Conduit Street meeting by more than a year. It took place on a Monday evening, 6 April 1868, with four such famous speakers and with such wide contemporary press coverage that its disappearance from the record of women's suffrage would seem to have been impossible.

Newspapers covering the meeting included four national dailies (the *Times*, *Telegraph*, *Morning Post*, and *Daily News*), two regional weeklies (the *South London Chronicle* and *South London Press*), and the special-interest Unitarian weekly *The Inquirer*.

The First Public Meeting On Suffrage

Henry Fawcett (1833-1884) was, as noted, in the chair. He had in 1865 been elected MP for Brighton after an earlier, unsuccessful campaign in Southwark. (Stamford Street Chapel stands on the Southwark/Lambeth borough line.) He would have been well remembered in the neighbourhood; his 'feminist' credentials included seconding J.S.Mill's amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill, which would have extended the vote to some women. He also had near celebrity status for achieving both a Cambridge professorship and a seat in Parliament - despite being blind. Conway, who had met Fawcett several years earlier, tells in his autobiography a delightful anecdote about Fawcett and Fawcett's friend and biographer Leslie Stephen as young Cambridge radicals. A Tory squire had brought his son for possible enrollment in Trinity Hall but went first to the Hall to investigate rumours of radicalism there. He met Fawcett, who confessed that, yes, there had been extreme ideas about but assured him that they would now 'be contented simply with disestablishment of the Church and the abolition of the Throne.' Exit squire.³

Another speaker at Stamford Street was the prominent Unitarian James Heywood, (1810-1897), born in Manchester and founder of the Manchester Athenaeum. Formerly MP for North Lancashire, a scholar and philanthropist (Kensington's first free library), he was a member of the Senate of London University, where he campaigned for women to be allowed to take degrees.

Heywood himself, though ranked as Senior Optime in the tripos list at Cambridge, was, as a Unitarian, denied his degree until abolition of the University Test Acts twenty-three years later! (A similar fate lay in store for Henry and Millicent Fawcett's daughter Phillippa who was to rank above the Senior Wrangler in the mathematics tripos but be denied title and degree because she was a woman.)

The third speaker was Thomas Hughes (1822-1896), MP for Lambeth, whom Conway had met soon after his arrival in England. Hughes was a supporter of the Christian socialism of F.D.Maurice and of the Co-operative movement, and he founded the Working Men's College (1854). He was also the famous and popularly celebrated author of *Tom Brown's School Days*.⁴

It is, however, the fourth speaker who is of special interest. Moncure Conway had been at South Place Chapel for four and a half years in April 1868. He was known beyond his own congregation because of his anti-slavery speaking campaign, and his congregation was known as the most radical in London. Before turning to his women's rights interests, I would like to tell you about one incident that attests his strength of opinion and his capacity for direct action.

From late 1856 to 1862 Conway served as minister in Cincinnati, Ohio, and got to know southwestern Ohio well. The Ohio River, which defines the southern boundary of the state and flows past Cincinnati towards the Mississippi, was also the dividing line between slave and free territory. Those of you who have read Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will recall the fictional Eliza's escape with her baby across the ice of the Ohio River. Ohio was the goal of many real-life slaves as well, and Conway engineered a slave rescue almost as hazardous as Eliza's trip. In the summer of 1862, in the middle of the American Civil War, he took from his father's Virginia plantation a group of slaves, securing a risky 'safe-passage' from the Northern military authorities, and travelled with the slaves by train from Washington through hostile crowds in Baltimore, Maryland, (a slave state, where they had to change not only trains but stations). He took them to safety in Ohio and settled them just about 45 miles from Cincinnati in a small town called Yellow Springs, home of famous and radical Antioch College, founded just 10 years before, in 1852. He visited them there during a later trip home from London, and Yellow Springs is to this day a centre of radical thought and activity. Nearby are two historically black universities, one named Wilberforce, founded 1856. Conway's own detailed account of this rescue mission reads like a thriller.⁵

From Abolitionism To Women's Rights

There was a connection between the abolitionist and the women's rights movements in the United States - and it had come about because of an incident in London. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (whose name you will hear again) was among the women in the American delegation to the International Anti-Slavery Congress in London in 1840. The women were refused seats. One result was the Seneca Falls Convention in upstate New York in 1848, organised by Stanton and others, that began the American women's suffrage movement. Thus Conway's extension of his abolitionist concerns to women's rights was not unusual, and it began early in his career.

In an 1856 sermon (his first year in Cincinnati), Conway reports that he 'demanded that woman should be taken down from her cross and given freedom and occupation.'⁶ In 1858, the year of his marriage, he was feeling optimistic about everything: 'The year 1858 was altogether beautiful... the journals wanted editorials, various societies wanted addresses, and events were continually occurring which

called forth ethical discussion. The Woman Question was burgeoning out in various shapes....' [Perhaps not the happiest metaphor?] 'I did not espouse all that was called 'Woman's Rights,' but did not ridicule the much-confused cause, and in an early sermon said: "When any clear flame comes out of that smoke I will be as ready as any one to light my torch thereat and bear it before men." The fire beneath that smoke I regarded as the restrictions on female employment and its underpayment.'" He had discovered that women teachers in Cincinnati were being paid less than half as much as men.

After several months in England he realised that 'Englishmen awakened slowly to the fact that their whole duty to women was not fulfilled in having a queen.' Writing at the turn of the century, he adds, 'Since then [1864] the advance in the position of women appears to me almost the only progress made in civilisation. And although during most of those years I clamoured with women for their political en-franchisement, I believe that it was largely due to their helpless dependence on the absolutism of men that the outrageous laws were removed - through very shame.'

He thus discounts women as leaders or their own movement, writing just before the early 20th-century campaign of militancy began. And the 'outrageous laws' whose removal he speaks of were not the laws denying the parliamentary franchise. The reforms of the 1870s and 1880s were laws like the Married Women's Property Act, some divorce reform, and the Local Government Acts that enabled Englishwomen to vote for - and become - Poor Law Guardians, Parish Councillors, School Board members, and the like. To put into context this seeming change from support to condescension, let me reiterate that Conway's autobiography, which has to be taken as the chief source of his views, with all the usual caveats about autobiographies, was also written at a crucial point in the campaign for women's suffrage. At the turn of the century, the cause was at a very low point. Some chronology may be useful.

Parliamentary Action By J.S. Mill And Henry Fawcett

In September 1863 Conway had become minister at South Place. In 1866 the great petition with thousands of signatures (led by Mary Somerville's - you will hear her name again shortly) was presented to Parliament by John Stuart Mill, seconded by Henry Fawcett, as an amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill. The 1868 Stamford Street Chapel meeting at which Conway spoke came during a rising tide of expectations following the Mill petition. Hope stayed high until the defeat of a major and well-supported women's suffrage amendment in 1884. In 1886 a women's suffrage bill actually passed its second reading, but from then until the end of the century Conway watched as various Parliamentary procedural games prevented Private Members' bills - the only possible means for women's suffrage legislation - from even being discussed. Conway writes, 'The amusing day in the House of Commons was that set apart for the annual motion to enfranchise women.... [The leader of the Opposition] evidently took pleasure in tormenting the ladies behind their grating by making fun of them.'" In those days women could not even sit in the main public galleries in the House of Commons but only in a screened-off special section - literally behind bars. In 1897 such an amendment was run out of time by being placed fourth on the Order Paper, following discussions of bills about 'Verminous Persons', 'Plumbers Registration', and 'Locomotives on Highways', and was 'thrown over' for the session.¹⁰

His increasingly gloomy opinions about suffrage notwithstanding, Conway was in advance of opinion in encouraging women to speak in public. You will

remember that the speakers at the Stamford Street Chapel meeting were all men. He invited women into his South Place pulpit, and his congregations were addressed as early as 1872 by such famous American suffragists as Julia Ward Howe (author of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, previously mentioned as a founder of the American women's suffrage movement. Conway invited Englishwomen also, describing the Americans as 'more eloquent in the popular sense than the English female orators,' but adding 'in what is called "parliamentary speaking" the English ladies excelled.' He continues, 'I do not believe John Bright [the famous radical] ever made a finer speech than I heard from his sister [Eva McLaren].' Conway was especially pleased when his invited women speakers were both suffragists and freethinkers, like Stanton (editor/compiler of *The Woman's Bible*, 1895-1898), Susan B. Anthony (a friend and colleague of Stanton), and Annie Besant (writer, Theosophist, and friend of Charles Bradlaugh). Conway records that he 'distressed these suffragists by my belief that the disenfranchisement of their sex has made them individual thinkers and orators.' He is also scornful that 'Even the most emancipated ladies in London, demanding suffrage, did not dare to utilise for their cause the most eloquent among them, - Annie Besant, - because, I suspect, of her repudiation of Christianity.' Conway also tells in detail how he and his wife befriended Annie Besant.¹¹

Conway's argument (perhaps just a clever debating point?) that it was disenfranchisement that sharpened women's wits and skills is a good point at which to look more critically at Conway's growing ambivalence toward the vote per se. Here is his statement on his own exercise of the franchise. He voted for the famous Civil War president Abraham Lincoln in 1860, but 'it was the only vote I ever did cast for a president, having in Washington had no vote [the peculiar status of America's federal capital disenfranchised its residents] and in later years [had] no faith in any of the candidates or the office.'¹² (This complaint could pass for a more recent non-voter's excuse in more than one country).

Men-Servants Vote While Their Mistresses Cannot

Another argument, common in England both among supporters of women's suffrage and among those who claimed to support women but not necessarily votes for women, was an argument based on class. For instance, in the 1890s a group of middle and upper-class women activists staged a stunt in which they 'on election day drove their hired men in their carriages to the polls and waited outside while they [the male servants] went in to deposit their votes.'¹³ Conway quotes, from the young son of a friend, and approves an opinion based on this argument: "'It is a shame that my mother's men-servants should go off to vote while she cannot.'" That bright boy touched the only point that for me retained interest after the movement was submerged by the flood of democracy [i.e., universal manhood suffrage], - the stigma on woman, however intelligent, in the eyes of her own sons and of her inferiors.'¹⁴ (In post-Civil War America a similar argument tinged with racism was heard: if black men can vote now, why not women?) Conway's 'flood of democracy' phrase sounds as if he had just been reading the 'Eatanswill' chapter from Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*.

Nevertheless Conway continued to work on women's behalf, and to be counted as a friend of suffragists: in 1902 he would conduct Elizabeth Cady Stanton's private funeral service. He remained especially interested in their access to university education. The success of co-education at Antioch College and the roles of women as teachers and as commissioners of education in the states of New York and Massachusetts had been the chief points of his address to the 1868

Stamford Street Chapel meeting, according to the newspaper that reported Conway in greatest detail.¹⁵ In his autobiography Conway credits himself with having been instrumental, at least as messenger, in the founding of the first Oxford college for women; and a recent scholarly history of Somerville College confirms his role, but with a twist. Conway writes, 'In 1876 Mrs. Robert Crawshay, a lady connected with my South Place society, desired me to go to Oxford with the offer from her of a thousand pounds towards founding there a college for women which should be regularly incorporated with the university.... Thus the first step towards a college at Oxford for women was made in the house of my heretical self in London and the second [at a lunch to which Conway was invited] in High Church Keble College.¹⁶ From the Oxford point of view, however, 'the source of the offer - the wealthy feminist Mrs. Rose Mary Crawshay, acting through the mediation of the American Rationalist preacher Moncure Conway, a friend of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant - meant that the overriding reaction to this generosity was one of consternation. Realising that "any scheme evolved by these special promoters, who were persons of views little acceptable to the Oxford world, would hardly commend a women's college to the University," the local supporters of women's education were spurred on to work out a more acceptable scheme of their own.'¹⁷ The result was two colleges, Lady Margaret Hall, for the Anglican party, and non-denominational Somerville, named (amusingly at the suggestion of anti-suffragist, Mrs. Humphry Ward) for suffragist scientist and mathematician Mary Somerville 'who tended towards unitarian views, while remaining a member of the established church....'¹⁸ Both colleges opened in 1879.

Conway: Women Need Knowledge As Well As The Vote

But to return to Conway's attitude towards women's suffrage and towards voting in general. He was obviously appalled by some of the electoral excesses in the aftermath of universal manhood suffrage, as his phrase 'submerged by the flood of democracy' revealed. But Conway went further, to a position perhaps understandable but impossible to defend - or is it? He writes, 'However, the vulgarisation of the political vote rendered it inevitable that many thoughtful and scrupulous men should retreat from the mob-ridden polls and form with ladies a non-voting *élite*.'¹⁹ Is this anything more than Conway's unpleasantly worded justification of his own non-voting history? Or is he, as radicals often are, simply ahead of his times? Now that everyone *can* vote, though too few do, is voting still the most effective way to ensure good government? Conway stated that Mrs. Crawshay 'could not have secured with a hundred votes so much realisation of her personal aims' as with her thousand pounds.²⁰ Was he prescient about the future role of big-money donors in politics? More and more important matters seem to be controlled by civil servants and appointed experts not directly accountable to the electorate; and international corporations often seem more powerful than governments. Is Conway's 'non-voting *élite*' merely an accurate if harshly phrased forecast of special-interest, lobbyist politics and shareholder activism? Possibly there is something in his ambivalence toward voting to consider and debate. At the very least, as we use this building that bears his name, we may contemplate another aspect of the very interesting and complex character he was.

To close, a Conway quotation not from his autobiography may serve as a fair summary of his views on women and their political enfranchisement. In a long meditative essay 'The Madonna of Montbazou', inspired by a statue seen above an old fortified chateau, he sees a vision: 'It is Woman, her feet set upon ancient feudalism, her head crowned by science.' (A lightning rod!) And further, woman's 'influence must be largely increased. And how is that increase to be secured? Not

merely by giving her a vote, though that would be just and right. Still more, as I think, by increasing her resources of knowledge and culture, whereby she may grow with the growing world, and adapt her influence and strength to every new phase of the world's unfolding thought and power as it arrives."²¹

References

1. Moncure Daniel Conway. *Autobiography memories and experiences*. 2 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904. v.1, p. 391.*
2. Helen Blackburn. *Women's suffrage: a record of the women's suffrage movement in the British Isles*. London: Williams & Norgate, 1902. p.46.
3. Conway. *Autobiography*. v.1, p. 392-393.
4. For a fuller account of this meeting, its participants and press coverage, see Virginia Clark, 'Stamford Street Chapel 6 April 1868,' *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* 20, no. 2 (April 2000), p. 142-149.
5. Conway. *Autobiography*. v.1, p. 340-364.
6. *ibid.* v.1, p. 270.; 7. *ibid.* v.1, p. 289-290.; 8. *ibid.* v.1, p. 451.; 9. *ibid.* v.2, p. 80.
10. *Shafts* 5, no. 7 (Jul.-Aug. 1897), p. 207.
11. Conway. *Autobiography*. v.2, p. 284-291.
12. *ibid.* v.1, p. 318.
13. *Shafts* 1, no.3 (19 Nov. 1892), p.44.
14. Conway. *Autobiography*. v.2, p.294.
15. *South London Chronicle* 11 April 1868, p.2.
16. Conway. *Autobiography*. v.2, p.292.
17. Pauline Adams. *Somerville for women: an Oxford college, 1879-1993*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p.10.
18. *ibid.*, p.13.
19. Conway. *Autobiography*. v.2, p.294.
20. *ibid.*
21. Moncure Daniel Conway. 'The Madonna of Montbazon,' in his *Addresses and reprints, 1850-1907*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909, p.311, 319. □

*See also *Autobiography Memories and Experiences of Moncure D. Conway*, 2 vols. London: Cassell & Co, 1904 (different pagination from the US edn). [Ed.]

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. We have a library on subjects of humanist concern. All members receive the Society's journal, *Ethical Record*, eleven times a year. Funerals and Memorial Meetings may be arranged.

Please apply to the Admin. Secretary for membership, £18 p.a. Concessions (Over 65, unwaged or full-time student) £12 p.a.

Ethical Record, October, 2000

HUMANISM IN SCHOOLS - IS IT ALREADY THERE?

Marilyn Mason

Education Officer of the British Humanist Association

Keynote Address, Annual Reunion of Kindred Societies, 24 September 2000

Schools reflect society, and to the extent that humanist ideas are widely, if implicitly, accepted in our society, Humanism could be said to be alive and well in our schools. Indeed, given that schools are often more moral and humane environments than other parts of society, one could say that humanist values are more prevalent in schools than elsewhere. The difficulty for humanists, and I will come back to this, is that humanist ideas are often not recognised as humanist, and rarely labelled as such.

But let's look first at the many manifestations of humanist values in our state (or community) schools, and let's celebrate some progress. Our state education system, from nursery to university, is largely secular and broadly humanistic. Enquiry and independent thinking have long been part of our educational system, and I consider myself fortunate to have had a teaching career in an educational context where questioning, personal opinion, imagination and creativity, all good humanist values, were considered important. The ethos of most of our schools is essentially humanistic, sometimes in the face of considerable handicaps. Children are very rarely threatened these days with hellfire and damnation, at least in school, and many young (and not so young) people take for granted that their moral values have little or nothing to do with religion. Indeed, particularly in our primary schools, children are taught to listen to, respect and help each other, simply because it is the sensible and right way to behave, not because God or Jesus is keeping an eye on them.

Collective Worship Law Disregarded

The much detested law on collective worship in schools is widely disregarded, or interpreted so liberally that the average school assembly nowadays (and it is usually called assembly in schools, not 'prayers' or 'collective worship' - if it happens at all) consists of a (non-religious) moral story and a reflection - humanist in all but name - followed by school notices. There are few or none of the Bible stories, Christian hymns and prayers that we can remember from our dim and distant schooldays. 'Divinity', 'Scripture', 'Religious Knowledge' and 'Religious Instruction', have given way to the much less Christian and more detached perspective of 'Religious Education' or 'Religious Studies', where it is usual to find six world religions* studied in a more or less objective way.

Recent guidance on RE from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the government body that oversees the school curriculum and exam system, included advice that pupils should learn about 'ethical life stances' and 'religious and ethical teaching, enabling them to make reasoned and informed judgements on religious, moral and social issues', and that they should learn to evaluate 'religious, non-religious and their own views' on moral issues. All GCSE Religious Studies exams from all boards will shortly have to be 'accessible to candidates of any religious persuasion or none'. Most of them already contain a rubric to this effect and claim to include non-religious arguments, and to mark candidates who express them even-handedly. Some humanists working on some SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education - the committees that manage RE locally) have even

*Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism. [Ed.]

managed to get Humanism into their local RE syllabus, though this is, admittedly, a rare achievement. But materials produced by the BHA, on evolution, humanist ceremonies, humanist values and perspectives on contemporary moral and religious issues, do find their way into this more inclusive RE.

The recently revised National Curriculum now includes, for the first time ever, a statement on the values, aims and purposes of the school curriculum, which includes the following: 'a belief in education, at home and at school, as a route to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, physical and mental development, and thus the well-being, of the individual. Education is also a route to equality of opportunity for all, a healthy and just democracy, a productive economy, and sustainable development. Education should reflect the enduring values that contribute to these ends.' And that puzzling word 'spiritual' has been defined for educational purposes by Ofsted and SCAA/QCA in ways that are not narrowly religious.

The Source Of Values: God Or Human Nature?

A 'statement of values', produced by a National Forum for Values in Education and the Community, a working party in which the BHA participated, has also been included in the National Curriculum. It states clearly that these are shared moral values and that agreement on them 'is compatible with disagreement about their source', some people believing that God is the source while 'others that values have their source only in human nature'. No humanist could quarrel with that, or with the statement of values, which include 'self-respect and self-discipline', respect and care for others, 'valuing truth, freedom, justice, human rights, the rule of law and collective effort for the common good', and accepting responsibility for the environment. And there is recognition that all subjects, not just RE, can help to foster these values. Again, little for us to argue with there.

New subjects like Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education are poised to take on some of the social and moral teaching traditionally left to RE, for example 'learning about fairness, social justice, respect for democracy and diversity' (in KS3 and KS4 guidance on Citizenship education). New advice from the DfEE on Sex and Relationships Education is largely humanist in its stress on responsible choice and considering the consequences of actions, and its concern for good human relationships (of many varieties, notwithstanding the reactionary furore in the media about it and Section 28). God doesn't get a mention.

That things are moving in our direction must be put down to the valiant efforts of humanists in the past, as well as to greater general awareness of human rights, including children's rights, and the slow movement toward more secular and multi-cultural societies in Europe as a whole over the last few decades. But progress is too slow and too subtle for some of us, and much remains to be done.

Humanism Rarely Mentioned

The problem for us is not that Humanism doesn't exist and even flourish in our ordinary state schools, but that the word is rarely mentioned. Young people still leave school after 11 or 13 years of 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural development' thinking they are 'nothing' because they don't fit into one of the neat pigeonholes of the six major faiths they usually learn about in RE. There is still considerable ignorance of humanist alternatives to church weddings and christenings and religious funerals. Teachers and pupils often feel insecure in their moral values because the general moral ethos of the school has not been analysed and identified as based on shared human values. At its worst, teachers on auto-pilot

stoppily ascribe their successes to 'Christian' values such as 'hard work and respect for others'. No one in education has time for proper philosophical thinking - it can't be measured and doesn't appear in league tables. And, though no longer dominant in our culture, dogmatic and repressive religious ideas are not quite dead yet, and can sometimes appear in individual teachers, and in Education Acts.

More generally, though lip service is paid in political and educational circles to the rights of the child, much current practice militates against those rights. For example, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 29), education should be directed to 'the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential' (all very humanistic), but in reality the demands of the National Curriculum have all but killed off music in our schools, and some state schools provide only 12 hours per year of sport. Children are also apparently entitled to 'rest and leisure - and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts' (Article 31), but we put small children into school and begin on the 3Rs far earlier than in many countries, while at the other end of school head teachers now fear that recent changes to A and AS levels will mean that sixth formers have to work a 50-hour week! The stress on exams and on only the measurable and instrumental aspects of education is something that should concern us as humanists.

So we need to keep working at it. Religious Education is still far from perfect, and is patchy in quality, the law on collective worship in schools is absurd, and the growth in the number of religious schools should concern us all. It would be good for the personal development of children, and for our organisations, if every student left school at least knowing what Humanism is and that humanist organisations and support systems exist. We are not nearly there yet.

Pointless Internecine Wars

Within the kindred organisations there is a great deal of interest in education, and the will and energy to change things. But we do need to make sure that we don't squander our energy on battles that are already more or less won, or on pointless internecine wars over status or territory. None of our organisations is large enough or rich enough to waste resources. As one of the seven staff employed by the largest of the UK humanist organisations, but which has fewer than 4000 members, I am amazed that anyone listens to us or asks us for our point of view on anything. We punch well above our weight in the public arena, and that is a credit to all of us, staff and members and volunteers, past and present, and a recognition that we are still relevant and have interesting and worthwhile things to say on contemporary social issues and in education.

But we shouldn't all try to do, or claim to do, everything. We have our different strengths and areas of expertise, though we can make common cause on many issues. Indeed, on educational issues such as collective worship and religious schools, we ought to be able to make common cause with many groups and individuals well outside the humanist organisations, even, dare I say it, religious ones. We need to capitalise on our varying perspectives and constituencies, inform and support each other, and work together without treading on each other's toes. We are all on the same side, really, and we'd all like to see Humanism more explicitly taught about in our schools.

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

EMOTIVISM

Text of a talk to be delivered and discussed on 22 October 2000
by **Chris Bratcher** in the Ethical Thinkers Series

The Good: A Fact Or A Wish?

My last talk followed Bertrand Russell's journey to his conclusion that pronouncements on what was good asserted nothing that could be true or false but expressed a wish that the speaker's desire for the thing, or state of affairs, be universally felt. The context of Russell's formulation was two assumptions:

that *the* Ethical issue, as posed by G.E. Moore, concerned judgements of goodness;
and that analysis of such judgements was a matter of psychology, and in the empiricist tradition would be formulated in terms of an omnibus category of 'desires'.

Young philosophers in the decade straddling the World War II were not so constrained. Those who shared Russell's view that ethical assertions were not matters of fact did so on the basis of looking at the dynamic and varied language in which they were expressed. A whole range of utterances were evaluative. The **emotivist** label was stuck to a mixed bag of constructions of all sorts of utterances, of which which moral judgements were considered to be a sub-class: for example¹ those used:

'to *express* or *excite* feelings and attitudes' (Ogden & Richards, *The meaning of Meaning*);

'to *evoke* a certain kind of emotion' (Broad, 1933);

to evince moral [dis]approval;

'to arouse feeling and so to stimulate action' (A.J.Ayer, *Language truth & logic*, 1936);

'the emotive meaning of a sign is an emotional response which [it] ... produces in any normal listener...'² (K.Britton, *Communication*, 1939).

No doubt fascist demagoguery gave striking public examples. You may like to reflect on whether the most simplistic versions of the theory would ever have got off the drawing board without a climate of collapse of politics into propaganda. The scandalousness of emotivism, in non-academic circles, was that it not only asserted that ethics was irreducibly subjective, but implied that those that voiced moral opinions were inherently practitioners of the Orwellian arts of 1984.

C.L.Stevenson

The fullest adumbration of the theory is in the American philosopher, C.L.Stevenson's *Ethics and Language* of 1944: 'the emotive meaning of a word is the power that the word acquires .. to evoke or directly express *attitudes*, as distinct from describing or designating them'. His mature views were more sophisticated, in response to the contributions of philosophers we will cover in later talks, and are therefore less interesting².

It is, of course, unfair to pass judgement on the basis of such truncated examples. (As you will see in the next paragraph, Stevenson, in the same book, went on to decouple emotive meaning and attitudes.) But several questions spring to mind.

(a) Some of the analyses I quoted relate to *expressions* of emotion; others to *generation* emotions in others. Is 'the theory', that moral terms inherently, in declarative sentences, do one, the other, or both?

Stevenson's analysis of 'This is good, was 'I approve of this - please do so as well'. Like Ayer, he considered that the emotive component lay in the injunction to share the approval. Rightly, he recognised that an attitude of approval need not be emotional. It was irreducibly subjective; and as an attitude, he (I think) viewed the notion of approval as a mere term of psychology, and philosophically uninteresting. (Well, as we shall see, in this he was mistaken).

(b) No doubt value terms, in context, will 'do' all these things. But if I say, 'that's a *good* make', or 'I think you *ought* to buy that washing powder, because the *Which* guide says powders with enzymes do a *better* job of removing egg stains than soap-based ones', I would have to be a washing powder devotee, or advertising executive, for it to be plausible that my words carried any emotion on my part, or were designed or expected to evoke one in you. Normal parlance is emotion free about unexciting things, and sprinkling it with good, right, and ought makes no difference.

(c) If I fail to generate an emotion in you by the use of these value words, in discussing more 'emotive' - or 'moral' - topics, I cannot infer that you have misunderstood me, or are defective in English. Only in rare contexts might I thereby judge you to be autistic (emotionally defective). As I may be presumed to already hold the view I am putting forward, why should doing so produce an emotion in me or in you, if you already agree? Emotion commonly arises from disagreement. It may be heightened by the clear value I put on a view that you abhor, by my using 'value' terms, but the terms themselves are not inherently expressers or triggers.

Evaluating Emotivism

What is wrong with the theory, in its crude form, is that it presumes a general causal theory of meaning, as did Russell's analysis in terms of desires. The weaknesses of such is beyond my scope. The *use* to which words are put may well be driven by, or be intended to evoke, emotion; and utterances as a whole, like any other activity, will have their causes: but the words themselves do not, with the possible exception of expletives and endearments, have embedded emotion; perhaps, precisely because they are tokens of meaning.

But there is something of worth in emotivism. Its wellspring and legacy was the recognition that evaluation was not just Moorean contemplation of the good, but was an everyday action of sorts, typically in speech with someone. The idea of a 'speech act' (the relation of which to 'meaning' was to be an issue in Metaethics in the 50s and 60s) may be unfamiliar. Some utterances, most recognisably by convention, are to be wholly understood as actions; 'I thee wed' makes you married. We shall see that the idea that the 'core activity' of Ethics (in current parlance) was a setting of standards, led to the view that the core and invariant element in the meaning of Ethical terms was an evaluative one. Obvious, maybe? We will see that the linkage was to generate a powerful theory, and a logical 'home' for ethical judgements that is in dispute to this day.

1. Culled from J.O.Urmson, *The Emotive Theory of Ethics*.
2. For the same reason, I have decided (with apologies to those who were led to expect otherwise) not to complicate matters by attempting to survey the views of Paul Edwards, in *The Logic of Moral Discourse* (written 1950/1; published, 1955). The book was, at the time, an acclaimed defence of the emotivists' insights against criticism, from a point beyond them. Although Edwards stuck to the notion of emotive meaning, in the acknowledged tradition of Stevenson and Ayer, he abandoned Stevenson's view that the rationale of moral judgements could only amount to the efficacy of factors in changing attitudes; and his admission of 'descriptive meaning' as an inherent element in value judgements makes him less interesting. In this he was closer to Richard Hare, who, as we shall see next time, had developed a more rigorous theory to the same effect.

VIEWPOINT

On Enhancing Life Well And Purpose Of SPES

Roy Silson's letter [Sept *ER*] asks me to expand on what I had in mind when viewpointing on SPES's purpose in the previous issue, I envisioned a body that looks, amongst other things, to house opportunities for other than primarily intellectual 'life-enhancing' experiences. Of course this was unspecific, as the context was our purposes clause at its most abstract. We already do so, in letting rooms to amateur string players, and other Arts practitioners, but such bookings have been accidental, and have not been seen as part of SPES's purpose.* I think it is legitimate to regard them as such, and therefore we should actively foster and espouse them. This would, incidentally, improve our status with the local authority and, perhaps, the Charity Commission.

I also had in mind the possibility of events that members of SPES, or the public, could walk in on, as well as 'closed' groups: occasional open life-drawing days, workshops for amateur musicians, even folk and jam sessions on/ around our pianos *might* fall in the category, as they would for an Adult Education Centre, if done with the same accent on quality that we attempt in our talks. My precise aim was not to be prescriptive, but to licence our collective imagination for events suitable to our small halls and rooms, for which we could seek convenors from outside the Society. Yes, people find pubbing 'life-enhancing'; but pubs cater for that, and it is hardly charitable or improving.

Philosophically, my use of 'life enhancing' is not far from eudaemonia, as advocated as the Good by Aristotle. This is badly translated as 'happiness'; but is closer to holistically [in his terms, virtuously] faring well. We don't do much of this, as it happens, in SPES, and we may die for the lack of it.

Chris Bratcher - London WC1

*Last month the Charity Commission confirmed that the Society was after all correct in maintaining that its century-old tradition of arranging Sunday Concerts was fully in accord with its charitable objects. The Charity Commission admitted it had been wrong last year to suggest otherwise. The membership will be kept informed of developments. [Ed.]

SOUTH PLACE SUNDAY CONCERTS at 6.30 pm. Tickets £5.

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 email: library@ethicalsoc.org.uk

OCTOBER 2000

Sunday 22

- 11.00 am Ethical Thinkers Series: 'Ethics and Emotions'
EMOTIVISM: C.L. STEVENSON Christopher Bratcher
- 3.00 pm **SCIENCE FICTION AND THE SHORT STORIES OF HG WELLS:**
A personal view by **Giles Hart**

Tuesday 24

- 6.30 - **INTRODUCTION TO SANTAYANA'S THOUGHT (2)**
8.30 pm **Tom Rubens.** £2 per session inc. tea.

Sunday 29

- 11.00 am **BEN JONSON (1572-1637) & HUMANISM.** Tom Lockwood on
the story of the dramatist.

Monday 30

- 7.00 pm *2 Lectures jointly with International Humanist & Ethical Union*
TAGORE'S HUMANISM AND OUR HUMANISM
Prof. Sib Narayan Ray, renowned humanist intellectual.

Tuesday 31

- 7.00 pm **WHAT IS RADICAL HUMANISM?**
Prof. Sib Narayan Ray, close associate of radical humanist
philosopher M.N. Roy and editor of his selected works.

NOVEMBER

Sunday 5

- 11.00 am **EMBRYO RESEARCH AND NEW THERAPIES: ETHICAL ISSUES**
John Gillott, Policy Officer, Genetic Interest Group
- 3.00 pm **TOPICAL TOPICS.** Chair: **Donald Room**

Tuesday 7

- 6.30 - **SANTAYANA'S THOUGHT (3).** Tom Rubens.
8.30 pm Also 21, 28 Nov, 5 Dec

Sunday 12

- 11.00 am **ETHICS AND PENSIONS: fairness between the sexes**
Christopher Bratcher.

Tuesday 14

- 7.00 pm **PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE WORKSHOP (2)** with **Filiz Peach.**
Jointly with *Philosophy For All.*

Friday 17

- 7.00 pm **ANNUAL ART SOIRÉE.** **Garry Kennard**, artist currently
exhibiting at Conway Hall, shows slides. Wine

DECEMBER

Thursday 14 Conway Memorial Lecture

- 7.30 **ETHICS AND CITIZENSHIP.** **Prof. Bernard Crick.**