

# Ethical Record

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## DAWKINS' AND EINSTEIN'S VIEWS ON FAIRYTALES



*The Wolf in Grandmothers clothing (see page 14)*

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**CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY**  
**Conway Hall Humanist Centre**  
25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.  
[www.conwayhall.org.uk](http://www.conwayhall.org.uk)

**Chairman:** Liz Lutgendorff; **Vice-Chair:** Giles Enders  
**Treasurer:** Carl Harrison; **Editor:** Norman Bacrac

Please email texts and viewpoints for the Editor to: [bacrac@fsmail.net](mailto:bacrac@fsmail.net)

**Staff**

<b>Chief Executive Officer:</b>	Jim Walsh	Tel: 020 7061 6745	<a href="mailto:Jim@ethicalsoc.org.uk">Jim@ethicalsoc.org.uk</a>
<b>Administrator:</b>	Martha Lee	Tel: 020 7061 6741	<a href="mailto:admin@ethicalsoc.org.uk">admin@ethicalsoc.org.uk</a>
<b>Finance Officer:</b>	Linda Lamnica	Tel: 020 7061 6740	<a href="mailto:finance@ethicalsoc.org.uk">finance@ethicalsoc.org.uk</a>
<b>Librarian:</b>	Catherine Broad	Tel: 020 7061 6747	<a href="mailto:library@ethicalsoc.org.uk">library@ethicalsoc.org.uk</a>
<b>Hon. Archivist:</b>	Carl Harrison		<a href="mailto:carl@ethicalsoc.org.uk">carl@ethicalsoc.org.uk</a>
<b>Programme:</b>	Sid Rodrigues	Tel: 020 7061 6744	<a href="mailto:sid@ethicalsoc.org.uk">sid@ethicalsoc.org.uk</a>
<b>Lettings Officer:</b>	Carina Dvorak	Tel: 020 7061 6750	<a href="mailto:lettings@ethicalsoc.org.uk">lettings@ethicalsoc.org.uk</a>
<b>Caretakers:</b>	Eva Aubrechtova (i/c)	Tel: 020 7061 6743	<a href="mailto:Eva@ethicalsoc.org.uk">Eva@ethicalsoc.org.uk</a>
<i>together with:</i>	Brian Biagioni, Sean Foley, Tony Fraser, Rogerio Retuerma		
<b>Maintenance:</b>	Zia Hameed / Chey Green	Tel: 020 7061 6742	<a href="mailto:Zia@ethicalsoc.org.uk">Zia@ethicalsoc.org.uk</a>

**Obituaries**

We regret to report the deaths of John Rayner (see page 31)  
and Harry Stopes-Roe (see page 29)

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**CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY**

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

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

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

**The annual subscription is £35 (£25 if a full-time student, unwaged or over 65)**

# THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS: CONTOURS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Philip Davies

*Lecture to the Ethical Society, 27 April 2014*

There are many aspects of the Scrolls that, having appeared to be solved in the decades after their discovery, have more recently become controversial. Rather than engaging in these unresolved debates, I will restrict myself to some of the major religious ideas that these manuscripts embrace—which are surprisingly, even challengingly, broad.

## The Scrolls' Discovery

The site of the manuscript discoveries lies at the northwestern corner of the Dead Sea, where there is a narrow shoreline bounded by cliffs which, over a stretch of a few miles, contain several hundred caves. Sometime in early 1947 two Beduin shepherds entered one of these and saw inside number of jars, their lids sealed with wax, containing, as it turned out, tightly rolled scrolls made of animal skin (parchment). The scrolls were shown to dealers in Bethlehem and eventually disposed of in two batches. One batch was acquired by the Metropolitan of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Mar Samuel, who brought them for identification to the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem, where they were carefully photographed by a young man called John Trever who was also able to identify one scroll as a copy of the book of Isaiah, in a script that after expert analysis identified the writing as 2000 years old.

The other batch came into the possession of a Jewish professor at the Hebrew University, Eliezer Sukenik, the father of the more famous Yigal Yadin, general, archaeologist and politician. This was a tricky process, because at this time Palestine was under British Mandate and there was hostility between Jews and Arabs. On 14 May 1948 the State of Israel declared itself in existence, leading to an Arab-Israeli war, whose resolution left the cave beyond the reach of the new Israeli state until 1967, when Israel invaded the West Bank. Because of the war, Mar Samuel smuggled his scrolls to the USA, where they were advertised in the *Wall Street Journal* of 1 June 1954, and bought, anonymously, for the State of Israel, where they were added to Sukenik's batch. The scrolls from this first cave, and subsequently those from other caves, which had been housed in Arab Jerusalem, are now at a specially built museum in West Jerusalem.

**WALL STREET JOURNAL**  
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*Advert in Wall Street Journal  
1 June 1954*

After the Arab-Israel war ended, a search was organized by the Jordan Department of Antiquities to find the cave, with the help of a UN officer and members of the French archaeological school in Jerusalem. The cave was located, and this time attention was drawn to nearby ruins, which at first were not investigated. But when further scrolls began to turn up, what was known as *Khirbet Qumran* became a focus of attention. It was excavated between 1951–56 by the French archaeological school, which concluded that these buildings housed a Jewish sectarian group, probably to be identified with the Essenes, known from several ancient sources as a Jewish party alongside Pharisees and Sadducees, and who composed the scrolls at this site. But it is now thought that only a few of the scrolls may have been composed or copied here, while new suggestions are also being made about the purpose of the site and the identity of its inhabitants.

The site is, at any rate, almost certainly connected to the scrolls. During the excavations, ten more scroll caves were identified, some very close indeed to the ruins, such as Cave 4. This had been artificially enlarged to hold scrolls on shelves, and its contents, not being preserved in jars, suffered a lot of damage. Fragments of hundreds of manuscripts were scattered everywhere, and putting them back together took several decades of work. Hence it took many years for the all texts from these other caves to reach the public. About a quarter were copies of books from the Old Testament, some more were Jewish writings already known, but many were new compositions. The Jordanians set up an international team of editors (no Jews included) to reassemble and publish these, and long delays gave rise to accusations of conspiracies and cover-ups. But the fragments were in a mess, the money to pay for the work dried up and the editors had to find jobs elsewhere. One editor, the British representative, John Allegro, did nevertheless publish his assignments quickly. He was a colourful character who quickly became convinced that the Scrolls proved Christianity to be not at all original: the gospel story had all happened before. (He later achieved notoriety with his book *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*). In fact, much early interest in the Scrolls arose from a desire to find something within Judaism that would explain Christianity. But the range of ideas these texts exhibit is wider than orthodox Christianity and Judaism together would express.

### **Religious and Historical Background**

Knowledge of the historical background of the Scrolls may help to explain such diversity. After centuries of living fairly peacefully under a succession of empires—Babylonia, Persia, then, after the conquests of Alexander the Great, the Greek kingdoms of Egypt, then Syria, the Syrian king Antiochus IV, faced with a civil war in Judah, tried to abolish the Jewish cult in Jerusalem, and a successful rebellion under Judas the Maccabee led to an independent Judean kingdom that lasted for about a century. At its peak it incorporated most of Palestine, bringing within its borders the populations of Idumea, (Edom) Galilee and parts of Transjordan. After the kingdom broke up, Judea continued for a while as a semi-independent kingdom under Herod the Great and his successors, but Judea itself finally became a Roman province. Continuing unrest led to a war against Rome, in which the Judeans were defeated, and the temple destroyed in 70 CE.

The religion of Judea during these times was focused on the Temple and the laws of Moses, but each of these institutions attracted disagreement and even hostility among different parties. The existence of Greek cities in Palestine and the new populations of the kingdom brought customs and beliefs alien to Judean traditions. It is impossible, therefore, to speak of a 'normative Judaism' at this time. The Qumran scrolls represent nearly a thousand manuscripts, probably comprising the remains of a library or libraries. As the only contemporary writings preserved in Hebrew from the lifetimes of John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul, the Scrolls can illuminate the religious culture of their times like no other source. And between about 200 BCE and 100 CE, when the Scrolls were written, this culture was far from static or settled. It was boisterous, contentious, fragmented and highly politicized. Some of the religious beliefs that these writings reflect were widely shared, others were confined to particular parties and sects.

### **The Contours of 'Qumran Religion'**

'Qumran religion' does not describe the doctrine or system of belief of any one group. But the Scrolls exhibit a few common features. The most obvious of these is adherence to a particular calendar. The calendar has theological and religious implications, and calendrical differences are evident even in the Bible.

Calendars are either basically lunar or solar. In a purely lunar calendar, such as Muslims observe, the year contains twelve lunar cycles, or about 354 days, so that the months (and noticeably the fast month of Ramadan) moves back through the seasons. The Jewish calendar that has been normative for at least 2000 years also adopts lunar months, but intercalates an extra month at the spring equinox whenever a thirteenth new moon appears before it, every 3 years or so (and hence Passover and Easter can move by up to a month). The Qumran calendar is solar, having 12 months of 30 days, plus four quarter days, giving a total of 364 days.

Why should the calendar be a religious issue? One reason is that if the festivals are not celebrated at the right time, they do not fulfil the law and are invalid. It follows also that adherents of different calendars celebrate the festivals separately. But more important is the theological problem. For if God made the sun and the moon, but they are uncoordinated, there appears to be something wrong with creation. In Genesis 1 the issue is bypassed by saying that God creates the sun to rule the day and the moon the night, disconnecting both from the calendar. But according to Genesis 1 God created the world perfect, and the independence of the two great heavenly bodies suggests cosmic disorder.

So the calendar brings us to another, related characteristic of Qumran religion, namely the origin of evil. Again, two views were prevalent among Jews, both reflected in the Bible. One is that evil and sin are due to human disobedience, beginning in the Garden of Eden. The other view, which we find in the non-biblical books of Enoch, dating from the fourth or third century BCE onwards and found also among the Scrolls, is that evil began with the descent of rebellious angels to earth, who corrupted humans, and although the great Flood wiped them out, their spirits remain on the earth, causing evil and tempting humans into sin. Jewish and Christian mythology (related in *Paradise Lost*) have

since combined these two myths, so that Satan/Lucifer is said to have fallen to earth and then, as the snake in the garden, corrupted Eve and Adam. But originally the two stories represented rival doctrines. The New Testament strongly reflects the story of the angelic fall, making reference to Lucifer, Satan's tempting of Jesus, and the existence of evil spirits, and more weakly the disobedience of Adam and Eve.

Now, the alternation of light and dark, daily and seasonally, is a powerful symbol within the Scrolls of the struggle between good and evil. Humanity is also divided between the righteous and the wicked, or, in a variation, we all partake of both: good and evil fight within us. In either case good and evil are represented by angelic beings, a Prince of Darkness and a Prince of Light. There is a cosmic struggle between good and evil, light and dark, and it's hard to deny the influence of Zoroastrianism. Indeed, during the first century BCE, Zoroastrians were living on the other side of the Dead Sea. But having ranged from calendar dualism, I will now explain how, according to the Scrolls, humans can be good in the world.

### **Sectarianism Begins**

The answer seems to draw on the other myth of evil, for it insists on obedience to the divine law revealed to Moses. The scriptural promises to Israel would be fulfilled only when Israel obeyed the law to the letter. And here the writers of at least some of the Scrolls were extremely particular, believing the leaders of the people to be in error. One of the Scrolls is in the form of a letter addressed to a Jewish king, laying out various matters of dispute over Jewish law, and urging the king to change his habits. According to many scholars, this document points us to the beginnings of a sectarian process that the Scrolls illustrate. For disagreement about the law and the calendar caused the writers or their successors to boycott the Temple cult. As well, they set up 'camps' in which they lived according to their own laws. Furthermore, they expected that they would soon be vindicated when God finally intervened in the near future.

We have a description of the life in their camps, their laws and their theology from a document found in Qumran Cave 4 and called the 'Damascus Document'. What is interesting about this document is that copies dating from about the ninth century CE were found just over a century ago in a Cairo synagogue. How did a copy of a Dead Sea Scroll turn up much later in Cairo? Did the movement survive? Or did someone else discover the scroll and copy it? (This is, by the way, the only Scroll in the UK, and can be found in the University Library, Cambridge).

But once religious communities split off, splits tend to keep happening. As I interpret the Scrolls, a figure claiming to be the messianic bringer of the endtime was accepted by some and rejected by others, leading to a new movement, more isolated socially and ideologically. This saw itself as forming a human temple and offering 'sacrifices of holiness'. One text contains hymns for a liturgical cycle of 13 sabbaths conducted by angels in the heavenly temple, and may imply the writers substituted the heavenly cult for the earthly one. The organization and teachings of this group are set out in another Scroll known as the 'Community Rule', and it is this text that contains the most explicit dualistic

doctrine. It also prescribes a rite of entry by baptism, signifying cleansing by the Holy Spirit and echoing the words and deeds of John the Baptist, who, it has now and then been suggested, might form a bridge between the Scrolls and Christianity. But as far as we know, there is no overt allusion in the New Testament to either the Scrolls or their authors.

However, another aspect that ‘Qumran religion’ shares with the New Testament is the belief that contemporary events fulfil scriptural prophecy. Among the Scrolls are commentaries on various books in which verses are interpreted as reflecting the life and deeds of the sect and its founder, the messianic figure referred to a little earlier, known as the ‘Teacher of Righteousness’. Likewise, the gospel of Matthew has Jesus being taken to and from Egypt or going to Nazareth as fulfillment of scriptural texts. The point of such interpretation in both cases is to reinforce the idea that the believers themselves are part of the divine plan revealed in the Bible.

There is no single messianic belief in the Scrolls, however. Yet another such figure, the heavenly high priest Melchizedek (Genesis 14) is expected to deliver a final atonement for Israel’s sins. He is also mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews as the priestly prototype of Jesus, and the Melchizedek Scroll contains the same scriptural words read by Jesus in the synagogue in Luke 4: 18-19 concerning the liberation of Israel. This, along with a few other similarities, continues to encourage some scholars to see a direct connection between the Scrolls and Jesus. But we must remember that what is appearing in these Scrolls has many standard Jewish features: adherence to the Law of Moses, devotion to the Temple, a belief that the end of the world was coming, a hope for some messiah or other. Some items of agreement must only be expected.

### **A Great Cosmic Battle**

We can end this review by returning to good and evil, light and darkness, and a manuscript that describes the end of the world, calling itself ‘The Rule of the War of the Children of Darkness against the Children of Light’. It relates an elaborate battle between the forces of good and evil, and mentions a great enemy called the ‘Kittim’, which seems to mean the Roman Empire. So, is this a dream or does it betray a real commitment to the war that the Jews *did* fight in 66 CE? ‘Qumran religion’ imagines this as a great cosmic battle—not unlike what we find in the book of Revelation—between the forces of good and evil, light and dark.

We can get a fuller account of this doctrine with the help of some other texts. First, a section from the ‘Community Rule’ which first divides the human race into two, those who are light and those who are dark, like the War Scroll. But then it goes on to explain that all humans are some shade of grey. This is then explained further in some fragments of horoscopic texts, in which the individual’s zodiacal sign, physiognomy and degree of virtue are all correlated in a way that emphasize the predestinarian aspect of this doctrine: we are made the way we are and cannot escape our nature or our fate. Yet we also find members of the ‘Community’ in question being obliged to take an oath to observe the Law of Moses. Do we assume that only those who had the right profile were admitted into its ranks?

A more telling question is the extent to which this kind of doctrine can be called 'Jewish', without any regard for a chosen people or a covenant. We might reflect on the modern phenomenon of sects such as Christian Science or Mormons or any number of others that embrace doctrines greatly at variance with the orthodoxy of their parent religion. We might also reflect on how far religious people are capable of believing quite contradictory things at the same time. At a Christian funeral the soul of the departed is often believed to have gone to heaven. But this is not the Christian doctrine. The body will remain, being eaten by worms, in the ground until the last trumpet. Then we shall be raised and judged, some blessed but most damned. This is the point of the doctrine of resurrection. Many Christians are also superstitious, believing in luck, horoscopes, or Fate or vampires or ghosts. Religions may organize our beliefs but they cannot dictate them entirely.

### **The Modern Relevance of the Qumran Scrolls**

But let me give a few reasons why the Scrolls might be relevant to our own time. We can, of course, look from the perspective of existential questions facing humans at all times. How do we reconcile predetermined behaviour (whether by God or genes) and free will? What do we mean by 'evil'? Should one engage with what we regard as evil, or a world we regard as evil, or should we seclude ourselves from it? Can human activity change the world, or are there forces at work that we cannot really understand, let alone affect?

We can also justify reading the Scrolls on historical and religious grounds. These writings express the beliefs, practices and the imagination of people whose society was about to witness the end of Judaism as it was previously known and the birth of a new form: the rise of a new Jewish movement that would become a world religion. Having abandoned the temple, the Jews who wrote and read the Scrolls had to find other ways of securing atonement for their sins, salvation and access to God. They had to consider what the future held for them and for the rest of Israel in the days to come. Some of their responses open the way for Christianity, others anticipate rabbinic Judaism.

Finally, even when it is calculated that less than 10% of the material originally deposited here has survived, there is an astonishing range of religious ideas. Can we really, as I have done, speak of 'Qumran religion'? Not in terms of sects, practices or doctrines. But 'religion' can encompass much more than a creed, and include whatever a human being may believe about himself or herself, about the nature of the world, what happens after death, what is good and what is bad. And since there are no correct answers, or no certain knowledge of answers, is it not reasonable to entertain more than one option? And does it matter what people believe and imagine? Well, the Judeans fought with Rome and lost their temple and later their land—not because of economic or political necessity, but because they believed God would give them victory, and acted accordingly. They were wrong, but human life is not lived only by what we know but what we believe—or do not believe.

**David Swanson - Coordinating Committee of WorldBeyondWar.org**

Wednesday 2 July 2000h at Conway Hall

# WAR CRIMINALS, REFUGEES AND THE UK

**Brian Moore**

**Former Chief Constable and Director General UK Border Force.**

**Founder, Torture Aware UK**

*Lecture to the Ethical Society, 11 May 2014*

The UK is an enduring democracy with a good record of respecting human rights including challenging states which unjustly persecute people. One would expect that the UK has effective and transparent processes to identify and hold to account suspected war criminals within its borders, whilst ensuring that asylum-seekers fleeing persecution have adequate safeguards before a decision is taken about their eligibility to remain in the UK. My research suggests that the UK's processes are neither as effective nor as transparent as they should be. More worryingly, there appears to be no agency in the UK actively looking for those who have been involved in the murder, torture and rape of millions of innocents over the last 25 years.

## **The Ancient Laws of War**

Two thousand years ago, the customs of war were straightforward – surrender promptly and survive, or resist and expect exemplary punishment in order to deter others. In 146 BCE, after a three-year siege by the Romans, Carthage fell and 50,000 citizens were enslaved whilst the remaining 450,000 inhabitants were killed and the City destroyed. By modern standards, such slaughter would be a war crime, but not then. Violent war crimes and crimes against humanity may be old phenomena but their legal basis, and particularly individual criminal responsibility for killing civilians, murdering prisoners of war, raping those conquered and wanton destruction of enemies' cultural artefacts, is new. Historically, military defeat was itself 'punishment' for aggressive wars and 'crimes' during such conflicts, but how were states deterred from using excessive violence against their own citizens?

In 1648, following Europe's 'Thirty Years War', several nations negotiated the Peace of Westphalia to limit international conflicts but they also agreed not to interfere in each other's domestic affairs, giving rise to the principle of state sovereignty. For good or bad, reluctance to engage in other states' internal conflicts remains the norm and hence some rulers are able to inflict abuses on their own people without international hindrance.



*the Peace of Westphalia*

## **1945 Treaty of London**

Little changed internationally until after World War II. The enormity of that conflict (estimated 48 million people killed) and the horrors of the Holocaust



*Genocide in World War II*

stirred the victorious nations to introduce profound changes to international law. The 1945 Treaty of London established the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal which prosecuted, individually, the Nazi leadership for their aggressions. No longer could leaders claim that they were ‘following orders’ where obedience required heinous acts. At the same time, the United Nations was founded (replacing the ineffectual League of Nations) with a mandate and powers – reserved to the Security Council – to engage the military assets of

member states to preserve world peace. The murders of countless Jewish people – for no reason other than their religion – shocked the world and established a new crime – genocide, which some call the crime of crimes. It is hard to conceive of the intention to destroy an entire people simply because of their race, ethnicity, nationality or religion but that is what the 1948 Genocide Convention set out to prohibit and 144 nation states have since ratified it but prohibition has not meant elimination of genocides. World War II displaced millions of people which became a political issue for states, leading to the 1951 Refugee Convention. It defines a refugee as someone outside their country who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted if they return.

### **The 1984 Torture Convention**

A 30 year hiatus in international criminal law followed, in some part because of the political discord of the ‘Cold War’. The 1984 Torture Convention was an important addition to the laws of individual criminal responsibility because the crime must be committed by, or with the consent of, a state official for the purpose of obtaining information or a confession or to punish someone (except as part of a lawful court sanction). Torture remains a common international crime despite 154 states having ratified this treaty.

### **The 1998 Treaty of Rome**

Following conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Cambodia where the judicial infrastructure was either non-existent or partisan, the United Nations exercised its ‘universal jurisdiction’ power to establish tribunals to prosecute those responsible for serious crimes. Whilst these tribunals have made important contributions



to international case law, they have been ad hoc, established in respect of some conflicts but not others and so the 1998 Treaty of Rome which created a permanent International Criminal Court (ICC) was a logical development. It is empowered to prosecute the most serious crimes of international concern and

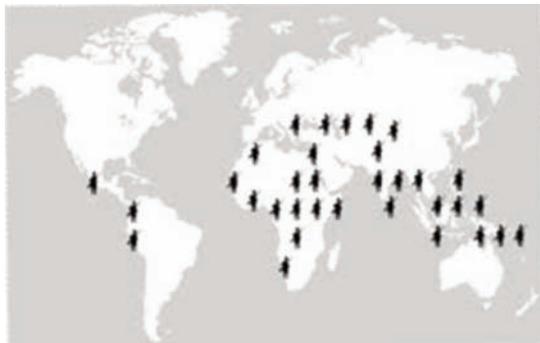
receives cases referred either by the Security Council (under UN Chapter 7 powers), by a state referring itself or where the Court's Prosecutor initiates an inquiry.

Every tribunal, including the fledgling ICC, has been dogged by political controversy. The role of the Security Council in referring situations to the Court has been viewed sceptically because three of the five permanent members of the Security Council have not ratified the ICC treaty (USA, Russia and China) whilst reserving the right to refer other states to it. The Prosecutor's power to inquire is constrained by the statutory requirement to secure the agreement of a special panel of the Court to formally investigate. In respect of state referrals, Ukraine's recent referral of the violence in Kiev in February 2014 was made by the current interim regime of alleged behaviour by the ousted regime. Deciding when a crime is of 'international concern' appears as much a political consideration as a legal one.

The African Union (AU) has publically criticised the ICC as being a racist organ for appearing only to prosecute African leaders and even voted to leave the ICC's jurisdiction but those calls seem to have abated – for now.

### **The 1951 Refugee Convention**

The decision to afford the status of refugee to an asylum-seeker is hardly more straightforward. Article 1F of the 1951 Refugee Convention requires that if there are serious reasons for considering that an asylum-seeker was involved in war crimes etc, then he/she must be excluded from the protection of the Convention and either prosecuted for their crimes or returned to their home country or another country. However, very few prosecutions occur in the UK. Investigators tend to suggest that it could be un-safe to deploy during an on-going conflict, or that the host-country would not permit an investigation, or that a conflict is old and evidence no longer exists. Further, international laws (Article 33 Refugee Convention, Article 3 Torture Convention and Article 3 European Convention on Human Rights) prohibit ratified nations from expelling or returning a person who might face persecution. Sometimes, therefore, suspected war criminals remain in the UK because they cannot be prosecuted or removed.



### **My Research**

In 2013, I researched Home Office files relating to such refugee cases. I examined 87 interviews of 57 subjects from 15 different countries which had been involved in violent conflicts to establish what information was relied upon to decide their status. Subjects were from military and rebel organisations, police and prison services, intelligence and security agencies, national and local political groups, the civil service and businesses sponsoring conflicts or providing logistics. I identified seven themes that were consistently enquired

about, and applied a ‘probability’ formula to rank the themes’ bearing on the decision to exclude the subject from the Refugee Convention: The themes’ order is:

Subject’s accounts

Subject’s role

Conflict type

Motivation

Compulsion

Influencers (e.g. family)

Proximity to violence

There were some surprises: observing that a subject’s account was central to the decision to exclude from the Refugee Convention, and noting that a number of asylum-seekers admitted lying in interview, it was a concern that no fore-warning was provided about the need to tell the truth or about the consequences of exclusion. Albeit with a small sample size, I found women applicants more likely to be excluded than men. There may be several reasons for this, but some research suggests that social constructions pre-suppose women are more nurturing and caring than men, so it is more shocking when women engage in serious violence than when men do.

Given the imprecision of the decision-making process, one would expect to see greater safeguards in the UK system and concerns about fairness arise.

### **The UK’s Position**

Given this historical, political and legal context, how does the UK identify war criminals and how many are there? I found that there are two ‘closed loops’ operating; one involving Home Office cases and the other involving police cases. The Home Office suggests that there are 100-115 suspects in the UK but this group is, in fact, those who self-refer, i.e. persons who claim asylum and suggest that they have been involved in war crimes etc and cannot be returned on persecution grounds. The police ‘loop’ involves 40-50 investigations per year. Generally, such investigations arise as a result of intelligence disclosures from other Governments or government departments.



Both loops are ‘closed’ because communities in the UK are not permitted to know who the subjects are and therefore are unable to offer any information or intelligence which might assist the investigations. Whilst the police teams and immigration teams are experts in their fields, there is no rigorous referral mechanism between them such that there has never been a prosecution as a result of an immigration referral to the police.

If a member of the public in the UK had information about the presence of a suspected war criminal, how and to whom would they report what they know? There isn’t even a public website available and I conclude that no one is actually looking for war criminals in the UK.

I believe that it can be assumed that there are more, and possibly many more, than 165 (115 + 50) suspects out there. Firstly, consider the maths: over the last 25 years, conflicts in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria have seen millions of people murdered, tortured or raped. War crimes require a state's coercive apparatus, so the people responsible include junior members of the military, police, prisons, security organisations, local politicians and civil servants as well as despot leaders. In the conflicts mentioned, this means hundreds of thousands of war criminals, but where do they go when the regime changes? They will probably seek a foreign country which is safe, economically vibrant and where the authorities may not be looking too hard to find them. Viewed in this light, the 165 figure is probably an under-estimate of the true number of suspected war criminals in the UK. Secondly, there are a small but growing number of case studies and anecdotes which suggest that the 'closed loops' are not properly reflecting the scale of the problem.

### **Torture Aware UK**

For all these reasons, earlier this year I set up a web-based, not-for-profit organisation called Torture Aware UK ([www.tortureawareuk.org](http://www.tortureawareuk.org)) in which I pose the following of communities in the UK:

Have you witnessed a war crime or crime against humanity? Do you know who was responsible?

Have you seen that person in the UK or do you have reason to believe they are in the UK?

I hope that with information to augment the 'closed loops', the UK can strengthen its ability to uphold its international obligations and begin to develop an effective strategy to underpin the rather good 'Secure Borders: Safe Haven' policy which has been in existence since 1991.

Daily we are assailed by terrible images of violence around the world. We believe that those responsible should be held to account and their victims should receive our protection. Yet the combination of history, politics and law, complicated by a lack of public awareness and transparency, means that there is a need for some simple further steps to deter war criminals and safeguard asylum-seekers: I suggest – as a start -- engaging the public to identify the former and fore-warning the latter about the consequences of desperate accounts.



Contact me at [brian@tortureawareuk.org](mailto:brian@tortureawareuk.org) if you can help with our work.

If you have any suggestions for speakers (their contact details are required) or event ideas, or would like to convene a Sunday afternoon informal, get in touch with Sid Rodrigues at [programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk](mailto:programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk) or 020 7061 6744.

# THOMAS THE TANK ENGINE FOR EVER

Jennifer R. Jaynes

‘He killed God ....now he’s after Santa’.

This was the rather alarming headline to be seen in *The Times* on Thursday 5 June 2014. The piece was of course about **Richard Dawkins** although I would think he would find – in this land of an established church and compulsory RE – the assumption he had achieved deicide to be somewhat flattering and hyperbolic.

Dawkins was speaking at the Cheltenham Science Festival. The report continued that now he had ‘Father Christmas, witches, wizards and princes who turn into frogs in his sights’. The ‘scientist and atheist’ argued that parents should consider sweeping aside childhood fantasies and fairytales in order to ‘foster a spirit of scepticism’ in their children. ‘It’s rather pernicious to inculcate into children a view of the world which includes supernaturalism.’

Even fairy tales, the ones we all love. ‘There’s a very interesting reason why a prince could not turn into a frog – it’s statistically too improbable’. As for Winnie the Pooh, the idea of a bear, tiger, pig and kangaroo ‘sharing an ecosystem is implausible’.

Part of the attraction of fairytales, Dawkins acknowledged, lay in their magic but a ‘supernatural perspective on the world was second rate compared to the scientific.’ He ‘resented children being brought up with a second rate explanation for our existence’.

**Albert Einstein**, generally considered to be one of the greatest scientists of all time (and whose equation  $E = mc^2$  can often be quoted even if its meaning is less understood), *The Times* quotes as saying, ‘If you want your children to be intelligent read them fairytales; if you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales’.

By the very next day however, Friday 6 June, Dawkins was to be found in the *Guardian* complaining his comments had been unfairly reported. ‘I did not and will not condemn fairy tales. My whole life has been given over to stimulating the imagination and in childhood years, fairy stories can do that. I wouldn’t mind being cast as a big bad wolf but I don’t like being cast as a Gradgrindian bore; I love the imagination.’

Humans are storytellers. Small children very much enjoy having stories read to them and can object vociferously if one word is out of its usual place. I used to read stories to my little brother. In particular we liked the trains in Rev. Awdry’s tales and our absolute favourite was Thomas the Tank Engine. I didn’t think Thomas was actually talking and my brother didn’t either. What is damaging is to tell ‘Jesus stories’ as if they are literally true and proof of some eternal deity in the sky.

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

## HUMANISM SURVEY

*The following notes on Humanism (pages 15-18 can be pulled out), are intended primarily to inform RE teachers newly tasked with introducing the subject. Please show them to any teachers you meet, emailing their opinion (and yours) to me: bacrac@fsmail.net Thank you.*

### **Humanists maintain that:**

1. All religions were created by human beings alone. The books called 'holy' and the texts held sacred by the various religions were not revealed by a god or delivered by an angel. Although religious writings are worth studying, having been composed by imaginative and, on occasion, very humane people, we now see that many of the notions handed down reflect the limitations of those who wrote them and the times at which they were written. Such differing stories of the origin of the world and of human beings demonstrate, in nearly all cases, scant knowledge of what did happen or of how nature actually works.

2. A reliable way to approach the truth about how nature works is called 'the scientific method'. This starts with (1) careful *observation* of the subject of interest, (2) formulation of an idea or *theory* to account for the observations, (3) doing *experiments* and/or making further observations to test the predictions of the theory, (4) *amending* or even changing the theory if necessary. This method was developed about 400 years ago; using it, we have discovered many of the laws or rules that apply to events in the world, enabling us to travel to the moon, cure many lethal diseases and utilize radio waves for worldwide communication.

3. We have found (from their DNA) that humans and other animals and plants on earth today have a common ancestry, all having descended from the earliest life forms which arose almost four thousand million years ago; all life, including animal and human minds, has evolved from the simplest to the most complex forms by means of *natural* selection (ie selection for reproduction by nature itself) of the more successful from the less viable forms. There has been no need for, nor has any evidence been found of, intervention by a supernatural agency or *artificial* selection by an 'intelligent designer'.

4. Our many, so far unanswered, questions (eg What is the age and size of the universe? How did DNA originate? How do brains work? What are the cures for still troublesome diseases?) pose an exciting challenge especially to young people, who have the opportunity to contribute to their solution.

5. Moral questions (ie How should we behave towards one another and the environment?) are to be answered using the wisdom gathered from our collective human experience. Good actions are done to benefit other people, not to please or placate a transcendent, divine being. Humanists do not expect to be rewarded (or punished) after death for their good (or bad) deeds, nor do they pray for special favours for themselves or others. Instead, while hoping for the best, they try to offer the most practical help in the circumstances.

6. The possible consequences to sentient creatures of our action should always be estimated: will it cause happiness? – then it's OK; cause pain or suffering? – then it's not OK; cause pleasure to some but also pain to others? – again not OK,

because it's wrong to seek to derive pleasure if that incurs another's pain. If forced to choose between two inevitably unpleasant, painful outcomes, the action that is likely to cause less pain should be undertaken.

7. Even those people who believed scriptures really had contained divine commandments, or reported accounts of 'superior' moral behaviour, would still need to evaluate those precepts and assess that behaviour to see if they satisfied their ethical ideals. There is no moral merit in unquestioning obedience to commandments; only very young children are expected to do what they're told without question – older children and adults should know and be satisfied with the reasons for their actions for them to be of moral worth.

8. Each human being is necessarily the outcome of his/her own personal history. This starts at conception with their genes and is then constructed throughout life as one grows up by the continuous interaction everyone has with their human and natural environment. This builds our brain's abilities and results in how we each think and therefore behave at this moment – but we know that the brain is plastic, i.e. it can be modified by further education and learning experiences, so one's character is not fixed.

9. Understanding people's motivation (by appreciating the causes of their behaviour) allows us to influence the future effectively. We may praise good actions (to encourage them) and condemn bad actions (to discourage them). Knowing the reasons for misbehaviour should preclude vindictive or retributive punishment, but still permits reasonable sanctions to deter harmful and promote responsible behaviour. Once someone fully acknowledges their misdeeds, their rehabilitation may become possible.

10. We should apply the same moral principles to sexual relationships as apply to all other matters – being responsible and sincere; every child should be a wanted child.

11. We should have concern for the state of our society: everyone should have the opportunity for education, work and the provision of health care; injustice and unfairness should be investigated and rectified wherever possible.

12. Everyone should have concern for the present and future state of the world, including all its peoples, animals and plants. Humanists in particular feel responsible for their environment on planet Earth, their only home.

13. In this crowded and diverse world (over 7 billion people and rising by 80 million every year), everyone can expect criticism of their ideas. Ideas and beliefs cannot feel and so cannot suffer. Humanists are not offended by criticism of their beliefs but welcome frank discussion of them. Criticism of religious ideas should not be considered offensive by religious people – ideas are not the sole property of their believers but are available for anyone to comment upon.

14. Death ends life; there is no consciousness after death. We can remember people's good qualities and their achievements; we can profit from the example of people who advanced human welfare – and learn about those whose acts caused misery.

## Humanists value:

1. **Conscious experience**, which includes the five senses as well as thoughts, feelings and emotions, and therefore aim to increase the amount of happiness and satisfaction experienced by sentient (conscious) beings and reduce the amount of pain suffered by humans. Animals with nervous systems are assumed to be sentient and should at least be given the benefit of the doubt.
2. The creative use of **imagination** and **intelligence** for artistic, literary, physical and scientific pursuits.
3. The **Golden Rule**, expounded for thousands of years – the principle of treating others as one would wish to be treated in the same situation.
4. **Truth**, essential for authentic social interaction and for understanding the world.
5. The **freedom** to express ideas and theories because history shows that this is how errors and unfounded beliefs can be corrected and progress made. Criticising ideas should not extend to insulting the people and groups holding them but criticising someone's ideas should not be regarded as insulting them. People and animals are entitled to respect, but not ideas.
6. **Tolerance**, because people may hold and express differing views and opinions, so long as they do not interfere with other people's freedom, happiness and security, which should not be tolerated.
7. **Ideas** they consider to have merit, whatever the source, but take a sceptical, critical attitude towards religions, ideologies and dogmas because humanists recognise no infallible authority.

## Glossary of relevant terms:

A **theist** believes that a god or gods exist. Theists usually follow one of the major religions of the world.

A **deist** believes that a god or spirit created the universe but does not intervene in its working or take an interest in human activity.

An **atheist** sees no reason to believe that any god exists and sees good reason to believe that an almighty, all-knowing and totally beneficent god does not exist (especially the suffering experienced by millions of animals and humans during the world's history). An atheist lives as though there is no god. Most humanists are atheists (i.e. without religion) but not all atheists are humanists: an atheist who is very strongly committed to a non-religious dogma or to a political ideology may perform or endorse actions harming individuals for the sake of the 'cause' – so cannot be a humanist.

An **agnostic** claims one can never know for certain that supernatural beings either do exist or do not exist. Actually, there is very little any of us can know for certain (according to Descartes, certain knowledge is limited to one's present

conscious state). In practical life, one has to believe many things, so if one does not believe in a god or follow a religion, then one is living 'without' religion and so is actually an atheist.

A **materialist** believes that life and consciousness are the natural products of the material universe, evolving in accordance with its laws. Although not in receipt of immaterial souls, we know our brains may generate amazing experiences once exposed to all the potentialities of civilization. Being a materialist in this philosophical sense should not lead one to overvalue mere possessions.

A **utilitarian** strives for the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. Most humanists agree that actions whose consequences will likely diminish suffering and/or are capable of increasing enjoyment are good actions. Aristotle's 'virtues' and Kant's 'duties' can be morally worthwhile too – if their practice has mainly beneficial consequences.

A **secular society** would be one where there is no state religion (as the Church of England is the state religion of England at present), receiving special privileges (eg bishops in the House of Lords) over other religions and beliefs. In a secular state, individuals and groups with different religious or non-religious beliefs would be treated impartially in public life and have equal rights to maintain their beliefs and (within the law) their practices. Humanists look forward to a secular society.

**Humanism** is not a religion but is an alternative, naturalistic philosophy of life.

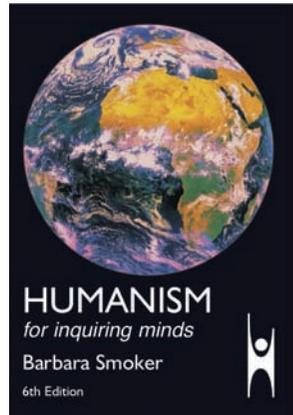
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# ETHICS IN AFRICAN WARS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION

Dan Thea

*Lecture to the Ethical Society, 18 May 2014*

I first spoke at this famous venue in 1993, when, as Vice-Chair of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, I called for enhanced solidarity with the people of South Africa fighting for democracy. That glorious campaign proved victorious, and the apartheid regime was swept away two decades ago, replaced by a new, democratic, rainbow South Africa.

The freedom of countries and peoples is an innate and completely ethical goal; and occupied countries have an absolute right to affirm their humanity by engaging in wars of national liberation. However, there is the ultimate necessity to rid the world of the scourge of war itself altogether, and I trust the Conway Hall Ethical Society shares this viewpoint.

In Africa, wars of national liberation occurred in: Kenya, Algeria, South Africa, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Congo-Kinshasa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia and South Africa. As a general rule, wars are barbaric, reflecting the still limited human development. It is unethical for some nations to invade, occupying and rule others. Conversely, to resist aggression, enslavement, domination and oppression is moral and just.

It was ethical for the Third World to wage wars of liberation from colonisation. Asserting and affirming humanity and equality is ethical. It was doubly immoral for Europe to, firstly, forcibly occupy the Third World, and, secondly, to wage wars against national liberation forces. Wars of national liberation deserve universal solidarity.

## **Voyages of Discovery**

The 'voyages of discovery' by Europeans were motivated by the search for resources, enrichment and aggrandisement generally, but also by the sheer curiosity of what lay beyond the horizon. They were quickly followed by conquest and colonisation, looting and destruction of whole civilisations, continual forcible migration of peoples/nations, deliberate destruction of industry, e.g. textiles in India, the forcible introduction of opium as a commodity in China, and the declaration of Australia as an 'empty' land, to justify British occupation.

The horrendous 350 years of the African slave trade was another mass crime against humanity. In the slave trade, ships would leave Europe and sail to the west African coast; load with 'black gold', i.e. African slaves; and then sail to the Caribbean/Americas. There the slaves would be *sold*; and then the ships would return to Europe with cargo of the looted real gold, silver, sugar, tobacco, etc., completing the 'Slave Triangle'.

Following the 1823 USA declaration of the Monroe Doctrine (prohibiting Europe from interfering in the Americas/Caribbean) and the end of the Atlantic slave trade in mid-1800s, Europe turned full square to Africa, no longer for just slaves, but *to own Africa outright*. The crime of European 'Scramble for Africa'

was formalised at the infamous 1884-5 Berlin Conference, with an arrangement on how European empires would share Africa, while avoiding war among themselves. Freedom, justice and a deep sense of equality are innate human qualities, and the colonised peoples were eventually bound to rebel against their tormentors. In Asia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Myanmar and others won their independence by around 1945. In Africa, free Ethiopia, Liberia and Egypt were joined by the bulk of the African countries by the end of the 1960s.

### **The Kenyan Mau Mau War, 1952-61**

Kenya, at first 'owned' by the British East Africa Company, was declared a Crown Colony in 1895. It was intended for permanent white settlement, like South Africa, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Algeria, and following India's independence it inherited the title of 'the jewel in the British crown'.

However, Kenya became the first African colony to launch a national liberation war. With the masses ravaged by the previously unknown land hunger due to the creation of the 'White Highlands', poverty, joblessness and legalised, pervasive racism, the Mau Mau liberation movement was established during 1945/6 as a guerrilla force, strongly supported by trade unions, urban dwellers, rural population and, critically, Kenyan veterans of World War II in the British Army fighting the Japanese in the India/Burma theatre.

By 1952, when Britain woke up to the Mau Mau reality, a 20,000 force was already organised in eight commands in the Mt. Kenya/Nyandarua Range region, complete with networks of supply lines, recruiting and intelligence. Colonial records reveal that over 90% of central Kenya's adult population, not to mention the youth and even children, took the oath of allegiance to the Mau Mau.

Shocked, Britain declared war, and dispatched powerful World War II--hardened military forces and moved troops from neighbouring Uganda and Tanganyika: all headed by a Commander-in-Chief, East Africa. Nevertheless, within two years the Commander reported that the war could not be won militarily, because of its mass support. Total war was declared on the Kikuyu people, who were deported from the rest of the country to the 'Kikuyu Reserve' and shoved into makeshift concentration camps called Emergency Villages. A massive 300,000 of the 1.5 million population perished!

All this was to no avail. Within ten years the dream of eternal white minority domination evaporated, replaced by the reality of a sovereign Kenya, after 68 years of colonisation. Sixty years after independence the Mau Mau War veterans again triumphed when in June 2013 the British government admitted to torture and paid compensation. This victory has set off a wave of similar reparation demands from former colonies. In the Mau Mau War, victory was on the side of justice; while defeat was with imperialism.

### **The Algerian National Liberation War**

Algeria, located in the historic region of the ancient Carthaginian civilisation and the Amazig (Berber) people, quite close to Europe, was colonised by France in 1830. In 1848 Algeria, which is five times bigger than France, was declared a full part of France, and divided into three Departments, just like Normandy or Brittany!

In 1945, as the World War II was ending, with France making huge reparation demands from defeated Germany for aggression and occupation, French forces massacred thousands of people in Algiers for demonstrating for freedom, exhibiting staggering racist double standards. Even more shocking, no voice was raised in protest in all Europe! Later an Algerian colonial parliament was created with 60 representatives for the 9 million Algerians and 60 for the 1.5 million European settlers!

For the Algerians enough was enough. In 1954 the FLN (National Liberation Front) ordered its ALN (National Liberation Army) to launch a liberation war. In the same year the Vietnamese overwhelmed the French forces at Dien Bien Phu, forcing them to vacate not only Vietnam but also Cambodia and Laos. Appreciating the inevitability, and to spite Algeria, France hurriedly conceded independence to Algerian's neighbours Morocco and Tunisia in March 1962.

In quick response, the Algerians unilaterally declared independence on 3 July 1962, ending the 133 years colonial rule. President De Gaulle deployed the French military evacuated from Vietnam to Algeria, but to no avail. Eventually, at the Evian negotiations in Switzerland, France recognised the already existing Algerian independence.

### **Independence Without Actual War**

In 1956, the fiercely anti-colonial Asagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah guided Ghana to be the first British African colony to gain sovereignty, while avoiding war. Not surprisingly, imperialism organised his removal from office.

Similarly, another staunch opponent of neo-colonialism, Guinea-Conakry's Sekou Toure, led his country to independence in 1958, rejecting the path advocated by departing France. He was an icon of his people and all Africa; but equally hated by the imperialist camp. In the context of liberation wars, Nigeria's independence in 1960 was unremarkable.

The huge Belgian Congo was led to independence in 1960 by the patriotic Patrice Lumumba in extremely inauspicious circumstances, under the name Congo-Kinshasa. Imperialism soon had Lumumba removed from power and brutally murdered. The traitor and puppet of the West, Moise Tshombe, was installed in power; but quite soon the barbaric dictator and darling of imperialism, Mobutu Sese Seko, took over; and proceeded to rename the country Zaire, ruin and loot it, and move the capital to his forest village. Reportedly, his stolen fortune remains in European banks.

Tanzania, at first a German colony before Britain took over at the end of World War II, won independence in 1960 led by the outstanding liberation era Pan-African leader Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and his party, Chama cha Mapinduzi, (Revolutionary Party). His strong push to unify the East African countries Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania at the moment of independence was deliberately frustrated by the British; and it is only now that the project is being realised, after 60 lost years. Later, when imperialist scheming threatened Zanzibar's integrity, Nyerere unified it with Tanganyika, forming today's Tanzania. Later still, following the installation by the West of the murderous military dictator Idi

Amin as Uganda's ruler, Nyerere sent in the Tanzanian army and evicted him. Further, it was Nyerere who provided the South African ANC with military training bases, well out of range of apartheid bombers.

### **Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe, (and Zambia), was named after the British 'explorer' Cecil Rhodes as Southern Rhodesia (and Northern Rhodesia), who had dreams of creating an unbroken super colonial estate stretching from the *Egyptian Mediterranean coast to the Cape in South Africa*. Like Kenya and South Africa, Zimbabwe was a white settler colony. Led by Ian Smith, the settlers staged a coup d'état in 1961, with Britain acquiescing. The liberation movements ZANU and ZAPU responded militarily, and conducted a liberation war during 1965-79. After victory, the country was renamed Zimbabwe, commemorating the ancient empire of the region, while disgruntled settlers left the country.

### **Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and Mozambique**

Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands had been part of the Portuguese Empire since the 16th century. The liberation movement PAIGC, led by the brilliant revolutionary Amilcar Cabral, fought a long war for the liberation of these countries, with the motto *One movement, one revolution and two states*. Together with Angola and Mozambique, this liberation struggle benefitted from the 1974 Portuguese Carnation Revolution and achieved independence in 1974. Mozambique, after another long guerrilla war, led by Samora Machel's FRELIMO, gained independence in 1975.

### **Angola, South Africa, Namibia: a Common Liberation.**

After 500 years of Portuguese rule, Angola gained independence under the leadership of Agostino Neto's MPLA liberation movement in 1975. However, the decisive war with imperialism was in 1987/8 when apartheid was routed by Cuban/Angolan/Namibian forces in southern Angola, forced to accept Namibian independence and to negotiate for democracy in South Africa. The liberation movements SWAPO and ANC assumed power in Namibia in 1991 and in South Africa in 1994, respectively, finally ending colonial rule in Africa.

### **The Effect and Lessons of the Victory of National Liberation**

The decolonisation of Africa virtually closed the colonial era, with the overwhelming majority of humanity joining the tiny minority that was already free. Today, 193 United Nations members, compared to 51 in 1945, reflect greater global democracy. The World Bank reports that Africa is the fastest growing region; six of the ten fastest growing economies are African; and the fastest is Angola. Decolonisation has enhanced international understanding.

The victory for national liberation serves as an example and an encouragement for humanity to tackle such challenges as uneven development levels, poverty and lack of democracy, not to forget the subject of this lecture subject: war. Regarding war, I believe it should be a key target for complete elimination: internationally and within countries. So, let us get rid of war!

**Note:** Readers will remember the anti-imperialist Fenner Brockway, whose statue is in Red Lion Square, was a regular lecturer at the SPES. {Ed.}

## VIEWPOINTS

### More on Meritocracy

At first sight, Tom Rubens' defence (*ER* March 2014) of what he terms the meritocratic outlook looks uncontroversial: posts demanding exceptional ability are best filled by persons possessing such ability. No doubt all would agree that, for example, eye surgeons should be up to the job. However, it's arguable that the generality of people, and not just a small elite, could fulfil such roles, given appropriate motivation, opportunities and training. Also, given the wide variety of essential and demanding tasks – from skilled parenting to designing safe bridges – on whose fulfilment society depends, and the fact that in large measure these tasks do get fulfilled, we might reasonably assume that plenty of 'exceptional' talents are available – in which case the adjective appears to be redundant.

Another problem with Tom Rubens' formulation is that where ministerial office and other politically orientated posts (for example in the media) are concerned, exceptional ability is not the prime consideration. Given the choice between an intellectually outstanding candidate who serves the interests of the rich and powerful and regards ordinary citizens, especially poor ones, with borderline contempt, and a candidate of average intellect whose instincts are the reverse of these, there is a powerful case for preferring the latter. In other words, considerations of class alignment and fundamental values can trump "exceptional ability".

As Peter Wilkinson recalled in the February *Ethical Record*, when Michael Young coined the term meritocracy it was with satirical intent. What Young warned of has come to pass: a new class has emerged which largely monopolises the best-paid and most prestigious jobs for itself and for its progeny. These latter are exceptional only insofar as they enjoy privileged access to educational, income, job and status opportunities. There is no reason to suppose that this particular social minority is endowed with rare talents unmatched among the ranks of the currently underprivileged.

Meritocracy has two further defects, besides the word's satirical origins, which militate against its serving as a social ideal. In the first place the word tends to convey the elitist, even authoritarian, implication that those who are deemed to be meritorious because of their putatively exceptional abilities should exercise more political power than other people, whereas democracy proposes the political equality of all adult citizens.

Secondly, meritocracy conveys the assumption that deserving can be imputed to those who possess large talents. The concept of merit (and its shadow, the notion of undeservingness) are social constructs which serve to stabilise unjust societies in the interest of ruling classes and to repress social discontent. The paired ideological discourses of merit and of undeservingness respectively produce arrogance in the privileged and the demoralisation of such of the disadvantaged as can be persuaded to blame themselves, not a class-based social structure which systematically discriminates against them, for their inferior position and prospects. Internalised anger consumes the spirit but calls

no-one on to the streets in protest against social injustice or, for example, to press for a human right outlawing discrimination against members of disadvantaged classes.

But the concept of merit is philosophically as well as politically suspect. Our life-chances are the product of our varying genetic endowments and of the social and cultural circumstances (advantageous or disadvantageous as these may be) in which we happen to be located at birth and later. None of these factors being under our control, we cannot reasonably either claim credit or be penalised for their outcomes. Moreover, as William Morris put it, individuals who have been poorly served by “the tyranny of nature” have no reason to accept a society where economic and social arrangements simply reinforce that tyranny. There is no sense in, even implicitly, attributing merit to those who happened to be lucky enough to be dealt a fistful of aces, which they could hardly fail to capitalise on, and attributing demerit to those who were dealt a poor hand which predictably becomes a losing one, consigning them (and increasingly so in a country whose political class has embraced neo-liberal nostrums) to poorly-paid, unfulfilling jobs, or to a life on niggardly benefits.

Such considerations point towards the desirability of a society of equality, in which everyone contributes according to their ability, is rewarded according to their needs, is held equally worthy of social esteem and is accorded an equal share of political power. To advocate such equality of condition is not, as Tom Rubens suggested in the January 2014 *ER*, “to empty the concept of ‘merit’ of all meaning”. Rather, it is to recognise that the concept of differential social merit is fundamentally flawed, has pernicious consequences, and to reject it as one of the ideological enablers of class discrimination and class repression.

**Michael McCarthy – London W13**

### **Genuine Meritocracy Is Not Socially Unjust**

In response to Michael McCarthy’s comments (*ER*, June 2104, Viewpoints) on my arguments about meritocracy, I will deal with the issues he raises in every paragraph of his letter, giving each time the paragraph number in which the issue appears.

*Para One:* Michael says that “it’s arguable” that most people could fulfil highly specialist roles, given motivation, opportunity and training. I note the absence of the word ‘capacity’ from this list. Without the latter, the other factors would not be enough.

*Para Two:* In job contexts where class-alignment rather than exceptional ability is the prime consideration, there is *no* genuine meritocracy. Hence little purpose is served in arguing against meritocracy by pointing to examples of non-meritocracy. Also, when Michael refers to a person who is “intellectually outstanding” and to one who is only of “average intellect,” is he making a fundamental and generic distinction between the two? If he is, he is recognising the reality of innate capacity. Further, it is not invariably the case that intellectually outstanding people favour the rich and the powerful.

*Para Three:* While Michael correctly points out that many people enjoy

privileged access to good education, there is still the capacity-factor to be considered. These people will not be educationally successful if they lack ability; and the same would be true if, in an ideal social situation, everyone had equal access. Moreover, when Michael speaks of people preserving top jobs for their progeny, this, again, is *not* meritocratic.

*Para Four:* Meritocracy cannot automatically be equated with authoritarianism. In so many fields of activity, different ability-levels ‘peacefully co-exist’ with each other, either in separate departments or with people actively working together toward a shared goal, each one contributing “according to his ability” (to quote Michael’s phrase in para 7). In the latter context, some abilities are openly viewed by all concerned as being more advanced than others; with the possessors of the more complex capacities providing guidance or supervision to others, and in this sense justly exercising *authority*, as distinct from being authoritarian. Examples of this kind of situation are a large-scale surgical operation or a hazardous project in civil engineering.

As regards Michael’s point in the same paragraph about meritocracy implying unequal degrees of political power, two observations need to be made:-

Firstly, in a democracy, no-one, whatever his/her level of ability, has more than one vote. This is, in fact, the “political equality of all adult citizens” to which Michael refers. Secondly, in elections people vote for candidates whom they wish to exercise political authority; and they vote for them on the basis of what they think are their merits. So, in a democracy, considerations of merit linked to legitimate authority are actually central.

*Para Five:* Points about strategems serving the interests of ruling classes are, yet again, *not* points about meritocracy.

*Para Six:* Michael now, for the first time, speaks explicitly of “genetic endowment” — something he should have done in paras 1 & 2. But he also talks of people being socially “penalised” for not possessing a strong genetic endowment. Certainly, where such people are mistreated or abused, economically or in any other way, such practices are indefensible. But the latter are not an inevitable feature of a meritocratic society. The core principles of such a society are that everyone should have the chance to hold a position which fits his/her capacities, and that no-one should be in a position which does not accord with his/her abilities. This arrangement is not only psychologically satisfying but also, in a practical sense, imperative. Beyond these core principles, there are no misbehaviours which can, logically or by definition, be attributed to meritocracy.

Hence meritocracy need not involve the conceited attitudes which Michael Young rightly attacked in his 1958 book *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. Given a really good education system and mature cultural atmosphere, people can be taught the virtues of modesty, humility and self-criticism. Meritocracy is in principle perfectly compatible with the view that no-one is to be disrespected for having only limited ability — or is, on that account, to be denied political and civil rights. In addition, meritocracy can be sustained without large differentials

in economic status: certainly nothing like the huge ones which unfortunately exist in present-day society — and exist for all sorts of social and economic reasons, most of which are actually not to do with meritocracy but with social privilege.

Finally, none of the above points affects in any way what I have elsewhere said about “equality of condition”. Such equality would obtain in, say, a situation where many people of widely differing levels of ability filled exactly the same kind of occupational position: one calling for a calibre of capacity which only a few of these people possessed. This state of affairs would clearly be untenable. To recognise this is to understand the crucial distinction between initial equality of opportunity and subsequent, inevitable inequality of condition.

At no time should the reality of difference in level of ability be overlooked, and especially not for reasons of political ideology.

**Tom Rubens - London N4**

### **On Terrorism**

This extract in the *ER* (On Terrorism, May 2014 p13) seems to have come out of the blue.\* Ben Dupre, an Oxford classicist, is listed as having written four separate volumes each with 50 ‘accessible & engaging’ essays on almost every or any topic. This productivity may explain the superficiality, even banality, of his insights. His invocation of the ‘official’ version of the 9/11 events as a part of his exposition was particularly crass as, although it is rather easy to see the official version as false, no-one can assert that they know for sure just how all that dreadful business came about -- therefore this sort of stuff will not serve as historical evidence about ‘terrorism’.

I recently cleared a book shelf, including all my back copies of the *Ethical Record* going back to the 1980s. Instead of binning them, I found a welcome for them in the library of the Bishopsgate Institute. It occurs to me that someone with an interest in collecting 50 good essays on ethical issues could do well by going through back copies of the *ER* and picking out candidates for a much more valuable collection of 50 essays, as a contribution to public understanding, than is suggested by this particular Dupre extract ‘On Terrorism’. Is anyone, I wonder, up for it?

**Jasper Tomlinson - London SE1**

*\* Ben Dupre was unable to deliver the lecture he had been booked for and so sent the piece ‘On terrorism’ as a substitute. I’m gratified your old Ethical Records were not binned but sent to the Bishopsgate Institute, a very suitable place for them. We hope we can now add the Institute to our mailing list. {Ed.}*

### **(1) The Equality Act 2010**

While Angela Pinter’s Viewpoint (*ER* May 2014 p 16) is not wholly inaccurate, it’s quite wrong in stating that the Equality Act 2010 does “not apply to individuals” (p 17). In fact, the Act is a consolidating Act, albeit with some innovations, which brings together provisions formerly in the Race Relations Act 1976, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and so on.

The large bulk of litigation under the Act, as under its predecessors, is in the employment field between employees and employers. Thus, for example, an individual employer found guilty of race or religious discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 will have to pay compensation. It is also true that the 2010 Act does, as Angela states, “apply to the provision of goods and services and to public bodies” but this litigation is less common than in the employment field.

## **(2) Affirming the Judicial Oath**

Meeting Mazin Zeki at Liberty’s AGM on 26 April, he mischievously averred to me that I was a believer in Sharia Law. In fact, in my new position as a First Tier Tribunal judge, I took the judicial oath and oath of loyalty to the Queen on 17 December 2013. I did it by affirmation as befits an agnostic rather than swearing on the Qu’ran.

**Christopher Purnell – Orpington, Kent**

## **Creationists and Science**

A couple of points on Professor Braterman’s excellent lecture (*Intelligently designed: the creationist assault on science*, ER May 2014):

**OLD EARTH CREATIONISM.** Not all ancient creationists treat the ‘days’ of creation as indefinite periods of time. That most erudite and readable of creationists, the late Alan Hayward (*Creation and Evolution, the facts and the fallacies*), proposes that on the six days of creation, God issued six ‘edicts’ which were fulfilled, not immediately, but gradually over a long period of continuous creation. New species stopped appearing when the final edict was fulfilled with the advent of Adam (“Let us make man in our image”).

**IRREDUCIBLE COMPLEXITY.** Michael Behe and others contend that, for instance, bacterial flagella are too complex to have arisen by the process of natural selection. Behe makes himself look ridiculous by demanding that evolutionists actually demonstrate the process; all that is necessary is to show that flagella *could have* evolved from simpler organs, and this has been done. But science has been served by the contention. All theories, even Darwin’s theory, benefit by being contested.

**Donald Rooum - London E1**

## **Faith Schools**

We are a secular society with values derived primarily from the European enlightenment, and not religious beliefs - indeed it can be argued that religion held back the development of modern western civilisation for many centuries. It is therefore very disappointing that well into the 21st century so many of us have been persuaded to educate our children according to the confused, self-contradictory and, on occasion, downright vicious contents of books such as the Bible. The provenances of such books in the deserts of the Middle East in distant times are obscure. They were produced within primitive tribal cultures with which, fortunately, we have very little in common, as much as some fundamentalists would like to put the clock back.

At their core, faith schools wish to encourage children to believe in non-existent supernatural beings - the model of the universe which has no more intellectual

strength than that of the flat earth society. The fact that so many people apparently want their children to attend faith schools is a reflection of the deficiencies of other establishments and, it must be said, lack of thought by otherwise caring and secularly-minded people who, one would have thought, should know better than to tolerate the form of intellectual child abuse which their children suffer in such schools.

Parents who would be outraged at the idea of their children being exposed to physical abuse appear to give no thought to the intellectual damage these same children suffer in faith-based schools. Such schools are too often sources of primitive unscientific thinking, sectarian division, racial and cultural prejudice and dysfunctional social practices. Their existence is both a cancer on the educational body and the wider society, and it is greatly regretted that their growth within a modern secular culture is being encouraged.

**David Reidy - Coulsdon, Surrey**  
davidreidy61@aol.com

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### **THE TWO NEW SAINTS** **Barbara Smoker**

The choice of people to be canonised as saints has always had a political aspect, but the joint canonisations in April of two contrasting popes – John XXIII and John-Paul II – reveals a uniquely diplomatic negotiation in the Curia.

Before his historic resignation, Pope Benedict had planned the canonisation of his immediate predecessor, who shared his traditional views and to whom he owed his own successful career in the Vatican; but it is most unlikely that he made the decision to couple him as a saint with the reforming pope of the second Vatican Council. That decision must have been made by the present pope, Francis – who, though also a traditionalist, is much more a fair-minded man of the people, keen to reconcile the dissident sections of the Church.

Pope John not only set up the reforming Council but also, as an offshoot of it, the Birth Control Commission. One of its members was the British Cardinal Heenan, who told my friend Harold Blackham that all the members were in favour of sanctioning the Pill (as opposed to methods of contraception during copulation!). Sadly, however, when John died in 1963, the Commission's report was part of his unfinished business.

I am often asked why, in *A Rationalist Encyclopaedia*, Joseph McCabe castigates John XXIII as the worst of popes. The answer, of course, is that McCabe died before Roncalli became pope and there was a much earlier pope of the same name and number – though he was so wicked that even the Church removed him retrospectively from the record.

If you have any suggestions for **FILMS YOU WANT TO SEE** at  
Conway Hall please let Sid Rodrigues know their titles.  
programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk or 020 7061 6744.

## OBITUARIES

### Harry Stopes-Roe (27 March 1924 – 11 May 2014)

**David Pollock** writes:-

As the 1960s came to an end Religious Instruction was struggling to establish its educational credentials. The 1944 Act had made Religious Instruction (RI) and collective worship compulsory in all schools as an act of repentance as the World War neared its end, aiming to produce a generation of pious and peace-loving Christians. But religious instruction was unpopular with pupils and increasingly looked on askance by other teachers as a sort of indoctrination. Among academic leaders in the field — people like John Hull and Owen Cole — there was already a realisation that change was needed away from instruction towards education, but ideas were inchoate.

Harry Stopes-Roe, as a philosopher from Birmingham University, joined the statutory local committee in Birmingham charged with revising its RI syllabus. He introduced the idea — then absolutely novel — not only that Christianity was neither the only religion nor self-evidently superior to the rest but that even the whole range of religions was inadequate as a field of study. He saw that people did not need a religion but could live very fulfilling lives without one — and he realised that the English language lacked a word to describe this full range of religious and non-religious options. He coined the term ‘stance for living’ — later ‘lifestance’ — and persuaded the Agreed Syllabus Conference that ‘RI’ had to cover the whole range of stances for living.

But the Church of England’s National Society objected and put in a narrowly legalistic objection which resulted in the end in the new syllabus being rejected and something much more traditional put in its place.

It was then that Harry, who was relatively new to the humanist movement at the time, decided that he needed to develop his ideas in writing. I was then a member of the British Humanist Association’s education committee, and he and I worked together on what became an influential booklet called *Objective, Fair and Balanced*.

The ideas are now commonplace but we were working out for the first time the pedagogical needs for a new subject -- we called it Education in Stances for Living. The three requirements in our title emerged from long consideration and debate:

***Objective*** — in contrast to persuading children to believe in Christianity, the intention should be educational, so they could learn about not just a range of religions but also non-religious beliefs such as Humanism.

***Fair*** — because even objective statements about religions and beliefs could be selective and so give a biased unfair picture.

***Balanced*** — because the course as a whole needed to give a balanced and proportionate picture of the whole field of religion and belief.

Harry took the lead in the work: apart from drafting a Parliamentary Bill to implement our ideas, my role was as the whetstone on which he sharpened his ideas. Day after day I would get home tired from my office job only for the phone to ring and there was Harry set on another two hours or more of intense discussion of what exactly we were seeking, what terms and definitions we should use, how specific the law should be. He was unrelenting and almost always right, but determined to pursue rigorously every suggestion or question I might raise and ensure we overlooked nothing.

In the end our booklet was quite influential, and Harry became the BHA's representative on the Religious Education Council, which later went on record with an appreciation of the strong humanist contribution to its thinking. Sadly, 40 years on, though our approach is endorsed by the subject experts, politics and narrowly legal arguments mean that in practice we are still far from seeing that sort of education implemented in most schools. There remains a heavy bias towards religion with scant attention to the non-religious alternatives, even though at least half the population -- and more among young people -- live effectively non-religious lives.

Harry was the son of Marie Stopes, the pioneer of birth control who by the time he was born was fashionably devoted to eugenics and had highly eccentric views on bringing up children – for example, he was forbidden to read books for fear it would tarnish his originality. He survived this childhood by developing a strong independence of thought, defying his mother's veto on his marriage to Mary, the daughter of Barnes Wallis, because she had a squint, took a masters degree in science at Imperial College and a doctorate in philosophy at Cambridge, and then became a lecturer in science studies at Birmingham. There he became a humanist and, as recounted, a member of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus Conference.

That experience led to his joining the BHA's executive committee where he served for 20 years, nine as chairman, before being appointed a Vice-President in 1994. He represented the BHA on the Religious Education Council for most of that time, and was a stalwart of the now defunct Values Education Council. He was also one of the pioneers of the BHA's humanist ceremonies and took an active role in the International Humanist and Ethical Union, being largely responsible for their Minimum Statement on Humanism to which all member organisations are required to consent. He continued to contribute provocative wisdom well into his old age, signing a BHA letter to the *Daily Telegraph* to protest at David Cameron's characterisation of Britain as a Christian country only days before he died.

**Norman Bacrac** writes:-

Harry Stopes-Roe was an Appointed Lecturer of the South Place Ethical Society from 1978 until the posts became defunct and also a Holding Trustee of the Ethical Society until 2009. Harry was very active in 1980 at the time of the High Court case where SPES achieved charitable status as an educational, not religious, charity, a matter on which he was justifiably quite eloquent and adamant.

**John Rayner** (1929 -- May 2014)

**Don Langdown** writes:

John was a fine example of the type of strong-willed maverick character which our movement attracts. While sometimes stubborn and awkward, his expertise in finance contributed to keeping us on our toes. The treasurers of various organisations will now need someone else to chivvy them about getting obscure details on their balance sheets right. John's lively mind will be missed by those who knew him in the various societies in which he was active, including Population Matters, the National Secular Society, the Rationalist Association and Harrow Humanists.

**Norman Bacrac** writes:

In this Society, John was a Trustee and for several years he voluntarily assisted Marina Ingham in the admin office. He also served on the Premises subcommittee. Latterly, John regularly chaired a Sunday afternoon discussion group. He was capable of expressing his opinions in a forthright manner and had no compunction about striking out in an independent direction.

*John's funeral will take place at Breakspear Crematorium, Breakspear Road, Ruislip at 1.15pm on Thursday, 12 June 2014*

DIGNITY IN DYING invites you to

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### **Against assisted dying:**

**Rt Rev Peter Forster**, Bishop of Chester

**Rabbi Alan Plancey**, Emeritus Minister at

Borehamwood and Elstree Synagogue

**Madeleine Teahan**, Associate Editor at the *Catholic Herald*

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Conway Hall Ethical Society, 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn, WC1R 4RL.

Tel: 020 7405 1818 Registered Charity No. 251396

For programme updates, email: [programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk](mailto:programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk)

Website: [www.conwayhall.org.uk](http://www.conwayhall.org.uk)

Admission to Sunday morning lectures is free for members of CHES and £5 (£2 conc) for non-members. For other events, no charge unless stated.

### JUNE 2014

Sunday 1 1100 **DO PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS MIX?**  
**Mark Fielding**

Sun 8 1100 **CORRUPTION IN FINANCE AND THE LAW**  
**Nicholas Wilson** "Mr Ethical"

Sat 14 1030 Centre for Inquiry UK and Conway Hall Ethical Society present  
**GOD IN THE LAB: THE SCIENCE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF**  
Presented by **Stephen Law**  
11.00 **Glen Carrigan**, 12.00 **Chris French**, 13.45 **Jon Lanman**  
£10 (£5 students, Members of Conway Hall Ethical Society and the British Humanist Association and Friends of CFI UK).

19:00 CHES, New Humanist Magazine & Istros Books present  
**THE 'YOUNG BOSNIA' GROUP: TERRORISTS OR FREEDOM FIGHTERS?**  
Alternative perspectives on the Sarajevo assassination that sparked WW I  
Bosnian author and journalist, **Muharem Bazdulj** & **Dejan Djokic**, Reader in History at Goldsmiths College  
Tickets £5.

Sunday 15 1100 **CLASSIC LIBERAL-INDIVIDUALISM AND THE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN WORLD.** **Tom Rubens**

Sunday 22 1100 **WHO CAN JOKE? WHAT, WHEN & HOW: THE ETHICS OF HUMOUR.** **Anja Steinbauer**

Thursday 26 1930

82nd CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE  
**THINGS I NEVER KNEW ABOUT MY FATHER – JACOB BRONOWSKI**

**Lisa Jardine CBE**

Professor of Renaissance Studies at University College London,  
Director of the UCL Centre for Humanities Interdisciplinary  
Research Projects

and the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters

Chairman: **Laurie Taylor**

Tickets are free.

Sunday 29 1100 **THE SUNDAY ASSEMBLY - THE FASTEST GROWING SECULAR 'CHURCH' IN THE WORLD?**

### JULY

Sunday 6 1100 **A GATHERING FOR (MARTIN) GARDNER – RATIONALIST SUPREME** with **Colm Mulcahy**