

Ethical Record

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REMEMBERING WOMEN FREETHINKERS



Frances Wright 1795-1852

Two quotations from the work of Frances Wright (see article on page 15):

... the condition of women affords, in all countries, the best criterion by which to judge the character of men.

Views of Society and Manners in America, 1820.

... the best road to correct reasoning is by physical science; the way to trace effects to causes is through physical science; the only corrective, therefore, of superstition is physical science.

Course of Popular Lectures, 1829

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SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Conway Hall Humanist Centre

25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

Tel: 020 7242 8031/4 Fax: 020 7242 8036 www.ethicalsoc.org.uk

Chairman: Jim Herrick

Vice-chairman: Ed McArthur

Treasurer: Chris Bratcher

Hon. Rep.: Derek Lennard

Registrar: Andrew Copson

Editor: Norman Bacrac

Please email texts and viewpoints for the Editor to: bacrac@fsmail.net

Staff

Chief Executive Officer:	Jim Walsh	Tel: 020 7242 8031/4	admin@ethicalsoc.org.uk
Finance Officer:	Linda Alia	Tel: 020 7242 8031/4	finance@ethicalsoc.org.uk
Librarian:	Catherine Broad	Tel: 020 7242 8037	library@ethicalsoc.org.uk
Programme Co-ordinator:	Ben Partridge	Tel: 020 7242 8034	programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk
Lettings Officer:	Carina Dvorak	Tel: 020 7242 8032	conwayhall@ethicalsoc.org.uk
Caretakers:	Eva Aubrechtova (i/c)	Tel: 020 7242 8033	
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GALHA: Equal rights – are we there yet? Peter Tatchell

1930 Friday 11 March 2011 at Conway Hall

Association of Humanist Students 3rd Annual Convention

1200-1330 Saturday 12 March 2011 at Conway Hall. Tickets £3 for members

Speakers include AC Grayling, Johann Hari, Andrew Copson and Robin Ince.

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The Humanist Reference Library is open for members and researchers on Mondays to Fridays from 0930 - 1730. Please let the Librarian, Catherine Broad, know of your intention to visit. The Library has an extensive collection of new and historic freethought material.

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To receive regular Society news and programme updates via email, please contact Ben Partridge at programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk. Similarly, if you have any suggestions for speakers or event ideas, or would like to convene a Sunday afternoon informal, get in touch with Ben on 020 7242 8034.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Reg. Charity No. 251396

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

the study and dissemination of ethical principles based on humanism 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 Reference Library. The Society's journal, *Ethical Record*, is issued monthly. Memorial meetings may be arranged.

The annual subscription is £20 (£15 if a full-time student, unwaged or over 65).

VARIETIES OF IRRELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: ATHEISM IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Summary of a lecture to the Ethical Society, 30 January 2011

Jonathan Rée

Jonathan Rée began by referring to William James's book, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), a book of which James – who was a Darwinian scientist, but not a denier of religion – said with some pride that it seemed to give fuel to the fires of believers and unbelievers alike. The point of his book was that religion is many things, and that it serves many purposes, and that we should beware of anyone who offers us sweeping statements about it. Rée explained that he wanted to develop a corollary to James's argument: that there are also many ways of not being religious, and in particular that the difference between being religious and being irreligious cannot be reduced to the difference between believing or disbelieving in the existence of God.

Shelley's Atheism

Rée then turned to a consideration of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Exactly two hundred years ago, Shelley was an 18-year-old student in his second term at University College Oxford, relishing his freedom after six miserable years at Eton. But then he was identified as the author of a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*, arraigned before the College authorities, and expelled on 25 March 1811. Since then, the persecution of Shelley for his *Atheism* pamphlet has made him a hero to humanists, rationalists, and atheists of all kinds; but Rée argued that rumours of his atheism were rather exaggerated. The pamphlet did no more than argue that 'every reflecting mind must allow that there is no proof of the existence of a Deity.' But it would have been hard to find a believer who would have been either surprised or troubled by what Shelley wrote. Most Christians thought of their religion as a historical tradition rather than a metaphysical system, and they regarded belief as a matter of grace rather than proof, or faith rather than knowledge. Shelley's argument would have held no terrors for them, and was indeed compatible with perfect orthodoxy.

Moreover when Shelley reprinted *The Necessity of Atheism* two years later, as an appendix to his politically subversive poem *Queen Mab*, he made it clear that all he was objecting to was the idea of a God who had created the world out of nothing at the beginning of time. In truth Shelley was not so much an Atheist as a Pantheist or Deist, and he insisted that 'the hypothesis of a pervading spirit co-eternal with the universe remains unshaken.' To modern ears at least, there is nothing very atheistical about that. George Bernard Shaw probably had it right when he said that what was special about Shelley was that, regardless of what he actually believed, he insisted on his right to call himself an Atheist, and to do with boastfulness and bravado. The notion of atheism was therefore not as precise as it might have been; but as Shelley himself once put it, 'it is a good word of abuse.'

This example, according to Rée, shows how very vague and various the ideas associated with Atheism can be; and he went on to mention three problems that have played a key role in the decline of religion, but which have no direct bearing on the question of God.

The Problem of Scale

First, there was *the problem of scale*: the transition, as it has been put, from closed world to infinite universe, and the growth of a powerful if very vague consciousness of the minuteness of the human race compared with the vastness of cosmic space and time. This thought, though perfectly compatible with the existence of a God, made it hard to believe that such an entity could take any interest at all – let alone a close personal interest – in the fate of individual human beings.

The Problem of the Soul

Then there was *the problem of the soul*. In 1838 Ralph Waldo Emerson asked the Divinity students at Harvard to consider the capacity of the soul to expand to occupy ‘the full circle of the universe,’ and to merge with the ‘one mind’ which is active everywhere – ‘in each ray of the star, in each wavelet of the pool.’ This was the kind of thing that got Emerson a reputation as a closet atheist, but in fact all he was doing was following up an idea that he had probably come across in Spinoza and Hegel, namely that if there is such a thing as spirituality, it belongs to us not as separate individuals but as aspects of an infinite principle that pervades the universe. It followed that if survival of bodily death is possible, it is conceivable only at the cost of individuality. in which case the old religious idea of rewards and punishments in another world becomes incredible.

The Problem of Morality

Third and last, Rée mentioned *the problem of morality*. He referred briefly to Nietzsche’s notorious paradoxes about morality and the superhuman, before turning to the less well-known arguments of John Stuart Mill, who (unlike Nietzsche) had never been troubled by the slightest intimation of religious belief. As far as the existence of God was concerned, Mill did not think there could be any certainty one way or the other; but he was sure that if there was a God there was no reason to praise him or offer him thanks. The moralities of the past had nearly all been religious moralities, and on the whole they had been very bad moralities too (particularly in their treatment of women). And if there was a God who could send him to hell for refusing to call him good, then Mill was not going to be intimidated, ‘if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him,’ Mill said, then ‘to hell I will go.’

Rée concluded by quoting Mill’s observation that some people who were brought up to be religious imagined that they still believed the same as they always had, because they failed to realise that their religion had been subjected to ‘modifications amounting to an essential change of its character.’ They had become irreligious without realising it. And that, Rée concluded, should give irreligious people pause: religion is not a single unambiguous entity; and the same applies to irreligion too.

Thomas Paine Society Annual Lecture

PAINE AND THE ENGLISH RADICAL TRADITION by Ted Vallance

1400 Saturday 5 March 2011 at the Brockway Room, Conway Hall
All welcome

MORAL THINKING: FOUNDATIONS, APPROACHES AND APPLICATIONS

Henry Haslam

Author of *The Moral Mind*, Imprint Academic, 2005

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 6 February 2011

Although for many people moral thinking is associated with religious belief, the two are not identical – indeed, they are sometimes in conflict. The moral mind is something that believers (I speak as a Christian) and non-believers have in common, and there are many opportunities for agreement – and for fruitful discussions – on moral issues.

Reason and Rationality

It is sometimes said that one approach to morality and the question of how to live is based on reason or rationality. What does this mean? One meaning is ‘*not from divine revelation*’ or ‘*not from the authority of religion*’. That is rather negative. Does it mean anything positive? In practice, most of us base our moral thinking on our own consciences – and this is true of Christians as well as humanists.

A morality based on reason can be contrasted with one based on emotion, instinct or intuition. Many of our moral sentiments and convictions are derived from these gut feelings. Two famous quotations from the philosopher David Hume make the point well: ‘Morality is more properly felt than judg’d of.’ ‘Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.’ The psychologist Jonathan Haidt says the same thing: ‘Morality is driven by emotions and intuitions, not reasoning.’ Reason has a role in moral thinking, but it is the passions, emotions, intuitions or gut feelings, that take the lead.

Modern psychology tells us that it is commonly the emotional part of our nature that makes decisions; reasons follow later. The people who can make up their minds are the ones who just *know* what is the right thing to do. They may wish to clothe their decisions with reasons, but that comes afterwards. Benjamin Franklin understood this well: ‘So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do.’ If reason is a tool for justifying whatever we have a mind to do, it cannot be a secure foundation for moral thinking. It can, of course, be a valuable tool for working out moral behaviour once we have established the foundations.

A third understanding of reason is through the term ‘reasonable’. A reasonable person is a sensible, right-thinking sort of person, someone whose moral sentiments and thinking we can agree with. Agreement about moral issues is important. A community is held together by shared moral values. It is generally right that we should fit in with the moral conventions and values of the society in which we live. Laws should command general consent, and it is generally right that we should obey them. This agreement, however, is far from being all there is to morality. Our moral thinking has to take account of societies with different moral values and of minorities within our own society.

Another point is that if we all just followed convention, if we all just kept agreeing with each other, we would still be owning slaves and hanging people for stealing sheep. Moral thinking can challenge prevailing, accepted values. The role of the reasonable person here is pithily expressed by George Bernard Shaw: ‘The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.’

So the idea of basing morality on reason or being reasonable doesn’t seem to have much going for it, does it?

You Can’t Explain It

This brings us to the most frustrating, but also intriguing and fascinating, thing about moral thinking. It is elusive. You can’t pin it down. You can’t explain it in terms of anything else. Equally, you can’t explain it away in terms of anything else. It’s not all a matter of upbringing. It’s not all a matter of culture and convention. It’s not all a matter of evolution. As we have seen, it is not just a question of being reasonable or rational. All of these can help us to understand particular aspects of moral thinking, but none of them explain why morality exists as one of the dimensions of reality and none of them, on their own, offer a secure foundation to enable us to build a moral code.

There is a fundamental dilemma, which is summed up so well by Bertrand Russell: ‘I cannot see how to refute arguments for the subjectivity of moral values, but I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don’t like it.’ He found that the evidence of his own inner convictions was at odds with the theoretical ‘arguments’ that moral values are entirely subjective. Russell was a philosopher: I am a scientist, and when a scientist finds that evidence or observations conflict with theory he is inclined to ditch the theory.

A Scientific Approach

How can a scientific approach help us to understand our moral thinking? What evidence can we use for a scientific study of moral thinking? The only evidence available to us is the human experience. People do have moral sentiments. We do hold moral opinions. We do make statements about moral values.

If we are to believe the evidence of the human experience (and why shouldn’t we believe it?), the moral dimension is real, statements of moral value are real statements about something that matters, something that is more than a subjective personal opinion. We feel that, somewhere out of reach, there is a truth that we are striving to express. We inhabit a moral universe, as Desmond Tutu has put it.

The next point is that humans, unlike other species, have the mental capacity to recognise this moral dimension, to engage with it, to make moral judgements, and to seek to understand what is good behaviour and what is bad.

The Three Approaches to Moral Decision-making

There are three main approaches to moral decision-making. The first is *moral*

principle. It is wrong to steal or murder, for example. Kindness and generosity are good. The second is to judge an action by its consequences: *consequentialist ethics*. What are the benefits? What are the losses?

The third approach is *virtue ethics*. Virtue ethics focuses on the character of the person, rather than on the deed itself or its consequences. It is a question of self-image, the kind of person I want to be; it's about my own integrity. The website of the Ethical Society and the main lecture hall at Conway Hall carry the Shakespeare quotation 'To thine own self be true.' This could be understood as a call to virtue ethics.

Personal Morality, Social Morality and the Law

We may distinguish three areas of life in which moral thinking may be applied: first, our personal lives, with the decisions we make as individuals about how we should live; secondly, the values that we share with other members of our community, the kinds of behaviour that we generally approve of or disapprove of; and, thirdly, the law.

Much legislation is based on moral values, but the law does not try to cover everything that people disapprove of. Too much regulation can inhibit people from taking responsibility, and from making their own professional and moral decisions. To quote Philippa Foster Back, director of the Institute of Business Ethics: 'Business ethics goes beyond compliance. Compliance can all too easily be about "ticking the boxes" so only the bare minimum is achieved, whereas business ethics is about striving to uphold the highest standards, above and beyond those that comply with the law, and doing the right thing even if no one is watching.' This is virtue ethics, and you can't legislate for virtue.

The Media

The media sit in judgement on the nation's morals. They delight in exposing any supposed wrongdoing, especially by people in the public eye. Yet they themselves operate by moral standards that are quite different from those that the rest of us would recognise.

A few years ago the Code of Conduct of the National Union of Journalists began with 'A journalist has a duty to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards.' The code has now been revised. Ethical standards have disappeared, and the code starts with 'A journalist at all times upholds and defends the principle of media freedom, the right of freedom of expression and the right of the public to be informed.'

Consequentialist thinking has an important part to play in moral thinking, particularly in public issues. If we apply such thinking to the media, we would ask questions like 'What benefit might come if this information is placed in the public domain? What harm?' Most of us, if we are thinking ethically, would think it right to refrain from giving lots of people information that was likely to cause hurt, with no compensating benefit. Journalists are not like that. For them, the right to freedom of speech is top of their code. If people get hurt, or there is some damage to the public interest, that doesn't matter. Time and time again, we see stories in the public domain where the hurt or harm from putting it there far

exceeds the benefit – stories that just should not be there. Often they concern people who are in no way public figures. Often they concern people who are.

Within the last year, it was the media who made sure that the new government lost one its most promising ministers, David Laws. It was the media who were clearly going to make it impossible for David Miliband to remain a prominent figure in the Labour party when his brother was party leader. It was the media who, it was thought, would make it impossible for Lord Young to continue as a government adviser. Three men who had something to give to public life, removed by the whim of the media. The nation loses; who benefits?

Quite a different example, now. One of the threats that face us today is the conflict between Muslims and the West, between the values of Islam and those of Western societies. The media delight in reporting inflammatory statements by Muslim hotheads. They don't report statements by mainstream, peace-loving Muslims. On the Christian side, when a small-town pastor in Florida announces his intention to burn the Qur'an, he gets worldwide publicity. Why?

The media don't report the excellent work done by interfaith groups in our towns and cities, building up understanding and friendship between people of different faiths. They don't remind us of all the British Muslims who have a love for their country as well as a love for their religion. They don't remind us of all the Muslims who share with most other people in this country a high regard for our liberal, democratic traditions.

By choosing what to report, the media can promote understanding, trust and friendship between Muslims and other sections of British society, or they can promote distrust, fear and hostility, leading to civil unrest, racial strife and sympathy for extremist, even terrorist, views. The media have that choice, and it seems that they choose the latter.

For reasons of space, the part of the lecture dealing with environmental ethics has been omitted. It may be found in the full text of this lecture (see below).

Conclusions

I hope that one thing that has emerged is that on ethical matters there is a huge amount of common ground between humanists and religious believers. Believers and non-believers can share an understanding of moral principle, consequentialist ethics and virtue ethics and can discuss ethical matters based on these concepts.

We share the conviction that ethics matters. Humanists and religious believers can join forces to remind people that we are moral creatures, capable of change, and capable of moral thinking and living. Humanists can tell the world boldly that moral thinking is not just for religious people: it is for everyone.

The full text of this lecture may be found at
www.moralmind.co.uk/SPESlecture.pdf

A RESPONSE TO ‘THE MORAL MIND’ Graham Bell

The talk (summarised in this issue, page 5) by Henry Haslam (HH) was primarily an appeal to the religious and non-religious to “join forces” “to remind people that we are moral creatures, capable of change ...” since “on ethical matters there is a huge amount of common ground between humanists and religious believers”. The original talk included applications to environmental ethics (only in the full text available on the internet), the media and also to business ethics and the law. For reasons of space, this response concentrates on recent research in Moral Psychology and Evolutionary Psychology into the origins of human morality and how moral judgements are processed in the brain.

HH suggests, “[T]here are many opportunities for agreement” between believers and non-believers “and for fruitful discussions ... on moral issues”. However, fruitful discussion depends on consideration of all available relevant evidence. According to moral psychologist Jon Haidt (pronounced *height*), “Moral psychology is undergoing a multi-disciplinary renaissance” (1), a development which has accelerated rapidly since the introduction of reliable functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and other techniques early this century. HH selectively refers to some of Haidt’s conclusions, but does not consider the implications, especially when evolutionary considerations extend our understanding of both the biological origins of moral codes and their content.

Significantly, naturalistic explanations offer an account of the origin of human morality that is consistent with biological evolution and the observed behaviour of other social species but not consistent with the teleological doctrines of the major monotheistic religions. In the section **You can’t explain it**, HH states “*moral thinking ...is elusive....You can’t explain it in terms of anything else*” (My emphasis). Admittedly, none of the potential components of morality that HH puts forward “*on their own*, offer[s] a secure foundation to enable us to build a *moral code*.” (My emphasis). However, multi-disciplinary research areas such as Moral Psychology and Evolutionary Psychology have produced plausible multi-causal explanations of why humans *think morally*. Furthermore, research scientists have been able predict some of the likely components of human *moral codes* purely on evolutionary grounds. Many of their predictions appear to be supported by experimental evidence.

Traditional Explanations of Human Moral Decision-making

In the west, it has long been asserted that morals originated with and are dependent on religion. The Enlightenment was partly a reaction to the strong hold of organised religion on everyday life and thought. It was also strongly influenced by scientific advance, especially the discovery of universal gravitation by Newton. Belief in the power of human reason was reinforced. It was expected that the methods of Newton and others could be applied to uncover the laws governing the rest of nature. Many people came to believe that by the application of reason, unending progress would be possible — progress in knowledge, technology, prosperity, and even in moral values. The competing beliefs that morality originated in religion and that morality arose from the

judicious application of reason still abound but both are being severely challenged by recent advances in Moral Psychology and related disciplines.

Biological Evolution and Moral Decision Making

A reading of modern Darwinism, a purely naturalistic explanation, inescapably leads to the conclusion that nature, for all its 'red in tooth and claw' and purported 'natural evils', is morally neutral. Humans, however, do possess moral sentiments, related to the *conscience* of folk psychology. It is instructive to look for the origin of these as a product of human evolution.

Man is a social animal, some say ultrasocial given the group sizes of modern urban conglomerations. The emerging fields of evolutionary biology, and in particular Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology, have shown that while human behaviours are complex, their precursors can be seen in the behaviours of other social species. The basic reason for social animals to live in groups is that opportunities for survival and reproduction are much better in groups than living alone. However, all social animals have had to curb tendencies towards individualistic behavioural patterns for group living to be worthwhile. The biological origins of morality then can be seen as a cost/benefit calculus in which social animals have to restrain individualistic behavioural tendencies that involve interaction with others in the social group in order for the group to flourish and thereby individual members to benefit from group membership. This might appear to some as impersonal and heartless, but it is such considerations that have driven natural selection forward and have resulted in the profusion of life on this planet in all its wonderful variety.

Morality may be defined as a system of ideas about right and wrong conduct. Ethologists observe that nonhuman social mammals possess a *sense* of morality and a moral code that allows them to tell the difference between right and wrong (2). As it is unlikely that these species have the ability to form and process *abstract* concepts such as morality, it is safe to assume that morality is solely a human construct. Therefore ethologists have described as proto-moral (or premoral) those behaviours in nonhuman animals that appear to be analogous to human moral behaviour.

It is difficult to attribute moral behaviour to social insects such as ants and bees whose behavioural traits are probably almost entirely originally encoded in their genes but phenotypically encoded in their nervous system. In more complex social animals, species-specific moral behavioural tendencies are genetically encoded but phenotypically encoded in the brain as neural circuits. There are also innate learning mechanisms that allow the animal to modify its behavioural patterns as a result of experience. These changes can be stored in the brain as modifications to the relevant neural circuits. Our closest evolutionary relatives, the great apes, but also other social mammals such as elephants and dolphins, show some of the traits that would have been necessary for the evolution of human morality: high intelligence, a capacity for symbolic communication, attachment, bonding, cooperation and mutual aid, biological altruism and reciprocal altruism, conflict resolution and peacemaking, deception and cheater detection, a sense of social norms, a realisation of 'self' and a concept of continuity (2).

Research suggests that the size of human groups grew from about 50 to about 150 over the course of the 2.5 million years or so of the evolution of genus Homo – that is until about 12,000 years ago when the Neolithic revolution led to settled communities of larger size. Stricter rules for group cohesion will have been increasingly required. Starting from a form of primate proto-morality, the system of morality common to all humans gradually evolved as an increasingly complex set of behavioural adaptations for enhanced social living.

A further factor was the development of culture, the beginnings of which primatologists have observed in chimpanzees and other primate species. Culture allows knowledge and values to be transmitted within as well as down the generations. Gene-culture co-evolution assumes that there are two paths of information transmission: genetic and social learning. These two systems interact because what an individual learns partly depends on its genotype. But also, natural selection acting on the genetic system is influenced by the cultural traits present; that is, cultural traits acting on natural selection can effectively become encoded genetically over a sufficiently long evolutionary time.

For humans, evolutionary psychologists propose several extra levels of sophistication not found in primate societies. Two examples are a more rigorous enforcement of society's moral codes with rewards, punishments and reputation building. And with the gradual development of language and symbolic thought, early humans increasingly applied a degree of judgement and reason not possible elsewhere in the animal kingdom. Some evolutionary psychologists propose that organised religions and their moral codes initially evolved as cultural adaptations as a means to help maintain group cohesion by homogenising behaviour and group conformity before control being taken over by religious hierarchies. Unfortunately, it is likely that reliable evidence will never be forthcoming to confirm or reject this proposal.

Thus, the data that informs human moral judgement appears to have three sources: 'rules' arising from information encoded in the genes; 'rules' internalised following individual social experience; and moral judgement from active reasoning. These three sources are reflected Haidt's Social Intuitionist Model, a dual process model for human moral judgement.

Jon Haidt, Moral Dumbfounding, the Social Intuitionist Model and Beyond
Haidt set out to investigate both the way humans arrive at moral judgements and the components of these judgements. To test his own ideas, partly based on those of earlier researchers, he developed a series of scenarios in which most people declare immediately that the acts described are wrong whereas in reality no one is harmed. One such situation: 'A brother and sister, both young adults, decided to make love. She was already taking birth-control pills and he wore a condom. They both enjoyed the sex but decided not to do it again. They kept the night as a special secret, which made them feel closer to each other. What do you think about that? Was it O.K. for them to make love?' Most people responded with an immediate *yuck*. The researcher was able to counter any apparent justifications raised by the subject – 'Incest often results in birth defects; the siblings will be emotionally hurt; the community will be offended; etc.' - from the facts of the story. Some finally agreed with the researcher that no harm was done: 'It was

O.K. I guess'. Many others were less convinced: 'I don't know, I can't explain it, I just know it's wrong.' This latter group was morally dumbfounded.

fMRI scanning of the subject's brain showed that different areas of the brain were more active during the quick *yuck* response than from during the subsequent reasoning with the researcher. Areas of the brain associated with emotional responses and with conflict resolution were more active for those who were morally dumbfounded.

From the results of these and other experiments, and from quite different dilemma-based experiments performed elsewhere, Haidt devised the Social Intuitionist Model for moral judgement. (The following is necessarily only a simplified outline. For greater detail, see (3)). The central claim of this model is that moral judgement is initiated by rapid moral intuition. This is followed (when needed) by slower moral reasoning. Moral judgement arises as a result of the interaction of and the resolution of any conflict between moral intuition and moral reasoning. Most often, following neural signals from the moral intuition system to the moral reasoning system, the latter simply 'rubber stamps' the 'decision' of the former: we have come to a moral decision automatically and without being aware of it.

Occasionally, as in moral dumbfounding, the decisions are in direct conflict: our moral intuitions have informed us emotionally that something is morally wrong but moral reasoning concludes, for example, that no harm has been done to others. The model claims that most of the time we operate automatically and moral reasoning, if it occurs at all, agrees with and simply justifies the moral intuition. However, moral reasoning can override moral intuition as probably happens with the subjects who finally conclude that the sibling incest is morally acceptable. (Principle 1: Intuitive primacy but not dictatorship).

Research suggests that moral intuition is associated with evolutionarily older parts of the brain, parts that are present in the brains of all social mammals. Foundation 'moral rules' are originally encoded genetically but their expression as neural networks in the brain can be modified or augmented as a result of social experience and of previous reasoning. For example, moral vegetarians can develop an intuitive *yuck* response to the thought of eating meat and people who grew up when or where homophobia was prevalent can in time overcome their former revulsion in a more tolerant society and/or as a result of reasoning. Moral intuitive information processing is extremely rapid, automatic and beyond our control. It is 'rule-based' and neither the processing nor its decision is available to consciousness.

Moral reasoning, on the other hand, is associated with evolutionarily newer parts of the brain. The information processing is slower, can be available to consciousness if our focus is on reasoning and can be deliberate. Experimental analysis suggests that most, perhaps all, of the information processing associated with automatic, non-conscious moral reasoning is of a consequentialist type.

Researchers in the field generally find merit in Haidt's Social Intuitionist Model. Some accept the theory in outline, especially as it is consistent with general evolutionary theory and observation, but dispute the details. A few have developed models for human moral judgement based on completely different principles.

In his *New Synthesis of Moral Psychology* (4) Haidt has proposed a further 3 principles to supplement Principle 1 above: 2. Moral thinking is for social doing; 3. Morality binds and builds; 4 Morality is about more than harm and fairness. In The Moral Foundations Theory (1), Haidt and co-workers have looked at the way morality varies between cultures and have identified five fundamental moral values shared to a greater or lesser degree by all different societies and individuals.

Consciousness the Tip of the Iceberg

A general principle in neuroscience is that consciousness is just the tip of the iceberg; most of what goes on in our mind is hidden from us. We are not, and cannot become, consciously aware of most of our brain's ongoing activities. When we are awake, the senses and the brain are continuously monitoring the environment. Unless something attracts our attention and we focus our mind on it, we are usually quite oblivious to this constant monitoring. For most functions for most of the time, we work on automatic with the brain controlling the body's activity and making decisions for us. Once we have learnt to drive, we can travel safely for miles deep in conversation or listening to the radio oblivious of the fact that we are constantly watching the road ahead and changing gear when necessary without worrying when or how to do so, or even conscious of doing so on occasion.

Much the same is true of most moral decision making – the brain does it for us without our being aware of the fact. Haidt notes that we can engage in deliberate moral reasoning, for example in consciously thinking through a moral problem alone or in conversation with others or perhaps in role-play where we put ourselves in the shoes of another person in order to get another perspective on a problem. However, most of the time our brain makes moral assessments without our awareness. Frequently when we feel that we have rapidly thought out a moral solution, all that has happened is that our moral reasoning system has simply endorsed our initial moral intuition and left us with the illusion that we came to a moral decision as a result of deliberation (see (3) for further details). Thus, in a sense, human evolution has made us 'moral creatures' but without our being totally conscious of the fact or, indeed, without our being in complete control of the matter. The potential for human morality is part of our biological inheritance.

Conclusions

Science therefore is on HH's side when he says that "we are moral creatures". Contrary to the claims of some, science does not debunk morality. The scientific study of the moral sense can advance it by allowing all, especially the religious, to see through the illusions that evolution and culture have encumbered us with and to focus on goals we can share and defend. It is in this spirit that believers and non-believers might come together for fruitful discussion. As Anton

Chekhov wrote, “Man will become better when you show him what he is like.”

Finally, a wry response to the concluding sentence of the talk: “Humanists can tell the world boldly that moral thinking is not just for religious people: it is for everyone”. A problem for humanists is equitable access to the media to say anything humanistically significant, let alone boldly. A nationally organised charade is to be played out this month: the religion question on the 2011 census. Exactly the same flawed question is to be asked as on the 2001 census (why?) This closed question is presented in a style which suggests that the government considers adherence to a particular religion to be the norm, and that most people would identify themselves with one or other religious concept.

This produced in 2001 the unrealistically high result that in England and Wales almost 72% of the population is Christian. This inflated figure has been used in a variety of ways; for example, to justify the presence of 26 bishops in the House of Lords, to justify the state-funding of faith schools and their expansion, to justify the law that every maintained school in England conduct a ‘daily collective act of worship’, to justify and increase religious broadcasting and to justify the exclusion of atheists, agnostics and humanists from programmes such as Thought For The Day (5). Unsurprisingly, the larger the amount of religious broadcasting, the fewer opportunities there are for specifically humanist views to be expressed. Humanists might privately encourage others not to refer to sacred texts or religious authorities when making moral decisions but are largely excluded from saying this via the mass media. Contrast this with the frequent access to the media of the religious who can ‘tell the world boldly’, almost always unchallenged, that morals are based on religion!

References

- 1 Chapter 1, *Handbook of Social Psychology*, J Haidt and S Kesebir (2009); Chapter 1 www gratis
- 2 For example,
Empathy: Nature’s Lesson for a Kinder Society, F de Waal (2010);
Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals, M Bekoff & J Pierce (2010)
- 3 *The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail*, J Haidt (2000), www gratis
- 4 *The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology*, J Haidt et al (2007), www gratis
- 5 See Census 2011 Campaign on the BHA website for further problems thrown up by the religion question on the census.

The Conway Hall Jazz Appreciation Group

meets on the third Tuesday of each month, except August, to listen to, discuss and enjoy jazz music in a relaxed atmosphere. We gather at 6.30pm for a 7.00pm start and the sessions are about two hours long. Events are usually free, with donations accepted for light refreshments.

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

PRIESTESSES OF BEELZEBUB: FRANCES WRIGHT AND EMMA MARTIN

Terry Liddle

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 12 December 2010

The history of Freethought in Britain is sadly neglected. Even more neglected is the role played by women pioneers of this movement in its early days. Two of these women were Frances Wright and Emma Martin.

Frances Wright

Frances Wright was born in Dundee in 1795. Her father, a trader in textiles, had contributed funds for the publication of a cheap edition of Paine's *Rights Of Man*. Having been orphaned, she lived with her aunt. Frances then went to live with her great uncle, James Milne, a freethinking rationalist who had spent two years in political exile in America.

Having visited France to see Marie-Joseph Lafayette, a hero of the American and French Revolutions, she went with him to visit President Monroe in America. She also spent two weeks with Thomas Jefferson.

On seeing a ship crowded with slaves in chains awaiting transport to the Savannah slave markets, she became an abolitionist. She set up the Nashoba Commune with the aim of educating slaves for liberty. Francis felt that black and white should integrate until their blood was of one hue. The Commune fell into difficulties when Frances returned to Europe to recover from malaria. Eventually she took the liberated slaves to Haiti where a slave rebellion had defeated France. The Trinidadian Marxist writer CLR James details the revolt of the black slaves in his book *The Black Jacobins*.

Frances made it plain there was no room for religion in Nashoba. She confronted it head on in Cincinnati, a centre of revivalism. She lectured in the court house and the town theatre. The clergy dubbed her the priestess of Beelzebub. She wrote:

Helpless age was made a public spectacle, youth driven to raving insanity, mothers and daughters carried lifeless from the presence of the ghostly expounders of damnation, all ranks shared the contagion, while the despair of Calvin's hell itself seemed to have fallen in every heart and discord to have taken possession of every mansion.

Moving to New York, she converted an old Methodist church into a Hall of Science, organised lectures, set up a day and a Sunday school and opened a dispensary with an attending doctor. She also edited the *Free Enquirer*.

Frances joined the Workingman's Party, which had been formed in New York in 1829 following a strike by carpenters for a shorter working day. She became its leader. It stood for universal adult male suffrage, equal educational opportunities, freedom from imprisonment for debt and an end to compulsory service in the militia. The Party published the first labour newspaper in America, *The Working Man's Advocate*.

However, the party split over Frances's scheme for the State Guardianship of children aged two to twelve in boarding schools, which she said would rear a generation able to carry on the true spirit of the American Republic. Some members formed a short-lived Equal Rights Party while others joined the Democratic Party.

She contracted a free union with Piquepal D'Arusmont, a French printer. When she inherited her family's property in 1844, she put it in a trust which excluded her partner from the power to dispose of it should he survive her. He used American law to gain control of all her property. But she divorced him and managed to regain control of it.

In 1852 she fell on the ice, breaking her hip. She lingered for a painful ten months and died in December 1852. She left her property to her daughter Frances Sylvia.

Emma Martin

Emma Martin was born in Bristol in 1812. At 24 she became editor of the *Bristol Magazine*. A strict Baptist, listening to a lecture by the political reformer and trade unionist, Alexander Campbell, and the trials for blasphemy of George Holyoake and Charles Southwell (who were both were imprisoned) led her to question her faith and become a freethinker.

While mainly a public lecturer, she penned a number of pamphlets. Executions were then carried out in public. Opposed to capital punishment, Frances wrote a pamphlet *The Punishment of Death* and lectured on this in the open air to a crowd of over five thousand in Nottingham's Market Square. The booking of the Assembly Room had been cancelled after a complaint from the Anglican priest Rev. J.W. Brooks. Fluent in Italian, Frances wrote a novel *The Exiles of Piedmont*.

In 1848 a leaflet was circulated in Scotland giving an account of her 'death-bed conversion'. In fact at the time she was lecturing in London. G.W. Foote said she was prosecuted for blasphemy but I can find no further evidence of this. There is nothing in Hypatia Bradlaugh-Bonner's *Penalties Upon Opinion*.

Emma clashed with the law when in 1845 she left placards in a Glasgow church saying she was going to criticise the Sunday sermon. She was fined £3 for creating a public disturbance.

Emma's marriage - she had wed young - was desperately unhappy. Left alone with her four daughters, she trained as a physician for women to maintain them.

Eight days before her death, she was visited by Holyoake and asked him to speak at her graveside. She died from consumption, undoubtedly worsened by her punishing tour of lectures, in October 1851. She is buried in Highgate Cemetery. Holyoake wrote an obituary, *The Last Days of Emma Martin: Advocate of Freethought*, which was published in *The Reasoner* and later republished as a pamphlet in 1852.

Holyoake wrote: “ She was one of the few among the early advocates of English Socialism who saw that the combat against religion could not be confined to an attack on forms of faith – to a mere comparison of creeds - and she was attracted only as a secondary issue to the abuses of Christianity, when she saw that the whole was an abuse of history, reason and morality.”

More information on Emma Martin can be found in Annie Laurie Gaylor’s *Women Without Superstition* published by the Freedom from Religion Foundation in Madison, Wisconsin, USA. The Freethought History Research hopes to import this book into Britain. {There is a copy in the Humanist Reference Library.[Ed.]}

VIEWPOINTS

The History Of Humanism

I read with great interest the learned and excellent lecture by John Severs on the *History of Humanism* (ER Feb 2011).

However I was surprised that there was no mention of the actual beginning of humanist world views in Italy. Though the term Humanism probably originated later in Germany, the term Humanist (“umanista”) was coined in Italy. At the beginning of the Renaissance, students of “Studia Humanitatis” (the studies about humanity) like Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) in his *De Hominis Dignitate* (on the dignity of man), focussed their studies no longer on the transcendental world, but on our human world.

The “umanisti” (humanists) were not against religion, at least not overtly, but abandoned the world views of the Middle Ages to resurrect the culture of Rome and Greece, what we now call the Renaissance, which also started in Italy.

David Ibray
Chairman of the Anglo-Italian Cultural Circle of N. London

The History of Humanism

I enjoyed John Severs’ brisk run through the *History of Humanism* (*Ethical Record* Feb. 2011). I was on the classical side at school and we read the pagan authors in Greek periods and the New Testament in divinity periods, with never a suggestion that Christianity and the pagan Greek world were in any way incompatible.

However, the Rationalist Press Association was set up in 1899, not 1890 (p10); the usual date for the establishment of SPES is 1793, not 1787 (ibid.); “Protagorus” should be Protagoras (p3) and (Werner) “Jaegger” should be Jaeger (ibid.)

Charles Rudd - Ealing

{I believe that 1787 was the date when the new congregation first met and 1793 was when it had its first premises. [Ed.]}

Women Freethinkers

I was disappointed but not surprised at John Severs' long article on a *His story of Humanism* that *totally* ignored the contribution of the outspoken women freethinkers who, despite the centuries of exclusion of women from education, the professions, academia, science and all that flows from that — played a remarkable part in promoting the cause of atheism and secular-humanism over the last three hundred years. No wonder so few women are drawn to the freethought movement today.

These British and American women campaigned against slavery, for women's rights, education and other progressive causes and the strides made in health and social welfare reform of the last 200 years, yet there was not a single word of recognition of these campaigners, who were strongly supported by male secularists of the time, including Ingersoll, Holyoake and Bradlaugh, though the name George Eliot did appear among a list of poets and Margaret Knight as a major source. They campaigned for freedom and equality (as they still do) and most importantly, they recognised and exposed the role of patriarchal religion by the prejudices in its doctrine and teaching.

Before Annie Gaylor edited her inspirational book *Women Without Superstition 'No Gods No Masters'* in 1997 that featured fifty women freethinkers and biographical sketches on another 39 — this omission might reasonably have been assumed to be accidental. Now however, despite many attempts to persuade the secular-humanist movement to put the traditional religious prejudice and patriarchal discrimination of church and state at the top of their agenda, there is no excuse for air-brushing women activists and writers out of 'his story'.*

Women Without Superstition 'No Gods No Masters' — a wonderfully detailed yet readable book is published by the American Freedom From Religion Foundation — but there is no publisher or distributor in this country, though it is available on Amazon. Nor does it figure in the book-lists of the British secular humanist organisations, journals or websites and is apparently unknown even by the Freethought History Society. With the author's permission, some material, including some published in her book for the first time, is on a British website.

Sue Mayer - London

***Note.** The English word 'history', deriving from the Latin *historia*, a narrative of past events, is not intrinsically gender-biased. {Ed.}

Out With Rational Garbage

In his critique of Keith Ward's *Response to the God Virus* (ER Feb 2011), Ian Buxton pours scorn on Ward's identification of rationality with Catholicism. However, one meaning of the word rationality is 'step-by-step argument' — and that, unlike the direct revelation of Protestantism, *is* characteristic of Catholic theology.

Our modern corrective insight is: 'garbage in, garbage out'.

Barbara Smoker – Bromley, Kent

ESSAY — OF CABBAGES AND KINGS

Richard Eastburn-Hewitt

Member of the Ethical Society and the Rationalist Association

Lewis Carroll, whose immortal story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has fascinated both children and adults ever since its first publication, was also a well-known mathematician and, therefore, no stranger to logical thinking. In real life, the Revd. Charles Dodgson — the fact that he was an Anglican priest probably owes more to the requirements of the university authorities than any great ambition on his part to proselytize — was also painfully shy and afflicted by a pronounced stammer. This all seems to have hidden a much more complex and incisive mind. Where he, personally, would have stood in relation to the present day problems of Church and State must, in the absence of any recorded evidence, remain an open question; but a study of this work may give a strong indication of his probable stance. A man of his mental stature cannot have been indifferent.

Although a study of Lewis Carroll's writings can give a pointer only to the mindset of the author, this can be indicative of the type of thinking that is still common to so many creative people who are around us today. It may be thought that it would be altogether simpler to study a contemporary subject, but those who are contemporary are still evolving and, therefore, any view we may be able to glimpse will be incomplete.

In choosing to look at just one book, written for children, the subject of which was a child herself, Alice Liddell, one might conjecture that the breadth of the research is too small. If we were looking for conclusive proof of a factual outcome this might well be true. Indeed, however many instances we examined, closely or generally, historically or contemporarily, we should still end up with an inconclusive result, one that supplies us with trends and indications rather than proofs

Alice in Wonderland

What is there, then, in that delightful narrative, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, that can shed light on Dodgson's views on the admixture of government and religion? There are a number of such episodes, larger than life in all cases, where the author can be seen to be stating a principle, or making a point. Take, for example, the very last episode in the book. the trial of Alice before the King of Hearts, and the totally ridiculous findings of the jury. Alice has had more of this illogical rubbish than she can take and yells at them that they're nothing but a pack of cards, anyway!

Earlier incidents, like the bottle labelled 'drink me', the remarks of the Caterpillar and the opposing segments of the mushroom, giving one an ability to grow or shrink to order, tend to back this theory. The whole of life, Dodgson seems to be saying, is littered with nonentities *designed* to confuse us and to retain us within the mythology of ignorance; thus keeping us under the control of those who consider themselves to be our 'elders and betters'. This succinctly describes the *modus operandi* of every religion since the dawn of time.

Dodgson Chose the Safe Way

So many of us who, when were children, read Lewis Carroll's work and then either passed the book on to younger siblings, cousins, or the children of friends, without realising that its main import, the meaning within a meaning which it contains, was there to be interpreted by older and more experienced minds than ours. Some may feel that it was totally unnecessary for the author to hide this vital message within the pages of a children's book; but they did not grow up in the Victorian age when, in order to obtain a place in the realm of academia it was obligatory, not merely to be a Christian, but to be an ordained priest in the Church of England, as Charles Dodgson necessarily was. Now we live in times when people are free to express their own views on such matters without – or almost without – fear. Charles Dodgson lived from 1832 to 1898, 66 years, and at a time which supported the poor only by the workhouse, so he could not afford to jeopardise his livelihood by rash acts. He was reasonably safe in expressing himself in the way he chose.

Dodgson would have been expected to give a sermon in the university chapel once a year and this must have nearly choked him. Perhaps, he was saved this exquisite torture by reason of his stammer – not out of kindness by his college Dean, but in order to spare the dons the agony of sitting through the inevitable display of mangled speech.

The Victorian era was time of great repression. Its demands on all the nation's citizens: to comply with the constrictions of what was virtually a theocracy, were overwhelming. People *said* that they believed, for their own protection, and they also attended church.* Women and children were second-class subjects and those in authority habitually passed judgement on others, though often indulging their own venal desires in secret. One can still see the occasional hangover of this disgraceful state-of-affairs today.

Voltaire, in 1762, said: 'Whatever you do, stamp out superstition, and love those who love you.'

*Although, apparently, Charles Darwin escorted his family to the Church door and then went home. {Ed.}

SCIENCE, HUMANITIES, RELIGION: HOW MANY CONFLICTS?

Richard Baron

Lecturer in philosophy in adult education. www.rbphilo.com

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 20 February 2011

The topic of this paper is the conflicts, or the potential conflicts, between three areas of human thought: science, the humanities and religion. "Science" refers to the natural sciences: physics, chemistry, biology and so on. We can include at least some types of psychology. Then we have the humanities: subjects like history, literary criticism and philosophy. Then we have religion.

The Natural Sciences and Religion

We are all well aware of the conflict between science and religion. Some people think science shows that God does not exist. Others think that there is no

outright conflict, but that the sciences have left God with nothing useful to do. Although the conflict is familiar, it is by no means finished. There will always be new generations who need to debate the issues afresh and every time science claims to have made God redundant, religious believers claim to find something that remains unexplained.

The Humanities and Religion

Turning to the humanities and religion, my focus will be mainly on history, rather than on the other humanities. Here we have a conflict that has received much less attention than the conflict between science and religion. It is not a conflict between the practice of the humanities and religion. Instead, it is a conflict between religious and non-religious ways of taking their results. It arises out of the fact that there is a very important question for us: a question on the lines of, "What is human life all about?". How we use history to help us answer that question depends on our attitude to religion.

The question must be made more precise. I propose identifying two specific questions within it. First, "What is there that motivates us?", and second, "What is there that makes us joyful?".

These two questions are not straightforwardly narrower versions of the original question. That is important. The question "What is human life all about?" is not directly a request for factual information. It is an expression of some form of angst. But the angst can be assuaged by the provision of factual information, so long as it is taken in the right way. The two smaller questions do have factual answers. We can talk about what in fact motivates us, and what in fact makes us joyful. But that does not in itself do the job. In order to assuage the angst, we have to take the information in the right way. This is where the religious and the non-religious approaches come apart. They require us to take the things that may motivate us and give us joy in different ways.

Historical Accounts

The issue is that of how historical accounts can motivate us. It is not the content of historical accounts. A religious belief, and specifically a desire to see God's purpose at work, can influence how one writes history, but it does not have to do so. The religious historian has the option of writing exactly the same narrative as the atheist historian, and then taking it to be a sign of God's purpose. This is possible, regardless of the content of the narrative, because the concept of God's purpose is pretty flexible, and the specific purposes can easily be pretty opaque to human beings. That flexibility and potential opacity allow purpose to be attributed in the context of pretty well any narrative of any stretch of history.

A claim that history reveals God's purpose is a factual claim. But it is closely related to a claim about value. We get to the claim about value by adding the premise that we should live in accordance with God's purpose. That premise is something that most people who believe in a religion that has a personal God will accept. Put it together with the factual claim that history reveals God's purpose, and we can reach the claim about value. It is the claim that history helps us to see how we should live. History is not likely to be our only guide. But to the extent that it is a guide, it is a guide via this route. Furthermore, when history becomes a guide to how we should live, that makes it an inspiration. It may not make our hearts beat faster, but it still inspires us to do things, simply because a recommendation from God, even an indirect one that is hidden in a pattern of

history, is one that the religious person will automatically be inclined to follow. And if a religious person views the course of history as a sign of God's purpose, that can also be a source of joy. He or she can see that little by little, God is reclaiming the world from the evil done by those human beings who have misused their free will.

A non-religious historian, on the other hand, cannot sensibly see any ultimate purpose. He or she must also acknowledge that a great many historical events have turned out very badly indeed for humanity. But the fact that there is no ultimate purpose to be found liberates us to focus on the inspiring episodes. We must not pick and choose when writing history. But we can pick and choose in the search for inspiration, so long as we are not foolish enough to conclude that humanity is better than it actually is. We can concentrate on the great scientific discoveries, on the great artistic achievements, and on the political structures that we have created to allow personal freedom alongside civil peace. Thus we can, very easily, find motivation and joy.

The religious historian who sees God's purpose does not really have that freedom to pick and choose, at least not in any honest way. If he or she would thank God for bringing down tyrants, he or she must also overlook the tyrants' original ascent to power. God must be assigned the credits, but not the debits, even though the historian has no ground whatever, in the picture of history as disclosing God's purpose, for doing so. Alternatively, the religious historian must claim that what looked bad, was in fact an essential element in some larger good that we are unable to see. When it comes to monstrous figures like Stalin, {Or especially, Hitler. Ed.} that gets a little difficult.

Things of Beauty

Things of beauty can both motivate us and give us joy. Flowers and sunrises are most likely simply to give us joy. Fine music, or art, or mathematics, can both give us joy and motivate us. The motivation comes from the recognition that members of our own species can do these wonderful things. We may not aspire to the same heights, but we may well feel the urge to do what we can in the same general direction. We are not here concerned with the direct impact of things of beauty, the impact that prompts an inarticulate response, but with what happens when we reflect on the beautiful things. Why do we derive motivation, and hang on to our joy, when we reflect on things of beauty?

The proper religious answer is that things of beauty are minor miracles. We live in a world that is suffused by the divine, so of course we feel joy. It is also natural to feel motivated. The message of things of beauty is that we live in God's world.

Atheists are easily accused of missing all that. A flower is just a natural organism. A symphony is just an arbitrary product of synaptic activity. Above all, our reactions to such things are not validated by the presence of God's magic touch in those things. Instead, our reactions are simply the workings of our brains, workings that could have been very different. How can we derive motivation from neurological facts? And how can joy survive a reduction of experiences to the mechanics of the brain?

This gloomy conclusion misrepresents the facts. We can marvel at the world, even while knowing that our reaction is determined by facts about our

own brains. Aesthetic discourse is rich and complex, without any reference to God. Indeed, the introduction of God and his minor miracles rather puts a block on aesthetic discourse. It gives us reason to stop seeking the power of things of beauty in their relations to their artistic context and to our way of life. Atheists, by contrast, can go on exploring, never expecting to find conclusions to their aesthetic discussions, but feeling enormously enriched by them. In that dense network of connections, we can find ample joy. We can also find motivation, because we do not just recognize that people of our own species can do these things. We can recognize that they do not do these things by magic. They do them because they are, just like us, embedded in traditions and societies, but still individuals. Their brains just work a bit better than those of most people.

So there is the conflict. We take reflective joy in things of beauty, and are motivated by them, either because we see the hand of God at work in them, or because we see the unaided hands of nature and of humanity. The latter approach is the richer one.

The Natural Sciences and the Humanities

Is there a conflict between the natural sciences and the humanities? Specifically, do the natural sciences threaten to make the humanities redundant?

They do not. There is obviously no practical prospect of replacing talk of historical figures and events with talk of neurons, and that is not just a matter of the overwhelming complexity of any neuron-based account. We can see that it is not just a matter of complexity by being more realistic in our reductive ambitions, and thinking about replacing the humanities with the social sciences. The social sciences might regard themselves as fairly directly related to the natural sciences, both via psychology and via their use of statistical methods.

In order to produce a worthwhile history, we have to go way beyond what either the natural sciences or the social sciences would regard as justified. We have to tell a good story. The skill, of course, is to tell a good story that is true to the evidence. A historian who ignores inconvenient facts, or who downplays something that was manifestly important at the time, is a bad historian. But one who merely recites the evidence and those inferences that would be warranted by the canons of the natural or the social sciences, writes something dull that does not speak to us.

There is the problem. History must be made to speak to us. It must be adapted to the psyches of the readers. That requires going beyond the scientifically legitimate inferences. Contrast, at the other extreme, physics. The equations are what they are. No concessions are, or should be, made to our psyches. If we cannot grasp what the equations say, that is our problem.

Going beyond scientifically legitimate inferences does not, however, place us at odds with science, provided that we recognize what we are doing, and do not over-state the validity of our conclusions. We should not deny ourselves our intellectual adventures in history. At the same time, we must always look critically at the historical evidence we have, and we must stand back from our conclusions and ask whether they really make sense. Not being limited to what the natural or social sciences would endorse, does not mean allowing ourselves a free-for-all.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS AT THE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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

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For programme updates, email: programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk

Website: www.ethicalsoc.org.uk No charge unless stated

Sunday meetings are held in the Brockway Room.

MARCH 2011

- Sunday 6** **SPECIESISM AND PAINISM - A MODERN MORALITY**
1100 **Richard Ryder**, author and philosopher
- Wednesday 10** **UGANDA HUMANIST SCHOOLS PHOTO EXHIBITION LAUNCH**
1900 Photographer **Andrew West** and speakers from USHT, Brockway Room
Contact programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk or 020 7242 8034 to reserve a place
- Sunday 13** **BUDDHISM: GODLESS RELIGION, OR DEVOUT ATHEISM?**
1100 **Stephen Batchelor**
- Tuesday 15** **JAZZ APPRECIATION GROUP**
1900
- Sunday 20** **WHISTLEBLOWING: A MODERN DILEMMA FOR DEMOCRACIES?**
1100 **Ernest Rodker**
- Sunday 27** **CHOICE, FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY**
1100 **Thomas Pink**, Kings College London

APRIL

- Sunday 3** **ASSISTED DYING**
1100 **Dr Michael Irwin**, Society for Old Age Rational Suicide
- Sunday 10** **ALLOHISTORY AND THE HEGEMONIC SENSIBILITY:
WHY IS 'WHAT IF?' SO FASHIONABLE?** **David Murray**
- Sunday 17** **BRAINWASHING UNDER FREEDOM:
CHOMSKY'S MODEL OF THE WESTERN MASS MEDIA**
1100 **Milan Rai**, author, campaigner and editor of *Peace News*

SPEs's CONWAY HALL SUNDAY CONCERTS 2011

March

- 6** **London Concertante String Trio:** Schubert, Villa-Lobos, Mozart
13 **Carducci Quartet:** Haydn, Ravel, Beethoven
20 **Maggini Quartet:** Haydn, Bridge, Mendelssohn
27 **Tim Hugh** cello, **Simon Callaghan** piano: Debussy, Beethoven, Rachmaninov

April

- 3** **Gould Trio:** Haydn, Dvorak, Ravel
10 **Adoch Ensemble:** Bruch, Brahms, Rebecca Clarke - Viola, Mozart
17 **Linden Piano Trio:** Brahms, Messiaen, Shostakovich

6.30pm Tickets £8; under 18 £4

Full details on: www.conwayhallsundayconcerts.org.uk