

# Ethical Record

The Proceedings of the Conway Hall Ethical Society

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## *JEAN PAUL SARTRE AT WORK IN HIS CAFÉ*



*Illustrating the 'existence' of the public intellectual – J P Sartre – ready, complete with paper, coffee and cigarette, to meet his disciples*

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## CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY

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### New Members

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### CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY

Reg. Charity No. 1156033

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 80th CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE

## JEREMY BENTHAM: PROPHET OF SECULARISM by Philip Schofield

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# SARTRE AND THE ANGUISH OF FREEDOM

Jane O'Grady

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 1 March 2015

In the immemorial controversy over free will and determinism, those philosophers who argue that we humans are somehow exempt from cause and effect tend to present their claims as positive, uplifting, liberating, and what we would all like to believe. They are often in fact accused of succumbing to a wishful, emollient illusion. But, although Jean-Paul Sartre, the twentieth century Existentialist, champions the theory of free will, no one could ever accuse him of emollience. He doesn't argue against determinism in the way that an Anglo-American analytic philosopher would, or tackle the possibility that free will and determinism could somehow co-exist (the 'compatibilist' position).

What he asserts, rather than argues for, would perhaps, in the analytical tradition, count as a libertarian position on free will. Even at knife-point or in prison, it seems, and whatever our genes and conditioning (not that he mentions these), each of us is always and absolutely free to choose. Sartre acknowledges that there are some intransigently set factors in what a person is (his "facticité"), but insists that, apart from these, we are each free (or, rather, forced) to create ourselves. Freedom, in his portrayal of it, turns out to be far more exacting and inexorable than the chains of cause and effect. For Sartre, freedom is a penalty, a life sentence. "Man is condemned to be free", he says – and ruefully declares that determinism is "'more human' than the theory of free will".

Under the tutelage of his life-partner Simone de Beauvoir, and as he became less of a Romantic individualist, and more politically aware, Sartre conceded that freedom is to some extent a matter of degree, and his notion of "facticité" does allow a certain leniency (although he never precisely enumerates the attributes it comprises). In his 1943 book *Being and Nothingness*, he insists that the very essence of human nature is freedom precisely because we have no essence. The distinctive human quality is to be able to think of what is not, to think of the lack of something – of something we can create, of someone who is not there when we expect to see her. "Human reality is not something that exists first in order afterwards to lack this or that; it exists first as lack". In fact we bring *nothing* into the world, which without us (without consciousness) would be a plenum. Equally, "consciousness ... is total emptiness (since the entire world is outside it)". Consciousness is therefore *the same as freedom*, since it inevitably entails choice. It is not just that we are free to choose, we *have* to choose. Rather than being either an illusion or a providential gift, freedom is our inescapable burden.

## What We Are Is What We Do

Everything else in the world is in-itself (en-soi): self-contained, fully ensconced in the immediate moment; but each human is *for-itself* (pour-soi): able to see outside the present, and to choose what to do and be. We are separated from ourselves — by nothing. And yet that *nothing* prevents us from ever being flush with ourselves. What we are is what we do, a constantly changing process; and each of us is "haunted" by the self we lack. In a striking image, Sartre compares the human condition to that of a donkey attached within the shafts of a cart from which dangles a carrot. It keeps trying to seize the carrot in its mouth but the

very effort to do so pushes the carrot, and the cart, further away. So we pursue an unachievable essence, fruitlessly. We will never catch up with ourselves; can (indeed must) always be other than what we are.

If what we are is what we do, what should we do? According to the Sartre of Being and Nothingness, there would have to be a God for there to be moral values. Since there is not, it is we who create values and read them into the world. It seems as if certain actions are demanded of us – helping a friend, telling the truth – but instead it is our actions that “cause values to spring up like partridges” in our path; we ourselves have bred them and the sense of urgency they inspire. “Value derives its being from its exigency and not its exigency from its being”. Every action is of the same value— whether we get drunk or are a leader of nations.

But that does not mean we can escape morality, for in choosing we create value — and *we have to choose*. That there is nothing intrinsically significant and valuable might seem to make choice arbitrary and unimportant. In fact it does the reverse — makes all decisions momentous. Precisely because there is no morality, every choice is a moral choice, and an agonising one. I have no rules to rely on, no “guard rails against anguish” which would insulate me from the terrifying prospect of deciding what to do, and, although I continually create them, I should learn to recognise their constructedness, that (for instance) “it is I who confer on the alarm clock its exigency – I and I alone”. If I automatically jump out of bed on hearing it, I “elude the question ‘is work my possibility?’” To assume that I have a role which I *have* to engage in, or a set of responsibilities which I *have* to fulfil, is to abrogate the anguish of choice and to be “in bad faith”.

### **Being in Good Faith or in Bad Faith**

Not only does Sartre, in introducing the concept of bad faith, inconsistently espouse a value himself (that of being in *good* faith), but, for all his eagerness to épater the bourgeois, he is utterly bourgeois himself. Most people don't have enough time to lie in bed and indulge in existentialist angst if they are to get to work on time. That the alarm clock is a summons to me is in a sense projected, but is also real. Not to ‘obey’ it will ultimately result in my being sacked, and being sacked could ultimately mean destitution. Sartre himself may have the luxury (and hell) of choosing whether to work, but only because he is one of the élite. He invites us to “consider this waiter in the café” who is immersing himself in his waitery role as if he did not in fact transcend it, and as if it were part of his “facticité” (his inescapable physical attributes). But it is immensely patronising and snobbish of Sartre to indict the waiter for being in bad faith. Of course the waiter is “playing at being a waiter”. If Sartre himself had ever had to take such a boring job, spoofing it might well have been his recourse too.

We are also being in bad faith when we describe ourselves as having some quality which forces us to act in a certain way— to say: I am ugly, for instance, is to say something about the future as well as the present, and is “my choice of myself in the world”. Sartre's stern edict of freedom sometimes seems to permit no possible way of being in the right. He imagines a homosexual who denies being a homosexual. After all, says the “pederast” (as Hazel Barnes's translation

labels him), he is being properly Sartrean to declare that, being *pour-soi* rather than *en-soi*, he is not a homosexual in the same way that an inkwell is an inkwell. But this too, says Sartre, is a form of subterfuge and a way of evading responsibility for both what he is and is not. "In the final analysis, the goal of sincerity and the goal of bad faith are not so different."

### **Our Emotions are a Matter of Choice**

For the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*, and also of *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (1939) it is not only our morals but even our emotions and perceptions that are a matter of choice. "Consciousness chooses itself as desire"; emotions are ways in which we "magically transform" the world when we either cannot face up to the responsibility of acting on it, or despair of acting on it as we'd like. If someone faints in fear when seeing a wild bull, it is because he would like to annihilate the bull, cannot, and thus annihilates it from consciousness instead. Crying is to create a veil of tears between ourselves and the world, as well as to exonerate ourselves from acting on it. Although Sartre is adamantly against Freud's notion of the unconscious, he seems to avail himself of something similarly inaccessible to our conscious awareness when he describes the way we stage-manage what we perceive and experience. Like the servant in a house who has tipped off the burglars about when to rob it, and who enjoins them to bind him to a chair so as to make him appear an innocent victim, so, says Sartre, we collude with the emotional states which seem to overwhelm us.

Sartre vociferously repudiates Descartes' mind/body dualism, but he is often inadvertently Cartesian. The "nothing" of consciousness is remarkably substantial and substance-like, and in fact far more powerful and world-consuming than Descartes' God-ruled *res cogitans*. Sartre too often writes in the first-person, and although his 'I', like Descartes', seems to invite the reader to inhabit it (it is an Every-I), it is also distinctively Sartre's own. Sometimes his views seem to amount to solipsism, or at least to the sort of "practical solipsism" he mentions, and to claim a sort of omnipotence over the body, mind and even world, at least for himself. (It may be *ad hominem* to say this, but his sense of our all-powerfulness was partly fuelled by the enormous quantity of amphetamine-type drugs he consumed).

Yet in some ways he is more sensitive to the otherness of other human beings than many philosophers are. If I am a nothing which the world is outside, then so too are other people. In a wonderfully graphic example, I (Sartre, and the reader) am alone in a park. It is my world, not so much what *I* see as what *is seen*. Then suddenly I catch sight of a man in the distance. This man is in one way an object like the other objects in my view, and "belongs to my distances", but in another way this "man-as-object ... unfolds about itself its own distances" and thus "escapes me". Now "the grass is something qualified; it is *this* green grass which exists for the Other." Now "the world has a kind of drain hole in the middle of its being and that it is perpetually flowing off through this hole". Worse still, the man can look at me, and can know what I am more than I myself do. I am now an object which is seen by someone else, instead of a nothingness looking into the world. For Sartre, as for Garcin, one of the characters in his play *Huis Clos*, "Hell is other people".

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre sees relations between human beings in terms of a struggle — each does not want to be an object for the other, is threatened by the other’s “infinite freedom” and wants to gain transcendence over that other. Sexual possession is, for Sartre, less a matter of physical connection than of inducing the Other to be wholly identified with her body so that her freedom is ensnared in it and then I (the Sartrian ego) can, like someone skimming milk, cream off her transcendence. To possess her body only would never be enough to satisfy me. It would be like getting hold of someone who wriggles out of his coat and leaves it in your hands. “It is the coat, it is the outer shell which I possess” unless I can “possess the Other’s transcendence as pure transcendence and at the same time as *body*”.

This negative attitude to human relations, and Sartre’s totally subjectivist view of morality, was severely criticised by humanists, Christians, and Marxists. In 1945, Sartre gave a lecture, ‘Existentialism is a Humanism’ (published in English as *Existentialism and Humanism*) to defend himself from the accusations against him, protesting that, despite what his critics said, existentialism is not pessimistic and not totally subjectivist, but does involve concern for others. This is surely inconsistent with his earlier pronouncements, and with his earlier indifference to other people’s disapproval of him. Perhaps thanks to de Beauvoir’s arguments, as well as his brief period of being a prisoner of war, and the War in general, he seems to have become less extreme in his insistence on our absolute freedom, less adamant on the responsibility of the lone ‘I’ for its actions, emotions, perceptions and being.

The Philosophical Society of England

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**THEOLOGY:  
THE LAST FRONTIER OF PHILOSOPHY?**

**Dr. Jean-Baptiste Dussert**



*Jean-Baptiste Dussert*

A book published in 1991, entitled *The Theological Turn in French Phenomenology*, had a great impact in the philosophical world. Its author, Dominique Janicaud, accused several philosophers of betraying the principles of Husserl's thought, by the introduction of theology into philosophy. Basing my reflection on the works of Michel Henry (1922-2002) one of his most important targets, I will question the validity of this criticism. Is theology a deviation within continental philosophy, demonstrating that it has not the validity of a science? Or does questioning the idea of God lie at the heart of Phenomenology through the experience and practice that it offers?

**All welcome, admission free  
Conway Hall, 2.30 pm, Saturday, 16th May, 2015**

## CONWAY HALL SUNDAY CONCERT REPORT

### Giles Enders

At the Conway Hall Sunday Concert on 8th March, The Badke Quartet gave the UK premiere of a long lost quartet in C by Max Bruch. The conductor, musicologist and biographer of Bruch, Dr Christopher Fifield, gave an illustrated talk about Bruch and the quartet's origins.

Among the many guests were the direct descendants of Fanny Mendelssohn, Ignaz Moscheles and William Sterndale Bennett. Moscheles was Mendelssohn's teacher, life-long friend and after Mendelssohn's death took over his music school. Sterndale Bennett in his youth was championed by Mendelssohn and invited to Germany by him. Mendelssohn dedicated his *Hebridean Overture* to him. Sterndale Bennett later became Principal of the Royal Academy of Music. All three were both pianists and composers.



*The picture of the descendants is of Sheila Hayman (Fanny Mendelssohn) Henry Roche (Ignaz Moscheles) and Barry Sterndale-Bennett.*

#### THE HUMANIST LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

The Humanist Library and Archives are open for members and researchers on Tuesdays to Thursdays from 1000 - 1700. Please inform the Librarian of your intention to visit. The Library has an extensive collection of new and historic freethought material.

When evening courses are running, the Library will remain open on selected evenings. These will be advertised on the website.

Tel: 020 7061 6747. Email: [library@ethicalsoc.org.uk](mailto:library@ethicalsoc.org.uk)

## VIEWPOINTS

### **Capital Punishment's Irreversibility**

Chris Bratcher (*ER* March, p 12) must be troubled by the death instinct in seeking to revive the case for capital punishment. It does not deter murderers as experience from the USA shows. States which have the death penalty have far higher murder rates than in the UK.

What I also find convincing as an argument against the death penalty is its irreversibility. Once you have hanged an innocent man, you can never bring him back to life. This is quite unlike other punishments, a fine or imprisonment, where, if it is subsequently found that the supposed criminal was innocent, he or she can be compensated. Since all systems of justice make mistakes, the irreversibility of the death penalty is a telling argument against its reintroduction in this country.

**Chris Purnell, Orpington**

### **The Capital Punishment Debate**

I was very surprised to learn that CHES was having a debate on capital punishment, surely something which all members would oppose. I was even more surprised to find at the debate and in *ER* (February and March) that this was not so.

Long ago there was a debate in a librarianship journal about obscene publications, and one contributor said that obscenity was a matter of opinion: the most obscene publication he had ever read was the *Report* of the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment 1949-1953 (the Gowers Report). I didn't know it at the time, but have now got to know it quite well, and I know what he meant. It now seems almost beyond belief that, within living memory, a group of the most distinguished people in the land could solemnly debate whether one of the most advanced countries in the world should hang, gas, electrocute, shoot, decapitate, lethally inject or otherwise kill people in cold blood. (They were only asked to advise on the practice of capital punishment, not whether it should be retained or abolished.) The experience turned the Chairman, Sir Ernest Gowers, a distinguished civil servant, against the death penalty, as he recounted in his book *A Life for a Life* (1956).

The magazine *The Week* of 6 September 2014 published a shortened version of an article from *The Observer* by a former prison officer, Robert Douglas, of his involvement in 1963 in Britain's third-last execution, of Russell Pascoe, 23, by Harry Allen, Britain best-known hangman after Albert Pierrepoint. It is also hard to believe that, within living memory, as recounted in the article, a man could light a cigarette, leave it burning, go and kill a fellow human being, and return to his cigarette. We also killed dim, pathetic illiterates like Derek Bentley (who killed no-one; he was executed for involvement with someone who was too young to hang), and sad, demented women like Ruth Ellis.

It is now over 50 years since Britain's last executions, and several generations have grown up who cannot remember a time when we had capital punishment. I can, and am in no doubt that we are better off without it. There was a grisly



fascination with the subject, unfitting a civilised nation. Murder trials now attract far less attention than when someone's life was at stake. People complained when, in television dramas in which someone was convicted of murder, we weren't told what happened to them - meaning, of course, we weren't told if they were hanged; some programmes made a point of assuring viewers they were. When Ruth Ellis was hanged at Holloway, teachers at a nearby school reported that it was almost impossible to get any work done that day: the pupils could talk of nothing but the execution, revelling in the details of the hanging of a woman; some even claimed to have seen it.

And Sir Keith Joseph, usually considered a right-wing Conservative, was turned against the death penalty when, one cold, foggy morning, he was surprised to see more people than would normally be expected at such a time, alone or in groups, all heading in the same direction; he later found there was an execution that morning and they were going to the prison, and this was not, he thought, something that should happen in Britain.

There are now only three advanced, democratic countries where the death penalty is still practised, Japan, Singapore and parts of the USA, and in much of the world it seems a relic of a distant, barbaric past. So it should be.

**Ray Ward - London SE16**

### **Let's *Not* Wind Up the Godly**

Following up Dorothy Forsyth's Viewpoint item (*ER* March p12) and the two latest editorials, I find the attitude of "Let's wind up the godly" puerile and counter-productive; there is no unqualified right to give offence. Nor is there a right to violence when offence is given – or taken – and I include in that judicial or extra-judicial murder.

Religious belief can sometimes be correlated with national or ethnic origin, and the motivation for denigration of religion can *sometimes* be the national or ethnic origin of the believers, so the distinction between the two types of criticism is not quite as simple as the Editor seems to claim. The Editor referred in the January editorial only to satirical cartoons. I need not rehearse here the difference between satire and lampoon (refer, for instance, to the S.O.E.D. for that). When viewpoints are lampooned, it is predictable that the butt of those lampoons will not find them funny.

If those with whom we disagree take offence at having their follies or absurdities exposed, that is not our problem: like most, if not all humanists, I have never urged that religion should not be criticized, merely that criticism should be cogent, that is, rational and evidence-based.

**Colin Mills - Amersham**

### **Why Big Organisations so Often Make Big Mistakes...**

In a podcast available on iPlayer, first broadcast on 03.11.14, writer and business leader Margaret Heffeman explores this question. In it she specifically calls it highly relevant to the exposure of the widespread neglect and child abuse in Britain - the subject of the essay in the current *ER* (March, p13) by Rummy Hasan.

In the *Analysis* series of talks *Just Culture* on iPlayer, it addresses the question of why the authorities supposedly responsible for the chaos of child protection, as well as other large organisations such as the banks and the NHS, refuse to take the responsibility. She discusses the phenomenon of *wilful blindness* and the cure that could be the example of *just culture*, the prime example being the model of the aviation industry.

If the chaos is to be prevented, all the contributing factors need to be fully considered. The words highlighted are those needed to find the programme on the Internet: **iPlayer radio, Analysis, Margaret Hefferman on Just Culture**  
**Sue Mayer - Orpington**

### **The Cause of the ‘Cover Up’**

Has Romy Hasan (*ER* March, p13) never heard of Jimmy Saville? This wealthy white celebrity’s crimes and sexual exploitation were ignored while he was alive strongly suggesting that the cause of ‘cover up’ of sex crime is not multiculturalism but bourgeois hypocrisy. That and the poverty and unemployment caused by capitalism is the cause of the crimes against children and young women and their ‘cover up’.

Bureaucracy in the social services and the police, and authoritarian families and domestic repression also contribute to the kinds of crime Hasan is concerned about. If he wants to prevent this kind of crime he should stop attacking multiculturalism and concentrate on the contingent causes.

**Chris Purnell, Orpington**

### **Political Correctness**

Romy Hasan, in his essay “Political Correctness and Child Sexual Exploitation” (*ER*, March 2015) tells us that he is submitting this piece of writing “in response to letters from Messrs Rubens, Vlachos and Purnell” which appeared in the February issue of *ER*. His essay attacks political correctness, and quite rightly so; but, since my letter neither advocated nor defended nor even mentioned political correctness, I do not see in what way his essay is a “response” to it.

If he is implying that I voice political correctness when I say that multiculturalism is a highly complex phenomenon, about which both positive and negative comments can be made, then his position is quite untenable. Political correctness asserts that only positive things must be said on this subject. Further, I do assure Hasan that my views have developed independently of outlooks which are doctrinaire, dogmatic or politically motivated.

**Tom Rubens, London N4**

### **Anarchism in the Sixties**

I knew Donald (Rooum) in the Sixties during my Anarchist days in London. I, however, gravitated over to the Individualist Anarchists, a small group influenced by the Conscious Egoism of Max Stirner (within which Paddy McGuinness was a fellow denizen).

**David Miller - Australia**

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

## **Better Citizens Needed**

One point which Donald Rooum could have made but didn't is 'anarchy is not chaos', presumably because he is so close to his subject! Modern western societies have many problems; the powerful oppress the less powerful; the rich oppress the poor; men oppress women, particular cultural groups oppress others ...and we all contribute to environmental degradation (even if just as providing reduced sustainability for the human species).

Various political utopias: Marxist, anarchist, capitalist, feminist, environmental... envisage societies in which these problems are rectified and propose means to bring them about: peer-pressure; ethical re-education, training, legislation and revolution. But societies consist of individuals and it is the instincts, habits, opinions, ideals, knowledge and interactions of those individuals which in turn causes the injustices, prejudices, customs, culture and laws which constitute a society and the cause of its problems.

Whilst some legislative and educational reform is possible, in the end a fairer, less conflicted society requires saner, less conflicted citizens. So the contention is that a 'better' society requires 'better' citizens.

**Rohan McLeod, Australia**

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## **PUZZLING BODY PHENOMENA**

**Filiz Peach**

*Lecture to the Ethical Society, 15 March 2015*

When discussing the philosophical problem of *MIND AND BODY*, the human body as a whole does not get much attention. That is why I will focus on the philosophical aspect of the human body in this lecture. The main questions to be explored here are:

**What's the human body?**

**How do I perceive my body?**

**How do I perceive the body of the other?**

The traditional attempts to explain the living body experience in purely mechanical and/or psychological terms have failed to offer satisfactory explanations. Monist theories reduce the body either to a mere object, as in the case of *materialism*\*, or suggest that the body really is only a product of the mind as in the case of *idealism*. If we look at the topic from an existential/phenomenological perspective, we see that there is no Mind/Body split. The body is not taken simply as an object but as an entity entwined with consciousness. Most existential philosophers argue that there is an inseparable bond between the body, consciousness and the world. There are a vast number of interesting and puzzling body phenomena. These enigmatic cases are strange but philosophically interesting.

\**Eliminative* materialism denies consciousness, but traditional materialism has regarded consciousness as an aspect or attribute of matter, generated by the brain. {Ed.}

First, what's the body? It is a physical thing, like chairs and trees; it has basic properties like occupying space, having size, mass, etc, similar to other physical things. Physical objects are collections of molecules, and so is an organism. Molecular changes are constantly going on in physical objects including the human body. Although there are many similarities, the human body is quite different from other physical objects. For example, phenomenologists distinguish the human body, called *body-subject*, from other objects because it is related to subjectivity.

### **Awareness of One's Own Body**

We human beings define a person by his/her body in our everyday life, and we ourselves are identified and defined by our bodies. How I perceive my own body is very different from my relationship to the body of the other and how I perceive it. Awareness of my self is inseparably connected with awareness of my own body. I am in a way my body. As **Gabriel Marcel** said:

**My body is my body just in so far as I ...do not put a gap  
between myself and it. ...my body is not an object but, rather,  
I am my body.<sup>1</sup>**

What he is saying is that one's body is not a matter of possession/*having* a body, but rather *being* a body. He sees human experiences accomplished through the body as a part of being in the world. Similarly, according to Merleau-Ponty, the body is the expression of consciousness. He says that 'Mind/Body consciousness' is a unified system, they are inseparable.

My body is always present to me, that is, it is always there when I am conscious, and I cannot detach myself from it. I can touch it; I can see parts of it though I cannot see my body as a whole. My spatial position is my reference point in perceiving other objects around me. My body is my instrument through which I discover the world and function in it. It's only through my body that I can perceive things around me and make sense of the world. Most important of all, it is the only body I can directly control.

I am also aware that my thought processes are involved in my being in the world as a human being. Although I have immediate awareness of my body, this awareness may not be consciously noticed at all times. My awareness of it may be increased during some heightened physical states such as anxiety or pain. So, there is a close relationship between awareness of the body and awareness of the self.

Although most bodily activities are motor-activities, we do not regard our body as an external object. On the contrary, we feel *oneness* with it. However, it is also possible to put a distance between the body and the self particularly when one is ill. In this case, the relationship between the self and the body changes and in some cases the unity between the two may dissolve altogether. As a result, one may regard the body as an external alien object which is not really part of one's being in the world.

### **Dismorphia**

One example is the medical condition of *DISMORPHIA*, which involves the amputation of perfectly healthy limbs. With this condition, some people insist

that their limbs do not belong to them, but they are alien objects which are attached to their bodies. They feel miserable and insist that these objects should be removed from their bodies. There was a documentary about this on *BBC2 Horizon* programme some years ago. Those who were interviewed were looking for surgeons to remove the limbs and wheelchairs in preparation for their lives after their operation. What was striking was their enthusiasm for the removal of their perfectly healthy limbs. This certainly is one of the puzzling phenomena concerning the body.

What do we mean by *alienation*? By self-alienation we mean the process by which a self through itself becomes alien to itself or rather to its own nature. In this case, one experiences oneself as a separate being from the body. As a result of this internal division, the self becomes alien to the body. Self-alienation may also be experienced as a result of suffering; e.g. a terminally ill person may somehow attempt to dissociate his/her self from the body as a result of excessive physical pain.<sup>#</sup> It seems that ineffective body-function prepares the ground for bodily alienation. So, self-alienation manifests itself when there is a gap between the self and the body. Self-awareness is also experienced in one's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, instincts and so on. So, each mental event tells me that all these thoughts, feelings, etc belong to me personally. This aspect of '*mineness*' is significant in such experiences.

Body-awareness is not a meaningless empty concept but a mode of being in the world and a form of self-understanding which become, during our lifetime, an inseparable part of our existence. This habitual aspect of body-awareness is clearly experienced in the phenomenon of the phantom limb. It has been acknowledged that some patients sense their amputated limbs, and this habitual sensation is very real to them. After the amputation of a limb, the patient still attempts to walk on the missing limb, despite the fact that he is aware of the circumstances. For Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenon of the phantom limb is closely connected with the personal history of the subject.

He says that it can be understood as 'pre-reflective ways of relating to the world'. According to Merleau-Ponty, there are two levels of perceiving one's body: the *habitual body* and the *present body*. The former signifies the body as it has been lived in the past which has acquired certain habits and ways of relating to the world, and the latter is the body that functions in a particular way at the present time. Merleau-Ponty says that the patient's habitual body may prompt him to walk on his missing limb because he still remains involved in his past bodily experiences, and his awareness of his new situation does not prevent him from his futile attempts to walk. This, he believes, confirms his view that our being in the world is based on what he calls 'bodily subjectivity'.

Another interesting example Merleau-Ponty cites is the case of Schneider's. Schneider has been injured at the back of the head, and as a result he has suffered from a variety of disorders including visual, motor and intellectual disturbances. His visual data are unstructured, and his normal body co-ordination has been reduced to minimum. For example, he cannot raise his arm when he wills. In other words, he is not able to 'convert the thought of a movement into actual bodily movement'. When he is told to touch his chin, for example, he cannot do

it automatically. However, if he has a mosquito on his cheek, he slaps his cheek without any prior thinking. Again Merleau-Ponty explains Schneider's automatic reaction in terms of pre-reflective awareness through which Schneider's habitual body performs an act as a result of his past habitual experience, not as a conscious decision.

Merleau-Ponty's views regarding the body are interesting but rather complex. He argues that the perceiver, that is the self, is neither a mechanical body, i.e. pure physicality, nor a pure thinking subject, but a third mode of being, which he calls a 'body-subject' and 'an ambiguous mode of existing' which is not reducible to consciousness. What he is saying is that the body is not just a physical thing among other entities. It is a living entity with its own peculiarities.

### **The Body of the Other**

The 'other' is a concept of the identity of difference which is perceived as distinct and separate from the self. Otherness implies everything that is outside me.

How do we perceive the body of the other? First, we see the body of the other which appears as a separate entity but distinct from all the inanimate objects around us. We have the understanding that the body of the other is able to sense things and perceive things in the world just like our own body. We are also aware that the body of the other has consciousness and thought processes as we do. So, we experience the other as a subject who is part of the same world, but who is a separate being. I am aware of the other as distinct from the self through awareness of my self as a self.

For Sartre, the body is the necessary condition of the existence of a world. The body, he says, is '*inapprehensible*', and '*it doesn't belong to the objects in the world*'. As far as the relationship between consciousness and the body is concerned, he says that this relationship is existential. For him, the other is a thinking substance which is essentially similar to the self, but which is not the self. In everyday reality, the other appears to us as a body given to us in situation in the world. Thus I perceive the other's body in a fundamentally different way from the way I perceive other objects in the world. If we perceive the relationship between my body and the body of the other only as an external relationship, it would not be an adequate explanation in his view. First, he says, one must apprehend the other as the subject for whom one exists as an object. For him, consciousness comes first, then the body. He writes:

**..the Other exists for me first and I apprehend him in his body subsequently.**

**The Other's body is for me a secondary structure.** <sup>iii</sup>

### **The 'Look'**

In Sartre's view, the relationship between the self and the other is best exemplified in the experience of the '*look*' of the other. In this experience, being looked at by the other, that is, being reduced to an object before the other, and being conscious of being made an object are the issues for the self. One feels shame of self, he says, because this experience reveals the other's look and one's being an object in his presence. In this situation, the other is taken as a conscious subject. I experience myself as looked at and this look alienates me. In Sartre's view, it seems that the

very essence of the relationship with the other is insecurity, confrontation and conflict. He thinks that the others inevitably restrict the individual's freedom. In fact, the mere existence of the other leads to the dimension of alienation, and the alienated self is the self's relationship with the other.

Sartre's description of relations with others is quite different from Merleau-Ponty's position. It seems that Sartre puts too much emphasis on the freedom of the individual. He describes the relationship between the two individuals as an encounter of two individual consciousnesses. For him, the primary relation is not one between my body and that of the other.

Unlike Sartre, I believe that we also communicate bodily with each other, in that, we have a relationship and understanding between our bodies rather than seeing the other as an object. There is something called '*Body Language*'. It is possible to perceive the intentions of the others which are expressed by their body and to express our intentions by our bodily movements. This bodily interaction within our shared world provides the social basis for our co-existence.

There is another dimension to the perception of the body of the other as an object. But this is entirely different from Sartre's views and it stems from a form of mental disorder. Oliver Sacks describes a puzzling and interesting case regarding the body in his book '*The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*'.<sup>iv</sup>

### **The Perception of the Dead Body**

Since we cannot experience our own death, the question of perceiving our own dead body does not arise. What we can experience, however, is the death of the other which is revealed to us in the dead body of the other. How does one perceive a dead body? This depends on each individual's attitude towards and relationship with other human beings.

If one perceives the dead body as any other entity which is subject to scientific curiosity, then the corpse is just an object to be examined and theorised. For example, in performing an autopsy on a corpse, a doctor might regard it as a collection of limbs and organs. But we do not experience the living body as being such a combination. The living body is not just a system of related parts and organs but rather a being which displays certain powers, a bodily unity and intentionality in a realm of subjectivity. The lived body is animated by existence which a corpse lacks.

Ontologically a corpse seems no more than an object among other things in the world. But phenomenology of the non-living body can assert itself in different forms, depending on the perception of the individuals who are involved in the situations which are related to the dead person before, during and after his/her death. There are indeed quite a number of curious reactions towards a dead body and the best examples can be found in the world of literature.

In *The Outsider* by Camus, the hero feels nothing except indifference at his mother's funeral. He says he could not feel an interest in a dead woman. His blankness and lack of any emotional expression do not stem from a stoic standpoint, but rather from his inability to relate to a situation, namely mourning

for his mother and from his lack of care for other human beings. His perception of the universe is indifferent, and he feels that his own indifference to this particular event is compatible with the indifference of the universe.

In D. H. Lawrence's novel the reaction is totally different. The hero, Paul Morel, perceives his dead mother as his lover in fantasy:

**With his candle in his hand he bent over her. She lay like a girl asleep and dreaming of her lover... She was young again ...She would wake up. She would lift her eyelids. She was with him still.<sup>v</sup>**

The comparison of an elderly woman's corpse with a sleeping maiden would seem a little too sentimental. But soon Paul realises that this image is a delusion:

**He bent and kissed her passionately. But there was a coldness about the mouth. ... Looking at her, he felt that he could never, never let her go. No! He stroked the hair from her temples. That too was cold. ... Then he crouched on the floor whispering to her 'mother, mother!'<sup>vi</sup>**

This young man here is clearly not really able to come to terms with his mother's death. In order to cover up this reality he transforms in his mind his dead mother's corpse into a sleeping maiden. Yet this image can stay with him only for a short while. This momentary comfort is shattered when the reality of his mother's death grips him and when he feels the pain of the sense of loss.

Finally, in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the attitude towards the dead body is unusual and refreshing but it is talked about somewhat disrespectfully. Joyce looks at death sardonically and humorously. He describes rather cleverly how a rat goes into a stone crypt where a dead body lies, and referring to this obese grey rat he writes:

**One of those chaps would make short work of a fellow.  
Pick the bones clean, no matter who it was.  
Ordinary meat for them. A corpse is meat gone bad.<sup>vii</sup>**

In this passage, the human body is seen as the source of nourishment which is an unusual but an interesting way of perceiving a corpse.

Having looked at various aspects of bodily phenomena, I would like to conclude by stating that indeed I am my body as a living being in the world, yet I still do not know what exactly the body is and how it functions. Perhaps the reality of our bodily phenomena in human experience is likely to remain puzzling.

## References

i Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, quoted from *A Concise Dictionary of Existentialism*, by R. B. Winn, p.9

ii See Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*

iii Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.339

iv Oliver Sacks, *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat* (1985) p.10

v D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, pp.485-86

vi Ibid.

vii James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p.116



## THAT: BRITAIN'S HEAD OF STATE SHOULD BE ELECTED

For the Proposition: **Jennifer R. Jaynes**  
*Debate at the Ethical Society, 22 March 2015*

Every time I walk along to visit my General Practitioner, whose surgery is near Hampstead Heath, I pass a public house called the *Magdala*. This establishment was in the news at Easter 1955, when one Ruth Ellis, a nightclub hostess shot dead her faithless boyfriend, David Blakely, outside. A plaque on the wall used to explain what the gunshot-shaped holes were, although more recently it seems to have been removed. The holes in the wall therefore remain, inconspicuously, without explanation.

Why do I mention this here? For those for whom the relevance is not immediately obvious let me explain. Most British people tend, even in apparently progressive circles, to be somewhat conservative in outlook. In terms of government this realm, indeed this kingdom, is, more than that, somewhat backward and I would not even be controversial if I here argued that the elderly, unelected and very dull Head of State should keep her privileged position without any democratic addition to the status quo rather than cause any fuss or ructions.

However, even here change may eventually happen. Ruth Ellis was indeed hanged for murder, the then punishment for this crime. I gather there was some vocal public opposition, including I am glad to say from leading Humanists. Yet, she was the last woman to be punished by hanging for the crime of killing someone in Britain and by 1966 the practice had been abolished altogether. If this point needs reiterating – even here in Britain we may eventually act on principle, decide on reform, make improvements.

I imagine Mr Carroll, who is arguing the opposing point of view, will expatiate on the 'if it's not broke don't fix it' type of conservatism. We have had a monarchy here so long, since Anglo-Saxon times, so why not keep it? I would argue this point of view is simplistic, unimaginative and reactionary. Britain deserves better.

Although Britain is generally anti-intellectual, we have had a few high calibre thinkers and progressives: Thomas Paine for one who wrote the *Rights of Man*, though his radical, indeed then disreputable, ideas of democracy and universal suffrage spread more widely in the United States of America and France than here.

### **What is Government?**

Paine asked, cogently,

**“What is Government? It is not, and from its nature cannot, be the property of any particular man or family but of the whole community at whose expense it is supported. Though by force and contrivance it has been usurped into an inheritance, the usurpation cannot alter the right of things”.**

It is very hard to improve on Thomas Paine as I believe Mr Carroll's\* compatriots have found. We can occasionally produce thinkers. Britain has a

very good record in the history of science. It is the home of Isaac Newton (gravity), Charles Darwin (evolution) and Michael Faraday (electricity). We can certainly be proud of that. Yet we are still treated as peasants, to all intents and purposes.

Unlike the Americans, we do not possess any inalienable rights. We do not even have a constitution. Why not? Because the first sentence would be -- British people are certainly not equal. Some of them are born superior, into privilege and the proletariat has to accept it. Of course the British cannot choose their Head of State.

It is possible even in this extremely backward and conservative land to have principles, ideals, to make some progress. We have a very minor role in the election of representatives for the House of Commons. We aren't allowed to elect senators for the House of Lords and of course, not our Head of State.

### ***Legoland Our Top Attraction***

It is interesting to note the most popular visitor attractions in England. The organisation *Visit England* keeps track. Monarchist propaganda likes to claim the various castles and homes of monarchs that are open for visiting lead the list. This is not so. The top one is in Windsor and not the castle but *Legoland*.

Although the Queen is 88 (born in 1926, the same year as the late Margaret Thatcher) she seems not to have the stamina of the Queen Mother who died in her 100s. Whenever the demise occurs however, her successor is already in place – eldest son Prince Charles who some of Princess Diana's supporters will never forgive for some responsibility for her early demise. So much then for monarchy being unifying.

Paul Carroll is apparently a professional Toaster. No doubt he often suggests toasts to the British unelected Head of State. I for one look forward to being able to toast the first President of Great Britain, whose responsibilities would be similar to those of the Irish President.

\*Paul Carroll, is an American; his speech will appear in the May *Ethical Record*.  
{Ed.}

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## **ESSAY - THE FUTURE OF THE ETHICAL SOCIETY – DIRECTION OR DRIFT?**

***John Dowdle, FRSA, CHES Member, BHA Life Member, NSS Life Member***

To address this topic properly, two questions have to be addressed:-

1. What is meant by Ethical?
2. What should an Ethical Society properly do?

In answer to the first question, I frequently experience the concepts of morals and ethics being deployed interchangeably – which must be incorrect; otherwise the two different words and concepts would not exist.

Let us begin by differentiating between what I understand – at least – as the differences between morals and ethics. Looking at dictionary definitions of both

words, I was struck by the concept of folk-ways as a form of definition of the word *mores* – pronounced morés – which is frequently employed by US social scientists and is gradually gaining acceptance in this country.

This suggests that so-called moral values come from the ways of ordinary folk in any society. Etiquette applications like queuing or arranging cutlery in sequence on dining tables are more the area of moral values, which suggests that morality develops from the bottom-up in any society and that the appropriation of moral values by religionists or anyone else is wholly bogus. It is the people collectively who set and define moral values and not some self-appointed social elite in society.

Ethics – by contrast – seem to me to be rather more top-down in prescription and usually associated with knowledgeable experts in certain narrow but significant areas of activity. We normally associate the idea of an ethical committee or grouping with something like a hospital or medical ethics committee, implying that these are standards which are created by knowledgeable people as guides for themselves and others in their profession to follow.

Indeed, the concept of profession seems to me to be irreducibly associated with ethics. I have previously been a purchasing manager, a teacher/college lecturer, a chair of school governors, an elected councillor, as well as parliamentary candidate in the past. In each of those areas, there are professional ethical codes of conduct and standards which apply. They can be viewed on-line for anyone wanting to know more about them.

### **What should an Ethical Society properly do?**

In the case of Conway Hall Ethical Society (CHES) – a globally unique organisation as far as I am aware – I believe everything it has done in the past and is doing now is fine and should be wholly supported. However, is the existing scale of activity sufficient for a modern ongoing ethical society? I suggest the answer is “No”.

In answer to the inevitable riposte “Well, what do you suggest?” I suggest the following: I assume most CHES Members are familiar with the Latin term *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* meaning in English, ‘Who will guard the guards themselves?’ As part of the future activities of CHES, I suggest that an Ethical Committee should be appointed or voted-in from among CHES Members with a principal responsibility to examine periodically the ethical standards of other organisations in the UK with a view to making submissions for improvements to those organisations’ ethical standards in the best traditions of Conway Hall and its own ethical principles.

Of course, the wider CHES membership will need to discuss this and decide upon it democratically. However, I believe strongly in such a role for the Conway Hall Ethical Society as it will enable our principles and values to be communicated to a much wider audience of influential groups and individuals in future. I will conclude by suggesting that this topic be included in one of the Sunday discussion and talk activities of Conway Hall Ethical Society in the very near future.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

Tel: 020 7405 1818 Website: [www.conwayhall.org.uk](http://www.conwayhall.org.uk)

Admission to Thinking on Sunday events is free for members of CHES and £3 (£2 conc) for non-members. For other events, no charge unless stated.

## THINKING ON SUNDAY

APRIL 2015

Sunday 5 **EASTER.** No meeting

Sunday 12 **GEORGE SANTAYANA**, social and cultural philosopher  
1100 **Tom Rubens**

Sunday 19 **W L CRAIG'S 8 REASONS FOR GOD – REFUTED**  
1100 **Norman Bacrac.** See *Philosophy Now*, Issue 99

Sunday 26 **ALL CHANGE: RELIGION & BELIEF IN BRITAIN**  
1100 **Jeremy Rodell**, co-founder SW London Humanists, BHA Trustee

MAY

Sunday 3 No meeting

## LONDON THINKS EVENTS

April

Wednesday 8 **HOW TO TOPPLE A DICTATOR**  
1930 **Srdja Popovic** in conversation with **Nick Cohen**  
Ticket: £15 (£5 for CHES members)

May

Wednesday 13 **BUYING AND SELLING SEX: THE BIG DEBATE**  
1930 Professional dominatrix **Margaret Corvid v. SPACE**  
supporter **Fiona Broadfoot**  
Ticket £15 (£5 for CHES members)

## CONWAY HALL SUNDAY CONCERTS

Artistic Director: **Simon Callaghan**

Doors open at 1730 Concerts start at 1830 Tickets £9; students £4; under 16 free

Full details on: [www.conwayhallsundayconcerts.org.uk](http://www.conwayhallsundayconcerts.org.uk)

April 12 **Gildas Quartet:** Haydn, Janacek, Britten

19 **Rautio Trio:** Brahms, Rautio, Ravel

26 **Piatti Quartet:** Webern, Phibbs, Dvorack  
Pre-concert talk 1730: **Joseph Phibbs**

May 3 **Fournier Trio:** Haydn, Faure, Kidane, Schumann

10 **Ardeo Quartet:** Mozart, Ravel, Bartok  
Pre-concert talk 1730: **Simon Callaghan**

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 Evan Parker at [evan.parker@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:evan.parker@warwick.ac.uk) Tel nos 07403 607 046 (mob) or 0202 565 5016.