

Ethical Record

The Proceedings of the Conway Hall Ethical Society

Vol. 120 No. 3

£1.50

March 2015

BANGLADESHI ATHEIST SCIENTIST MURDERED

Maryam Namazie, of *One Law for All*, has created a petition which you can sign calling on the Bangladeshi Government to prosecute the killers of Avijit Roy.



Avijit Roy and his wife Rafida Ahmed Bonya

The petition begins:

“We are outraged by the senseless and brutal hacking to death of well-known scientist, atheist and writer Avijit Roy and the serious attack on his wife and blogger, Rafida Ahmed Bonya, by Islamists in Bangladesh. Avijit had received numerous threats over the years for publishing articles critical of Islam, and promoting secular views, science and social issues on the Bengali-language blog, Mukto-mona (Free Mind), which he founded.

He had travelled to Bangladesh from the US to attend a book fair where his book *The Virus of Faith* was being launched. It was whilst he was returning from the fair that he was brutally killed.” To read the petition in full and see previous signatories, google:

Avaaz.org community petitions

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BRAND NEW WEBSITE TO BE LAUNCHED BY CHES

It is now nearly three years since we launched the current website and whilst it has worked tremendously as the centre of our online activities, it is now time for a change. So, in late spring/summer we shall launch a new version. It'll have all the existing functionality with a new look and feel, taking us into a new era. For the first time we shall be accessible through many different types of devices such as mobile phones and tablets. It will be far easier to navigate with a built-in search function which will search the whole site with the click of a button. Our social media and videos will be fully integrated as will our online *Ethical Record* section.

Members will be able to amend contact details and membership information online and donations can be Gift Aided! You will be able to purchase tickets online for our events on our actual website. We've even added Transport For London's up to the minute information for the tube, buses and the number of Boris Bikes available in the area! We hope this will improve the experience for all our members and visitors to our website.

Jim Walsh, CEO

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)

TTIP : A DEAL THAT WILL END OUR FREEDOM

Chris Bratcher

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 22 February 2015

TTIP stands for ‘Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership’; a ‘Free Trade’ treaty with the United States currently being negotiated by the European Union. Completion is projected to be the end of this year. Such treaties used to be about removing import tariffs. There are now few such, and the negotiation is principally about what are coyly termed ‘non-tariff barriers’. The aim is to both set a ‘liberalised’ climate for investment, and to ‘harmonise’ differing regulations and standards in a multiplicity of sectors that prevent goods or services being exchanged. Such ‘barriers’, which we consider hard-won protections to the consumer, could disappear because the treaty will override national laws.

Chickens Coming Home to Roost

Here are some food and agricultural products that the US would like to export. In the US, consumption of diseased meat is prevented by chlorination of the carcasses: chickens are bleached, rather than discarded. The EU bans (since 1997) such practises, partly because of health risks evident in US meat processing plants. Do you fancy a chicken McNugget with added bleach? The EU banned hormone treated beef in 1989, because of health fears from ingesting synthetic hormones. Then there is the whole issue of genetically modified crops.

To be fair, it is widely assumed that EU negotiators do not want any of these outcomes. The sting in the tail is that proposed treaty, in addition, sets up a ‘**regulatory co-operation council**’, consisting of the heads of the parties’ regulatory agencies, to progressively eliminate differences. What may be left unagreed when the treaty is signed, to allay public fears and political controversy, may be quietly agreed later.

Public Services

The treaty also gives rights to invest in the provision of all manner of services, including those that we would regard as ‘public’. ‘Public services’ are excluded from the ambit of the treaty, but it’s understood they are to be defined as

“ .. services not in competition with any other service provider”.

Lo and behold, the Health and Social Care Act of 2012 enabled competition in the supply of healthcare services, and so they are within the ambit of the treaty, unlike those of significant EU signatories. Transnational ‘health’ is on its way.

Benefits?

The European Commission says that the TTIP would boost the EU’s economy by €120 billion, the US economy by €90 billion and the rest of the world by €100 billion. This is highly dubious. In a *Guardian* article of 15 July 2013, Dean Baker of the US Center for Economic and Policy Research observed that “If we apply the projected income gain of 0.21% to the projected median personal income in 2027, it comes to a bit more than \$50 a year. That’s a little less than 15 cents a day. Don’t spend it all in one place.” What seems to have gone on is counting as a ‘plus’ the increased GDP from inward investment, whilst ignoring the jobs displaced by it.

The Investor-state Dispute Settlement (ISDS) Provision

I mentioned that the overarching aim is to enable investors, effectively multi-nationals, to be unconstrained by national restrictions – and national *decision making*.

The truly frightening thing is the proposal to set up an extra-governmental body to govern disputes between investors and government: the Investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) provision. It enables investors to sue governments for unlimited amounts, with all costs falling on the latter whatever the outcome, if regulations or decisions damage or impede their present or potential profits. The proposal is similar to the World Bank Group's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) tribunal.

Essentially, the body will provide protection to companies from – as they would regard it – adverse changes in legislation or public policy, and so effectively give them unprecedented power to force a reversal of policy. The judges – if that is the right word – are to be accountants and the like, concerned with assessing damage to profits, rather than the public interest or domestic legislation. There is no route to appeal to national or international courts against their decision. I assume that any liabilities created by the judgement will be enforceable as sovereign debts.

This mechanism exists in other 'free trade' deals with the USA, and in bi-lateral treaties (see www.bilaterals.org/) : actions are already being taken against other countries:

Vattenfall v Germany 2012: following Germany's decision to phase out nuclear power generation, the Swedish company Vattenfall has launched an investor-state lawsuit demanding € 3.7bn in compensation for lost profits that would result from the closure two of its power plants – one of which has been inoperative since 2007!

Philip Morris v Uruguay and Australia: the US tobacco giant is suing them over their anti-smoking laws. It claims that plain packaging and health warnings are impacting on its marketing opportunities, by preventing it from displaying its trademark.

There are several ongoing disputes in Latin America following the Pan-American 'free trade' agreement there, where utilities have been privatised, and the increased costs have caused the countries concerned to impose caps on charges. Compensation for minimum wage legislation has been demanded from Egypt, where it was not in force when the investment was made. .

The Secret Non-state

Unprecedented security surrounds all the documentation and negotiation position papers: key parts of the text under negotiation are embargoed. Consequently the talks have a private momentum of their own. (A source for leaked docs is <http://eu-secretdeals.info/>). After a proposed draft was leaked in March 2014, the European Commission launched a public consultation on a limited set of clauses and in January 2015 published a selective overview of the state of play. MEPs cannot interrogate those involved. What the European Parliament is formally told is from a 'rapporteur', or reporter back from the

talks, essentially there to stonewall enquiry. We are given to understand that ‘a reflection process’ is under way: i.e., negotiations over the inclusion of ISDS are currently – we are led to believe – frozen, due to widespread Continental public protest. But given it is a feature of other free trade agreements, one cannot be optimistic.

The EU Parliament, let alone that of the UK, has no vote over the particular contents of whatever deal emerges; it will only have the opportunity to vote yes or no on the deal. Any horse-trading will be done in private by EU governments: naturally, they will try to ensure that the treaty is not vetoed, and the parliament will be faced with a unanimous governmental ‘Yes’. Rumour in Greece has it that the new government threatens to use its veto to scupper the deal unless it got a satisfactory outcome from its pleadings for refinancing and a limit to austerity. Alas, I doubt we can rely on that. Where national constitutions require a vote before assent to ratification, veto votes have a habit of being replayed until a ‘right’ answer emerges.

There is a lack of democracy in the governance of the EU, stemming from the allocation of powers between participant governments, the European Commission, and the EU Parliament. If there is any case for voting UKIP, it lies in this – and the threat of the treaty. Some of Nigel Farage’s utterances suggest he – and therefore UKIP - is to oppose the latter, as part of his/its case for independence. I hope they make and explain this commitment at the election, and oblige other parties to come clean. Only the Green Party has unequivocally come out against the treaty in the UK, along with some Labour MEPs and Trade Unions.

Francis Fukuyama wrote a much derided book, *The End of History*, that saw as its endpoint the conclusion of the Cold War and the dominance of Capitalism as the basis of supply. What is now envisaged is, if anything, more extreme: rule by transnational corporations over such legislatures that they have not already bought into. We must make this politically impossible.

Information and opposition:

George Monbiot’s *Guardian* article:

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/04/us-trade-deal-full-frontal-assault-on-democracy>. There are two vigorous Stop TTIP campaigns, **www.StopTTIP.net**, and **www.38degrees.org.uk**.

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JEREMY BENTHAM: PROPHET OF SECULARISM
by **Philip Schofield**

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

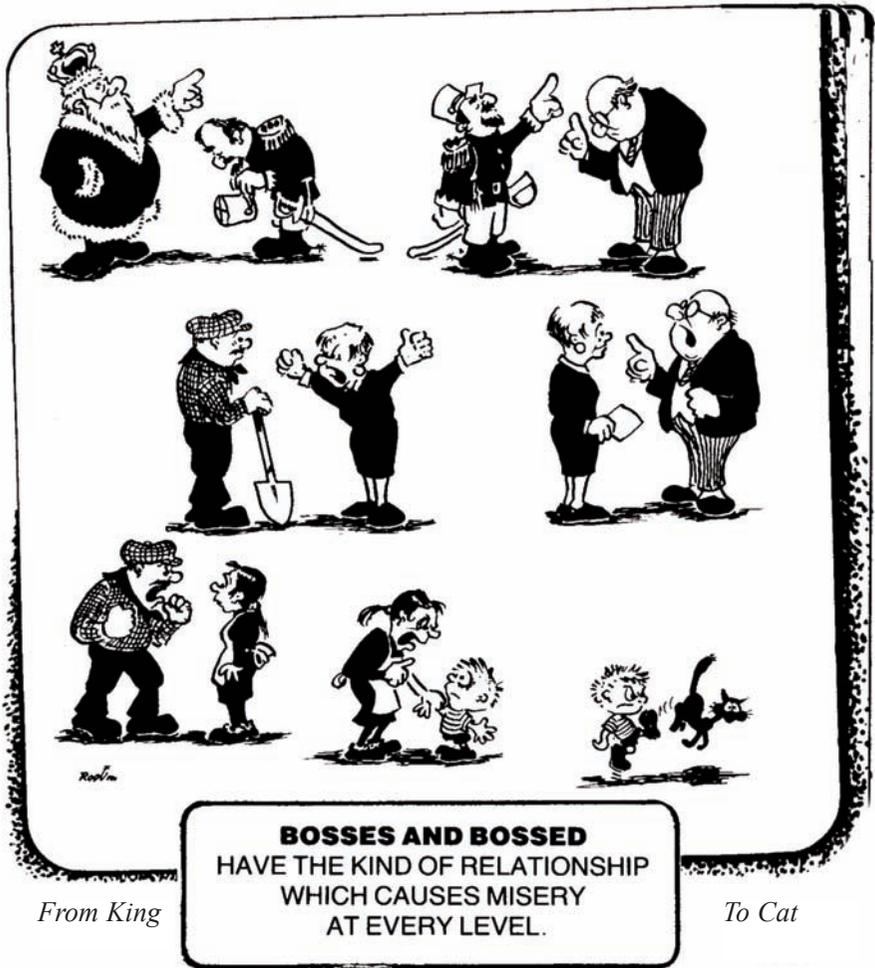
THE RELEVANCE OF ANARCHISM TODAY

Donald Rooum

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 15 February 2015

Anarchy means absence of government: monarchy, rule by one; oligarchy, rule by a few; anarchy, rule by nobody. By government or rule, anarchists do not mean organisation or leadership. We are in favour of organisation provided it is voluntary, and we are not against leaders, so long as they do not dominate by means of threats. Anarchism is ethical, in the sense of being about good and bad. We say that coercion, intimidation, forcing people to do things by means of threats, is bad. Anarchism is relevant today because, in aiming for the ideal of no governments, we try, and sometimes succeed, in weakening governments.

Anarchism is a bit like atheism, in the sense that governments are a bit like gods, pretending to be benevolent without really being so.



A Few Wrong Ideas about Anarchists

First, that we are against elected governments but not against other rulers. A bloke at Conway Hall told me that if anarchists were successful, gangsters would take over. But that would not be absence of government; it would be government by gangsters. There are people, notably in America, who call themselves libertarians, but do not want liberty for all, only more power for capitalists.

I was once hiring a room for a meeting, not in Conway Hall but at a place in Bradford, and when I said it was for an anarchist meeting, the lettings officer said, "Who are you going to throw a bomb at?"; this was shortly after the bomb was thrown at Hiroshima. One November fifth, a speaker on BBC radio referred to Guy Fawkes as "an anarchist", although Guy Fawkes was a member of a conspiracy to put the Spanish Inquisition into power in England.

But most people here and now know better than to equate anarchists with bomb throwers.

A more common misunderstanding is the idea that anarchists know, or claim to know how, without governments, they would organise themselves: "Who's going to clean the sewers?"

When I was an army conscript, making no secret of my opinions, I was told by a sergeant major, "If everybody could choose what work they did, nobody would elect to join the army, and the country would be undefended." I am told that there is an A-level textbook on Government which says anarchists advocate a society consisting of primitive agricultural settlements. This is important to the relevance of anarchism now, but it has been around for a long time. It is still useful to read the answer given by the anarchist Errico Malatesta in 1891:

Some demand to be told in detail how a liberated society would be organised, and there follows a whole series of questions which might be interesting if we were studying the problems of anarchy in theory, but which are useless, or absurd, or ridiculous, if we are expected to provide definitive solutions.

What methods will be used to teach children? How will production be organised? Will there still be large cities, or will the population be evenly distributed over the surface of the earth? Supposing the inhabitants of Siberia should want to spend the winter in Nice? Who will empty the privies? Will sick people be treated at home or in hospital? Who will establish the railway timetable? What will be done if a train driver has a stomach ache while the train is moving? ... And so on, to the point of assuming that we have all the knowledge and experience of the unknown future, and that in the name of anarchy we should prescribe for future generations what time they should go to bed, and on what days they must cut their toenails.

If our readers expect a reply from us to these questions, which is more than our personal opinion at this moment, it means that we have failed to explain to them what anarchism is about. We are no more prophets than anyone else, and if we claimed to be giving an official solution to the problems of daily life of a future society, we would be declaring ourselves the government, and prescribing a universal code for present and future generations.

Socialist Utopias

Stories about alternative societies have been told for a long time. The word *Utopia* was coined by Sir Thomas More in the 16th century, but Plato's *Republic*

was written two thousand years earlier. Many are about coercion-free societies. A few examples:

William Morris, *News from Nowhere*;
H.G. Wells, *Men like Gods*;
Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*;
Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* ;
James Hilton, *Lost Horizon*;
Eric Frank Russell, “And then there were none”;
Eric Frank Russell , “Late night final”;
Vladimir Lenin, *The Slate and Revolution*.

In most stories, the alternative society exists in a far land, or on a far planet, or in a golden age of the past or the future. In *The Dispossessed*, the anarchist society has been set up by a friendly government. Of the above list, only two of the stories include descriptions of an insurrection bringing the free society into being.

In *News from Nowhere* there has been a sudden outburst of popular feeling at a public event in London, followed by a general election and a parliamentary vote for the abolition of all government institutions and private property. Everyone accepted the constitutional Sovereignty of Parliament, so property owners, General Officers Commanding, and all other bosses willingly gave up their power, and there was your free society, just like that. There is actually a political party, the Socialist Party of Great Britain, founded in 1904, whose policy is inspired by *News from Nowhere*, to gain a Parliamentary majority and vote the State out of power. According to its website, its ideology is ‘Socialism, Marxism, Impossibilism’.

There is a graphic novel, *Breaking Free*, in which the working class unites against the bosses, and the streets are filled with crowds of happy revolutionaries. But the fantasy ends there, with no mention of how the free society might be organised. We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.

The State and Revolution tells its story in the future tense, and says something about how a free society might work (“the people will take action” . . . and so on), but rather more about how the free society shall come into being. The workers are to rise against their oppressors, and replace them with a non-oppressive committee of people trained in Marxist theory, who are to guide “the masses” in learning how to co-operate without bosses. After however long it takes, “the State will wither away” (translation of a Russian phrase, said to have been suggested to Lenin by Bukharin).

Anarchism and Marxism

A society without bosses, where everything is organised by voluntary co-operation, is the ideal of socialists in general, not just anarchist socialists. This meeting is about the relevance of anarchism today, not the early history of socialism. But the dispute, which is important today, is noted in the minutes of the Brussels Conference of the First International, in 1868, where the two factions were led by Mikhail Bakunin and Karl Marx.

The Bakunin faction advocated, and still advocates, that the institutions of oppression should be opposed, weakened, and if possible destroyed, wherever they occur. By this piecemeal campaign of attrition, the social environment becomes less coercive than it might have been. Little by little, society changes in the direction of total freedom.



The Marxist faction advocates that the institutions of oppression should be seized by the working class and collected into a strong, all-powerful State, which is handed over to ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’, an elected committee of socialists, which will guide people until voluntary co-operation becomes the norm. The objective of total freedom will be reached, paradoxically, by starting out in precisely the opposite direction. The difference seems trivial to some Marxists (including William Morris) but anarchists think it is fundamental. This is how Bakunin criticised the Marxist programme:

[Imagine an elected government consisting of citizens] ... as intelligent and devoted as you like, in an ideal State, founded on a free contract ...

At first these citizens are privileged not by right, but by fact. They have been elected by the people because they are the most intelligent, clever, wise, courageous, and devoted.

Taken from the mass of citizens, who are regarded as all equal, they do not yet form a class apart, but a group of persons privileged only by their nature, and for that reason singled out for election. Their number is necessarily very limited, for in all times and countries the number of men endowed with qualities so remarkable that they automatically command the respect of a nation is, as experience teaches us, very small.

Here, then, is a society divided into two categories, if not yet to say two classes. One, composed of the immense majority of citizens, submits freely to the government of its elected leaders. The other, formed of a small number of persons, recognised and accepted as especially worthy, is charged by the people to govern them. Dependent on popular election, they are distinguished from the mass of citizens only by the very qualities which recommended them. They do not yet assume to themselves any privilege, any particular right, except that of exercising, insofar as the people wish it. the special functions with which they have been charged. For the rest, by their manner of life, by the conditions and means of their existence, they do not separate themselves in any way from all the others, so that a perfect equality continues to reign among them.

Can this equality be long maintained? We say that it cannot. Nothing is more dangerous for man’s morality than the habit of command.

“The masses”, the elected guide says to himself, “recognising their incapacity to govern on their own account, have elected me their chief. By that act they have publicly proclaimed their own inferiority and my superiority. The people have need of me. They cannot do without my services. Therefore they must obey me for their

own security, and in condescending to command them, I am doing them a good turn.” It is thus that power and the habit of command become for even the most intelligent and virtuous men, a source of aberration, both intellectual and moral.

Socialists of the Marxist faction dismissed Bakunin’s prophecy, until it was proved true in the case of Uncle Joe Stalin, then in Mao Zedong, Kim II Sung, and many other elected guides. It may seem that Marxism has been thoroughly discredited, but many still believe.

Anarchists oppose coercive institutions and practices as a whole, but concentrate on those which seem most vulnerable, the soft underbelly of government. These worst aspects of government attract opposition from people who are not anarchists, so almost every instance of anarchist activity is as part of an alliance.

For instance, anarchists opposed conscription in World War One, and so did a lot of other people, so they all worked together, and were remembered at meetings commemorating their resistance in Conway Hall, last year. Taking all the old war resisters together, it may be difficult to discern the anarchist groups, not because they are hidden like needles in a haystack, but because they are hidden like bushels of hay in a haystack. The same happened in World War Two (where, incidentally, the British Communist Party was allied with war resisters until June 1941, but then turned against their former allies*).

Anarchists were some of the members of the Direct Action Committee which organised the first mass Aldermaston March against nuclear weapons organised in 1958, and joined in later marches in the opposite direction organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a groups within the Labour Party. There were anarchists among the Committee of One Hundred, which organised a campaign of disruption when CND turned to enrolling the whole anti-nuclear movement for the Labour Party (it seems that the CND leaders actually expected Harold Wilson to Ban the Bomb).

Anarchists against the Poll Tax

Anarchists were prominent in the successful campaign against Margaret Thatcher’s poll tax, and the unsuccessful campaign against Tony Blair’s joining George W. Bush’s war in Iraq (now the subject of the Chilcot Inquiry). The notice of this meeting on the Conway Hall website notes that the demonstration was unsuccessful, but that is not to say it was irrelevant. But sometimes there are indications. In 1962, groups on the Aldermaston March carried banners displaying their various affiliations, and the number of banners carried by anarchist groups was approximately equal to the number carried by Labour Party branches.

What has often distinguished anarchists from other protestors is their opposition to voting for alternative personnel, on the ground that the government always wins. Anarchists sometimes say that all governments are alike, but that is an oversimplification. We recognise that some governments are stronger than others, and that when they are weaker it is often because of popular actions against their strength. Institutions which derive from the state can be beneficial

*When Germany attacked the USSR. {Ed.}

when they challenge the use of authority by other institutions, such as cruel parents, greedy landlords, brutal bosses, violent criminals, and police who fake evidence.

Most anarchists in Britain support the National Health Service because, although it derives from the state, it provides medical services according to need. We would far rather live here than in, say, Saudi Arabia where a man can be sentenced to ten years imprisonment and a thousand lashes for expressing opposition and disbelief. But we watch on television as the crown prince of Britain shakes hands with the family of princes in Saudi Arabia.

Fifty years ago, police hoping to increase their arrest rates would visit places used by homosexual men, and arrest them in the act. A favourite game was to persuade one of a pair to turn 'Queen's evidence' and get the other imprisoned. Various heterosexual games were also illegal, but all are now acceptable. When the new edition of the Oxford English Dictionary was published in 1971, the common words 'fuck' and 'cunt', which had been excluded in 1933 for fear of prosecution, were restored (yes, I know fashions change and taboo words are replaced, but I cannot easily imagine 'golliwog' now being excluded from a scholarly dictionary).

Pictures of nude women could not be legally published in the 1970s, but these days every pretty female actor poses for nude photographs, without damage to her professional reputation. Before 1940, children were beaten with canes as an ordinary part of school life, but now spanking is an erotic game enjoyed by conscious and willing adults, not to be inflicted on children.

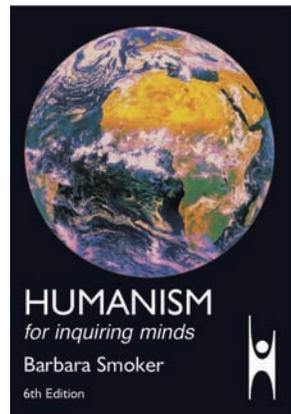
Unorthodox sex de-criminalised, rude words de-criminalised, rude photographs decriminalised, torture of schoolchildren criminalised. Of course these additions to freedom were not achieved by anarchists on their own, but I think it is right to claim them as anarchist victories .

THE 6TH EDITION OF *HUMANISM* (2014)

A new, revised and updated 80-page edition of Barbara Smoker's classic book, now called *HUMANISM for inquiring minds* (for secondary schools and as a general introduction to this important subject), has been published by the Conway Hall Ethical Society. ISBN 978 0 902368 28 6

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VIEWPOINTS

Capital Punishment

Any discussion of penal policy ought to at least begin with the concept of punishment – all other justification, in terms of utility, is secondary. (Ted Honderich's 1969 Pelican book, *Punishment: the supposed justifications* is a philosophically literate starting point.)

Punishment and reward depends on desert: if 'every good boy deserves favour', malefactors deserve .. what? Leaving aside determinists who would drop the notion of desert altogether, a case, or rather, assertion, can be made that the death penalty fits or matches the crime of taking life. But then we get into the morass of degrees of responsibility and extenuating circumstances (both of which are also a challenge to any substitute for a death penalty). Who dare judge that when life is at stake? Given all this and the issues of irreversibility and revulsion at judicially taking life, I think the only room for revived capital punishment is at the option of the transgressor.

A life sentence, from the standpoint of utility, seems as pointless as capital punishment, and wildly differs in its severity and duration, particularly according to the age of the transgressor. Anything short of a whole life tariff for the most heinous crimes is popularly considered inadequate. It can be at least as cruel and unusual a punishment as a quick death. For some (Brady, for one) it is something they do not wish to endure.

A fault of supposedly civilised penal systems is that they do not leave a place for perpetrators to have an input into their punishment. A decision to opt for 'termination' could be as rational as the wish for assisted suicide, with similar protections against decisions made under duress or without due and repeated consideration, and capital punishment could be freshly seen as the mercy option.

Chris Bratcher, Hythe, Kent

Printing 'Provocative' Cartoons

Was it ethical for *Charlie Hebdo* to print provocative cartoons in the name of free speech, which led to the deaths in Paris? Is free speech more important than the death of innocent people? In your January Editorial you gave examples in history showing that denigrating ethnic groups can result in violence against them. Surely this was predictable and it is not justified in the name of free speech. It can start with words, or cartoons and can finish as actions. We must be aware that some people are not rational, and cannot be expected to take these things as a joke.

Dorothy Forsyth - Eastbourne

Editor's Note. My January Editorial attempted to make a distinction between the two types of *target* of the cartoons or writings — (1) lampooning religious (or other) *ideas* and (2) denigrating *ethnic groups*. The former is acceptable, nay, necessary in a society of freethinkers, whereas the latter is not acceptable. This is because a cartoon satirising religious ideas does not incite atheists to attack the believers, whereas the writings quoted in the editorial denigrating ethnic minorities gave the green light to their more simple-minded readers to physically attack them.

ESSAY - POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Rumy Hasan

*Submitted in response to letters from Messrs Rubens, Vlachos and Purnell
(February ER)*

The report on child sexual exploitation in Rochdale, in Greater Manchester, by Ann Coffey MP in October 2014 follows a similar (and more devastating) report by Prof Alexis Jay about the Yorkshire town of Rotherham in August 2014. It is clear that the grooming of girls that leads to child sexual exploitation appears to be widespread as evidenced by cases in recent years in other towns and cities, for example, Derby, Oldham, Oxford, Telford, and Peterborough. The evidence shows three recurring themes: that the perpetrators are overwhelmingly men from a Pakistani Muslim background; that the victims are overwhelmingly vulnerable white girls (invariably under-16 years of age); and that the authorities had adopted the stance of ‘see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil’. Even though thousands of girls have been identified as victims, this might still be the tip of the iceberg. Indeed Ms Coffey considers this appalling phenomenon to have become a ‘social norm’ in Greater Manchester.

So why has there been such a monumental dereliction of duty on the part of the authorities? After all, a report on child sexual exploitation in Rotherham was submitted as far back as 2002 yet no action was taken. The Jay report states: “Had this [2002 draft] report been treated with the seriousness it merited at the time by both the police and the council, the children involved then and later would have been better protected and abusers brought to justice.”

Critics following the shocking Jay Report put this inaction by the various authorities down to political correctness, that is, they were fearful of the charge of racism. The former Labour MP for Rotherham Denis McShane admitted as much in an interview on BBC Radio in August 2014. He said: “I think there was a culture of not wanting to rock the multicultural community boat Perhaps yes, as a true *Guardian* reader and liberal leftie, I suppose I didn’t want to raise that [issue] too hard.” Mr. McShane’s comments are a classic case of the political correctness and self-censorship that may have led the authorities to criminal neglect. Now imagine if the perpetrators had been white men and the victims Pakistani Muslim girls. Make no mistake there would have been a vociferous outcry from across the political spectrum with the charge that these horrific crimes were a blatant manifestation of racism and Islamophobia.

So what explains this political correctness and the resultant gross dereliction of duty? I would argue that it has much to do with white liberal post-colonial guilt that has long afflicted wide layers of the majority white-British society. It is political thinking from the 1970s and 1980s and stems from the fact that many non-white migrants were from former colonies and were often subjected to racism and discrimination. Accordingly, they needed solidarity and protection. This led to the evolution of a form of reverse racism, that is to say, an attitude of ‘see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil’ with respect to criminal acts and wrongdoings by ethnic minorities. In other words, non-whites are forever treated as perpetual victims. Silence or apologetics are offered in their support. And, for

their part, ethnic minorities have become adept at playing this new version of the race card. For instance, Islamic organisations such as Tell MAMA robustly argue that dwelling on Muslim involvement in phenomena such as child sexual exploitation, the murder of the soldier Lee Rigby on the streets of London, and the barbarism of Islamic State, is adding to Islamophobia and racism, and aiding the far right. Though evidence for this is dubious at best, the message is clear: cast a blind eye as to what our people do, don't criticise, and don't rock the multicultural community boat.

It is this reasoning that leads to the silence on the part of self-styled progressives and feminists with respect to other nefarious phenomena that are peculiar to some ethnic minorities. They include forced marriage, honour killings, the veiling of women, and (until recently) female genital mutilation. Indeed, when Ann Cryer, the former MP for Bradford and Keighley, began to raise the issue of forced marriage in 1999, she was denounced as a racist. But if there is widespread silence and self-censorship over such phenomena, then don't be surprised that they carry on. What we now have with the child sexual exploitation scandals is a case of the chickens coming home to roost.

It is also noteworthy that child sexual exploitation is prevalent in parts of towns and cities where the Labour Party is dominant. Here it needs stressing that Labour has been especially keen to maintain its support among the Pakistani Muslim community, and has a long history of accommodating the demands made by its 'leaders', and indeed of leaders of other ethnic minority communities. This also applies to an extent to the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats too. The blunt truth is that they do not wish risking the loss of this substantial vote bank. This separatist politics is a core aspect of multiculturalism and of late multi-faithism. An important lesson is surely that if the horrors of Rotherham and Rochdale are not to recur, the mindset embedded in multiculturalism must change drastically.

Note. The above essay was first published in *SputnikNews.com* on 9 November 2014. Since then the report by Louise Casey in February 2015 found that officials in Rotherham Council were still in "complete denial" of the horrific crimes committed and which has led the government to remove the leadership of Rotherham council and replace it with commissioners. On 15 February Labour leader Ed Miliband acknowledged (albeit belatedly) that his party "let people down in Rotherham" over the child sexual abuse scandal. Also, in November 2014, a number of Somali Muslim men were convicted of child sexual exploitation in Bristol. RH.

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 Tel nos 07403 607 046 (mob) or 0202 565 5016.

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BOOK REVIEWS - THE GOD QUESTION

Joy Wood

The God Question is a vast topic. Two areas not covered are religious child abuse and the harm which religion wreaks on the lives of women. For information on those topics I recommend Janet Heimlich, Sue Mayer and Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Jesse Bering's *The God Instinct* is subtitled 'the psychology of souls, destiny, and the meaning of life'. Bering says Richard Dawkins may have been mistaken when he dismissed religion as a mere by-product of something which is, or once was, useful (Bering 2011, 2013 p6). Bering cites current findings from the cognitive science of religion. There are several inherent human traits which predispose us to be susceptible to religious ideas and belief in god. For example, if they caused people to refrain from contemplated destructive acts, belief in a god who was interested in monitoring and judging our behaviour would have been strongly favoured by natural selection.*

Dan Dennett has named the propensity to automatically ascribe intentions to other people, animals, etc as an 'intentional stance'. We cannot seem to help trying to work out why others do things, and again this trait was favoured by natural selection as it enabled us, to some extent, to predict behaviour. It seems what makes humans unique is having a theory of mind, ie being able to think about other minds, to be a natural psychologist as Nicholas Humphrey termed it. "We are exquisitely attuned to the unseen psychological world. Theory of mind is as much a peculiar trademark of our species as is walking upright on two legs, learning a language, and raising our offspring into their teens."

It is a short step from recognising our theory of mind to questioning whether belief in god is a product of this same human trait. Could god be our default setting whenever we cannot think of what else might have caused a phenomenon we are puzzled about? Was our ability to think about other people's intentions so successful, in enabling us to explain and predict other people's behaviour that it became overextended and we now see minds even in non-living objects and phenomena?

Teleofunctional Reasoning

In addition to theory of mind we have evolved teleofunctional reasoning, which means we tend to think that something exists for a preconceived purpose rather than just arising as a functionless object. For example it isn't until age ten or eleven that children, regardless of their religious or non-religious background, start to grow out of the idea that things in nature are there for a reason (eg, mountains are there "to give animals a place to climb" (Bering p56.)) Creationist beliefs are not solely the result of socialisation but persist due to "certain propensities of the human mind" (Bering p58). Young children are naturally inclined to believe that minds can persist after death (Bering p124), and with children being indoctrinated into religion, and the double whammy of theory of mind and teleofunctional reasoning, it is little wonder that religious beliefs persist in the face of alternative scientific explanations.

*Unless the god ordered or favoured the destruction! But are religions ancient enough to have influenced our genes? {Ed}.

Theory of mind, combined with language, enables humans to feel shame and guilt, both of which can regulate behaviour since, if we think someone has witnessed us behaving badly that thought can influence us to behave better to maintain our reputation. The sense of being watched is adaptive because, as societies have become larger, anybody who behaves too selfishly can be excluded from the group. Belief in god or other supernatural entity would lead people to believe that even when they are alone they are being observed and judged.

Joachim Kahl's *The Misery of Christianity*

The second book looked at here is *The Misery of Christianity*. Religious apologists contend that the harms of religion are only the result of human error; eg by misinterpreting scripture (either by mistake or through opportunistic abuse of their position of power in society) or by failing to carry out God's word. Joachim Kahl is one writer who has shown how false that defence is and, through examples from history and scripture, has demonstrated that the horrors of (just to mention two) slavery and antisemitism arose as a direct consequence of acting on a belief in the words of the New Testament, and are the logical conclusion of fulfilling the demands of the Christian bible (Kahl 1968). Even non-Christians such as Nietzsche accepted the widespread concept that there was an ideal form of primitive Christianity which suffered a later falling away. "All the same, it is wrong. All the crimes that have been committed by Christians throughout the history of their religion are to be found in embryo in the New Testament, so that it would be more correct to speak of an escalation than of a decline" (Kahl p98).

A major difference between religion and science is that 'the books' of science can be added to and revised or updated but scripture is the word of God, so infallible. The Church supported the persecution of Jews right from the antisemitism of John Chrysostom in 387CE, through the verbal and written antisemitism compounded by repressive acts of society and state, via Constantine then his sons, then Justinian, then in every Christian country during the Middle Ages (Kahl p55). Hitler's *Mein Kampf* "was never placed on the Index of prohibited books which, until recently, included all books and articles that were contradictory to Catholic teaching matters of faith and morals" (p60). From 1933-1945 the church supported the Nazi regime and antisemitism. "The Dominican, Thomas Aquinas...not only justified slavery and antisemitism but also made the death penalty for heretics theologically legitimate" (p65). The punishment for persistent heresy was burning alive which from 1231 "was carried out on the instructions of the Pope himself". Note that burning was an eternal punishment, because if a person's ashes were scattered "it would be impossible for him to rise again at the end of time" (p67). Wars and crusades were also carried out against heretics.

Moreover, Kahl goes on to show that Protestants were no more lenient than their Catholic counterparts. Luther was largely responsible for the Saxon Visitation which in 1527 compelled all non-Protestants to emigrate from Protestant lands. In 1531 Luther consented to Melanchthon's suggestion that Anabaptists be punished by death and in 1536 he persuaded the Landgrave of Hesse (ie Philip) "to accept the principle of the death penalty for all heretics". In 1553 Calvin ordered the death of the Spanish physician Michael Servetus who maintained that

the doctrine of the Trinity was unbiblical (p70). Kahl's many examples of church atrocities are not just from the past: From 1941-1944 the Catholic fascist movement in Croatia was responsible not only for 240,000 forced conversions of Orthodox Serbs to Roman Catholicism but for putting 750,000 of them to death.

These massacres were so brutal that even the Croatians' allies, the German Nazis, protested against them and petitions were sent to the Vatican. Pope Pius XII, however, said nothing, just as he also said nothing about Auschwitz. It was not until some ten years later, in 1953, that he broke his silence by promoting Archbishop Stepinać, who, as one of those bearing the greatest guilt, had been sentenced by the Supreme People's Court of Yugoslavia to sixteen years' forced labour, to the rank of cardinal for his 'great services' to the Church. (Kahl p72)

An example of atrocities arising as a direct result of scripture is antisemitism and Kahl cites passages from the Christian Bible to support his claim. For example Jesus's opponents in the New Testament are almost always scribes and Pharisees portrayed as stubborn and bloodthirsty enemies. In the gospel of John the Jews *per se* are presented as Jesus's opponents. Another example of the evangelists' antisemitism is the portrayal of the Jews and not the Romans as responsible for the death of Jesus, namely the chief priests (in other words Jews) delivered up Jesus out of envy, but Pilate could see that and didn't want to sentence Jesus to death. Luke and Matthew both absolve Pilate and blame the Jews, and Paul went further to blame the Jews and to proclaim Christians innocent (p52). Christian love and brotherhood is generally accepted as an obvious good, but talk of love in the New Testament is always in the concept of what can be gained by it, not love freely given (eg eternal life and how it can be *earned*); moreover John's gospel "restricts love purely to the Christian community" (p100).

When left-wing Catholics and Protestants reject authoritarian behaviour as unchristian.....they should, however, realize that they cannot base their arguments on the New Testament and they ought to ask themselves.....why it is that the overwhelming majority of Christians have always allied themselves.....with every possible form of nationalism, antisemitism, fascism and anti-communism. This has not happened purely by chance. There is a logical process at work here..... (Kahl p101)

Sam Harris's *The End of Faith*

Harris has peppered his *The End of Faith* (Harris 2004) with so many instances of terms such as *spirituality*, *sacred*, *spiritual truths*, *spiritual experience*, *mystical*, *psychic phenomena* and *my soul*, that it brought to mind an entirely different book, one by that icon of 1960s counterculture Alan Watts (Watts 1966). Indeed, although Watts does not feature in the index, one of his papers (a work on psychedelics and religious experience) is listed in Harris's 29-page bibliography. Harris argues that there is scientifically proved merit in spirituality; and not just as a form of stress management. He recommends people experiment with spiritual practise and find out the truth of it for themselves, as a strengthening of independent thought and an antidote to relying on dogma – whether religious or otherwise:

Without denying that happiness has many requisites – good genes, a nervous system that does not entirely misbehave, etc. – we can hypothesize

that whatever a person's current level of happiness is, his condition will be generally improved by his becoming yet more loving and compassionate, and hence more ethical. This is a strictly empirical claim – one that has been tested for millennia by contemplatives in a variety of spiritual traditions, especially within Buddhism. We might wonder whether, in the limit, the unchecked growth of love and compassion might lead to the diminution of a person's sense of well-being, as the suffering of others becomes increasingly his own.....

Given this situation, we can see that one could desire to become more loving and compassionate for purely selfish reasons. This is a paradox, of sorts, because these attitudes undermine selfishness, by definition. They also inspire behavior that tends to contribute to the happiness of other human beings...The point is that the disposition to take the happiness of others into account – to be ethical – seems to be a rational way to augment one's own happiness.....The connection between spirituality – the cultivation of happiness directly, through precise refinements of attention – and ethics is well attested. Certain attitudes and behaviors seem to be conducive to contemplative insight, while others are not. This is not a proposition to be merely believed. It is, rather, a hypothesis to be tested in the laboratory of one's life. (Harris p192-193)

Harris maintains that religious faith is not only unnecessary, it is positively harmful. Religious faith is based on no scientific evidence and furthermore the religious-apologist claim that science is a religion is false, because science is based on facts so there is no need to 'believe' in science.

A kernel of truth lurks at the heart of religion, because spiritual experience, ethical behavior, and strong communities are essential for human happiness. And yet our religious traditions are intellectually defunct and politically ruinous. While spiritual experience is clearly a natural propensity of the human mind, we need not believe anything on insufficient evidence to actualize it. Clearly, it must be possible to bring reason, spirituality, and ethics together in our thinking about the world. This would be the beginning of a rational approach to our deepest personal concerns. It would also be the end of faith. (Harris p221)

Elizabeth Anderson's *If God is Dead, is Everything Permitted?*

Elizabeth Anderson argues that, contrary to the claim that “without god, morality is impossible” (in Hitchens 2007 p333), ie, without an overarching authority of the sort that only god could provide there would be nothing to underwrite order, the opposite case is true. Following Plato's objection to divine-command moralists: Is something right because god commands it or does god command it because it is right? If it is right to do something then it is right whether or not god commands it so his authority is unnecessary but if it is only right because god commands it then, in theory, anything could be permitted if god decided to issue the command, whether it was something we would consider moral or not. Anderson goes further. Theists (by that Anderson means people who believe “in the God of Scripture”) maintain that god would not do anything immoral or command anything immoral to be done but Anderson shows, with numerous

examples from the Bible, that god routinely punished people for other people's sins and visited many cruel and unjust treatments. He also issued commands for humans to put to death adulterers, homosexuals and people who work on the Sabbath, and instigated genocide and the resultant theft of the slain people's land. For apologists who say this is mostly the god of the Old Testament, Anderson points to Jesus's 'family values', where the rod is not enough for children who curse their parents, they must be killed. Anderson further reminds us that, scapegoating is immoral yet the death of Jesus is a core teaching of Christianity.

I find it hard to resist the conclusion that the God of the Bible is cruel and unjust and commands and permits us to be cruel and unjust to others. Here are religious doctrines that on their face claim that it is all right to mercilessly punish people for the wrongs of others and for blameless error; that license or even command murder; plunder; rape, torture, slavery, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. We know such actions are wrong. So we should reject the doctrines that represent them as right. If God Is Dead, Is Everything Permitted? (in Hitchens 2007 p339)

Like Kahl, for each of her points, Anderson supplies numerous examples and specific references to Bible verses. Anderson contends that, far from God creating morality, if we rely on God to tell us what is moral we are not being accountable to other human beings. Only by listening to the complaints of others can we know how our behaviour needs to change. We will not find out by consulting scripture and refusing to listen to other people whom we have harmed. Another quote from her:

To a mainstream Christian, Jew, or Muslim, nothing is more obvious than that founders and prophets of other religions, such as Joseph Smith, the Rev. Moon, Mary Baker Eddy, and L. Ron Hubbard, are either frauds or delusional, their purported miracles or cures are tricks played upon a credulous audience (or worse, exercises of black magic), their prophecies false, their metaphysics absurd. To me, nothing is more obvious than that the evidence cited on behalf of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam is of exactly the same type and quality as that cited on behalf of such despised religions. Indeed, it is on a par with the evidence for Zeus, Baal, Thor, and other long-abandoned gods, who are now considered ridiculous by nearly everyone. (in Hitchens 2007 p345)

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Further reading

- Freedom from Religion Foundation website – www.ffrf.org
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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

Tel: 020 7405 1818 Website: 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.

MARCH 2015

THINKING ON SUNDAY

Sunday 15 **PUZZLING BODY PHENOMENA** discussed by existential philosopher **Filiz Peach**, in the framework of the mind-body problem

Sunday 22 DEBATE: **BRITAIN'S HEAD OF STATE SHOULD BE ELECTED**
For: **Jennifer R. Jeynes** (republican). Against: **Paul Carroll** (monarchist)

Sunday 29 **CONTEMPORARY WARS**. A panel, **Derek Gregory, Vlaho Kojakovic** and **John Edwards**, discuss Yugoslavia's recent conflicts and the Russia/Ukraine war

APRIL

Sunday 5 **EASTER**. No meeting

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

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

LONDON THINKS EVENTS

March

Thursday 19 **THE RISE OF UKIP**: Where did it come from and how far can it go
1930 in the general election?
Matthew Goodwin, Daphne Halikiopoulou, Peter Kellner
Chair: **Helen Lewis**. Ticket: £15 (£5 for CHES members)

April

Wednesday 8 **HOW TO TOPPLE A DICTATOR**
1930 **Srdja Popovic** in conversation with **Nick Cohen**
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Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 11

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