

Ethical Record

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TASLIMA NASRIN: SECULAR ACTIVIST'S LIFE THREATENED



Islamic radicals reportedly linked to al-Qaeda, the same violent extremists who claimed responsibility for the recent murders of freethought writers Avijit Roy*, Washiqur Rahman, and Ananta Bijoy Das, have been threatening the life of Taslima Nasrin.

Taslima is a world-renowned secular activist and author, whose uncompromising advocacy of human rights and criticism of religion forced her into exile from her native Bangladesh in 1994. A physician by training, she has written innumerable books, articles, and poems, and she has been at the forefront of political activism for secularism, free expression, and equality. Since 2004 she has lived in India, but even there she has faced persecution and threats.

Because of the very real danger to her life, Taslima has decided to leave India. For the indefinite future, to preserve her life, she will need to stay in the United States — where she currently has no job or home. Center for Inquiry will need to provide assistance with food, housing, and the means to get safely settled.

(See **Center for Inquiry's** website for further details)

*Pictured in March *ER*

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CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY

Reg. Charity No. 1156033

Founded in 1793, the Society is a progressive movement whose Charitable Objects are: **the advancement of study, research and education in humanist ethical principles.**

We therefore invite to membership those who, rejecting the supernatural, are in sympathy with the above objects. In furtherance of these, the Society maintains the Humanist Library and Archives. The Society's journal, *Ethical Record*, is issued monthly. At Conway Hall the educational programme includes Sunday lectures, discussions, evening courses and Sunday concerts of chamber music. Memorial meetings may be arranged.

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

RECONSIDERING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT - THE RATIONALE

Evan Parker

Proposing the case for re-introducing Capital Punishment

How far will we, - or won't we, go for the sake of a principle?

Debate held at the Ethical Society, 11 January 2015

*[The case **against** CP's re-introduction was made by **Barbara Smoker**
and printed in the February 2015 Ethical Record]*

Discussing Capital Punishment (CP) these days is a highly emotive issue as was evident in a recent "Big Questions" BBC 1 TV programme, prompted by the killings of drug dealers in Indonesia. The large majority (including two Bishops) shouted down the two people who thought it an appropriate punishment for heinous crimes.

My stance on this matter is very much a rational one, which is developing a progressive society which continuously reviews its structures to enhance the quality and experiences of life for its members, and certainly including eliminating premature death occurring as a result of 'unreasonable' behaviour of others. An abiding principle is that human life is sacrosanct and the unnecessary killing of anyone should be outlawed. With our much-valued freedoms, many of us naturally take risks and tragic accidents can happen; that's the stuff of life (excuse pun) and I am not considering those in this debate.

There are still many aspects of our society which cry out for fundamental reform. Killing is an intrinsic part of how society functions. We are prepared to kill people if we consider our freedoms or lives are under threat; one of the rationales for our engagement in the Afghanistan War was "to make our pavements safer" although there was no direct threat to us, which lead inevitably to many perceived 'guilty' and innocent people losing their lives. Even as a householder, we can kill if we feel our life is in great danger by an intruder of mal intent. A Police Officer can kill if he considers either he or a member of the public is in severe danger (22 people lost their lives in this way in the UK in the last ten years); no judge or jury presiding here and in some cases the person was not threatening to kill. A split second later then we would be prepared today to spend vast sums on keeping the perpetrator alive until his natural death.

Consequentialism

The short definition of 'consequentialism' taken from the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*: "Of all the things a person might do, the morally right action is the one with the best *overall* consequences". *Not* doing things can also lead to consequences, pointing us towards a more holistic approach when considering life and death in our society. This obliges us to consider the consequences of not only our actions but also of our *inactions*. We must therefore consider the most serious case where our society for all intents and purposes *lets*, through inaction, many completely innocent people be killed and consign many to horrendous and often lifelong suffering. A driver recently mowed down a young mother of two, ultimately leading to her death in a traffic-calmed road just round the corner of my flat in Belsize Park. We have known for around 20 years that these euphemistically called "traffic *accidents*" can easily be prevented by

imposing and *effectively policing* 20mph speed limits in residential areas.

Intriguingly it was Tony Blair who could have introduced this relatively straight forward traffic act when he came into office in 1997, when there was powerful lobbying by various groups for such action. Infamously, he never wanted to confront the motoring public and to remove their “freedom” to drive at speeds up to 40mph in towns. Had he had the political guts to do this he would have saved the lives of 100s (likely > 500) of innocent people *every year* since and prevented the horrendous and often lifelong suffering of many 1000s. There is no downside to such a traffic act. Contrary to popular belief, average journey times are hardly affected. I estimate we would save around a staggering £1,000,000,000 pa, produce a less polluted environment and create a safe environment for pedestrians and cyclists (14 cyclists were killed and over 400 seriously injured in the London area alone in 2013) and even allow children to play outside. Please note



Jim (our CEO): speeding traffic is most likely the main reason why families in towns confine their offspring to living quarters, not fear of strangers.



Entrance to a 20 mph zones with signing

50 % Want CP

So, in the light that our society already condones killing and suffering in certain circumstances, my purpose is to consider if the ultimate sanction of CP has any useful role to play in progressing us towards a better and more moral society. Human beings (and, as recently shown, apes) have an innate sense of what is fair and just, and around 50% of people in our country consider the CP is justified for the most heinous of crimes.

I suspect, however, that everyone in our Ethical Society opposes the reintroduction of CP. Certainly Barbara Smoker, Chris Purnell and Ray Ward (see Viewpoints April *ER*) do. The reasons are primarily because mistakes have been made, it is not an effective deterrent and it's barbaric, unfitting for a civilised nation Ray says, and a relic of the distant past. The Bishops of Huddersfield and Hulme said it brutalises our society. For you and them it's a fundamental principle that society should never be party to the deliberate and unnecessary taking of human life.

So obviously it follows that our members in particular, and the good Bishops, have sound ethical credentials and put great store on the right of all humans to life. Thereby I would hope also you and they take some interest/responsibility, in working to help ensure that the life of every member of our larger society is protected against unreasonable action by others. They/their predecessors certainly did in 1965 when you took on 80% of our population who had completed a polling questionnaire indicating support for CP!

With Barbara very much to the fore (I understand) they lobbied successfully to outlaw the death penalty. However, I am not aware of any significant lobbying action from our members on speeding in built-up areas (much too prosaic!), comparable to the 1960s effort to abolish CP, that would save so many more lives, in this case, of innocent people. But I stand corrected. I wrote to all the leading candidates up for the recent parliamentary selection in my local constituency suggesting a route to nation-wide effective 20mph speed limitations in towns and received only one satisfactory reply, gratifyingly from the person who got elected.

So please permit me, in the pursuit of further consolidation of these views, to ask members if you would still maintain your objection to CP if:

1. The problem of uncertain identification of the perpetrator was dealt with?
2. There was some evidence that fewer people would be murdered with CP in place?
3. There were other significant gains to be had?

In this spirit I invite you all to consider the following *facts*:

(i) imprisoned convicted murderers kill others, either whilst in prison or when released back into society. Twenty-nine people lost their lives in this manner in the UK between 2000 and 2010 - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16638227> Rehabilitation had obviously not been very effective for these people and this aspect of imprisonment needs urgent attention.

(ii) In many cases in the modern era with DNA profiling and CCTV evidence,

there is no doubt whatsoever as to the identity of the person who deliberately murders another. I emphasise that it is *only* those people who carry out such a monstrous act in cold blood, that would qualify for the ultimate punishment.

(iii) Contrary to what many think, including both Barbara (Smoker) and Ray (Ward), there is no very reliable evidence that having capital punishment on the statute books does not deter such monstrous behaviour. There are some that think it does have a strong deterrence effect e.g. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/timstanley/100099693/as-britain-debates-the-death-penalty-again-studies-from-america-confirm-that-it-works/>

CP is a Positive Deterrent

There has been no definitive or conclusive study or analysis, but it was found that when some states in the USA turned CP on and off during the last half of the 20th century, although hugely variable, the results nearly always showed a positive deterrent, even though the average time before exercising CP in the USA is 12yrs. However more systematic work needs to be done and no firm conclusion can yet be made regarding the deterrent value of CP.

(iv) The least crime-ridden OECD country is Japan, which *does* have CP on its statute books, which obviously and perversely must thereby be a barbaric nation. Its capital, Tokyo, which I know well, is one of the safest cities on the planet; on my numerous visits I thought my daughter at any age would be completely safe in that city day or night. In contrast our nation has the most dangerous city - Glasgow - http://www.civitas.org.uk/crime/crime_stats_oecdjan2012.pdf This of course does not necessarily imply any correlation between having CP available and a very harmonised society; it's much more to do with the innate culture embedded in the society - more on this later.

(v) A potential gain from having CP available is that we could save on average around £1,000,000 per person executed if the process were efficient (which is most certainly not the case in the USA). This could be used to further reduce suffering in our world. More poignantly, it could be used to undertake research that might lead to some understanding the neurological/psychological processes that cause a small number of people to undertake cold-blooded murder and take corrective action.

I, absolutely, object to the unnecessary killing of any member of our or indeed of any society. But there is an argument that it is a fallacy to focus on how we might deal with the very small number of proven cold-blooded murderers in our society. A severe case of tunnel vision; CP should not be considered in isolation when considering the ethical integrity of a society. For sure, these murderers are a product of our society and you might say they are obviously mentally impaired (although many are intelligent and declared 'sane'), and it is our responsibility to treat and correct this impairment. However we do not yet have the understanding as to why they carry out, sometimes repeatedly, such a heinous crime, and my guess is that we are a long way off that. My sympathy is more directed to those who have been damaged by these people, not to those who have deliberately inflicted the damage.

So, where do we go from here? Obviously the most pressing priority should be the pursuit of a much better society, through effective moral, ethical, philosophical education, starting early in schools, ultimately producing individual behaviour more akin to what is on show in Japan today. A revolution in the way we prepare children to enter our society is now possible with the advent of the internet and relevant technology, freeing-up time for this vital aspect of education and the development of critical thinking skills.

CHES's Intransigence Suspected

As for CP, I suspect intransigence by all members of our Society, and can hear you saying No, No, No. Society is demeaned by the deliberate taking of life, and should be avoided at all costs. This is despite the facts and perspective presented above (I stand corrected if they can be refuted), and contrasts with the thinking of many on the subject. On balance, one could argue there is a *rational* case for reintroducing CP as an interim measure until we get our society sorted. The facts reveal that the execution of proven, cold-blooded murderers may *save other lives* and is thereby not in conflict with society's existing ethos on life preservation. After all, killing another is on our statute book, either the individual or the state can undertake killing in certain circumstances if they *think* it will preserve human life, just as it is reasonable to *think* that CP may ultimately saves lives. Also it does not cost us anything, in fact it does the opposite - it *releases money* which can be used to do good things. As does the curbing of excessive speeds in residential areas.

My position is that our Ethical Society should always work for the greater good, across all the professions, institutions and all levels of our greater society. I hope that after considering the above rationale in this short essay, may just cause some of you to stop and re-think your position on CP and the right to human life. But having shown this essay to some of my best friends who are adamantly opposed to CP, I doubt it. Paraphrasing, they go as far as saying that even if it were proved beyond all reasonable doubt that CP was an effective deterrent, they would still not be moved. They are prepared ultimately to sacrifice the deaths of others in support of their vision of an idealised society. This can be judged as being entirely ethical, but nevertheless irrational. The fundamental difference between all the killing addressed above and CP, is that CP is an additional deliberate act and smacks at retribution - that's what makes it so demeaning. You feel equally devastated for both parties. It's a tragedy for our society. But our failure to take simple action to avoid death and suffering in the towns where we live, already demeans us big-time.

One's position on this depends whether the focus is on the process that leads to untimely death or the outcome itself. Bertrand Russell said "...when it comes to the philosophy of moral judgements, I am impelled in two opposite directions and remain perplexed". This resonates well with the CP debate and with me; it is indeed a paradox.

Note: A poll after the debate at CH did show a majority (but not nem con) against CP. An account of the notorious Brady/ Hindley murderers by B. Smoker will appear in the July ER. [Ed.]

CONTEMPORARY WARS – THE WAR IN THE UKRAINE

John Edwards

A contribution to the Ethical Society's panel on modern wars, 29 March 2015

My first contacts with the Russian language and people were in the late 60s but I first visited Russia in 2009, and have maintained a close interest ever since. The aim of this talk is to briefly look at the background to the present situation in Ukraine for which most of the mainstream media reporting is biased. This has drawn criticism from commentators on both left and right.

Peter Hitchens has called this 'Elite hypocrisy on a massive scale.' Jon Pilger said: 'The suppression of the truth about Ukraine is one of the most complete news blackouts I can remember.' We thus need to look at several sources and integrate them, in order to arrive at a sufficient understanding to decide how to respond.

Wikipedia is a useful source of facts and figures; albeit occasionally biased, but the TV programmes *Russia Today (RT)* and *Al-Jazeera* are no more so than western media and *Russ Fort* and *Novorossia today* have some intriguing information. Even in the US, *RT* is widely viewed as a vital source of an alternative perspective, to the extreme annoyance of John Kerry, even though US state media spend is more than 3 times *RT*'s \$220m.

The Background

The ceding of Crimea to Ukraine by Khrushchev in 1954 was regarded as a mistake but did not matter too much at the time when there was no risk of its leaving the Union, and it was a semi-autonomous region. According to Valery Giscard d'Estang, Khrushchev 'invented' the states of Ukraine and Belorussia in order to gain two extra seats at the UN. Against this background, the allegations of a hostile invasion make no sense.

The reintegration of Crimea into the Russian Federation was accomplished without violence and with huge popular approval. We now know that Vladimir Putin had prepared his ground well, having commissioned a secret opinion poll. He may have had advance notice of a possible 'regime change' which would have endangered the security of Russia's southern fleet.

Ukraine is a country large enough to have different backgrounds and loyalties in different regions; the legacy of WW2 is still apparent. At the previous election, the 70 % in the east voted for Yanukovich. However, as Mikhail Gorbachev has noted in his autobiography, a referendum was held in March 1991 in which between 71 and 76% of the whole population, including Ukraine and Belorussia, were in favour of preserving the Soviet Union, but this result was disregarded by Yeltsin and his cronies.

An understanding had been reached between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev that there would be no further eastward extension of NATO, and there was a great achievement, conventional arms limitation. The US has more recently tried to make recreate Georgia as a puppet state on Russia's southern flank, though not altogether successfully as two regions, Abkhazia (with access

to the Black Sea coast) and South Ossetia remain affiliated to Russia, and have recently agreed to further integration. Here the BBC tried to make it look as if, in 2008, Russia had attacked Georgia and not the other way round.

Western Interference

Western 'cold war' interference in Ukrainian politics has been going on since about 1949. More recent efforts have entailed the spending of an alleged \$5bn since about 1990, much of this on creating NGOs and in interfering in public affairs. We need to look carefully at this situation. Mainstream press coverage of events since the 'revolution' or rather 'putsch' of last year, has been in thrall to a western agenda, parroting the US State Department's line, and taking little or no account of the views of those on the ground. They were either marginalising or demonizing the people of East Ukraine, suggesting that they were 'puppets'.

My impression was that the rising was a spontaneous working class movement, fully aware of the danger to their livelihoods of Kiev rejecting Yanukovich's deal with Russia, which accounts for 70% of their economy. However, even the BBC admitted on its website that some of the Russian volunteers were genuine, like those in the Spanish Civil War. There is little or no evidence of large-scale Russian involvement apart from humanitarian support.

If you look closely at the footage of the Maidan riot, it's obvious that there has been a great deal of outside and support and money behind it. At first, there were young, idealistic people protesting against the alleged corruption of the Yanukovich government, but they were soon joined by violent elements including overt fascists and freelance snipers firing on both demonstrators and police. The idealists are now thoroughly disillusioned as there is neither free speech nor democracy, just oligarchy and extreme nationalism.

There has been no real investigation of any of the crimes committed. Kiev continues to connive with western agencies to suppress information on the fate of flight MH17. Extremists with little electoral support such as Dimitri Yarosh of Right Sector have forced their way into power.

Is Ukraine a Failed State?

I did attend a solidarity meeting on behalf of the workers of the Donbass last year. RT correspondent Graham Philips, who was there, has recently said that no-one he has met here supports Ukraine. He now regards it as a failed state. However at the Farnborough Air Show, from which Russia was largely excluded, I met a Ukrainian nationalist at the Ukraine stand and a thick English Poroshenko fan taken in by the propaganda.

Kiev has never negotiated in good faith with the separatists and has inserted a 'poison pill' into the Minsk2 agreement, which effectively demands surrender before real negotiations can begin -- a guarantee of continued conflict. Violations of the cease fire by Kiev continue, and there has recently been a spate of murders of members of the deposed government and of journalists.

- It is time to abandon the US State Department. and NATO mission and to stop sending arms and US and UK military advisers to assist not just the Ukrainian

army but armed groups, who are not merely *playing* at being neo-nazis. (They are planning a celebration of last year's Odessa massacre, and there is video footage of an opponent being crucified and set on fire.)

- Take note of OSCE cease-fire monitoring, and start serious negotiations on partition.
- Lift sanctions against Russia.
- Stop demonising Putin, who has shown remarkable forbearance to a stream of insults. This is unwise, as the West depends on technical cooperation with Russia, particularly in the aerospace field.

A group of Ukrainian WW2 veterans has sent an impassioned letter to Angela Merkel asking her to condemn the rise of fascism in Ukraine. The Simon Wiesenthal Institute has also expressed concern. Finally, I hope readers will keep track of the ongoing situation using alternative media sources.

Note. *An alternative point of view on these events is awaited from the other panellist, Vlaho Kojakovic.* [Ed.]

A WORLD WITHOUT WAR

Derek Gregory

A contribution to the Ethical Society's panel on modern wars, 29 March 2015

Why do people fight at times in our lives? What is it that interrupts our peaceful living? Could it be a hunger for power and prestige by a dominant individual(s) of one tribe or nation over another, or indeed others? Or a drive by an elite(s) to conquer others for the purpose of enslavement and provision of a high quality of life for the conquerors? Or an expanding population wanting more land for its ever greater numbers of young entering into the world?

One way [to prevent war], in theory at least, is to develop a democratically agreed national and/or international system of birth control and the subsequent education of the young accordingly. Not easy, to say the least; probably almost impossible. If so, nature alone may eventually deal with the matter in an unpleasant way. However, that remains to be seen.

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

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

SANTAYANA AS SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PHILOSOPHER

Tom Rubens

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 12 April 2015

A talk on Santayana, is, I think, timely. For many years he's suffered undeserved neglect in Britain; he doesn't - as I believe he should - occupy a major place on university philosophy courses, or in the philosophy section of bookshops and libraries. The neglect is curious in view of the fact that in the earlier part of the 20th century he was widely read, and comparable to Russell and Dewey in his impact on the philosophical scene. The influence of these two thinkers has undergone nothing like the reduction that Santayana's has.

Another reason to wonder at the inattention to him is that his range as a philosopher is very wide, covering metaphysics, ethics, the arts and sciences, and social and cultural issues. He's the author of 28 books, published between the years 1896 and 1951: a span with few equals. Also, his writing style is arguably one of the finest in the entire history of philosophy. According to Corliss Lamont, for example, he 'writes philosophy more beautifully than any other thinker since Plato.' His language possesses classic clarity and eloquent economy virtues by no means universal among philosophers, particularly modern ones. This, one would think, should have secured him lasting appeal.

Whatever the reasons for the disregard, a revival of interest is long overdue. It may even be on the way. We've seen such revival in recent decades in the cases of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, philosophers with whom Santayana has quite a lot in common. Perhaps the momentum created by these developments will extend to him as well. I've already referred to his range as a thinker. The breadth and sweep of his writing creates a problem of selection, and I've decided to concentrate on his social and cultural philosophy. But before discussing this, something needs to be said about his basic ontological position, because it's on this that all his other perspectives rest.

Santayana is an Epiphenomenalist

Santayana is an atheist, an evolutionist and, crucially, a materialist. He regards matter as the fundamental reality in the universe, and mind as a product of matter. Mental events are always grounded in material ones. He distinguishes his materialism from the kind which regards matter as the sole reality. Mind, he insists, is as much a fact as matter but is, again, wholly dependent on the latter. As he puts it:

That matter is capable of eliciting feeling and thought follows necessarily from the principle that matter is the only *substance*, *power* or *agency* in the universe: and this, not that matter is the only *reality*, is the first principle of materialism. ¹

Hence matter, while not the only reality, is the only entity that causes things to happen ("the only... power or agency") This view places mind in an essentially passive role. Mental happenings are always effects, never causes. Mind is therefore an epiphenomenon – a by-product- of physical processes in the brain. Santayana conveys his view with particular vividness in the following:

Is it the mind that controls the bewildered body and points out the way to physical habits uncertain of their affinities? Or is it not much rather an automatic inward machinery that executes the marvellous work, while the mind catches here and there some glimpse of the operation, now with delight and adhesion, now with impotent rebellion? ²

As a materialist, Santayana sees himself as part of a broad tradition that includes Democritus, Lucretius, Spinoza and Darwin.

Santayana's Social and Cultural Philosophy

I'll begin with his views on religion. His atheism, evolutionism and materialism inevitably shape his attitude toward supernaturalistic styles of thought, but that attitude is by no means as negative as one might expect. Santayana is in fact quite accommodating toward religion. In this, he's like Schopenhauer, though not Nietzsche or some other prominent atheists such as Marx, Russell or Freud. In seeing religious thought as flowing from the source of all thought – the material human animal – he regards it as something to be studied with the same kind of interest and respect accorded to any major human project. For Santayana, as for Schopenhauer, religion is coupled with great art and poetry, and it's highly significant that one of his books is entitled *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*. Religious thought, quite as much as the poetry with which it is entwined, is an index of human sensitivity, imagination and emotional capacity- indeed, at its best, an index of genius.

However, as a psychologist of the religious mentality, Santayana is careful to differentiate between the fruits of that mentality and its origins. He follows Feuerbach in arguing that the whole conception of God or gods results from man's tendency to project from himself, to locate outside himself the ideals and values which he actually originated. Deity, something super-human, then becomes their source and champion. Santayana may have Feuerbach in mind when he writes:

what men attribute to God is nothing but the ideal they value and grope for themselves, and ... the commandments, mythically said to come from the Most High, flow in fact from common reason and local experience.³

Also, he concurs with Lucretius in regarding the emotion of fear as a fundamental factor in the formation of God-ideas. This, however, doesn't lessen his respect for religion as a cultural creation; and his complex, many-sided attitude comes across when he asserts:

'That fear first created the gods is about as true as anything so brief could be on so great a subject.'⁴

What, then, has religion's essential contribution been to human progress? In answering this question, Santayana separates the ontological from the ethical aspects of religious thought, and examines their respective truth-claims. Religion has erred when it has tried to perform the function of science and propounded doctrines about the origin and nature of the universe. In this area, its tenets, usually dogmatic, have impeded the development of true science. Its ontological claims, then, have no scientific value. On the other hand religion

does make a valid truth-claim in the sphere of ethics. This validity lies in its 'symbolic rendering of that moral experience which it springs out of and which it seeks to elucidate.'⁵ Through symbols, metaphors, parables and allegories, religion has presented the facts about our ethical emotions and our ethical interaction with each other. It has conveyed the lessons of experience; and so both stimulated and educated our moral nature.

But, of course, for the atheist Santayana, religion must now hand over that role to secular agencies. The removal of moral education from the religions sphere involves a full acceptance of science, plus a change of focus for the feeling of reverence which religion has traditionally channelled in a direction away from man, nature and the world. That feeling must now be focused on nature -which, for Santayana, means on matter, its powers and processes. He writes:

When the heart is bent on the truth, when prudence and the love of prosperity dominate the will, science must insensibly supplant divination, and reverence must be transferred from traditional sanctities to the naked power at work in nature, sanctioning worldly wisdom and hygienic virtue rather than the maxims of zealots or the dreams of saints. God then becomes a poetic symbol for the material tenderness and the paternal strictness of this wonderful world.'⁶

Matter's Creative Dynamic

We're back, then, to the basis of Santayana's philosophy - materialism; and ethics is seen as ministering to matter's creative dynamic. This outlook places Santayana firmly in the camp of evolutionary ethics, where he joins, among others, Nietzsche, Spencer, Russell and Dewey.

His evolutionary standpoint in ethics is germane to his social philosophy. Social ideals, like religious ones, express evolved biological processes and natural functions. The link between the natural and the ideal is emphasised when he says: 'no natural function is incapable, in its free exercise, of evolving some ideal and finding justification'.⁷

Santayana's social outlook is many-faceted, and is perhaps most completely expressed in *Reason in Society*, a book from which all my subsequent quotations, unless otherwise stated, will come. Having affirmed the animal basis of human society, he discusses individual and communal values, aristocracy and democracy, government and industry. All in all, the ideas in this book are among the most insightful in modern social thought, and are certainly as worthy of our attention now as they were when first published in 1905.

Let's begin with his treatment of individual and communal values. He strikes a fine balance between concern for the individual sphere - for privacy, novelty and experiment, and concern for the public sphere - for cultural centrality and collective heritage. On the side of the individual, he declares:

Individualism is in one sense the only possible ideal; for whatever social order may be most valuable can be valuable only for its effect on conscious individuals. ... It would be a gross and pedantic superstition to venerate any form of society in itself, apart from the safety, breadth or sweetness which it lent to individual happiness.

In fact, he regards a highly developed individualism as the hallmark of a civilised society, and recognises, with Hegel, that increase in personal freedom has been one of the most significant features of modern history. Barbarous societies, by contrast, are essentially uniform; they crudely subordinate the individual to the status quo, and prohibit questioning of it. The more civilised a society becomes, the more the whole exists for the sake of the parts. In these arguments, we find a defence of the generally liberal course that Western society has taken since the Renaissance, particularly with regard to the decline of patriarchal authority in the family.

Santayana feels that a full personal development directly contributes to society. It enriches the social scene and satisfies 'the need men have of distinction' because it fires the imagination. Hence the vital importance of genius and any extraordinary human quality. Santayana avers:

There is no greater stupidity or meanness than to take uniformity for an ideal, as if it were not a benefit and a joy to a man, being what he is, to know that many are, have been and will be better than he. Grant that no one is positively degraded by the great man's greatness, and it follows that everyone is exalted by it. Beauty, genius and holiness ... radiate their virtue and make the world in which they exist a better and more joyful place to live in.

Thus the pursuit of high reputation and lasting fame is perfectly valid; and Santayana gives examples of cultures which in his view encouraged this pursuit: ancient Greece and Rome, Renaissance Italy and Elizabethan England. He also argues that a high level...of individual diversity precludes the growth of a collectivist mentality which is over-intense. He perceives the inhumanity of societies, whether religious or secular, which are imbued with an indoctrinated virtue. This kind of virtue, he says, can turn easily to group-fanaticism and brutal intolerance. I would only add that the 20th century has provided more than enough examples of this. Moral and ideological tyrannies with appalling consequences range from Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia to Pol Pot's Kampuchea and the Ayatollah 's Iran.

Meaningful Friendship

Another aspect of his interest in the individual sphere is his concern with friendship. He sees meaningful friendship as one of the finest achievements of private life, and as a definitive feature of a liberal society. The feelings involved in friendship are, says Santayana, much more specific than those of comradeship in enforced circumstances, or of general social sympathy. They go out to 'those among our fellow-men who share our special haunts and habitats'. And they differ from those of sexual love because they're free of the latter's tendency toward possessiveness and anxiety. The friend accepts what the other chooses to offer 'and the rest he leaves in peace ... for the society of friends is free'.

Profound friendship always comprises sensuous attachment to a person and spiritual attachment to the ideals that person holds. As Santayana puts it, in words perhaps as beautiful as any ever written on the subject: '**Friendship might thus be called ideal sympathy refracted by a human medium, or ... sensuous affinity colouring a spiritual light.**'

Interestingly, he expresses the view that modern society is less conducive to prolonged friendship than that, say, ancient Athens, where personal life, for men anyway, retained a public dimension for a lot longer than it does now. There was the forum, the palaestra, the camp, the theatre and the temple: all venues for forming and maintaining friendships well into one's mature years. In modern society, on the other hand, the claims of work, family and impersonal political allegiances reduce the space and opportunity for enjoying friendship to the full. Food for thought!

Loyalty to One's Entire Civilisation

Turning now from the private to the public sphere, Santayana focuses on the fund of cultural achievements to which the individual may contribute. He sees every outstanding attainment as an addition to the legacy which society as a whole bequeaths to each new generation. Hence the circumspect person 'will perceive that what deserves his loyalty is the entire civilisation to which he owes his spiritual life and into which that life will presently flow back, with whatever new elements he may have added.' That civilisation is the focus where all individuality converges, where general experience, memories and ideals are shared; and where each person becomes integrated without violation of his idiosyncrasies. Civilisation's continuum offers a home to all; and for an atheist like Santayana, that continuum replaces religion as the main bulwark against social fragmentation and personal loneliness.

The need to avoid fragmentation is pivotal in Santayana, because he recognises that modern industrial and commercial society have, by their nature, an atomising tendency. The social and economic conditions of modern times are largely the product of the liberalism of the 18th and 19th centuries. While, as we have seen, Santayana admires and defends that liberalism on most counts, he's also aware of its negative side: its emphasis on economic competition and its potential for producing a general selfishness:

It was the vice of liberalism to believe that common interests covered nothing but the sum of those objects which each individual might pursue alone; whereby science, religion, art, language ... would cease to be matters of public concern and would appeal to the individual merely as instruments.

Against such a belief, the sense of social heritage is a safeguard. It:

ennobles a man not so much because it nerves him to work or to die, which the basest passions may also do, but because it associates him, in working or dying, with an immortal and friendly companion, the spirit of his race. This he received from his ancestors, tempered by their achievements, and may transmit to posterity qualified by his own.

Santayana then considers the question of how this sense could be actively promoted at the political level. His general concern to link culture with political leadership places him in a philosophical tradition which goes back to Plato, and which includes, nearer his own time, Carlyle and Nietzsche. It's a concern which is still valid today, given the fact that modern governments see their main role as supervising economic systems: a role that far outweighs any interest they may have in emphasising and preserving cultural traditions.

Santayana recommends what he calls ‘timocracy’: government by men of merit in whom the benefits of civilisation have been integrated:

The same abilities which raised these men to eminence would enable them to apprehend ideal things and to employ material resources for the common advantage. They would ... cultivate the arts and sciences, provide for government and all public resources.

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Note: This article will be concluded in the July *Ethical Record*.

WHAT ARE PROFESSIONAL ETHICS?

John Dowdle FRSA, CHES

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 10 May 2015

The origins of this talk lie in a presentation entitled *The Future of Conway Hall Ethical Society – Direction or Drift?* to the Ethical Society on 15 March 2015 (subsequently printed in the April 2015 edition of the *Ethical Record*), in which two principal questions were raised:-

What is meant by ‘Ethical’

What should an Ethical Society properly do?

In answer to the second question, Conway Hall Ethical Society (CHES) – as a nationally unique organisation – everything it has done to date is fine and should be wholly supported. Is our scale of activity sufficient for a modern ongoing ethical society? I suggest the answer is “No”.

As part of the future activities of CHES, I suggested an Ethical Committee be formed by CHES Members, with a principal responsibility to examine periodically the ethical standards of other UK organisations 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. I believe strongly in such a role for Conway Hall Ethical Society, as it enables our principles and values to be communicated to a much wider audience of influential groups and individuals in future.

I concluded by suggesting this topic be included in one of the Sunday morning discussion and talk activities of Conway Hall Ethical Society in the near future. I was contacted by Professor Evan Parker to make a suitable Sunday morning presentation on the topic of Professional Ethics and how the Ethical Society could fulfil a role in acting as a custodian of ethical values and also act as an overseer of the ethical codes and standards of professional organisations.

At a time when senior British politicians (Rifkind, Straw *et. al.*) have had to step down after exposure by undercover journalists, and former teachers and school administrators in Atlanta, Georgia have been jailed for up to seven years in a test cheating scandal, I suggested this is a timely moment to ask the question “What are Professional Ethics?”

What do we mean by ethics and what are professional ethics? To answer these questions, I will consider case studies of the General Pharmaceutical Council and a similar body. What do we learn from these case studies and should there be a quasi-professional ethical watchdog in Britain? To consider what is meant by ethics, the following changingminds.org web site entry is useful:-

Values

Values are rules by which we make decisions about right and wrong, should and shouldn't, good and bad. They tell us which are more or less important, which is useful when we have to trade off meeting one value over another. Dictionary.com defines values as: beliefs of a person or social group in which they have an emotional investment (either for or against something); “s/he has very conservative values”

Morals

Morals have a greater social element than values and tend to have a very broad acceptance. Morals are far more about good and bad than other values. We judge others more strongly on morals than values. A person can be described as immoral, yet there is no word for them not having values. Dictionary.com defines morals as motivation based on ideas of right and wrong.

Ethics

You can have professional ethics, but seldom hear about professional morals. Ethics tend to be codified into a formal system or set of rules which are explicitly adopted by a group of people. Thus you have medical ethics. Ethics are thus internally defined and adopted, whilst morals tend to be externally imposed on other people.

Dictionary.com further defines ethics as: A theory or a system of moral values: “An ethic of service is at war with a craving for gain”; *The rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession.* (Emphasis added) [1]

Different aspects of ethics (*e.g.* ethics, meta-ethics and applied ethics) were not the principal purpose of the talk. That approach requires talks by professional philosophers. I suggested that lecturers from the London School of Philosophy at Conway Hall should be invited to provide talks on Ethics, Meta-Ethics and Applied Ethics to CHES members on a regular basis.

Let us now turn to the question ‘What are professional ethics?’ The following definition is by Professor Ruth Chadwick from a section on Professional Ethics, published in the Routledge *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998) edited by E. Craig:-

“Professional ethics concerns the moral issues that arise because of the specialist knowledge that professionals attain, and how the use of this knowledge should be governed when providing a service to the public.”

Some Case Studies

The General Pharmaceutical Council is the regulator for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and registered pharmacy premises in England, Scotland and Wales. In September 2010, they issued a “*Guidance on the provision of pharmacy services affected by religious and moral beliefs*” document, in which they stated “This document provides guidance on standard 3.4 of the standards of conduct, ethics and performance. **You must make sure that if your religious or moral beliefs prevent you from providing a service, you tell the relevant people or authorities and refer patients and the public to other providers.**” (Emphasis added) [2]

They also issued supplementary guidance on Emergency Hormonal Contraception and Routine Hormonal Contraception laying out conditions under which pharmacists could *not* dispense contraceptive or other medications, whether against prescription or over the counter.

In Canada, medical doctors refusing to prescribe birth control or other medical services because of personal values could face possible disciplinary actions. Moral or religious convictions of a doctor cannot impede a patient’s access to care, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario voted 21-3, supporting an updated Professional and Human Rights policy. The Canada Supreme Court has legalized doctor-hastened dying from February 2016. [3]

As seen in the examples above – UK General Pharmaceutical Council and College of Physicians & Surgeons of Ontario – they have contradictory ethical codes of conduct. I believe we – as an ethical society – should be lobbying organisations like the General Pharmaceutical Council to update their ethical policies too.

Considering just two sets of professional codes of ethics and conduct raises the question “*Is there a role for the Ethical Society in Professional Ethics?*” My answer is “Yes”.

We should over-view and review the established practices and outcomes of professional, public sector and commercial organisations to assess whether or not they and their members are truly adhering to their own ethical standards and codes of conduct. This could lead to the creation of a new societal role of Ethical Auditor, similar to the role of financial auditing carried out by chartered accountants for major companies and corporations in the UK and world-wide.

We should work with organisations, such as the American Ethical Union (<http://aeu.org>) International Humanist and Ethical Union (<http://iheu.org>) and – possibly – the British Society for Ethical Theory (<http://www.bset.org.uk>) to promote the establishment and maintenance of professional ethics in professional and public life in Britain today.

In a recent survey of public attitudes towards conduct in public life 2014 (published in March 2015), their overall findings were that on the whole, respondents had fairly negative views about the standards of conduct of people in public life: few respondents thought the standards of conduct of those in public life were high; more respondents thought standards had got worse in recent years; most were not confident the authorities are committed to upholding standards in public life; most believed wrongdoing would not be uncovered or punished by the authorities.

Opinions about these topics were more negative than those found in any of the Committee's biennial surveys of public attitudes (2004-2014) towards conduct in public life. [4]

Public Scandals

There has never been a more relevant time for a British organisation which is concerned about professional ethics and maintenance of high ethical standards in British professional public life. Recently, Members of Parliament from both Houses were enmeshed in scandal over claiming of expenses. Peers' attendance allowances were called into question when disgraced peer Lord Hanningfield claimed £300 for 20 minutes attendance. [5]

We have witnessed a series of public scandals, involving sexual abuse of children in all areas of our country, including Wales, Northern Ireland and Jersey. This led the Home Secretary to set up the Goddard Inquiry, which – I believe – we should follow very closely as an ethical society. We have also recently witnessed scandal after scandal involving show business 'celebrities'.

On the corporate level, revelations about banking operations involving tax evasion schemes, LIBOR fixing and foreign currency fixing rates have rightly raised questions over the extent to which voluntary corporate compliance policies and HMRC taxation policies are effective.

Within the last few weeks, we have witnessed senior FIFA officials being arrested to face charges of corruption, fraud, racketeering and money laundering in the 'beautiful' game. Former Olympic champions have been forced to return their medals after being positively tested for performance enhancing drugs, as has former Tour de France champion Laurence Armstrong. It is totally vital to our societal cohesion that we insist on professional and other groups across our society adhering to properly established codes of ethical standards and conduct.

World Happiness

Statements published for the World Happiness Report 2015 included the following:- 'Countries seem to differ markedly and persistently in the average prevalence of pro-social behavior. Such persistent differences are observed both in the replies of individuals in surveys and in the observed practices of voluntarism, tax evasion, public-sector corruption, and other contexts of social dilemmas. These persistent differences matter enormously, since countries with high social capital – meaning the observed tendencies towards pro-sociality – tend to have greater happiness and development performance through channels we have already described.' (p. 156)

‘...professions should establish codes of ethics that emphasize pro-sociality. [The] modern banking sector currently lacks such a code of conduct. This was made vivid by the claim by Goldman Sachs after the 2008 financial crisis that it was justified in selling toxic securities to clients because those clients were “sophisticated” and therefore should have protected themselves against bad investment decisions. In other words, said Goldman, its counterparties are on their own, without any obligation by Goldman to disclose the truth about the securities it marketed. The assumption is pure egoism in the pursuit of profits. Ironically, the credit markets are named after the Latin root “credere,” to trust.’ (Page162)

‘We are at an early stage of testing effective approaches to building social trust and prosocial behavior, especially in societies riven by distrust, corruption, and anti-social behavior. As this challenge is of paramount importance for achieving sustainable development and a high level of well-being, we intend to pursue this challenge of building social capital in future editions of the *World Happiness Report*.’ (Page 163)

It should be noted that the UK holds only 21st place (out of 158) in the Ranking of Happiness 2012-2014 (Part 1) table and that the UK holds only 70th place in the Changes in Happiness from 2005-2007 to 2012-2014 (Part 1) table. [6] These facts suggest that the UK is not performing too well with regard to positive social capital formation due to an underlying flaw in the ethical standards being applied and operated here.

If we want to live in freedom in a country under the rule of law, then we have a duty to ensure that everyone – including those in positions of power and prestige in the power elite structures of our country – are held to account under a clearly established set of ethical codes of conduct. As a descendant of the South Place Ethical Society, this organisation participated successfully in past campaigns for reforms. It joined a coalition for Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws in 1912 and also worked for secular education, with an additional emphasis on the development of Moral Education. Ethical members joined the Peace Society set up by freethinkers before the Great War, calling for no conscription and opposition to military training in schools. More women were involved in the Ethical Union than in the Secular movement and there was support for the suffragettes.

The Ethical Societies’ movement promoted penal reform and neighbourhood community work, along with assisting the women’s movement and drawing attention to racial, colonial and international problems by initiating and supporting effective action. Is it right that we fail to follow-up on this truly splendid historical tradition of ethicism?

A New Role for our Ethical Society?

I propose we consider establishing a role for our Ethical Society at Conway Hall to act as a guardian of professional ethical values, initially in Britain. Our Ethical Society could chart a course for ethics and ethicism in Britain, and contribute substantially towards the achievement of a more ethical way of life in our country to the benefit of many future generations to come.

There are already discussions taking place as to how the Ethical Society could promote the study, research and promotion of Ethics and Public Policy values. While this approach seems to resonate more with younger persons with an interest in ethics, it is to be hoped that older members too will be supportive of this new role for our future activities as an ethical society.

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Long-Time CHES Member

TOM RUBENS

has just published a **NOVEL** entitled
“MIXED PICTURE.”

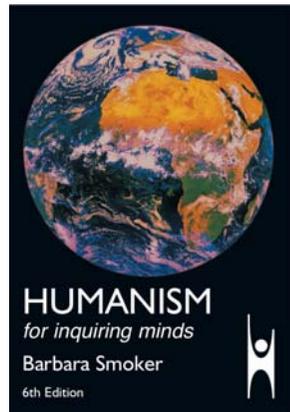
The publisher is Austin McCauley. The book is available on Kindle, at £3.00. Tom Rubens has an author page on www.authorcentral.amazon.com where information about all his published books can be found.

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VIEWPOINTS

William Lane Craig's 8 Reasons for God - Refuted

Norman Bacrac's talk to CHES on 19 April 2015, on the subject of the theology of William Lane Craig (see 'ER', May 2015, p 10), was in the best traditions of the Society. It continued our long-standing practice of combatting those theological arguments which are weak and specious; and it did so by the perennially valid methods of referring to the latest findings in science and to the logical implications of those findings. This practice has distinguished the Society right from when it became an openly secularist organisation in the c19; and, since that time, there have been many notable examples, at our meetings and in our journal literature, of attack on theological positions of philosophically dubious character. Of these attacks, Norman's is the most recent instance.

Such work must continue. At present in Britain, approx. 49% of the population are religious believers, and their beliefs are almost entirely of a theistic kind. Hence plenty of effort is still required to critique theological postulates— with the precision shown by Norman, and without concern for either (so-called) political correctness or the psychological consequences on believers of being subjected to unflinching rigorous reasoning.

Tom Rubens, London N4.

The Late Charles Kennedy

Charles Kennedy, former leader of the Liberal Democrats, should be particularly remembered for his forthright opposition to Tony Blair's going along with G W Bush in invading Iraq in 2003. The newsreels record his vehement speech at the vast (but ineffective) anti-war rally at Hyde Park, comparing the imminent attack on Iraq to the UK's disastrous Suez invasion in 1956.

Jennifer R. Jeynes - Hampstead

ESSAY - THE FELICIFIC PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

"There was no evidence for the existence of God other than the human longing that it should be so." – Martin Amis

Robert Ilson

Down through the ages, Mighty Minds have offered various proofs of the existence of God – whilst other Mighty Minds have tried to confute them. Whatever their truth value and however magnificent they may be, it is doubtful whether such arguments have ever converted anyone. Can the idea of an Unmoved Mover cause a Damascene conversion? Is anyone brought to the altar by the notion of a Being so perfect that its essence entails its existence? Such arguments may be supreme works of art but they cannot dry one's tears. Their function is rather to provide those who already believe with assurance that they have not lost their minds.

Nevertheless, behind and beneath such proofs there is another, shared by the most learned Doctors of the Church and the humblest of the faithful. It is so pervasive that it need not be defended – because it is never attacked. It is felt rather than understood. It is The Felicific Proof of the Existence of God: It would be nice if God existed; therefore God exists. For those in search of a Hint of Eastern Promise,

an alternative version runs: It would be nice if Reincarnation existed; therefore Reincarnation exists.

The Felicific Proof works elsewhere, too. A childish version is that Father Christmas exists because it would be nice if he did. Adults put away such childish things. But they can do so because Father Christmas is a Transitional Object: a security blanket that can be discarded because there is something bigger and better to fall back on: God, the Rock of Ages.

Far be it from me to quibble about something that has been so important for so many for so long – and that I would like nothing better than to cling to myself. But, perversely perhaps, I feel a need to examine it. The first step in that investigation is to formulate The Felicific Proof explicitly. That has been enough for me, at least, to reject it. “For shame!” I hear myself saying, “To have succumbed to a notion so unworthy!” But, once made conscious, the Felicific Proof cries out for closer analysis.

The Felicific Proof presupposes that God is in fact nice; that is, benevolent. But would it really be so nice if God existed? Yes – if we could be sure of his support. But how can we know that when we cry “God for Harry, England and St George!” God will hearken unto us rather than unto our German opposite numbers shouting “Gott Mit Uns!”? [God is with us]

The Dark Night of the Soul

What if we strive to do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with our God — only to fall prey to pain and loss? The theological answer is straightforward: What is good is down to God; what is bad is down to us. Well, by contrast I am used to the sort of academic book whose author in its Forward thanks his colleagues for all their good advice but takes full responsibility for any residual mistakes. God may be Master of the Universe but he’d never get tenure.

More seriously, however, is the Dark Night of the Soul that those experience whose God has let them down. It’s like a love affair gone wrong, only worse. Such a dashed hope can help to veer to The Dark Side an ex-seminarian like J. V. Stalin or a one-time apprentice Buddhist monk like Pol Pot.

Can we even be confident that God plays by his own rules? To be sure, Jesus enjoined us to Love Our Enemies. But does he love his? After all, that very same Jesus also said: **Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels ...** (Matthew 25: 41). That’s not nice at all, is it? Indeed, is the Felicific Proof sufficient to assure us that at the hour of our death we shall be numbered with the Saints rather than with the Sinners? Or will to our terminal agony be added the terror of an uncertain after-life?

Perhaps the lesson is that I shouldn’t think about the Felicific Proof. But once I start I find it hard to stop. And the more I think about it the flimsier its solace becomes. So what is to be done when the native hue of resolution is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought? Who knows? All I can suggest – tentatively – is that though suffering is nasty its clear-eyed contemplation need not be. Nor need be dismissed our puny human efforts to relieve it. In other words: wisdom and compassion may still be available even when the Felicific Proof has lost its charm.

BEES AND PLANET UNDER THREAT

Luke Dixon

www.urbanbeekeeping.co.uk

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 30 May 2015

From his shop at No. 326 Holborn, a stone's throw from Conway Hall, Daniel Wildman sold both bees and hives. The bees were encouraged to build comb and store honey in bottles and bell jars on the top of his hives. Curious to know where his urban bees foraged for honey, Wildman would dust them with flour as they emerged from his Holborn hives and tracked them as far as Hampstead. Wildman also gave bee shows as far away as Germany. His book *A complete guide for the management of bees*, published in 1773, was a best seller, running to numerous editions and being published in French and Italian editions on the continent.

Londoners have always kept bees. There has been an association for beekeepers in the city since 1883. A century ago there were an estimated one million managed colonies of bees in Britain. Now the figure is a quarter of that but is growing again. It has been the decline of the honey bee and our increasing awareness of our dependency on it that has been in large part responsible for the growing twenty-first century increase in interest in bees and beekeeping. As England became urbanised bees became fewer. Before the industrial revolution some think that every second or third dwelling had a bee hive. As the cities encroached on the countryside, many of those hives disappeared. Others just moved upwards onto roofs.

Today the plight of the honey bee is well known and we are all more aware of how dependent we humans are on them for pollinating much of our food. Support for urban beekeepers could not be stronger. About a third of all the food we eat and drink is the result of pollination by honey bees and without them our diets would be much the poorer. Einstein is reputed to have said that if the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe then man would only have four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination....no more human-kind!

Some think that Einstein's quote is apocryphal; whatever its origins it is a stark reminder of just how dependent we are on honey bees for the pollination of so much of what we eat and drink. Something like a third of all we consume is reliant on honey bee pollination. Examples of crops pollinated by bees include: Allspice, Almonds, Artichoke, Asparagus, Avocado, Blackberries, Blueberries, Broccoli, Brussel sprouts, Cabbage, Cacao, Cantaloupe, Caraway, Cardamom, Cashew, Cauliflower, Celery, Celery, Chicory, Chives, Cinnamon, Citrus, Coriander, Cranberries, Cucumbers, Currants... and that's just A - C.

Bees and Flowers Evolved Together

Bees have been on our planet for something like 130 million years; as long as the first flowering plants. Flowering plants are dependent on flying insects for pollination and flying insects are dependent on the nectar and pollen in flowers for food, so the two must have evolved side by side. It was a long while before man came along and for most of those 130 million years bees lived without humans stealing their honey. The first hominids – the *homo* species -- came

along about two and a half million years ago. Humans as we know them, *Homo sapiens*, appeared about 160,000 years ago. For thousands of years humans did not think to ‘keep’ bees, but left them in the wild, raiding nests for honey and wax.

On the wall of a cave in southern Spain is a painting. It shows a figure climbing to a bees’ nest and stealing honey. It was painted perhaps 3,000 years ago and we will never know why or who by. It is the earliest image we have of human and honey bee. Sometime between the appearance of man and that image being painted onto the wall of the Spanish cave, humans realised the taste and energy giving properties of honey. They may also have discovered the wonderful light that could be made from the burning of beeswax. Our Spaniard is not keeping bees but climbing high into a tree to retrieve honey and wax from a wild nest. In some parts of the world that is still the way in which honey is taken and bees are not kept but left to live wild as they have always done.



3,000 year old cave painting

In the wild, bees live in dark voids, usually empty spaces inside dead trees, sometimes in caves or mountain clefts. They are creatures of the dark, the queen in the deepest darkest space of all, the tens of thousands of workers around her communicating not by sight but by smell, a complexity of pheromones that tell the colony all they need to know and control all that they do.

Eventually Bees Were ‘Kept’

It was all very well climbing high into trees and up cliffs and crevices but what if the bees could be kept somewhere closer to home and contained in something from which the honey and wax could easily be extracted. Eventually humans devised ways to keep bees, breed them, and harvest wax and honey as it was needed. The first hives replicated the bees’ homes in the wild, carved out of felled tree trunks and placed horizontally or vertically with lids or doors for easy access to the colonies within.

There are other early images of man and bee and archaeological discoveries of ancient bee hives. Pictures of hives made of clay can be found in tombs of the Pharaohs. They are still used in the Middle East. Other cultures wove their hives from straw or wicker. Called *skeps* they are like upside down wastepaper baskets with a small hole for the bees to come in and out of. You can still find them in

some parts of Europe where they have to be brought indoors or stored in a brick 'bole', a kind of open air cupboard, over cold winters. Different designs of hive were made in different parts of the world, using the materials to hand and adapted to different climates. All these simple hives have a major disadvantage – the colonies of bees have to be destroyed in whole or part to extract their contents.

It was an American pastor, the Rev. Lorenzo Langstroth, in Massachusetts in 1851, who came up with a solution. Bees, he noticed, always build their comb in vertical sheets and always with just enough space between them for the bees to pass one another on facing sheets of comb without knocking each other off. This is the crucial 'bee space'. Too much space between the combs and the bees will fill it with wax, too little and the bees will not be able to work. If the parts of a hive could be kept between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch (6 mm and 9 mm) apart, the bees would be able to work and would not join them together with bits of comb or sticky *propolis*.

Langstroth realised that if the bees could be persuaded to build their comb on moveable wooden frames that could be kept in boxes piled on each other and removed at will without destroying the nest, it would then be possible to inspect the bees, remove frames and extract honey, add extra boxes of frames to encourage honey production and so on, all without harming the colony. The story goes that Langstroth experimented with an old champagne crate and that it was the size of the crate that dictated the size of his frames. Whether true or not, Langstroth created the first modern bee hive and all those made since have been constructed on his principles.

The Hive Population

A hive can contain up to 70,000 bees in midsummer. There is 1 queen, 250 drones, 20,000 female foragers, 30,000 female house-bees, 5,000 to 7,000 eggs, 7,000-11,000 larvae being fed and 16,000 to 24,000 larvae developing into adults in sealed cells. The queen makes a mating flight during her early life during which she stores the sperm from up to 20 drones. Drones that mate with her die in the act. She can store the sperm for up to 5 years. Bees are busy outside of the hive from the onset of warm spring weather until the beginning of autumn. While flowers are in bloom they will collect nectar and make it into honey which they store in the hive to live on over the winter months. A worker honeybee in summer lives only 6 to 8 weeks from the time she hatches as an adult bee. Before that, it takes just 3 weeks for her to develop from an egg. During the winter the bees rarely leave the hive but cluster together to keep warm. Winter bees live for 6 months and will occasionally go outside to defecate in order to keep the hive clean.

Honey in its natural state can be in two physical states, clear (runny) or crystalline (set). When removed from the hive in late summer, it is warm, runny and clear. Once extracted some honey will crystallize (or set) within days, most naturally will not set for many weeks or months. Because of its antiseptic properties, during the First World War honey was used to dress soldiers' wounds. In the Second World War it was used until penicillin became available. Honey is still widely used in UK hospitals for treating open sores and ulcers.

To collect 450 grams of honey a bee might have to fly a distance equivalent to twice round the world. This is likely to involve more than 10,000 flower visits on perhaps 500 foraging trips. In a single collecting trip, a worker will visit between 50 and 100 flowers and return to the hive carrying over half her weight in pollen and nectar. Honey is stored on frames of wax inside the boxes of the hive. It is removed usually just once a year at the end of August and strained and bottled. A jar of honey weighs 454 grammes and a bee can carry about 0.04 grammes of nectar. But nectar is only about 40% sugar and honey needs to be about 80% sugar so the bee actually only carries about 0.02 grammes of honey on each trip. 22,700 bees are required to fill a single jar of honey.

This sounds impressive but of course a colony of bees doesn't just make one jar of honey. Over the year the queen will produce between 100,000 and 200,000 bees that will each spend between 10 and 20 days collecting nectar. Bees continually use up their honey as fuel, primarily to keep the brood warm. So at any given time there may only be between 10 and 20kg of honey in the hive.



A hive at Conway Hall

The Mayor of London and the GLA are advocating the support of increased beekeeping in London. This is what they say:

“In the winter of 2009/10, Britain lost a third of its bee colonies. Bees are a vital part of Britain’s ecology, and are directly responsible for pollinating at least 30% of the food crops we eat. They are also an important indicator of our ecosystem’s overall health. There are many reasons for the decline of bees.

What is clear however is that large, urban centres are becoming havens for bee populations. They provide a milder climate and a wider range of food than the countryside. London has a key part to play in the future survival of Britain’s bee populations and with more Londoners than ever choosing to grow their own food, bees are more important than ever.”

Note. There is an ongoing project of two hives on the roof of Conway Hall, looked after by Luke. Small pots of the honey produced are on sale at the shop in the foyer of Conway Hall. {Ed}

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.

THINKING ON SUNDAY

JUNE 2015

- Sunday 7 1100 **CULTS AND BRAINWASHING: HOW TO ADDRESS A HIDDEN EPIDEMIC.** Alexandra Stein
- Sunday 14 1100 **ARMENIAN GENOCIDE – THE TRUTH**
Nouritza Matossian
- Sunday 21 1100 **THE ROBOTS ARE COMING**
Chris Bratcher
- Sunday 28 1100 **DIVIDED BRITAIN: THE IMPACT OF RISING INEQUALITY**
Stewart Lansley, author of *Breadline Britain*

JULY

- Sunday 5 1100 **MANUFACTURING CONSENT IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY**
Graham Bell, CHES member
- Sunday 12 1100 **MIGRANTS OR PEOPLE?**
Jim Walsh, CEO of the Conway Hall Ethical Society
- Sunday 19 1100 **DEBATE: THAT BANKS ARE A FORCE FOR GOOD**
Proposed by: **Jon Parker**. Opposed by: **Paul Carroll**
- Sunday 26 1100 **UNCONDITIONAL HOSPITALITY – OPEN BORDERS**
Manu Bazzano

LONDON THINKS

June

Monday 8 1930 **HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE ALTRUIST**
Philosophers **Peter Singer & Nigel Warburton**
Ticket £15 (£5 for CHES members)

Thursday 18 1930 **IN CONVERSATION**
Physicist **Brian Cox** with geneticist **Adam Rutherford**
Ticket £15 (£5 for CHES members)

July

Thursday 9 1930 **FACTS AND FANTASY ABOUT YOUR DIET AND HEALTH**
Tim Spector and **Barbara Prainsack**, both professors at Kings' College London and **Sue Nelson**, Science Journalist
Ticket £10 (£5 for CHES members)

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.