

Ethical Record

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NSS's SECULARIST OF THE YEAR – SAFAK PAVEY

Turkish MP, Safak Pavey, won this year's National Secular Society's award as Secularist of the Year. She was presented with £5,000, donated annually by Michael Irwin, the campaigner for the right to assisted dying.



Safak Pavey with Michael Irwin

Safak Pavey is a member of Turkey's main opposition party. Safak has spoken out about the need for secularism in Turkey, a country where there are religious tests for civil servants and job applicants, no evolution on school syllabuses, segregation by gender in schools and universities, and 90,000 mosques being used as propaganda centres for the government.

She has also worked for an improvement in the protection of the rights of women, where one out of three marriages involves child brides, honour killings increased 14 times in the past seven years and a Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, who said he does not think men and women are equal. Freedom of expression is another threatened right in Turkey – youtube and twitter were banned in the midst of a corruption scandal and one can be criminalized for 'insulting Islam'. Turkey ranks 154 amongst 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index.

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CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY

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New Members

The Society welcomes the following new members:

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Carmen D'Cruz, Croydon; David Garcia, London SE1;
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Elizabeth Rowlands, Hertfordshire; Thomas Ryan, London E6;
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Obituary - Mary Lincé (1915 – 2014)

David Morris writes: We are very sad to report the death on 26 March of Mary Lincé. Mary was a long-standing member of the Society and had by far the longest memory of the concerts, going back to South Place (pre 1926), where she first attended with her parents as a young girl. She was a remarkable, delightful person, being active on the SP Concerts committee for over 60 years. She had a positive outlook and was always warm and a pleasure to talk to at our concerts. The loss of Mary really does mark the end of an era -- she is someone we will miss dearly. We extend our warmest wishes and sincere condolences to her family. [A fuller tribute to Mary will appear in a subsequent issue of Ethical Record.]

CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY

Reg. Charity No. 251396

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

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

We invite to membership those who reject supernatural creeds and are in sympathy with our aims. At Conway Hall the programme includes Sunday lectures, discussions, evening courses and the Conway Hall Sunday Concerts of chamber music. The Society maintains a Humanist 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)

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FAILED PROPHECIES

David V Barrett

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 12 January 2014

On 21 December 2012, the Mayans had prophesied that the End of the World would occur – at least, according to a number of New Age pundits and the authors of a surprisingly large number of books. In fact the Mayans had prophesied no such thing. In the exceedingly complex Mayan calendar there is only one reference to the date, possibly equivalent to 21 December 2012 and (*contra* the apocalypticists) no clear indication of what was supposed to happen on that day. But the clincher is that there are many hundreds of Mayan inscriptions referring to other dates – and a fair number of them look forward to dates well after 2012.

The media enjoyed it as an offbeat story – though apart from articles by myself and others in *Fortean Times* magazine, few of the media bothered to follow it up when, as always, nothing happened. Much the same had happened the year before, with American evangelist Harold Camping's prophecy that Christ would return, first on 21 May; then when he didn't, on 21 October. Few knew that Camping had previously prophesied 6 September 1994, and before that 21 May 1988. After October 2011 he went quiet for a while, then let it be known that he was retiring from the prediction game.

I've lost count of the number of times I've been wheeled out on Radio 4 or TV News programmes to talk about Nostradamus (July 1999), Pre-Millennial Tension (1999), assorted Christian prophets over the years and the supposed Mayan prophecy. Each time, nothing happened. Every prophet who has set a date for the end of the world or Christ's return or the arrival of Our Brothers from space has one thing in common: he (or more rarely she) was wrong.

The classic study on this was *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group That Predicted the Destruction of the World* by Leon Festinger et al (1956) which studied a small group that believed a UFO was about to save them from the devastation of the world; Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, which stems from this, looks at the psychological consequences of disconfirmed expectations.

Apocalyptic Beliefs in Judaeo-Christianity

The idea that this world will come to a cataclysmic or transforming end can be traced back to Zoroaster, founder of the first monotheistic religion of the Middle East. Zoroaster taught that there would be a final conflict when Ahura Mazda (God) would defeat Angra Mainyu (the Evil One), leading to the Frashgird, an eternity of bliss for true believers. Zoroastrianism had a huge influence on the beliefs of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, including the idea of the apocalypse ('uncovering, disclosure, revelation') in all its gloriously colourful imagery.

In the couple of centuries around the time of Jesus the Jewish world was awash with apocalyptic frenzy as they eagerly awaited the arrival of their Messiah – a human priest-king, and a very different figure from the Christian Christ – to save them from their oppressors. The book of *Revelation*, which very nearly didn't

make it into the New Testament, was just one of many weird and wonderful apocalyptic works of its day; prophecies of Jesus' impending return today would be a lot less colourful without it.

The early Church Fathers – Hippolytus, Origen, Jerome, even the authoritative 4th-century Augustine of Hippo – said the Second Coming should be read allegorically, not literally – but they have been comprehensively ignored by preachers and prophets ever since, each of whom clearly knows better than Jesus, who said, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (*Matthew 24:36*).

From the earliest centuries people have prophesied the imminence of the End Times. Bishop Hilarion wrote in 397 CE that the last battle would be 101 years ahead, while the 6th-century Bishop Gregory of Tours set the date between 799 and 806 CE – both of them sensibly long after their own deaths.

Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202) preached that there were three Ages, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Third Age would begin around 1260, again sensibly after his death, with a brief reign of the Antichrist followed by the coming of a new Adam or a new Christ. He was hugely influential, including on Dante and Francis of Assisi – but again, he was wrong.

Isaac Newton's Prediction

In the 16th century there were prophecies of the Day of Judgement happening in 1524, 1525, 1528, 1533, 1534, 1535, 1544, 1555, 1556, 1588 (believed by John Dee and Queen Elizabeth I) and 1593. In the same century Martin Luther predicted Jesus would return 300 years from his time, so around 1830-1850. In the late 1700s John Wesley predicted 1836. It wasn't just preachers. Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) believed it would happen in 1656. John Napier (1550-1617), creator of logarithms and an early slide rule, decided the Last Judgement would be 1688 (going from *Revelation*) or 1700 (going by *Daniel*). Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) said 1948 – or possibly 2060.

The 19th century was a hothouse of millennial expectation. The best known movement still around today is the Jehovah's Witnesses, who have made many predictions of the End. Founder Charles Taze Russell said '1874'; later JWs said 1914, then 1925, 1941 and 1975. In 1920 Russell's successor 'Judge' Joseph Rutherford, who gave the movement their name, coined the brilliant slogan “Millions now living will never die!” Although some people living in 1920 are still around today, it's probably safe to say that his prophecy too has failed.

The Catholic Apostolic Church, founded by Edward Irving in the early 1830s, believed that Christ would return between 1838 and 1855. It died out because it had made no provision for appointing new clergy after Christ's return – which didn't happen.

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon religion, said in 1832 that Jesus would return in 1890. Dr John Thomas, founder of the Christadelphians, said in 1866, “It is pretty certain that Jesus will return within the lifetime of the present generation.”

American preacher William Miller said that Christ would return “sometime between 21 March 1843 and 21 March 1844”. When he didn’t, Miller was reluctant to set further dates; it was his followers who settled on 22 October 1844, which became known as the Great Disappointment. But out of this came the Seventh-day Adventist Church, founded in 1860. From the same movement came the Branch Davidians, who met their own awful day of judgement in 1993, and the Worldwide Church of God (WCG), founded by Herbert W Armstrong in 1934.

In 1958, Armstrong published a booklet, *1975 in Prophecy*, which made it quite clear that Christ would return by then. The booklet became strangely difficult to get hold of from the mid-Seventies. WCG lost quite a few members – but Armstrong’s response was simply to say that he’d been misinterpreted, and that he’d never said Christ was going to return by 1975.

Following radical changes to WCG’s beliefs after Armstrong’s death, hundreds of ministers and thousands of members left to set up new Churches, all continuing to proclaim the imminent return of Christ. One of these was Ronald Weinland who led the Church of God – Preparing for the Kingdom of God. In his 2006 book *2008 – God’s Final Witness* he wrote: “If the things written in the book do not shortly come to pass, then what is written here is false, and I am false.”

The failure of any of his specific prophecies for 2008 to occur did not appear to have fazed him. Instead he castigated those who criticised him: “Foolishly there are those who are quick to find fault by saying we are wrong or that I am a false prophet since physical destruction did not come at a time I had previously stated.” He explained Christ’s non-appearance with a common coping strategy: “God is being merciful by temporarily holding back the day when the Second Trumpet sounds and massive physical destruction begins... This ‘holding back’ is in large part due to the result of God answering the prayers of His people who set aside a time of fasting.”

He then prophesied that Christ would return on 27 May 2012. In his online final sermon for the Saturday Sabbath service on 26 May, the day before the Big Day, he said: “We are hours away from Christ’s returning in the atmosphere of this earth.”

Three days later he wrote: “27 May has come and gone, so how can I say this is still the day of Christ’s return?” The answer was that “I viewed it in a physical manner until God revealed that it was spiritual.” A few weeks later he was able to be more explicit, using two further common coping strategies: redefining terms (moving the goalposts) and shifting the date. “Yes, the ‘Day of the Lord’ is a year in actual length. 27 May 2012 was the beginning of the ‘Day of the Lord’ when Jesus Christ will return on the final day of Pentecost 2013” – i.e. 19 May 2013. Wrong again.

Other Religions

It’s not just Christians who make predictions of the End of the World – other prophets of doom are just as bad at it. 1999 was a favourite year. Shoko Asahara,

leader of Aum Shinrikyo, which launched a Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995, said Armageddon would happen on 2 or 3 September 1999. Philip Berg, head of the Kabbalah Centre, said a great ball of fire would hit Earth on 11 September 1999 – unless they raised enough money to open a number of new Kabbalah Centres...

Let's politely draw a veil over the many very convoluted interpretations of Nostradamus, including a 1991 book by VJ Hewitt and Peter Lorie which said (amongst much else) that 2 May 1993 would see the coronation of King Charles III with his wife, Queen Diana, that there would be a great earthquake in California in 1993, that Margaret Thatcher would become Conservative leader again in 1996, and that there would be a manned space flight to Mars in 2000.

In 1982, Scottish-born artist Benjamin Creme (b. 1922) announced that Maitreya, the long-prophesied fifth Buddha, the living incarnation of a Master and the new World Teacher, was living anonymously in the Asian community in East London, and would reveal himself to the world shortly; the media must be ready. In 1985, 22 journalists met in an Indian restaurant in the East End, hoping that Maitreya would join them; they were disappointed. Creme's explanation for the Maitreya not turning up when he said he would was the insincerity and lack of belief of the journalists assembled to greet him (or not). {Creme hired Conway Hall for his meetings! [Ed]}

Finally, let's look briefly at two UFO religions. Ruth Norman, or Uriel (1900-93), one of the founders of the San Diego-based movement Unarius, told her followers that aliens would come openly to Earth in 1974, then 1975, then 1976, and then 2001 – by which time she could no longer be embarrassed by her failed prophecy. Unarius's justification of the alien non-arrival is that our Space Brothers have now decided not to appear visibly "until people stop their warlike attitudes and practices". They may be waiting some time.

In 1973 a young French sports journalist, Claude Vorilhon (now known as Raël), was contacted by a being from another planet and given a message for mankind: that we were created by an extra-terrestrial race, referred to as the Elohim in *Genesis*. They are not God or gods, but humans much like us. Two years later he visited their planet. Raël, it turns out, is Jesus' half-brother; they shared the same biological father. Having appeared to Raël, the prophet for our age, and explained themselves in scientific terminology we can understand, the Elohim will shortly be returning physically to Earth to greet all of us, and instructed Raël to build an embassy where they can meet world leaders. The Raelians expect the Elohim to visit the Earth before 2030 – but they have already said that the space visitors will not come if they feel they are not welcome by the majority of mankind, which seems a safe advance get-out clause.

A Model of Excuses

The sensible thing is to prophesy Christ's return or the arrival of the spaceships for at least a few years after you expect to have departed this Earth yourself – it avoids embarrassment. But if you do insist on setting imminent dates you need some sort of rationalisation when movements, to quote a late-Victorian writer on the Catholic Apostolic Church, "are forced by the stern logic of life to turn their

backs upon their past history, and to make their doctrines square with facts when facts absolutely refuse to square with doctrines” – a brilliant 19th-century rendering of cognitive dissonance. I have designed a typology, a model of ideal types, to categorise the most common coping strategies of failed prophets.

Explanations for Failure of Prophecy

	Positive/Forthright	Negative/Evasive
Human failure	We were wrong	We never said that
Spiritual explanation	God in his mercy stayed his hand	People’s faith was not strong enough
Redefine the situation	Our calculations were incorrect; he’s actually coming next year	He did return, but invisibly or on a spiritual plane

Examples of the two aspects of human failure are the Jehovah’s Witnesses and (eventually) Harold Camping on the one hand, and Herbert W Armstrong of the Worldwide Church of God on the other. The two spiritual explanations are useful for any prophet. Saying “I asked God to be merciful and he listened to me” makes the prophet look good; saying that people’s faith wasn’t strong enough shifts the blame away from the prophet. Ronald Weinland is one of many examples of the first, and Benjamin Creme and the Raelians of the second.

As for redefining the situation, it’s very common for prophets to keep changing the date: William Miller, Harold Camping, Ronald Weinland, Unarius and many others have done this. A more subtle, evasive redefining is to change the meanings of words, as Weinland did, or to say, as the Seventh-day Adventist Church do, that Christ actually did return when they said – but he did it invisibly, on a spiritual plane. This has two great advantages: they can still claim they’re right, and no one can prove them wrong.

I’m reminded of the 1961 revue that launched the golden age of satire, *Beyond The Fringe*, with Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller, Dudley Moore and Alan Bennett. They are seated, huddled, on the top of a mountain, awaiting the Second Coming. After some typically Cook-style dialogue they begin to chant “Now is the end – Perish the world!” The chanting fizzles out, and Cook says, “Never mind, lads, same time tomorrow... we must get a winner one day.”

Dr David V Barrett is a writer on minority religions, esoteric societies, the Last Things and other weird ideas. His 20+ books include *The Fragmentation of a Sect* (2013), *A Brief Guide to Secret Religions* (2011), *A Brief History of Secret Societies* (2007) and *The New Believers* (2001). He describes himself as a Fortean rather than a sceptic, and certainly not a skeptic.

CORRECTION DOWN UNDER

In his article *A Few Thoughts on Atheism* (ER March 14 p 16), the author Nigel Sinnott’s correct address is Sunshine West, a western suburb of Melbourne. Nigel runs a free press extract service of interest to freethinkers.

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UNDERSTANDING HUMANS

Omar Sheikho Murad

Author of *Understanding Human* (ISBN 9781467009805)

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 26 January 2014

Over seven billion humans live on this planet. Theoretically speaking, there must be enough food and space for everyone. The reality, however, is very different. It has always been the case, it will always be the case, that never will all humans have exactly same belief system or value system. The dream of having a planet with perfect equality, with a single belief system and a single value system is just pure fantasy.

The pain is that we put our lives and our resources on fighting each other because of our differences (which are just natural) in an attempt to make everybody else like us by force, in the hope of creating that dream of one single uniform society or world. Such a goal of uniform society or world is impossible (as it has always been impossible) because it is pure fantasy.

Therefore, can we put our lives and our resources on something else more useful and more achievable? I mean can we concentrate on learning and training ourselves about how we can all live on this planet with peace and tranquillity, respecting each other's boundaries and stopping those destructive cycles of offence and counter-offence, revenge and counter-revenge, abuse and counter-abuse, demeanization and counter-demeanization, intrusion and counter-intrusion?

The answer is definitely 'Yes'. But only 'Yes' when we all reach that level of maturation that allows us to better understand those endless differences and feel better about them and consequently behave better towards each other. All our differences are because we see things from different angles, different perspectives and even because of different chemistry. Seeing things from different angles while keeping to the angle one is happy with is certainly possible.

Evolution Good – Revolution Bad

Anything we use around us has undergone a continuous development over time, i.e., it has evolved. Evolutions could be slow, such as in transport facilities or very fast, such as the evolution in telecommunication. In the latter case, even one year can make a huge difference. Although fast evolutions look like revolutions, they are not (because there is no destruction to what was there before). In fact, new things have been built on what was there before. Revolutions are not like evolutions because they destroy all that was there before and come up with something completely different.

Evolutions or revolutions in science and technology, when not abused, are fine and might be harmless. The problem is in political and social revolutions. The damage is from the use of the Rock-Logic (i.e. violence & aggression) and the damage is from the destruction. That is the basic idea that I want to concentrate on here. Personally, I am against all revolutions at all times for whatever reason, even when Rock-Logic is not used. I just think revolutions are wrong. Certainly,

revolutions are destructive and counter-productive when Rock-Logic is used, regardless of the goal wanted. To me, there is absolutely no noble goal that is really noble, if that goal allows the use of violence and aggression.

A revolution means an overnight radical change. Such a dramatic, fast radical change means a huge pain, suffering, stress and maladjustment for absolutely everyone. When violence and aggression are used (as is the case in the vast majority of cases) then human costs and material costs are just too much. When a healthy-wise person looks at real costs, then she/he will never allow a revolution to take place, under whatever circumstance, for whatever goal. A healthy-wise person will always start an evolutionary process to make the change and will only accept the use of Water-Logic as a means.

To sum up. Evolution is the healthy way for changing things and Water-Logic is the only healthy means to make changes. Revolution on the other hand is the unhealthy way for changing things and Rock-Logic is definitely an unhealthy means to make changes.

Evolution means: studying the problem, gathering all necessary information from all different parties, explaining why change is necessary, finding options and alternatives, putting peaceful functional plans and alternative plans for the change, starting a peaceful process to change and, at the same time, dealing with unwanted painful consequences in a responsible manner, keeping the mind open for going forward and backward, left or right, until the change is suitable for everyone and everyone is happy with it and, thus, all win and no one loses.

Revolution means: an overnight radical change, that cannot be done without using violence and aggression (huge human and material costs); no one really understands the new idea that now must be implemented and tested, for the first time, at whatever cost. Above all, everyone is the loser in one way or another.

Those who are pro-wars, pro-revolutions, pro-Rock-Logic are either unhealthy or ignorant. They have no idea at all what Rock-Logic means in terms of human material costs. Those of the first group (the unhealthy ones) need to know that they are not only narrow-minded but also they are really unhealthy in their thinking, feeling and behaviour.

Those in the second group (the ignorant ones) need to be taken to experience war and revolution conditions (first hand experience) in one way or another so that they can make some sense of the costs, both human and material, and thus gain some insight. When I took some very revolutionary friends for a visit to the Imperial War Museum in London, they became very non-revolutionary just within a few hours of seeing the human cost of wars and revolutions (i.e. of the Rock-Logic, i.e. of violence and aggression). Change and evolution are inevitable in life and all we need to do is to get the balance right, use appropriate means (i.e. Water-Logic only) and allow changes to take their own natural course.

The human mind is composed of two parts, conscious and unconscious. The conscious mind is the place of thinking, learning, working, beliefs, willpower

and determination. The unconscious mind is the place of desires, instincts and suppressed-repressed wishes. The unconscious mind is under the influence of all environmental factors, such as: the family background, society, education and culture.

Psychology

To me, what people call spirit, psyche etc. are either just different names to the unconscious mind or are just parts of it. The conscious mind and the unconscious mind might move toward the same direction and goal. In this case, there might be no conflict between them. But when each of them is moving toward the opposite direction, there will be an obvious conflict between them. The intensity of that conflict is proportional to the intensity of the difference between what the conscious mind wants and what the unconscious mind wants.

The human consists of 3 components:

- 1- Body (flesh and blood).
- 2- Conscious mind (thinker / intellectual).*
- 3- Unconscious mind (psycho-spiritual).*

The needs of all the 3 components must be healthily met so that the human can be balanced and in harmony with the self and with others. Ignoring any component will lead to imbalance and disharmony. All philosophies and systems that destroyed the balance, and thus the harmony of the above 3 components seriously harmed the human.

Certainty versus Uncertainty

The \$64 questions are: Are we really sure that we have the 100% truth? In fact, there might be no certainty in our world. There might be nothing that we know for sure. Everything around us is uncertain. The only exceptions are some basic chemical structures that we know about, eg the molecule of water consists of both hydrogen and oxygen. The certainty that we embraced for so long is fantasy and the uncertainty is reality.

- We need to accept the uncertainty and feel happy about it.
- We need to stop living in the fantasy world of certainty.

In sciences, even in humanitarian sciences, such as psychology, anthropology and sociology, every scientist has to realise the above new concept and embrace uncertainty. The problem, however, is in the field of philosophy. Here, the picture is quite different. Although all philosophies are probably by-products of human imagination, not all philosophers have embraced uncertainty. In fact, many of them still stick to the world of certainty. They do not want to convince themselves that the opposite is true. Certainty usually leads to wars, violence, extremism and intolerance. Uncertainty has no such consequences.

Dr Omar Sheikho Murad, physician and psychiatrist at South London and the Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, is the author of *Understanding Islam* (2011). Email: muradpath@hotmail.com

* {A materialist would say that both 2- and 3- are actually components of 1- i.e. Body. [Ed.]}

FREELoadERS ON THE LAND

Christopher Snowden

Director of Lifestyle Economics, Institute of Economic Affairs

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 2 February 2014

The Freemen on the Land (FOTL) ideology is based on risible misinterpretations of legal concepts which are employed in the hope of giving the follower immunity from the law. Freemen beliefs change over time due to the conspicuous failure of their arguments in court, but the following ideas are typical.

Freemen believe that statute law has no power over them unless they give their explicit consent. They believe that the only law that everybody is obliged to obey is what they call ‘common law’, which normally refers to case law but in the minds of Freemen is actually closer to ‘natural law’ or ‘universal law’. Their conception of common law bears some resemblance to a crude version of John Stuart Mill’s ‘harm principle’ in that it says that the only real crimes are to directly harm another person or his property. Beyond these limitations, the individual is free to do whatever he likes. Freemen not only believe that the law should operate on this principle, but that it does operate on this principle. They think that statute law has no force and that a vast legal-political-corporate conspiracy tricks people into consenting to statutes in crafty and subtle ways.

The belief that most law is based on personal consent leads Freemen to see legal issues in terms of contract law. If there is no contract, they will not obey. They regard the government, the police force and other state institutions as corporations and view courts as places of business. For reasons that are not entirely clear, they also think that courts mischievously practice maritime law—as we shall see, Freemen are strangely drawn to the ocean.

An important strand of FOTL thinking is the belief that there is a distinction between a person as a legal entity and a person as a human being. They refer to the former as a ‘legal fiction’ or ‘straw man’ while the latter is a man or woman ‘of flesh and blood’. Since the former has all the obligations while the latter has all the rights, they wish to discard the legal fiction and live as freemen on the land, paying no tax and ignoring laws as they see fit. However, they fear that the legal conspiracy is constantly attempting to get them to admit that they are their ‘legal fiction’. In Freemen mythology, any such admission creates ‘joinder’ and therefore consent (in fact, ‘joinder’ means bringing multiple charges, or multiple defendants, together in one court case).

Are Men and Women Made of Straw or Flesh and Blood?

Freemen efforts to distance themselves from the ‘legal fiction’ are childishly simplistic. Most commonly, they involve making minor amendments to their name or using meaningless punctuation. For example, I might describe myself (a man of flesh and blood) as ‘christopher of the family snowdon’ or ‘the man commonly known as christopher’ or christopher-john:snowdon. In Freemen mythology, my legal fiction’s name is CHRISTOPHER SNOWDON (all in caps). This rests on the (incorrect) belief that people’s names are always put in capital letters in birth certificates and legal documents. Freemen are keen to avoid the use of capital letters for fear of creating ‘joinder’.

When, as frequently happens, Freemen find themselves in court, they will go to great lengths to deny who they are. Since they refuse to employ lawyers (thinking them part of the conspiracy) they will often represent themselves while talking about themselves in the third person. For example, I would say “I am christopher-john of the family snowdon representing the legal fiction that you call CHRISTOPHER SNOWDON.” Other unusual behaviour that they think prevents the court having authority over them includes not standing when the judge enters the court, not fully entering the dock and claiming common law jurisdiction. They will repeatedly ask the judge if he is acting under his oath and will endlessly repeat phrases they have heard in TV courtroom dramas (such as “for and on the record”) in the hope that the use of quasi-legal verbosity will make the judge take them seriously.

Freemen put great value on their time and frequently issue apprehending officers with ‘fee schedules’ which declare that the official will be invoiced for thousands of pounds per hour for the privilege of talking to them. Similar demands are sent to the courts, often demanding payment in gold or silver coins (Freemen are suspicious about fiat currencies). In at least one instance, a Freeman has demanded \$100 million (Canadian) to reproduce his name in print. They do not recognise the irony of making these demands without the other party’s consent.

Lawful Rebellion

Insofar as FOTL beliefs are based on evidence, two documents are most frequently cited. It is doubtful whether many practitioners have read, let alone understood, either. The first is Article 61 of Magna Carta. This clause, which was repealed three months after King John signed it in 1215, gave 25 barons the right to overrule the monarch. For reasons that defy explanation, Freemen believe that this clause gives them the right to enter what they call ‘lawful rebellion’. Lawful rebellion typically involves the Freeman creating and signing what he (mistakenly) calls an ‘affidavit’ in which he ‘officially’ announces that he will no longer obey statute law and has instead sworn his allegiance to the Queen, the (fictional) Baron’s Committee or some other authority. Some Freemen will inform the DVLA that they have revoked their driving license since they do not believe they need permission to ‘exercise your right to travel’.

In a further twist of logic, they think that ‘register’ means ‘hand over to’ and therefore believe that registering their car with the DVLA means giving it to the government. By revoking their licence, they believe that they are reclaiming their property. Similarly, they believe that registering a birth means handing over one’s child to the government (which is exchanged for a ‘berth’ certificate—another nautical reference). Most peculiarly of all, some Freemen think that the government uses its own people as collateral to borrow money and that the birth/berth certificate is some sort of bond which can be exchanged for a large pot of gold.

The Cestui Que Vie Act of 1666 is the other legal document that has somehow assumed enormous importance in the Freemen belief system. This brief piece of legislation simply states that a person missing at sea is assumed to be dead after

seven years. No reasonable person could interpret it in any other way, and yet Freemen believe that it means that the government assumes everybody to be dead from the age of seven (or some variation thereof) and has taken possession of their person and/or property. Since the Act was passed in the same year as the Great Fire of London, Freemen mythology has been embellished with the claim that the Act was passed at the height of the blaze and that the Great Fire was an early example of the ‘false flag’ attacks that are so beloved of conspiracy theorists.

‘Legal Numerology’

FOTL been described as ‘legal numerology’. Time and again, Freemen misinterpret not only legal terms but simple English words. They believe that ‘legalese’ is more than a slang term for long-winded legal texts but is an actual language. They think that the dock in a court has some nautical significance. They believe that words such as ‘consent’, ‘contract’, ‘control’ and ‘consequence’ are all derived from the word ‘con’ (which, of course, is actually a shortened form of ‘confidence’). They are suspicious of any word ending in ‘-ship’, such as citizenship, because of the maritime connotation of the suffix. They think that a summons is an invitation, a demand is an offer and ‘must’ means ‘may’. They also think that ‘understand’ means ‘stand under’ (ie. obey). This leads to rapidly escalating problems for Freemen when they receive a summons or a tax demand, or are asked by a policeman if they understand that they must get out of their car.

The origins of many of these misconceptions are mysterious. Others can be explained by the FOTL’s reliance on—and misreading of—Black’s *Law Dictionary*. Black’s is now in its ninth edition and only applies to US law, but British and Canadian Freemen nevertheless rely on the second edition, published in 1910. Their use of a 104 year-old legal dictionary from an irrelevant jurisdiction can only be explained by its open access availability online. It contains no laws, only definitions, such as its definition of the word ‘driver’ as “one employed in operating or conducting a coach, carriage, wagon or other vehicle”. Misunderstanding the meaning of the word “employed” in Black’s, Freemen sometimes tell traffic police that, contrary to all appearances, they are not driving a car because they are not being paid to do so. They insist that they are merely travelling in an automobile, for which they believe they need no insurance, tax disc, licence or MOT.

Needless to say, this sort of gibberish gets short shrift in a court of law. Numerous videos on Youtube (filmed by associates of Freemen) are entertaining testimonies to the failure of FOTL ideas when it matters. For most who dabble in this way, the outright rejection of their Freemen defence in court is sufficient for them to reconsider their beliefs, but there have been cases of gullible or arrogant individuals turning trivial offences (typically motoring offences or non-payment of council tax) into prison time. The wheels of justice turn slowly and Freemen can spend a year or more believing that victory is just around the corner before the hammer finally falls. For the most hardened believers, even a gaol term is not enough to make them lose faith in FOTL. Instead, they blame the judge and the police for not knowing the law and cite their imprisonment as evidence that, as ‘roger of the family hayes’ put it after serving 21 days, “We’ve

basically got a judicial system now that's very scared of us because they know that we know what going on."

The Financial Limits on FOTL Growth

There is much about the FOTL movement that is comic, but there is a serious side when Freemen gurus sell their services to hapless clients who are frequently desperate and/or mentally unwell. They advertise ways to 'get out of debt free' and their ideas have found pockets of support amongst both the political far-left and far-right as well as amongst those who have no coherent political beliefs. According to one estimate, there are 30,000 self-described Freemen on the Land in Canada where they have been clogging up the courts to such an extent that Judge J. D. Rooke wrote a comprehensive and witty 200 page document in the hope of debunking their nonsense once and for all (*Organised Pseudolegal Commercial Arguments*, Meads versus Meads: 2012).

In my view, FOTL lacks the potential to become a truly mass movement because the private cost of being a practising believer is too great. Those who believe that 9/11 was an 'inside job' or that the moon landings were faked do not generally pay a price for their irrationality. The worst that will happen is that they might suffer ridicule, but several conspiracy theories are sufficiently popular for ridicule to be avoided in many social circles. FOTL beliefs, on the other hand, will lead to bankruptcy and imprisonment if followed through in the way the guru recommends. Unlike the average conspiracy theorist, the Freeman must pay a heavy price for being wrong. These private costs limit the number of active participants even if it does not prevent people believing FOTL ideas in theory (while encouraging others to put them to the test). Freeman arguments have never succeeded in court and it must become clear to even the most wide-eyed disciple that the judge is utterly unmoved by them. Although there are no signs of the FOTL movement disappearing completely, the cost of irrationality imposes a limit on its growth potential.

FROM FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIAN TO AGNOSTIC ATHEIST

James Peter Jandu

Summary of lecture to the Ethical Society, 2 March 2014

Jonathan Edwards, the former Olympic champion, who still holds the triple jump world record, recently confessed he does not believe in God any more. In 2010, he told Sky News: "I think I was probably quite narrow-minded and fundamentalist in my views and a bit of a scary person. I believed that what I believed was the truth. Some of those extremes I feel slightly embarrassed about now, but overall no regrets."

As a former fundamentalist Christian myself I can identify with these remarks. I was converted to Christianity from Sikhism in the late 80s. For two decades I travelled and preached at various events and on Christian TV and radio. I also pastored a church for ten years. For seven years, I organised an annual three day Church workers' and leaders' conference in Kerala, South India attended by hundreds. Around the year 2000 I chose not to refer to myself as a Christian

except for clarity in certain circumstances. I was increasingly becoming disillusioned with the extreme form of Christianity in which I had been involved.

It was at Antioch that “The disciples were for the first time called Christians.” (*Acts II: 26*). In antiquity, the Antiochians had an unenviable propensity for coining scurrilous nicknames. The name ‘Christians’ seems to have been a sarcastic nickname with which the followers of Christ were branded by the mocking citizens of Antioch. It is feasible that they mistook the Greek word *Christos*, (whose Hebraic meaning was ‘the anointed one’, a word which would not be generally known to them) with the more familiar Greek word *chréstos*, which at that time was pronounced exactly as *Christos*. The word *chréstos* meant ‘good, mild, kindly’ but often it was used mockingly, meaning ‘simple’ or ‘silly’, rather like the phrase, ‘goody-two-shoes’. The word most probably carried this derogatory, sarcastic sense to many Antiochians.

I Was Arrogant

Since my de-conversion I have reflected on my past attitude and beliefs and find them quite arrogant. I was also simplistic in my understanding and ignorant – subconsciously choosing to ignore niggling doubts and questions. This is what I find with most Christians I meet — they are simpletons. Even the Bible admits many early Christians were uninformed. “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.” (*I Cor 1:26*).

There were certain subjects that led to my drifting over a period of twelve years.

1. The realisation that the idea of Hell being a never-ending punishment was not in the Bible was a real eye opener.*
2. I came to learn that the Gospels were not historical accounts, though they contain some historical facts.
- 3 The biggest blow was to learn that the Biblical character, Jesus, was more of a myth created from Jewish scriptures and paganism.

Today I spend my time assisting people who are in fundamentalism and seeking a way out. This includes Hindu, Muslim and Christian fundamentalists, though I focus on Christian fundamentalists. They should endeavour to better understand their scriptures by viewing them through rational lenses. I prefer to encourage a new version of Christianity rather than fight to eradicate religion. What you fight you ignite. Arrogance solidifies and reinforces their beliefs and so I take a more understanding approach. I prefer mind transformation through education rather than enforced behaviour modification. “No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” — *Albert Einstein*.

The information age is bringing a massive change that is filtering through to the broader Christian community. I am seeing the emergence of a new type of Christianity that is more inclusive. It may take some decades to become a majority view but I am convinced it will.

* {Others might be turned off Christianity by the realisation that Hell *was* indeed a significant threat in the New Testament. [Ed.]}

VIEWPOINTS

Soft and Hard Targets

The picture painted by Keith Porteous Wood in the *Ethical Record* (A Secular Society? Feb 2014) is rather deceptive. The National Secular Society aims at soft targets like the Church of England but is reticent in dealing with the growing threat from Islam at every level of British society.

It seems obsessed with abuse in the Catholic Church but remains silent about similar abuse in mosques. It has taken no position on the burqa and is not mounting a campaign on Muslim education*. Nor has it said anything about the growing Muslim population which will be followed by increasing demands and concessions. This growth is due to migration from Muslim countries and the higher Muslim birthrate. But presumably NSS considers this 'not to be a secular issue'. Perhaps the NSS will change its mind before it's too late. Meanwhile it thinks it is increasing in influence by being blind to the evidence. There is more religious pressure than ever before.

Duncan Mayhew

*The NSS web site always contains items about faith schools. [Ed]

Citizens Income as a means to reduce wage slavery

An unconditional (ie not means tested) Citizens Income (CI) already exists in some countries and is now being piloted in India with encouraging results*. A CI is therefore not Utopian in the sense of 'impossible' or 'impractical'. The purpose of a CI is to provide a secure income for every individual sufficient to meet their basic needs, thus giving them a realistic choice as to what, if any, kind of paid work to do. Removing economic coercion (or 'commodification' or 'wage slavery') would, for example, enable people to refuse employment they considered unethical, unsocial or hazardous, take lower paid jobs or to spend time in other ways.

However, Donald Langdown (*ER* March 2014) perhaps meant that equal incomes are impossible and in this he is probably right. Earnings on top of a CI would still be variable and taxable, although it's worth noting that other societies manage happily with more compressed earnings ratios than in the UK. This is because money is not the only, or the best, motivator. If it were, who would take up teaching and be in a position to inspire pupils? Who would look after their children or their frail relatives unpaid? Who would take the risk of sinking their savings in inventing new technologies in a shed or garage? Who would study art or philosophy? A CI, by removing the risk of destitution, would make it easier for people to pursue their interests and enthusiasms as pupils, students and adults. Such motivation is surely the key to doing anything well, to being creative and to gaining satisfaction from the chosen activity.

As to ensuring enough people are willing to work on a North Sea oil rig, perhaps we should ask: should anyone be forced by economic need to do such work if it is unpopular? Many unhealthy and mind-numbing jobs (cotton-picking by hand, chimney-sweeping by children, farming with a hoe, making phosphorus matches by hand) have been transformed as human ingenuity has found alternative methods. We could also ask: is it sensible to extract ever more remote fossil fuels

from the earth when similar investment in renewable sources (tide, wave, wind, solar) could fulfil our energy needs but for the opposition of the powerful oil, gas and electricity corporations?

* Standing, Guy (2013) *Piloting basic income in India*, seminar at Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Stockholm, 4 October.

Jay Ginn – Coulsdon

Emotions Not Universal

Geoff Bond (Viewpoints, *ER* March 14, p15) has suggested that the evolutionary view was missing from my article, and this is to some degree true. That fear and the associated flight-fright-freeze response are likely to be universal and an important evolved trait is certainly the case, as, probably, are those emotions linked to in- and out-group experiences. At the most basic, I see emotion as a binary structure of aversion and attraction, with various evolved and sociocultural complexities built on top.

One factor perhaps missed is in the emotion of honour, now all but lost to us in its past form. It was the feeling associated with such a belonging at a time when social bonds were essential. To lose one's honour was to lose your place within society and the world you knew. However, Geoff Bond's assertion that "disgust against excrement and vomit are universal" is simply incorrect and appears to be a myth born of mistakes made by psychologist Paul Rozin and anthropologist Mary Douglas; not to mention the research by Paul Ekman into 'basic emotions' that was always flawed and has been refuted many times.

The first problems with such a universalist conception is that coprophagia exists, desensitisation is possible, and young children do not find excrement disgusting. Historically, vomit, even that of others, was often desired and met with relief, even happiness, during periods in which 'to vomit' was associated with the expulsion of yellow bile and the balancing of humours within the body. To simply say that vomit universally causes disgust is quite wrong, as is the idea that the emotion 'disgust', as we understand it, has always existed.

Despite William Ian Miller's suggestions otherwise in *The Anatomy of Disgust*, the passion of abomination was not disgust, and was not always attached to feelings of nausea. Abomination was associated with an emotion that had a far greater reach than just sensations of disgust. For example, in 1604, Thomas Wright described the passion felt when a neighbour's house caught fire, potentially damaging your own, as 'detestation'; another word for abomination.

The problem has arisen in placing a very narrow modern view of what we call disgust (linked primarily to taste and smell) onto other cultures and history, without investigating what people in these cultures and histories are referring to from their own point of view. This is not to say that a sensation associated with unpleasant experiences is not universal, just that the associated elicitors vary too much to use the term 'universal', as do the emotional understandings linked to the sensation.

Richard Firth-Godbehere – Cambridge

BOOK REVIEW - ENDTIMES OF HUMAN RIGHTS

by **Stephen Hopgood** (Cornell University Press 2013)

Review by **Mazin Zeki**

Secularists will recall the year 1859 as the year of *Origins*. That year also saw the battle of Solferino, a now forgotten engagement, which left huge injuries and losses and was witnessed by Henri Dunant, who later founded the International Red Cross, leading to the Hague and Geneva conventions. Stephen Hopgood considers that this was the moment that human rights began. Hopgood is a formidable critic who has undertaken prodigious amounts of research for a polemical work which should concern all secularists.

He is an academic who has written critically about Amnesty (*Keeper of the Flame*) but is not opposed to human rights. He joins the growing critical literature on human rights since Samuel Moyn's *Last Utopia*, which considered the 1970s as the crucial decade when human rights became instrumentalised through vehicles such as Helsinki Basket 4 in disarmament negotiations.

'human rights' and 'Human Rights'

Hopgood makes a clear distinction between 'human rights' (lower case), which is a localised negotiation of conflicts over rights, and Human Rights (upper case) which is a version imposed by states, international NGOs and other supra-national actors, leading to the Responsibility to Protect -- R2P. It is the latter to which he is totally opposed and predicts or wishes its demise.

Hopgood claims that it was primarily C19 Protestant middle-class liberals who mutated into a secularist force after the abolition of slavery. This created the 'sacred secular', an ideology which was humanitarian but increasingly became bureaucratised, hegemonic and was imposed on the world. Most practitioners of human rights will either automatically presume to occupy moral high ground or incessantly use the language of human rights as if the use of such language by itself legitimises their truth claims.

Hopgood punctures the pretensions of both human rights, the myriad view of local NGOs and Human Rights, the organisational structures which are increasingly dependent on corporate funding, foundations or sponsorship for their activities. The corporatisation of both types originates from the producer-interest within structures. He thinks the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Human Rights Watch, the UN Human Rights Council etc are fatally compromised. Failed states may have required R2P but R2P does not guarantee anything in practice.

He is scathing about the International Criminal Court and its failures. The threshold for intervention can be subjective, based on cleansing or genocide producing a calculus with the word 'only' having a grotesque meaning. The same countries which are arguing for this or that intervention condemned Vietnam (when its army, then the fourth largest in the world, invaded Cambodia to stop the murderous Khmer Rouge). The Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur, Libya and DRC interventions were all without specific Security Council mandates. In Sierra Leone, a bloodbath was stopped by a small British force supplemented by a private army.

In fact, even in peacekeeping, non-state actors such as private military companies (PMCs) are taking over many functions. The structural homogeneity of international law is meeting increasing resistance. Hopgood argues that HR has lost its moral authority and encountered pushback from assertive new states and religion. R2P uses the language of human rights but operates in circumstances where human rights either do not apply or can easily be subverted. For the central fact is that human rights require a state, as only a state can guarantee them. The most extreme abuses occur from non-state actors where the state has collapsed. Intervention in a failed state can prevent human rights abuses but does not resolve the problem of what happens after the withdrawal.

If everything is a right then nothing is a right in practice. Human rights have also become subsumed within corporate social responsibility and therefore are rapidly losing their meaning. Hopgood has an accurate assessment about the degradation of human rights language through inflation and trivialisation, but perhaps overstates his case.

Henri Dunant was the first winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and that prize has also been degraded and discredited. Recent recipients have included Kissinger, Obama and the EU MSF. The need for symbols and secular saints hides the reality of HR losing its moral authority. The Red Cross is now a vast bureaucracy which has become politicised through its ‘depoliticisation’ and impartiality.

‘Pushback’?

HR has also coincided with deepening economic inequality worldwide. Religious mobilisation increasingly dominates political discourse in several countries: Israel, Iran, Latin America etc. As well as being reactionary it has been used for advocating social justice in less individualised societies leading to serious progressive dilemmas. The pushback is not just ideological but an outcome of shifts in global power relations and the ineffectiveness and unrepresentativeness of the UN structures. It is the *relative* weakening of the West and US hegemony which is crucial to this. The rising power of countries which had no part in the formulation of human rights architecture will mean that human rights will have to compete with other values.

Hopgood refers to this as ‘pushback’, resulting in compromises having to be made. However Hopgood may be wrong about growing state sovereignty, for the pushback is also a response to globalisation which has reduced state power in recent decades. He concludes by pleading for realism and the ‘neo-Westphalian’ reality of states which are now more assertive and the growth of state authority. Meanwhile the corporatisation of HR and its official promulgation by government and transnational foundations has made it more detached from its supporters. The NGOs have become a class just like the political class — a new salariat. Secularists tempted to ignore Hopgood’s critique would be making a serious error. In the past secularists have assumed that their concerns automatically conform to HR.

Increasingly there are conflicts over serious moral and other issues which do not have a yes or no answer and cannot be resolved only with human rights

principles. Human rights advocates seem to support an unrealistic, homogeneity-based ‘single best method’ approach to a whole range of issues, globally agreed and locally imposed. Hopgood argues that is not really possible. Human rights are not a substitute for political action. Nor, if they are to retain legitimacy, should they be used to avoid debates or to frustrate majority political opinion. This is a rich book with complex, pessimistic arguments calculated to infuriate many but which deserves much wider debate among all who are concerned with the present and future of human rights.

THE SERPENT’S PROMISE
The Bible Retold as Science

by Steve Jones. (Little, Brown 2013), in the Humanist Library (HL)

Steve Jones, Emeritus Professor of Genetics at University College London and Conway Memorial Lecturer in 2006, is no stranger to secularists. Both Old and New Testaments provide him with a large range of topics over which he can exercise his considerable biological wisdom. Adam and Eve, giants, Methuselahs, the Ark, human evolution, original sin, genetics, predestination, sexism, racism, genius, epidemics, plagues, health and sickness, food, drugs and visions, are all commented on in Steve’s typically humorous and witty style. **NB**

REASONABLE ATHEISM
A Moral case for Respectful Disbelief

By Scott F. Aikin and Robert B. Talisse, (Prometheus Books 2011), in the HL

This book is a very easily readable account of the moral case for atheism. ‘Ethics without God’ is the ideology of the Ethical Movement, which began in the United States in the nineteenth century. The two authors, both atheists, want to debate with religious people. They aim to counter the popular conception in the USA that atheists are dishonest, amoral, mean, untrustworthy and unfit for public office (viz. the Patriot Act). They argue that being an atheist itself does not make one any of the above. The authors go further in setting out very clear reasons for being antitheists, that belief in God is morally bad and worship is quite unjustified. **NB**

THINKING ABOUT REASONS
Themes from the life of Jonathan Dancy

Edited by David Backhurst, Margaret Little and Brad Hooker. (Oxford 2013)

This very erudite collection of essays, intended for philosophers, now in the Humanist Library (HL) at Conway hall, “is offered as an expression of affection and esteem for Jonathan Dancy”, writes Brad Hooker (both of whom lectured here). In October 1994, Jonathan Dancy spoke on ‘Ethical thought and ethical principles’ (ER Nov 94), where he quoted George Eliot against “the men of maxims”. This article explains very clearly why Dancy believes there are no universal principles of morality – such as ‘never lie’. Members of CHES can read this piece on the Society’s website. That might provide a convenient introduction to Dancy’s thought. **NB**

HUMANIST LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

New Additions March 2014

Beckett, Francis	The great city academy fraud	2007
Begley, Louis	Why the Dreyfus Affair matters	2009
Bennoune, Karima	Your fatwa does not apply here	2013
de Botton, Alain	Religion for atheists	2013
Dearden, Ian	Do philosophers talk nonsense?	2013
Dworkin, Ronald	Justice for hedgehogs	2013
Dworkin, Ronald	Religion without God	2013
Grant, Melissa Gira	Playing the whore	2014
Harris, Matthew	The founding fathers and the debate over religion	2012
Hastings, Derek	Catholicism and the roots of Nazism	2009
Ibn Warraq	Why the West is best	2011
Ikeda, Daisaku	A new humanism	2010
Katz, Claire Elise	Levinas and the crisis of humanism	2012
Kemmerer, Lisa	Animals and world religions	2012
Kurtz, Paul	Forbidden fruit	2008
Leiken, Robert S.	Europe's angry Muslims	2012
Pitcher, George	A time to live	2010
Rausser, Randall	God or godless?	2013
Seddon, Laura	Women composers	2013
Stone, Dan	Histories of the Holocaust	2010
Sumner, L.W.	Assisted death	2013

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Please email any recommendations to library@ethicalsoc.org.uk.

Cathy Broad, Librarian

THE HUMANIST LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

The Library has an extensive collection of new and historic freethought material.

Members are able to borrow books from the Library. Readers will be asked to complete a Reader Registration Form, and must provide photographic ID, proof of address and proof of membership. They will be issued with a Reader's card, which will enable them to borrow three books at a time. The loan period is one month. Journals, archive material, artworks and other non-book material cannot be borrowed. Full details of the lending service are available from the Librarian

The Library is open to the public Sunday to Thursday, 1000 - 1700. When evening courses are running, the Library will remain open in the evenings until the start of the classes. The Library will be closed on Fridays. Check the website for details or contact the Librarian.

Cathy Broad, Librarian

Tel: 020 7061 6747. Email: library@ethicalsoc.org.uk

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

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

GODLESS AND BROKE: MAKING SECULAR GROUPS LESS MIDDLE CLASS

Alex Gabriel

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 23 March 2014

Life without God shouldn't have to be a luxury

When I wrote on my atheist blog (i) that I was once homeless, the response was good, including, to my surprise, from colleagues with affluent backgrounds. What's not surprising is how many of my colleagues' backgrounds were affluent. The secular movement is notoriously exclusive,(ii iii iv) and even internal moves for change have met resistance. Demands we talk about class from those unwilling to adjust their politics have at times derailed gender and race debates, but it doesn't mean we shouldn't try. A friend sought suggestions last week about how to be more economically inclusive. Here are my suggestions.

1. Remember poor people: some of them are atheists

Most things here are concrete actions. Class inclusion can require those: changing attitudes goes a long way to reaching women and minorities, but connecting with people who lack money is a singularly hands-on task. If you're an affluent atheist group or leader, remember that some of us are harder up than you, and ask how what you're doing makes us feel. If you're claiming a humanist award, don't describe at length how you, your grandfather, your ancestor whose name began with 'Sir', a past recipient, his father and the head of the group giving it to you all went to one exclusive Oxford college.v If you need an auditorium for your event and are looking at local school halls, don't hold it at a private school.

If atheist bloggers seek donations so their hours of work pay, don't accuse them of begging. If you're tearing into holy texts, don't lambast them as products of illiterate goat herders. Literacy, rates of which are low in inner cities, isn't necessary to be shrewd or sceptical. Atheists live in those boroughs, too.(vi) If you're mocking Christian fundamentalists, don't mimic the accent of an uneducated, white (or black) Bible Belt person—as if educated millionaire preachers there aren't bleeding the poor dry.(vii) If religious fanatics kill your colleague in the street, forcing you into hiding, you've endured something horrific—but don't blame the fact the perpetrator was on welfare, so “Had the time to plot a murder, which in the United States he would not [because] he would be busy trying to feed himself and find a roof over his head.”(viii) These can be profoundly alienating things for poor people to hear. They are slaps in the face when you're trying to extend a hand.

2. If your group's a church alternative... be an alternative

Humanist chaplaincies and Sunday Assemblies: I'm talking to you. Your selling point is often providing something churches do: celebration of life; ethical leadership; sheer wonder; songs. If these were all your church gave you, chances are you were one of the wealthier parishioners.(ix x) When I was five with a mum on benefits, we had intense beliefs, but mainly church meant help. Our priest wrote her a cheque when she needed money. Church friends offered food when we had none. Cast-offs were donated when I needed clothes. Lifts were

given when we had to travel. This help was paid for in religious loyalty. It's easy to demand people quit their churches, but quitting's sometimes impossible. Where would these things have come from had we left? (xi)

Chris Arnade calls atheism a luxury for the rich in a column on AlterNet.(xii) He's right, but not in the way he thinks—and it's a problem. Each church has atheists reliant on it who'd quit given a chance. Be a real alternative and give them one. If you want to replace religion, don't just replace the abstractions the middle-class get from it. Replace the food and clothes. Find out who needs a fridge, a lift, and a babysitter. Keep track of this. Put volunteers and email lists in place.

Don't just do what churches do, do what rationalists do. Distribute food and clothes and condoms.(xiii) Support meetings for humanist choir practice... and a secular sobriety circle. (Looking for class-related issues faith groups hijack? Substance abuse should be high on your list.)(xiv)

3. Don't just meet at the 'nice' end of town

It's almost always the most wealthy (and most white) end. Making it your habitat is partly a symbolic error—it conveys that your group is for monied, middle-class atheists, and poor people will be outsiders. But it also makes that likely in more matter-of-fact ways. If your meetings are a bus ride from hard-up prospective members, they won't all have the money for a ticket. Go the extra mile, literally, for them.

If you meet in a bar or café, passers-by will notice you. Patrons will see your posters. If all those people are less middle-class, the ones who join up will be, too. Likewise, meet in the community centre after jiu-jitsu class and you might learn the instructor's a sceptic, then hear from her that the knitting club women and electrician next door are as well. Concerned by higher crime rates? Unglamorous venues? No Wi-Fi? The people you want to meet have those issues daily. Put yourselves in their shoes.

4. Don't charge prohibitive entry fees

Small price on the door for student groups? Donations at Skeptics in the Pub? Offering plates at humanist assemblies? £100 for your weekend conference? Thumbs up. £300 for that conference, plus travel and hotel? Thumbs firmly down.(xv) Every conference excludes someone. Even if it's free, like Skepticon, getting there costs something.(xvi) But if tickets cost more than my monthly rent, you've gone badly wrong. Offer discounts for the unwaged as well as seniors and young people. Subsidize tickets with gala dinners for extra or third-party sponsorship of certain talks. Have bloggers raise independent grants (ask them!) for poor attendees. We will.(xvii) But don't fund grants by raising prices overall. That guarantees poor guests will be a minority.

5. Provide childcare, free of charge

American Atheists offered this last year with the Richard Dawkins Foundation's (RDF) support, a giant step in opening up conferences to mothers, treated frequently as unpaid child-minders, but also to parents too broke to hire one and for single parents who can't split childcare hours with a partner and are broke because of that. Make them as cheap as possible because of this. If you're

running a humanist assembly, consider finding congregants who'll staff one as in most churches, but make sure they don't all end up, as in most churches, being male parishioners' wives who came for the service. If you sense communal childcare will side-line your group's women, find 20 people (or one rich person) to pay for professionals.

(Fundraising, you'll notice, comes up a lot. You might be tempted to mount one all-purpose donation drive. Don't. Have dedicated collection plates and donors for each thing you need to fund: people give more when it's transparent where it's going, and can feel more valued if they have distinctive roles.) If you're running an annual conference, professionals are definitely your port of call. Contact foundations like the RDF. Tell them why it matters, and convince them to cover not just subsidize childcare.

6. Don't hold graphic design contests

Your book needs cover art. Your conference needs a logo. Your small group, branded T-shirts. So hold a contest! You'll get dozens of entries and select the best. Nice idea, right? (xviii xix xx) Wrong. Graphic design, like godlessness, is an exploitation-filled industry. Contests amount to what's known as spec work: commissioning artists, paying if you like the finished product. (Assuming the winner gets paid.)

That means they do hours, often days of skilled, costly work not knowing whether they'll be paid. Would you expect that of a sculptor? a decorator? an architect? Contests have one difference, in that all entrants but one are guaranteed *not* to be paid. This hurts clients, too. You're committing to very little design input, leaving to chance there's a satisfactory submission (often there's not — artists don't work for free) and advancing decline in the industry by not supporting quality design.(xxi xxii)

Find a person or firm with a track record. Commission them at proper rates, hold a proper consultation and commit, contractually, to paying. I know of one national secular group promising to pay for hundreds of dollars of work, then renegeing. Sign contracts. Atheists are famous for being scientist-led and infamous for bad design. (xxiii xxiv xxv xxvi xxvii) Scientists are brilliant. So are artists. Good design gets you more members, sells your books, and improves your billboards. Fix our image by making atheist art viable financially. No more design contests. Seriously.

7. Don't just hire graduates

The Humanist Community at Harvard fired Teresa MacBain for falsifying her academic record.¹ Secular blogs were critical but understanding. Her faked degree, they felt, had little connection with her job if any. I know at least one dropout at a major sceptical group who despite supportive colleagues fears their non-graduation becoming known. I know countless secular campaigners who'd never have got their jobs without degrees—even quite unrelated ones: computer science, medicine, maths. Some who attended university with me even chose activist careers not wanting to stay in their academic field.

Fewer than half British people and far fewer in the U.S. have college degrees. If

your advert demands a degree but doesn't specify what kind, there's a good chance you're excluding a majority for no reason, not just from your offices, but from our movement. Don't just hire through graduate recruiters. Don't say degrees are needed when they're not. Do say you'll welcome applicants without one.

8. Pay your speakers well

Speakers' fees are commonplace in U.S. atheism. Britain lags far behind. It shows. Our speaking circuit is far whiter, wealthier and more dominated by academics and national groups' staff. It's far less accessible to bloggers, artists, filmmakers and people who aren't stably employed. This happens when speaking isn't recognised as work.

Covering expenses—say, for travel—is not enough. Good speakers put hours into talks. They're writers, researchers, editors, lecturers, comedians, and orators, things we pay people to be. They're often discussing costly activism. (Jonny Scaramanga, whose blog about creationist exam papers went viral recently, spends huge sums getting hold of them.)² Speaking for free means a real-terms loss even before expenses: the hours of work that go into it, as with graphic designers, could have gone into paying the rent.³ Academics, wealthy authors and the stably employed comprise most of our speakers because they can afford this loss. Others can't. You need to cover it.

Given what U.S. speakers earn, the minimum wage and the skill involved, I recommend offering a £100 honorarium. You *can* afford that! Humanist assemblies: you found 20 people to pay for your childcare. Now find 40 to put extra cash on the collection plate (better still, give it by monthly direct debit). Student groups: charge non-members that much on the door. Foundations like Todd Stiefel or Richard Dawkins will sponsor local groups. Secular authors will donate books to fundraising sales. Online atheists will donate to your page. For more ideas, see Darrel Ray's advice.⁴

If you can't pay all your speakers yet, ask them to consider waiving the fee if they're well-off. Don't allow negotiation. Higher and lower individual fees mean a race to the bottom where those who'll work for least get booked the most. You're trying to prevent that.

9. Pay your interns—money

If I could stamp one practice out in atheism, unpaid internships would be it. In 2010 the British Humanist Association offered me a three-month internship, 40 hours a week, unpaid. I couldn't take it up. Living unwaged in London for long working employee's hours would have wrecked my finances. People my age who took up those roles, some of whom the BHA now employs, stayed locally with family, were in London already or had thousands to spend.⁵

The American Humanist Association recruits unpaid interns all year round to work full time. The Secular Coalition for America is seeking them this summer. The Humanist and Cultural Muslim Association listed a yearlong unpaid role—'Monday to Friday, 7 hours per day'—in September. Project Interfaith's site lists three different ones. Others, like the Center for Inquiry, seek interns without specifying hours or, frequently, whether or not they'll be paid.⁶

I shouldn't have to explain the problem here. These groups do seriously important work. Their positions are prestigious. They help enormously when seeking an activist career. Shutting people out who can't work for nothing, or who might even lose welfare cheques if they do, keeps atheism dominated by the rich. And labour has value. Not paying for it is theft. You wouldn't accept pay in 'experience', so don't expect your interns to. And don't just pay a stipend to subsist on. Pay the minimum wage where you are; if you possibly can, a living wage.⁷ The BHA spent £1,199,965 in 2012.⁸ Its chief executive's salary was advertised as '£50,000 - £65,000 plus benefits.' It could afford it. So can similar groups. If you can't at present, fundraise. (See above.) If you're on a high-up's pay, take a cut—that sounds like ethical leadership to me. If you really, really can't afford paid interns, don't take on unpaid ones. Better you don't help anybody up the ladder than that you only help the rich.

10. Remember students and young people aren't synonyms

I ran a student atheist group once. Thousands attended our events and flowed through our bank account, and several of us have since built secular careers. Most of our work was done with local humanists who welcomed colleagues under 70. The nationwide union of such groups in Britain was itself incorporated into the BHA several years back, combatting godlessness's grey-haired image. America's Secular Student Alliance (SSA) has been similarly lauded as 'the future of our movement'. Fine—if you're happy with a future free of anyone who couldn't pay five-figure sums each year.

Secular students play a king-sized role. Campuses can be nests of fundamentalism and winning battles there is critical.⁹ **10** But tensions with religious parents? Bullying by peers? Being history's most heathen generation? These are all young atheists' issues, not just students. And you won't find many atheists paying tuition fees who've fled cults, been cut off by family or can't renounce religion since their church provides their food.

Atheist groups crave access to campuses for the same reason believers do: vast communities of teens and twentysomethings are good spots to connect with youth. But if that's where all your youngest members are, you ignore the thousands who are godless, young and broke, hit hardest by religious power. Diversifying in age at the expense of class means shafting them. Concrete suggestions are hard, since campuses are the biggest single clumps of young people. Try seeking poor and working-class members first, then using inroads made to reach young people in that demographic. Like Black Skeptics Los Angeles, support poorer young people through scholarships and grants. Offer free or cheaper membership to under-25s, not students.¹¹ Work with high schools, like the SSA, as well as student groups. Make young non-students in your group more visible. If you're a local community association, scout out young people's events nearby—that might be where the breakthrough comes. Some of the things on this list are hard. Some will mean fundamental change in how you operate. Unless you want your group, and our movement as a whole, to stay an economically exclusive one, you have to do them anyway. Atheists like me will cheer you on—and so will those you meet for the first time.

Alex Gabriel is the author of Godlessness in Theory, a blog on religion and how to leave it, popular rhetoric and political dissent, secular, nerd and LGBT cultures, sexuality and gender or whatever else comes to mind. Follow him on Twitter @AlexGabriel.

- i <http://freethoughtblogs.com/godlessness/2013/12/24/class-dismissed-how-i-went-from-homelessness-to-oxford-and-what-richard-dawkins-has-nightmares-about>
- ii <http://www.alternet.org/atheism-intellectual-luxury-wealthy>
- iii http://www.salon.com/2013/07/29/five_reasons_there_arent_more_women_in_atheism/b
- iv <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2013/09/13/comedian-w-kamau-bell-atheism-is-like-the-highest-level-of-%EF%BB%BF-white-privilege>
- v <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkPoDnLgdc0>
- vi <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/0001424052748703559004575256143731101672>
- vii <http://jezebel.com/yes-atheism-happens-at-all-income-levels-all-races-i-830714884>
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- ix <http://sundayassembly.com/about>
- x <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/templeofthefuture>
- xi <http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/2901-nyt-ad>
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- xiii https://scontent-b-lhr.xx.fbcdn.net/hphotos-ash3/1512643_10153658943950363_166638971_n.jpg
- xiv http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular_Organizations_for_Sobriety
- xv <http://whc2014.org.uk/registration>
- xvi <http://skepticon.org/>
- xvii <http://hayleyisaghost.co.uk/qed-tickets>
- xviii <https://www.facebook.com/AmericanAtheists/posts/472512932759079>
- xix <https://www.facebook.com/humanism/posts/463186797032959>
- xx <http://centreforinquiry.org.uk/?p=494>
- xxi <http://stephenlaw.blogspot.co.uk/2010/08/logo-competition.html>
- xxii <http://fc02.deviantart.net/fs71/f/2011/331/b/9/b91d00a9b443a2482ee363bcd0439b87-d4hhufa.jpg>
- xxiii <http://i.imgur.com/0m1DPM3.jpg>
- xxiv http://unitedcor.org/sites/default/files/edit-contentimage/colorado/cocore_activism/COCORE_imaginary2012_sm.jpg
- xxv <http://mnaatheists.org/images/stories/mna-billboard-1.jpg>
- xxvi <http://wp.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/files/2012/08/20120813FallBillboardsMormonism.jpeg>
- xxvii <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2012/03/11/the-generic-atheist-billboard>

- 1 <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2013/09/26/pastor-turned-atheist-teresa-macbain-caught-in-resume-fabrication/>
- 2 <http://www.alternet.org/belief/33-jaw-droppingly-stupid-multiple-choice-questions-christian-education-curriculum>
- 3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opportunity_cost
- 4 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duJ5tVqHEU>
- 5 <https://www.facebook.com/humanism/posts/134277860005347>
- 6 <http://americanhumanist.org/AHA/Internships>
- 7 <http://secular.org/careers>
- 8 <http://www.internweb.com/internship/XX/25944/18084/int/>
- 9 <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/unitednations/about/opportunities/>
- 10 <http://internjustice.com/2013/08/06/are-unpaid-interns-the-victims-of-wage-theft/>
- 11 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_wage

The Philosophical Society of England

<http://www.philsoc.co.uk>

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NARNIAN EDUCATION: WHAT WOULD C.S. LEWIS THINK OF 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLING?

Dr. Mark Pike

Mark Pike, Associate Professor in the School of Education, is author of *Mere Education: C.S. Lewis as Teacher for our Time*. He will talk about C.S. Lewis and his views on Education. Lewis was the author of the Narnia books, of which the best known is *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

2.30pm Saturday 17 May 2014 Admission free, All welcome
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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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Website: www.conwayhall.org.uk

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

APRIL 2014

Sunday 20 Easter Holiday - No Meeting

22 April - 3 June 2014

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The psychology of musicians, composers and conductors

Six Tuesdays at 1930. £10 per session in advance, £12 on the day, £50 for the six.

Friday 25 THE SHAW SOCIETY presents **SHAW AND SEXUALITY**
19.30 **Alan Knight**. £4

Saturday 26 PER Group. **THE RELUCTANT FE PROFESSIONAL**
1000 **Sue Crowley, Denise Keir**

1400 SOCIALIST HISTORY SOCIETY
TONY BENN'S LEGACY FOR THE LEFT
Keith Flett, Dr Duncan Bowie, Willie Thompson, Stefan Dickers,
Jon Lansman, Stan Newens, Dr Kate Hudson

Sunday 27 **THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS: CONTOURS OF BELIEF**
1100 **Philip Davies**

1400 "THE IDEA OF ISRAEL". **Ilan Pappé** (postponed from 16 March)

MAY

Saturday 3 CFI UK AND CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY
1100 – 1545 **THE SURVEILLANCE SOCIETY**
Chair: **Stephen Law**. Speakers: **Caspar Bowden** (ex Microsoft Adviser),
Tom Sorell (U of Warwick), **Judith Rauhofer** (U of Edinburgh)
10.30 Registration £10 (£5). Free to friends of CFI UK

1900 THEATRE – **TO BEGIN THE WORLD OVER AGAIN:**
THE LIFE OF THOMAS PAINE
Ian Ruskin (writer/actor) trained at the RADA and currently lives in LA
Tickets Advance: £10 (plus booking fee), Concs. £5 (£15/£7 on the door)

Sunday 4 No Meeting

Saturday 17 PSE presents: **NARNIAN EDUCATION: WHAT WOULD**
1430 **C.S. LEWIS THINK OF 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLING?**
Dr. Mark Pike

Sunday 18 **THE ETHICS OF LIBERATION WARS**
1100 **Dan Thea**, Deputy Chair of the Anti-Apartheid Movement

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