

Ethical Record

The Proceedings of the Conway Hall Ethical Society

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THE SCREAMING POPE



*Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X
by the artist Francis Bacon. See article by Jim Walsh on page 20*

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New Members

We welcome the following to the Society

Timothy W Bank	Jacqueline Conway	Dave Hughes	Chloe Sellwood
Stella Blair	Anca David	Nisha Maturani	Stephanie Singer
Christopher Blohm	William Dunbar	T H Mitchell	Philippa Sivan
Steve Boyle	Fiona Etherington	Norma Rana	Edward Turner
W G Brett	Jane Feld	Eleanor Reilly	John Webb
Trent Burton	Catherine Goodey	Jennifer Ritson	Sonia Williams
Emily Cole	Samantha Gower	Kate Rogers	Kim Wilson

Obituaries

We regret to announce the death of **Donald Liversedge**. An obituary is on page 27. July 2015 was the 10th anniversary of the “7/7” bomb attacks in London. SPES member and humanist **Giles Hart** died on the bus at Tavistock Square. Interestingly, at the St. Paul’s memorial ‘service’ last month it was mentioned that humanists were amongst the victims. Isn’t it time we had a secular state to organise such events? NB.

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 Thinking on Sunday, 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)

THE ROBOTS ARE COMING

Chris Bratcher

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 21 June 2015

Grey Walter's Tortoises

The UK can claim a first in robotics. The first electronic automated robots were created in Bristol in 1948 by William Grey Walter {Who lectured on them to SPES. His son, Nicolas, was, in the 1980s, Chairman of its General Committee. [Ed]}. Named 'Elmer' and 'Elsie', they looked, and crawled about, like tortoises; to alter their program, Walter had to change their wiring set-up. The first digital programmable robot, called 'Unimate', was invented by George Devol in 1954, and sold, once a patent for it was granted, to General Motors in 1961. It was used to lift hot metal from die casting machines. The robot comprised a large box (the computer) joined to another box and an arm, with its tasks stored on a memory drum. It appeared on an American TV show, where it knocked a golf ball into a cup, poured a beer, and grasped and waved the show's orchestra conductor's baton, and, apparently, an accordion.

At first sight, things have not moved on much. Yesterday, a Japanese designed robot, Pepper, was released. At a preview, according to the *Independent*, "It glided onto the stage, conversed with celebrity guests, did a dance, sang a birthday song, and demonstrated how it could record family life in photos and serve as a companion". You may boggle at the latter claim; the robot, which costs £1000, is designed not only to recognise human emotions, but to react with simulations of anger, irritation – how human, you may feel – and joy: apparently expressed when it was praised or stroked onstage. I suggest cats are marginally cheaper; but *they* regard us as their robot servants.

A Japanese hotel, opening next month, will be run almost entirely by robots. Three will 'man' reception, four will be on hand to carry luggage, and three will clean the 72 rooms. They are designed to look like young Japanese women, and will appear to guests to be really breathing, blinking, and making eye contact: a living, breathing something-or-other doll. But so much for cuties. There is a serious concern as to what this tells us about C21st life in a home or hotel room software silo (particularly, but not only, in Japan), where the psychological capacity and social space to relate has so atrophied that machines are posited as a 'must have' substitute. Mine is the more prosaic replacement of humans by machines.

I imagine most of you have bought stuff from Amazon. It has 'fulfilment centres' (ugh) – vast stock rooms from whence it retrieves the goods you order. The job is done by state-of-the-art robots. Have you ever seen film of factory floors where wine, jam, cat food, whatever, is squirted into containers that are labelled and sealed by machines – but the containers are loaded from boxes onto a moving belt by hand? That used to be the case, because automation couldn't cope with the wobbles of the jars in the boxes. Now it can. Just under ten years ago, Honda unveiled their supposedly amazing new healthcare robot; in nurses' white plastic with a black facemask. Alas, at its demonstration it fell down only two steps up a flight of stairs on its 'rounds': red faces all round. That was then; the 'last frontier' of automative robotics, the difficulties in so-called 'simultaneous location and mapping', has melted away in the last five years.

A Chinese Explosion

According to the International Federation of Robotics, an association of academic and business robotics organisations, China bought approximately 56,000 of the 227,000 industrial robots purchased worldwide in 2014 – a 54 percent increase on 2013. And this is just the start. In March, the government of Guangdong Province, the heart of Chinese manufacturing, announced a three year programme to subsidise the purchase of robots at nearly 2,000 of its largest manufacturers. Guangzhou, the provincial capital, aims to have 80% of its factories automated by 2020.

The Taiwanese company Foxconn makes I-phones, I-pads, Kindles and I-don't know what else for, *inter alia*, Nokia, Motorola and Microsoft. It employs 1.2 million people, most of them, I imagine, in assembly plants. The owner plans to buy a million robots. And no doubt they will be assembled by other robots. One has to be very optimistic, as some attenders were, to imagine that even the highly controlled Chinese economy could manage to redeploy their factory workers. The Far East is heading towards mass unemployment; and so are we.

Hurray, you may say. An end to mindless, fiddly, 'RSI' inducing, sweat shop drudgery. But those doing it will be put on the scrap heap, or worse. David Graebner is an American anarchist (and leading figure in the 'Occupy Wall St' movement), and after being refused tenure at Yale, is now professor of Anthropology at LSE. As he put it in an article in *STRIKE!* magazine two years ago (<http://www.strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/>)

“In 1930, John Maynard Keynes predicted that, by century's end, technology would have advanced sufficiently that countries like Great Britain or the USA would have achieved a 15-hour work week. There's every reason to believe he was right. And yet it didn't happen. Instead, technology has been marshalled, if anything, to figure out ways to make us all work more. In order to achieve this, jobs have had to be created that are, effectively, pointless. Huge swathes of people, in Europe and North America in particular, spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed. The moral and spiritual damage that comes from this situation is profound. It is a scar across our collective soul. Yet virtually no one talks about it.”

A mass release of labour into supported leisure was always a product of very rose tinted spectacles. (The current hope is for – presumably worldwide – citizen's income, to keep us all consuming in our hours off.) I also doubt that technology has been installed to make us work more, although it has no doubt worsened the lot of those in unautomated workshops, and more generally in the economy where comparable rates of return on capital are inevitably demanded. Graebner's bullshit jobs masquerading as service, cited as call centres and all-night pizza delivery, are not deliberate inventions to enslave us; rather, they are all that are available for those without the veneer or chutzpah to be well enough presented to get the equally soulless jobs as managers of the damned.

Keynes' Casualties

Keynes coined a term for the casualties: 'technological unemployment': he defined it as where “our discovery of ways of economising on the use of labour

outruns the pace at which we can find new uses for labour”. This was thought to be an inherently temporary and transitional problem, solved in his time by public works until war, then post-war reconstruction, and the manufacture (literally ‘making by hand’) of cars and domestic labour saving devices produced at least forty years of full employment.

But consider Keynes’ terms for a moment. The assumption was that ‘we’ – the abstract ‘we’ beloved of economic theory, would ‘find’ – as if a cache of jobs were a bit like an undiscovered gold seam – ‘uses for labour’, again in the abstract, as if labour were an undifferentiated commodity, like excess coal piled at a pit head. This is not a criticism of Keynes, but of a certain sort of economic discourse. I am not by any stretch of the imagination an economist, but I am given to understand that a foundational axiom of economics is that economic processes are based on human wants; and since these are supposedly infinite, the economy supposedly will never come to a halt – and, as the supply of those wants has an ingredient termed ‘labour’, jobs, bar periodic mismatches, will never run out. But substitute a concrete living being for ‘labour’ – say, ‘horses’, and one can see the absurdity of the idea that economising on the use of horses must be a temporary blip before we can find new uses for them. We are being eliminated in the same way as horses were by tractors.

You may think we have seen this before and the sky didn’t fall in. In the 1960s, mainframe computers began to churn out bank statements and bills. In the 1970s, memory-enabled typewriters replaced repetitive typing by armies of clerks. In the 1980s, ATMs replaced bank tellers; bar-codes read at tills largely eliminated the labour of stock-control, and now credit and insurance and utility supply – to name but a few things – can all be processed on-line, with a few humans in a call-centre to deal with data that breach the program parameters, and the computer lame and infirm.

But it is not going to stop with the displacement of shelf-stackers, storekeepers, assembly line workers, clerks and tellers. Take a recent news report of Apple’s quarterly earnings (\$74.6 billion) and profits. It goes on to report the variation from analysts’ expectations, and consequential stock market trading. It reads as if it has been written to a formula – and it is, but not by a human. A company called Automated Insights owns the software. No financial analyst or journalist wrote it. A lot of stock work by them, and by lawyers, is being automated: for example, trawling documents with the use of specialist legal search software. The lesson, in factories and offices and newspapers, is that once a major industry player automates what was hitherto a niche function or occupation, the house of job cards crumbles throughout that industry.

Computerisation

Two Oxford economists, Carl Frey and Michael Osborne, wrote a paper in 2013 called ‘The Future of Employment: How Susceptible are Jobs to Computerisation?’ They deployed novel statistical techniques to rank 702 occupations. Those at greatest risk are Insurance Underwriters, Mathematical Technicians, and Title Examiners, Abstractors and Searchers. Three of the four most secure occupations were Recreational Therapists, Emergency Management Directors, and Mental Health and Substance Abuse Workers – rather supporting

Graebner's case for the debilitating effect of 'nothing' – or no - jobs. Frey and Osborne's conclusion was stark: over the next two decades, 47% of all employment is in the 'high risk' category, as 'potentially automatable'.

Short Term - it Pays; Long-term – it's Catastrophic

Productivity used to be a far better indicator of living standards than Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – after all, other things being equal, GDP goes up as a population grows. But the incomes of workers in the West have barely gone up since 1979, whereas, at least in the USA, productivity has gone up year by year. Where the latter has resulted in increased profitability, the surplus has gone to capital, rather than labour. Returns on capital exceed the present stagnated rate of growth. Gross inequality results. This is the state of the world set out in Thomas Picketty's magnum opus, *Capital in the 21st Century* [Harvard, 2014]. Convincing arguments have been made that the force to blame is increased automation.

Marx, as no doubt you all know, believed that the simple extraction of profit, conceived as surplus labour value, would in the end bring about the inevitable collapse of capitalism. It was an understandable assumption that an impoverishment of the workforce and consequential decline in their ability to pay for the *existing* products and services on which profits depended, would be a self-accelerating process. I leave it with the aside – no more – that, rather like Zeno's paradoxes of motion, the theory of inevitable collapse rested on a static or step-by-step analysis of a dynamical process. As mentioned, job creation through *new* products or public works and services has hitherto kept the show on the road. But it has given credence to the comforting notion that the economy is cyclical and will necessarily correct – or can be primed to do so. In my view, the theory that there will be an inevitable correction, simply through market forces, is as much metaphysics as an ever-draining lake of labour value. The concentration of wealth in the few, despite their no doubt extravagant tastes, will not be enough to 'trickle down' and sustain the purchasing power of the rest of us.

Strange, that this was Scarcely Imagined

Science fiction at its best is a brilliant predictor of invention, even of societies, but no good, it seems to me, at economics – few stories, as far as I am aware, have been written around it. The science fiction of the 1950s, particularly that of Isaac Asimov, foresaw the coming of robots. His Earth population was hostile to them; but for psychological reasons, rooted in a fear of machines running amok, or being instructed to act harmfully unawares, rather than because of their economic threat. They were imagined largely as an extrapolation from the domestic labour saving devices that were then filling American homes. His robots enabled the grossly overcrowded population of Earth to be fed and serviced, but nothing was said about how the people formerly employed to do so, earned a crust. They were developed on colony worlds in outer space, that were thinly populated by isolates, where displaced labour was not an issue. (He did anticipate humanoid robots giving them the quantum of solace that Pepper is now designed to provide.) His robots were an unpriced given, developed and supplied by a powerful corporation; how the state, commerce, or individuals were able to pay for them, or the merchandise they produced, was never mentioned.

Even that profound writer, Philip Dick, who transcended the genre in the 60s and 70s, and had conglomerates of dystopian Orwellian states equipping themselves with military drones and ‘homeland security’ robots to wage war and police an aimless human population beneath an elite, was silent on the matter. Individuals took vexatiously chatty driverless taxis, and dwellings came equipped with automated services that demanded payment before they would operate. Robotic teaching machines replayed the iconic personalities of American history, and Frey and Osborne’s therapists were, of course, robots. Residual human satisfaction (but scarcely a living) often came from turning to Arts and Crafts, or simply repairing stuff, in the face of displacement.

Dick’s economic model was, like Orwell’s, a Nazi/Stalinist command economy, and the American military/industrial cartels of the period; the latter in reality waxed because the State was fiscally strong enough to pay for their robotic products out of taxation. Multinationals are now substantially free of this ‘burden’.

Today, Western states print money in the form of credit to pay their and our way. It cannot last, at least in this form with correspondingly created debt. Is the age, in W.B. Yeats’ words, robotically slouching towards Jerusalem and utopia, or the abyss?

BOOK REVIEW - FROM MONK TO MODERNITY

The challenge of modern thinking

by **Dominic Kirkham**

Published in 2015 by SOF (Sea of Faith Network) at £10. 162 pages.

“I write as a victimto modernity” says Dominic Kirkham. “As one who was brought up a Roman Catholic, received all my education in Catholic institutes, becoming a teacher and then – after seemingly interminable years at a seminary – being ordained as a priest, and spending nearly thirty years in a religious order, the challenge of new ways of thinking, and the changes that were introduced by the church as a result, have been a particular concern and constant undercurrent.”

Pope Pius X in 1907 declared ‘modernism’ to be a threat to the RC church – it was ‘the synthesis of all heresies’, pernicious for being insidious. An almost McCarthyite atmosphere prevailed in the church for much of the 20th century, when efforts of modernisers could lead to virtual excommunication. Kirkham notes that the present Pope Francis’ criticism of the Vatican curia as suffering from ‘spiritual Alzheimer’s’ correctly characterises the traditional old-fashioned viewpoint.

The failure of the church to modernise under Pope John Paul, eg the literalist insistence on the reality of Adam and Eve and Original Sin, was not credible for Kirkham in comparison with evolutionary biology’s account of how humanity came to be, with all its faults. This thoughtful account of an intelligent man’s evolution towards humanism and the development of ideas in the modern world is most interesting.

NB.

DIVIDED BRITAIN: THE IMPACT OF RISING INEQUALITY

Stewart Lansley

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 28 June 2015

‘Inequality is the root of social evil’, declares Pope Francis. It’s ‘the defining challenge of our time’, adds President Obama. One of the most enduring of early post-war trends – the building of more equal societies – started to go into reverse from the late 1970s. Since then, Britain has moved from one of the most equal to one of the most unequal of rich nations.

Over the last three decades, the share of national income taken by the top one per cent has risen from 5 to 14 per cent, taking it back to the share they enjoyed in the pre-war era, and leaving much less of the pie for everyone else.ⁱ Although the shift towards higher levels of inequality has been led by the US and the UK, a similar, if shallower and slower, trend has been occurring in a majority of rich nations.

In Britain, the seemingly ubiquitous national debate about inequality is not about the gap across the broad range of society, between say bus drivers and brain surgeons. It is about the widening chasm between the two extremes of the income distribution, between a small financial and commercial elite at the top, able to colonise a rising share of the economic cake, and a growing army of low paid workers facing insecure jobs and deteriorating opportunities, at the bottom. One of the key drivers of rising inequality has been a 30 year decline in the share of the economy going to wages, and a rise in the share going to profits.ⁱⁱ Alongside this shift has been a growing gap between top and bottom pay levels. More than a fifth of the workforce in the UK is now low paid, the second highest level, behind the US, amongst rich nations.

A few years ago, the growing gap between rich and poor barely registered on the political Richter scale. The economic orthodoxy, accepted across the broad political spectrum, from Thatcher to Blair, was that higher inequality was the price we would have to pay for a more vibrant economy and faster growth. It is better to have a bigger cake shared *less* equally, the argument ran, than a smaller one divided *more* equally. ‘Of the tendencies that are harmful to sound economics’, the pro-market theorist and Nobel Laureate, Robert Lucas, pronounced in 2003, ‘the most poisonous is to focus on questions of distribution.’ For the last three decades, ‘the distribution question’ – of how the pie should be shared - has indeed been written out of the political and economic script.

According to pro-market theorists, the shift from wages to profits – creating a golden age for capital and its owners - should have improved national and global economic health. Yet the evidence is that the mass post-1980 experiment in deregulated, unequal capitalism has failed to bring the promised pay-off of a bigger cake and greater dynamism. By creating a number of highly damaging distortions - fractured demand, debt-fuelled consumption and heightened economic risk – it has instead bred fragility and stifled economic growth.

There is now a considerable body of research that suggests that inequality was a significant contributory factor in the 2008 Crash, helped to deepen the recession

and delay recovery and makes economies much more prone to crisis. Highly influential studies by the IMF have found not only that inequality slows the rate of growth but that redistribution of wealth does little to harm it. ‘Lower net inequality is robustly correlated with faster and more durable growth ... redistribution appears generally benign in terms of its impact on growth; only in extreme cases is there some evidence that it may have direct negative effects on growth.’

The OECD has come to a similar conclusion. It finds that, in the two decades up to 2008: ‘In Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States, the cumulative growth rate would have been six to nine percentage points higher had income disparities not widened... On the other hand, greater equality helped increase GDP per capita in Spain, France and Ireland prior to the crisis.’ⁱⁱⁱ Above a certain limit, one breached over the last two decades, income polarization, driven by a steady rise in the return to capital at the expense of the workforce leads to what Guy Ryder, director general of the ILO has called a ‘dangerous gap between profits and people’.^{iv}

There are three main reasons why inequality at current levels is so economically damaging. First, high levels of inequality cut the level of wage-based demand and stifle purchasing power. In Britain and across the globe, falling wage shares have created a chronic deficit of consumer demand. Consumer societies have increasingly lacked the capacity to consume, becoming dependent on artificial – and unsustainable - stimulants, from huge hikes in debt to the mass printing of money, to keep going.

Secondly, despite the predictions of pro-market theorists, the boost to profits has not been associated with improvements to productivity and innovation. Globally, innovation rates have been higher in more equal than in less equal, countries.^v In the UK, inequality has been associated with a much poorer record on the key drivers of growth, including investment.^{vi} This is bad news for productivity (output per worker), pay levels, jobs and economic opportunities.

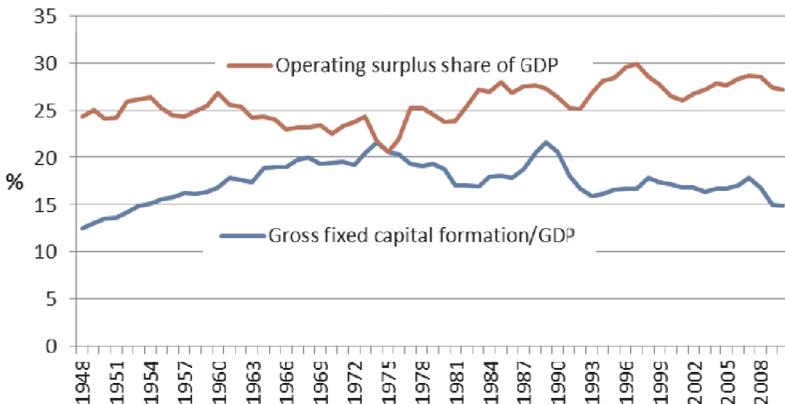


Figure 1: Rising profits and falling investment, UK, 1980 to 2012^{vii}

IN the UK, as shown in figure 1, higher profits since the 1980s have been associated with a steady decline in investment as a share of GDP. This decline has, in turn contributed to Britain's increasingly low paid economy. By making labour increasingly cheap, long term wage contraction in the UK has reduced the incentive for firms to invest to become more productive, helping to steer the UK into today's low value-added, low-skilled economy and low productivity economy.

Thirdly, the long squeeze on wages and spending power has led to swollen corporate and private surpluses which have added to instability. Instead of boosting investment, these surpluses have created a mountain of footloose global capital that has been used in ways that amplify the risk of financial crisis. The world economy was awash with spare capital in the build-up to 2008, a product of corporate and private accumulation that continued to gather pace through the crisis years. While living standards fell sharply across rich nations from 2008, corporate cash balances – aided by tax engineering – reached new heights in both the UK and the US. These swollen corporate and personal wealth surpluses – ‘dead money’ as Mark Carney has called them^{viii} - are the flipside of shrinking wage shares.

It is no coincidence that the two nations with the largest corporate cash surpluses, the US and the UK, are also the economies characterised by low pay and insecurity. When they are released, these surpluses tend to be used not in ways that strengthen the productive base of the economy and promote long-term growth, but on forms of financial restructuring that deliver large, short term, windfall gains for those masterminding the deals.

Today's heightened levels of inequality should be a political red alert. They have big implications for the social shape of society as well as economic sustainability. In Britain, poverty levels have been rising for a generation. Whatever measure is used, poverty levels are much higher than in the 1970s and compared with most other rich countries. As shown in figure 2, the proportion lacking three socially determined necessities (from basic housing conditions and diet to household durables and social activities chosen by the public) has doubled since 1983.

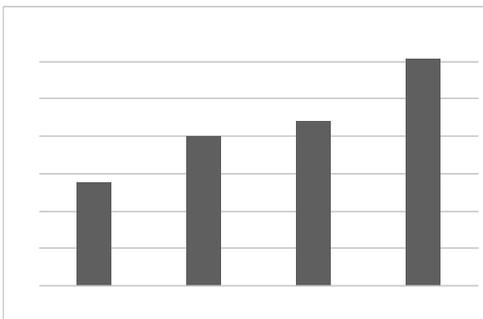


Figure 2: The rise in deprivation poverty, 1983 – 2012^{ix}

Deprivation levels are typically higher today than in the late-1990s. Today more households live in a damp home while three times as many cannot afford to heat their home adequately (figure 3). The numbers who skimp on meals is at a 30 year high. The poorest fifth in Britain are 40% poorer than their counterparts in Germany and 30% poorer than in France.

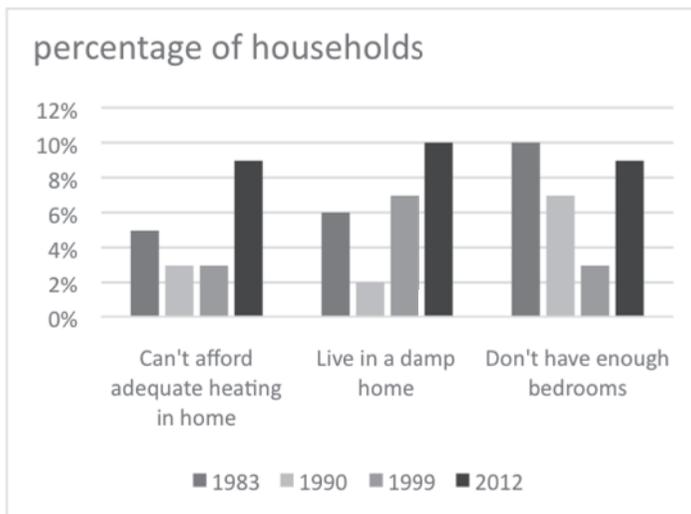


Figure 3: The spread of poor housing and inadequate heating^x

Poverty and inequality are intimately linked. The gains from growth over the last thirty have increasingly bypassed the poorest, colonised instead by the top 1 percent and playing havoc with jobs, pay, housing and life chances for the poorest. Many of the mechanisms that enrich the few simultaneously weaken the opportunities of the most disadvantaged. More and more business activity today – from high merger and acquisition rates and widespread use of private equity deals to ever more sophisticated forms of financial engineering – add up to a zero-sum game, redistributing existing corporate wealth upwards at the expense of company workforces and often the taxpayer.

While affluence, comfort and an array of choice is the norm for many sections of society, daily hardship and struggle is the lot of a large and growing cluster of the population. Close to a third of adults (more than three out of five them in work) not only lack a range of key, publicly-defined necessities, but suffer multiple, related problems as well, from damaged health, fragile finances and declining work and housing opportunities. Britain is now close to the American model, extreme affluence aside growing and deepening hardship, with the poorest facing a declining prospect of progressing beyond the barest of living standards, and a political culture that is more anti-poor rather than anti-poverty. The social and economic risks posed by ever-rising levels of inequality may have become a pressing political issue, but the response has been muted at best. As a result, the income floor has continued to slip while the ceiling has continued to rise. Indeed, inequality levels in most countries are still heading upwards.^{xi} This trend is matched by widespread fatalism. The American academic, Len Kenworthy, has argued that the way profits have outstripped wage growth is likely to be the 'new normal' rather than a temporary blip. The American economist, Tyler Cowen, warns that societies are likely to become ever more polarised between the super-affluent and the poor. In his highly influential book, *Capital*, the French economist, Thomas Picketty argues that the

four-decade long era of the ‘great narrowing’ that began in the 1930s was unique, replaced by a more permanent ‘fundamental force for divergence’.^{xii}

Secular Stagnation - the New Norm

If these predictions are right, the consequences are profound, a mix of rising social divisions and prolonged economic turbulence. As Larry Summers, the former White House adviser, has warned, if the Anglo-Saxon economic model is only able to achieve decent growth through short-lived asset bubbles, ‘secular stagnation’ may become the new norm. Recovery across the world is now being engineered not by a sustained increase in demand coming from rising real wages and corporate investment, but by artificial stimuli - from rising personal credit levels to the boosting of asset values. This is sowing the seeds for the next meltdown.

Stemming and reversing the inequality tide requires much more than tinkering, a modest increase in the level of the national minimum wage here or tougher talk on tax avoidance there. The level of inequality in a society ultimately depends on political choice. In general, more market oriented economies (such as the US and the UK) have bigger income and opportunity gaps than more regulated models such as those in Scandinavia.

If Britain – and other countries with growing inequality – are serious about reducing inequality, there needs to be a fundamental change in direction, one that reinstates the centrality of the distribution question in policy, that raises the floor and lowers the ceiling and ensures that the gains from growth are more equally shared. This requires the weakening of the economic grip still held by the City and the breaking up of Britain’s intense concentration of power, away from big business to consumers, small businesses and the workforce. It means too, a rebalancing of the wage-profit ratio in favour of wages, a shift in social and cultural norms and tougher boardroom constraints. It also requires ways of sharing the fruits of private ownership of capital more widely through, for example, the encouragement of more collective business models, from co-operatives to partnerships, and the introduction of social wealth funds.

Yet the mechanisms that might secure even modest change – the rich paying their due taxes, caps on unearned corporate pay, tighter regulations on finance, a boost to labour’s bargaining power and a smaller finance sector doing its job – are not even remotely close to the political agenda in Britain or globally.

It is possible we are approaching the political limit to inequality. The public may not tolerate further gains for the rich at the expense of the rest of society. The economic limit has already been breached. Further economic turbulence may force a stronger political response. Economies built around poverty wages and huge corporate and private surpluses are unsustainable. Given the economic risks of persistent inequality, policies that ensure a more equal distribution of the cake are not just a matter of social justice, but an economic imperative.

Stewart Lansley is the author of *Breadline Britain, The Return of Mass Poverty* (with Joanna Mack), Oneworld and of *The Cost of Inequality*, Gibson Square, 2011.

Notes

i Paris School of Economics, *The World Top Incomes Database*, 2015.

ii S. Lansley, *The Cost of Inequality* (Gibson Square, 2011), ch. 3. J. D. Ostry, A. Berg and C. G. Tsangarides, 'Redistribution, Inequality and Growth', *IMF Discussion Paper*, 2014.

iii <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/inequality-hurts-economic-growth.htm>. See also http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/trends-in-income-inequality-and-its-impact-on-economic-growth_5jxrjncwxv6j-en

iv http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/comment-analysis/WCMS_234482/lang-en/index.htm

v J. Hopkins, V. Lapuente and L. Moller, *Low levels of inequality are linked to greater innovation in economies*, *British Politics and Policies at LSE*, 2013; <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/archives/39215> UK Gross Domestic Expenditure on Research and Development, 2012 (London: Office for National Statistics, March 2014).

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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

THINKING ON SUNDAYS SPEAKERS REQUIRED

If you have any suggestions for speakers (their contact details are required) or event ideas, please get in touch with Evan Parker at evan.parker@warwick.ac.uk Tel nos 07403 607 046 (mob) or 0202 565 5016.

THE LOS ANGELES PRESS CLUB'S JOURNALISM AWARDS

Tamara Sheriff ©

At the 57th Annual Southern California Journalism Awards held on 28 June 2015 by the Los Angeles Press Club, there was a mystical yet undeniable energy. Held at the historic Biltmore Hotel in its grand ballroom, where once upon a time Senator John F. Kennedy held his first news conference before he became President, the Press Club honoured outstanding candidates for its Awards.

Cameras flashed in multiple sequence on the red carpet in the lobby to capture the moments of each arrival, followed by a silent auction and cocktail hour before a happy-go-lucky host holding a triangle dinner bell summoned us in unison with words of our forefathers, 'You may be seated, dinner is served'. A crowd full of student journalists, news crews, board members and admired honorees could be heard amidst the tinkling of silverware and wine glasses.

In between student categories, the President's Award for CBS This Morning, comedian, Alonzo Bodden, cracked jokes about 'Obama' Care and white supremacists among us, advising us to count on lying down in our cars if we felt unwell rather than in a hospital due to the fact that car insurance was a much better bet for the American people than health insurance! He also helped us visualize the unmistakable features of white supremacists in the wake of the Charleston church shooting. Among these features were missing teeth, fat beer bellies and baseball caps, reminding us that there was nothing supreme about a hillbilly on meth!

Charlie Hebdo Honoured

Alonzo's hilarious act could not prepare us however, for the sombre and heart wrenching award presentation for the Daniel Pearl Award in honour of Charlie Hebdo, received by one of the only survivors of this year's Paris atrocity last January led by the Islamist terrorist group Al-Qaeda. Antonio Fischetti was attending his aunt's funeral when Charlie and staff were murdered in cold blood. During this serious and engaging speech by Daniel's father, Judea Pearl, there was an eerie silence, drawing such a parallel during the ceremony between humour and horror.

Public Affairs, Commentary, Entertainment, Investigative News, Journalists of the Year, along with the Quinn Award in honour of Willow Bay, a veteran television journalist and current director of the USC Annenberg School of Journalism, highlighted the talents of our future student journalists and asked us to support them. We were reminded how much journalism has changed over time, reinventing itself to tell a story of truth. It struck me that it was as if time had stopped during this lavish ceremony and, if only for a brief moment, the voices of the people who were honoured but couldn't be there or who had lost their lives, accompanied us in spirit through the jokes and serious speeches to carry out a tradition in the middle of one of America's most vibrant cities. I wondered if every guest noticed the tiny gold angel on the white chocolate disk that sat on top of their dessert. It reminded me that here we all were, celebrating life and discussing death in Los Angeles -- the city of angels.

VIEWPOINTS

A Very Murderous Cult

Alexandra Stein, in her very useful analysis of cults (*ER* July 2015), leaves out the *Aum Supreme Truth* (a.k.a. Aum Shinrikyo) movement in Japan. This was a fanatical and murderous cult if ever there was one, and of course ‘divinely inspired’. In 1995, thirteen passengers on the Tokyo subway were overcome by the nerve gas sarin, and died horribly painful deaths, and over a thousand more were hospitalised. Shoko Asahara, the group’s leader, had ordered the attack, and his plan was to paralyse the government of Japan.

Devotees were not just the ‘no-hopers’ picked up off the streets that many cults depend upon. Among the team who carried out the attack on the underground were Dr. Ikuo Hayashi, a 48 year-old heart surgeon who had studied in America before joining Aum; Yasuo Hayashi, a 37 year old electronics engineer; Masato Yokogama, a physics graduate, and two other graduates. People who were caught trying to leave the organisation were killed, and when a young lawyer named Sakamoto took up the case of 23 families who had lost children to the cult, he and his family were all murdered on Asahara’s instructions.

Aum’s doctrines drew upon a mixture of New Age religion, Hinduism (particularly Shiva the Hindu god of destruction), Buddhism and the Christian idea of Armageddon. Asahara had heard voices telling him to lead God’s armies. He also had more worldly ambitions such as to become rich. He preached that the end of the world would come in 1997, beginning with an American nuclear attack against Japan. You guessed it: if you wanted to survive the apocalypse, you had to become a disciple of his and donate large amounts of money.

Amazingly Aum continues to thrive, but not of course in its old clothes. 1997 came and went, and the world did not end. As with other apocalyptic cults, members didn’t seem to mind the false prophecy. They usually simply set a new date. It now calls itself the *Aleph Group*. Asahara was arrested in May 1995, a couple of months after the tube attack. Although the evidence against him was overwhelming, the court case dragged on for years, mainly because of Asahara’s refusal to cooperate. He was finally sentenced to death in February 2004. Although two appeals against the sentence failed, his execution seems to have been postponed indefinitely.

David Simmonds – Woking, Surrey

New Religious Movements or Cults?

Alexandra Stein’s (*ER* July 2015 p 3) on *Cults and Brainwashing* refers to ‘cults’. When I worked at the LSE a few years ago with eminent sociologist professor Eileen Barker, the acknowledged expert in this field, at the charity INFORM (Information on New Religious Movements), she much preferred the term *new religious movements* to ‘cults’, which she thought derogatory.

We in INFORM had a telephone service where people could phone in with their queries. Some parents were upset if their children joined such groups, but this could have been the child’s ‘knight’s move’ way of escaping a

cloying situation at home and negotiating a way to maturity. One mother told me that her son had definitely benefited from joining a group. Of course, one always has to be aware of excessive influence from over-dominant individuals who often lead such groups.

Jennifer R. Jeynes - Hampstead

Capital Punishment

Since writing my article on the Moors Murders (July *ER* p 21), I have realised that the death penalty was still in force in this country at the time Brady committed his first three murders – and it obviously did not deter him. In fact, I suspect that the exquisite challenge of it would actually heighten his feelings of excitement and triumph.

As for his contention today that it is because he is kept in a hospital instead of prison that he is prevented from starving himself to death, this may be so, since the law is that patients are not allowed to commit suicide unless they are ‘of sound mind’ – and, according to the psychiatrists at Ashworth Special Hospital, Brady is insane: ‘a psychopath with delusions of grandeur’. Of course he is; and has obviously never been anything else. But surely the specific legal prevention of an insane suicide ought rationally to apply only to patients who oscillate between alternate episodes of sanity and insanity, not to the continuously insane.

Barbara Smoker – Bromley

Support for Capital Punishment? Happily Declining

Barbara Smoker and Chris Purnell (*ER*, July 2015) have dealt effectively with Evan Parker’s various arguments for the reintroduction of capital punishment – other than his clearly felt but still odd attempt to justify it by condemning society (and the Society) for not doing more to reduce road traffic deaths (*ER*, June 2015). Leaving aside the struggle to understand how causing a fatal accident (however culpable) can be equated with deliberate murder, it’s worth adding that his statistics, like his arguments, are out of date.

It is no longer correct that “around 50% of people in our country consider the [sic] CP is justified”. A YouGov poll in August 2014, to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the last two executions in Britain, found only 45% in favour of capital punishment, a fall from 51% in a similar poll four years previously (and massively down from the 80% Evan claims back in 1965). Interestingly 52% of 18-24 year olds polled opposed reintroduction while support for it was strongest ‘among UKIP voters, the over-60s and those in lower social grades’ [1], so hopefully the young will continue the trend. Similarly an e-petition in 2011 for a parliamentary debate on reinstatement attracted fewer signatures than a counter-petition opposing it.

The fact is ‘We now live in an era where the majority of people in Britain don’t want the death penalty and don’t really think much about it except, perhaps, when they read about a horrific botched execution in the US ... Britain has fallen out of love with judicial killing, recognising its arbitrariness, inherent cruelty and sheer excessiveness’ [2]. Happily we are not alone in this. Since 1991 the number of

countries abolishing state-sponsored execution has doubled, from 48 to 97 [3]. The growing majority unconvinced by dehumanising justifications for barbarism in aid of some ‘greater good’ will welcome this cultural evolution. If it distinguishes us further from those societies and regimes where utilitarian or theological arguments still actively promote judicial killing (China, parts of USA, Iran, ISIS), who would seriously wish to turn the clock back?

- 1) theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/12/less-half-britons-support-reintroduction-death-penalty-survey
- 2) theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/13/fifty-years-hanging-britain-death-penalty
- 3) amnesty.org.uk/fifty-50-years-death-penalty-britain-uk#.VYgk-ulFCM8

Carl Harrison

Santayana’s Timocracy

In the June 2015 edition of the *Ethical Record*, Tom Rubens’ article *Santayana as Social and Cultural Philosopher* referred to ‘timocracy’, which I had not previously known about. According to a Wikipedia article on timocracy, it is defined as:

“**Timocracy:** *time* meaning ‘price or worth’ and *kratia* meaning ‘rule’: a state where only property owners may participate in government. The more extreme forms of timocracy, where power derives entirely from wealth with no regard for social or civic responsibility, may shift in their form and become a plutocracy where the wealthy and powerful use their power to entrench their wealth.”

I find it difficult to believe that anyone would find this form of government acceptable in a modern era, though the growing levels of inequality in our present global societies may indicate that we are in fact all slipping into some modern form of timocracy.

John Dowdle - Watford

BOOK REVIEW – THE FAITH I LEFT BEHIND

Edited by Tom Flynn, Andrea Szalanski and Julia Lavarney
Inquiry Press, Amherst, NY, USA. ISBN 1-937998-03-7 (2015)

Review by **Norman Bacrac**

Free Inquiry invited its readers to submit autobiographical essays describing ‘the life-stance odysseys that had led them to their present positions of secular humanism or atheism’. An earlier and well-known exponent of this type of writing was Bertrand Russell’s essay *Why I am not a Christian*. The editors received forty-two essays, with titles ranging from *Why I am not a member of anything*, *Why I am not a Catholic*, *Why I am not a Muslim*, *Why I am not an observant Jew*, *Why I am not a supernaturalist* to veteran freethinker Barbara Smoker’s *Why I am not an agnostic*.

Barbara says she is aware that strictly speaking, as she does not claim to ‘know’ that there is no god, agnostic is her correct designation, *together with* ‘atheist’ (non-belief in the existence of god). However, as most people take agnostic to mean ‘I don’t know what I believe’ and Barbara certainly *does* know what she believes and disbelieves, she eschews the term agnostic.

This book is to be placed in the Humanist Library and Archives at Conway Hall.

**BOOK REVIEW - THE TROJAN HORSE:
A Leftist Critique of Multiculturalism in the West**
by **Göran Adamson**. Pub. by Malmö: Arx Forlag, 2015
Review by **Rumy Hasan**

In the preface to the English edition, Swedish academic Göran Adamson of Copenhagen University points out that he had attended a Fri Debat event in Copenhagen but was unable to attend the following meeting – which was attacked by an Islamist in February 2015 that led to his colleague Finn Nørgard being murdered. Some 40,000 people attended the demonstration of solidarity at which speakers advocated interfaith dialogue – but there was not one headscarf in sight. In this sharp polemic, Adamson argues that not only Sweden but the Western world has allowed a Trojan horse into its midst – that of multiculturalism and its subset, diversity.

Adamson utilises the case study of Swedish universities – focusing on the May 2000 report *Diversity at the University* commissioned by the Social Democratic government. Its purpose was to ‘increase diversity regarding ethnic background among students and teachers in order for the university to better reflect diversity in society’. The assumptions of the report are clear and flow from the politics of the political establishment: that increasing diversity leads to increasing quality and it is a ‘good thing’ because it enables a diversity of perspectives to be provided so that different voices can take part. Furthermore, ‘cultural diversity in higher education leads to multicultural and multisocial understanding and reduces ethnic prejudices’ – the mixing of cultures reduces intolerance which increases societal acceptance.

The Ideology of ‘Diversity’

Adamson robustly challenges these assumptions arguing that the link between diversity and quality is emotional and no evidence is provided for it; moreover, in the ideology of diversity, voices do not refer to individual voices but to the rights of ethnic groups as a homogenous entity. His is a self-proclaimed ‘leftist critique’ because of its stress on the egalitarian principle set out by the British historian Bernard Crick {who gave the Conway Memorial Lecture in 2000, entitled ‘Ethics and citizenship: a new agenda for the 21st century’. [Ed]} who, at the LSE in 1963, co-founded the Society against Racial Discrimination. Crick argued that the British public ought to treat immigrants from ethnic minority groups as ‘equals but not as more than equals’. Adamson accuses advocates of multiculturalism and diversity of acting in breach of this principle: by proffering privileges to newly settled ethnic minorities. They have been treated as more than equals, with invidious feelings from the indigenous Swedish population.

He gives the example of the Social Democratic Prime Ministerial candidate Mona Sahlin, who opined of immigrants that ‘you have a culture, an identity, a history that binds you together. What do we have? We have Midsummer’s Eve and ridiculous stuff like that’. Adamson describes this as reflecting decades of self-abusive discourse within the Swedish political elite and a manifestation of what George Orwell had termed ‘transferred nationalism’, a kind of nationalism barred at home but hailed overseas or those who hail from overseas; a case of psychological compensation to salve liberal postcolonial guilt. Whilst this is

explicable in former colonial powers such as Britain, it is rather odd coming from those in a country that did not possess third world colonies and which, moreover, has been generous in welcoming immigrants and asylum seekers from the third world. Perhaps the most robust critique of diversity comes from research conducted by the American political scientist Robert Putnam, with the surprising and uncomfortable finding that ‘across countries in the West, ethnic heterogeneity appears to be linked to lower social trust and less sense of solidarity’, where people appear to ‘hunker down’, that is pull in, much like turtles.

‘Ethno-religious-centric Teaching’

The recommendation of *Diversity at the University* is to advocate ethnocentric teaching and multicultural affirmation for minorities, a notion which Adamson derides, arguing that it is an affront to scientific accuracy and constitutes emblematic anti-intellectualism. He questions how much cultural affirmation a modern society can tolerate without disintegrating. Another LSE academic, Iftikhar Ahmed, has claimed that the reason why Muslim children have bad grades is partly caused by the fact that they read the Koran too much — a case of the hazards of ‘ethno-religious-centric teaching’. For purveyors of diversity the ethnic group is the focus, not its individuals and moreover dissidents within an ethnic group are treated as being de facto enemies within. This is an important point that has been made by secularists and free thinkers in the West from religious minorities, to the effect that they have never been supported by leftists and liberals who, thereby, have been given the epithet the ‘reactionary left’.

Adamson takes issue with *The Diversity at the University’s* assumption that diversity is anti-racism and that multiculturalism rests on a progressive, tolerant, and egalitarian foundation and finds it deeply troubling that views that contest such thinking are denigrated. On the contrary Adamson asserts that a scientific discussion should allow for the opposite point of view where diversity and racism are two branches of early 19th century political romanticism. By not so doing, Swedish universities have failed in their intellectual mission – the only mission that matters – and descended into ‘mindless trumpeting of Social Democratic pseudo-radicalism’. He concludes that ideas embedded in multiculturalism under whose umbrella diversity falls, have failed concerning the independence of universities in regard to ideological debate and critical thinking. This has undermined the autonomy of lecturers and researchers and ‘infiltrated panels, projects, institutes, faculties, offices, courses and curricula’. The final damning charge is that it has let students down: ‘instead of showing them how to think, it has told them what to think’.

Though the book is directed at a Swedish audience, it provides a powerful critique of an ideology that is prevalent throughout the western world including in Britain. The insights from Sweden and its universities are valuable in and of themselves and provide a cautionary tale as to how, despite good intentions, supposedly progressive doctrines are, in fact, quite the opposite as they give succour to some profoundly reactionary cultural religious beliefs and practices and are, moreover, antithetical to the intellectual endeavour.

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

MIGRANTS OR PEOPLE?

Jim Walsh, CHES CEO

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 12 July 2015

There is a positive drought sweeping over us, which threatens to create a bleak, desolate and fearful existence. We are blindly falling into oblivion and with each passing day there appears to be no arrest to our descent. News item after news item generates shudders and terrors as we stare fixedly into the stream of chaos, distress and horror with which we are seemingly presented.

The achievements of the 20th century that took so many great strides to overcome inhumanity are slowly showing signs of erosion. The abolition, by so many, of capital punishment is in great danger if one believes and becomes persuaded by 'debating' polls glibly erected to canvas a simple click of a button, which, if enough people press, starts to become a powerful political tool in the wrong hands. Can it be that we live in a society that can excavate and smash one of the foundations of a mature society by naively swaying the populace with fear? The focus of fear, of course, being that post 9/11 iconographic term coined by George W. Bush, 'Terrorists', which is now slowly but surely morphing into the term 'migrants'. But really this is fear of the other.

The fostering and nurturing of fear, suspicion and hate is a real problem and left unchecked, it will cripple humanity through war and convince individuals to self-impose barriers to community that will escalate the loneliness and depression that swarms exponentially among us.

It's time for a change and it's time for us to realise what we mean to each other even if at first we don't understand one another and can't see why we each believe or do the things we do. The lessons learned in the twentieth century and the results achieved subsequently by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have shown us the danger that lurks in each one of us and also the good that we can collectively attain, striving for global civilization. We must not go backwards, we must continue to strive, we must also realise the risks we face every day by lazy thinking that seeks to reduce questions of other people to problems that must be overcome. Each of us deserves consideration, thought and understanding. Each of us deserves to be treated ethically, because we are all people.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

Within his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer set down a re-interpretation of a neglected and overlooked school of thought: Hermeneutics, the study of understanding. For Gadamer, philosophy and hermeneutics needed to address what it is for us to live, breathe, and be among others in the world around us.

To begin with Gadamer tackled four particular areas: prejudices, horizons, conversation and the work of art. By taking each in turn, we shall see not only how Gadamer unveiled his philosophy, but also how he can open our eyes so that perhaps we may notice, acknowledge and welcome the 'other' into our lives and thoughts.

Prejudices

For Gadamer, the person gazing at the thing itself, for example, a book, undertakes a process whereby they “project a meaning for the text... because [they] read the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning.” Such ‘expectations’ do not come from the thing that is gazed upon, instead the “person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore-meanings.” These ‘fore-meanings,’ according to Gadamer, come from our prejudices, our internal modes of orientation, with which we try to understand the world. They underpin our engagement with everything that we sense, and they help us to understand the new, the suspicious, the mundane, the beautiful, etc.

“Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth... They are simply the conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us.”

Gadamer’s main concern regarding prejudices, though, was that we need to be aware of their existence within us and that they exert influence whenever we try to understand something.

Horizons

Gadamer’s perspective was the realisation that the level of consciousness we have so far been able to attain is analogous to a personal horizon, whereby we find ourselves, as he put it, with a “range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.” Which, because Gadamer was focussed upon hermeneutics – the study of understanding – translates into consciousness having a fixed point around which it perceives the world.

At this juncture, it is important to note that in order to have consciousness one needs to have a horizon. Without such a horizon one finds themselves somewhere between a goldfish and a sty-bound pig. As Gadamer conversely illustrated, “A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence over-values what is nearest to him”. Rounding it all out, the near-sighted person, if one follows Gadamer’s logic, has little or no consciousness.

However, we are limited by what we can see within our horizon and advancing beyond it requires a shift in consciousness. This should not present too drastic an obstacle though, because by the very fact of having the horizon – an important first step - we are also able to comprehend that there are sights beyond our current vision.

There is a second critical stage to Gadamer’s work on horizons and how we think, understand and engage with the world. In order that we do not objectify the other, or their claim, we must avoid trying to assimilate them into our horizon as it stands, but also we should not attribute an alternative horizon to them into which we transplant ourselves whilst ignoring our own horizon. Instead of objectifying them, as in the former, or indeed objectifying ourselves, as in the latter, we need to recognise the fluidity of ourselves with the other and attempt to achieve what Gadamer termed a “fusion of horizons.”

For Gadamer, the “fusion of horizons” required regulation, and this he saw as the task of a “historically effected consciousness.” In talking to Carsten Dutt, Gadamer said “we must take the encounter [potentially fusing horizons] seriously” because “one of the most essential experiences a human being can have is that another person comes to know him or her better.” Isn’t that what we all want – to be understood? To have someone that listens properly to the wit and wisdom we have to bestow whilst also appreciating the depths of our torment and the highs of our joyful responses to the world.

Conversation

Gadamer articulated three conditions regarding conversation. The first was that one must allow the subject matter of the conversation to dictate the flow of the conversation, and that one should not enter into a conversation with a pre-determined goal if one wants to have a genuine experience. The second was that one must remain open to what the other actually gives within the conversation, and hence respond to those opinions and not just what arises in one’s own thoughts. The final condition, for Gadamer, was that “every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language.”

“Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other... Where a person is concerned with the other as [an] individuality – e.g., in a therapeutic conversation or the interrogation of a man accused of a crime – this is really not a situation in which two people are trying to come to an understanding.”

Understanding through conversation, therefore for Gadamer, requires that each person regard the other’s opinion and not just the other as an object. A stunningly obvious truth, but one that absolutely needs stating, in this current climate of fear, suspicion and hatred towards immigrants.

The necessary realisation being that we need to stop looking *at*, and start looking *with*, if we want any actual understanding to emerge, because understanding comes through participation not observation as far as Gadamer was concerned.

The Work of Art

“The work of art has its true being in the fact it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The ‘subject’ of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself.”

Excusing the fact that the translation has managed to provide us with the word ‘experience’ four times in two sentences, there are three neat mini-revolutions contained within this terse prose: First, there is the explicit challenge to accepted models of understanding in both aesthetics and epistemology. In both disciplines, the standard criterion for the experiential subject is to be static and stable, and not as Gadamer proposed, dynamic and changeable. Second, the statement regarding the work of art’s ‘true being’, the attainment of which is predicated upon its ability to alter the spectator, acts to license the judgement of the work in a radical manner, in that any such judgment is determined by

whether or not there is a perceivable effect upon the viewer. Finally, the third element, in contrast to the malleable spectator, sees the work itself remaining constant.

Perhaps, it's as well now to make clear and bring completely in focus that whenever we describe the engagement with an 'artwork' or 'work of art' we are building a template for how we could engage with another person. Make no mistake, all Gadamer's work on aesthetics has an implicit ethical lesson. So, the person – migrant – is not like some alien from another universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in and through them.

Let's look at some art to visualise Gadamer's thoughts. In 1650, Velázquez painted his portrait of 'Pope Innocent X'.



Pope Innocent X. By the artist Velázquez

Ever since, the work has been revered by art connoisseurs, for example, Hippolyte Taine described it as “the masterpiece amongst all portraits.”

Three hundred years after Velázquez, Francis Bacon painted several variations on Velázquez's original work and managed to create a total reformation and new icon in the history of art: 'The Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X,' affectionately known as the 'Screaming Pope' (see front page)..

There are many respected art critics and aestheticians that venerate Bacon's work and consider it a triumph of genius. Robert Hughes said, "Once you have seen two or three of Bacon's screaming popes, you can't get them out of your mind." And this is it. This is Gadamer's point. Some art "has its true being in the fact it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it."

When one sees the 'Screaming Pope' for the first time one comes away changed. The experience of it alters our perception of what painting is. Somehow the work invades our mind, sets up shop, and makes us slightly different from who we were before. And this power, Gadamer understood, is the "true being" of art: the power to change "the person who experiences it."

In 1868, Manet painted one of his iconographic scenes of the bourgeoisie at rest, 'The Balcony', containing friends and family as the main figures in an homage to Goya's 'The Majas at the Balcony'.



The Balcony. By the artist Manet

In 1950, a confident and self-assured Magritte painted 'Perspective II. Manet's Balcony'. The work is an exact reproduction of 'The Balcony', except that each of the figures is replaced, or encased, by a coffin shaped to match their posture as depicted by Manet. Here we see the same power to shock and disturb as we saw with Bacon's 'Screaming Pope'.



Viewing Magritte's work alters one's understanding of what a work of art can be and how we are to engage with it. Gadamer's idea demands that we consider the spectator as a malleable figure. The work of art has its "true being" or, perhaps switching things around, the work can truly said to be art, if it changes the person who experiences it.

Perspective II. Manet's Balcony
By the artist Magritte

'The Great War,' for example, works to continually irritate us because the hydrangea is precisely in the way of where we want to look – the Edwardian lady's face. We don't cope too well when faces are covered up, obscured or removed entirely. Perhaps instinctively we are upset and disturbed by this. The face is after all where we direct our gaze when regarding each other and it is always our first port of call when examining portraits, the surroundings forever are secondary.

The Great War
By the artist Magritte





Not to be Reproduced
(Portrait of Edward James)
By the artist Magritte

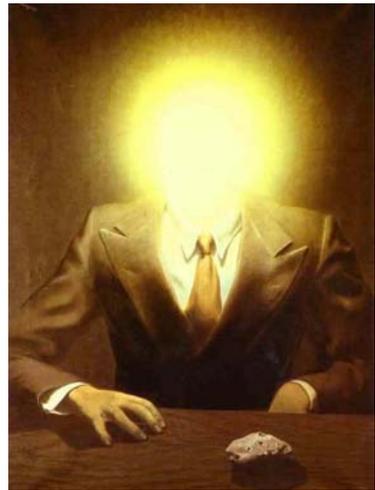
In ‘Not to be Reproduced’, Magritte plays further with this unsettling theme by giving the work the sub-title – ‘Portrait of Edward James’ - a device he repeats in ‘The Pleasure Principle.’

Both works deepen our sense of being unsettled because the solitary protagonist is actually named and the work presented as a ‘portrait’. Our expectations, therefore, become visually and textually distressed by Magritte courtesy of his painting and its title.

We need to acknowledge, though, that Magritte is a cypher for how we can relate to an artwork or an artist’s oeuvre. His work demonstrates the power that any art can have on us, in that we can be changed by it, if we let it. The question is can we let ourselves be affected by a work of art?

Are we able to stand in front of something that we know could push us, change us, re-shape our boundaries, redefine our customs, and tinker with our deepest thoughts and emotions? Because what I hope to have shown with Magritte and Bacon can be found, and should be found, in the whole gamut of art. After all, one person’s Magritte is another person’s Miró, Picasso, Van Gogh, Michelangelo, Goya, or even Velázquez or Manet.

By examining Gadamer’s thoughts within the first half of *Truth and Method*, I think it is clear that a convincing case is starting to form concerning how we regard each other. And perhaps it is to ourselves that we should look first if we perceive that we have problems with migrants. We should reflect upon our own prejudices, the limits of our own horizons, our ability to enter into a real conversation and how a person, a migrant even, might be able to personally affect and change us for the better if we could only allow ourselves to regard them, in the same manner that Gadamer suggests we regard a work of art.



The Pleasure Principle
(Portrait of Edward James)
By the artist Magritte

For a richer and more detailed account of the issues briefly mentioned in this article, please refer to the posts in Jim Walsh’s blog, ‘An Ethical Thirst,’ in the ‘Ethical Record’ section of the Society’s website – www.conwayhall.org.uk

OBITUARY - DON LIVERSEDGE, 1917-2015

Don Liversedge, who has died at the age of 98, was born in Llanelli on 30 June 1917. Soon afterwards his family moved to Addiscombe (Surrey), and then to Bexhill-on-Sea. His father died when he was 14, and his mother opened a guest-house in Bexhill, which Don assisted in running. During the Second World War, Don was in the army and served in Northern Ireland. In the 1945 general election, Donald worked as an election agent for the Labour Party. In 1952-54 he studied PPE at Ruskin College Oxford, where he met his lifelong partner Diana Cant at a college reunion in 1959. He then trained as a careers officer and worked for Herts County Council advising school-leavers. In about 1975 he moved to a similar job with the London Borough of Hillingdon, retiring in 1982.

Don's family background was non-religious: a christening arranged by his grandfather was cancelled by his mother! He was active in the humanist movement, serving for many years as a Trustee and Honorary Representative (and also Treasurer {Ed}) of the then South Place Ethical Society. He was also a founder member of Harrow Humanists in the 1960s, together with Alex Dawn, Henry and Ruth Young, and Rosemary Bennett. He chaired the Harrow Association of Voluntary Services, and promoted the "Agenda 21" environmental initiative in Harrow. He was a tremendous committee man, and is said to have sat on 27 committees as part of his work or as a volunteer.

Don's interests included jazz: he ran a jazz appreciation group at Conway Hall; cars: he learned to drive at an early age, and owned an early Ford which he bought for £7.10s in old money; and biology and psychology – he was a member of the Galton Institute. He was carried through his long life by a quirky sense of humour, an equable temper, and a lifelong interest in education.

Charles Rudd, with thanks to **Diana Cant**

Christopher Ormell, Secretary of the Philosophy for Educational Renewal Group (PER) writes:

Don joined the PER Group in the late 1990s when it was based at the University of North London (UNL). He was firmly of the view that something as radical as 'renewal' was needed in education. In 2000 there was an impasse in electing a new Group Chair and Don gallantly offered to take on the role. He was instrumental in taking the Group to Conway Hall and making Conway Hall its base.

Don was not a theorist, but we much appreciated his realistic advice, and every now and then he came up with 'mots' which expressed important insights. His best was to define education as the process needed to turn youth into the "people we would like to be". On Don's watch the Group began to grow, if only slowly, and it became more firmly established than it had been at UNL. The Group staged a small Dinner in 2007 on *The Lotus* in Millwall Inner Dock to celebrate Don's 90th birthday. Don retired as Group Chair in 2010. In 2013 we invited him to be the special guest at the conference at Conway Hall to celebrate the Group's first 20 years, but sadly he declined to come. We have lost a good friend, and a trusty, realistic adviser who took the long view.

Donald had been in hospital and care home for his last 5 months. His wish was for no funeral or memorial meeting and for his body to be left to medical science. [NB]

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.

AUGUST 2015

WOMAN UP! UK & CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY:

WOMAN UP!

Weekend Saturday 29 10:00 am - Sunday 30 1730

Ticket £6 (£3 for CHES members)

SEPTEMBER

LONDON THINKS

Tuesday 1 September 19:30 **WILL WE CRASH AGAIN?**

Why capitalism needs debt write-offs to survive. **Steve Keen**

Ticket £10 (£5 for CHES members)

Tuesday 8 September 1930 LONDON FORTEAN SOCIETY & CHES Ticket £5

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WILLIAM B SEABROOK (1884-1945)

Roger Luckhurst

Tues 8 1930 CHES EVENT: **POLITICAL SKULDUGGERY:**

What kept Charles Bradlaugh from taking his seat in parliament?

Deborah Lavin (Secretary, Freethought History Research Group)

THINKING ON SUNDAY

£3/(2 conc), free to CHES members

Sunday 13 **IS HIERARCHY THE ROOT PROBLEM IN POLITICAL ECONOMY?**

1100 **Clive Menzies**, Editor and Communicator, Critical Thinking at the Free University

Sunday 20 **WHEN WAS 'ONCE UPON A TIME?'** or, why there has only ever
1100 been one story - a thesis to be demonstrated by **Peter Logan**

CENTRE FOR INQUIRY & CHES

Saturday 19 September 1100 - 1500 **GOD AND THE BIBLE**

with **Keith Ward**, **Francesca Stavropoulou** and **Stephen Law**

£10/(£5 for CHES members)

CONWAY HALL SUNDAY CONCERTS

Artistic Director: **Simon Callaghan**. Ticket £10 (free for 8 – 25s)

13 September 1830 **St Paul's Quartet**

Haydn: Quartet in D Op.20/4 - **Schubert**: Quintet in C D956

20 September 1830 **Camerata Alma Viva**

Mozart: Divertimento K136 - **Mozart**: Sinfonia Concertante K364

Shostakovich: Chamber Symphony Op.110a