

The Leicester Bus Campaign

Everyone knows that the Pope is a Catholic, but how many people in Leicester know what Secularism is? Although great strides have been made in raising the Society's profile in the local press, not everyone reads the *Mercury*.

The national campaign of bus advertising never came to Leicester, so the Secular Society Board has now decided to start a local campaign. It was agreed that it should follow the broad outline of the national campaign using its central slogans. However, it was thought that a more local dimension could be introduced with different straplines and it was agreed that the Board should consult with members over this.

Although the local campaign has yet to be launched, pledges worth £540 have been made by those attending the December meeting of 'Skeptics in the Pub' and the Society's Winter Solstice Quiz Night.

There has already been some debate about the campaign by members on the web. For some, the 'There's Probably No God' slogan seems a bit tame, although one member was worried that using it might be too forthright and prejudice our working relationship with other religious groups opposing faith schools.

Getting a slogan everyone is happy with was always going to be a challenge in a Society made up of independent thinkers, but the Board wants to reach a consensus by its next meeting. Despite the various reservations about the 'There's Probably No God' slogan, so far it seems the one which enjoys broadest support, since it was used nationally and now internationally. (See photo above from Finland.)

Bus advertising is expensive. A full campaign on the side of 50 double-decker buses covering both City and County



would cost over £7,500, but for about £1,000 we can secure advertising on the back of five buses and on the side of a single-decker.

Ideas for slogans so far include the national version (top left of this page), or the first magenta lines of it followed by one of the following:

1. *So Why Do We Have Faith Schools?*
2. *So Why Let Religions Run Schools?*
3. *So Don't Let Religion Divide Us*
4. *So Let's Enjoy Life Together*
5. *You Can Be Good Without God*
6. *Religion - Man's Silliest Invention?*
7. *So Don't Use Taxes to Support Faith Schools*
8. *So Keep Religious Privilege Out Of Government*
9. *So Please Don't Label Me*
10. *Say No to Faith Schools*

Other ideas included:

*Don't Do God? Neither Do We Religion Divides; or
Don't Do God? Neither Do We Say No to Faith Schools*

If we can raise enough money we could use several of these straplines or others in our first campaign. If you would like to contribute an idea for a slogan, please email atheistbus@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk or drop a line to the Hall.

Ned Newitt

(NB Another view on this topic on page 6)



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sunday 17th January, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: The Bureaucracy Still Rules, OK? Members Jill and Harry Perry give an illustrated talk on their motorhome trip to Russia, with observations on regional life and politics after the fall of communism.

Tuesday 19th January, 7.30pm, Square Bar, Hotel Street: The Persistence of Delusion. Skeptics in the Pub. Andy Lewis talks about homeopathy. Non LSS event.

Sunday 24th January, 7pm - 10.30pm, Secular Hall: Traditional Ceilidh with the Greenshoots Ceilidh Orchestra. First-floor ballroom; no outdoor shoes please. All welcome - £3 entry.

Sunday 31st January, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: The Hall and the Society (Members only). An opportunity to discuss the proposed hall modernisation plans in depth. Not a decision-making meeting.

Wednesday 3rd February, 7.30pm, Swan and Rushes, Oxford Street. Philosophy in Pubs. The topic will be decided by those attending. Non LSS event.

Friday 5th February, Loughborough University: Where's the Honour? Daytime conference for women and activists on Forced Marriage and Honour-Based Violence. For booking form call Varsha Parmar or Maillem Al-Rawi at Loughborough Human Rights and Equality Council on (01509) 261651. Non LSS event.

Sunday 7th February, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Which Way for Secularism? Simon Barrow, co-Director of the religion think-tank, Ekklesia, will ask this question.

Thursday 11th February, 7.30pm, Secular Hall: Annual Darwin Lecture - What a Wonderful World with Adam Rutherford of *Nature* and *The Guardian*. Please note the day and time.

A Visit by Tom Paine

Paine is a very apt subject for Leicester Secular Society.

On Sunday 12th December Michael Gerard read Martin Green's script of Tom Paine telling his life story in his own words. As it was a long and eventful life the reading took two hours, which is longer than our normal Sunday programme, but the 30 people present seemed unfazed by the time taken.

The bust of Paine on the front of the Hall is probably the first public tribute to Paine in Britain, and was a brave move by our founders as Paine was vilified by the ruling classes, and any association with him would have been noted.

Michael not only entertained, but also enthused and shared his obvious admiration of Paine with his audience, passing on to them a respect for Paine's ideas and principles. He relished the task and added to it by appearing in period costume, with props, and delivering it from the heart in a sonorous voice. All this worked very well and sounded very authentic, portraying Paine's views with sincerity and enthusiasm.

All of which could not fail to make one sympathetic to Paine's



ideas, and while the dialogue gave us a history lesson in the politics of the time, plus a biography of Paine's life, it never failed to be entertaining.

All of his writings were referred to, from *Crisis* in the American Revolution, to *Rights of Man* in the French Revolution. His brushes with death, to his cast-iron bridges, and his escape from England by coach to a waiting ship just ahead of the militia, who had a warrant for his arrest for sedition, were events all equal to any Hollywood adventure film script.

So if you haven't read Paine please do so, and if you have read him, please consider joining the Tom Paine Society.

Congratulations to Michael for his excellent adaption, and taking on a role that would have daunted most of us, and thank you, Michael, for an entertaining and unforgettable evening.

The last word must go to Tom Paine: 'I am a citizen of the world, and to do good is my religion.'

Lyn Hurst



If he has a grave, Tom Paine will be spinning in it ...

www.atheism.about.com reports that Republican Mike Huckabee is openly advocating amending the US Constitution to transform it from a secular document designed to create a secular, civil government into a religious document designed to reflect 'God's standards'.

This is the explicit goal of American Christian Reconstructionists, the most extreme among right-wing Christian Nationalists, but all adherents of Christian Nationalism support the general goal which Mike Huckabee is pursuing. This places Huckabee firmly in the camp of theocrats who do not want to live under a secular government or secular laws. This places everyone else in America in jeopardy.

'[Some of my opponents] do not want to change the Constitution, but I believe it's a lot easier to change the Constitution than it would be to change the word of the living God, and that what we need to do is to **amend the Constitution so it's in God's standards rather than try to change God's standards [so it lines up with some contemporary view of how we treat each other and how we treat the family]**'

said Huckabee, referring to his campaign for a constitutional human life amendment and an amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman.

Harry

Don't Expect Priests To Do Humanist Funerals

An item from Ingrid Walker in the NSS weekly Newsline is of interest in the context of the recent discussion in the Secularist:

My father passed away last month and his funeral was held on the 27th. He had no religious views and we asked the funeral company that his wish for a Humanist funeral, like my mother's 20 years previously, be granted.

When the minister came to 'chat' with us prior to the funeral, towards the end of the chat she mentioned that, although she was aware my father had no religious views, she did believe in 'a higher authority' but that she would respect our wishes for my father's funeral. (So you should, I thought, you are being paid to!)

However, when the day came, it seemed she was unable to refrain from adding the odd religious line, such as 'Although this service is non-religious, I personally do have a great faith and believe in a higher authority who some people call God, or Jehovah, or Allah or an Energy Force.' She also said 'Although there will be no prayers here, I will pray that he will adjust to his new life in that place we call heaven' among other similarly related lines.

I found this kind of talk at my atheist father's funeral very offensive, insulting and distinctly lacking in compassion for those to whom the minister was preaching. It made my blood boil. It is NOT what he would have wanted and certainly not what was requested. Payment matters aside – my question to you is: Should religious ministers be conducting non-religious funerals?

A Funny Thing Happened ...

On 6th December 35 members and guests heard our member Eleanor Davidson give an amusing, thought-provoking and entertaining presentation of her experiences and opinions deriving from her work as a Humanist Celebrant.

One of the things the audience were asked about was whether they had made preparations for their own funerals. Only half a dozen hands went up. Come on you lot, you surely don't want your dodgy relatives making the decisions for you?



'At all the best funerals there's a punch-up'



Models Not 'Proof'

In taking serious issue with Wilf Gaunt's article 'Proof', I start by observing that I try not to make assertions about subjects on which the state of my knowledge is patchy or worse, and that I would hope that I could credit all LSS members with this approach.

Starting with Astrology: Clearly, the Moon and the Sun do influence our lives and life on Earth itself in the critical ways referred to by Wilf. But that is **not** the 'basic assumption for astrology', is it? In so far as I understand that 'basic assumption', it is about the zodiacal 'Star Sign' at our time of birth and the apparent paths of the planets through the constellations related to these 'signs'. But the constellations on which the whole edifice is built have no real physical significance, being merely 'line-of-sight' effects. The inventors of 'astrology' thought that the Earth was at the centre of the universe and that all the stars were embedded in a 'celestial sphere' which revolved around the Earth at some distance unknown but relatively only a bit further than that of the furthest planet then known, Saturn. Adherence to this 'Ptolemaic' version of cosmology was historically very forgivable, but, from Copernicus onwards, found to be hopelessly wrong. The reason why 'honourable men' now regard astrology as superstitious nonsense is that the scientific evidence to support our modern version of cosmology is overwhelming. Sorry, Wilf, but it looks as if your assertions about astrology are based on a fundamental misunderstanding.

So, if the stars cannot influence our lives, what about the planets? By definition, the Sun's energy and gravity dominate the solar system - no argument. To save unnecessary content, I hope Wilf and *Leicester Secularist* readers will accept that, in the case of the Moon and the planets, the only influence worth considering now is that of gravity. And here I must introduce the concept of a **mathematical model**: Wilf, science is not about proof; it is about the process in which evidence and observation feed and are fed by mathematical models, so that the models become more and more accurate representations of reality to the extent of their ability to accurately predict further observations and experiments. General Relativity is a more refined model of gravity than Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation. But I will use Newton's Law because (a) it is a very good model for most purposes, certainly for routine events in our solar system, and (b) it is much simpler! This Law simply states that the gravitational force exerted by a body is a constant times its mass divided by the square of the

relevant distance. If we do the sums, we find that the force exerted by the Sun on the Earth is roughly 180 times that of the Moon. Evidently, the influence of the Sun is massive. The force of the Moon is much smaller but is still important, particularly when it comes to tides, which are a gravitational effect which normally only becomes significant when the sizes of the bodies are comparable to the distance between them.

The planet with the largest gravitational force on the Earth is Jupiter: at about a hundredth that of the Moon at closest approach, the effect of Jupiter's gravity is much smaller again than that of the Moon: not quite negligible, but much too small to have any effect on our daily lives. Venus has about half of Jupiter's effect at closest approach, but the gravity of the other planets can be considered as negligible for most Earthly purposes, certainly in terms of influencing 'our everyday lives'. Returning to the stars, our nearest stellar neighbour, apart from the Sun, is the Alpha Centauri triple system, and, at its distance of about four light-years, its gravitational force is roughly that of Jupiter divided by half-a-million! As for any other stars, need I say more?

I have dealt with Wilf's arguments about 'proof' by reference to the mathematical modelling process. So I will conclude with some comments on his assertions about Relativity and Quantum Theory. He starts with quite a profound and reasonable definition of time ('a measure of the observed progress of the universe') but then goes on to confuse the macro with the micro by linking the progress of time with the motion of an electron. Quantum Theory really doesn't say anything about the 'progress' or 'development' of the universe (except possibly in the first zillionth of a second after the Big Bang, for which we will need a coherent theory which links gravity with quantum processes, and we are not anywhere near that yet). I can't remember any 'honourable men' seriously discussing time reversal or 'jumping', at least not in connection with our stable location in the space-time universe. I think the 'hard questions' **were** asked, Wilf, and are being asked all the time. But General Relativity and Quantum Theory have stood up to all the hard questions and remain by far the best models of the macro and micro respectively. Maybe, like Newton's Laws, they will eventually be refined by a 'Theory of Everything', but, also like Newton's Laws, I very much doubt if they will be discarded.

Geoff Gay



A Big Year for Science

This year 2010 marks the 350th anniversary of the foundation of the Royal Society in 1660, so it's going to be another big year for Science; Melvyn Bragg is getting it off to a good start with four 'In Our Time' programmes in the mornings on Radio 4. No doubt we can expect to hear of some results from the experiments at CERN during the year, and perhaps from the new space telescopes.

Another series of programmes on Radio 4 are the 'Dear Darwin' letters written by current scientists explaining how Darwin's ideas are relevant to their research. (These were apparently first broadcast early in 2009, and are now being repeated late at night.) Last night's letter by Peter Bentley covered developments in computing, whereby evolutionary methods are being used for

purposes of improving design. Contrary to 'Intelligent Design' proponents who maintain that evolution cannot produce more information, he indicates that evolution is all about information, and that it has much wider relevance than solely to the evolution of biological species.

The 'Material World' is another Radio 4 science programme that I regularly listen to. The presence of science on radio has been quite good lately. However on television my impression is that it is less evident. The Royal Institution Christmas Lectures for instance have been sidelined to a lesser channel.

George Jelliss (Hastings Humanists)



Of Fish and Men

Daniel Dennett, at the end of an intriguing lecture (<http://tinyurl.com/yllvwxo>) comes up with an interpretation of 'darwin' as acronym in Latin - well it has to be 'daruoin', since there is no w in Latin. We get 'delere auctorem rerum ut universum infinitum noscas', which translates as 'destroy the author of things to understand the infinite universe'.

He was provoked into this by reflecting on the use of the fish symbol by early Christians: this came from interpreting the Greek word for fish, *Ichthus* (ΙΧΘΥΣ) as an acronym for 'Jesus Christ, God's son, saviour', *Iēsous Christos Theou Huios, Sōtēr*. Unfortunately there is no object called a darwin to correspond to the fish.

Non-religious funerals

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BHA ACCREDITED

Dear Editor

I'd like to let you know how much I've been looking forward to reading John Edmondson's articles in the *Secularist* on Christianity and Humanism. Like him, I come from a Christian background and I'm keen to see what good we Secularists can make of this tradition, as we discard the bad bits. Unlike me, though, John's obviously been able to think this through properly and to articulate it for everyone's benefit.

It would be really good if Society members who began in other religions could do a similar job - but I can see that John's given them a hard act to follow.

Yours

Chris Williams

* The Electronic *Secularist* *

Taking your *Secularist* as a .pdf file over the internet would save the Society hundreds of pounds. We now have sixteen members taking it on this basis saving us about £16 per month - that's over £150 per year! Contact the Editor (box on back page) to make the switch.

Harry

Ed.

Solstice Quiz Night



Frank Friedmann (in Santa hat), ably assisted by Eleanor Davidson, provided an entertaining and instructive evening

for the 25 members who attended on Sunday 20th December. Members brought along a wide array of seasonal fare and refreshment.

Winners of the quiz were certain eggheads, calling themselves The Team on the Side, comprising John Catt, Ariadne Tampion and Mike Burden. They are still arguing over who is to be first to read the prize - *The Atheist Guide to Christmas*. (An excellent book, by the way. Ed.)

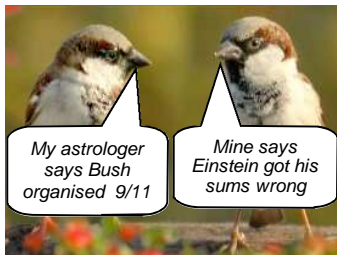
Six people gave talks on their favourite subjects, including the (not to be outdone by their parents) youngsters Isobel and Sophie (Tampion/Catt). Many members contributed to the 'just a minute' spot, speaking impromptu on issues raised by images projected by Frank on to the big screen.

Two Birds, One Stone

Two pieces in the December 2009 edition of *The Leicester Secularist* reminded me of the old, but invaluable, instruction that *extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence*: Wilf Gaunt's apologia for astrology and Dave Ray's call for a debate on whether the then US administration was responsible for the attack on the twin towers.

If Wilf is arguing that the configuration and motion of the planets has a general effect on human behaviour then I agree with him. For example, no doubt like many other people, I am feeling pretty browned off at the moment by the combination of cold and overcast days which induce depression and lethargy. However, that is a far cry from astrological divination which claims to be able to produce individual horoscopes which precisely anticipate an individual's life choices and expectations.

Tantalisingly Wilf makes no such specific claim but simply asserts: 'But the "honourable men" ... say that the basic assumption for astrology is superstitious nonsense. And, because they are "honourable men", we accept their verdict: even though the REALITY around us screams otherwise.' From this one can only draw the conclusion that Wilf does think that astrology is some kind of valid science even though he will not say so outright.



Extraordinary claims

I don't really see why Einstein needs to be drawn into the picture, but in the typical implicit manner in which he argues Wilf states: 'When Einstein's arguments required that time be regarded as a variable, in order to achieve a conclusion [a strange way of putting it - TH], should not some hard questions have been asked?' Well they were and in fact Einstein's theories are backed by substantial experimental evidence which I

find it hard to believe that someone as intellectually curious as Wilf is not aware of.

I do not know what Wilf would regard as proof or even PROOF, but a differentiating characteristic between astrology and Einstein's theories of relativity is that the former has no backing whatsoever from experimental research and the latter enjoys substantial verification.

Regarding Dave Ray's call for a debate on the events of 11th September 2001, and recalling that *extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence*, if Dave thinks that he has such evidence then it would surely be informative to have such a debate. If, however, the 'evidence' is merely the material presented by the various '9/11 Truth Commissions' which proliferate on the Internet I fear that the meeting would simply be a waste of everybody's time.

Ted Hankin

Are We Born with an Expectation of 'God'?

In an article published on the new BHA website I advocate an explanation for the widespread human belief in an omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient (3O) 'creator' in the form of an evolved 'expectation'. I then propose that religion provides one form of 'self-medication' that reduces the anxiety resulting from the disconnect between the experiences of the young in our mammalian ancestors, and that of our more recent forebears, as it applies to this evolved innate expectation.

Young mammals have an instinct to suckle which could be described as an 'expectation of the breast'. Perhaps, over the 200 million years of mammalian evolution, a psychological expectation has developed which prepares humans to seek out a 3O creator because of the common experience of every surviving ancestor. Perhaps this entity, far from being supernatural, is simply the individual's mother. Of course, suckling has a Darwinian explanation based on natural selection - those that didn't suckle would die. However, recent research has shown that experiences within the life of the individual can alter gene expression and thus may be passed on to subsequent generations. This may lead to evidence of a form of inheritance of 'acquired' characteristics or behaviour, not quite Lamarkian, but not quite Darwinian either.

For our mammalian ancestors to survive, they would need to encounter a mother who was:

Present - an infant with an absent mother would die (Omnipresent);

Potent - to a newborn, the provider of all its survival needs would appear supremely powerful (Omnipotent);

Knowledgeable - a mother who was intuitively in sync with her infant would appear to 'magically' interpret and know how to provide for its needs (Omniscient).

If the human child, with its remarkable pattern-seeking and highly perceptive brain, is primed by evolution to encounter a 3O entity, it will unavoidably be disappointed. Infant humans may be unique in that a lack of fitness of the

biological mother, including her medium- or long-term physical absence, does not necessarily result in its death. As the child matures and recognises that his mother and he are separate individuals, he will inevitably determine that she is not a 3O being. She may be busy, depressed, abused, chaotic, mistaken, dishonest, inadvertently unfair, or even deliberately cruel. However, the absence of the 'perfect' creator is psychologically unacceptable as the individual instinctively feels that he could not exist without it. No other human provides complete security either. So where is it? 'Who' is it? Does the human brain produce an unflinching 'being' to fill this emotional void and relieve the resultant insecurity?

A frustrated expectation which invokes feelings of loss and insecurity may respond well to various forms of 'self-medication' which increase the sense of well-being. We all have feel-good behaviours (or substances) that can be utilised when necessary. Have organised religions simply developed their highly successful businesses as providers of self-medication, in the form of faith, used instead of, or in addition to, other anxiety-reducing behaviours or addictions?

If religion is a form of self-medication akin to alcohol and drugs, maybe we should recognise churches and temples as equivalent to public houses or clubs, with the clergy as publicans/suppliers. If so, there may come a time when the idea of 26 bishops in the House of Lords will be seen as being as ridiculous as having 26 brewers there!

If individuals choose religion as their particular form of anxiety reduction, they should, of course, have the right to do so. However, at least let the 'suppliers' contribute in taxes to the society that enriches them. Most importantly of all, those who do not make an adult and informed decision to use this particular 'drug' should not have its effects foisted upon them!

Pennie Blatchford

Full article posted on the new BHA website at: <http://tiny.cc/6RO26>



Free Speech and the BNP

In reply to my argument that the BBC was right to invite the BNP leader Nick Griffin to appear on Question Time, Chris Goodwin argues (*Secularist* 13) that the Society policy of 'no platform for fascists' should not change.

I question whether such a policy exists.

As I understand it, in the 1970s the Society decided against allowing the Hall to be used by the National Front after it disrupted a planned meeting with Tariq Ali. This tallies with Chris's statement about the Hall but does not go any further than that, i.e. it does not support the view that the Society supports the 'no platform' position.

The following elements of the Freethought tradition are included in the current objectives of the Society:

'to promote freedom of belief and thought'; and

'to promote open dialogue, participation, co-operation and friendship'; and

'to promote freedom of expression and action'.

None of these provides the basis for a Society policy that would limit the rights of any other group to argue for their views - no matter how obnoxious they might be.

However, to simplify and popularise the Society's objectives the Board about two years ago approved the following statement with relevance to this issue:

'We believe people should be free to express and publish their beliefs, however controversial, without

fear of prosecution, persecution or physical harm as long as they accord the same rights to others.'

The first part of this accords with the Society's objectives. The latter part, in bold, qualifies this as a policy but without any backing from the objects clauses of the Memorandum and Articles. It is a political view that might allow a 'no platform' policy to be adopted in respect of groups or individuals calling for limitations on the rights of free expression of others (e.g. Geert Wilders, Islamofascists, etc.). But Nick Griffin and the BNP say they are in favour of free speech. This may be a tactical claim that hides a much more pernicious policy of suppression in the traditional fascist mould but if we base our judgements on our assessments of hidden motives it would drive a coach and horses through the policy of free expression in the Memorandum. This may be a naïve view but if it is, and members feel the need for the Society to oppose the BNP's right to articulate its arguments, then the objectives clause needs to be amended.

The Tory MP Michael Howard recently restated his concerns about the battle against the BNP being neglected but he did not argue for the 'no platform' position. He said: 'I think you have to take them on, you have to confront them and you have to expose the appalling evil of their arguments.' This is the traditional Freethought position and I feel that it is the appropriate one for this Society to maintain.

Harry Perry



The Task Ahead

It is well to know where we stand and what we are up against: we can then decide what to do. Little more than 50% of the population of Britain now describe themselves as Christian according to a new study from the National Centre for Social Research, compared to 66% in 1983 (both figures make a nonsense of the 71% often quoted from the now admitted unreliable 2001 Census).

Those with no religion now make up 43% of the population compared to 31% in 1983.

Professor David Voas, who released these figures ahead of the full publication this month, says that the changes are largely due to a drift away from the Church of England which is losing its share of the Christians (down from 40% to 23%).

On the other hand, those in a non-Christian religion now make up 7% of the population compared to 1% in 1983. However, the Church is still a formidable manipulator: it admits that it is losing young people but it is fighting hard to use its privilege and resources to proselytise. It is still increasing the number of schools that it controls and now it is scheming to move into nurseries and social services.

The document, *Going for Growth* (<http://tinyurl.com/ycwvq5v>) points to youth clubs, play centres, contact centres, SureStart projects, children's centres, extended school provisions, breakfast and homework clubs, parenting support and sports activities as providing opportunities for 'life-enhancing encounters with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ'.

The CofE's success with the similar strategy laid out in the *Dearing Report* of 2001 (<http://tinyurl.com/2o7s9u>) should be a warning that the new initiative will succeed in adding to its resources unless it is blocked at the *political* level. For this we need the help of everyone who supports the separation of religion and state and the end of religious privilege - and this includes many in the religions. Secularism must win this one.

I am very happy to say that Professor Voas has agreed to give a talk - time to be arranged.

THERE'S PROBABLY
NO GOD
NOW STOP WORRYING
AND ENJOY YOUR LIFE

**SECULARISM MEANS
RESPECT FOR ALL**
LEICESTERSECULARSOCIETY.ORG.UK

Which is the best approach?

DON'T DO GOD?
NEITHER DO WE
SAY NO TO FAITH SCHOOLS

**THERE IS NO GOD
GET OVER IT**
RELIGION DIVIDES

Secularism Is For Everyone

In the adjacent article I direct attention to the importance of countering the influence of the Church of England. But we have a bigger aim: a secular state that serves everyone; a democratic state that guarantees all people the freedoms and respect that all should have in this country; that encourages us to live together in mutual help and happiness; that avoids conflict and combats extremism.

We can only achieve this bigger aim by convincing our neighbours that it is for their good as well as ours. If we force decent Muslims in Highfields to choose between their religion and what we seek then we will fail.

The city will soon have a majority of people who would find themselves faced with such a choice if we get our message wrong, and with communities that might then shun those of their members who agree with us.

We are considering how the Society will campaign. Ned Newitt's article last month advocated a bus poster campaign. I think we should try this, but we must not be party to dividing the city as a primarily atheist campaign would.

We must campaign for a city in which the non-religious are respected and listened to, where everyone is respected and listened to. If we do that, we will find many friends, and we will succeed.

Allan Hayes



On Tolerance

One of the core ethical and philosophic principles that have guided me during my 78 years of life has been the need for tolerance. Generally speaking, my tolerance has been based on the J. S. Mill principle of allowing that which has been voluntarily entered into, and which is doing no harm to, or interfering with, others. Though this is a stance I'd independently worked out and applied myself long before having heard of, or read, Mill.

In applying tolerance during my lifetime I have noticed that, too often, people regard it as licence to take advantage, or as a sign of weakness. This last being a mistaken conclusion, which some have discovered to their cost; and, on one occasion, nearly led to my being prosecuted.

Financing faith schools, which are allowed, in the name of tolerance, to indoctrinate philosophies antipathetic to our cultural norms and ideals is a pathway to the eventual collapse of our social homogeneity. In tolerating the spreading influence of these small fanatical



groups of immigrants who have no respect for, or toleration of, our indigenous cultural norms and ideals, we are guilty of social weakness, and allow the souring of relations with the vast majority of the peace-loving and tolerant, live-and-let-live, immigrant population settled here.

When tolerance means not standing by one's own ideals when they come under attack by fanatics, it's a recipe for cowardly non-involvement. Tolerance practised in this way is, in itself, a sort of fanaticism; that, coupled with the general population's unwillingness to become involved, can only lead to eventual social disorder and collapse: ending with the failed state situation suffered by ancient Rome and modern Somalia. This a betrayal of our forebears' struggles and suffering to establish our current comfort zone.

Political correctness prohibits proper debate of this subject; and, just as the Victorians refused to admit that sex existed while presiding over an unprecedented population explosion, we are witnessing, in the name of tolerance and integration, a threatened destruction of our own hard-won social ideals. The result of this is that the only political force actively promoting our way of life is the BNP! Isn't this the syndrome that brought Hitler to power?

Wilf Gaunt



Evolution and the Evangelist

1 The Therapist

Reading an article on Narrative Therapy I came across a sentence that suggested that therapy could be seen as a kind of evolutionary process. Suddenly several ideas slotted into place in my mind. I take it for granted that the Theory of Evolution as postulated by Charles Darwin is now an established scientific theory but, if true, then human beings are an evolving species. Understanding this in the context of human history is a task for someone but I felt that to see the relationship between the therapist and the client in these terms brought it into the realm of the here and now.

For a long time there has been debate as to how or what influences us most. There are the environmentalists who claim that what we do and even what we are is the product of the environment in which we are brought up, so that there are plenty of people who think that children are almost inevitably indoctrinated by their parents and their schools. On the other hand, there are those who think that genetic influences have the greater say. Neither position gives any support for a notion of personal responsibility so beloved of the courts and everyone else when the game is to find someone to blame. It is easy to think of therapists and their fellow travellers as people being dragged into this debate. If someone commits

suicide it is the psychiatrist and team who are to blame, and the NHS who employs them must cough up. On the other hand, if someone commits a murder, despite considerable extenuating circumstances, then they are to blame, even if it is assumed that a genetic predisposition is at the bottom of their behaviour.

It is into this entangling mess that the Narrative Therapist develops his or her role. Starting with the client's basic approach to life he or she creates an opportunity to explore contradictions and evolve new approaches to solving the problems of life in place of the muddled contradictions and inefficiencies of past endeavours.

I sometimes think Narrative Therapy is a bit of a pompous title for something that is going on in every conversation, in everything we read and write, in every meeting we attend or everything we watch on television. All the time we are helping each other to see life differently and hopefully, on the strength of this, to better solve the problems of life together.

It is moreover a very humanist enterprise and, as I hope to show in future contributions, it points to a need to think here and now of our contribution towards our evolution forwards rather than asking what is the will of God.

John Edmondson



Universalism or Relativism?

It is high time wider society had a debate about 'relativism' or 'universalism', and stood up to the injustices and demands of Islam, but this is not happening.

Perhaps this Society in particular, and secularism in general, can hold this debate since all political groups, including the Left, confuse themselves by claiming that to be anti-Islam is to be racist; but this cannot be so, because Islam is an ideology held by many ethnic groups, Arab, black and white, worldwide, and theoretically, in Leicester at least, a voluntary undertaking. Of course we all know they are not truly free to choose but their lack of choice is ignored, and they are condemned to live in 21st century Leicester but under the rules of the Dark Ages. This is 'relativism'. Are these Leicester children left to their fate because they are mostly Asian? I hope not because that attitude has a whiff of racism about it.

Perhaps it is 'relativism' that unintentionally allows a form of racism to take hold in our society and not the call of 'universalists' for equal rights for all; or critics of Islam, who are 'racist imperialists' after all.

As the Left continues to confuse their heroic history of anti-racism with 'relativism', and allow such a corny, superstitious ideology as Islam to gain an undeserved credibility and respect under the false flag of anti-racism, the real racists are left with an open goal, as they are perceived as the only critics of Islam when it truly needs criticising.

Of course the fascist attacks on Islam really are a smoke screen for racism, and this is a perverse stroke of luck for all radical freethinkers and secularists. The luck being that the fascists' true racism has clouded their view of Islam, and stopped them from seeing just how much they have in common with the Islamists.

If these two forces of conservative reactionaries combined together, as is still a possibility, in their shared hatreds, e.g. of women, homosexuals and freethinkers, and united in their drive for an autocratic society, without individual rights, trade unions, or class struggle, we might still find ourselves in the football stadium sharing our final hours on Earth together.

We clearly cannot rely on this government of hypocrites, who are 'universalist' in foreign policy, as they claim to fight wars for the rights of women in Afghanistan, and democracy in Iran, while pursuing a policy of 'relativism' at home by conferring on Islam millions of pounds, into the hands of unelected, unaccountable men, along with over-the-top respect and

privilege towards religion. Courtesy of the 'principles' of T. Blair.

And as all this denial and wearing of hair shirts by government and all other political groups, including the far Left, continues under the title of 'relativism', the universal rights of women, and children in Leicester, or elsewhere, can go to hell.

While it is disappointing to see how easily the Islamists have subverted the flag of anti-racism to their own ends, and distracted the principles of anti-racists with such a simple and obvious tactic, their own first strategy remains the same: the threat of violence. Violence, whether against women, cartoonists, film makers, or any other insult no matter how small, true or perceived.

As the Left and liberals defend reactionary Islamists, and the women who revel in their own subjugation, the women who deserve our support are ignored: those brave enough to write about and criticise the treatment of women in Islam, like Ayaan Hirsi Ali, writer, film maker and politician, whose partner in film making, Theo van Gogh, was murdered for helping to make a film critical of Islam that she had written; Tasleema Nasreen forced to leave Pakistan because of her feminist writings; and Fedela Amara who works in the French banyols, fighting as a Muslim against the gang rapes used to force all women living there, Muslim or not, to conform to Muslim dress codes.

All of these women receive death threats, as do those who ask only for a more sympathetic interpretation of the Koran towards women, such as Asra Normant and Amina Wadud, and to be allowed to lead prayers in the Mosque.

The list of brave Muslim women and the violations they suffer would fill pages, as I am sure you are aware, from forced marriage to murder, and if the campaign for Sharia Law is ever successful, where a woman's word is worth only one-third of a man's, all these 'customs' will become more widespread.

Let us support freethinking Muslim women, and criticise Islam as it deserves. The longer it is left the harder it will become, but surely an Islam without respect and privilege will hopefully become as meaningless, and diminishing, as the CofE, and this can only be a good thing in the long run for those Leicester children born into religious homes, if they are ever to get their universal human rights.

Lyn Hurst



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Audio-visual kit: This is normally held by Michael Gerard or Mike Burden.

All can be reached by post via the Hall address.

A Note from the Chair

1. I shall be at the Hall from 6pm to 8pm on Tuesday 26th and Thursday 28th January so that anyone who would like to familiarise themselves with the possible options for development of the Hall can come and have a preview before the 31st January meeting, though the plans will also be available on the evening of the 31st.

2. Please remember that the Ceilidh on Sunday 24th January is in the ballroom on the first floor and no outdoor shoes can be worn up there (to protect the ballroom floor).

3. Can I stress also that the Darwin Lecture is on **Thursday 11th February with a start time of 7.30pm.**

Thank you

Mike Burden

Sense About Science

One of the key sources for information on the campaigns against practices like homeopathy is Sense About Science. Their website address is:

<http://www.senseaboutscience.org.uk/index.php>

The Leicester Secularist Copy Deadline

The copy deadline for the next edition is **12 noon on Thursday 11th February 2010.**

Remember, articles, letters, jokes, poems, news, announcements, book reviews, adverts are all welcome. Please send to me via the Hall or email at the address in the box adjacent. Include photos or illustrations where you have them.

Thanks. Harry Perry, Ed.

2010 Subscriptions

It's nagging time again - please pay your subs without further chasing!

You can **pay an officer cash at a meeting**, or you can **send a cheque** to John Catt, Treasurer, c/o the Secular Hall, or you can **do an armchair banking transfer** to our account at Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, B1 2HB. Sort Code: 08-60-01; A/c No. 20195380. If you use this method please include your surname in the reference box or email me that you've done it. **The subs are:**

Individual member = £18

Household = £24

Low income = £6

Go on, do it now before it slips your mind. The Society needs the cashflow. Thank you.

John Catt, Treasurer



Board Report from 8th December 2009

- Next meeting 7.30pm, Wednesday 20th January
- Ned Newitt to co-ordinate a 'secular bus campaign'
- Mike Burden to discuss with Paul Howe his ideas for setting up a bottle bar
- Well-known national figures have been approached re. supporting fund raising for the redevelopment of the Hall
- Allan Hayes to investigate regrading the Hall to Grade 2* listing with members of Leicester Civic Society
- LSS to contribute to discussions re new bus station and changes to Humberstone Gate
- Gillian Lighton reported on condition of the Library. Some repairs to be carried out and the facility drawn to the attention of members.
- Spring programme has been printed. 17 speakers needed between Easter and July. More women and ethnic minority speakers to be encouraged. Suggestions for speakers welcome.
- Hall rental space has only 15% utilisation. The Civic Society are no longer using the Hall. Funding sought to allow groups lacking resources to hire the rooms.
- Dave Ray to investigate modernising the kitchen
- Emergency lighting circuit in the shop to be repaired
- The gutter has been repaired at a cost of £500

Disclaimer and Code of Conduct

The Leicester Secularist is a not-for-profit undertaking of Leicester Secular Society. Please note that the views and proposals expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board of the Society and the Society and its officers accept no liability for views expressed. As the journal of a Freethought organisation any member's views will be published subject to the usual constraints of avoiding libel and occasional editing to fit the space available. When writing please abstain from intemperate language and avoid being unnecessarily offensive, especially to other members!. We express our thanks for non-Society images sourced under the fair use convention for the purposes of debate and education. Resolution is reduced to prevent onward commercial use.