

Ethical Record

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The Proceedings of the
Conway Hall
Ethical Society

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

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Ethical Learning at Conway Hall

Guest Editor: **Richard Firth Godbehere**

Conway Hall Ethical Society is, at its heart, an educational charity. Its object is 'the advancement of study, research and education in humanist ethical principles.' As an educator myself, such a commitment to learning is what attracted me to become a member and then a trustee. It is what made me honoured to be nominated as chair of the learning committee, and the reason my current role as chair of the Audience and Programming Committee continues to revolve around learning. However, I am often asked 'what is learning' and 'how does it differ from education?'

Learning is more than just education. While education is the acquisition of new information, learning is also the reinforcement of, and a reflection on, things we already know. Learning is also about developing behaviours and values as well as skills, and this is why the development of humanist ethical values remains core to the learning programme at Conway Hall. This is true of courses we help to run, such as, for example, the BSA Masterclass's Science Communication Primer and our Language taster sessions. The first allows the attendants to understand how informing the public of the evidence supporting our latest understanding of the cosmos is an ethical good itself. The second, as with all language learning, broadens the mind, expands horizons beyond the confines of English and helps in seeing the world

in a wider view. Learning also intersects with our charitable objects in our various series of talks. Be it London Thinks or Thinking on Sunday, such meetings allow us to learn new information, challenge old information, and engage with cutting-edge thought. Most importantly, we do this with a commitment to allowing debate on any and every issue, however controversial: a key humanist ethical principle.

This esteemed organ is also a conduit not only of what has been happening within the hall and the society, but also our charitable object. As well as providing members access to goings on in the hall, it contains articles and letters designed to stimulate the debate, progressive thought, and intellectual rigour central to the humanist ethical view on learning. I hope this month's issue is no different.

Finally, I would like to mention the sad loss of a great Conway Hall Ethical Society member and my one-time trustee colleague, Terry Mullins. Others have written more eloquently and knowledgeably about him elsewhere in this edition, so I will keep my memories brief. Our trusteeships crossed by one year, one year in which each meeting with one of his trademark jokes, and even the tensest discussions were lightened by his eternal levity and positivity. I am genuinely saddened by his passing, and wish his friends and family my very best.



Before joining Queen Mary, University of London, Richard gained a BA in History and History of Ideas with first class honours from Goldsmiths, University of London, where he won two Reverend Peter Galloway Awards for Academic Excellence. After this, he read for an MPhil in early modern history at the University of Cambridge, focusing on aversion in medicine in 17th-century England. He is currently a Wellcome Trust-funded doctoral candidate in the medical humanities, and a trustee of Conway Hall Ethical Society.

*An Intimate Conversation
with*
Roger Penrose

—
Sir Prof Roger Penrose in discussion with Ideas Roadshow host Howard Burton
—

Thu, November 10, 2016

Doors open at 7 pm, starts 7.30 pm

**CONWAY
HALL**

**‘The Spirit of Meliorist Reform’
and Other Essays**

By Tom Rubens

Long-time Conway Hall Ethical Society Member
Lecturer and Archivist

Thursday 17 November, 7.30pm

Launch of Tom’s 8th published book on philosophy

The Bertrand Russell Room

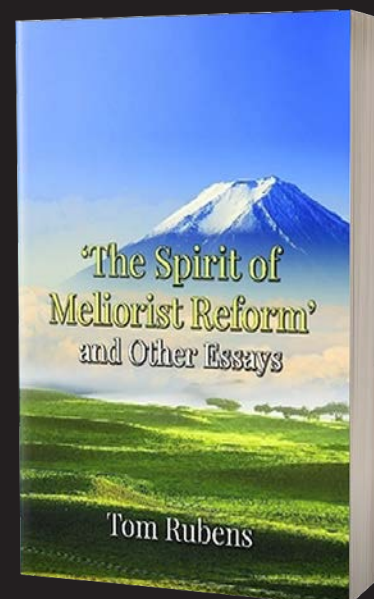
Conway Hall
25, Red Lion Square
London
WC1R 4RL

Tom will read a few short extracts from the text,
to convey its general intellectual thrust.

Copies of the book (price £8.99) will be on sale

All welcome. Refreshments available.

*BOOK
LAUNCH*



Are Law Courts Biased Against Defendants?

Donald Rooum



The first time I visited a Magistrates Court, it was 1954, shortly after I moved to London. A friend who could not be at court, because he would be at work, asked me to observe the trial of a girl he knew. She was accused of standing in the street, inviting men into a 'clip joint', described on the charge sheet as a 'near beer club', an establishment which looked from the outside like a place where men could buy alcohol and meet girls, but was in fact a place where men were invited by hostesses to buy drinks (of non-alcoholic near beer), for a ridiculously exorbitant price.

Women's ordinary street dress at the time had a skirt which came down to about four inches below the knee, but the lady on trial was an eccentric who wore a long skirt, which came right down over her feet. When she was arrested outside the clip joint, she was not wearing a long skirt but was dressed as a can-can dancer, in a bright red dress with fancy stockings. Prosecution witnesses were two plain clothes policemen, corroborating each other's testimony. The first policeman said she was wearing a form of fancy dress, which the defence solicitor lifted up so that the



Donald Rooum became an anarchist in 1944 and has contributed articles to the anarchist paper Freedom since 1947. He studied graphic design in Bradford, England, and his cartoons have been published in the British press since 1950. His editorial cartoons have appeared in Peace News since 1962. His strip series Wildcat has appeared in Freedom since 1980, and Sprite in The Skeptic since 1987.

magistrate could see it was short but not indecent. The second police witness corroborated the story that she was wearing a form of fancy dress, but when he was asked to describe it, he said it had a long skirt which came right down over her feet. The solicitor held up the red dress and said 'Nothing like this, then?'

The magistrate said 'Case dismissed. I think there's some doubt'.

He did not say 'The policeman called to corroborate the story was obviously lying, and the first policeman must have instructed him in what to say. Court Inspector, please arrest both of them and charge them with perjury'. Of course he didn't. The woman they had failed to convict was a clip-joint swindler working in Soho, the entertainment centre of London, where many of the entertainments on offer were illegal (including some which have since become legal: gay clubs, pornography, and cash-in-advance gambling). In the early evenings there were groups of swarthy men hanging about on street corners, waiters from the posh restaurants waiting to meet bookies' runners. Before the Street Offences Act of 1959, the streets were lined with prostitutes. And all the illegal and barely legal establishments were preyed upon by protection rackets and thieves. Police enhanced the evidence, because otherwise, their job would have been impossible.

The fact remains, however, that if the police had told the same story about the girl's fancy dress, she would have been convicted, guilty or not.

Away from Soho, and in more recent times, a woman I know was accused of passing a traffic light at red. The policeman who charged her said he could not remember how long he had been on duty. She remembered saying 'This is the first time this has happened to me', the policeman remembered her saying 'This is the first time I done this'. Prompted by the Clerk of the Court, she pointed out that, being grammar-school educated, she would not have said 'I done' meaning 'I have done', and was acquitted. She would have been convicted if only the officer had learned to talk proper.

The cases I quote are those which result in acquittal. We only hear in private of those who were not guilty but were found guilty despite their denials, or pleaded guilty because they are advised that have no chance of acquittal, and should therefore plead guilty in the hope of a more lenient sentence.

By the letter of the law, defendants are deemed innocent unless they are proved guilty, but if that were really so, people who say they are not guilty would be told 'In that case goodbye, and we're sorry you've been troubled'. In real life, however, a defendant who is not guilty has to prove it. I dare say most magistrates, judges, juries, court clerks and police officers try not to prejudge cases, but a defendant is automatically at a disadvantage, because she is a stranger in court, while the judge sees the prosecuting officers every day, and gets into the habit of trusting their testimony.

In countries where policing is by consent, police statements are routinely taken as true. In the first criminal case to use DNA fingerprinting in 1978, the inventor was asked by the police for help in showing that a man, who had confessed to one rape and murder, was also responsible for another rape and murder, which he denied. DNA tests showed that both rapes had been committed by the same man, but he was not the man in custody. So why did he confess to a rape he had not done? Or a better question, how do we know he confessed? Answer, the police told us he confessed.

I turn now to a celebrated case of 1962. The proprietor of two striptease theatres in Soho was menaced by a gang of protection racketeers, and rescued by local police. Headlines in the London Evening Standard read 'Woe betide anyone else, judge warns Soho racketeers', and 'Sergeant Harry topples "King" Oliva'. 'Sergeant Harry' was Detective Sergeant Harry Challenor, leader of 'a dozen detectives'. Joe 'King' Oliva was a known protection racketeer, convicted several times of threatening to smash the property and persons of people who did not pay up. He usually worked alone, preying on businesses of doubtful legality, and evidently regarding the fines he paid as business expenses. But on this occasion he came with a gang, and was convicted of conspiracy. As the law stood at that time, conspiracy to do something was a worse crime than actually doing something. He was sentenced to six years in prison.

That case came to the attention of the National Council for Civil Liberties (now known as Liberty), amid doubts that Oliva's gang actually existed. One member of the alleged gang, Ricardo Pedrini, worked as a waiter at a café owned by his parents, where Mary Clark, a worker at the NCCL office, was a regular

customer; she thought he was innocent, and so did some of his fellow prisoners at Wormwood Scrubs, who mentioned him to their solicitors.

In August 1963, six months after he put King Oliva's gang away, D/S Challoner was in another celebrated case. On July 10 1963, a crowd of demonstrators booed the Queen, and monarchists were annoyed. Next day, July 11, Challoner and three of his aides set out to discredit the noisy but peaceful demonstration, by planting evidence that it was violent. They arrested eight people, four demonstrators and four people who were not demonstrators but happened to be in the area, and charged each of them with carrying a piece of broken brick, for use as a missile. Three cases were adjourned to Juvenile Courts. Four adults were convicted, and sent off with criminal records for carrying offensive weapons. One was acquitted, because Sergeant Challoner made a mistake.

I have told the story of my encounter with Mr Challoner several times*, and will not reiterate it here. But what judges and police have written about the Challoner case may throw some light on the question we are discussing, whether courts are biased against defendants.

Mr A.E. James, the Recorder of Grimsby (afterwards appointed a Judge of the Appeal Court) was appointed to conduct a Public Inquiry 'into the circumstances in which it was possible for [Challoner] to continue on duty' when he was mentally ill. There is no doubt of his mental illness. On August 22, two weeks after it was proved that he had presented false evidence, his Chief Inspector 'found a marked deterioration in his powers of concentration'. But he was still on duty at 1.30am on September 5, when he arrested three young men in Clapham, without being able to say why. He was certified unfit for duty on September 6, and in October his behaviour at a dinner 'led to arrangements being made for Detective Sergeant Challoner's immediate admission to hospital'.

The easiest explanation of his breakdown is cognitive dissonance: he was unable to reconcile his concept of himself as a smart operator, with the knowledge that he had been brought down by a silly mistake. The hospital psychiatrist, Dr Sargant, wrote

in October 'I am certain the Harold Challoner is very mad indeed'; but thought the onset of his madness was recent. As he told the Inquiry 'I have got no evidence at all that this paranoid schizophrenia started before May to June of 1963'. For his own 'finding' about the time at which Challoner went mad, the Mr James refers the reader of Chapter 1 of his Report to Part Two, and the reader of Part Two to Chapter 1, but does not come to a conclusion. He quotes Mr Justice Lawson, 'it seems likely that he had been unbalanced for some time', and takes this to mean that Challoner was mad when he planted the bricks.

One of the 'brick case' victims, Lucky Apostolou, told the Inquiry that he had been taken to a room where Challoner and his three CID Aids were standing with two other boys and two bits of brick on a table. He said 'I didn't know they had bricks on 'em', and Challoner said 'The biggest brick for the biggest boy', and put another brick on the table. Note the similarity to the case of King Oliva's gang, where it was alleged that Challoner produced an iron bar and told Pedrini 'That's yours', then a knife and told another alleged gangster 'This is for you', then another knife which he put back in his pocket when a police inspector came into the room. Mr James's finding was that these allegations were untrue, but how does he account for the allegations in the brick case? He does not mention them: 'The terms of reference of the Inquiry did not necessitate any findings ... I have therefore studiously avoided making any findings'.

Some twenty-six cases were either dropped, or those convicted 'given free pardons' after courts ruled that Challoner's testimony was unacceptable. But the Report of Inquiry assumes that all statements by police officers, including those by Challoner, are true, except in the few cases where police officers contradict each other.

I have read two books by former police officers, both of whom wrote of Challoner with approval, and neither of whom strongly disapproved of his evidence faking. Mike Seabrook, who served at the same station as Challoner but not at the same time, writes in *Coppers: An inside view of the British police* (1987), 'I speak for the majority of policemen, I believe, in feeling that where the Krays concerned

* E.g. in Donald Rooum, *Wildcat Anarchist Comics*, PM Press 2016.

the gloves must come off ... So if you can't take them by fair methods you take them by foul and everybody else cheers you on ... Indeed, all the accounts I heard of [Challoner] from those who remembered him were told with intense admiration and approval. I shared both.'

The Kray brothers were notorious criminals who lived and conducted their business in the East End, far from Challoner's beat in Soho. There is no actual evidence that he ever met the Krays, or even that they had heard of him, but a doubtful story is circulated that they were at dinner in a West End restaurant, and fled when they heard Challoner was in the vicinity. The same doubtful story is told in Dick Kirby's *The Scourge of Soho* (2013), which also has photographs of the Kray twins on the cover.

Kirby, who served twenty-six years in the Metropolitan Police, writes 'I encountered a number of stories about Challoner's conduct which I decided not to include, firstly because they could not be authenticated, and secondly because it was highly likely that they were the result of "Chinese whispers"'. However, he decided to include the unauthentic story that the Krays were scared of Challoner. Perhaps the stories which he did not include are those which present Challoner as less than heroic. For Challoner was not the only policeman said to have planted evidence; there was also a false rumour about Dick Kirby himself. 'Over forty years ago, a story was circulated about me, to the effect that ... the senior judge Peter Mason QC, MC sent for me, showed me a flick knife and said "Now look here, Mr Kirby; this is the third time this week I've seen this flick-knife in three separate cases and it's got to stop! Still, keep up the good work and come and have a glass of sherry"'.

Kirby's view may be summarised as 'Whenever police fake evidence, they do so for good reasons; but they never do so'. His book is highly critical of anyone who doubts the good will of police (except those convicted of accepting bribes). A plea by the MP Tom Driberg, for Challoner as a mental patient to be treated sympathetically, is described as 'surprising' in view of Driberg's 'trenchant anti-police views'. The NCCL, who defended the public against the worst excesses of government coercion, are seen as allies of the perpetrators of unlawful coercion. So am I, whose transgression was to save my own skin: 'At Challoner's removal from the West End, the gangsters, thugs, pimps, and strong-arm men of Soho could scarcely believe their good fortune. Although they had been prepared to [spend] £1,000 (£16,000 by today's standards) to rid themselves of the pestilential Challoner, a skinny little anarchist, who was unknown to them, had done it for them free of charge'.

Later, when I was a college lecturer, the then Chairman of the Magistrates Association came to talk to the students about the difficulties of a magistrate's job. He knew in advance about my case, and before I started to ask a question told me that it was very unusual. I would have agreed that it was very unusual for an experienced Detective Sergeant to make a mistake in planting evidence, but I did not say so because, of course, that was not what he intended. He meant to say that it is unusual for politically motivated police to bring false prosecutions against their political opponents. No disagreement there. But the fact remains, when the police bring a false prosecution, the victim has no chance of acquittal, except the chance that the police may make a mistake in planting the evidence.

The Abolition of Aging?

David Wood

To be human is to age. Many of us are already deep within the clasp of aging, with declining power and faltering memory. But is an ongoing downward spiral of feebleness, illness, and (perhaps) senility truly inevitable? Or could we take advantage of the remarkable ongoing progress in multiple fields of science and technology, in order to delay, reverse, or even abolish aging? Might the first generation to break free from the grip of aging already be alive?

As a futurist, I'll start with a prediction. Although the topic of the future of aging is currently only a fringe interest in public discussion, it's set to grow in popularity in the next five years. Views which have for centuries been dismissed as 'immature' – views that aging could (and should) be challenged and defeated – will move centre stage. Rising awareness of the revolutionary possibilities of waves of disruption in healthcare will refocus minds splendidly. With a vision of a better future, we'll set aside some of our present-day preoccupations. We'll find a new cause to focus our energy on: the widespread availability of affordable, comprehensive, reliable rejuvenation therapies. People will start to proudly 'come out' as being in favour of the abolition of aging. A movement will blossom.

But the future of aging is far from being all rosy. The abolition of aging is only one of four scenarios that deserve our collective attention. The future



contains threats as well as opportunities. Sometimes the scenarios that we initially thought would be wonderful turn out to have nasty stings in their tails. 'Be careful what you wish for,' is a wise warning. Conversely, scenarios which initially repulsed us may, on cooler reflection, turn out to be attractive after all. In both cases, we need to set aside the waves of 'future shock' which can paralyse our analytic capacities.



David Wood studied mathematics and philosophy of science at Cambridge before spending 25 years as a software engineer in the mobile computing and smartphone industry. He founded the London Futurists meetup, and has been chairing discussions in London since 2008 on technoprogressive and transhumanist possibilities. He is now an independent futurist speaker, writer, and consultant. He has been visiting Conway Hall Ethical Society intermittently since moving to London in 1986.

FOUR SCENARIOS

Consider Eve, born exactly forty years ago in the United Kingdom. Eve is aware that, when she was born, the life expectancy for females in the UK was 76. She knows that her present age – 40 – is more than half that figure. As her ‘big’ birthday has loomed closer, Eve has grown morose and thoughtful. *More than half my life has passed by*, she thinks to herself.

But Eve was intrigued to hear from a friend that life expectancy has been increasing, more or less constantly, since the 1840s. The ‘best practice’ life expectancy for women – the average age of death in the country at that time with the longest lived women – rose from the mid-forties around 1840 (in Sweden) to the mid-eighties around 2000 (in Japan). That’s an increase of 40 years over a passage of 160 years. (This data was assembled by demographers Jim Oeppen and James W. Vaupel.) Stated otherwise, it’s an increase of three months every year; an increase of ten years every forty years.

Eve therefore has the following scenario to consider: In the course of living forty years, she has gained an extra ten years of life expectancy. Her life expectancy has already risen to 86, assuming she remains statistically average. To make another assumption, if this striking trend continues, by the time she reaches the age of 80, she’ll have gained *another* ten years of life expectancy. Playing around with simple maths, Eve realises she can expect, in this scenario, to live a total of 101 years. *Wow*, she muses.

I call this the **optimistic** scenario for life extension. We should contrast it with what might be called the **realistic** scenario that results from looking more closely at the figures for changing life expectancy in the UK.

Digging into the latest figures from the World Bank (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.FE.IN>), Eve observes that female life expectancy in the UK has risen from 75.9 to 82.7 over the forty years of her life so far. That’s an increase of only 6.8 years, not a full 10 years. If *that* trend is extrapolated, Eve can expect to live to the age of 91.6. But there are caveats: the trend lines seem to be dipping, in more recent times; she might be ill with a chronic illness for many years before her death; and her pension may run out before the end of her life.

This is far from being the worst scenario for the future of aging. Recent newspaper headlines highlight

a *reversal* of life expectancy trends for various demographics. ‘Life Expectancy for White Americans Declines’, reported the Wall Street Journal in April 2016. Earlier that month, the Telegraph ran a story ‘Alarm over sudden drop in female life expectancy’. The BBC recently raised the question, ‘Will today’s children die earlier than their parents?’ The answer, in my view, is ‘maybe’. The cause is poor lifestyle and poor diet, coupled with waves of depression and anxiety, leading to dangerous levels of addiction to alcohol and other drugs.

This **pessimistic** scenario involves not only declining overall life expectancy but also an unprecedented increase in what’s been called ‘the longevity gap’, namely the difference in life expectancy between the affluent and the poor.

Each of the scenarios mentioned so far – the optimistic, realistic, and pessimistic – involve extrapolation of various trends from the present into the future. The fourth scenario involves extrapolation of a different kind of trend, namely, the acceleration in the overall capabilities of technology. That scenario envisages a kind of phase transition ahead, in which each additional year of life will bring an increase of *at least another year* of life expectancy. That is, humans who are alive at that time can reach a ‘longevity escape velocity’, akin to the progress of sufficiently fast rockets through the Earth’s atmosphere to escape the hitherto all-conquering downward pull of gravity. In this **abolitionist** scenario, members of society, if they choose, will be able to remain in a youthful state indefinitely.

TWO DISRUPTIONS

To understand which future scenarios are credible, we have to do more than extrapolate current trends. Indeed, some trends may slow down or stop; other trends could intensify. Futurists seek to raise awareness of factors that can act either as brakes or accelerators for trends.

It’s also possible that trends which are dominant at one time can become surpassed in importance by trends which previously seemed insignificant. This is especially true for trends that have an exponential shape – in which a period of slow, disappointing growth is superseded by a period of rapid, surprising growth. Such disruptions can torpedo the fortunes

of major companies. Examples abound of once-great companies that stumbled in the face of exponentially improving technology – consider Kodak, Blockbuster, Nokia, Palm, Britannica, Yahoo, and many more.

It is my contention that not one but two major disruptions lie ahead in the field of healthcare. The first will allow a transition from the realistic scenario for the future of aging to the optimistic scenario. The second will allow a further transition to the abolitionist scenario. If neither transition succeeds, the pessimistic scenario may actually become the most likely outcome, due to increased social inequality, alienation, and disintegration.

To explain these two disruptions, we need to characterise the present state of healthcare. It focuses on tackling individual diseases, rather than addressing aging. This ‘disease-first’ mentality has had a string of renowned successes, especially for infectious diseases. But progress against chronic diseases – such as heart disease, dementia, and cancer – has been disappointingly slow. All this time, aging has been pushed to the back of the queue for medical research dollars.

However, a new conception is starting to become ascendant. This recognises that chronic diseases all become more prevalent (and more severe) in older people. Importantly, aging can be analysed as a series of degradations happening at the molecular and cellular levels of the organism. These degradations include factors such as chronic inflammation, weakening of the regenerative mechanisms of stem cells, macromolecular damage, and deterioration of the metabolism, proteostasis, and the operation of epigenetics and regulatory RNA. Slowing down these lower-level degradations ought, therefore, to slow down the onset and decrease the severity of chronic diseases.

This approach has gained credibility due to discoveries, from the 1980s onwards, of various mechanisms that can, indeed, slow down aging in various organisms, including fruit flies, nematode worms, yeast, and rodents. These mechanisms involve changes in the DNA of the organisms, the applications of various drugs, and even changes in lifestyle (such as diet). Critically, slowing down aging is compatible with the organisms remaining in a good health state overall.

From only a handful of researchers doing serious work in this field in the 1980s, the community of scientists aiming to delay aging has grown roughly

tenfold every decade since then. If *this* trend can continue (and I realise that’s a big *if*), there may be around one million people doing good work on these lines by 2040. In that case, expect major progress in the treatment of all sorts of chronic disease.

The second disruption that I foresee switches the focus from *delaying* aging to *reversing* aging. Rather than slowing down the degradation of molecular and cellular processes, this approach aims to undo such degradation – akin to refurbishing a veteran car and giving it a new lease of life. What makes this transition credible is the maturation, in the next few decades, of a number of new disciplines: 3D printing of new body parts, nanotech interventions for lower-level repairs, stem cell therapies, genetic reprogramming, synthetic biology, and – perhaps most important of all – deep learning AI with the ability to spot patterns in vast biomedical data that previously eluded human observation.

As greater proportions of healthcare professionals become proficient in these emerging technologies, the prospects for abolishing aging – perhaps by as early as 2040 – will increase.

OUR CHOICE

Behind many cries of ‘it *can’t* be done’ – referring to the supposed impracticality of the kinds of regenerative biomedical interventions that I have just discussed – often lies the belief that ‘it *shouldn’t* be done’. The abolition of aging would, supposedly, be bad for the planet as a whole, for human social interactions, and for the sheer meaning of what it is to be human. Critics raise concerns about overpopulation, excess waste, unequal access to premier healthcare, disruption to pension schemes, social stagnation due to people remaining in positions of power indefinitely, the onset of boredom, and a view that life without death would, somehow, become meaningless.

These criticisms take some time to refute comprehensively. There is often an important nugget of truth in what the critics assert. Suffice to say that over the course of 385 pages in my recent book *The Abolition of Aging*, I do my best to present all these criticisms fairly and fully, before giving my responses. In short, I argue that rejuvenation is a noble, highly desirable, eminently practical destiny for our species – a ‘Humanity+’ destiny that could (with sufficient

focus) be achieved within just one human generation from now. As I see it, the abolition of aging is set to take its place on the upward arc of human social progress, echoing developments such as the abolition of slavery, the abolition of racism, and the abolition of poverty.

For millennia, people from all social classes took slavery for granted. Thoughtful participants saw drawbacks with the system, but they assumed that there was no alternative to the basic fact of slavery. They could not conceive how society would function properly without slaves. Even the Bible takes slavery as a given. There is no Mosaic commandment which

says 'Thou shalt not keep slaves'. Nor is there anything in the New Testament that tells slave owners to set their slaves free.

But in recent times, thank goodness, the public mind changed. The *accepting-slavery* paradigm wilted in the face of a crescendo of opposing arguments. As with slavery, so also with aging: the time will come for its abolition. The public will cease to take aging for granted. They'll stop believing in spurious justifications for its inevitability. They'll demand better. They'll see how rejuvenation is ready to be embraced. The sooner, the better.

THE HUMANIST LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Conway Hall Humanist Library and Archives is home to a unique collection of published and archival sources on humanism and its related subjects. We are open for members, researchers and the general public on Tuesdays to Thursdays from 10 till 17. Our collections include printed materials such as books, pamphlets and journals as well as archival material of unpublished institutional and personal records and papers, such as manuscripts, letters and photographs. For your time and convenience it is advisable to contact the library before your visit so we can ensure the material you seek is available.

Tel: 020 7061 6747.

Email: sophie@conwayhall.org.uk

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 invite people who identify with our aims, principles and objects to join our society. The Society maintains the Humanist Library and Archives. The Society's journal, *Ethical Record*, is issued monthly. Conway Hall's educational programmes include Thinking on Sunday, London Thinks, discussions, debates and lectures, courses, and Sunday concerts of chamber music. Memorials, funerals, weddings, and baby naming ceremonies can also be arranged.

THE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION IS £35 (£25 IF A FULL-TIME STUDENT, UNWAGED OR OVER 65)

Brexit: The Fall of Troy?

Takis Tridimas, Professor of European Law, King's College London, and Barrister, Matrix Chambers, offers an update on the situation since he gave his Thinking on Sunday talk about the EU referendum

In Jean Giraudoux's play *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, translated in English as *Tiger at the Gates*, one might recognize the affinities of the protagonists with the two sides of the campaign leading to the Brexit referendum. Acquiescence, bellicose rhetoric, false optimism, and incongruous reasoning define the juxtaposition between Hector's peace minded side and Paris's belligerent camp. At times, the conversations occur at different levels, almost in the absence of a common frame of reference that is a prerequisite to a dialogue, with Helen's inability to resist her impulses adding to the tragedy of the play.

What then can be said of Brexit so far? Whilst the full implications of the referendum cannot properly be assessed before the dust settles, it is not too early to offer some reflections on its immediate aftermath and repercussions. They are not intended to be partisan nor to inspire pessimism.

First, the departure of the UK is a great loss to the EU. Brexit shatters the irreversibility outlook implicit in the integration model of 'ever closer Union'. The rejection of the integration project by one of the most economically and politically powerful Member States cannot but be seen as a great setback. The UK has been very influential in shaping EU policy, leading the way in many areas of decision-making and, with its *laissez faire* orientation, often seen as providing

a counterbalance to continental corporatist inclinations. It has also been, in terms of its compliance with EU law, one of the Union's best citizens. Losing a key player is a disappointment and a political failure. This is not to say that the referendum outcome is to be blamed on the Union's intransigence. The proposed settlement for the UK, reached in the European Council in March 2016, went a long way towards accommodating Britain's requests. It recognized the exceptionalism of the UK; it imposed substantial limitations on the free movement of workers, coming agonizingly close to breaching the EU Treaties; and was a concession that few Member States could achieve. It is also highly doubtful that, had more extensive concessions been granted, the referendum outcome would have been different.

Secondly, the call for exit has given rise to an enormous amount of uncertainty and inefficiencies of a daunting scale. Managing Brexit has become, and will continue to be for a number of years, the main preoccupation of political leadership and the civil service in Britain, increasing exponentially the costs of public administration. The Institute for Government estimates that the annual cost of Whitehall restructuring to manage Brexit will be 65 million for each year that the Department for Exiting the EU and the Department for International Trade



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will operate. The costs are exacerbated by the lack of preparation both at policy and logistical levels. There appears to be no specific alternative blueprint as to the trade policy of the UK and, prior to the referendum, the civil service had made no preparation in anticipation of a possible Brexit outcome. The EU will also be preoccupied with mastering a meaningful response whilst the cost of uncertainty, both economic and non-material, to individuals and businesses will be momentous.

Thirdly, the referendum outcome places the UK and the EU in a trajectory of conflict. Although Member States negotiate hard and pursue their own individual interests within the EU, they do so under the aegis of shared objectives and commitment to common institutions and processes. The decision to leave views the EU legal framework as an expression of EU hegemony and brings the UK and the Union in a competitive relationship both vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis third countries. A renaissance of sovereignty as a backlash to globalisation may be understandable but hides the fact that any inequalities in the allocation of benefits borne by free trade have been the result of distributional decisions taken principally at the national level.

Fourthly, irrespective of the motives or objectives of individual voters, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the no vote has empowered illiberal causes. The rejection of EU membership favours anti-immigration policies and fosters an 'us' and 'them' political culture. It has promoted nationalism and xenophobia building capital for political parties at home and abroad that favour a nationalist agenda. One may take the view that, on a cost benefit analysis, the empowerment of illiberal causes is a fair price to pay for deriving the sovereignty gain that results from Brexit. But denying its existence would appear to run counter to the evidence.

Finally, the referendum brought to the fore tensions between direct and indirect democracy. The outcome is widely perceived to be at odds with the views of the majority of the members of the Westminster Parliament. It thus leads to the paradox that a fundamental constitutional decision is taken despite the disagreement of the people's elected representatives in a polity where parliamentary sovereignty is the defining constitutional principle. Yet, the triumph of direct democracy may well be

temporary. The referendum question presented a multi-dimensional decision as a binary choice. Exit from the EU is only half of the story. The other half is the articulation of an alternative economic and social blueprint on which the referendum question was silent. Voters with widely diverse preferences coalesced around the no vote. Some view the EU as a threat to democracy. Others are critical of the EU's perceived social orientation which they see as a threat to economic growth. Yet others accuse the EU of not allowing enough protectionism: free movement of workers is perceived as a threat to the domestic labour force and the EU was even blamed for not permitting the government to rescue the steel industry. In short, the negative message of the referendum vote is clear but the positive one is not. Here, then, lies another paradox. Since the Brexit vote cannot be seen as endorsing any specific economic or political vision, it can only be interpreted as an empowerment to articulate such a vision but it is uncertain to whom the empowerment is given and under what processes any ensuing decisions are to be taken. The referendum, in other words, has prompted delegation of power to political agents in a way that highly enhances their discretion and may end up increasing the powers of the executive vis-à-vis those of parliament. The Government has been keen to rule out the possibility of another referendum. The truth is that the debate occurs in an uncomfortable constitutional vacuum. It would be as legitimate to hold a second referendum on whatever deal emerges as not to do so. Much as the referendum has been hailed as a triumph of direct democracy, governments rather than citizens might be the winners.

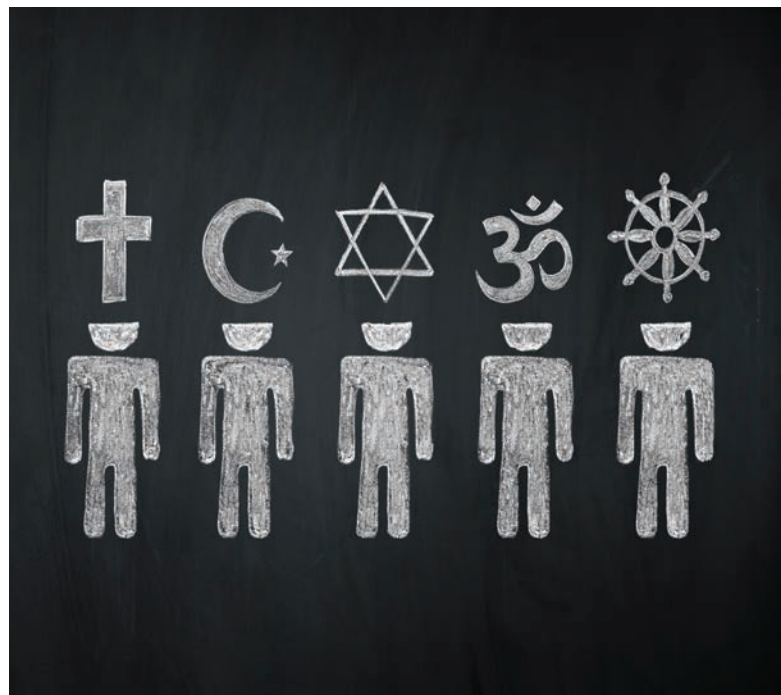
As Brexit unravels, lawyers may find themselves in more familiar, albeit disturbing, territory. No poet has ever interpreted nature as liberally as lawyers have interpreted reality, proclaims Hector in Giraudoux's play. This is an elegant aphorism that many a lawyer would justly take issue with. But it serves to underscore Hector's preceding statement: 'the law is the most powerful school for the imagination'; and we will need a lot of it to make Brexit work.

Religious Education: Where has it been? What is it doing? Where is it going?

John Holroyd discusses some of the key moments in the recent history of Religious Education in Britain, and some of the current and projected causes of concern and sources of hope for this vital aspect of a child's education.

IN THE BEGINNING WAS RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

Until the 1970's at least much Religious Instruction as it was known in the UK was confessional in character. This reflected the state of the nation in which many teachers of religion were in their posts for confessional reasons among others. With the publication of Edwin Cox's *Changing Aims in Religious Education* (1968) and Ninian Smart's *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion* the teaching of Religious Education as it was becoming known became more about the teaching of the phenomena of religion. Smart pioneered Religious Studies as an academic discipline distinct from Theology and orientalist perspectives on other world faiths. He advanced a



neutral approach to the study of religion in which both scholar and school pupil were to suspend their prejudices, backgrounds and beliefs in the study of religion in search of understanding. Having thus bracketed out bias, the student was then encouraged to enter into the life-world of a faith through the use of the sympathetic imagination.

LEGISLATION AND THE CURRICULUM

The Inner London Education Authority was ahead of the pack among local authorities in teaching a full range of world faiths in the kind of non-confessional way that Smart proposed. The thematic study of faiths in the first three years of secondary school became



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especially popular. Pupils would study festivals across a range of faiths in the autumn term, places of worship in the spring term and rites of passage in the summer term. There was a pressing desire to celebrate multicultural Britain and to expunge racism from the classroom and the wider society. The 1988 Education Act finally gave the imprimatur to non-confessional Religious Education and also gave it the odd status of being outside the national curriculum while continuing to insist that it was compulsory. However there was a backlash. Fearful that Christianity was being increasingly marginalised, the Christian right, through the work of people like Baroness Cox in the House of Lords succeeded in putting some limits on this development. Reforms to the bill for example insisted that collective worship in schools was to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. The thematic study of religions also came under fierce criticism and Locally Agreed Syllabuses as well as examination syllabi came to teach religions in a systematic rather than thematic way once again.

Voluntary Aided schools of course continued and still continue to be confessional as Robert Jackson concluded in his study in 2010. Church of England schools for example follow their own diocesan syllabuses and the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998 introduced the concept of schools having 'religious character status' whereby they could discriminate in the appointment of any staff on grounds of religious confession. Research does suggest however that an overtly confessional approach to the teaching of RE in schools today is largely counter-productive with those not already from strongly religious backgrounds being repelled rather than attracted towards faiths that take this evangelical stance within the classroom.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

A further development took place in the 1990's and 2000's in Religious Education, this was the rise of Philosophy of Religion and Ethics. The numbers taking Religious Education at A-level had been in decline in the 1970's and 1980's. Those studying the subject including many teachers coming into the profession in the 1990's were less interested in Theology and Biblical Studies and more interested

in discussing concepts and analysing arguments. By the early 2000's 90% of pupils studying A-level Religious Studies were studying a combination of Philosophy of Religion and Ethics. This has also led and been influenced by similar changes at university level, in which the study of Biblical Studies has declined and Philosophy and Ethics has grown. With this however the study of world religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam has also gone into decline at examination level, at least in schools. They are taught at KS3 level and to a degree at KS4.

Of a piece with these developments, Professor Andrew Wright of King's College, London, has had a significant impact on the way that teachers are trained today in the teaching of RE. He has also had a key impact on curriculum design. Dismayed by the incursions of post-modernism and various shades of liberalism within RE and more widely within academe, Wright set out to distinguish between critical religious education and liberal religious education. The essence of religion, Wright insists, is the pursuit of truth and truthful living. The study of religion in schools should therefore consider religions in terms of the truth claims they make. Its concern should be to evaluate these truth claims and thereby the validity of the entire religions on which they are based. Of course, we can't tell straight off, which religion is true and which is not, but this is the issue before us and we shouldn't avoid it for the purposes of social cohesion or political correctness, that's like ignoring the elephant in the room for Wright.

For me however, there are other elephants in the room. Wright is mistaken I think in speaking so boldly about the essence of religion. As his colleagues Byrne and Clarke have argued in *Religion Defined and Explained*, it is hard to pin down an essence of religion. It is still harder to say what that is. Wright evades the issue as to whether his concept of truth is one of propositional truth or non-propositional truth because at the heart of his claim about essences is no essence but ambiguity. His claims are also not research based but break one of the most basic methodological rules of thumb when thinking philosophically, that the grander your generalisation the greater your evidence base needs to be by orders of magnitude. Of interest is the fact that widespread across faiths, most especially in their mystical expression, is the view that the truth lies beyond words. As such

the truth cannot be critically discussed and this does not help Wright's cause. Yet Wright superimposes on such inconveniences a top down pedagogical approach rather than listening to what the very wide range of religious believers have to say about the essence of their faiths or if they have essences.

LOOKING FORWARD

Today we are concerned by the growth of many religiously inspired free schools and academies. Some operate a curriculum that is disturbingly narrow and is clearly aimed at maintaining a very specific communitarianism within some exclusivist religious communities. I commend Andrew Copson's call for broad and balanced education for all. However this is to be achieved through argument within politics and religious freedoms cannot be ignored. It seems to me that religious freedoms should be no more or less than other forms of freedom within the framework of the nation-state. People of some very extreme religious conviction are also as much a part of the nation-state as others, however much they seek to transform the nation-state for their own ends.

However just as the nation-state grants, rightly, a great deal of freedom to religion, it can equally demand that responsibility is operated by those who are religious just as by everyone else. If a religion is proposing violence against others in society, the state quite rightly it seems to me can call a halt to religious activities at that point. Religions sometimes also claim that they are vulnerable in relation to the state and should therefore be afforded protection from it. I am very much in favour of looking out for minorities where they may be vulnerable to the wider cultural, capitalist and global forces at work. By the same logic, however, the state should be equally interested in the vulnerability of individuals within religious communities where that is needed. Individuals should also both in principle and practice be able to leave the faiths of their upbringing without threat or intimidation.

Ultimately education needs to be released from the nation-state. We need to go back to the future with Diogenes rather than Teresa May and educate for global citizenship, dialogue and hope.

Obituary: Terry Mullins 1931–2016

I am very sorry to report the sudden death of Terry Mullins on 11 October 2016 from necrotising fasciitis. He was 85 years old. There is to be a memorial meeting for Terry in our main Conway Hall on the morning of Sunday, 27 November 2016, when Terry's many interests and causes will be represented.

A long-standing member of the Ethical Society, Terry served as a keen Trustee for many years. He was a regular attender at our Sunday morning

meetings and our Sunday evening concerts, even after succumbing to severe mobility problems in the past few years caused by a rare neurological condition similar to Parkinsons.

We will particularly remember him for his humour and clever witticisms that caused most of the laughter during audience participation. There will be fewer laughs without Terry.

Barbara Smoker



Tom Rubins

Humanistic and Religious Culture

In a genuinely humanistic culture, artistic expressiveness, in any form, is seen as a value in itself. Articulation of individual sensibility and personal response-mode is viewed as possessing an ultimate importance. Hence a humanistic culture – fundamentally prizing variety of sensibility and of ways of voicing sensibility is, in this sense, foundationally pluralistic.

Thus, it differs from religious culture, both in the latter's super-naturalistic and naturalistic forms. In religious doctrines of a super-naturalistic character, range of individual expressiveness may well be valued, even highly; but it is esteemed only as a (supposed) reflection of (alleged) super-natural realities which (again putatively) have inspired it. These realities are themselves regarded as being most fully voiced, not in art, but in the doctrine which comprises the core of the religion in question. Also, the creed is monistic, in the sense of being: fixed, with definite parameters; distinct from every other religion; and the collective possession of all the religion's adherents. The continual emphasis on the doctrine which embraces the individual makes these religions essentially

supra-individualistic in outlook, and therefore not foundationally pluralistic.

In religious creeds of naturalistic character, supra-individualism is again found. If we take pantheism as the chief example of such naturalism, we see that it identifies deity with the natural world. Hence deity is nature. Further, since the individual person is part of nature, s/he is also part of deity. Thus deity transcends the individual: in this case, within the parameters of the natural world.

Hence no religious culture can be pluralistic in the way humanistic culture is. It must always be looking beyond the individual, constantly referencing the individual sensibility to supposed realities which are thought to transcend that sensibility. It can never, then, view the personal perspective as possessing an ultimate, un-transcendable status. So, for all the interest it may have in human variegation, it can never deem such variety to hold a significance which cannot be surpassed. For it, what is unsurpassable and beyond transcendence is the (alleged) super-human realm – a realm which is an item of religious belief.

Tom Rubens is a semi-retired teacher of English and Philosophy and has worked as a university and college lecturer. He has produced eight books on philosophy and has also published poetry and recently, a novel. He has been a member of Conway Hall Ethical Society since the 1980s, and has been active at Conway Hall, delivering Sunday morning lectures and doing archive (from 1870) work on the Society.



It will be seen that religious culture, as defined above, actually has a certain parallel feature with science. This statement may at first seem an odd one: there are of course a number of obvious ways in which the religious mindset differs fundamentally from the scientific – or, at least, from the scientific mindset which possesses unqualified empirical openness. However, what must now be noted is that the scientific perspective is, like the religious, essentially supra-individualistic. It never places primary importance on the individual sensibility or mode of experience. Indeed, it prides itself on dealing in what it regards as totally objective realities which lie beyond the idiosyncrasies of experience. Its chief concern is the sphere of general objective reality, of which the individual is seen to be a part. In this position lies its supra-individualism.

This said, though, the differences between science and religion re-take centre stage. As said, science sees the general sphere which envelopes the individual as that of the totality of objective facts. It regards these facts as arrived at by strict empirical methods, and crystallising around laws of nature – processes which underpin human behaviour just as much as the behaviour of other natural phenomena. This emphasis on the general rather than the particular means that the scientist, no matter how much s/he may be interested in individual sensibilities, will ultimately attempt to reference these to general categories of knowledge, for purposes of achieving systematic kinds of explanation and classification. The personal, then, will tend to be subsumed under the impersonal.

Clearly, the supra-individualistic sphere in science is very different from that in religion. Because established through empirical, experimental and analytical procedures, it is not based on faith in any religious sense, or on received ideas which remain untested and hence stand as forms of doctrinal authority or dogma.

In fact, science has always flourished most extensively in non-religious cultures; and, at any rate in the West since the 17th century, it has widened its realm largely in proportion to the expansion in humanistic culture. Hence, though science is marginally like religion in being essentially supra-individualistic in outlook, its much deeper linkage is with humanism.

The two chief linking factors are: 1) their eschewal of super-naturalistic styles of thinking, and 2) their

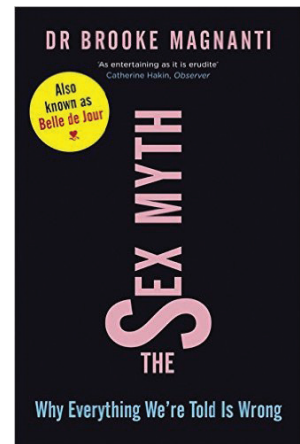
empirical openness to the natural world. On the latter: this is an openness which, in science, has one kind of focus, and, in humanism, another. As said, the scientific focus is on not the particular but the general (and in its study of all particular phenomena, not just human ones); in humanism, or rather in humanism as a broad cultural outlook, it's on the personal and the particular in the human sphere, and especially on the arts. Of course, no-one could sensibly argue that genuine humanists are uninterested in science; but, again from the broad cultural standpoint, their emphasis does fall on the individual sensibility: on what it is in itself, and on its products, as distinct from the reasons why (identifiable by science) it is what it is. Humanism's interest in people could never be confined to the perspectives of the hard sciences.

Returning now to the differences between humanistic and religious culture: the value which humanism places on art actually finds a parallel in religion, and so constitutes a similarity. One reason for the prominent role historically played in religion by art is that the former's doctrines have usually been (while non-scientific) highly imaginative, with many poetic elements, and highly appealing to the emotions. In these respects, they have shared common ground with the arts.

Further, much of the art with which, in the above sense, they have psychologically chimed, was in fact art which voiced, or at least implied, religious doctrine. Thus the religious mind could deeply appreciate the art in question, while at the same time viewing it as something which transcended the private sensibility of the artist. So, in this way, the supra-individualistic perspective did not clash with interest in the individual mindset.

However, given what has previously been argued, here is where the shared appreciation of art by the religious believer and the humanist comes to an end. Once more: for the humanist, art can never point to the existence of super-natural realities. Its quality and calibre always lead back to consideration of the individual who produced it i.e. to the kind of consideration regarded as fully rewarding in itself. In accordance with this perspective, the humanist completely concurs with Ortega y Gasset when the latter writes: 'Each person is a point of view directed at the universe.'

PROSTITUTION: ANOTHER VIEW



I was at Janice Williams's talk on prostitution and have read her piece in the October ER.

Whatever one thinks of prostitution, it has existed in every society which has permitted or at any rate tolerated it, and all attempts to eliminate it are doomed to failure. Jan's assertion that it has been abolished in some places is an example of the blinkered, head-in-the-sand denial of which she accuses others. Any attempt to ban it by law, on either or both sides of the transaction, only drives it underground and probably makes things **worse**, not better, for practitioners. It might be possible in a grossly repressive society like North Korea (though even that is improbable), but I hope Jan wouldn't want that.

If adults choose, of their own free will, to engage in sexual activity that is their decision and nobody else's business, and it does not, I think, make any significant difference if one or all are being paid (a point also applying to pornography, on which I know Jan also holds strong views). Yes, the ideal is that sex should only ever accompany meaningful relationships, but that is a counsel of perfection unattainable with real human beings.

Some of Jan's assertions are strongly disputable, particularly that the mortality rate of prostitution is at least 12 times that of any (**any?**) other activity (military service? Dangerous sports?). I see no way in which such a figure could be arrived at. How are these deaths supposed to occur? Murder by clients? Yes, it happens, and when it does it is, of course, appalling, but it surely cannot make such a vast difference to the death rate. Sexually transmitted diseases? Again, they couldn't possibly make such a difference. Similarly, it is surely wildly exaggerated to say that **everyone** in prostitution needs to

self-medicate with drugs or alcohol, or that 90% risk mental health problems, or that there is, 'say', a 70% risk of being raped or beaten. Again, where do these figures come from? And that 'say' is a very revealing weasel word!

Much 'evidence' comes from services helping women to leave prostitution, and it seems obvious that they are only going to hear from women who wish to leave prostitution. Maybe there are thousands of prostitutes who are perfectly happy to be in what Jan calls (with a capital A) this Activity. What would she say to a prostitute who told her she was glad to be one, wished to continue, and objected to any attempt to rob her of her source of income?

I refer anyone wanting more information to an excellent book, *The Sex Myth: Why Everything We're Told is Wrong* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012; Phoenix, 2013) by the American-born naturalised British scientist Dr Brooke Magnanti, who, in 2009, 'came out' as Belle de Jour, the prostitute whose blog and books inspired *Secret Diary of a Call Girl*. She demolishes many myths: tens of thousands of women are trafficked as sex slaves; restricting and banning prostitution stops it; those who oppose the sex industry are motivated by what they think best for society (in fact they often want to outlaw it even for consenting adults), etc.

Trafficking figures are wildly exaggerated. An MP said 25,000 per year; the highest reliable figure was fewer than 1,500. Then there were the 40,000 prostitutes said to be heading for Germany for the 2006 World Cup; the number of confirmed cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation for the **whole** of Germany and the **whole** of 2006 (not just Cup venues and the Cup period) was - er - five! 'Pentameter

Two', a vast investigation covering the whole UK, resulted in just five convictions, none detected due to the operation itself. Apparently three quarters of a million men could find a sex slave every day, but highly trained police officers running a special nationwide operation lasting months found only tiny numbers of possible victims, probably almost none of whom were actually 'trafficked', as opposed to coming here, and working as prostitutes, voluntarily.

Some of the things said by people who say they oppose the exploitation of women (in fact they usually oppose the very existence of the sex industry, even if women are in it perfectly willingly) are almost incredibly idiotic. One said that no one should be forced to do work they don't want to simply to survive, as if that applied only to prostitution! Don't the vast majority of employees work only for a living, and would stop if they didn't need to? Prostitution is particularly degrading? Magnanti says that never in it did she experience the dehumanisation she endured as a charity mugger, in a call centre, and in retail jobs. And some can only be called vile, like the reviewer who said that *Secret Diary* should end with the protagonist dead in a ditch, or Julie Burchill's remark that when the sex war is won prostitutes should be shot as collaborators.

Prostitutes are stereotyped as having chaotic, desperate lives. It's said that most are not there through choice and are addicted to drugs or alcohol; many are trafficked and held against their will, were abused as children, and are homeless; all are victims and the solution is criminal punishment. None of this is true, but people with no first-hand knowledge of prostitution claim to tell the 'real' story, shouting down anyone who disagrees. All prostitutes are assumed to be damaged, emotionally unstable, incapable of making their own decisions, and so must be 'rescued'. It is as if anyone who has taken money for sex is rendered incapable of speaking for

themselves. To be, like Magnanti, a former prostitute with anything to say that isn't 100% negative is to be written off, disregarded and ridiculed by people thinking their preconceptions carry more weight than actual experience. Prostitution is the only occupation in which commentators assume you must hate what you do in order to take money for it - 'There are few accepted stories for sex workers other than Criminal or Victim' - but most long-term prostitutes Magnanti knows don't hate sex or their jobs.

Magnanti is particularly interesting on the reactions when she 'came out'. To her surprise (it wouldn't have surprised me!), most of the bile came from women who probably considered themselves feminists. One columnist repeatedly derided her looks. Well, I remember the Miss World contest being disrupted by a feminist demo; isn't it a fundamental tenet of feminism that women shouldn't be judged by their appearance? '[I]n the minds of many feminists, to be a prostitute at all was to be a prostitute only Having been a sex worker at any time ... strips you of any other permissible identity and defines you absolutely. It makes you open to ridicule, regardless of your credentials in any other sphere.' And: '[O]ur so-called sisters ... more often than not are the cruellest and most spiteful haters of all.'

Poor research, Magnanti says, often starts from an assumed position, any data falling outside being ignored. Writers come with a bias and look to find ways for the numbers to fit their preconceived notions of what the truth should be rather than what it actually is: the Texas Sharpshooter technique of shooting, painting a target round the hole, and getting a bullseye every time. As she neatly sums up: '[W]e seem hard-wired to reject anything we don't like rather than let our views be changed by hard evidence.'

Ray Ward – London

British Columbia Survey of Religious Views Shows Religion in Decline

The Canadian census mandatory long-form has, for many years, been an important guide for the government in Canada to understanding the extent of religious belief in the country. The census results are then used to assist government in providing social and cultural resources to the population according to greatest need and demographics. Secular humanists, however, have long wondered if the wording on the census was too favorable towards religion and has skewed the results by giving the wrong impression about religious belief in the country.

The British Columbia Humanist Association (BCHA) set out to inquire further into this subject by hiring Insights West, a survey company, to conduct 800 online interviews between May 31 and June 3, 2016, to find out more details about people's religious beliefs and also, their religious practice. The results were quite marked. While 56% responded that they believed in the existence of a higher power (26% did not believe and 18% were unsure), when it came to actually practicing a religion 69% indicated that they didn't practice a specific religion or faith. When asked further if they ever attended a religious service at a church, temple, mosque, or synagogue, 55% indicated that they never attended, 23% indicated that they only attended on holidays or for special events, 4% attended once or twice a month, 5% only several times a year, and only 11% attended once a week or more.

The survey company then asked whether respondents supported charitable status for religious institutions to which 60% agreed with the granting of such status. However, when this was broken down into a question of specific subsidy for houses of worship, parking lots and clergy residences, support dropped and over 50% stated that they opposed these specific subsidies. The support for institutions such as religious hospitals also significantly dropped if these institutions were seen to discriminate against employees or clients on religious grounds (75% opposed) or if they refused to provide specific services such as hospitals refusing to perform abortions or doctor-assisted dying (71% opposed).

Ian Bushfield, the executive director of the BCHA remarked that 'Religion is on the wane in BC. In its place is an increasingly secular and non-religious constituency that politicians and policy makers will need to pay attention to As BC becomes increasingly irreligious, it is up to religious groups to justify the entitlements they continue to enjoy at taxpayers' expense. There's no reason many of their services couldn't be provided by secular and inclusive alternatives. The state doesn't need to continue to privilege religious world views over secular ones.'

See www.bchumanist.ca/religious_and_secular_attitudes_2016

CONWAY HALL SUNDAY CONCERTS

Start at 18.30 unless specified otherwise.

NOVEMBER 6

London Festival of Bulgarian Culture: Concert 1

NOVEMBER 13, 14:00 to 15:00

Children's Workshop with Alena Lugovkina (flautist)

NOVEMBER 13

London Festival of Bulgarian Culture: Concert 2

NOVEMBER 20

London Festival of Bulgarian Culture: Concert 3

NOVEMBER 27

Simon Callaghan & Friends

DECEMBER 4

Delta Piano Trio

DECEMBER 11, 13:00 to 14:00

Children's Concert: Little Red Riding Hood

DECEMBER 11

Brook Street Band

DECEMBER 18

London Mozart Players Chamber Ensemble

For ticket prices and other information, please visit www.conwayhall.org.uk/sunday-concerts/

LONDON THINKS

Start at **19.30** unless specified otherwise.

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| Thursday
Nov 10 | An Intimate Conversation with Roger Penrose <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Prof Sir Roger Penrose</i> in discussion with Ideas Roadshow host <i>Howard Burton</i> |
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THINKING ON SUNDAY

Start at **11.00** unless specified otherwise.

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| Nov 6 | Secularism in the Kurdish Region of Iraq <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Gona Saed</i> |
| Nov 13 | Transforming Justice <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Chris Purnell</i> |
| Nov 20 | To be announced |
| Dec 4 | Is it Time to Rethink the “University”? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Prof Dennis Hayes</i> |
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OTHER EVENTS

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| Sunday
Nov 27 | Terry Mullins (1931–2016) Memorial Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10.00 to 12.00 (starts 10.30); buffet lunch 12.00 to 13.00• RSVP if possible to midsomer.myers@gmail.com |
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For ticket prices and other information, please visit www.conwayhall.org.uk