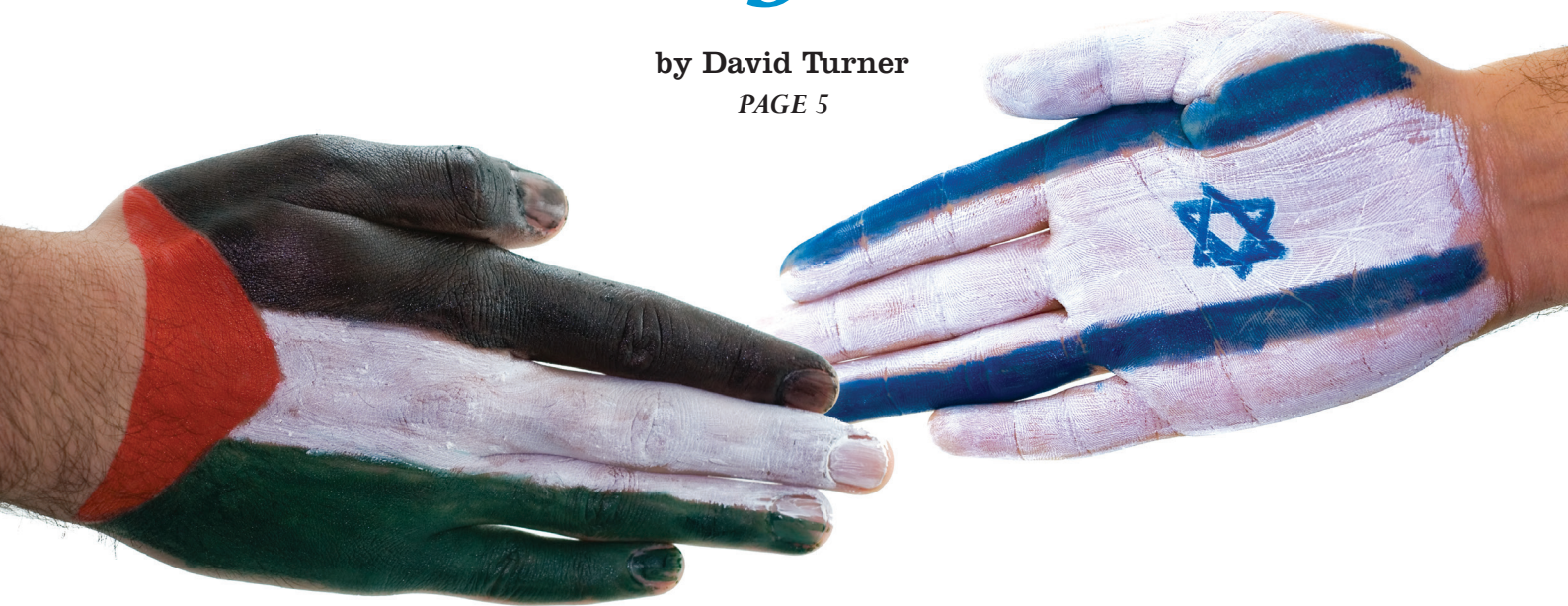


Prospects for a Solution to the Israel/Palestine Conflict

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How the Mensheviks
Lost the Russian Revolution

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The Story of
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by Grant Bartley

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This is the first quarterly edition of the *Ethical Record*. The next will be the October/November/December issue. After many years as a monthly publication a decision has been taken to prioritise the accessibility, reach and immediacy of the *Ethical Record's* online content. With more than 80% of our members choosing to engage with the online rather the printed version, plus the fact that the online reach extends internationally, it makes sense for our resources to be aligned with how our content can be best consumed and have more impact.

Please see the *Ethical Record* section of conwayhall.org.uk for regularly updated content and also take a look at the online archive, where every issue published since 1895 is available in a digitised form.

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

EDITORIAL

A Bond Strengthened by Shared Creative Experience

Guest Editor: **Karen Scott**

Sitting on a crowded tube on a normal workday journey, the usual human silence was broken by a trio playing a lively rendition of 'When the saints go marching in'. Whatever the message of the song, it fundamentally changed the mood in that tube carriage. Now people were smiling and, once we had all overcome the discomfort that comes with knowing we would be asked for money, there was a hint of that sense of community that is sparked by a shared experience.

Whatever their personal reasons, those three musicians had helped a carriage full of people to benefit from the sharing of a human experience and the sense of happiness that this can bring. Music is so powerful in its ability to bring people together and, as humans, we experience music within the context of a range of communities. My own favourite way to do so is at a live event, where it is very much a shared experience with a community bonded by a shared taste in a particular type of music. The trio on the tube created that community unexpectedly, and briefly, but effectively.

Even more special is a community that actively gets together to make music. A choir community requires members to actively participate and creates a bond that is strengthened through that shared creative experience. Singing brings people together. Choir singers do so because they want to contribute to the chorus and, in doing so, make music that adds to the

wellbeing of others as well as themselves. Singing in a choir is about being in harmony with your choir community and this relates to the sounds produced as a singing unit and also to maintaining a consensus on repertoire.

In contrast with choirs based on religious beliefs, repertoire for a humanist choir might focus on what it means to be human and to be happy as a member of the wider human community. Songs are chosen for their meaning in terms of the human state rather than their reinforcement of religious beliefs. This means that the repertoire can be wide and diverse and so there is a wonderful variety of music to suit a range of singers and audiences.

As a member of London Humanist Choir I have been lucky enough to perform songs as diverse as Tim Minchin's Woody Allen Jesus, Ian Shearing's Who is Sylvia and a range of contemporary music. Our One Life concert, held in June each year is an evening of celebration of the one life we have. An evening of comedy and music, it is a wonderful showcase of our repertoire and a chance to celebrate the year with an audience ready for an entertaining evening, some great music and a good laugh.

As I write we are preparing for our 2017 concert, being held at Conway Hall, where we will be joined by Tony Hawks, Tim Renkow and Steve Cross. The choir is the perfect way to share the human experience through music, for both singers and listeners.



Karen Scott is mother of three and grandmother of two and lives with her husband in Kent. She has spent most of her life working in vocational education, specialising in computing, and now runs a social enterprise, futureCoders, helping teenagers to gain confidence, skills and experience, through projects, as a step up to a career in software development. She has been a member of the London Humanist Choir for four years and is a committee member and, currently, secretary.

The Martin Ryle Trust and Conway Hall Ethical Society present

The Business Plan for Peace

Making Possible a World Without War

Dr Scilla Elworthy

Mon 2 Oct 2017

7.45pm

CONWAY
HALL

Prospects for a Solution to the Israel/Palestine Conflict

David Turner



The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is one of the longest running of modern times and is not comprehensible without some knowledge of its history. I will first revisit the most important points of that history. Then I'll look at the attempt, beginning around 1991, to solve the conflict within the framework of the so called two state solution and why this has run into the sand. Finally I will sketch an alternative framework which a growing number of people see as the only productive way forward.

PALESTINE UNDER BRITISH RULE: 1917 TO 1947

You won't find Palestine on a current map of the world, but if you look at a map of the Eastern Mediterranean dated any time between the wars, say around 1926, you will see that the place where Israel now sits is labelled "Palestine". Before 1948 the land that is called Israel today was called Palestine and its majority population were Palestinian Arabs.



David Turner is Emeritus Professor of Computation at the University of Kent. He has a long-standing interest in the Israel/Palestine conflict, which he has been following since 1968. He is a signatory of Independent Jewish Voices and of Jews for Justice for Palestinians. David serves on the executive of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (UK), an Israeli-founded human rights organisation which campaigns against the removal of Palestinians from their homes.

Originally part of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine was ruled after WWI by Britain under a League of Nations Mandate – an international trust in which a great power looked after the interests of the mandated territory until its people were deemed ready for independence. Palestine was recognised as a state by the International Court of Justice in 1926, with the expectation that it would in due course become fully independent. Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations described the duty of the Mandatory to prepare the people of the mandated territory for sovereignty and independence as “a sacred trust of civilisation”.

However, in 1917 Britain had also promised a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine “without prejudice to the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish population”. This, the *Balfour declaration*, was incorporated into the text of the Palestine mandate, creating a potential contradiction with the Mandate’s primary purpose, depending on what was intended by the term *Jewish National Home*.

In 1917 Jews were 10% of the Palestine population. The emigration of European Jews to Palestine increased sharply after 1933 when the Nazis assumed power in Germany and by 1947, following WWII and the Holocaust, Jews were 30% of the population of Palestine (note that the Arab majority was still 70%). The leader of the Jewish community in Palestine, David Ben Gurion, demanded that a Jewish state be created in all or most of the territory, which was strongly opposed by representatives of the Arab majority. The British handed the problem to the United Nations.

PARTITION 1947-9

On 29 November 1947 the UN General Assembly passed a resolution (UNGA 181) recommending that Palestine be partitioned into two states – a “Jewish State in Palestine” with 55% of the land, an “Arab State in Palestine” with 43% of land and, as a *corpus separatum* under international control, the holy city of Jerusalem (including Bethlehem).

The details of the proposal were completely impractical – neither state was contiguous, the Jewish state had an Arab minority of 49% and only 10% of the land within it was Jewish owned. Nevertheless the Jewish side accepted, probably on tactical grounds, knowing that the Arabs would reject it.

The proposal was rejected by the Arab Higher Committee, representing the Arabs of Palestine, and by the Arab League, representing the Arab states. The Arab position was for Palestine to stay as one country with a government elected by all its citizens, both Arabs and Jews.

The General Assembly resolution was a *recommendation* under article 10 of the UN charter. Only the Security Council could make the plan legally binding and authorise the use of force to implement it. The Security Council debated the plan for weeks without adopting it – another proposal was put on the table (likewise never adopted) to make Palestine into a UN Trust territory.

In the meantime civil war broke out in Palestine, from December 1947. In March 1948 Jewish forces, having gained the upper hand, began the mass expulsion of Arab civilians. On 14 May 1948 the State of Israel was declared in Tel Aviv and the following day, 15 May, the Arab States intervened, sending their armies into Palestine for the declared purpose of protecting the Arab population. Note that Jewish forces outnumbered Arab forces at every stage of the war. When the fighting stopped, in January 1949, the new state of Israel held 78% of Palestine in an area from which around 730,000 Arab civilians had been expelled, creating a substantial Jewish majority.

No Arab state recognised the newly created state of Israel, but during January to April 1949 Israel and the Arab states negotiated agreements defining armistice (cease fire) lines – the so called “Green Lines” – which served as Israel’s *de facto* borders until 1967. The remaining 22% of Palestine consisted of the West Bank and East Jerusalem (20%), which were annexed by Jordan, while Egypt held the Gaza strip (2%).

In December 1948 the General Assembly passed a resolution (UNGA 194) affirming the right of return and of compensation for Palestinian refugees and calling for the removal of all military forces from Jerusalem.

In May 1949 Israel was admitted to the UN, without legal recognition of its borders but on an understanding that it would negotiate with the Arab states to resolve outstanding issues – borders, refugees and Jerusalem – on the basis of resolutions 181 and 194. The Lausanne conference on these matters broke up in September 1949 without reaching any

agreement. It remains the case today that Israel has no internationally agreed borders and no internationally recognised sovereignty over any part of Jerusalem.

The mass expulsion of Arab civilians in 1948 is the central event of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Without it there would have been no Jewish majority in what became Israel.

1967: THE SIX DAY WAR

In June 1967, in response to threats by Egypt, Israel took the initiative, defeating three Arab armies in 6 days and gaining control of the rest of Palestine – East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza – now called the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), together with Egyptian Sinai and the Golan Heights, belonging to Syria.

In November 1967 the UN Security Council passed a resolution (UNSC 242) calling for “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict”. Sinai was eventually returned to Egypt in a treaty of 1979 but East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights were annexed by Israel, both annexations being declared unlawful by the UN.

Israel continued to rule West Bank and Gaza without annexing them – leaving their Palestinian inhabitants under Israeli military rule. However Israeli settlers, introduced into these territories from 1967 in violation of the 4th Geneva Convention, retain their rights as Israeli citizens and are subject to Israeli civilian law.

In 1974 the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), created in exile with the aim of overthrowing Israel and restoring an Arab Palestine, gained observer status in the UN General Assembly and was recognised as “the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people”. Factions of the PLO waged irregular warfare against Israel, which responded with strikes against PLO targets.

THE MADRID/OSLO “PEACE PROCESS”

In December 1987 an *intifada* (uprising) of Palestinians living under occupation began in Gaza and rapidly spread through the OPT. Israel resorted

to brutal methods to suppress unarmed civilians, damaging its international reputation.

In this situation the PLO intervened unexpectedly, announcing in November 1988 that it now accepted the principle of partition (after rejecting it for 40 years!) and offered to negotiate a two state agreement with Israel.

In 1991 a conference took place in Madrid, under American auspices, between Israel and the Arab states (the PLO was not allowed to attend but represented by Jordan) leading to bilateral negotiations, including between Israel and a Palestinian negotiating team. The latter eventually led to the Oslo agreement between Israel and the PLO, signed in 1993 and further elaborated in Oslo II (1995). By these Yasser Arafat, as president of the PLO, recognised Israel within the Green Lines (78% of Palestine) potentially allowing 22% for a Palestinian State in Gaza and the West Bank with its capital in East Jerusalem.

The text of the agreement, however, does not refer to a Palestinian state. It created a “Palestinian Authority” (PA) with Arafat as president – since his death in 2004, replaced by Mahmoud Abbas. This initially covered Gaza and Jericho, subsequently expanded to full authority for the PA in “area A” (the main Palestinian towns, which are 18% of West Bank) and partial authority in “area B” (an additional 20% surrounding the towns) while Israel retains full control of “area C” which is 62% of West Bank including the Jordan valley – and all of East Jerusalem.

This was all supposed to be temporary, allowing for negotiations on a final status agreement to be concluded by end of 1999. The deadline passed and an attempt by the Americans to broker a deal at Camp David in 2000 failed, reportedly because Israel refused to offer Arafat any meaningful sovereignty over East Jerusalem (although the Israeli account differs).

After Camp David Palestinian frustration boiled over into a second *intifada* triggered when Ariel Sharon, a right-wing Israeli politician, visited the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem accompanied by 1000 armed soldiers.

In the meantime Israel has continued to build settlements. In 1993, when Oslo was first signed there were 160,000 Israel settlers in the Occupied

Territory, now (2017) there are 620,000 including 200,000 in East Jerusalem. Israel has also continued to demolish Palestinian homes to make way for Israeli settlers.

If you look at a map of the West Bank areas A and B are disconnected islands of Palestinian self-rule surrounded by a sea of Israeli control. Israeli settlers now outnumber Palestinians in area C (most of the West Bank).

In 2005 Israel withdrew its settlers from Gaza but continues to control Gaza's borders. In 2006 elections to the PA legislative assembly were won by Hamas, a Palestinian group that is not part of the PLO and did not support the Oslo agreements. Israel and USA refused to recognise the result of the Palestinian elections, with the eventual outcome of Hamas holding power in Gaza only. In the hope of overthrowing Hamas, Israel has placed Gaza under siege, with periodic exchanges of fire between Israel and Hamas. The consequences are devastating for the civilian population of Gaza, numbering 1.9 million, half of whom are children under 16.

Areas A and B of the West Bank continue to be administered by a PA government that has little democratic legitimacy, as Fatah (the largest party within the PLO) lost the 2006 legislative elections. Mahmoud Abbas (of Fatah) remains in office as president of the PA, although his presidential term legally expired in January 2009.

The international community maintains its official stance of promoting a two state solution and there are periodic attempts to revive negotiations, most recently by John Kerry in 2014, but many diplomats will admit in private that the two state solution is effectively dead.

The causes for the failure of Oslo were largely in the agreement itself. First, the agreement was not symmetrical – Arafat recognised Israel but Israel recognised only the PLO, not a Palestinian state. Second, everything important – Jerusalem, borders, statehood, refugees – was left to final status negotiations. But the fatal omission was the absence of any ban on Israel continuing to expand its settlements, which it has done relentlessly. The international community has failed to apply any meaningful sanctions on Israel to deter this.

Assuming that the intention was to retain control of the Occupied Territory without making

its inhabitants citizens, from Israel's point of view Oslo was not a failure but a resounding success.

What Israel is carrying out in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is a continuation, in modified form, of the ethnic cleansing by which Israel was created in 1948. In the West Bank Palestinians are being gradually concentrated in areas A & B, leaving area C, the bulk of the land including the Jordan valley, free for Jewish settlement.

The "Palestinian state", if it ever emerges, is likely to consist of Gaza plus areas A & B of the West Bank, amounting to 10% of historic Palestine. It will be demilitarised, a fundamental Israeli requirement which the PLO has long accepted, and will not control its own borders. This is not a state but *a native self-rule area within an apartheid state*.

THE SINGLE STATE REALITY

Between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean there is one army – the Israeli army, which can go anywhere, while the PA has only a police force which requires Israeli permission to go outside area A. There is one economy – the Oslo accords cement the Occupied Territory in a single market and customs union with Israel. There is one currency – the Israeli shekel, which circulates even in Gaza. There is one electricity network and one telephone system. The Israeli government controls all external borders – Palestinians, even those in Gaza, require permission from Israel to travel abroad and to return. De facto this is a single state ruled by the government of Israel.

The powers of the PA are in reality those of a municipal authority operating with Israeli permission, not those of a national government. The collaboration between the Palestinian security forces and the Israeli military in suppressing resistance to the status quo makes the Palestinian Authority part of the apparatus for maintaining Israeli domination.

In international law the Palestinian territories are *occupied* by Israel, but the material reality is that Israel has *annexed* them. Israel's legal borders remain undefined – the 1949 Green Lines were cease-fire lines, not *de jure* borders. But Israel's *de facto* borders are those of Mandate Palestine (apart from the Golan, which belongs to Syria) and Israel has ruled the whole of this space for the last 50 years.

The Green Line is invisible to Israelis – they can drive from Tel Aviv to the Dead Sea without crossing a check point, using a network of roads through the West Bank on which only cars with Israeli number plates are allowed. Palestinians face check points manned by Israeli soldiers even when travelling between West Bank towns and require permits, which can be withdrawn at any time and do not allow them to stay overnight, to enter Israel from the West Bank.

The existence of internal borders which are invisible to one ethnic group but constrict the movement of another is characteristic of an apartheid state.

Within the de facto single state of Greater Israel there are 6.5 million Israeli Jews and 6.7 million Palestinian Arabs (as of March 2017). Israeli Jews are citizens with a vote and the same rights regardless of whether they live inside the Green Line or in the Occupied Territory. But Palestinians have different rights depending on where they live. Only those inside the Green Line (1.7 million) are citizens and have a vote – they are second class citizens in a Jewish state. The Palestinians in East Jerusalem (300k) have civil rights but no vote in Israeli national elections, those in the West Bank (2.8 million) have no vote and live under military law and those in Gaza (1.9 million) have no vote and live under siege in an open air prison guarded by Israel.

In addition there are several million stateless Palestinian refugees living in nearby countries who have a right of return to what is now Israel under international law, but are unable to exercise it.

THE BINATIONAL ALTERNATIVE

The current situation is clearly unjust and in the long run unsustainable. The two state solution has failed, not only for contingent reasons, but because it is based on a false analysis. The Israel/Palestine conflict is not a dispute between two neighbouring peoples, one of whom is occupying the territory of the other. It is a conflict about rights between two peoples who inhabit the same land.

A just solution requires Israel to change from being a Jewish state ruling over millions of non-Jews to a binational democratic state in which Israelis and Palestinians have equal rights – equal individual rights and equal national rights. These would include a right of return to what is now Israel for those Palestinian refugees who wish to return. This would be a political entity of perhaps an entirely new type. There would have to be constitutional provisions to ensure the representation of both groups in all important institutions of the state and “parity of esteem” between the two national cultures.

This will not be easy to bring about, starting from the current situation, but the first step is to recognise that the continued pursuit of the failed “two state solution” is not merely futile but actively harmful, as it provides Israel with cover to continue policies of ethnic cleansing and apartheid in the whole of historic Palestine.

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A THINKING ON SUNDAY LECTURE, 2 April 2017

How the Mensheviks Lost the Russian Revolution

Francis King

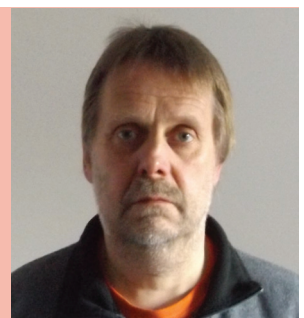


Sometimes a political party may enjoy a massive lead over its rivals at the start of a contest, only to throw its advantage away through its own ineptitude. But this piece is not about the farce of Britain's

Conservatives in 2017, but the tragedy of Russia's Mensheviks a century before that.

When Nicholas II of Russia fell from power at the end of February 1917 and soviets of workers' and

Francis King lectures in Russian history at the University of East Anglia, and is editor of *Socialist History* and co-editor of *European History Quarterly*. He recently published a translation of Menshevik leader Fedor Dan's memoir *Two Years of Wandering*.



soldiers' deputies mushroomed across Russia, most of these new bodies were established and dominated by Menshevik-aligned labour activists. By the end of October 1917, most of the Mensheviks' supporters, and many of their erstwhile members, had deserted them. Workers and soldiers switched their allegiance to the more radical Bolsheviks, who were able to seize power in Russia in the name of those same soviets.

Since 1903, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks had been the two main factions in Russian Marxism, nominally both part of the social-democratic party (RSDRP) but often operating entirely separately. When it first emerged in the 1880s and 1890s, Russian Marxism had a developmental schema: Russia was not 'different', it was merely backward. It could not avoid following Western Europe into industrial capitalism. Economic progress required political progress – the pre-capitalist autocracy, with its archaic social structure which concentrated power in a small land-owning nobility, would have to be swept away. The coming revolution would bring political freedom, the right to assemble and organise, equality before the law, an equal franchise – but it would be a 'bourgeois', not a socialist, revolution. The working class would gain freedom and rights, but not power. After all, despite its rapid industrial development, Russia still consisted almost 80% of peasants.

In 1905, a wave of workers' and peasants' risings swept across Russia. The generally more radical Bolsheviks saw an opportunity: the workers' party could conceivably take power if it allied with the revolutionary peasants. The Mensheviks tended to mistrust peasants and stuck with the old schema, in which power would pass to urban liberals, while working class parties remained outside of government. The autocracy's reassertion of control after the end of 1905 rendered these points moot. The RSDRP was again driven underground, and many Mensheviks in particular preferred instead to concentrate on the (new but limited) opportunities for legal organisation among workers in unions, co-operatives and friendly societies. While the party's factional leaders schemed and squabbled in exile abroad, activists within Russia were embedding themselves and their ideas in working-class life.

When World War I broke out in 1914, most European governments co-opted their labour movements to assist the war effort. In Russia, in contrast,

all leading RSDRP members at large were rounded up and sent to Siberia. But the rank-and-file labour activists continued organising and agitating among the workers, not least in the greatly expanded munitions sector. Consequently, when the Tsarist regime collapsed, Menshevik-aligned labour activists were already in place both to create revolutionary organisations and set the tone for them. The first executive of the Petrograd Soviet, the most important one in Russia, was overwhelmingly Menshevik, from the more moderate, practical elements in that faction – people like Nikolai Chkheidze, Boris Bogdanov and Matvey Skobelev.

At first, the course of the revolution seemed to fit the Menshevik schema like a glove. Liberal politicians from the State Duma (parliament) formed a new Provisional Government by agreement with the Petrograd Soviet, and liberal elements took over local authorities across Russia. Political prisoners were released, civil liberties were proclaimed, and Russia became the freest of all the belligerent states. Work started on preparing for a Constituent Assembly, to be elected via universal, equal suffrage of both sexes. Russia looked destined to become a modern, democratic, parliamentary republic. Meanwhile, the role of the soviets was to ensure the revolution stayed on track, to support the new authorities from without 'to the extent that' they carried out the 'tasks' of the revolution.

This restraint did not stem solely from theoretical considerations. There were several compelling practical reasons why the Petrograd Soviet did not try to take power itself in early March 1917.

Firstly, Petrograd was not all of Russia. It was not initially clear how, or even whether, the revolution was going to spread across the empire.

Secondly, there was no reason to expect the civil service or the army would recognise and obey the Petrograd Soviet, whereas they would recognise a Provisional Government formed from elected Duma politicians.

Thirdly, the soviet leaders understood that the Tsar had fallen not because workers had demonstrated in Petrograd but because the autocracy had been deserted by the military and political elite.

There remained powerful forces – in the army, the state apparatus, the Orthodox Church, and among landowners and capitalists – who might attempt to restore the dynasty. The soviet leaders

could not risk the best ever chance of freedom for a political adventure. Finally, they did not believe that conditions were ripe for Russia's small working class to become the ruling class.

The 'honeymoon period' of the revolution, when there was general consensus between liberals and socialists about what needed to be done, lasted a few weeks. But Russia was slipping into an ever-deeper crisis, which was exacerbated from early April 1917 by the return from Swiss exile of the Bolshevik leader, Vladimir Lenin, who took a very different, radical and uncompromising line. The political differences concerned not only questions of policy and tactics, but the interpretation of the revolution itself. Lenin's Bolsheviks competed energetically for the support of workers, sailors and soldiers in factories, soviets, committees and military units across Russia. They denounced their Menshevik rivals as conciliators, opportunists and worse, and argued that the workers, peasants and soldiers should take power themselves through their soviets.

Underlying all of Russia's acute problems in 1917 was the question of the war. Russia could no longer sustain the war effort. Its economy was disintegrating and the front was crumbling. Desertion, fraternisation with the enemy and indiscipline were growing problems, and the supply of men and materiel for the front was increasingly difficult. Russia needed peace, but nobody would advocate a separate peace with Wilhelm's Germany. Most Russian social democrats had not rallied to the flag of Imperial Russia in 1914, and supported the internationalist demand for 'peace without annexations or reparations'.

However, like it or not, with their influence and authority among soldiers and sailors, after February the soviet leaders acquired a joint responsibility for the war effort. The Petrograd Soviet issued an appeal on 14 March to the peoples of the whole world calling on them to work to end the war, but in the meantime it accepted the need to defend revolutionary Russia against the reactionary and predatory Central Powers, pending a general democratic peace. In effect, it was calling on Russia to continue to fight, but not in order to win.

The war was the main issue over which Menshevism itself split. The mainstream Menshevik leader Fedor Dan appealed in June 1917 for soldiers to support War Minister Alexander Kerensky's plan

for an offensive against Germany and Austria. Dan imagined revolutionary Russia's international prestige would be enhanced if it showed it could still fight. A left-wing, semi-detached 'Menshevik-Internationalist' faction, led by Dan's brother-in-law (and lodger) Yuliy Martov, denounced this as a betrayal of international socialist principles. The Bolsheviks, meanwhile, were finding a ready audience among the soldiers, encouraging fraternisation at the front, and claiming that if Russia had a soviet government which proclaimed a general peace, any government of another belligerent state which resisted would be immediately overthrown by its own working class.

The Mensheviks' taboo against joining a 'bourgeois' government had to be abandoned by early May 1917, when a government crisis over war aims could only be resolved by soviet representatives, including the leading Menshevik Iraklii Tsereteli, taking portfolios. They thereby tied themselves directly to the fate of the Provisional Government. But they continued to insist that only a cross-class coalition of 'all the living forces in the country' could cope with Russia's deepening political, social and economic crisis and lead the country up to the Constituent Assembly.

At the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets in June-July 1917, the Mensheviks, in alliance with the peasant-oriented Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, still enjoyed a comfortable majority over the Bolsheviks and far left. But they had committed themselves to a disastrous policy which would lead to their complete eclipse by the end of the year. In government, they insisted on coalition with non-socialists. On the war, they insisted on maintaining the front, supporting offensives and working with the Allies until an international peace conference could agree an ideal democratic peace. They had sound reasons for their policies – a fear of civil war if the socialists attempted to go it alone, and a belief that a separate peace would lead to a carve-up by German imperialism. But they could not withstand the relentless criticism from the Bolsheviks and even from the internationalist left within their own party. By the late summer and autumn of 1917, the Menshevik party was melting away, haemorrhaging its support among the workers and soldiers to the Bolsheviks.

Why did Martov's Menshevik-Internationalists not join the Bolsheviks? Many of their criticisms were identical. There were several reasons. Firstly,

Martov's group did not believe that 'soviet power' was either possible or desirable. Although by autumn 1917 Martov was calling for an exclusively socialist coalition government *answerable* to the soviets to lead Russia up to the Constituent Assembly, the soviets themselves, with their indirect, class-based representation and fluid structure, were no substitute for a state machine. Secondly, they did not believe that the basis for a socialist revolution existed in Russia or that a world socialist revolution was imminent. And thirdly, perhaps most importantly, socialism for all Mensheviks was a *constructive* doctrine. The class-war agitation of the Bolsheviks, with calls to loot the looters, seize the goods of the rich and so forth had no constructive content. It was merely a redistribution of the general impoverishment. This was their dilemma: they could not go along with the Bolsheviks, but nor could they offer an attractive alternative.

By October, the Bolsheviks had won over the bulk of politically active workers and soldiers. At the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets on 25/26 October they had a majority of delegates to support their action of deposing the Provisional Government and proclaiming soviet power. The mainstream Mensheviks walked out of the congress at the start, followed later by Martov, who, having failed to secure a compromise, was dismissed by Leon Trotsky to join his comrades in the 'dustbin of history'.

At a loss on how to respond, the Mensheviks regrouped. Fedor Dan and the centre ground in

the party abandoned the right and allied itself with Martov and the left. The right minority regarded Bolshevik rule as the counterrevolution itself, to be resisted by any means available. The centre and left feared that a right-wing reaction to the Bolsheviks which would sweep away all the gains of the revolution, and therefore opposed any attempt to resist the Bolsheviks by force. The party overall fragmented and crumbled.

The period immediately after October represented its lowest point in 1917 – in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, which went ahead in November despite the Bolshevik seizure of power, the Mensheviks won only 3%, and half of their total vote was in their stronghold of Georgia. The Socialist Revolutionaries, who had been content to follow the Menshevik lead in the soviets in 1917, fared much better in retaining their peasant support across Russia, and won around 40% as against the Bolsheviks' 24%. This meant that a majority of the assembly deputies favoured a parliamentary republic rather than soviet power.

However, when the deputies convened on 5 January 1918, after ten weeks of Bolshevik rule, the assembly was an empty shell with no state apparatus at its disposal, and was easily dispersed by a detachment of pro-Bolshevik sailors. There would be no parliamentary republic. The actual course of the revolution had completely falsified the Mensheviks' preconceived schema.

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)

The Story of Scepticism

Grant Bartley



In common use 'scepticism' means a tendency to disbelieve or at least suspend belief in what you're being told. But in philosophical circles it primarily means the tendency to disbelieve the evidence of the senses, or we might say, to not believe what we commonly take to be true about the world from our experience of it. In other words, is how things appear to us to be the same as they really are, or is reality itself radically different from its appearance?

PARMENIDES & ZENO Let's first go to Parmenides (515-450 BC), who was a Greek living in Elea in Southern Italy. Parmenides' view was that change is an illusion, and thus our whole experience of reality is false.

To paraphrase his argument, Parmenides claimed that all is Being, since non-Being does not exist. But whence change, since to move from complete Being to complete Being is no move at all, no change? That is to say, the only change that can be made in absolute Being is by admitting not-Being into Being. However, not-Being does not exist. Therefore it's impossible for Being to change. Therefore all change is an illusion.

A different argument about the illusory nature of change and so the world we experience was advanced through a number of paradoxes by a pupil of Parmenides, Zeno (490-430 BC). To choose just one from Zeno's many paradoxes of motion, let's look at Achilles and the Tortoise.

Grant Bartley has been an editor for Philosophy Now magazine for over 11 years. He was also the main host for the Philosophy Now Radio Show for about 35 shows on Resonance FM. He has published many articles in the magazine, as well as a philosophical manifesto and a book of short stories.



This paradox has Achilles and the Tortoise in a race. Achilles, the fastest runner in Greece, has the virtue of being a good sport, and so gives the Tortoise a head-start of several cubits. Zeno's argument is that it is impossible for Achilles to ever catch up with the Tortoise. Consider, while Achilles crosses the twenty cubits to where the Tortoise first started out, the Tortoise has moved on, let's say, one cubit (it is a fast Tortoise). And when Achilles has crossed that, the Tortoise has moved on, a further inch or so. And so on. And although the gap becomes diminishingly small, the Tortoise is always ahead, and Achilles can never catch up with him.

Your reaction to this might be the same as that of many of those who originally heard it: to laugh derisively and snort, "Everybody knows that a fast runner can quickly overtake a tortoise! What nonsense is Zeno speaking?" But this is, I think, to miss Zeno's point. Zeno is questioning how motion specifically, or change generally, can be possible, given his arguments. What's wrong with the argument?

Aristotle provided a good answer to this question, in which he prefigured quantum mechanics by over two thousand years. He said that space is only potentially and not actually infinitely divisible. Or, because a line cannot be infinitely divisible or composed of dimensionless points, only finite divisions of space can be real. In a modern idiom, space is quantised.

PLATO I think it's fair to say that in the Classical world a view of the distinction between experience and reality reached its highest expression in the philosophy of Plato (427-347 BC).

Plato's idea was to say that there is an eternal reality independent of the world of everyday experience, in which exist the perfect *Forms* or *Ideas* of things. Since they are perfect and unchanging, these things are the true reality, they have true Being, whereas this world of change is an illusion.

A good way to think of Forms is as *ideals*, or perhaps paradigms, that is, like perfect blueprints from which all the things in this world fall short. For instance there would be a Form of Table, an abstract 'Table' blueprint, which all tables would be imperfect instances of.

There are many problems with the theory of Forms, some of which Plato acknowledged. What would the idea of a perfect Table *be* – or of Cat, of Rat, or of Disease? Surely the idea of 'perfection' differs according to the use to which something is to be put. A perfect Disease

would presumably be immune to every Cure, whereas a perfect Cure would cure every Disease! However, the theory an attempt to systematically think through how change and being can coexist, while showing that experience is not a good guide to reality. In this way, it's the height of Greek scepticism.

Plato's view of the relationship between experience and reality is exemplified in the Allegory of the Cave, found in his dialogue the *Republic*. Humanity is like prisoners in a cave chained up to face a wall. Behind us is a walkway along which people and things pass, and their shadows are cast on the wall in front of us by means of a fire. Because we have never experienced anything else, we mistake the shadows we see for the real thing; and when we hear the echoes of voices in the cave, we think it's the shadows talking. For Plato, seeing the truth about the ideal Forms is like escaping from the chains, first to turn to see the real things that cast the shadows, and then eventually to ascend out of the cave finally to the full light of day.

THE SOPHISTS & PYRRHONIANS The Sophists were active around the time of Socrates. These thinkers doubted it was possible to get real knowledge since they believed that all truth was relative to the individual. A wind that felt warm to someone could feel cold to someone else, for instance. Protagoras is famous for saying that 'man is the measure of all things', and Gorgias said that 'nothing exists, and if it did, no-one could know it, and if they knew it, they could not communicate it.' So instead of seeking truth, the Sophists focused on winning arguments, especially in law courts, and how to be happy and successful in life.

There was also a school of scepticism named after Pyrrho (360-270 BC). The Pyrrhonain school was radically sceptical, claiming that we cannot know anything, since arguments also have contrary arguments. If you asked them if they *know* that we can know nothing, they would answer 'no'. They advocate rather a 'suspension of belief'.

Pyrrho himself claimed that because all knowledge involved uncertainty we could not know that one course of action was actually better than another, so, for instance, you might as well follow the customs of your surroundings, whatever your actual beliefs. Pyrrho's disciple Timon (died 235 BC) went about as far as scepticism can go, and argued that you can't even prove the principles of logic, that is, of rational argument. Rather, finding the roots of any argument would require either an end-less chain of reasoning,

or circular reasoning, so no argument can be ultimately justified. Timon's Pyrrhonain successors then tended to demonstrate their scepticism, that is, the uncertainty of all knowledge, by arguing vigorously for both sides of an issue.

DESCARTES Let's skip forward two thousand years or so, to René Descartes (1596-1650), who is called 'the father of modern philosophy' just because of his sceptical approach. You'll know Descartes' foundational thought, '*cogito ergo sum*' – 'I think therefore I am'; but let me put this infamous first step of modern philosophy a little in context.

Descartes believed that Galileo had not provided adequate philosophical foundations for science. As he reports in his *Discourse on Method* of 1637, in 1619 he had a vision of a new science, or more precisely a vision of a way of unifying the sciences. Descartes stated the first precept of his Method in the *Discourse on Method* thus: "never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth." This has become known in Cartesian circles as 'The Method of Doubt'.

The use of this method was emphasised by Descartes' in his *Meditations* (1642) through the possibility that for all he knows he's dreaming, or the possibility of there being an evil demon who systematically deceives him about everything. How does he know that either possibility is not the case, and so how does he know that what he thinks is true about the world he perceives is true, even the very existence of material objects? As he says, "there is nothing in all that I formerly believed to be true, of which I cannot in some measure doubt."

This is the context in which he argues that no matter how badly he is being deceived, in being deceived he nevertheless has thoughts, and in having thoughts, he must exist: 'I think therefore I am'. This argument then provides the first step away from radical doubt, Descartes claims.

However, Descartes might have asked himself a question any later Witt-gensteinians might also want to ask themselves, 'How can I be sure that the words mean what I think they do; especially as I can't rely on my experience of the world to validate them?' Or a Buddhist might object that Descartes has presupposed the self, the I, in his first thought, and that a better formulation of his indubitable truth might be 'there is thought, therefore there is being'.

Descartes' route out of his sceptical hole of doubt of all that is not incontrovertible used some not very incontrovertible 'proofs' of the existence of God, allied with equally dubious arguments about what we can

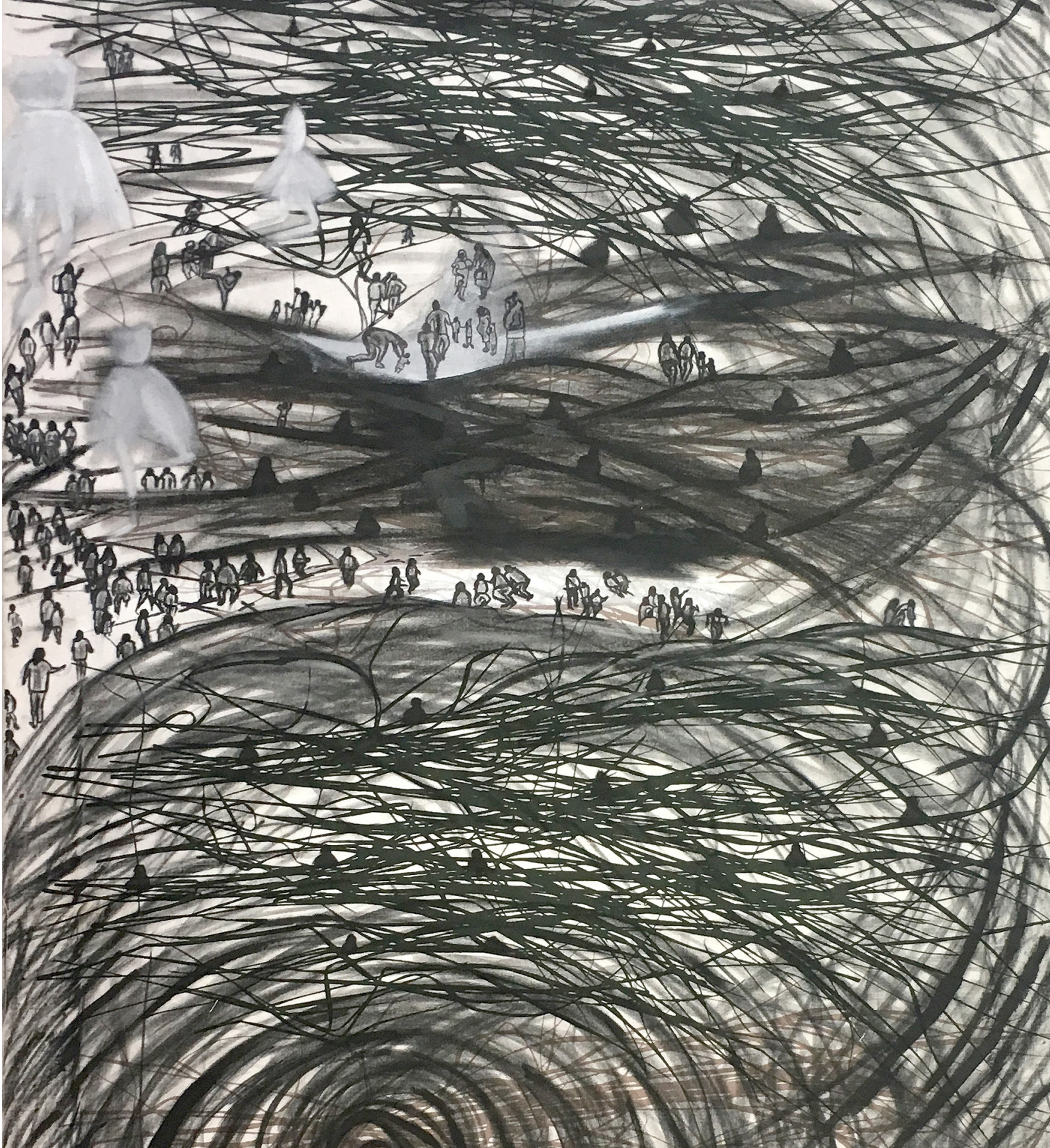
assume about God's desire not to deceive us. In particular, Descartes argued that it would be inconsistent with the goodness of God for Him to deceive us by presenting us with ideas of a material world with no material world corresponding to them.

HUME In his book *A Treatise Concerning Human Nature*, David Hume (1711-1776) is famously sceptical about causation. His argument about this was that although we frequently see one thing following another, we do not see or have any other impression of cause itself. Rather, through repetitive experience we come to associate one type of thing as always happening after another, and thus come to infer the idea of the first thing causing the second. But we don't see the cause. So, there's no reason to believe in causation.

This scepticism about causation only worked for Hume because he didn't have access to modern science, with its systematic ideas of how one thing causes another at the subatomic level. The fact that we know causes through analysis not experience is a problem only if we have Hume's reliance on experience. But we would say that we believe things to exist that we could never possibly experience. In this case, I think Hume was insufficiently sceptical about his own theory of knowledge.

KANT In modern philosophy the experience/reality distinction is best formulated by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant thought our experience of the world is constructed through faculties he called 'Categories'. The Categories are fundamental aspects of mental operation which predetermine how a rational mind will organize its experience. For instance, Kant reasonably claims that our minds construct our experience of the world in accordance with the Categories of space and time. The Categories include other features of our experience, such as causality. Thus, Kant thinks that causality is a feature of the world of appearances, and not of the world as it is in itself. I think he's wrong about this, and causality is an aspect of the world independent of our experience of it.

However, I would relate Kant's thinking to the neuroscientific theory that our experience of the world is constructed in our brains from information received via our nerves. So the appearance of things to us is very much a product of a particularly human way of experiencing the world. We might then ask, how is the *experience* different from *reality itself*? This brings us right back to the scepticism that began with Parmenides.



Transitions

Raquel Chinchetru

23 June - 21 July 2017

conwayhall.org.uk/transitions

**CONWAY
HALL**

Transitions

Martha Lee

Raquel Chinchetru explores the journeys made by people seeking asylum, looking at both the individual and the collective perspective. She uses real stories and thermal photography of a boy smuggled in a suitcase, as well as groups of refugees crossing borders, as the basis for her artworks. Even though refugees are individuals, policy makers and the media tend to treat them as a group, as a collective. This way of categorising refugees then filters down to the host population who see refugees as 'them/other', in opposition to 'us', with all the threatening repercussions that such a perception leads to.

Raquel's humanist approach responds to the refugee issue using art, science and the renaissance. She believes that art, using multi-sensory media, can be the means to enable audiences to challenge the process of integration that is rapidly disappearing in our fast-paced world. Her work is willing to respond to, increase awareness of and create a critical thinking about how integration and economic well-being needs to be addressed for those human beings who find themselves having to flee their home country and who are ultimately Survivors.

"In order to promote the process of acculturation (the process by which both hosts and refugees adjust to each others' cultures), a more humane approach is needed in which refugees are given the base they need to integrate their experiences, in order to ensure they are treated with dignity and compassion, rather than hostility and misinformation".

"Syria is the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time, a continuing cause of suffering for millions which should be garnering a groundswell of support around the world," (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi). In the UK, the Government's response has been to commit to resettling 20,000 Syrian

refugees by 2020. Thus far only a fraction of that number have arrived in the UK (2,898 up until the end of June 2016) and the political focus has been on reducing net migration to the tens of thousands.

Raquel Chinchetru, originally from the Rioja region of northern Spain, lives and works in London. Her interests lie in both Psychology and Art as reflected in her academic career. She has both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Psychology, a Master's degree in colour theory applied to organisational psychology, a Master's degree in Health Psychology and a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Art from the Sir John Cass School, London Metropolitan University. She has completed numerous courses in drawing and painting, figurative drawing, portraiture and black and white photography. She has participated in a group exhibition in Zagreb (2013), an exhibition on silence entitled "Interlude" at the Sir John Cass School of Art (2014) and was an artist in residence in Havana, Cuba under the direction of the Riojan painter Luis Burgos (2016).

As well as working as an artist from her studio in Brixton, Raquel is also a Chronic Pain Clinical Specialist, a qualified yoga therapist and is the founder and creative director of Breathing Being, providing mind and body therapies. Her interest in the plight of refugees developed and informed her art whilst she was working with clients who had sought asylum and were suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of the experiences they had endured.



Please contact Martha Lee – martha@conwayhall.org.uk – if you have any enquiries regarding the artworks or the exhibition.

Should you wish to purchase an artwork, all proceeds will go to refugee charities.

For more information, visit: conwayhall.org.uk/transitions



In 1929, Conway Hall was unveiled with a niche in the foyer. This niche was designed to display a revered piece of artwork; a bronze bust of Dr Moncure Conway (1832 – 1907), celebrated writer, abolitionist and free thinker, for whom the building was named. However, in the building's 80 plus year history the bust was never displayed in Conway Hall.

In 2015, the idea was to make a short film about the missing bust, however this quickly became a complicated mystery concerning Moncure Conway and the search for a missing piece of art history that spanned two continents.

In 2016, *The Empty Niche* was released as a full documentary recording the adventure, detective work and solution to Conway Hall's missing bust. *The Empty Niche* is presented by Ginny Smith, a keen science enthusiast who regularly presents shows for *The Naked Scientists* on BBC Radio 5 Live and BBC Radio Cambridgeshire. Trunkman Productions produced and directed *The Empty Niche* and it was written and directed by the company's founder, Trent Burton.

Heritage, Culture, Knowledge and Cutting-Edge Technology

Dr. Jim Walsh

In June 2017, the story continues with the launching of publicly available 3D print software of the bust thanks to Conway Hall, Dickinson College (Philadelphia, USA) and My Mini Factory's Scan The World project. The software can be downloaded by anyone, anywhere who has a 3D printer to allow them to make their own bust of Moncure Conway. Following on from technology saving heritage by producing the 3D bronze-effect bust in Conway Hall, it now takes another giant leap forward and allows multiple replicas to be printed all across the globe! Conway would have been astounded.

So, who was Moncure Conway and what makes him so special?

He championed intellectual freedom and rational inquiry. This he learned from Ralph Waldo Emerson. This lifelong stance came off the page in the tragic circumstances of his infant son's death as he asked "How could a benevolent deity allow my son to die?" He was thirty-one and had just moved to England from America with his wife Ellen.

His curiosity. Combined with his intellectual endeavours, his curiosity enabled him to converse with scientists, such as Thomas Henry Huxley (known as Darwin's Bulldog), Charles Darwin, himself, Charles Lyell, a Fellow of the Royal Society, who gave the first proper account of earthquakes and volcanoes. Poets such as Robert and Elizabeth Browning. Writers, such as Tennyson, George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) and George Henry Lewes (George Eliot's husband) and Charles Dickens. Politicians such as Gladstone. He was also effectively the British literary agent for both Mark Twain and Walt Whitman. His intellectual thirst and curiosity seemed to know no bounds.

His advocacy for the abolition of slavery. As a young man, he witnessed a slave being beaten and this gave him a lifelong hatred of slavery and cruelty. During the American civil war, he went against his family's wishes and helped his father's slaves achieve freedom. He also promoted the abolition cause wherever he felt he could lend his voice and thoughts to give good effect.

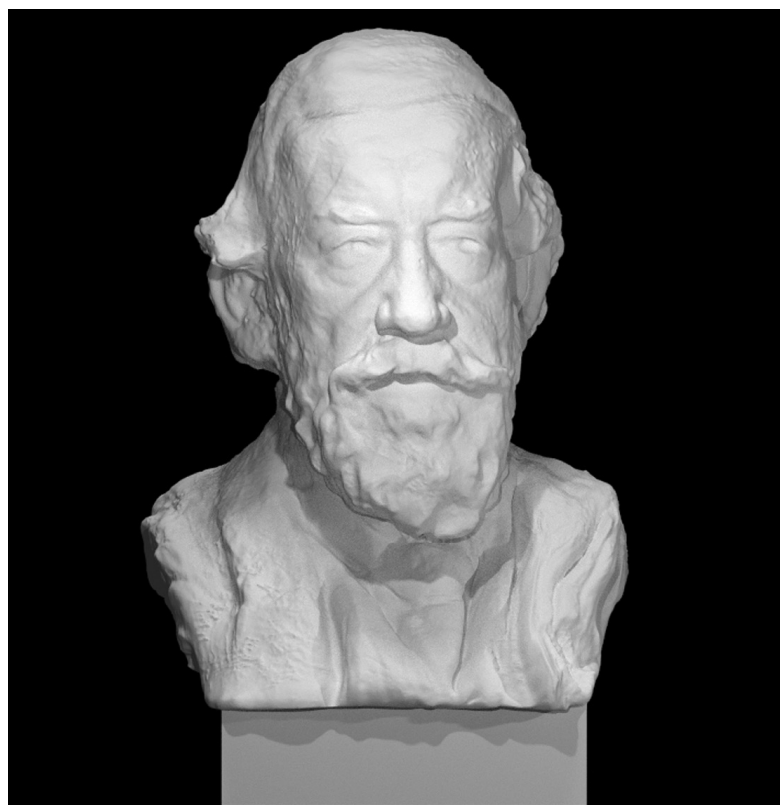
His dedication to women's rights and suffrage – as brought to his attention by his wife Ellen Dana. In 1871, at Hackney town hall, 47 years before the first women (who being over 30 and meeting the minimum property requirements) could vote, he

spoke on the need for equality between men and women. Before that, in 1869, Conway initiated the "appearance of women in our pulpit at the South Place Chapel". Ernestine Rose, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Julia Ward Howe (prominent abolitionist), Helen Taylor (feminist author and actor and step daughter of John Stuart Mill), and Annie Besant, among others, all were given a platform to speak from.

Finally, his advocacy for peace. In 1870, he was the New York World and Daily News front line reporter in the Franco-Prussian war. The atrocities he witnessed churned within him and made him a lifelong champion for peace. He met with the International League of Peace and Freedom and also freethinkers and working men who wanted a United States of Europe. And, in 1899, he attended the first Hague Conference for Peace.

Conway Hall is and always will be the place for those who dare to dream of a better world.

Dr. Jim Walsh is Chief Executive Officer of Conway Hall, to contact him email ceo@conwayhall.org.uk.



Response to David Simmonds

David Simmonds' response to my article 'The Question of Iran' (March 2017's *Ethical Record*; Vol 122, no. 2: 13-15) that was published in the April issue (Vol 122, no. 3: p20) deserves attention from two major angles:

1. 'Human rights' is and should always remain the most fundamental issue, in particular for progressive thinkers, when assessing international relations. Mr Simmons pushes this under the rug by saying "The leaders of Iran today are an unpleasant lot with a repressive social agenda, and are openly anti-Semitic. However ..." and then the rest of the article is an attempt to white wash the regime that is responsible for over 120,000 political executions, the mass murder of political prisoners in 1988 which Geoffrey Robertson QC called the "most heinous crime against humanity since the 2nd World War", and has 63 UN resolutions condemning its human rights record.
2. The second important angle that I challenge is the notion of "appeasement". Mr Simmons seems to be using "alternative facts", as the Trump administration would call it, when he questions my analysis relating "appeasement" to "the carnage that we see today". All western countries and in particular all the American administrations in the past 38 years of the rule of the medieval theocracy in Iran have always been appeasing the mullahs in action even when rhetoric got tough between them. This has been so ever since Ronald Regan's inauguration on 20 January 1981 when the 52 American hostages were released. In *Taking on Iran*, Abraham D. Sofaer starts his book with this paragraph which explains everything:

This book was triggered by the incongruity I experienced first-hand as a member of the Reagan Administration when we were dealing simultaneously with the threats posed by the Soviet Union and Iran. We dealt with the Soviets with intensity and professionalism. We resisted Soviet aggression and negotiated solutions. We dealt with Iran, on the other hand, in an off-handed manner, failing to defend against surrogate attacks in Lebanon and elsewhere, tolerating the seizure of US hostages, and swinging wildly in our diplomacy from a refusal to negotiate on political issues to directly appealing to Iran's leaders in the Iran/Contra Affair to release our hostages in exchange for the sale of military equipment. For years since that time I have watched the threat posed by Iran grow due to the failure of the US to apply to US/Iranian relations

the toughness and realism that paid off in our dealings with the Soviet Union.
(Sofaer, 2012, p.11)

He goes on to explain how consecutive US administrations failed to deal properly with Iran's expansionist policies and terrorism.

And I just make another reference to former FBI director Luis Freeh who investigated the bombing of Khobar Towers in 1996 and discovered the role of Iranian regime officials behind the Hezbollah operatives, yet he was told to shut up because President Clinton wanted to appease the regime that had just come up with a new 'moderate' president.

There never were any serious sanctions against Iran until 2013. After the US congress proposed serious sanctions on Iran, the Obama Administration reluctantly followed through. But as soon as the sanctions started to have an effect on Iran's extraterritorial advances, mainly in Syria and the Iranian regime was losing the war, the Obama administration struck a deal to postpone Iran's bomb making efforts for 10 years. They released billions of USD of untraceable cash into the hands of the regime that was immediately used to change the balance of power in Syria and unleash an influx of refugees towards Europe, hence crippling the continent too.

In *The Iran wars: spy games, bank battles, and the secret deals that reshaped the Middle East* Jay Solomon says:

In attempting to fix one problem, hoping it would solve many others, the [Obama] administration appeared blind to new threats mounting in the Middle East. Some U.S. officials believed that the White House's obsession with the Iran deal handcuffed the administration, preventing it from acting decisively in Syria. President Obama warned he would use military force to end the civil war in Syria but then repeatedly backed down. This hesitancy came with a cost: hundreds of thousands of civilians died in Syria, and the conflict fueled the rise of Sunni extremist groups such as the Islamic State. Because Syrian president Bashar al-Assad was Iran's closest Arab ally, "there was definitely a fear that strikes in Syria could alienate the Iranians and make them walk away from diplomacy," said Fred Hof, who oversaw Syria policy in the State Department during Obama's first term.

Contrary to American hopes, Khamenei dug in, reaffirming his country's anti-West position, regardless of the White House's actions. "Whether the deal is approved or disapproved, we will never stop

supporting our friends in the region and the people of Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon,” Khamenei said in a speech marking the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, just days after the negotiations in Vienna concluded. “Even after this deal, our policy toward the arrogant U.S. will not change. We don’t have any negotiations or deal with the U.S. on different issues in the world or the region.” (Solomon, 2016 p10)

Now going back to the arguments put forward by Mr Simmonds, he starts by blaming the 2003 war with Iraq as the basis of the current carnage in the Middle East. This is true except that the role of the Iranian regime in promoting this war through its double agent Ahmad Chalabi, and in the aftermath of the war in funding and training various terrorist groups to destabilise Iraq, is ignored.

About the 1953 coup d’état Mr Simmonds is very correct about the historical facts, except that he forgets to mention, or is not aware that, Khomeini’s mentor, Ayatollah Kashani was the domestic partner in that coup. The followers of Mossadegh were either killed or driven out of the country after the 1979 revolution. In other words the ‘Islamic’ regime that took control in 1979 was the other side of the same coin. Iranian people see the appeasement of turbaned tyrants in Iran as a continuation of the same policy that organised the 1953 coup d’état.

Mr Simmonds refers to Maurice Motamed and now Siamak Moreh Sedgh as representatives of the Jewish community in Iran’s so called parliament. In truth they are representatives of Iran’s Supreme Leader in the Jewish community, like Hans Schoeps in Nazi Germany. The fact that Iran was a religiously tolerant society and the Iranian people are still, has nothing to do with the practices of the medieval theocrats ruling Iran. I refer the readers to the 2016 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief about Iran.

Compared to other Islamic countries, Iran is the only one where the religious leader is also the head of state. This is not so in Saudi Arabia or any other country in the world. In fact the one and only Islamic State (with a real Caliph who is called Supreme Leader to divert attention) is Iran. The Saudi kings have no interest in supporting terrorism. They are actually the first targets of the likes of ISIS, while the Iranian rulers have shown time and again that they are not hesitant in using terror and hostage taking as a tool of their foreign policy. In fact Iran has been recognised as the ‘most active state sponsor of terrorism’ by all major western governments in the past 20 years based on real facts gathered by various credible intelligence sources. But these facts have been covered up by the same governments in order to continue doing business as usual with Iran.

And to justify Iran’s nuclear ambitions by saying that its neighbours are “hostile” or “have nuclear bombs” is farfetched. In my view, the ‘most active state sponsor of terrorism’ should not have its hands on enriched uranium at all. I am sure readers are well aware of the effects of a ‘dirty’ bomb in the hands of terrorists; not justifiable at all.

As for Mr Simmonds’ third (iii) argument, brandishing Iran’s expansionist wars in Iraq, Syria and Yemen as “proxy” and then giving it credit for “modern Iran has never attacked another country” is beyond belief. Iraq for Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the ‘Islamic’ regime, was like Austria was for Hitler, the first step for expansion. Saddam was foolish enough to fall into the trap laid before him by Khomeini who started publicly calling for, and covertly providing means for, the Iraqi Shia community to rise up and topple him. When in 1982 Iraq pulled all its military forces out of Iran and accepted a peace plan suggested by the Iranian Opposition, Khomeini rejected the suggestion and said “we will fight until we capture Jerusalem via Karbala” (the holy city south of Baghdad). The terrorist Qods (Jerusalem) Force, the external arm of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, is mandated in the constitution to capture Jerusalem and turn all the Moslem lands under the command of Iran. Already four of those states are under the command of the Qods Force and its commander Qassem Soleimani. I don’t think it would be wise for other Arab states to wait until Iran’s “proxy” forces occupy them. The new coalition is aimed at curtailing such ambition of the Iranian regime and you cannot blame them.

And for conclusion, Mr Simmonds suggests exactly what the Western governments and the UK have been doing for the past 38 years. I don’t think we have time to carry on making the same mistake again and again. That is the definition of insanity, doing the same thing hoping for a different result. Iran just had another selection, called an ‘election’. I think Saddam’s elections, when he was the only candidate and got 98% of the vote cast by his supporters, were more honest. There were two candidates in this recent farce, one a mass murderer and the other, Rouhani, an advocate of public execution of opponents who also takes pride in being the first who forced Iranian women into the hijab. No opposition was allowed. Even a former president, Ahmadi Nejad, who has become slightly critical of the system was crossed out. A medieval Caliphate, ‘Islamic’ State of Iran, is deceptively calling itself a Republic – don’t be fooled by this name. The only sane solution to this problem is to cut the resources behind the Iranian regime’s long terrorist arm, the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps). The West should list IRGC as a terrorist entity and prevent this notorious organisation from operating freely in the Middle East and the wider world. This will certainly make the world safer.

Events · July 2017

THINKING ON SUNDAY

Start at 11.00 unless specified otherwise.

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| Jul 09 | Art for Our Sake <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Dr Jim Walsh, Holly Tingley and Lawrence Mathias</i> |
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| Jul 16 | Unlocking a Better World <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Richard Priestley</i> |
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| Jun 23 | Watch Out - Quantum Sensor about! <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Prof. Terry Whall</i> |
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TALKS & DEBATES

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| Jul 10 | Outskirts - Living Life on the Edge of the Green Belt <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>John Grindrod</i> |
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| Jul 28 | Conway Hall Book Club <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Istros Books and Peter Owen</i> |
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EXHIBITIONS

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| Until
Jul 21 | Transitions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Raquel Chinchetru</i> |
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HUMANIST LIBRARY & ARCHIVE

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| 10 am –
5 pm | Open Tuesday to Thursday |
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Events subject to alteration • See conwayhall.org.uk for the latest information

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 [conwayhall](https://www.instagram.com/conwayhall)

Events · September 2017

THINKING ON SUNDAY

11 am start unless specified otherwise.

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|---------------|---|
| Sep 17 | Capitalism on the Rocks
• <i>Harry Shutt</i> |
| Sep 24 | Ernestine Rose and TH Huxley on Atheism
• <i>Bill Cooke</i> |
| Oct 01 | Doughnut-Economics
• <i>Kate Raworth</i> |
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CONCERTS

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|---------------|---|
| Sep 05 | Rhinegold Live: Sam Haywood |
| Sep 10 | Tippett Quartet & Emma Abbate (piano)
• <i>Haydn, Schumann, Dvořak</i> |
| Sep 17 | Zelkova Quartet
• <i>Haydn, Beethoven, Debussy</i> |
| Sep 17 | Bartoz Wroch, Tim Lowe & Andrew Brownell
• <i>Hummel, Franck, Beethoven</i> |
| Oct 01 | The Fulham Opera Robert Presley Memorial Verdi Prize |
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