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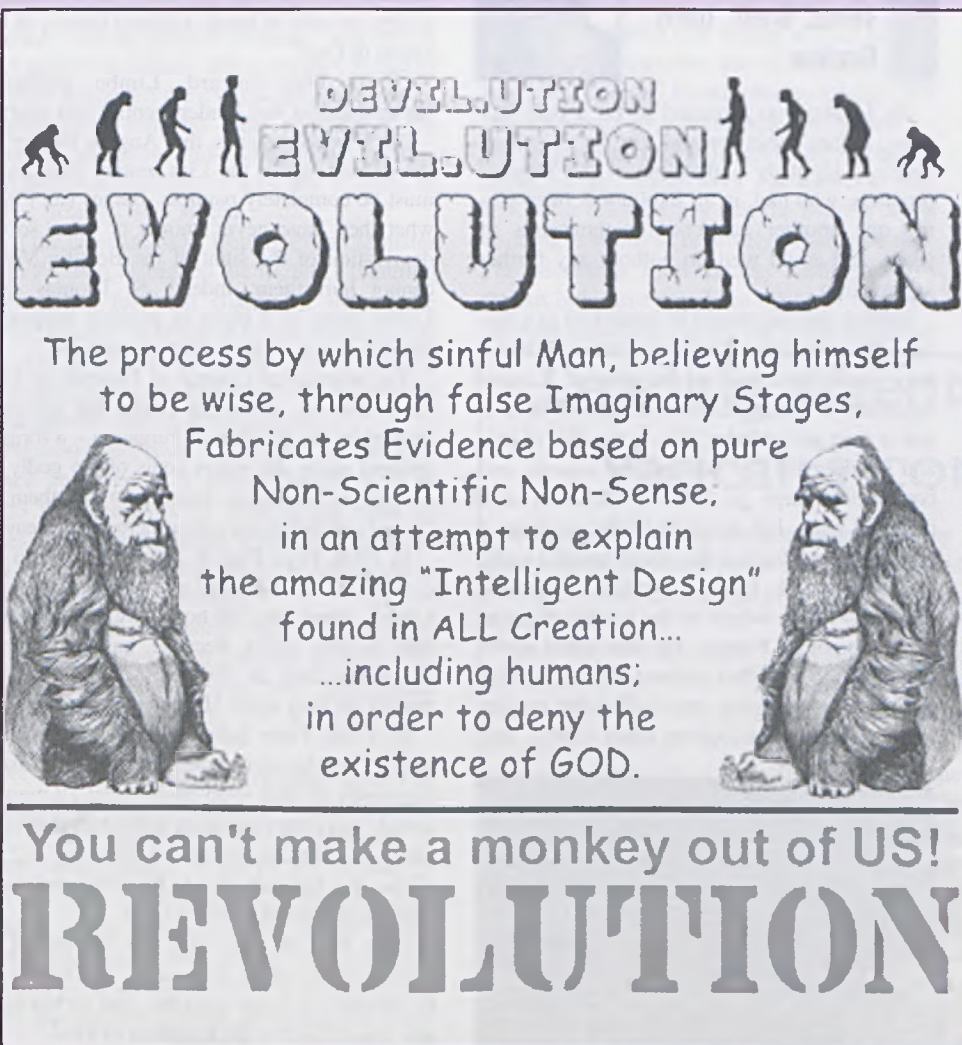
The

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Freethinker

Secular Humanist monthly founded by G W Foote in 1881

The Creationist/Intelligent Design War Hots up



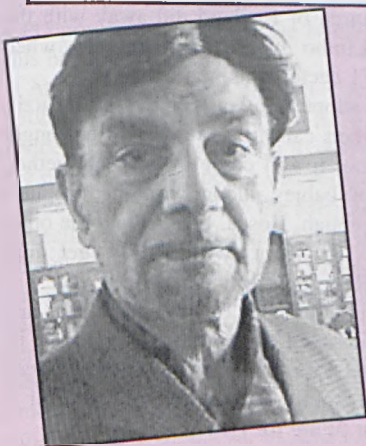
DEVELUTION
EVLUTION
EVOLUTION

The process by which sinful Man, believing himself to be wise, through false Imaginary Stages, Fabricates Evidence based on pure Non-Scientific Non-Sense, in an attempt to explain the amazing "Intelligent Design" found in ALL Creation... including humans; in order to deny the existence of GOD.

You can't make a monkey out of US!
REVOLUTION

This is the sort of pathetic propaganda American Creationists and ID advocates are producing in a bid to force evolution off school curricula in the US. Creator of this crude piece is Edward McNair, whose work appears on T-shirts, baseball caps, and even garments for toddlers and dogs

– see pages
7 & 11



Also in this issue:

This is Muslim fundamentalist Dr Mohammed Naseem, of the Islamic Party of Britain, whose website claims that "Islam is the solution to the world's problems. No other religion, way of life or culture can possibly succeed." Naseem has also provided around half of the funding for George Galloway's Respect Party – see p5

FREETHINKERS. I suspect, will be greatly underwhelmed by the news that Pope Benedict XVI, formerly Cardinal Joseph “the Rat” Ratzinger, is considering doing away with Limbo. But others – devout Jews in particular – are delighted by the fact that righteous Hebrew prophets, along with billions of babies trapped for centuries in this mystical halfway house, are finally to be freed to join the Big Guy in the Sky.

Limbo was a belated follow-up to a declaration by St Augustine in the fifth century AD that every unbaptised soul must, of necessity, be condemned to Hell. Harsh though this doctrine was, Augustine contrived to sweeten the pill by declaring that these damned souls would not suffer the full horrors of Hades. Instead they would be subjected only to a *mitissima poena*, a very mild pain, but only if they had led good lives. The man was all heart.

Nonetheless, even this was considered too cruel by French philosopher and theologian Peter Abelard (1079-1142). Abelard, whose fame as a teacher and intellectual made him one of the most renowned figures of the 12th century, argued that *mitissima poena* was too harsh a punishment for innocent unbaptised children whose only sin was that of being born with Original Sin – for which they had the rebellious, apple-nibbling Adam to thank – and Original Sin can only be washed away by the sacrament of baptism.

Abelard said such babies would not suffer the full torments of hell, but only the loss of the Beatific Vision. The Beatific Vision is the glorious sight of God Himself, which only the blessed may enjoy in Paradise, and is not something you can acquire by poodling off to Vision Express for a superior pair of specs.

He suggested that, instead of being allowed to luxuriate in the full glory of heaven, they would be corralled in a featureless, boring but pain-free area called Limbo – a sort of ecclesiastical Milton Keynes. Limbo is derived from the Latin word *limbus*, meaning “edge.” To be “in limbo” was to be on the edge of happiness, suspended between delight and pain, feeling neither.

Freethinker editor BARRY DUKE reflects on Limbo being sent, well, into limbo



As Limbo was intended to be a pain-free zone, babies’ souls would not be mixed-up higgledy-piggledy with those of the Hebrew prophets, who had, in all likelihood, been giving one another ear-ache for thousands of years, and could well do without any further aggravation.

Instead, the kids would be herded off to a section of Limbo called *Limbus Infantium*. I think I may once have had a preview of *Limbus Infantium* at a north London branch of Ikea. It was a zone set aside for kids. It was full of toys and jungle gyms and high-pitched squeals, and contained a large pit filled to the brim with coloured balls. For the sake of the prophets. I hope *Limbus Infantium* has sound-proofed walls.

For the adult Limbo dwellers – Abelard decreed – there would be the *Limbus Patrum*, the Limbo of the Fathers, and this would be the Guantanamo Bay (but without the torture) for Jewish prophets, who merely had the misfortune to have died before Jesus Christ, and

clearly did not deserve the hellish ministrations of Old Nick and his cloven-hoofed accomplices.

Abelard’s view found favour with Innocent III (1161-1216), the most powerful pope in history, who had been a lawyer before he was elected. Innocent was delighted with the idea of Limbo, described by Michael Browning in the *Oxford Press*, Ohio, as “a neat fourth drawer in the afterlife where untidy leftovers could be kept. [Innocent] published a Body of Canon Law, in which he said that those in Limbo would suffer ‘no other pain, whether from material fire or from the worm of conscience, except the pain of being deprived forever of the vision of God.’”

“From here onward, Limbo gradually became kinder and kinder, gentler and gentler.

“St Thomas Aquinas, the ‘Angelic Doctor’ of the church, said in the 13th century that Limbo must be completely painless. Babies can’t miss what they have never known or seen, so the deprivation of the sight of the Beatific Vision cannot hurt them. Indeed, St Thomas said, Limbo must be a place of positive happiness, because it is so close to heaven and God.”

The ecumenical Council of Florence in 1438 came close to abolishing Limbo but got sidetracked by the question of Purgatory – a form of spiritual sheep dip where souls of the godly go through a laundering process to rid them of “venial sin” before they are ushered into heaven.

In 1904, Pope Pius X defined Limbo in his catechism. “Babies dead without baptism go to Limbo, where they do not enjoy God, but neither do they suffer, because, having Original Sin alone, they do not deserve Paradise, but neither do they merit Hell or Purgatory.”

In 1992, Pope John Paul II took another step. ‘The Church can do no more than trust in the mercy of God, who desires that all men be saved,’ says the catechism published that year, citing the biblical epistle of Timothy (1.2.4): “Who will have all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth.”

John Paul II also cited the Gospel of St Mark (10:14) where Jesus says: “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.”

The Church of England did away with the idea of Limbo in the 16th century when Edward VI declared its non-existence.

“If it is adopted and ratified by ‘Papa Ratz’, as the Italians call him, Limbo will no longer be in limbo. It will cease to exist altogether. Billions of babies, along with the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Ezekiel and the other great Jewish seers, will finally get into Catholic Heaven,” commented Browning.

Ah, but will they? Being unbaptised, and therefore unsaved, would they not logically be fast-tracked to Satanland? Or is the Vatican planning to abolish Hell as well? And if it does, what future for Heaven?



On hearing the news that Limbo was about to be abolished, the new Archbishop of York, the Rt Rev John Sentamu, exclaimed “thanks be to the Lord Jesus. You have no idea how hard it is to dance under a stick wearing this silly hat!”

Money-grabbing UCKG Church is finally forced out of Walthamstow

THE United Church of the Kingdom of God, which became embroiled in a major controversy in the UK when it was revealed that Victoria Climbié had been "exorcised" by members of the church before her cruel death in 2000, has been forced to relinquish ownership of the EMD Cinema in Walthamstow, London.

The UCKG acquired Walthamstow's only cinema – a listed art deco building – at a cost of £2.8 million in January 2003, and gave notice of its plans to convert the it into a place of worship. Walthamstow residents were appalled at the prospect of having this evangelical Christian cult establish roots in the area, and a series of public protests were staged.

At the close of 2003, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott dismissed the UCKG's planning applications for both change of use at the venue and the variation of Listed Building status. The government concluded the site should remain a cinema and that it was not suitable for the proposed church development.

Prescott's decision was based on the evidence collected at a public inquiry held in 2003 where arguments were heard from all sides regarding the future viability of the cinema and its potential role in the regeneration of Walthamstow Town Centre.

Following this decision – and despite a number of approaches from potential buyers – the UCKG declined to enter into discussions regarding the sale of the site to a cinema or entertainment operator.

As a result, the local authority agreed in principle to issue a compulsory purchase order and reclaim the cinema for the purposes of public entertainment if the UCKG refused to sell the site voluntarily. In November 2004 council leader Clyde Loakes wrote to the McGuffin Film Society, saying "The council is committed to seeing the EMD Cinema coming back into use as a cinema, providing that it can be developed as a viable entity. It will use its CPO powers to purchase the building should this become necessary."

At the end of 2004 the MFS presented a petition to the UCKG signed by 1,100 local residents, urging the church to divest itself of the property. No response was received.

In the summer of 2005 the MFS assisted the council with a public consultation in order to obtain a clear picture of the demands of cinemagoers in Waltham Forest and determine the best way forward to secure the future of the venue. The MFS organised a large public meeting as the centrepiece of the consultation process held at Waltham Forest Theatre on July 10 and attended by around 400 people.

Representatives from UCKG also attended the meeting although they did not participate in the debate.

In September 2005 it was finally announced that UCKG intended to sell the cinema.

The EMD Cinema, the adjoining shops and Victoria public house were placed on the market by Mayfair-based estate agents Humberts Leisure. The EMD was valued at £1.5 million – £1.8 million less than the UCKG paid for it – by the London Development Agency last year following an independent assessment

Various potential purchasers who recently inspected the venue have confirmed to The McGuffin Film Society that the interior of the building remains in relatively good condition. The McGuffin Film Society confirmed that serious bids have now been made for the cinema with a view to reviving the venue as a place

of entertainment. In addition, Waltham Forest Council has decided to examine the options for constructing a new cinema in central Walthamstow in the event that a sale does not take place.

There is a similar situation in Catford, across the Thames, where the UCKG is seeking change of use permission for another art deco cinema they have bought.

At the time of the *Freethinker* going to press, the UCKG was embroiled in another legal battle – this time an attempt to overturn a ruling which last month banned the church from operating in Zambia, for for allegedly practising satanism and human sacrifice.

The sect, which originated in Brazil, is asking Zambia's high court to quash the government's ban on the grounds that it was imposed

(Continued on page 6)

Leading scientist condemn's Vatican's condom policy

LORD May of Oxford has launched a scathing attack on the Catholic Church, blaming Vatican policy for the spread of AIDS in the Third World. He said that the Vatican's opposition to the use of condoms was an example of dogma leading to the deliberate misrepresentation of facts, at great human cost.

Lord May's words came in his final speech delivered as president of the Royal Society, the world's oldest scientific organisation, past presidents of which include Isaac Newton and Joseph Banks. Lord May described AIDS as a pandemic, with more than 40 million people infected across the world. He quoted a UN report from June that said effective and essential prevention strategies "reach only a fraction of those who need them".

"The dissemination and adoption of successful prevention strategies is being seriously hindered by arguments over the role that contraception in the form of condoms should play. This controversy has nothing to do with a scientific assessment of the effectiveness of condoms in preventing the transmission of HIV, but rather derives from religious beliefs against the use of contraception," Lord May said.

"The Vatican promotes abstinence outside marriage, and condemns condom use. This disapproval ... is not an effective strategy for preventing dissemination of HIV, not least because unprotected sex with an infected individual is high risk regardless of whether the act is intended for procreation or recreation. With added support from fundamentalist groups, these arguments have the effect that aid from the US for tackling HIV/AIDS seems usually to be tied to promoting abstinence and condemning condom use."

May told the Society, "All ideas should be open to questioning, and the merit of ideas should be assessed on the strength of evidence that supports them and not on the credentials or affiliations of the individuals proposing them." He warned that fundamentalism was "skewing debates over some of the most pressing issues facing humanity, such as climate change and emerging diseases."

He excoriated religious extremists of all kinds for inhibiting what he called the "Enlightenment values of free, open, unprejudiced, uninhibited questioning and inquiry, individual liberty and separation of church and state."

Lord May is a pioneer in the use of mathematical theory to analyse the spread of disease in populations. He harbours a strong resentment against the Vatican for what he believes is an unforgivable denial of reality. While he has not attacked the Catholic Church publicly before, he reportedly stated at a private seminar in the early 1990s that the Pope had been responsible "for more deaths than Hitler" through Vatican policy on contraception.



Woolworths and Sainsbury's cowed into removing Jerry Springer, the Opera from DVD shelves

WOOLWORTHS and Sainsbury's have both taken the unprecedented step of removing the DVD version of *Jerry Springer, The Opera* from stores around the UK. The shops say it is because of "customer concerns" about the content of the musical, released in November. In fact, the "customer concern" appears to amount to 10 complaints from Christian Voice, the tiny extremist religious group that created the controversy around the show when it was shown on television, according to a report in the National Secular Society's weekly *Newsline*.

The move has been condemned by those who see free speech being abandoned to self-appointed censors. Joan Bakewell, the chairman of the National Campaign for the Arts, said the withdrawal was "deplorable". The composer of the musical, Richard Thomas, said "I think this is worrying for any artist."

Members of the NSS have been writing to the customer relations department of Woolworths seeking an explanation for the action. They have all received the same brush-off letter in return. Attempts to engage Woolworths in correspondence about the decision have also been rebuffed with emails stating "the correspondence is now closed".

The NSS also wrote to Woolworths seeking an explanation. Mrs Beverley Stack, who is described as a member of the Customer Support Team responded: The nature/number of calls, letters and correspondence between Woolworths and its customers must remain confidential. This includes the number of positive feedback calls and letters Woolworths receives. I can assure you that the number of complaints we had was substantial and there was no evidence that any activists were involved. This is why we took the action we took. We hope that you can understand the position we have been put in."

The NSS intends to pursue this matter at a higher level both at Woolworths and Sainsbury's.

Meanwhile, Stewart Lee, the man behind *Jerry Springer, The Opera*, invited members of Christian Voice into the press conference at His Majesty's Theatre in Aberdeen, this week but lived to regret it. Hysterical members of the religious group heckled loudly and refused to let Mr Lee answer their questions by interrupting his answers. It became so bad that the press conference had to be abandoned.

Mr Lee said afterwards: "These people were asking me questions about the show, but the difficulty is they have not even seen it. I just don't think they wanted to hear what I had to say, they had made their minds up already."

Duncan Hendry, the chief executive of His Majesty's Theatre, said that the venue was committed to hosting the show, which reaches Aberdeen in March.

Earlier this year, local Minister Rev Bruce Gardner protested about the opera visiting Aberdeen by comparing it to the evils of Nazi Germany. He said: "While not wishing to exaggerate unduly, this is how the Jews were singled out in Nazi Germany, first for ridicule, then contempt, then persecution."

However, Mr Lee's show at the McPhail centre in Ullapool had to be abandoned when no tickets were sold. Given that every other date on the tour has been sold out, the promoters are at a loss to explain this. Fran Harrison, of the MacPhail Centre, said: "Ullapool is not exactly a centre for comedy. A lot of people said, 'Who's Stewart Lee?' and if you can only say *Jerry Springer, The Opera*, that makes it difficult".

The campaign against *Jerry Springer, the Opera*'s regional tour also erupted in Liverpool, where the show is due to open in June at the Empire Theatre. Christian Voice is

already agitating to have it banned, threatening to launch demonstrations against the musical in a bid to stop anyone watching it when it comes to the city next June. Alan Chester, of Christian Voice (yes, there is now more than one member), who is spearheading the demonstrations, said watching the opera made him feel physically ill.

He said: "It did have a physical effect on me and I had to watch it in parts because to see it the whole way through would have made me sick. We pray to God in the name of Jesus and ask for blessings for our city, but why should He [bless us] when this is allowed and He is held up to foul, mocking ridicule in the name of so-called entertainment." Mr Chester said that, although he would not be advocating any form of violence, he would try his hardest to persuade people not to see what he considers to be a deeply offensive play.

CV's self-appointed messiah and prophet, Stephen Green, said of *Jerry Springer, the Opera*: "This tour can only bring the judgment of Almighty God on the United Kingdom."

Marlowe's Koran-burning hero is censored to avoid Muslim anger

THE producers of *Tamburlaine the Great* have come under fire for censoring Christopher Marlowe's 1580s masterpiece to avoid upsetting Muslims.

Audiences at the Barbican in London did not see the Koran being burnt, as Marlowe intended, because David Farr, who directed and adapted the classic play, feared that it would inflame passions in the light of the London bombings, according to a report last November in the *Times*.

Simon Reade, artistic director of the Bristol Old Vic, said that if they had not altered the original it "would have unnecessarily raised the hackles of a significant proportion of one of the world's great religions". The burning of the Koran was "smoothed over", he said, so that it became just the destruction of "a load of books" relating to any culture or religion.

Members of the audience reported that key references to Mohammed had been dropped, particularly in the passage where Tamburlaine says that he is "not worthy to be worshipped". In the original Marlowe writes that Mohammed "remains in hell".

The censorship aroused condemnation from senior figures in the theatre and scholars, reported Dalya Alberge, the newspaper's arts correspondent. She said that Terry Hands, who directed *Tamburlaine* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1992, said: "I don't believe you should interfere with any classic for reasons of religious or political correctness."

Charles Nicholl, the author of *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe*, said it was wrong to tamper with Marlowe because he asked "uncomfortable and confrontational questions - particularly aimed at those that held dogmatic, religious views". He added: "Why should Islam be protected from the questioning gaze of Marlowe? Marlowe stands for provocative questions. This is a bit of an insult to him."

Tamburlaine the Great tells the story of a shepherd-robber who defeats the king of Persia, the emperor of Turkey and, seeing himself as the "scourge of God", burns the Koran.

Farr, who reworked the text after the July 7 attacks, said in a statement: "The choices I made in the adaptation were personal about the focus I wanted to put on the main character and had nothing to do with modern politics." But Mr Reade said that Mr Farr felt that burning the Koran "would have been unnecessarily inflammatory".

Equality row exposes Islamic fundamentalist funding for George Galloway's Respect Party

A ROW about gay rights within George Galloway's anti-war Respect party has exposed a disturbing fact about the party's funding.

Eric Lee – who runs the trade-union-financed, London-based *Labour News* website LabourStart, checked out Respect's required financial filings this year with the UK Electoral Commission. He discovered that around half of Respect's money comes from one man, Dr Mohammed Naseem, who has been a Respect candidate for Parliament, and is a leader of the Islamic Party of Britain – a tiny sectarian group whose website claims that "Islam is the solution to the world's problems. No other religion, way of life or culture can possibly succeed."

Naseem's IPB also put out a statement claiming that the London bombings on July 7 were not carried out by Islamic fundamentalists but (as Lee summarises the IPB document he links to on his personal blog) "the attacks were a provocation, staged by the police, the Blair government, or Mossad – or all of them together."

Naseem repeated his claim that no Islamic fundamentalists were involved in the bombings even after the arrest of Yasin Hassan Omar, an Islamist who helped plan the bombings. Naseem is also, according to a BBC profile of him, Chairman of the Birmingham Central Mosque, "one of the largest Islamic institutions in Britain."

"Since Respect gets half its money from a Muslim religious leader whose IPB denounces secularism as the basis for organising government, and claims that only a strict interpretation of the Koran can guide the world, it's not surprising that Respect's leaders should be reluctant to defend gay equality, a secular principle which Naseem and his coterie oppose," said Doug Ireland, an American investigative journalist.

The gay rights row erupted at Respect's conference on London on November 20.

After leaders of the party vetoed the inclusion of gay rights in its list of principles, a grassroots revolt by party members took place, and they passed a resolution denouncing the party's leadership.

According to Ireland, "the reasons that Galloway and the Respect leaders killed any reference to gay rights in the party's platform – or its electoral manifesto, as party platforms are called in the UK – are quite simple. The district in which Galloway deliberately chose to run had a huge Muslim population, and it was thanks to their votes that he was elected. The party manifesto is to be the basis for

Respect's campaign in municipal elections this coming May, and the party leaders' strategy is to try to elect local city council members from areas that have high Muslim populations. Moreover, 'Respect is in alliance with the right-wing, anti-gay Islamist group, the Muslim Association of Britain [MAB],' as Peter Tatchell, the veteran gay and human rights campaigner who heads the gay rights group OutRage pointed out, adding that the party does not ally with liberal and left-wing Muslims. Respect's right-wing Islamist backers demanded the axing of gay rights as a condition of their electoral support for the party."

Ireland added: "The grassroots resolution, passed at the Respect party's conference over the objections of the party's leaders, called their failure to include gay rights in the party platform 'unacceptable'. From the podium of the conference, Respect leader Lindsay German, who is also a senior leader of the Socialist Workers Party, disparaged the resolution, claiming it had a 'hidden agenda' and was moved in 'bad faith'.

"The resolution read, 'Conference regards it as unacceptable that our manifesto for the general election did not contain any reference to the defence of LGBT rights.' Rather significantly, the account of the conference in the Trotskyites' newspaper, *Socialist Worker*, did not even mention the successful rank-and-file rebellion in support of gay rights against the SWP-dominated Respect leadership.

"OutRage's Tatchell went on to say, 'The MAB endorses the re-creation of an Islamic Caliphate where Muslims would be subjected to the barbarism of Sharia law, which includes the

execution of unchaste women, apostates and gay people. Respect has betrayed progressive Muslims, in favour of an alliance with Islamist conservatives and fundamentalists... Respect has failed to defend gay Muslims against fundamentalist Islamists and it attacks gay rights groups that support Muslim queers. The politics of Respect on LGBT rights is reformist at best. Its policies are far less radical than those of the Liberal Democrats. Unlike Respect, the Lib Dems included gay rights in their manifesto.'



George Galloway MP

"When Galloway spoke to the Respect conference that repudiated his and the leadership's refusal to include a forthright endorsement of gay rights, he did so from a podium decorated with a banner that proclaimed the party's commitment to 'Justice' and

'Equality'. But the party leadership's suppression of any reference to gay rights in its platform makes a mockery of those two words. Galloway has long made common cause with despicable, homophobic dictators, from Saddam Hussein to Syria's Bashir Al-Assad, without ever denouncing the reign of terror and repression their despotic regimes have visited upon gay Arabs and Muslims in their own countries. Now, Galloway and the leadership of the party whose principal spokesman he is, have demonstrated beyond argument that, from them, gays and lesbians can expect no respect", Ireland concluded.

Gays are worse off in 'liberated' Iraq

A group set up to monitor the treatment of gay men and women in Iraq claims that homosexuals are now worse off than they were during Saddam Hussein's reign. A report in the UK's *Pink Paper* (December 8) said that the group, Abu Nawas Iraqi LGBT, which is based in Britain, claims that the country's top Muslim Shia Cleric, Al Sistani, has even declared a *fatwa* which urges the faithful to murder all gays and lesbians.

A spokesman for the group, Ali (he did not divulge his full name for fear of reprisals) told the paper: "If you are discovered to be gay, you have one month to stop living as a gay man or you will be killed.

Ali claims that Al Sistani is linked to the powerful Bader Islamic Organisation, which holds key positions within the Iraq Ministry of Interior.

He added: "The British troops went in and let these organisations take over because they were against Saddam. But they are worse than Saddam, they are fundamentalists.

"There was no hassling or arrests by the police of gay people [under Saddam], but now it is impossible to have any sort of party or gathering."

We have stories of men and women being mistreated just because they have a Western haircut or have been drinking. They were treated as infidels, threatened or killed. People think that Iraq has become very liberal, but it's worse now."

Prayer and Free-will: an analysis

FOR six mornings a week, year after year, Radio 4 gives us *Prayer for the Day*. Unlike its equally simplistic sibling *Thought for the Day*, the programme seems to have escaped critical notice, perhaps due not only to its unsociable time of 5.43am when even alarm clocks aren't awake, but also to its less controversial material. After all, if a priest quotes from Mark 8.23 that Jesus spat on a man to cure him of blindness, there's not a lot you can say in response, though you may wonder about the likely aquatic means Jesus might have used to cure a prostate problem. Anyway, it's time this mindless mantra stuff was outed so here's a starter for one.

Each programme, as you would expect, ends in a prayer – frequently for pie in the sky from the God on high who might spit in your eye if his son's behaviour is genetic. So to make the first half of my point I shall now list a small

ARTHUR LEDGER, a glutton for punishment, gets up at the crack of dawn to subject *Prayer for the Day* to some critical analysis

sample of ten genuine recent prayers from the many thousands of the same sort made over the years; let's call them the ten Adjurements.

- 1 Cleanse us from jealousy, malice, ignorance and envy
- 2 Cleanse us from all impurity
- 3 Help us to be the kind of people who neither rush nor delay what we are called upon to do
- 4 Make us humble
- 5 Make everyone in public office put integrity before expediency
- 6 Cause us never to be unfaithful to our loved ones
- 7 Free us from all fear of making mistakes
- 8 Make us always sensitive to the needs of others
- 9 Help us to know the right time to be silent and the right time to speak, the right time to do nothing and the right time to act
- 10 Cause us all to have faith in God.

Yes, I agree, when put this way the list seems crazy but, believe me, it's all true and I'll be using it in evidence in a moment. First, though, I need another true statement.

With very few exceptions, every preacher from the Pope up, or maybe down to Ian

Paisley, has affirmed that we have free-will. And, both *Thought* and *Prayer for the Day* frequently claim certain knowledge of this gift from God. In fact, my last recorded free-will entry reads Martin Palmer January 21, 2004. Of course preachers must promote free-will because, without it, the myths of good v evil and reward v punishment would be unsustainable and the fall of man would be ended. Indeed, as I see it, free-will is the ultimate sheet anchor of religious faith without which the ship of fools would drift silently away to rust in some bywater, as so many other religious vessels have done.

So now let's put these two truths together and see what we get. Just as the 10 Commandments were, in fact, 613, so our 10 Adjurements should, more accurately, be greatly enlarged, maybe by millions, because, remember these prayerful requests have been going on for centuries and can still be heard world-wide today. Yet, if God grants even one of them we no longer have free-will (check out my 10 as proof). But theologians tell us we have free-will, of that there is no doubt. So they must know that their interminable begging prayers cannot be answered. But why do they continue with them? That's the puzzle and contradiction! In particular, *Prayer for the Day* is a two-minute con-trick because even the speakers don't believe their prayers will have any outcome. In this respect perhaps the biggest gaff was the 11th adjurement committed by that hilarious bishop Joe Aldred when he prayed "Dear God grant to today's preachers the courage and tenacity to speak the truth." They cannot do so, they dare not do so, because the entire religious structure is built on a deceit, as illustrated on most days around 5.43 am.

The UCKG

(continued from p3)

unfairly. The church filed papers for a judicial review over the ban, claiming that the rule of natural justice had not been followed.

The human sacrifice allegations led to thousands of people going on a rampage in Lusaka, smashing windows of the church's premises and stoning vehicles.

The authorities also ordered the two Brazilian pastors, who headed the church in Zambia, to leave the country within seven days, but those expulsions are also being contested in court.

Earlier, the church ran into difficulties in Brazil when federal police there arrested a congressman and several other members of the UCKG who were about to take off in a private plane from Brasilia airport carrying luggage stuffed with millions of US dollars.

Acting on an anonymous tip, police went to a hangar at Brasilia's airport and searched the aircraft that was about to carry conservative Liberal Front Party Deputy, Joao Batista Ramos da Silva, and several other clergymen on an internal flight. Police said that seven suitcases contained the equivalent of eight million US dollars in cash.

Ramos da Silva, who is also a bishop in the UCKG, told the police the cash came from church faithful donations. The UCKG is known for its luxurious temples and extensive media holdings in Brazil, paid for by huge sums of money extracted mostly from the poor. This is done through its "seed-faith" doctrine which says that if you want to receive money, healing or any other blessing, you first must give or "sow" money.

The cash reaped has enabled to the UCKG to establish a presence in many countries, and its influence is steadily growing in the UK.

Jesus and Mo



Kansas creationists accused of assaulting a university professor

AN American university professor who criticised religious fundamentalists has resigned his post after being beaten up by what he suspects are opponents of his views. University of Kansas religious studies professor Paul Mirecki said he was beaten up last month at the side of a rural road outside Lawrence by two men who'd been tailgating him in a large pickup truck. He has now resigned as chair of the Religious Studies Department.

Mirecki told the local press that his attackers made references to the controversial remarks made on the Internet denouncing Christian Conservatives and Catholics. The men punched him about the head and shoulders and struck him with a metal object, he said.

Professor Mirecki had already been forced to apologise for an e-mail he sent in which he called religious reactionaries "fundies" and said a course describing intelligent design as mythology would be a "nice slap in their big fat face." In a written apology, Mr Mirecki said he would teach the class "as a serious academic subject and in a manner that respects all points of view".

The department faculty approved the course but changed its title from "Special Topics in Religion: Intelligent Design, Creationism and other Religious Mythologies" to "Intelligent Design and Creationism." Mirecki's e-mail was sent to members of the Society of Open-Minded Atheists and Agnostics, a student group he advises. He addressed the message to "my fellow damned" and signed off with: "Doing my part to [tick] off the religious right,

Evil Dr P."

Apologising for his remarks, Mirecki said "I made a mistake in not leading by example, in the student e-mail forum. It is important to discuss differing viewpoints in a civil and respectful manner.

University Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor David Shulenburg said "While the e-mails were unquestionably offensive, I know that Professor Mirecki regrets the situation he created", adding that Mirecki had taught biblical studies for 16 years at the university, and had an international reputation for his work. He hoped that Mirecki would continue his work.

University Chancellor Robert Hemenway described Mirecki's e-mail comments as "repugnant and vile ...They do not represent

my views nor the views of this university,"

Hemenway stated. "People of all faiths are valued at KU, and campus ministries are an important part of life at the university."

University of Wisconsin history of science professor Ronald Numbers said he was surprised to hear about the violent attack on Mirecki and said the evolution controversy, though heated, rarely escalates to this level. "This is a hot issue that's divided many communities," he said. "It's like right-to-lifers bombing abortion clinics or something. They're always nuts on the fringes." Mr Numbers, who has written and lectured on the evolution controversy for the past two decades, said on one occasion, a student actually threatened to kill him. "You have to be really careful what you say," he said.

ID advocates dealt a significant blow in the US

ID proponents in the US were dealt a significant blow on December 20 when Pennsylvania district judge John Jones ruled that teaching "intelligent design" would violate the Constitutional separation of church and state.

"We have concluded that it is not [science], and moreover that ID cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents," Jones declared in a judgment following a lawsuit challenging the policy of the Dover Area School District. The Dover Area High School sought to become the first in the nation to require high-school science

teachers to teach the concept of intelligent design as an alternative to Darwin's theory of evolution. The suit was brought in December 2004 by 11 parents in conjunction with the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.

"To be sure, Darwin's theory of evolution is imperfect. However, the fact that a scientific theory cannot yet render an explanation on every point should not be used as a pretext to thrust an untestable alternative hypothesis grounded in religion into the science classroom, or to misrepresent well-established scientific propositions", Jones said, adding that the school board's decision was a "breathtaking inanity".

Jones presided over a six-week hearing that ended last month. His decision applies only to the Pennsylvania school district. The judgment effectively blocks the school district's plan "requiring teachers to denigrate or disparage the scientific theory of evolution, and to refer to a religious, alternative theory known as ID".

Jones said in his ruling that he did not doubt that intelligent design advocates "have *bona fide* and deeply held beliefs which drive their scholarly endeavours", but he also said scientific experts testified that Darwin's theory "in no way conflicts with, nor does it deny, the existence of a divine creator."

Mo: Miracles



He is God so he has the freedom to heal, to be our "therapist" – Rowan Cantuar

As a psychotherapist I often work with people holding odd and problematic beliefs. These are usually about themselves, often others, sometimes even gods. Such ideas tend to be both extreme and rigid: soandso is wholly good, bad, sexual, guilty, or whatever. Of course, my job is not to tell them what to think, rather to open up possibilities of change toward more tolerant, flexible and realistic beliefs.

It occurs to me that my response to religious people is rather similar. Many neurotic symptoms have a certain value to those that hold them (keeping them in what seems a safe position), and religions also have much to offer, from companionship to expectation of eternal delight. This is quite a good offer and atheists would be foolish merely to focus on the unreasonableness of theological arguments.

In this article I want to explore some of the personal gains and losses inherent in religion, and also to indicate how change might be facilitated.

Sometimes it is appropriate to be assertive and confrontational, and great gains may be made in the public arena. The right to cremation (destroying the body necessary for resurrection) and to sit in parliament as an atheist (affirming rather than making an oath to God) sprang from specific defiant acts. An urgent contemporary need is a well-defended right of personal decision to give up faith without fear of reprisal from fundamentalists. Here, though, I am concerned with dialogue based on genuine interest in which outright changes of belief are unlikely but some engagement is experienced. This in itself may be a huge step forward for those whose thinking is absolutist and who expect unbelievers to be wickedly or fearfully defiant rather than pleasantly concerned.

It is worth noting that many ordinary religious people compartmentalise their beliefs and may cooperate over practicalities even with those damned: if this seems illogical it may well be worth accepting unremarked in hope of further progress. The determined faithful may regard those of other faiths, but especially atheists, as either entirely deprived of all morality, or as agents of satanic evil. The latter position would, of course, suggest that atheists are devoted to gods, albeit evil ones, though clarifying this error only sometimes persuades believers (the devil would deceive, yes, so be first to point to pointy ears).

Those inner-troubled folk most anxious about what they call magic, superstition, paganism, and so forth should be helped to the confusing perception that these outlooks, if serious, are essentially religious, though a bit lacking in

holy texts and temples. Many faiths have included gods acknowledged to be demonic, and it should be a problem for the self-righteous to demonstrate which side they are on: followers of Jung or any kind of projective psychology will perceive the demons within. It is not usually too difficult to agree that at least some claiming the full support of God (Hitler is fair target: "God ... has placed the stamp of approval on our battle") have been thoroughly reprehensible, so one inquires innocently about how such claims can be trusted.

To the faithful those without faith can seem merely negative. Humanism itself is an attempt to counter this, and humanists are not surprised when ordinary people, given half a chance, behave better than many of those invested with authority of whatever kind. The supernatural endurance of the poor victims of recent natural disasters (including those in New Orleans, of whom the chiefs of relief were so shamefully fearful and rejecting) confirms this. But people are also easily led by authority to appalling behaviour, as the famous psychological experiments of Milgram and of Zimbardo long ago confirmed. Religion can provide a most convenient instrument of power over large numbers of adherents, and claiming to act for or with god guarantees nothing ethical, only that the supposed end may justify any means (certainly a thought of terror).

Looking at the behaviour of the generality of people without evident faith on a case-by-case basis will make clear that they are not amoral but guided in practice by principles such as "Well, you wouldn't like it" and "Suppose everyone did that?" and "It won't make anyone happy" are decisive enough for "Not with a barge-pole".

It is for self-conscious secularists to clarify these practical morals into ethical generalities, noting that some such gold is also embedded in religion.

How atheists regard those of faith can be equally problematic, for it is hard to see the why of it since there is not a shred of worldly evidence for a just and caring god, religious societies are often evil (as justifying being attacked by other religious societies), and afterlife is unknowably elsewhere. Faith, as distinct from knowledge and perhaps even most kinds of belief, hangs upon authority backed by community and is verified by feeling better when believing and acting in accord (dismissed by Ayer as "boohooray"). These are the issues to address.

Almost all religious people have parents of the same persuasion. To an atheist this confirms what merely contingent nonsense it all is (try the Gilbert & Sullivan song "But he is an Englishman"). This argument is worth implying when someone asserts their religion. "Oh,

Faith and Therapy

from your parents no doubt" will certainly shift the ground to the tribal rather than the supernatural. The geography of faiths is also clearly unfair and perhaps they have merely been allocated available spaces, rather as Hades and Poseidon drew the dark and the wet. As for the history of faiths, their cruel competition boasts the triumphs of power and not of virtue as their gods are carried on bloody swords. Objectivity of all kinds is disturbing to absolutism.

The origins of religion are outside the scope here, but it is worth the unsettling reminder

**Psychotherapist
EDWIN SALTER argues
that, when dealing with
the religious, 'the
carrots of engagement
should outnumber
the sticks of
denouncement'**

that most religions are long gone. Nor can it be shown that later faiths and their followers are demonstrably better: surely "horn-agains" are not somehow finer than were Celts. The "deist" attempt to view the various religions as approximating to some central if more remote truth arrives only at a confused emptiness, rather as the "intelligent designer" is a now invisible and untestable catch-all that purports to explain. From Amon to Zeus a myriad of gods are near vanished along with those unrecorded, whose peoples have been vanquished or coerced (and self-righteous evangelism continues to despise simpler gods). And would Christ recognise his faith in moderns who take his name in their pursuit of power and wealth?

Offering choices from the great range of alternatives sanctified by being religious may also reduce confidence somewhat. For example, Christians troubled by doubts of heaven might like to consider the so-well-in-touch Spiritualists or so-down-to-Earth Witnesses: or what about the so-let's-try-again Buddhists.

Those who deny any pursuit of an eternal bargain can be blithely advised that for them "It isn't about perfumed gardens, is it?" but that

and the therapeutic

perhaps, given the evident mysteriousness of god regarding suffering in this life, they should be a great deal more cautious in placing their hopeful bet for eternity.

Many of faith will emphasise not gains but sacrifices, hardships (from charity to possible martyrdom) by which they feel they have proved their love of god. They seem to think this makes a claim on god. Related to this is the claim made, we are told, by god in loving us (and that includes you). The human actions of such as stalkers and murderous lovers are often explained and justified by "love", a fearfully exalted concept, and the complaint "You can't do this, I love you" is fairly familiar. The love of god demands reciprocation, and rejecting it is a cardinal sin (and any abandoning faith, apostates, may be severely punished as a warning to others). So we arrive at the imposition of an extraordinary psychological bind. For example, individual suffering is somehow part of god's purpose, which is loving. Therefore the sufferer should best cry out "More pain! – let me know your love", and if this deeply sick transaction sounds unbelievable it is clearly advocated (C S Lewis and Alpha).

To atheists such meaningless but very powerful circular binds are phantasms because there is no attachment to reality anywhere. Other notorious examples of circularity include the ontological argument that the mere concept of a god proves its existence. A guilt trip beyond Kafka is presented by the very central demand that it is only when you admit being deeply fallen into sin that you can be acquitted by mercy: it is imperative to need god. Since all of us know we fall short of our best, the chance to make a grovelling confession followed by generous forgiveness is immensely inviting – it's just like being little again, only much better!

Systematic questioning and challenge is used by some therapists to attack binds, but unresolved issues can make such anxious dependent thinking spring back anew. The most forceful preaching often relies on absolute ("parental") assertion which escapes critical thinking, precisely because reason is mesmerised by bizarre combinations of ideas and forms of language. Hypnotic trance can be

induced both by abrupt command and by circumlocutious nonsense: add the collective theatricality of rite, and the suggestive power is immense.

An easier but slightly surprising psychological point is that making any gift to a cause tends to promote it. If one works hard without practical reward for a church then to justify this to oneself (and reduce cognitive dissonance) one inevitably assigns higher value to the faith. Something similar happens in ordinary life when we insist on throwing good money after bad, attempting to redeem the past.

In fact religion often brings advantages (and is espoused and promoted cynically by leaders utterly devoid of ordinary decency, let alone spirituality) and these are both practical and psychological. The advantages of a highly supportive community are many. The relative wealth of some Jews and high-caste Hindus and the tendency of immigrant groups to form restricted economies are familiar examples. In return is expected a loyalty which is historically grounded and resistant to change. Loyalty (including patriotism) is thought by most, who do not critically consider its object, to be good in itself (probably because biologically rooted in group survival needs): unfortunately it is particularly demanded by criminals and tyrants.

Money can however be deeply corrosive, as when medieval faith began commodity trading in relics and prayer for salvation. It may also be some comfort to secularists to note that fundamentalist groups are often among the more wretched the divided parts of some British cities for example. The identity which compensates for social inferiority and gives inappropriate self-esteem can also prevent social change and adaptation. Again (lest this article seem too favourable to faith as therapeutic), the contemporary dominance of solitary despotic male gods brings much Freudian hurt. The puritanism toward sexuality (god's jealousy indeed) and the oppression and blaming of women are not necessarily entailed by theism, it is just that the sheer nastiness of the dominant father figure will out. Gentle encouragement that absolute prohibitions are opposite only to inordinate excess and that there is in between a large area of prudent respect may soften fear that sees not moderation but only extremes.

It may seem ironic that it is the ghetto that most gives control, and the more separating features are linked in with a religion the stronger the boundaries (as Islam comes with the language of the Koran as well as many cultural markers). Personally I am not a pluralist (should England be still divided among Saxons, Vikings etc etc) but a slow local integrationist, and do not see that migration is accompanied by any right to a historical permanence of differentness. This is being written

at the time of riots in France which seem to show how difficult it is to maintain tolerant social fairness with emphatic cultural and ethnic separatism: the modern history of many divided states from USA to Rwanda repeats the story. It seems that on the large scale we have to be at least potentially kin to our neighbours in order to treat them as kith. That an implacable "We are different" translates into hostility is surely unsurprising both biologically and psychologically.

It is worth suggesting (as in Singapore) that a broadly secular state best encourages respect between religions and even offers protection for minority faiths. What makes for historical vigour of a community is a most difficult question. It has been proposed (by Peter Turchin from a study of empires) that "frontier" societies are forced by exterior enemies into fruitful togetherness which later dissipates with prosperity and social differentiation. Aggression may therefore harden communities as many warmongers have discovered, yet we are currently in a political religious agenda which seeks to justify itself by absurdly inflated warnings of terror that it may contrive to elicit further, as well as certainly inflicting.

How individuals may gain control of their own lives is an important issue both in large social terms and personally. Making decisions and taking action require information and power that may not be available, often by intentional deprivation (eg priestly Latin). "Westernism" tends to emphasise individuality over community, admiring those few who by privilege or chance get to the top and ignoring those who contribute and despising the needy. Therapists have been inclined to encourage self-belief in the sense of being able to succeed. This counters the helplessness learned by those depressed or victimised, but there is a real limit to what can be achieved. Too often "You can do it" as a political attitude is a "libertarian" way of disguising privilege and shifting blame onto those who never had a real chance to begin with.

Religion often establishes harsh social inequalities against low-caste members or those of rival belief. But it can also provide an individual comfort in which the person tries hard but is able to leave responsibility for the final outcome to God. "I've done all the revision, but whatever my exam results I'm sure God will make the outcome right for me" is obviously calm and probably an effective approach. However, this has to be finely tuned between the possibilities of a merely capricious deity and of abandoning oneself to fate. It is interesting to note how the Roman Fortuna, a goddess whom it was possible to approach and perhaps placate, became a pitiless and terrible mechanism in the Christian view, and only with the Renaissance do we find Machiavelli restoring the access of charm

and courage to winning good fortune. What we can achieve as secularists can benefit from the same qualities, perhaps along with realistic appraisal of our possible influence and control (the green slogan 'Think globally, act locally' catches this limitation which enables action to be started).

Atheists are sometimes puzzled at being more detested by fundamentalists than religious neighbours on terms of mutual destruction. There is a rough analogy from family therapy. In a dysfunctional family each member offers a conflicting perspective, yet their strange and damaging exchanges actually mesh them together. For the therapist it is rather like scanning a mysterious perpetual battle punctuated by obscure signs and ploys. Fundamentalisms do indeed feed off each other for they share much in terms of process. It is anathema that atheism does not play the same game and even denies it should be played at all. Family therapists, never embroiled as players, often seek to shift the system structures and interactions and they may point out the roles being adopted. Shifting roles (as in the drama of rescuer-victim-persecutor) can facilitate change rather as we may suddenly come to see beliefs differently. Apropos changing perspectives, Michael Moore makes the reframing observation that Osama bi Laden is also a multimillionaire: "Throw them all in jail!"

Religions grow numerically by retaining adherents, imposing faith on children and by conversion: they colonise the world through migration and media. Children are probably the most substantial contributors to growth and are vulnerable to grim claims of ownership by their elders as in the demand for sectarian education. Again it is possible to talk about change both between generations and as exemplified by the whole history of a religion. Religious urging to large families has consistently proved to fail against improving quality of life and again it is the benefit rather than the tirade that brings change.

All children learn from their parents whether ultimately this leads to acceptance or rejection. Almost all parents wish to be "good" however much they fail, and their own religious anxiety may be communicated in terms of very strict injunctions. Psychologically these functions, much like other assertions imposed on the child (which may be at such extremes as "You're a waste of space" or "Hate them") and vicious injunctions can establish a very damaging script for the individual to follow. The religious principle of parental rule may be extended back into ancestor worship and ultimately to totemic deities who define and protect the tribe. Richly colourful stories of the doings of the gods, still found in the pre-literate retreats of African and American jungles,

are great learning tools which prepare the young for the range of emotions and behaviours they may encounter in life. The sagas and epics which are now literature for us were once at the very heart of understanding and community, combining the functions of cosmology and entertainment, science and soaps.

Most individuals retain the faith of their birth family because much social reinforcement helps to establish the habits of religion. In general, habits greatly ease life, though a more risky dash of exploratory behaviour is also required for health. Praying to gods and remembering the dear departed are comforting repetitions providing a sense of truly addressing another person in complete confidence. It is rather like do-it-yourself counselling with such desirable features as calm, focus and time for reflection. But habits can get out of hand into the must-do-more of obsession or the must-never-do of phobia. When magic does not work the convenient explanation is that the rite was somehow incorrect and there should be more, not fewer rain dances.

Never speak to an evil-doer and in confirmation you will be entirely safe: that is, as you would have been anyway. The usual therapeutic route is behavioural and involves gradual progress to refrain from the compulsive act or perform the fearful one, though occasionally a "paradoxical" instruction is given to increase the deviance to an unbearable absurdity. Religions, however, often have cunningly inbuilt devices which resist putting such matters to direct experience because to test God is an offence in itself.

Happiness and hope are great human needs and it is to the therapeutic credit of Epicurus and of the stoics that they long ago formulated sensible ways to increase joy and to cope with misery. Religious conversion is much about giving a sense of warmth and trust and building it into reliable happy-clappy practice or the more exotic experiences of elaborate ritual and portentous symbols. Rational secularism sometimes seems to think that thinking is enough. Vulnerable individuals, perhaps solitary or depressed, probably already think too much (albeit in unhelpful ways) and the conversion process offers the active enthusiasm that is needed psychologically.

Religion also comes with a well-packaged meaning to life, and existentialist therapy correctly emphasises the overriding need for purpose and meaning (Frankl: "Man's search for meaning is a primary force in his life"). Such humanitarian motives as promoting justice and global quality of life can easily seem intangible and remote when you can save your soul by singing along and telling people you have faith. Those whose beliefs are scarcely reli-

gious at all may be a majority, but too easily both silent and unrepresented.

How might one respond to someone declaring faith or evangelising? Well, being merely polite seems to be not adequate. The sheer cheek of doorstep missionaries and street-corner loudspeakers certainly makes abrupt cheerful dismissal fair enough. If I have time to engage I do so and amiably embark on the attempt to chip away at certainties: sometimes, as a representative "unbeliever" I am so pleasant I hardly recognise myself. In more ordinary social situations I tend to try and leave the room in the middle, declining to focus on religious identity (what else is interesting for and about this person?) or switching to a more marginal or practical issue where dialogue is easier. The effort is to evade the cognitive distortions of extremist thinking which result in highly polarised concepts of what and who is good and bad. Such processes have probably contributed much to the most damaging aspects of the religious faiths. At one extreme there may be the sinner's fear of god, who sees and judges all, which is deeply crippling of normality. At worst there is the opposite pride of being absolutely right, chosen as an individual or group, which has bizarre effects on believers and frightening consequences for others. Such poles relieve people of autonomy and responsibility, giving instead the desperate props of rigid prescription and certainty.

This has been a rather whirlwind sketch of faith from a therapeutic view. I hope I have left a clear enough trail for those knowledgeable to argue without producing an unreadable complexity for the many more to whom this is unfamiliar territory. One main thought is to recognise that faith functions psychologically, and those who have it believe it is essential to their well-being. In attempting to change that opinion through personal dialogue, the carrots of engagement should outnumber the sticks of denouncement. And, most particularly, we as secularists deserve (and should appear) to be as good and happy as the meaning of our sensible and kindly view of humanity warrants.

Gay Humanist magazine re-launched

FOLLOWING their resignation of Andy Armitage and Dean Braithwaite, the editor and deputy editor of the *Gay & Lesbian Humanist Magazine*, as reported in last month's *Freethinker*, the publication has been relaunched as the *Gay Humanist Quarterly*.

The new editor, Brett Lock, says the new magazine hopes to bring readers "quality writing, incisive analysis, oodles of fun and an all-round good read." It aims to champion "secularism, reason and human rights."

IN some sense, all religious people are creationists. If one believes in a supernatural entity of some sort, that entity is usually connected in one way or another with the origin of the universe, if nothing else. Moreover, the term "creationism" has had a long and complex history, beginning well before the modern creation- evolution controversy, and even pre-dating the publication of Charles Darwin's *On The Origin of Species* in 1859.

In fact, in pre-Darwinian times creationism referred to the specific belief that the soul of each human foetus was specially created, in opposition to the theory of traducianism, where souls were inherited from one's parents – akin to genes in modern genetics. At the time of the debate on the inheritance of the soul, of course, essentially everybody was a creationist in the modern sense of the word.

However, the term "creationist" is relevant to today's cultural debate only in a sense that is neither historically accurate nor as broad as the general belief in a creator God. Creationists, in the discussion that follows, are people who deny all or most of the modern theory of biological evolution, with the purpose of advancing a religious agenda. Accordingly, I am not including under this label the occasional scientist outside of the academic mainstream, who may have genuine (if usually erroneous) concerns about evolutionary theory from a strictly scientific perspective (like the late cosmologist Fred Hoyle, for example).

Throughout I will assume that the reader realizes that evolutionary theory has the same status in modern biology as, say, quantum mechanics or relativity have in physics: there are many issues open to further research (both fundamental physics and organismal biology are active fields of inquiry), but few if any practitioners with the required expertise actually think that any of these theories will be fundamentally challenged on scientific grounds any time soon. In other words, what follows is an analysis of creationism, not a defense of evolution.

In order to facilitate a reasonable understanding of the controversy, we will first discuss the continuum of creationist positions, to underscore the fundamental idea that "creationism" is not a single intellectual or cultural entity. We will then analyze the two most important classes of creationist approaches: young-earth creationism (as embodied, for example, in the California-based "Institute for Creation Research") and the intelligent design movement (orchestrated chiefly by the "Discovery Institute" in Seattle).

Finally, we will examine the burden of science educators in the controversy, and conclude with some general thoughts about the future of the debate.

Eugenie Scott, of the National Center for

Science Education, has proposed an interesting classification of beliefs about "origins" (ie, the origin of humans, of life, and of the universe). While any attempt at a taxonomy of such a complex network of cultural practices and beliefs is of course a simplification, Scott managed to capture important features that help us to understand the debate. Her classification is based on the identification of a continuum of positions, which can however be clearly divided into two major classes: people who believe that the earth is very young, more or less accordingly with a literal reading of the Judeo-Christian-Muslim texts; and people who accept a major conclusion of modern science, that our planet is in fact billions of years old. As mentioned above, this is the same great divide that we will explore below when addressing the specifics of the belief systems of typical young-earth creationists and of intelligent design proponents.

MASSIMO PIGLIUCCI examines creationism in the US as a cultural, not scientific, issue

Within young earth creationism, Scott identifies a progression of beliefs from people who think the earth is flat (yes, there still are a few such misguided souls!), to those who are stuck in pre-Copernican times (the earth is not flat, but it is the center of the universe), to more "mainstream" positions that accept science up to and including Galileo's and Newton's findings, but refuse to update to 19th- and 20th-century geology and biology. This is a "progression" in the important sense that these various positions can be aligned on a gradient of increasing acceptance of scientific findings. Indeed, we could classify these people according to the century in human history in which their world-view seems to be stuck. So, flat-earthism hasn't moved beyond the 12th or 13th century (toward the end of the Middle Ages), while geocentrism was still popular in the 16th century; finally, young-earth creationism of the more common variety has "progressed" to the 17th century.

This trend continues across the divide identified by Scott and separating young- from old-earth creationism: the so-called "gap-theory" and "day-age" creationists are people who wish to retain some close reading of the Bible, but acknowledge 19th- and even some 20th-century science's findings about an old earth. Consequently, they propose gaps in the biblical narrative, or a reinterpretation of biblical "days" as geological ages. However, they refuse to accept much of post-Darwinian biology, though some do grant a limited role to natural selection (but so do some young-earth

creationists, admitting that natural selection can indeed eliminate maladaptive variants from within rather fuzzily described "kinds" – a biblical term – of plants and animals).

The final range of Scott's continuum of creationist positions includes more intellectually sophisticated (but still scientifically groundless) ideas, such as theistic evolution and, of course, intelligent design. Theistic evolution comes as close to a completely materialistic view of the universe as is possible for a religious person: essentially, theistic evolutionists think that God does exist and He did create the universe, but that things normally happen because of natural laws (put in place by the Creator, of course). Evolution by natural selection, therefore, is the way God decided to have things going in the biological realm. While this position has been criticized on philosophical and theological grounds all the way back to David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, it is really quite acceptable by scientists and science educators, because it doesn't result in challenges to the way science is taught in public schools. The same cannot be said for the intelligent design

Young-earth creationism is a quintessential expression of anti-intellectualism, a preference for folk understanding of the world over the one proposed by egg-headed intellectuals who spend most of their time hiding in ivory towers

movement, which we will examine shortly.

Young-earth creationists, by and large, believe that our planet is only a few thousand years old, and that human beings were created directly by God, together with all "kinds" of living organisms. They also think that God unleashed a worldwide flood about 4,000 years ago (despite the total absence of geological evidence), and that a guy named Noah single-handedly repopulated the earth with selected pairs of all animal and plant "kinds" (a radical type of genetic engineering, if there ever was one!). I once pointed out to young-earther Ken "Dr Dino" Hovind that to assume that the millions of species currently living on the planet are "derived" (ie, evolved) from a few thousand kinds that were present immediately after the flood is actually to concede a rate of evolution that not even the most wildly optimistic evolutionary biologist would be willing to contemplate.

But of course that is precisely the point: logic and evidence have little to do with young-earth creationism. This is a belief system that is highly emotional and very much intellectually unsophisticated. While it is hard

to imagine that people whose brains are complex enough to allow them to drive a car and hold a day job can fervently believe in self-contradictory fables written down thousands of years ago, that is a pretty accurate description of the reality of young-earthism.

This does not mean that young-earth creationists cannot change their minds, but it does mean that complex arguments do not make much of a dent with them. They are convinced that they “get it,” and they are genuinely stunned when they find that scientists, with all their PhDs, can be so dense and refuse to yield to the creationists’ “obvious” objections to evolution.

How, they wonder, can anyone seriously think that a random process is capable of originating complex organisms adapted to their environment? (Answer: evolution by natural selection is not a random process, because it relies on a combination of random mutations and non-random selection, the latter due to competition for resources among living organisms.) Or, asks the incredulous young-earthier, how can anybody believe in radioactive dating of rocks, when there are errors and discrepancies in the published measurements? (Answer: any human measurement of anything comes with a certain degree of error, which leads to discrepancies; the issue is not whether there are differences in the estimates of the age of the earth carried out with different methods or by different researchers, but how much of a difference there is. As it turns out, very little.) And so on.

Young-earth creationism is a quintessential expression of anti-intellectualism, a preference for folk understanding of the world over the one proposed by egg-headed intellectuals who spend most of their time hiding in ivory towers. It is the same sort of attitude that in politics often allows Republicans (an elite party if there ever was one) to win elections by using a cleverly constructed combination of sound bites, slick TV commercials, and shouting matches. This despite the more complex, subtle, and rationally compelling reasoning usually put forth by Democrats.

What then can be done when addressing a young-earthier? I personally know people that have overcome that narrow intellectual position, and I have inquired on how they did it. The answers are varied, but a common thread is that their beliefs got initially challenged in a more subtle, apparently non-threatening, way. Perhaps it was meeting another deeply religious person who happened to have beliefs just different enough from those of the young-earthier to seem irrelevant, and yet sufficient to condemn him to Hell. “How could this be?”, the thoughtful young-earthier may ask himself. “Can God really care that much whether one

does or does not sing during a religious service?” Or perhaps it was reading an article on popular science in a generic magazine (often Carl Sagan’s columns in *Parade Magazine* get mentioned), which stimulated enough curiosity to want to read more.

Once the wedge is in, the unsuspecting young-earthier embarks on a slippery slope that goes through libraries, college education, reading more newspapers and books, and may end up all the way into secularism – or at least a mainstream version of Christianity. Never underestimate the power of slippery slopes!

Dealing with ID proponents requires much more intellectual sophistication than their young-earth counterparts, because most of these people actually do have academic credentials, and because their arguments are built upon a lot of jargon and quasi-genuine philosophical or mathematical points

Even creationists have to give a nod to the fact that modern, particularly Western, society is highly influenced by intellectual endeavors, science being the one that gets both the most funding and the best media coverage. Hence the intelligent design (ID) movement. ID proponents make strenuous efforts to distance themselves from the more overtly religious tones typical of young-earth creationism, often by denying – when prompted – that they are creationists at all.

Their strategy (overtly declared in an infamous document known as “the wedge”) is to make headway into academic circles and mainstream media by presenting themselves as defending a reasonable position that ought to have its day in the court of scientific and public opinion, thereby opening the door for the teaching of religion in public schools.

The problem, of course, is that intelligent design already has had its heyday, culminating with the publication of William Paley’s *Natural Theology* in 1831. Paley was taken very seriously by Darwin, and the debate between a natural theology and a completely scientific view of the world raged throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

But this battle has been lost by intelligent design on intellectual grounds: it is no longer either a scientific or a philosophically viable position. This is why modern ID proponents such as Michael Behe (author of *Darwin’s Black Box*), William Dembski (*The Design Inference*, among several others), Jonathan Wells (*Icons of Evolution*) and Phillip Johnson (*Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*,

among others) are really a throwback to the late 19th century – as far as creationism has advanced and can ever hope to advance.

The important thing to understand about ID is that it is an entirely negative position: it begins (and ends) with the observation – denied by no serious scientist – that there are unexplained facts about biology, or discussions among scientists over different mechanisms to account for biological evolution. Both are certainly true (though there are countless examples of ID proponents misrepresenting the debate to the point that the smell of ideological bias is obvious), but that is the case in any viable science. The essence of scientific inquiry is that research is open-ended, debate is continuous, and revisions of past positions are always possible (unlike, one would want to add, any form of creationism proposed so far). To fault scientists for continuing their inquiries and disagreeing with each other is to fundamentally misunderstand (or actively misrepresent) what science is all about.

Moreover, what does ID have to propose as an alternative? Behe, Dembski and company are characteristically very vague about who the designer actually is, or how it operates. And for good reasons: were they to be more specific they would either have to admit that ID is a thin veil for Judeo-Christianity, or to actually come up with testable statements that could be used in the scientific process. But the latter is simply not possible. I have actually had the pleasure of asking Bill Dembski directly what sort of experiments would he propose to do if the Discovery Institute got federal funding to conduct research on ID. Of course, he had no answer.

The reason the intelligent design movement cannot be dismissed, however, is that it appeals even to mainstream religious people as a “reasonable compromise.” How could it possibly hurt to teach our students that there is a controversy? Isn’t the possibility of an intelligent designer at least conceivable? The answers to these questions are that the controversy could be taught, but in social studies, in the context of the “culture wars,” not in science classes, for the simple reason that ID is not science, by any definition of the term. And yes, an intelligent designer is obviously conceivable, but science is not about possible realities, it is about empirical facts that can be subjected to observation, experimentation and hypothesis testing. As for ID being a reasonable compromise, I wonder if anyone would seriously suggest that teaching both that the Holocaust happened and that it was a fabrication of Zionist propagandists (a position actually maintained by some pseudo-historians) would be considered an acceptable compromise in history classes. I think not, unless there really were a controversy raging among professional histori-

ans. But there is no such controversy, either among historians or among biologists.

Dealing with ID proponents requires much more intellectual sophistication than their young-earth counterparts, because most of these people actually do have academic credentials, and because their arguments are built upon a lot of jargon and quasi-genuine philosophical or mathematical points. That is why the most effective weapons against ID are better science education for science teachers (which hopefully "trickles down" into better science education for our children), and calling up the bluff: time and time again, ask for details on the sort of testable hypotheses an ID research program would actually propose, and you will see a lot of embarrassed faces and ever more frantic hand-waving.

Despite all of the above, it is not reasonable to blame the creation-evolution controversy exclusively on the illiteracy or bigotry of a large part of the public. After all, that public is supposed to be getting an education, and when that education comes from public schools and exposure to the media, then the educational and scientific communities are at least partly responsible for the current sorry state of affairs. There are two important points to keep in mind when discussing the role of science education in this or any other ideologically-charged controversy: first, the US culture in particular has always been affected by different strands of anti-intellectualism; these have various roots, and have been studied by sociologists for a long time. It is therefore naive to think that better science education is all we need to eliminate the problem. Second, "science education" can mean different things, and simply having more of the kind of science education that is currently being dished out is very likely not going to affect the national level of understanding of science (and of evolution in particular) very much.

While a discussion of science education is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to at least understand one important distinction: teaching factual knowledge of science with a minimal conceptual background is very different from teaching the conceptual foundations of science, peppered with enough factual information to ground the student's understanding in empirical reality. The first approach is by far the most common, but it is also the one that is arguably responsible for turning off many students from science, and it doesn't seem to be doing much to increase the level of critical thinking in our society – the real goal of a liberal arts education.

The second approach is, however, slowly gaining ground, both at the college level and, more importantly, at high school and earlier levels. Online resources, teachers' conferences

and workshops, as well as new textbooks are now available for educators seriously interested in turning the classical approach around: rather than have the ideas seep through an ocean of facts, one provides the students with the conceptual tools to seek and understand the relevant facts. Among many reasons why this is a positive trend is the obvious one that we cannot go on teaching "all the facts" in science because science keeps accumulating "facts" at a vertiginous pace. Consider, for example, that an introductory college textbook in biology is now more than a thousand pages long, typically only a few of which discuss the methods with which scientists actually uncover those all-important "facts". Indeed, it is likely that the textbook industry will eventually evolve separate offerings of reference and conceptual texts: just as one needs a dictionary to understand English literature, yet a sensible teacher wouldn't dream of having her students memorize the dictionary in order to learn how to read or write, we need reference books for science facts, accompanied by slimmer textbooks aimed at using selected parts of the "facts" database to learn how science actually works.

There are several reasons why this trend towards a more sensible science education will take much time to become mainstream; the main obstacles are as follows.

1 Classroom sizes: good teaching in general, and good science teaching with new methods in particular, require a much better ratio of faculty to students than is currently available in most schools in the US (or around the world). A top priority of legislatures and school administrators, therefore, should be to better that ratio as much and as quickly as possible. Not a likely scenario, given the current funding priorities of the federal and state governments in the US.

2 Standardized tests: any good teacher will be adamant about the fact that standardized tests are the worst possible way to assess one's level of understanding and education. Unfortunately, the politically-motivated emphasis on "accountability" has led to an increased reliance on standard tests, to the point that much of the effort of high-school teachers is devoted to prepare students for mindless testing, detracting from meaningful education. It is a matter of debate whether this trend is the result of simple stupidity on the part of the political class, or it is a symptom of a more sinister agenda to actually make our citizens dumber and easier to manipulate.

3 Teachers' training: the new methods of teaching that have been developed in recent years require a radically different sort of teachers' training from that currently available at most colleges offering educational degrees. This is not an insuperable obstacle, and

progress is currently being made, but it will take a generation or more to shift the balance in favor of the new methods, which means even more lag time before our students and society at large actually reap the benefits.

Despite these cautionary statements, a different science education, more focused on critical thinking and conceptual understanding, is a mandatory step not only in eventually overcoming the evolution-creation controversy, but more broadly in making our society more open, free, and truly democratic.

Are we ever going to overcome the creation-evolution debate? While the resurgence of creationism during the 1990s and early part of the 21st century, especially in the guise of the intelligent design movement, certainly does not justify a simple optimistic outlook, there are good reasons to hope for a better future. In fact, if we take the long view of the history of human societies, it is undeniable that a huge amount of progress has been made. Not only do modern scientists no longer have to fear the sort of retaliation from religious bigots that Giordano Bruno or Galileo suffered only a few centuries ago, but once highly controversial notions (such as that the earth is not flat, or that it isn't the center of the universe) are now accepted by most people on the planet as a matter of fact.

Eventually, one can hope, the controversy over evolution will go away in the same way as the one over Copernicanism did. However, the uncanny ability of humans to believe in nonsense is never to be underestimated, and will always find new forms. I would not be surprised if one of the forthcoming incarnations of such tendency towards irrationality will become apparent when (and if) scientists produce a viable theory of how consciousness arises as a natural epiphenomenon of the brain, or when (and if) we succeed in producing artificial intelligence. I can already see 22nd-century religious fundamentalists that have reluctantly come to update their beliefs to the standard of 20th-century science and accept the theory of evolution, draw the new line in the sand at the idea that a mere machine (or animal) can have consciousness: surely that must be the province of the soul. And so on.

There is also, of course, the constant danger of slipping back, if not straight into the Dark Ages, at least to a point in which science illiteracy becomes so widespread as to actually endanger the flourishing (and economic competitiveness) of a society. Science and reason, as Carl Sagan aptly put it, really are "candles in the dark," and critical and liberal thinkers everywhere need to be on a constant watch to make sure that the light stays on. Fighting creationism and intelligent design in all its forms is an important part of this ongoing battle.

'Racism' and political correctness

THERE is nothing puzzling about the itch of the religious to bring the infidel into line. Sir Ian McKellen, not too long ago, had to shut up a cultist for impertinently hectoring him.

In my village I avoid an evangelist who, though I doubt whether he will stray again, tried it on me. It goes as deep as the hole one digs for oneself, the need, when you know you are wrong, to bully others into being wrong with you.

Sajida Rishawi will be constant for another of the several reasons why she, a woman, should be a bomber. It is being unloved AND trapped – which, no surprise, the men in the thick of the Islamic milieu can feel just as acutely. And for me to tell this, and that from what I have seen and what my friend, divorced Pierrette, many a year married to a Muslim,

had concluded – “Kees, zey are all ze same” – makes me, like Andy Armitage, a sitting-duck for the charge of racism.

Unlike the political correctionists, I can only tell what I know to be true. I have lived much of my life in the *dar ul islam* and was always testing my experiences of life in it against the academic knowledge of Islam I had gained with the aid of distinguished dissidents such as Elie Khedourie.

On one occasion, I was warned never to walk under balconies lest a woman dropped from the sky. Another time, a fellow about to go hunting saw his wife come to the door for the thrill of life. He shot her dead and was imprisoned for a day.

Here is the problem for humanists: what to do when the apparatniks insist on putting us down on a trumped-up charge worthy of any-

thing in the old Soviet Union; racism in our case. Not least, there are the BBC and local media giving enormous attention to Islamic statements – especially the sort which, if they weren't Islamic, wouldn't get – because they are so fatuous – an airing. I did not have to read Samuel Huntington's book to know what the crucial issue is for Western civilisation, but I am clueless what we do if our masters are determined to corral us in “the centre-ground”.

Dropping off a balcony could make more sense than being trapped and not being able to find a normal way out.

KEITH BELL
Wrexham.

YOUR report on the storm in a teacup over the supposedly “racist” article in the “Gay & Lesbian Humanist” is depressing reading.

Help boost the *Freethinker's* subscription levels

THIS May, the *Freethinker* celebrates 125 years of uninterrupted publication. Today, our task is to ensure the continued success of the magazine – and to do so we would like to increase substantially its readership over the next few years.

You can help achieve this goal by helping to distribute a full-colour leaflet which we have just had printed. The front of the postcard-sized flyer is reproduced here. The wording on the back is as follows.

Religious fundamentalism is threatening to tear apart the fabric of our society. The time has come to tame, not appease it by giving it more influence, which is precisely what successive governments have been doing for far too long. Religion has to be returned to its rightful place – inside the heads of gullible believers, and in their homes and in their places of worship. It has NO place in our schools or in our legislative processes.

Since 1881, when it was first launched, the *Freethinker* has campaigned for a society free from religious interference, and has provided a valuable resource for non-believers. If you value a secular society, free of the hatred, intolerance and violence generated by religious zealots of every hue – you should be reading the *Freethinker* (www.freethinker.co.uk) and joining the National Secular Society (www.secularism.org.uk). The *Freethinker* is the only publication in the UK that pulls no punches in its total opposition to religion in all its virulent guises. It will keep you abreast of the threat we are under, and will help you network with like-minded people.

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When the story first broke I was flabbergasted that the GALHA committee, of all people, should cave in to the ridiculous accusations of racism by the politically correct (PC) brigade.

A more appropriate response would surely have been a robust defence of free speech coupled to an offer to the PC fundamentalists to have their criticisms published in the next issue. Instead, they turned into invertebrates and grovelled before the altar of political correctness, with two good editors as sacrificial victims to appease the offended.

Society seems to be in the grip of a paranoia about causing "offence", especially to Muslims. Thus criticism of Islam is commonly conflated with racism. This is a particularly pernicious manifestation of the culture of inoffensiveness, as vigorous criticism is exactly what a religion as vicious as Islam needs. So powerful is the PC brigade that high-street banks and councils compete with each other, to see who can be more petty, as they ban piggy banks and even the images of pigs. Meanwhile, schools display double standards in allowing a Muslim girl to wear *hijab*, while a Christian girl is forbidden to wear an inconspicuous crucifix.

The issues raised by Diesel Balaam in his offending article were valid ones, of concern to many. Immigration does have a downside. Some immigrants really are thoroughly undesirable, and the increasing numbers of devout Muslims in the country does have disturbing implications for our relatively liberal society. These are legitimate topics that need to be addressed, and doing so in a forthright manner is not racism.

When those of a tolerant, liberal and non-racist disposition are prevented from discussing these issues in robust terms it plays into the hands of those who really are racist. When ordinary tolerant people with justifiable concerns about immigration and Islam see that the only ones prepared to speak out are the BNP, then it is to the BNP they will turn. In their own blinkered way the PC devotees are as intolerant as the racists they condemn. Let us not forget, it was not a racist, nor an Islamist, who murdered Pim Fortuyn. It was a PC fanatic.

DR STEPHEN MORETON
Warrington

Life after death

JIM Cass (*Points of View*, November 2005) is right. Death is death. People who believe there can be "life after death" believe nonsense, because they have never critically considered the nonsense they

were told as children, and/or because they deceive themselves by wishful thinking, and/or because they are scared to admit, even to themselves, that they do not really believe it.

At the same time, Massimo Pigliucci is right. Philosophically we cannot be sure of anything except "there are thoughts", it is logically impossible to prove the non-existence of an event we do not experience, and Jim Cass's and my absolute convictions are no better evidence than anybody else's absolute convictions.

DONALD ROOOM
London

Editor's note: But atheist convictions are surely based on better evidence than theist ones?

National anthem

PLEASE, please can we freethinkers start a letter writing/public campaign to change the national anthem so that everyone can sing it – not just theists and monarchists?

I suggest the stirring tune of *I Vow To Thee My Country* – using the wonderful opening line but new words after that.

Any other ideas? If we could get someone to write the new words it could then be substituted for *God Save The Queen* whenever people felt the urge! Why not a *Freethinker* competition for the best suggestion? Perhaps invite other publications to join in.....

DOROTHY LEWIS
Surrey

'We are apes too'

AT the risk of appearing petulant, or patronising, or possibly both, may I ask John Radford and Donald Room (*Points of View*, November) to look again at the evolutionary tree that accompanied my letter in the October issue, and to contemplate its implications.



To claim that humans do not belong to the classification that includes all the chimps, gorillas and oranges-utans is like claiming that a person does not belong to the family that includes all her brothers, sisters and cousins.

Of course, Donald Room is right – there is nothing to stop us classifying things in any way we find useful. But the "descriptive" (ie un-Darwinian) classifications he refers to – choosing to describe the long-extinct common ancestor of all modern mammals, reptiles and

birds as a "reptile", and artificially excluding humans from the category "ape" – are both confusing and misleading. A confusing and misleading classification is unlikely to be useful to anybody, unless their aim is to confuse and mislead.

A social climber wishing to distance himself from his working-class family may find it useful to adopt an aristocratic-sounding name. But even if the name is recognised legally, his sisters will still be his sisters, his brothers will still be his brothers, and he will still be a member of the family.

If gorillas are apes and chimps are apes and orang-utans are apes, then no matter that we've adopted by deed-poll the snooty name "hominid", the inescapable fact is that we are apes too.

To pretend otherwise is to play into the hands of anti-scientific obscurantists.

GRAHAM NOBLE
Hampshire

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Events & Contacts

Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group: Information: John and Kath Wayland, 13 Elms Avenue, Lytham FY8 5PW. Tel: 01253 736397

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: Information on 01273 227549/461404. www.stovold.v21hosting.co.uk/humanist.html. The Farm Tavern, Farm Road, Hove. Tuesday, January 10, 7.30pm. Robert Stovold: *Robert Ingersoll: Ideas and Ideals*.

Bristol Humanists: Information: Margaret Dearnaley on 0117 904 9490.

Bromley Humanists: Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. Information: 01959 574691. Website: www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com.

Central London Humanist Group: Contact Jemma Hooper, 75a Ridgmount Gardens, London WC1E 7AX. E-mail: rupert@clarity4words.co.uk. Tel: 02075804564.

Chiltern Humanists: Information: 01494 771851. Friends Meeting House, 289 Hight Street, Berkhamsted. Tuesday, February 14, 2pm. Alan Taylor: *Tsunami and the Good God?*

Cornwall Humanists: Information: Patricia Adams, Sappho, Church Road, Lelant, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3LA. Tel: 01736 754895.

Cotswold Humanists: Information: Philip Howell, 2 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Tel: 01242 528743.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: Information: Tel: 01926 858450. Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 2HB.

Devon Humanists: Information: Roger McCallister, Tel: 01626 864046. E-mail: info@devonhumanists.org.uk. Website: www.devonhumanists.org.uk.

Ealing Humanists: Information: Secretary Alex Hill Tel: 0208 741 7016 or Charles Rudd 020 8904 6599.

East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group: Information: Carl Pinel 01298 815575.

East Kent Humanists: Information: Tel: 01843 864506. Talks and discussions on ten Sunday afternoons in Canterbury.

Essex Humanists: Programme available, Details: 01268 785295. Friends Meeting House, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford Road, Chedlmsford. Sunday, February 12, 7.30pm. Annual General Meeting.

Fens and King's Lynn. New group being formed. Information: Edwin Salter on 01553 771917.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): Information: 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB. Tel: 01926 858450.

Greater Manchester Humanist Group: Information: June Kamel 01925 824844. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.

Hampstead Humanist Society: Information: N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP.

Harrow Humanist Society: Information: 020 8863 2977. Monthly meetings, December – June (except January).

Havering & District Humanist Society: Information: Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Crescent, Gidea Park. Thursday, February 2, 8pm. James Brokenshire MP: *My First Year in Parliament*.

Humanist Association Dorset: Information and programme from Jane Bannister. Tel: 01202 428506.

Humanist Society of Scotland: Secretary: Ivan Middleton, 26 Inverleith Row, Edinburgh EH3 5QH. Tel: 0131 552 9046. Press and Information Officer: Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire. Tel: 01563 526710. Website: www.humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Humanist Society of Scotland – Dundee Group: Contact secretary Ron McLaren, Spiershill, St Andrews, Fife KY16 8NB. Tel: 01334 474551. E-mail: humanist@spiershill.fsworld.co.uk.

Glasgow Group: Information: Alan Henness. Tel: 07010 704776. E-mail: alan@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Edinburgh Group: Information: 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD.

Tel 0131 667 8389.

Perth Group: Information: perth@humanism.scotland.org.uk

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire: Information: Robert Tee on 0113 2577009. Swarthmore, 3-7 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, January 10, 8pm. Martin Schweiger: *World Trade Rules – OK?*

Isle of Man Freethinkers. Information: Muriel Garland. 01624 664796. E-mail: murielgarland@clara.co.uk. Website: www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk

Isle of Wight Humanist Group. Information: David Broughton on 01983 755526 or e-mail davidb67@clara.co.uk

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel: 0116 262 2250. Website: <http://homepages.stayfree.co.uk/Iss>. Public meeting: Sunday, 6.30pm.

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information: Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Website: www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com. Friends Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford. Thursday, January 26, 8pm. Denis Cobell: *The Compensation Culture*.

Mid-Wales Humanists: Information: Jane Hibbert on 01654 702883.

North East Humanists (Teesside Group): Information: C McEwan on 01642 817541.

North East Humanists (Tyneside Group): Information: the Secretary on 01434 632936.

North London Humanist Group: Monthly meetings. Information: Linda Wilkinson, 0208 882 0124.

North Yorkshire Humanist Group. Secretary: Charles Anderson. 01904 766480. Meets first Monday of the month, 7.30pm. Priory Street Centre, York.

Norwich Humanist Group: Information: Vincent G Chainey, Le Chene. 4 Mill Street, Bradenham, Thetford IP25 7PN. Tel: 01362 820982.

Reigate & District Humanist Group. Information: Roy Adderley on 01342 323882.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Information: 0114 2309754. Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, February 1, 8pm. Clive Tadhunter: *The Anthropic Principle*.

South Hampshire Humanists: Information: 11 Glenwood Avenue, Southampton, SO16 3PY. Tel: 02380 769120.

South Place Ethical Society. Weekly talks/meetings/concerts Sundays 11am and 3pm at Conway Hall Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8037/4. E-mail: library@ethicalsoc.org.uk. Monthly programmes on request.

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Wendy Sturgess. Tel: 01458 274456.

Sutton Humanist Group: Information: 0208 773 0631. Website: www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com.

E-Mail: BrackenKemish@ukgateway.net.

Welsh Marches Humanist Group: Information: 01568 770282. Website: www.wmhumanists.co.uk. E-mail: rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk. Meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at Ludlow, October to June.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group: Information: 01792 206108 or 01792 296375, or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0JY.

Humani - the Humanist Association of Northern Ireland. Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264.

E-mail: brianmccinton@btinternet.com

website: www.nirelandhumanists.net

Please send your listings and events notices to:
Bill McIlroy, Flat 3, Somerhill Lodge, Somerhill Road,
Hove, Sussex BN3 1RU.

Notices must be received by the 15th of the month preceding publication.