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Council meeting Equalities chief blunders

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Trevor Phillips, Chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, grossly misrepresented the National Secular Society's High Court challenge to council prayers when he accused the NSS of PROSECUTING a West Country council. Last month, under the *Sunday Times* headline *Human rights should help us protect the vulnerable*, Phillips wrote ... "there are some examples of cases in which, though the Human Rights Act might technically be applicable, I do wonder if people have just lost the plot. Last week, for example, Keith Porteous Wood of the National Secular Society, a decent and sincere fellow, made me drop my coffee when he told early-morning radio that he wanted to use the Act to *prosecute* the councillors of a small town in Devon. What was their alleged crime? Compelling unbelievers to walk over hot coals? Forcing small children to recite chunks of scripture before breakfast? No. It was for taking a democratic decision that those councillors who wished to follow the long tradition of saying prayers *before* meetings in the Council Chamber could do so. (The italics are ours).

NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood immediately responded with a letter to the paper, expressing his disappointment over "the serious inaccuracies" in Phillips' article. He wrote: "We are not seeking to prosecute anyone, and we have no objection to prayers being said before council meetings. It was clear from the *Today* programme interview that this was not a prosecution but a High Court hearing (a judicial review), and, as

Councillor Christie said in the clip, there had been an attempt to move the prayers to before the meeting (or have a short period of silence), but that the Christian councillors of Bideford had rejected this.

"Our co-applicant Councillor, Clive Bone, led that compromise process. We specifically said in the High Court hearing later on December 2 that we had no objection to pre-meeting prayers or a period of silence during the meeting."

Wood added: "Seeking clarity in the law would seem everyone's fundamental human right, including ours and I am saddened to be attacked for doing so.

"Just for the record, the NSS is trying to avoid the creation of a hierarchy of Human Rights with religion at the top, and we see that as a very real danger. That is why we intervened in the application of Ladele, Eweida, Chaplin, and McFarlane to the ECHR. We are the only organisation to have intervened to support all four judgments, as the Government has done, although I am pleased the EHRC now supports two of the verdicts."

Wood added: "I would appreciate an attempt by you to correct the record as both errors were repeated by the *Sunday Times'* Marie Woolf and the *Daily Mail*.

NSS President Terry Sanderson pointed out that the NSS's court challenge "drew an extraordinary and almost entirely negative reaction from commentators. Most of it could have been written well in advance by the usual suspects so predictable was it.

(Continued on page 6)



Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the NSS, flanked by Gerard Phillips, NSS Vice President, and Afonso Reis e Sousa NSS Council of Management member, outside the High Court

Photo: Stephen Evans

Fatuous fatwas and foolish fundies

RELIGION CONTINUES TO BREED HATRED AND MISTRUST, SAYS **BARRY DUKE**

Hardly a day goes by without reports emerging of acts of barbarism and sheer stupidity perpetrated in the name of Islam. Take, for example, the case of Amina Bint Abdulhalim Nasser, a Saudi woman who, according to Amnesty International, was beheaded last month after being convicted of practising “witchcraft and sorcery”, which is banned in the ultra-conservative kingdom.

The woman was executed in the northern province of al-Jawf, the Interior Ministry confirmed in a statement.

A few days before, an unnamed Muslim cleric, based in Europe, claimed that like bananas and cucumbers may “arouse” Muslim women, and “make them think of sex”. The *Times of India* reported that the cleric’s anti-phallic foodstuff fatwa went as far as to say that women should not even get close to foodstuffs such as these. “If women wish to eat these food items, a third party, preferably a male related to them such as their a father or husband, should cut the items into small

pieces and serve.”

The cleric added carrots and zucchini to the list of forbidden foods for women.

A number of Muslim commentators cast doubt on the veracity of the report. But at least one religious leader, Sheikh Gaber Taye’ Youssef, an Islamic scholar and chairman at Egypt’s Religious Endowments Ministry took it seriously enough to issue a statement in which he dismissed it as “nonsense and wrong. Such talk is empty of any logic or sense and has no roots or relations with Islam or its belief system. I don’t think any reasonable scholar or sheikh who was educated at al-Azhar or any other grand and respected institution would think of such a thing and voice it as a fatwa for people,” he said.

However, in 2007, the former dean of Islamic law at al-Azhar University, Abdullah Megawar, issued a fatwa which forbade *nudity* during sexual intercourse, saying it would invalidate a marriage between husband and wife. Furore followed. Suad Saleh, head of the Women’s Department of Al-Azhar’s Islamic studies, pleaded for “anything that can bring spouses closer to each other” and Islamic scholar Abdel Muti concurred, saying “Nothing is prohibited during marital sex, except of course sodomy.”

Megawar then back-pedalled and said that married couples could see each other naked but should really cover up with a blanket during sex.

According to the website *Listverse*, “with no centralised Islamic religious authority like a Pope or Dalai Lama, pretty much any Muslim “scholar” can create a fatwa – a religious edict for modern life supposedly guided by the Koran or the (less authoritative) hadiths. In recent years, supply has far outstripped demand, and it’s getting laughable.”

Equally laughable was a statement issued last month by a lunatic Christian organisation called the Florida Family Association which branded a TV reality show – *All-American Muslim* – as “propaganda”, and accused The Learning Channel programme of “attempting to manipulate Americans into ignoring the threat of jihad”. Demanding that companies withdraw their advertising from the programme, the FFA said: “The show profiles only Muslims that appear to be ordinary folks while excluding many Islamic believers whose agenda poses a clear and present danger to liberties and traditional values that the majority of Americans cherish.”

“In other words”, observed Dashiell Ben-

nett, writing for *The Atlantic Wire* “because the show is about Muslims who aren’t terrorists, it’s clearly pro-terrorism.”

Though the FFA’s demand was absurd, at least one large American company took it seriously and decided to withdraw its advertising. Lowe’s Home Improvement stores, admitted to pulling its ads because of the controversy, saying: “We based our decision to pull the advertising ... after hearing the concerns we received through e-mails, calls, through social media and in news reports. It is certainly never Lowe’s intent to alienate anyone. Lowe’s values diversity of thought.”

Be that as it may, Lowe’s decision to buckle under threats from a bunch of fundamentalist Christian bullies has proved to be a major blunder. Now others are turning their wrath on Lowe’s. A state senator in California, Ted Lieu, called the company’s decision “un-American” and “naked religious bigotry”. He said he would also consider legislative action if Lowe’s doesn’t apologise to Muslims and reinstate its ads.

Lieu sent a letter outlining his complaints to Lowe’s Chief Executive Officer in which he wrote: “The show is about what it’s like to be a Muslim in America, and it touches on the discrimination they sometimes face. And that kind of discrimination is exactly what’s happening here with Lowe’s.”

Dashiell Bennett added: “Clearly, the FFA’s protest is ridiculous and if Lowe’s had simply ignored it, their campaign would have gone mostly unnoticed. Instead, they’ve given attention and influence to a little-known group that otherwise didn’t earn it. (Their previous targets included the Teen Nick show, *Degrassi*, because it has a transgendered character.) It would be tempting to continue to ignore them, but it occasionally helps to be reminded that it’s still profitable to attack Muslims for political gain.

“The one positive that could come out of this whole story, however, is that some of that attention will now fall on the show, gaining it more viewers, which is the exact opposite of the FFA’s intent. People are now standing up for the show and the “radical” notion that most American Muslims don’t hate America.”

If nothing else, this sorry tale serves to prove that, when it comes to sheer barminess, Islam, by no stretch of the imagination, has a monopoly – and that religion, overall, is an evil that continues to sow hatred and suspicion among communities.



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AUTHOR THREATENED

CANADIAN author Irshad Manji suffered death threats during a conference on modern Islam in Holland last month.

The author was speaking after the release of her latest socio-political book entitled *Allah: Liberty and Love* when extremists from Sharia4Belgium stormed the De Balie theater in Amsterdam.

The extremists repeatedly declared "Takfir!", thereby ordering the execution of Manji. After threatening to break her neck, they demanded that the event, sponsored by the European Foundation for Democracy, be stopped.

'BEING BORN BRAIN-DAMAGED IS BETTER THAN BEING GAY'

JOE Dallas, the former leader of the anti-gay, US-based Exodus International organisation and speaker at Focus on the Family's *Love Won Out* conferences, appeared last month on a TV show to attack Christians who support equal rights for gays and lesbians. Dallas claims that he is an "ex-gay" and runs a "reparative therapy" group, Genesis Counseling.

The zealot has also endorsed the work of the immensely discredited Joseph Nicolosi, an officer of the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality and who jokes that it is better for a child to have brain damage than to be gay.

PINK BIBLE WITHDRAWN

SOUTHERN Baptist-owned LifeWay Christian Resources last month withdrew a pink Bible because it benefited a charity with ties to Planned Parenthood. The *Here's Hope Breast Cancer Bible* was sold at Walmart stores and other major retailers, with a dollar per copy going to the Dallas-based Susan G Komen for the Cure Foundation.

LifeWay decided to recall the Bible after receiving complaints that some of the breast cancer charity's local affiliates donated funds to Planned Parenthood.

Thomas Rainer, president of LifeWay, called the project a mistake. "Though we have assurances that Komen's funds are used only for breast cancer screening and awareness, it is not in keeping with LifeWay's core values to have even an indirect relationship with Planned Parenthood."

Religion in Britain is heading for oblivion

"WHY is the Church of England, demonstrably dying on its feet, still permitted such huge political privileges and allowed to run a third of our education system. Why, indeed, does it continue to have a constitutional status that it does not deserve?"

That was the question posed by the National Secular Society last month in the wake of the latest British Social Attitudes Survey, which painted a grim picture for the future of religion in the UK. It showed that the number of people who do not have a religion has risen to 50 percent (65 percent for the 18-24 age group).

In 1983 one in three did not have a religion, but by 2010 this has become one in two. Since 1983, the number of people who describe themselves as Anglicans has halved from 40 percent to 20 percent.

One in five people said they belonged to the Church of England; one in ten said they were Catholic; slightly less than one in five said they were affiliated to another Christian denomination, and one in 20 belonged to non-Christian religions.

Fifty-six percent of those who said they

have a religion never attend any services.

The study showed that people who are not religious in their youth do not embrace it as they get older. It follows that as the more religious older generations die out they will not be replaced with similar generations of religious older people.

The authors of the report concluded that this is not good news for the Government, which seems more and more inclined to involve religion in public life. They wrote:

"What does this decline mean for society and social policy more generally? On the one hand, we can expect to see a continued increase in liberal attitudes towards a range of issues such as abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia, as the influence of considerations grounded in religion declines.

"Moreover, we may see an increased reluctance, particularly among the younger age groups, for matters of faith to enter the social and public spheres at all.

"The recently expressed sentiment of the current coalition government to 'do' and 'get' God (Baroness Warsi, 2011) therefore may not sit well with, and could alienate, certain sections of the population."

65%

of 18-24 year olds do not affiliate to a religion, compared with 55% of the same age group (18-27) in 1983

Sadistic Muslim teacher jailed for assaulting pupils

A MUSLIM teacher working in West Yorkshire has received a ten-week jail sentence for kicking and hitting children during religious lessons in a mosque.

Sabir Hussain, 60, stood over the young boys as they sat on the floor and was secretly filmed kicking three in the back and repeatedly hitting one youngster forcefully with the back of his hand.

The teacher was caught on camera by the Channel 4 Dispatches documentary, *Lessons In Hatred And Violence*. The victims, aged between ten and 13, could be seen flinching from the sadist, who was giving Koran-reading classes to Muslim pupils at the Markazi Jamia Mosque, in Keighley, West Yorkshire.

Wearing traditional Islamic clothing, Hussain, at the time a voluntary teacher, can be seen walking around the class as the boys sat on the floor.

He is seen using considerable force to hit a child four times with the back of his hand as the boy cowers in fear.

Another sequence shows him kicking a boy in the back and then slapping him on the head. Two other sections of the film, shot in December 2010, video show Hussain kicking boys in the back. Hussain admitted four charges of assaulting boys and was jailed late last year for ten weeks.

He was originally charged with ten counts of assault, but the prosecution accepted his four guilty pleas.



Dutch Jews and Muslims unite against ritual slaughter ban

AHEAD of a Dutch Senate vote last month to ratify legislation banning ritual slaughter, hundreds of Jews and Muslims rallied to beg senators not to accept a bill introduced by the Party for Animals. The bill forbids any slaughter that isn't preceded by stunning, calling it inhumane.

The Dutch Parliament voted in June to effectively ban Jewish and Muslim ritual slaughter. For this to become a law, however, the Senate had ratify the bill.

One senior Dutch rabbi told The Jerusalem Post that a ban would apply "double standards that target minorities".

"It's very clear that [the] Senate is much more skeptical than parliament of this bill's merits," Raphael Evers, rabbi of the Federation of Jewish Communities in The Netherlands, said after attending a conference in Amsterdam in December.

In parliament, the anti-Muslim Party for Freedom, led by Geert Wilders, and the ruling VVD party supported the bill.

Ritual slaughter is currently banned in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. Switzerland permits it for poultry.

Prof Afshin Ellian, an Iranian-born professor of law from Leiden University, called the bill "nonsensical and non-liberal" but judicially tenable. "There are European precedents and grounds to restrict freedom of worship in favour of animal welfare," he said.

According to a BBC report, the slaughter of conscious animals was widely abandoned in the 20th Century and is now practised mainly in the Jewish and Muslim communities. Consumers increasingly expect animals to be stunned before death.

The BBC quoted Paul Meeuwissen, director of the Vitelco abattoir in the central town of s'-Hertogenbosch as saying: "Killing animals is never friendly, but what we do is done in the most animal-friendly way possible."

The plant, the second-biggest veal abattoir in Europe, has used stunning on all its calves – some 300,000 a year – since 2008. Before then it performed some religious slaughter without stunning for the Jewish and Muslim communities, but changing public attitudes towards animal welfare forced a rethink.

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe took the position in 2002 that "the practice of slaughtering animals without prior stunning is unacceptable under any circum-



Two ultra-Orthodox Jews look on as a chicken is ritually slaughtered

stances", and the issue has gradually become more central for animal welfare campaigners, and for politicians.

"We decided to stop 'ritual' killing because the idea didn't fit us," says Mr Meeuwissen. "My customers are very critical on how we produce our meat, and the large supermarket chains no longer want any meat which is produced ritually."

Jewish and Muslim leaders see a worrying global trend, with the Netherlands a critical test case. But Animal rights groups regard

the Dutch bill as a stepping stone towards further bans on religious slaughter.

"The Netherlands is a very important example, but for us it's just a battle, not the war," says Dr Michel Courat of Eurogroup for Animals, a federation of animal protection groups.

"We need to win lots of other battles after this one to make sure more countries stop this practice."

Raffi Berg, reporting for the BBC, said: "They are fighting a battle on two fronts – to dispel the idea there is anything inhumane about their traditional methods of slaughter, and to defend their right to live according to their religious beliefs.

"Both faiths put great emphasis on animal welfare, and adhere to a one-cut method of slaughter, intended to ensure the animal's rapid death. Under Jewish and Islamic law, animals for slaughter must be healthy and uninjured at the time of death, which rules out driving a bolt into the brain – though some Muslim authorities accept forms of stunning that can be guaranteed not to kill the animal."

A Dutch Muslim umbrella group, the Contact Body for Muslims and the Government (CMO), accused the Party for the Animals of leading an "emotional" campaign based on misleading information which "wrongly created the impression that Muslim and Jewish methods of slaughter are barbaric and outdated".

The result of the Dutch Senate vote will be published next month in the *Freethinker*.

Blame Leviticus for cruel Jewish killing methods

THE justification for kosher killing lies in Leviticus 17:13-17:14: "And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust. For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off."

Fiery atheist Christopher Hitchens dies aged 62

CHRISTOPHER Hitchens last month lost what he described in April as his “long argument with the spectre of death”

The 62-year-old British author, literary critic and journalist – renowned for his fiery attacks on religion – died from pneumonia, a complication of the oesophageal cancer he was suffering from at a Texas hospital.

Unable to attend the American Atheist Convention in April year due to his illness, Hitchens sent a letter instead to delegates, saying of his battle against cancer: “Nobody ever wins this argument, though there are some solid points to be made while the discussion goes on.

“I have found, as the enemy becomes more familiar, that all the special pleading for salvation, redemption and supernatural deliverance appears even more hollow and artificial to me than it did before.”

He said his trust was now better placed in two things: “The skill and principle of advanced medical science, and the comradeship of innumerable friends and family, all of them immune to the false consolations of religion. It is these forces among others which will speed the day when humanity emancipates itself from the mind-forged manacles of servility and superstition. It is our innate solidarity, and not some despotism of the sky, which is the source of our morality and our sense of decency.”

He added: “The pattern and origin of all dictatorship is the surrender of reason to



Christopher Hitchens, described by Richard Dawkins as ‘The finest orator of our time, fellow horseman, valiant fighter against all tyrants including God’

absolutism and the abandonment of critical, objective inquiry. The cheap name for this lethal delusion is religion, and we must learn new ways of combating it in the public sphere, just as we have learned to free ourselves of it in private.

“Our weapons are the ironic mind against the literal: the open mind against the credulous; the courageous pursuit of truth against the fearful and abject forces who would set limits to investigation (and who stupidly claim that we already have all the truth we need). Perhaps above all, we affirm life over the cults of death and human sacrifice and are afraid, not of inevitable death, but rather of a human life that is cramped and distorted

by the pathetic need to offer mindless adulation, or the dismal belief that the laws of nature respond to wailings and incantations.”

But just a week before his death, a US Christian commentator, Mark Judge, writing for the *Daily Caller*, posed the question: “Could Christopher Hitchens become a Christian?” And Judge, subsequently described here by atheist blogger Ophelia Benson as “a vulture licking its filthy chops”, said: “It’s a possibility that doesn’t seem laughable anymore”.

Hitchens is survived by his wife, Carol Blue, and their daughter, Antonia, and his children from a previous marriage, Alexander and Sophia.

Vanity Fair editor Graydon Carter described the writer as “someone of ferocious intellect, who was as vibrant on the page as he was at the bar. Those who read him felt they knew him, and those who knew him were profoundly fortunate souls.”

Hitchens was diagnosed with cancer in June 2010, and documented his declining health in his *Vanity Fair* column.

He wrote for numerous publications including *The Times Literary Supplement*, the *Daily Express*, the *London Evening Standard*, *Newsday* and *The Atlantic*. He was the author of 17 books, including *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, and a memoir, *Hitch-22*.

A collection of his essays, *Arguably*, was released this year.

Racism raises its ugly head in two US churches

ALL hell broke loose after members of a Baptist Church in Kentucky voted last year to bar mixed-race couples.

Nine members of the Gulnare Free Will Baptist Church in Pike County, voted for the ban after the daughter of church secretary Dean Harville attended the church with her African boyfriend, and the two sang for the congregation.

Harville said he was approached last August by Melvin Thompson, the church member who drafted the resolution to bar mixed-race couples, and was told that his daughter and her boyfriend were no longer allowed to sing at the church.

But in early December, Stacy Stepp, pastor at the church said that the vote had

been declared null and void after it was determined that the ban ran contrary to local, state and national laws.

Stepp said about 30 people who attended church services voted on a new resolution that “welcomes believers into our fellowship regardless of race, creed or colour.”

Shortly after, news broke that a white church secretary, Debra Dodd, was suing her former employer – the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Fayetteville, Tennessee – for discriminating against her because she had married a black man.

Dodd, who filed a lawsuit for back wages and \$500,000 in punitive damages, claims the all-white church first embraced her during her two years as secretary – then sud-

denly shunned and subsequently fired her on last May 26 after they learned she had married a black man in April.

Dodd said the church initially “treated me like family,” but that changed after three church leaders saw Dodd and her then-fiancé, Michael Hampton, eating together at a Fayetteville restaurant.

“Then suddenly it went downhill. All of the sudden my clothes were not appropriate, I was not doing my job right. People stopped looking at me. They would turn their faces away from me.

“When my husband and a friend of his visited one week when I sang, there were comments about the ‘coloured boys in the back’.”

War of words erupts over NSS

“Ann Widdecombe in the *Daily Express* could hardly contain her heaving anger as she labeled Clive Bone – the councillor at the centre of this case – ‘an ass’ and added: ‘I hope the High Court throws out this nasty little action, which predictably is backed by the National Secular Society, and awards the not inconsiderable costs against that body’.”

The NSS and the former Bideford town councillor Clive Bone brought judicial-review proceedings against Bideford Town Council after councillors there twice rejected Bone’s request for prayers to be abolished. The council said that prayers were not compulsory, and that councillors who objected to the practice could either sit in silence or leave the room until prayers were completed.

But David Wolfe, representing the NSS and Bone, told Mr Justice Ouseley: “Saying a person can leave [the room while prayers are being said] is not an answer. A council could say ‘We’re going to spend five minutes reading racist material or pornographic material’. Saying a black councillor or a female councillor can leave the room isn’t an answer. They are disadvantaged.”

Clive Bone was elected to Bideford Town Council in May 2007, but did not seek re-election in May this year. He said that he had “effectively been forced out of public life” because his fellow councillors insisted



Former councillor Clive Bone of Bideford outside the council chamber.

Photograph: Mark Passmore/APEX

on saying prayers. Bone was not present at last month’s hearing, but his barrister said that he could not stand for re-election because of the “embarrassment, awkwardness, and sense of frustration” he felt as a result of the prayers, and that he “did not believe religious observance to have any place in public life”.

Commenting further on media reaction to the NSS challenge, Sanderson said: “The *Daily Mail* wrote us off – again with complete predictability – as the ‘PC Brigade’.

“As we’d anticipated, there was plenty of abuse in store from the Christian lobby. They couldn’t actually grasp the larger issues

at stake here – the need to separate religion from politics – and concentrated instead on Clive Bone’s personal discomfort at sitting through prayers.

“Cristina Odone, the Catholic apologist who propagandises in the *Telegraph*, said: ‘Judges tend to focus on the discriminatory act, arguing, for example, that atheists and Christians alike would be wrong in banning same-sex couples from sharing a double bed in their B&B. So the Christian taken to court can’t claim that his religious beliefs are infringed. This is all wrong ... Christians have special requirements, just like the disabled, women, the elderly or ethnic minorities. Courts must accommodate their beliefs, not ignore them. I hope that this will prove a winning argument.’

“She asserted that if we were to win, the Coronation Oath would have to be abandoned, chaplains would have to be drummed out of the forces and there would be a general ‘evisceration of Christian culture’. Who’d have thought we were so powerful? So exercised was she by this that later in the week she wrote another article calling for some kind of religious war to be fought by Christians.

“Martin Hannan in the *Scotsman* branded us ‘the secular Taliban’ saying that just like the Taliban the NSS will not rest until all dissenting voices are silenced. Mr Hannan forgets to mention that the religious Taliban pray five times a day and kill people who don’t do likewise. We aren’t proposing execution for Bideford councillors. The whole point of equality law is protecting minorities being oppressed by the majority. And none of our detractors could bring themselves to mention that the Christian councillors had refused compromises of a period of silence

NSS adopts Secular Charter

THE Secular Charter was adopted as policy at the National Secular Society’s 2011 AGM last November. The Charter guides the NSS’s campaigning and policy objectives. The National Secular Society campaigns for a secular state, where:

- a) There is no established state religion.
- b) There is one law for all and its application is not hindered or replaced by religious codes or processes.
- c) Individuals are neither disadvantaged nor discriminated against because of their religion or belief, or lack thereof.
- d) Freedom of expression is not restricted by religious considerations.
- e) Neither the state, nor any emanation of the state, expresses religious beliefs or preferences.
- f) Religion plays no role in state-funded education, whether through religious affiliation, organised worship, religious instruction, pupil selection or employment discrimination.
- g) The state does not engage in, fund or promote religious activities or practices.
- h) Public and publicly-funded service provision does not discriminate on grounds of religion or belief.
- i) There is no privileged position in society or advantage in law for any individual or group by virtue of their religion or belief, or lack thereof.
- j) The state does not intervene in the setting of religious doctrine or the running of religious organisations.

NSS's prayer challenge

or prayers before the meeting.

"In the *Daily Telegraph*, Rev Peter Mullen called us 'totalitarian', while Michael White, the *Guardian's* resident Victor Meldrew figure, came up with an extraordinarily convoluted piece in a blog to oppose what we're doing. When you get to the end of it you'll wonder whether he's lost his thread or his marbles.

"In the *Daily Mail*, Rev George Pitcher (aka George of the Sixth Form) ascribes all kinds of powers to the 'bullying' NSS. Not only are we going to disestablish the Church of England, but we are going to 'sweep religion from public life', 'abolish the Royal Family', 'pass nasty laws to introduce euthanasia' and establish our 'authoritarian, godless and uniformly secular republic'. And all before teatime!

"In the *Church of England Newspaper*, Andrew Carey was even more apocalyptic: 'On the National Secular Society's case against Bideford Council ... rests the entire edifice of continuing religious freedom in the UK'.

"There was much, much more in similarly virulent vein. All of it was in the 'isn't the NSS cruel, picking on a tiny council like Bideford' vein. As we've explained before, one of their councillors approached us, and Bideford is a test case for a much wider principle. The council will pay nothing, even if it loses. They're backed by the well-resourced Christian Institute.

"The NSS is concerned with separating religion from politics and this is one vital element of that campaign. Naturally the Christians and other traditionalists won't be able to comprehend that some people don't accept that they are entitled to simply impose their religion anywhere they like. There's a time and a place and formal meetings in council chambers are not it.

"The one question that is never asked by our critics is: why is prayer part of civic business in the first place? Who decided that it should be, other than the vested interests in the Church? And why, when it comes to religion, is it imagined that 'tradition' trumps all else? If society never changed and never abandoned any 'traditions' we'd still be trading slaves and denying women the vote. Society moves on – as the British Social Attitudes survey shows. 'Tradition' should not be a reason to halt progress and keep us living in a past that is long gone."

There was more fury among Christian commentators when news broke last month that the Chairman of Gloucester County

Council had ended the practice of saying prayers before council meetings. Conservative Councillor Brian Thornton said he believed the historic practice "excludes" some members from full participation.

He said: "The reason I took the decision was that at a previous meeting when I spoke the prayer there were several members who did not stand up as a mark of respect. After that meeting I asked them if they would be prepared to do so and they said 'no' and suggested various options which I have looked into. Eventually we decided to go with a non-religious secular exhortation."

The *This is Gloucestershire* website reported: "To a shocked council chamber before a meeting at Shire Hall he said: 'This is not a religious setting, it is a council one. As such, I have decided I do not wish to cause exclusion in any way, so we will do without the prayers'. He added that some politicians might feel 'embarrassed' about taking part.

"The stance caused fury, with the deputy Mayor of Gloucester and Sheriff, Councillor Pam Tracey calling it 'disgusting'.

"The authority is believed to have first started the 'moment of prayer' when local government was re-organised in 1974, although some people think it was around, in a similar form, many years earlier.

"It was stopped in 1999 by former Labour group leader Maureen Rutter, only to be reinstated just one year later following an outcry. Calls have already been made to bring it back. Cllr Tracey (Con, Westgate) said: 'For many, many years this has been a wonderful tradition. It goes back forever and I think to do away with it is disgusting. Have we all lost the plot here or what? I am really, really disappointed and cannot believe we have forgotten how important it is. I wonder what the Queen Mother would think of this. You lot are all happy to get married and have funerals, yet this moment of prayer is going. It's crazy'.

This is Gloucestershire quoted Rev Bill O'Leary, the pastor at Tewkesbury Baptist Church, as saying that the council's move was "a sad thing" and should have been subject to a council vote.

The Bishop of Gloucester then stepped into the row. The Rt Rev Michael Perham said even if people did not sign up to a particular faith they have spiritual values and want that to be part of their lives. "A decision to exclude prayers from the county council is going in the opposite direction to where a lot of people are going."

bits&bobs

UK NEEDS 'BIBLICAL VALUES'

IN a speech last month to mark the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, British Prime Minister David Cameron said that a return to Christian values could counter the country's "moral collapse" – and he blamed a "passive tolerance" of immoral behaviour for this summer's riots, Islamic extremism, City excess and Westminster scandals.

"The committed but vaguely practising Church of England Christian" told C of E clergy who gathered in Oxford for the birthday bash that there were a number of reasons why the King James Bible was as relevant today as any point in its history.

DEPP ANGERS THE FUNDIES

ACTOR Johnny Depp is in deep trouble with Christian fundies in the US, who are fuming over his *Jesus Stag Night Club* song.

Depp teamed up with the band Babybird to record the number, which tells the tale of a boozing, stolen car-driving Jesus look-alike who gets his kicks at lap-dancing clubs.

Lee Douglas, spokesman for the religious pressure group The Christian Coalition, lashed Depp for his "blasphemy". He said: "I'm sure he thinks he's being very funny but he's simply a disgrace. One day, Johnny Depp and his cronies will face the judgment of our Lord and they will burn in hell for this filth."

Depp, 48, who helped to finance Babybird's pop comeback, is said to be "not concerned" about the controversy. And Babybird frontman Stephen Jones, 49, said: "Some people have no sense of humour."

PINK HUMANIST LAUNCHED

UK gay Humanist charity the Pink Triangle Trust (PTT) has re-launched its online magazine with a new title, *The Pink Humanist*. The PTT, which was founded in 1992, started publishing a printed magazine entitled *Gay & Lesbian Humanist* in 1993 and continued this until it went online in 2008.

Though described as an LGBT publication, it is aimed at all atheists, Humanists, sceptics and freethinkers and is the only one of its kind worldwide.

Contributors to the first issue include Russian gay activist Nikolai Alekseev who has been praised by human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell for "his amazing, ground-breaking work over many years".

AN INTRODUCTION TO EUTÉLIA

In his second exclusive article for the *Freethinker* **LÁSZLÓ BITÓ**, PhD, argues that legal euthanasia is necessary – but not enough

The fear of dying, which lies behind many of our anxieties and phobias, can often seize us amid the course of great bliss or even in moments of ecstasy. Hence, our happiness may depend in no small measure on how we come to terms with our mortality. Do we regard death as a divine punishment that we should fear? Or do we see it as the redemption that spares us the humiliations of a deteriorating body?

I mention redemption because I am not addressing the suffering caused by the impatient and cruel kind of death that threatens to take us long before our journey's natural end. *That* death we must oppose with all our might, using all the resources that medical science and a compassionate society can provide.

Eutélia is concerned primarily with the other kind of death, the one that patiently awaits us at the end of our journey. This death we must learn to accept, for even if we should win a couple of bouts against it, we will gain little more than a respite before the final defeat, often at the price of excruciating pain and the humiliation of a body that has lost control over all physiological functions.

In my book *Die Kunst des schönen Sterbens (Blissful Life – Peaceful Death)* on the emblematic aspects of life from conception to death, which has been also published in Europe in Russian, Romanian and Hungarian, I introduced the term eutélia, meaning “good end.” By this I refer to a comprehensive approach dealing with the practical, theoretical, medical, psychological, and socio-economic considerations that can create the conditions necessary to extend our inalienable right to pursue of happiness until our last breath.

We cannot talk about dying with dignity if we deny ourselves or our fellow humans this fundamental right, or if government places limits on our autonomy precisely at a moment when we are no longer able to stand up to defend it.

This broad approach to dying and death is in sharp contrast to the very narrow scope of the well-known word euthanasia, which literally means good death, but which, since its introduction by David Hume in the 18th century, has led



László Bitó

to much abuse and controversy, as well as unresolved debates about the means and goals of “bringing about a gentle and easy death”. Eutélia goes beyond addressing the ethics and the practice of euthanasia, “passive” or active, that have dominated public discourse to include many interlacing approaches that can enrich the last mile of life’s journey.

It aims to accept and befriend the merciful death that spares us total loss of the dignity for which we have striven all our lives. A gentle death in old age is not to be feared, but rather valued as a gift bestowed on those who have earned their right to peaceful repose. However, our youth-centred societies fail to acknowledge the mercies of this blessing and continue to do a disservice to the elderly by refusing to consider death from the perspective of the dying.

There are, of course, many practical questions that I must address in my advocacy of the concept of eutélia and its institutions. But first I would like to sketch a broad foundation for the basis of future discussions that can help us reach the goal of dying with dignity. As modern medicine extends lives, overburdened

health services will either collapse or have to curtail the services they offer younger generations. Such a dramatic outcome can be avoided if we, the elderly, become less self-ish in our expectations and discover the joy of lovingly passing on our greatest treasure, our place under the sun, to those we leave behind. But in exchange, the younger generation that take their fundamental right of self-determination for granted with respect to all mid-life decisions, must accept their elders’ right to self-determination with respect to all end-of-life decisions.

Many misconceptions concerning end-of-life issues must be dispelled, but first we must raise two fundamental questions: Do we have a moral obligation to suffer the pain and humiliation of terminal illness even when a life worth living is no longer an option? And if not, does society have a moral obligation to heed our cries for help when we can no longer

endure the agony of dying?

Eutélia’s answer to the first question is a definite, well-arguable NO, and to the second, a resounding YES. The unavailability of such help may not only fill our medically extended final days or months with the fear of unbearable suffering, but it may also cast a long shadow over much of our lives as we witness the seemingly endless agonies of relatives and friends waiting in vain for death, often attached to ever-more sophisticated life-sustaining equipment. All this, even after they have been brought back to life from the easy death of cardiac arrest or have been cured of pneumonia, which once was regarded as the best friend to the moribund elderly.

Those who support the right to ask for, and obtain help, in order to die with dignity when an acceptable quality of life is no longer possible refer primarily to the right of self-determination. Opponents, whose view is often influenced by religious considerations, refer to the sanctity of life, a principle that is derived from the Judeo-Christian teaching that God created us in His (or more precisely His and Her) image. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” we read in the first book of Moses. This use of the plural form, to-

gether with the conclusion of Genesis “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” indicate the dual nature of God in the first chapter of the Bible. This may represent a transition from polytheism to monotheism that finally had no other option but to assign the roles of Prometheus and Zeus, as well as those of Ares and Thanatos, to one God, bestowing on Him/Her the taking away of our progenitors and the giving of our progeny.

Western civilisation is built on the premise that God the Creator decides whether we are to have an easy exit or a long, painful, and humiliating decline before we are allowed to die. This ancient position of our churches disregards the fact that before resting on the seventh day our Creator endowed us with a keen mind, dexterous hands, free will, and all the other attributes that allow us to help one another as social beings in all endeavors of life.

For if death is part of life, we must eventually accept that we were intended to help those who wish to die before they are stripped of the last remnant of their dignity: their autonomy, their self-determination, their right to tell us when and how they wish to depart.

It is time to admit that medical science long ago took death out of God’s hands. We now replace diseased or worn-out organs, restart stopped hearts, and prolong the agony of dying. With our increasingly sophisticated technologies, we bring people back to life (and keep them alive, even if only in a vegetative state) after “God” has shown mercy by stopping their hearts. Yet we are deaf to the pleas of those who, overburdened with years, want to die in peace. Even if we hear their pleas for help, we lack the courage to break with long-outdated traditions and laws that date back to times when we did not have the means to keep even the brain-dead alive.

The exponential development of biomedical science and technology enables us to keep an ever-increasing number of bodies biologically “alive,” artificially maintaining them in vegetative states that do not resemble human life, often not even in appearance.

If this trend continues, in a few decades we may need to provide for the care and storage of millions of functionless bodies worldwide at any given time. Even as we maintain “living” bodies far beyond their natural capacity to sustain human life, doctors must ultimately take it on themselves to decide when those people should be al-

lowed – or helped – to die. So the question of exercising passive or active euthanasia is becoming less and less a question of whether we morally can make such decisions and more and more a question of who decides, and when.

Eutelia maintains that any end-of-life decision – palliative care until the end, whether in a hospice or at home, “passive” or active euthanasia and its means – must be an expression of self-determination directed either by the patient or by the patient’s appointed proxy. But no “living will,” advance health care directive, or any other piece of paper will allow us to anticipate all eventualities. Only a person with whom, over time, we have shared our concerns and wishes can do that. But who should that person be?

Many examples demonstrate that relatives frequently do not even agree on what last

No one ... should be without a durable power of attorney for medical decision-making. Everyone old enough to write down who they want to make medical decisions for them must do so. Every physician must ask every patient. Every hospital and nursing home must ask and record every person’s wishes

— Arthur Caplan PhD, writing in his capacity as Director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania immediately after the death of Terri Schiavo

rites the deceased should or wished to have. Friends can interpret a living will differently, if one exists. Some people may have a best friend or a close relative who may appear to be the logical choice as an official health care proxy but, when called on, may not be able to handle the emotional burden of making a life-or-death decision.

And even if they do make that decision, they may be tormented for years by doubts or guilt regarding the outcome. We need to have trained professionals to be available as proxies and discuss our living wills with us from time to time, amending them as our choices change, if they do. Thus, knowing the way we think about end-of-life issues, they would be able to act according to our concepts and beliefs even with regard to unanticipated eventualities. Such a specialist could, for example, act through and be licensed by an Institute of Eutelia. Such an organisation is essential as a means of representing and protecting those who wish

to maintain their right to self-determination, even with regard to the question of last rites, to the last minute of life.

Although euthanasia means “good death,” what it represents in public consciousness today is simply the shutting off of a respirator, the administering of an overdose of a “painkiller,” or a lethal injection as the ultimate *coup de grace*. We have the audacity to call such cases “good deaths” even when no one is present to hold the hand of the dying person. In contrast, most veterinarians have the compassion to ask the master of a dog to hold it in his arms while he administers the fatal injection. But where human euthanasia remains illegal, it has to be enacted secretly, too often under undignified circumstances and far too often only when care-givers can no longer endure witnessing the sufferings of a terminally ill patient.

Although I went into this in some detail in my book, I confess that after the Terri Schiavo case, I welcomed the rush to prepare living wills, which had become a right in most Western countries. Only on reflection did I realise that, under the present circumstances, living wills can be detrimental to the cause of eutelia, which is to enrich rather than to impoverish the last stage of life and certainly not arbitrarily or capriciously to shorten that stage. Specifically, if you give a “do-not-resuscitate” order, instructing doctors not to restart your heart after cardiac arrest, you may deprive yourself of the most rewarding years of your life since, as is commonly observed, many people

appreciate life more after a near-death experience than they did before and begin living richer, more caring, and gratifying lives.

Eutelia discourages the inclusion of “do-not-resuscitate” orders in living wills until a more enlightened time when one will be able to request that one’s heart be restarted, but with a *caveat* something like the following: “As soon after resuscitation as it is determined that I have suffered brain damage that will leave my body in a persistent vegetative state or that has caused defects inconsistent with human autonomy, I want all life-sustaining procedures to be stopped immediately. If death does not ensue within 24 hours, it is to be brought about by active intervention under the supervision of my proxy, whom I also authorise to execute all my wishes concerning farewell rites.” As long as one cannot stipulate this in the absence of legal “euthanasia,”

(Continued on p10)

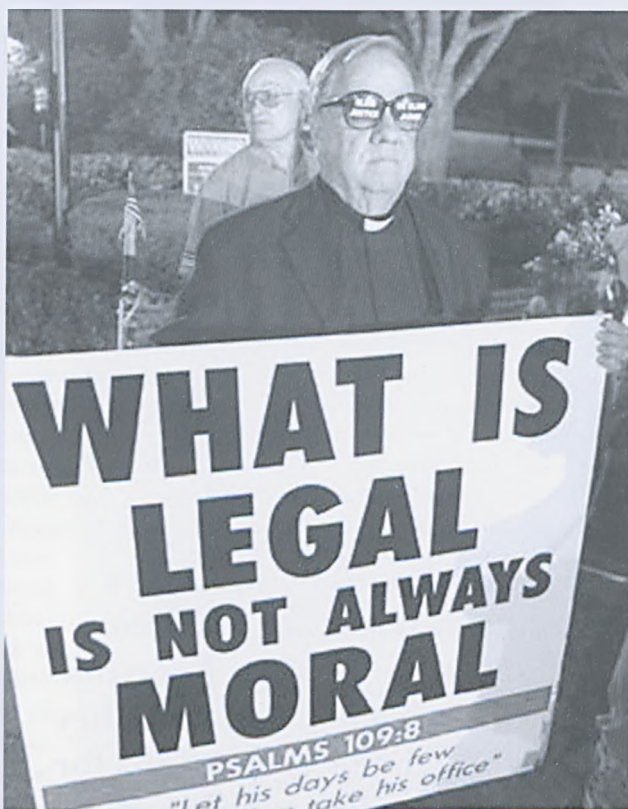
EUTÉLIA

one probably should not even mention resuscitation in living wills unless private arrangements can be made with a doctor who would respect such a *caveat* and find a way to execute it.

Eutélia calls for comprehensive laws crafted with appropriate attention to the complexity of the biological, sociological, and psychological considerations involved in end-of-life decisions. The statutes must allow for and provide assistance in many ways of making a final exit, recognising that we are different in many ways, having different religious or secular creeds and different concepts of life after death. We have different ailments and different pain thresholds. Discontinuing treatment may lead to rapid death in someone with congestive heart failure, but only intensify the pain of metastatic bone cancer. Some people can tolerate this pain stoically, while others may be driven nearly insane by it.

For several decades, Western societies have acknowledged our right to palliative care and most countries provide at least some financing for it. In the United States, governmental and commercial insurers finance both at-home and in-house hospice care. Even the uninsured can benefit from such care through the support of private foundations. Hospice care already provides help for more than a third of the people dying in the United States each year. Eutélia must fully support this service and its expansion as an important alternative that we can choose in exercising our right of self-determination. It must also stand up against laws that forbid the use of some of the most effective pain killers. In this country, codeine and morphine are routinely used, but the law prohibits the use of some other opiates such as the much more effective diacetylmorphine, because of its bad press under its more common name, heroin. True, it is more habit forming than morphine, but in terminal cases this should not prevent its use in doses that do not hasten death or cause severe adverse side effects for those whose pain can no longer be controlled by morphine or some other morphine derivatives.

Fortunately, in some states, lawmakers have begun to realise that they have no right to forbid the medical use of some of nature's most effective drugs, such as marijuana. For it is not always pain that torments the dying the most, and cannabis is one of the most



Chaplain John Butler Book protests outside the US hospice, where Terri Schiavo was on a life support system. Schiavo collapsed at her St Petersburg, Florida home in full cardiac arrest on February 25, 1990. She suffered massive brain damage due to lack of oxygen and, after two and a half months in a coma, her diagnosis was elevated to vegetative state.

In 1998 Schiavo's husband, Michael, petitioned the Sixth Circuit Court of Florida (Pinellas County), to remove her feeding tube pursuant to Florida Statutes Section 765.401(3). He was opposed by Terri's parents, Robert and Mary Schindler, who argued that she was conscious. The court determined that she would not wish to continue life-prolonging measures, and on April 24, 2001 Terri's feeding tube was removed for the first time, only to be reinserted several days later.

On February 25, 2005, a Pinellas County judge ordered the removal of Terri Schiavo's feeding tube. Several appeals and federal government intervention followed, which included US President George W Bush returning to Washington DC to sign legislation designed to keep her alive. After all attempts at appeals through the federal court system upheld the original decision to remove the feeding tube, staff at the Pinellas Park hospice disconnected her feeding tube on March 18, 2005 and she died on March 31.

effective treatments for nausea, for example, which is a frequent and in some cases devastating side effect of several essential drugs. If there were a demand, pharmacology could also come up with effective drugs to ease the anxieties of the dying. Indeed, such drugs are already used to alleviate patients' acute anxieties before surgery. Some of these agents surely could be modified to allow their use for longer times.

I see the need for an Institute of Eutélia

not only to provide direct assistance for those who must prepare to leave of this world, but also to represent in legislative bodies the needs of those nearing the end or preparing for it.

If we want to establish our right to a dignified death, we must not only guarantee terminally-ill individuals the right to self-determination, but must also establish an organisation to defend this right. I regard this as being an important function of an institution that is devoted to end-of-life issues.

New laws should no longer be derived from concepts or precedents predating the Middle Ages. Rather, they must be adopted or adapted with knowledge and consideration of modern biological, physiological, psychological, philosophical and sociological concepts and the complexity of the issues concerning death and dying. Enactment of these laws should be preceded by public discussions to bring about a new appreciation of the last phase of life and to overcome the hypocritical and bureaucratic half measures that have passed as "legalised euthanasia" in some European countries. Those measures do little more than to introduce bureaucratic measures that are obviously avoided by most busy doctors to maintain the status quo ante of helping covertly people to die.

Under the concept of eutélia, I do not promote the legalisation of euthanasia in order to encourage everyone to "shuffle off this mortal coil" with a lethal elixir or injection. On the contrary, I believe that if we are terminally ill and must face the possibility of increasing agonies and humiliations, the knowledge that euthanasia is legally available to us if we need it will help us cope much more peacefully and patiently with pain and suffering, making it possible for us to bear our sufferings longer and with less anxiety. This can bring comfort, particularly to those who would like to have their lives end naturally but do not wish

to be kept in a coma for years, hooked up to more and more contraptions, and who do not regard "terminal sedation" as natural. Such sedation is increasingly being used to make the maintenance of bodies less troublesome.

Rather than have relatives debate in court about when a body in an artificially maintained vegetative state should be allowed to die, we need a well-trained and experienced proxy to say when enough is enough. And

when such a decision is finally made, is it not barbaric to let the body slowly dehydrate until the circulation fails, or even worse, maintain hydration but terminate artificial nutrition, allowing the body to deteriorate even more slowly by consuming itself? Society would be up in arms if someone did this to a horse. The knowledge that this terrible fate may befall us even within the walls of a hospital can only increase our dread of dying, or even just going in for surgery.

Since my book on eutelia appeared in Europe, two objections have repeatedly been raised. Many people – and not only in the legal profession – are concerned that by advocating legalised euthanasia eutelia would open the way to the killing of elderly patients who are a burden on their relatives or who may leave behind a substantial inheritance (or both). I came to recognise the need for establishing institutions with licensed professionals and strict rules precisely because this would provide the best safety measures to prevent such abuses. Illegal euthanasia, on the other hand, is obviously uncontrollable. It would also be next to impossible to control legal euthanasia if we were to put it in the hands of hospital staffs who daily administer hundreds of doses of potentially lethal painkillers.

Physicians, on the other hand, object to the legalisation of euthanasia on the assumption that they would have to implement it. This is not the case. Indeed, the concept of eutelia rules this out, maintaining that the physician's role, which is to heal, ends when health can no longer be restored or maintained to an extent that life would be worth living. At that point, the physician, bound by the Hippocratic oath, should be able to turn the patient over to someone with a very different avocation and training, just as an

internist turns a patient over to a surgeon when medical treatment no longer works. This is consistent with the Hippocratic oath, which in some of the many versions we have inherited states: "I will not cut for [bile] stone, even for patients in whom the disease is manifest; I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners, specialists in this art." Eutelia maintains that when only death can save the terminally ill from further suffering and indignity, the physician must turn the patient over to a specialist in the art of helping people to die.

Most of the physicians with whom I have spoken in detail on the subject clearly object to eutelia because of its emphasis on patients' right to self-determination, while most doctors still regard life-and-death decisions as their prerogative. Clearly, preparing people for their last voyage and helping them across the threshold requires skills that could hardly be acquired within the context of an already overburdened medical school curriculum. And even if we trained them for it, we cannot realistically expect busy medical practitioners to help guide their patients to a dignified end.

Just as we have already established the professions of midwifery and obstetrics to help the foetus out of the womb, we need well-trained, dedicated, and empathetic specialists to help us, when our time comes, to step out of life.

Instead, we are surrounded in our final days and hours by health-care professionals who have sworn to keep us in this life. We could refer to the specialists skilled in the art of helping us out of life as thanatologists. But because eutelia assigns them a broader role in preparing people for and helping them across the threshold if need be, I would rather call them by a friendli-

er name: Christophers, after the saint who, according to legend, carried many people, including the little Jesus, across a river of terrifying eddies.

• Laszlo Bito, Ph.D. is professor emeritus of ocular physiology at Columbia University and creator of the world's best-selling drug, Xalatan, for the treatment of glaucoma. In addition, he is a leading European proponent of euthanasia. He is regularly interviewed on television in his native Hungary as well as in Germany, France, and Russia, among various other countries. He lives in Budapest, Hungary and spends part of each year in New York City. His website is www.laszlobito.com

The End of Sentience

By Petter Finne

THE day I die, that's it. I'm dead.
There's really no need for crying.
The act of life, of birth and being,
Includes the act of dying.

No mausoleum, no funeral pyre,
Just lay me in the earth.
Let my body restore a part of what
It has plundered since its birth.

No platitudes, no priests, no myths
Of life in the everlasting.
Remember me for what I was.
Perhaps, gently regret my passing.

Perhaps, think of me as in the breeze,
But always bear in mind
It's just a ploy to ease the thoughts
Of those we leave behind.

We all must die; and yet live on,
Though neither in heaven nor hell:
But in genes, passed on, and on again
Down time's eternal swell.

And also in deeds. The consequence
Of what we do on Earth
Can affect the lives of thousands
Who have yet to discover birth.

Judge not a life by piety,
But by things for which it stood.
Not from pious fear of godly wrath,
But from belief in the might of good.

It's possible we'll meet again
But only if, some day,
Men learn to bend the rules of time
And travel back this way.

For once I've died, that's it. I'm dead!
My sentience ends that day.
It will not have an after-life:
There is no need to pray.

More of Petter Finne's poetry can
be seen at [http://talitiser.com/
Tali/oddments/oddments.html](http://talitiser.com/Tali/oddments/oddments.html)

A Millipede with Gout is a wish come true

MANY readers of the *Freethinker* will remember the wonderful articles and poems that Neil Blewitt wrote for the journal over many years, using humour and satire to expose the absurdities and inconsistencies of religion.

He spent a lot of time on research, and this showed up very clearly in his writing.

He also penned a great deal of humorous verse on a wide variety of subjects. In fact, according to his widow, Ruth, he was working on an anthology to within a few weeks of his death, and it was "his dear wish to see it in print".

That wish has materialised in the form of *A Millipede with Gout*, an anthology recently published by Vanguard Press of Cambridge under his full name of Andrew Neil Blewitt.

The collection includes most types of humour; parody, satire, whimsy, wry comments, bathos and so on. Poems vary in length from two lines to over 100 and some are in classic form such as sonnets, limericks. Most are rhymed and metred while some are in free form.

A Millipede with Gout (Paperback, 223 pages, ISBN-10: 1843868741; ISBN-13: 978-1843868743) is available from Amazon for around £8.00, and will delight both those who have read Neil's work in the *Freethinker*, as well as those discovering his enormous talent for the first time.

A J B Allen: Lives of an Agitator

TERRY LIDDLE profiles a political activist who played a leading role in the New Zealand Rationalist Association

ERNEST John Bartlett Allen was born in 1884 in South Hinkesey, Oxfordshire, into a comfortable family. He studied languages at Oxford University. Bill Cooke in his *History of Rationalism in New Zealand*, says that Allen became politicised at university and dropped out. But in fact he had joined the Social Democratic Federation at 16 and had obtained a degree.

Some SDF members felt that its leader HM Hyndman was diluting the socialist message and, following discussions, some held in Allen's home, some London members broke away and formed the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Allen served on the SPGB's executive and was secretary of its Fulham branch. He supported socialist industrial unionism and when this policy was defeated in the SPGB he joined the rival Socialist Labour Party debating with the SPGB's Jack Fitzgerald in the Engineer's Club in Plumstead.

By 1907 he was a member of The British Advocates of Industrial Unionism, secretary of its London branch and editor of the *Industrial Unionist*. He was expelled in 1908 and took six London branches and a Welsh branch with him to form the Industrialist League, editing the *Industrialist* and writing *Revolutionary Unionism*.

In 1908 he moved to Colne Valley and supported the Socialist MP Victor Grayson. He spoke in Chicago with the Italian Anarchist Errico Malatesta and at the Charlotte Street Club in London with the Syndicalist Rudolph Rocker.

Moving back to London, he became Assistant Secretary of the Industrial Syndicalist League and Deputy Editor of the *Syndicalist*. In 1913 he emigrated to New Zealand where he became assistant editor of the *Maoriland Worker*. Founded in 1910 by the Shearers' Union it became the organ of the New Zealand Federation of Labour. His support for World War One and conscription cost him his job and expulsion from the Labour Party.

He returned to political activity in 1919 speaking at Labour Party meetings on Quay Street and writing for *Auckland Labour News*.

He supported John A Lee and was on the payroll in the 1928 election campaign. Lee had lost an arm in the war. His politics were a mixture of anti-clericalism. He published an edition of McCabe's *The Papacy in Politics*, *left-wing socialism and the economic theories of C*



E J B Allen at the SPGB 1905 Conference

H Douglas. When Lee was expelled from the Labour Party, Allen went with him into the Democratic Labour Party.

When the New Zealand Rationalist Association was revived in 1927, Allen became a leading member and writer for the *New Zealand Rationalist*. In the edition for July 1, 1944, he replied to "three quarters of a column of religious hysteria", by Rev C W Cleander. He concluded: "The medicine men of the creeds would have mankind go back to traverse again the tortured path of civilisation."

In the *Truth Seeker* for July 7, 1928, he wrote an article outlining the proper view for rationalists on politics. "Let all rationalists of all parties take a firm stand and refuse to support any candidates who openly or clandestinely supports the perversion of State educational institutions, making them hotbeds of refined martyrdom and open

bigotry." The Labour Party won the 1928 General Election and did very well in local elections.

In February, 1944, Murray Gitos had asked why the *People's Voice*, the paper of the New Zealand Communist Party, was not only uninterested in the struggle against religion but had published items by religionists. The CP replied, accusing the rationalists of lining up with the reactionary Catholic journal *Zelandia*. Allen, as a co-opted member of the Rationalist Association's executive, was asked to reply. He did so in the June 1, 1944, edition of the *New Zealand Rationalist*. He wrote: "As a matter of fact, the Communist Party is as opportunist on the matter of religion as on other matters."

He quotes the 1928 Congress of the Communist International which stated: "The fight against religion, the opium of the people, occupies an important position among the tasks of the cultural revolution." To underline his point, he quoted extensively from Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Finally he quoted from Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism*, hardly likely to endear him to the Stalinists of the Communist Party. His last words were. "...The Communist Party has not yet achieved what the old New Zealand Socialist Party achieved over thirty years ago, namely having atheist literature on sale at all their public meetings."

Allen died on June 16, 1945. His obituary published in the August 1, 1945 edition of the *New Zealand Rationalist* stated: "Mr Allen maintained to the last his interest in the fight for the intellectual and economic freedom of mankind. He wrote regularly for *Lee's Weekly* and was a frequent contributor to the *New Zealand Rationalist*. He also lectured for the Rationalist Association and Sunday Freedom League and was always listened to with interest"

His remains were cremated on June 19, 1945.

• Terry Liddle was born in Greenwich in 1948. He gained an Honours degree in history at East London University. He has been a member of the NSS, SPES, Lewisham Humanists, Atheism UK and the Thomas Paine Society. He is the founder of the Freethought History Research Group, and author of *Deptford's Red Republican*, *The Republic Must Come*, *A Radical History of Greenwich and Deptford*, *Slavery: Ancient and Modern*. He is a contributor to the *Freethinker*, *Ethical Record*, *Journal of Radical History*, *Journal of Freethought History*, and *La Raison*.

Carl Sagan quotes

- FOR me, it is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring.
- SKEPTICAL scrutiny is the means, in both science and religion, by which deep thoughts can be winnowed from deep nonsense.
- A CELIBATE clergy is an especially good idea, because it tends to suppress any hereditary propensity toward fanaticism.

Abortion and the godly

The Bible says 'Be prolific and increase in numbers (Gen 1:22). Translated, this means 'Swamp the gentile gods and their followers by becoming the majority', argues

WILLIAM HARWOOD

MODERATE theists tend to remain deafeningly silent when the Manchurians Candidates of the Christian Taliban denounce abortion and even murder doctors who provide women with a necessary medical procedure. But occasionally a moderate points out that nowhere in Leviticus (the source of Christian homophobia) or anywhere else in the Judaeo-Christian Bible is abortion condemned or even mentioned. Yet the fanatics remain convinced that their bronze-age scriptures do prohibit tadpolecide – and in a sense they are right.

It was the Bible's first theologian, a would-be historian whom scholars call the Yahwist (J), who, c 920 BCE, instituted the policy of freeing Jews from the oppression of surrounding goyim, "infidels," by transforming them into the majority. Since the alleged empire of King David and his god, Yahweh, was confined to a Jerusalem and suburbs somewhat smaller than Greenwich Village, the Yahwist was not so reckless as to advocate violent confrontation. Rather, he put into his god's mouth a commandment to "be prolific and increase in number," the policy currently being practised by Catholics conspiring to breed themselves into a majority in Northern Ireland, and remain a majority in South America, where defections to Protestantism and Humanism are threatening to reduce them to minority status.

Not until 621 BCE did a later Jewish theologian, the Deuteronomist (D), thought to have been the spokesman (Greek: *prophetes*) Jeremiah, feel sufficiently confident of Jewish military power to abandon his predecessor's nonviolent pursuit of majority status in favor of military means (Deut 7:1-23): "When Yahweh your gods has settled you in the land you're about to occupy, and driven out many infidels before you ... you're going to exterminate them in a massive genocide until they're eliminated."

Neither J nor D supplemented his methods of out-populating the goyim by restricting non-procreative recreation. It was the priestly author (P) of 621-612 BCE who borrowed Zoroaster's rules for obtaining the same result, by prohibiting same-sex coupling. (Zoroaster had also criminalized celibacy and masturbation, but P was not willing to go that far.) P pronounced male homosexuality a disobedience to Yahweh, (the real

meaning of "sin"), in the belief that he could force gay men to start breeding tithe-paying believers. Neither Zoroaster nor P banned lesbianism, for the logical reason that, in a society in which marriage to a man was an economic necessity, girl-on-girl action did not diminish the number of children a woman could be forced to bear. The Torah's final Redactor (R), thought to have been Ezra, reinforced P's ban on gay sex (for males) by adding a death penalty.

None of the Torah authors made any mention of abortion, presumably because it was not sufficiently prevalent to detract from their compulsory overpopulation program. But somewhere along the line the Catholic Church recognized that abortion represented a severe curtailment of its determination to outbreed surrounding Protestants. Whether that was Pope Pius IX's motivation when he added first-trimester abortion to the church's "you may not" laws by changing the traditional date that a fetus acquired a soul from the time of quickening in the fifth month to the instant of conception, can only be guessed. Attributing a logical reason to any of the decrees of the paranoid psychopath who first pronounced himself infallible would be like attributing a logical reason to the actions of Osama bin Laden. But following Pope Pius's personizing of fetuses, it was just a matter of time before fanatic Protestant sects such as America's evangelicals picked up the mantra and similarly demanded laws depriving women of sovereignty over their own bodies, in accordance with their Bible's

declaration (Gen. 3:16) that women were men's private property to do with as they pleased. And at the point when contraception became simple and reliable, the RC church concluded that condoms, IUDs, diaphragms and the pill were also incompatible with its determination to outbreed the Protestants, and banned all forms of birth control except Vatican roulette.

Even moderate theists recognize that biblical literalists are not the brightest lights on the candelabra. Anyone who can believe that the universe is about 6,000 years old simply because his bronze age scripture says so, while simultaneously rejecting that same scripture's 15 assurances that the earth is flat, can be politely described as inconsistent. Not surprisingly, moderate religionists who acknowledge that their Bible's young-earth cosmography and creationism are wrong, also recognize that their Bible's order to overpopulate was never intended to prohibit abortion.

As for the rabid anti-abortionists, it is highly unlikely that they see Genesis 1:22 as the basis for their position, since the most inflexible Bible-thumpers tend never to have actually read a Bible. Their equation of the abortion of a fetus with zero brainwave activity indicative of human thought with the killing of a self-aware sentient being, is so indefensible that the only argument they can come up with is, "My god says so, so there!" Sadly, to the civilized world's least intellectual 17 percent, that is all they argument they have ever needed.



Young anti-abortion protesters pictured in the US

points of view...

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THE BURQA AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

RICHARD Francis is dismayed (*Freethinker*, December) that I suggest it may not be a good idea to “ban the burqa” in Britain (we can’t do it anywhere else).

I am very well aware that women can be oppressed in Islamic regimes, as they, and men too, can be in all too many contexts. Rules about dress can be an instrument of oppression, but there is no necessary link. I made it quite clear that I think it is wrong to force women to cover themselves.

What exactly is to be banned? Shapeless body coverings? What about nuns’ habits, or indeed overcoats? Veils? Veils have been and are worn in many situations, such as marriage ceremonies, and sometimes by men.

The French and Belgian laws prohibit covering the face in public. I have not seen any systematic study of what the women think about this, but media reports are that some at least protest strongly against such a law.

They give two reasons. One is that covering actually prevents them from being viewed as “mere objects”. The other is that it is part of their identity as Muslims, which they do not wish to give up. I mentioned the sometimes violent reaction to perceived attacks on identity not to suggest they should be yielded to, but to indicate the strength of feeling. Would forcing women by law to reveal their faces prevent their being oppressed?

I don’t think it is naive to suggest that changes in attitudes may take place. All societies have formal or informal rules about dress, but these have changed very significantly over time. So have religious attitudes. We don’t burn heretics at the stake now, as was once taken for granted. As I mentioned, Islamic customs about dress vary widely. In Britain, even in strongly Muslim areas, full covering is by no means the norm.

Richard Francis raises a fundamental point in stating “wrong is wrong”. In my view things are seldom so simple. I don’t hold any kind of relativist view that anything goes. But few moral principles are absolute in their application.

Nearly all people world-wide will agree that killing another human is wrong (as studies show). But a large majority make exceptions, for self-defence or protecting others, for wars considered legitimate, for capital punishment, etc.

I think that oppression of some people by others is always objectionable. But it is often hard to draw clear lines between custom, conformity, coercion and compulsion. It is often hard to know exactly what individuals feel about these, and why.

I have not come across any very solid evidence in this case, and in its absence I still think, on balance, that a British “banning of the burqa” would not help.

John Radford
London

JOHN Radford concludes that he would not want the burqa banned (*Should Britain Ban the Burqa?* November 11), but that does not resolve the issue of how to treat the wearing of burqas, and other “religious” practices.

In other countries and cultures the burqa can be normal and acceptable. In the UK, however, there are practical reasons for not wishing to see it in use, as well as deeply rooted cultural objections.

At the practical level, the burqa renders polite discourse impossible, it is unhealthy, it represents a mediaeval and unacceptable attitude to women, and there are, in the current climate, very real security considerations.

Culturally, wearing the burqa conflicts with the values of liberty and equality considered precious in this country, not least

because of the centuries of sacrifice and suffering which went into their acquisition.

Despite the fact that not all Muslims insist on or approve the wearing of the burqa, and that it is not even a right in all Muslim countries eg Turkey, criticism of the burqa or the burqa wearer is treated as criticism of wider Islam or “Islamophobia”.

This is a minority hiding behind the skirts of the majority who, while possibly admitting some element of doubt, will not condemn the practice outright because they fear that it may be the thin end of a wedge that will divide Muslims and reduce their status and political clout.

But this is not a fault in Islam alone. It is the normal behaviour of any Abrahamic religious group. In the UK it is the standard attitude of the Christian “community” in which the majority will choose to remain silent over the shenanigans of lesser parts – witness the deafening silence of the Church of England over the abuse scandals rocking the Catholic Church.

Wearing a burqa is not a mandatory Islamic practice. Similarly wearing crosses to work, or choosing your customers or what you sell on religious grounds, are not mandatory Christian practices. These are personal choices inside the boundaries of a nominal religion, and while I agree there is no need for the law to ban these practices, there is no need for the law to defend them.

If banks wish to exclude burqa wearer’s on security grounds, if an MP or professional person declines to talk to a burqa wearer because it effectively prevents communication, or if an employer wants staff who do not pick and choose their customers on religious grounds, then they should be safe from any action for discrimination, but they are not. There is still much to be done.

George Taylor
Herts

BRUCE Bawer, in his *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom*, p242, calls Islamophobia a multicultural nonsense word when citing examples of European governments trying to tackle it.

Short of criminalising free expression, I fail to see how it can be tackled, because it encapsulates an instinctive wary response to an incursion into British life by peoples of a manifestly different culture. While hearing Eric Morcambe's plea to Ernie Wise to "Be honest," you can gauge your level of prejudice (or none): How close to your home would you tolerate the building of a mosque? Not next door? That's Islamophobia. Okay a hundred meters away? The next street? Maybe, if it's far enough away, out of sight and out of mind, you can deceive yourself into thinking that you're not at all Islamophobic and can feign tolerance.

Moderate Muslims there may be – and their willingness to assimilate should be welcomed – but as per the scholarly pens of Caldwell, Harris (Lee), Harris (Sam), Hitchens, Huntington, Phillips and Steyn, there can never be a moderate Islam while the Koran is taught as the immutable word of Allah.

This incompatibility with Western values is a direct challenge to a government already hard-pressed to deal with terrorism. Michael Gove, in his *Celsius 7/7*, argues that mass immigration, EU human rights legislation, and Muslim extremism, all have weakened the nation-state.

Here's an excerpt from Roger Scruton's *The West and the Rest*, p65: "A spokesman for al-Muhajiroun recently warned that no British Muslim has any obligation to British law when it conflicts with the law of Allah."

That is the reality of a demographically explosive, uncompromising religion whose growing influence is driving demands for more sharia. Small wonder that indigenous whites in Muslim areas feel threatened.

Blaming the far right – and me, as Colin Mills does *ad hominem* (*Points of View*, December) – for causing multicultural dysfunction by allegedly creating an anti-Islam anti-immigrant "atmosphere" is disingenuous. Intercommunal conflict is the result of the ethnically diverse overcrowding wrought by the immigration and asylum policies of successive British governments over the past 50 years. The politicians responsible are to blame. From their offices and homes, safely distanced from any potential disturbances, still politicians and other leaders can deceive themselves

about the socially disruptive effects of immigration – and deceive the public, as did the liberal establishment conceal immigrant numbers for a decade or more (Roger Scruton again, *ibid*, p62).

Immigration can, of course, bring great benefits. But when British born jihadists are dying to suicide-bomb fellow citizens, and Muslim sympathisers celebrate mass murder and the killing of British troops, something has gone terribly wrong in the country.

Clearly, religion is a problem. And not, as Education Secretary Michael Gove and Prime Minister David Cameron think, a solution. By sanctioning ever more religion-based academies, and handing out a Bible to every school, bizarrely they're saying that superstition and irrationality is fit and proper education for children in the 21st century. Both leaders would do better by handing out the booklet, *Why we believe in God(s)*, by J Anderson Thomson.

Graham Newbery
Southampton

CELIBATION

LÁSZLÓ BITÓ'S interesting article (*Freethinker*, December) made me wonder about the etymology of the word "paedophilia" which to me, with my schoolgirl Latin, meant something to do with love.

My *Shorter Oxford* of 1966 doesn't mention it at all; but *Wikipedia* has very detailed descriptions of paedophilia and related "pathologies" or "psychiatric disorders". It says that Kraft-Ebing lists "Pseudopaedophilia" as a related condition wherein "individuals who have lost libido for the adult through masturbation subsequently turn to children for the gratification of their sexual appetite", and claimed that this is much more common.

Does that mean that the poor monks, fearing their wicked masturbation will end them up in hell, decide to change to paedophilia, to which their church seems to turn a blind eye?

If the church's only recognition of legitimate sexual conjugation is marriage, then let them allow married priests. If a monk or a nun wishes to be celibate, that should reflect their personal allegiance to their god but not to their holy order.

By the way, my *Shorter Oxford* does list "paederasty", which it describes as "sodomy"; but turn to the latter and it is described as "an unnatural form of sexual intercourse, esp that of one male with another". My 1963 *Concise* is slightly more descriptive and even dares to mention "animals"; *Nuttalls Popular Dictionary* c 1934 has "a crime against nature!" I obviously need to ask for a new dictionary for Christmas

– about which I do agree with Paul Arnold (*Happy Christmas from an Atheist*, December.)

Fiona Weir
London

CELIBACY doesn't mean no sex. László Bitó evidently misunderstands the celibacy rule for Romanist priests.

It does not mean that they cannot enjoy sex, but that they cannot marry. Sex outside of marriage is a sin, of course, but there is no rule that priests are not allowed to sin.

The anti-marriage rule was apparently invented to safeguard church property, by preventing priests from mixing it up with family property.

A more recent rule, with the same objective, is that popes (but not other priests) must be of legitimate birth. The Church does not provide material support to the girlfriends or boyfriends of priests, or their children, but priests are not prohibited from providing for their illegitimate families, if they have resources outside the Church.

During the High Renaissance, when most popes were members of the Italian nobility, it was customary for them to appoint their sons, euphemistically described as "nephews", to be cardinals and archbishops.

To mention only one example, Pope Julius II, who commissioned Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel in honour of his predecessor Pope Sixtus IV, was in fact the "nephew" of Pope Sixtus IV.

Donald Room
London

HOMOPHOBIA

"GAYSTAPO" is an obvious, if witty, pun. As a libertarian, I believe that Alan Craig (*Freethinker*, December) has a point.

People have the right to be gay. They equally have the right to be homophobic. Anti-discrimination and equality laws violate freedom of speech, choice and association and should all be repealed.

Mark Taha
London

BAD SCIENCE

THE bad science of Genesis – Gen 1.3: "God said, let there be light." (Light comes from stars not then existing). Gen 1.16: "He made the stars and set them in the firmament." (Just one star, the Sun, has a diameter of 864,000 miles, is 333,440 times the weight of the Earth and has a temperature of 14 million degrees.) Heavy going, especially for a male deity who had to live in a tent because his people had not built him a "house" (temple) (II Samuel 7.6).

W K Harper
Stoke-on-Trent

the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

i information **w** website **e** email

Birmingham Humanists:

w www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk. 0845 2015135.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton.

Wednesday Jan 4, 7.30 for 8pm: *One Law for All* – Speaker: Dr Rummy Hasan.

w <http://homepage.nflworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist/>.

Bromley Humanists: Meet second Thursdays at 2pm at the H G Wells Centre **e** asad.65@hotmail.com.

Central London Humanist Group: **i** Chair: Alan Palmer. Sec: Josh Kutchinsky.

e info@centrallondonhumanists.org.

w www.meetup.com/central-london-humanists

Chiltern Humanists: Enquiries: 01494 726351.

w www.chilternhumanists.webs.com

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

Cotswold Humanists: **i** Phil Cork Tel: 01242 233746.

e phil.cork@blueyonder.co.uk.

w <http://www.cotswold.humanist.org.uk>

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

Cumbria Humanist Group: **i** Tel: 01228 810592. Christine Allen

w www.secularderby.org **e** info@cumbria-humanists.org.uk.

Derbyshire Secularists: Meet at 7.00pm, the third Wednesday of every month at the Multifaith Centre, University of Derby. Full details on

w www.secularderby.org

Devon Humanists:

e info@devonhumanists.org.uk

w www.devonhumanists.org.uk

Dorset Humanists: Monthly speakers and social activities. Enquiries 01202-428506.

w www.dorsethumanists.co.uk

East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:

i Carl Pintel 01298 815575.

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

Essex Humanists: Programme available **i** 01268 785295.

Farnham Humanists: 10 New House, Farm Lane, Woodstreet Village, Guildford GU3 3DD.

w www.farnham-humanists.org.uk

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):

1 Gower St, London WC1E 6HD. Tel: 0844 800 3067.

Email: secretary@galha.org. **w** www.galha.org

Greater Manchester Humanist Group: **i** John Coss:

0161 4303463. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday, 7.30pm) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Phone John Coss for details.

Hampstead Humanist Society: **i** N I Barnes,

10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 OHP. Tel: 0207 328 4431.

w www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk

Harrow Humanist Society: Meets the second Wednesday of the month at 8pm (except Feb, July and August) at the HAVS Centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. January 11, video evening – a showing of the film *Creation* about the life and work of Charles Darwin. **i** Secretary on 0208 907-6124 **w** www.harrow.humanist.org.uk **e** Mike Savage at mfsavage@mba@hotmail.com

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern Ireland: **i** Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 **e** brianmcclinton@btinternet.com.

w <http://www.humanistni.org/>

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

Humanist Society of Scotland: 272 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4JR, 0870 874 9002. Secretary: secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Information and events: info@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Education: education@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Local Scottish Groups:

Aberdeen: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Dundee:** 07017 404778, dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Edinburgh:** 07010 704775, edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Glasgow:** 07010 704776, glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Highland:** 07017 404779, highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire: **i** Robert Tee on 0113 2577009.

Isle of Man Freethinkers: **i** Jeff Garland, 01624 664796. Email: jeffgarland@wm.im. **w** www.iomfreethinkers.org

Humanists4Science: A group of humanists interested in science who discuss, and promote, both.

w <http://humanists4science.blogspot.com/>

Discussion group: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/humanists4science/>

Isle of Wight Secular and Humanist Group. **i** David Broughton on 01983 755526 or davidb67@clara.co.uk

Jersey Humanists: Contact: Reginald Le Sueur, La Petella, Rue des Vignes, St Peter, Jersey, JE3 7BE. Tel 01534 744780 **e** Jerseyhumanists@gmail.com. **w** <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Jersey-Humanists/>

Lancashire Secular Humanists: Meetings 7.30 on 3rd Wed of month at Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High St, The Square, Great Eccleston (Nr. Preston) PR3 0YB. www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk **i** Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fyde, Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 **e** ian@ianzere.demon.co.uk

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 07598 971420. **w** www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Liverpool Humanist Group: **i** 07814 910 286

w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/

e lghumanist@googlegmail.com. Meetings on the second Wednesday of each month.

Lynn Humanists, W Norfolk & Fens: **i** Edwin Salter Tel: 07818870215.

Marches Secularists: **w** www.MarchesSecularists.org

e Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org

Mid-Wales Humanists: **i** Maureen Lofmark, 01570 422648 **e** mlofmark@btinternet.com

Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group: **i** Chris Copey, 1 Thistledown Road, Horsford NR10 3ST. Tel: 0160 3710262.

Northants Secular & Humanist Society: For information contact Ollie Killingback on 01933 389070.

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

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

North London Humanist Group: Meets third Thursday

of month (except August) 8 pm at Ruth Winston House, 190 Green Lanes, Palmers Green, N13 5UE. Plus social events. Contact Sec: 01707 653667 **e** enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk **w** www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

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

Oxford Humanists: Chair: John White, 01865 891876. **e** jdwhite@talk21.com

Peterborough Humanists: **i** Edwin Salter Tel: 07818870215.

Pink Triangle Trust: The PTT is the only registered gay charity in the UK and publishes *The Pink Humanist* (www.thepinkhumanist.com) **i** Secretary George Broadhead. Tel 01926 858 450 **e** secretary@pinktriangle.org.uk. **w** <http://www.pinktriangle.org.uk>

Scottish Humanists:

w www.ScottishHumanists.org.uk. Free membership. Charity SC042124. Next meeting Sunday, February 26. Market Inn, Ayr. 2pm. All welcome **i** 07935272723.

Sheffield Humanist Society: **i** 0114 2309754. University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield.

South East London Humanist Group (formerly Lewisham Humanist Group): **i** Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Meets on the 3rd Thursday each month at 7.70 pm at The Goose, Rushey Green, Cufford SE6.

w www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk

South Hampshire Humanists: Secretary, Richard Hogg. Tel: 02392 370689 **e** info@southhantshumanists.org.uk

w www.southhantshumanists.org.uk

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Edward Gwinell on 01935 473263 or **e** edward.gwinell@talktalk.net

South Place Ethical Society: Weekly talks/meetings, Sundays 11am at Conway Hall Brockway Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8031/4 **e** programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk. Programmes on request.

Suffolk Humanists & Secularists: 25 Haughgate Close, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1LQ. Tel: 01394 387462. Secretary: Denis Johnston.

w www.suffolkhands.org.uk **e** mail@suffolkhands.org.uk

Sutton Humanists: **i** Brian Dougherty 07913 734583. **w** www.suttonhumanists.co.uk

Watford Area Humanists: Meet on the third Tuesday of each month (except August and December) at 7.30 pm at Watford Town and Country Club, Watford. **i** 01923-252013 **e** john.dowdle@watford.humanist.org.uk **w** www.watford.humanists.org.uk

Welsh Marches Humanist Group: **i** 01568 770282 **w** www.wmhhumanists.co.uk **e** rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk. Meetings on the 2nd Tues of the month at Ludlow, Oct to June.

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

Please send your listings and events notices to barry@freethinker.co.uk or to PO Box 234, Brighton BN1 4ND. Notices must be received by the 15th of the month preceding publication.