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Assisted suicide debate gets wide coverage in Sussex

A sizeable crowd braved heavy rain last month to hear Dr Michael Irwin address a meeting of the Brighton & Hove Humanist Society on the subject of assisted suicide. His talk – entitled *Assisted Dying: What is Legal and What is Not* – received front page coverage in the Brighton *Argus*.

The paper reported that, shortly before he delivered his talk, Dr Irwin, 78, been arrested for helped a London man commit suicide.

He paid £1,500 for Raymond Cutkelvin, 58, to have a lethal dose of the sleeping aid nembutal in the Swiss clinic Dignitas.

The doctor, said the *Argus*, claims to have helped around 50 people to die during his 40-year career as a GP.

He said that many doctors help patients to die by supplying them with higher doses of diamorphine and sedatives.



Dr Michael Irwin

Mr Cutkelvin was suffering from an inoperable tumour of the pancreas and requested to be taken to the Zurich clinic with his partner Alan Rees-Cutkelvin, 57.

Dr Irwin said: "I met Raymond and gave him £1,500, around a third of the total cost needed for him to get to Dignitas. I went with him and Alan and some family, and we all had a last dinner together.

"The next morning we went to the clinic and arranged to have Raymond's favourite Motown music played so he could have his last dance with his niece to Diana Ross. It was surreal but beautiful."

Dr Irwin added: "He sat down, drank a sherry glass of nembutal and made a face because of the bitter taste. Within half an hour he was dead."

The group had travelled to Switzerland in February 2007, but were not arrested at the time. But after the story was highlighted by the media Mr Rees-Cutkelvin was arrested in July.

A furious Dr Irwin demanded that he be arrested too – and he was, shortly after.

He said: "I gave financial support, moral support and advice. I consider myself equally involved."

Dr Irwin said it is common for doctors to increase the painkillers and sedatives of patients who are dying.

He added that he could openly remember discussing the case of a Polish patient with terminal stomach cancer when he was a house physician at a North London hospital in 1956.

He would have been in his mid-twenties at the time.

He said: "In those days you could openly discuss it with the ward sister and the consultants and we agreed to keep on doubling the morphine every day."

During his career the Hove-based doctor said he helped patients in the United States and in South East Asia to die this way.

A survey of nearly 900 doctors by Professor Clive Seale from St Bartholomew's Hospital in London showed one in six

(Continued on p4)

Surfing the Internet – Islamic-style

BARRY DUKE DISCUSSES AN AMUSING NEW SEARCH ENGINE FOR MUSLIMS

Google, probably the world's best-known internet search engine, is the first port of call for vast numbers of people seeking information on the web. But the problem with Google, as far as some Muslims are concerned, is that, despite having safety filters, this search engine might provide links to sites that they feel may be morally harmful.

Reza Sardeha, a Muslim with a clear(ish) understanding of how the interweb thingie works, has tackled the problem by creating a search engine designed to act as a barrier against all "offensive" and "inappropriate" web content.

Called *I'm Halal*, Sardeha's brainchild was the result of friends complaining that sites like Google and Yahoo! were flagging up all sorts of naughty stuff.

Said Sardeha: "First of all, we have blocked all sexually explicit content. We are also in talks with imams to determine what might be considered haram and therefore be blocked."

Being a curious cove – and mischievous with

it – Dr Robert Stovold, *Freethinker* subscriber and contributor, sprang into action to test the new engine. His findings were disturbing – but, in some instances, utterly hilarious.

First, he found, somewhat surprisingly, that the *Freethinker* site is kosher, pardon, halal, as is Richard Dawkins' site. Also halal is **Religion of Peace.com** (which sets out to demonstrate that Islam is anything *but*) and **Jesus and Mo.net**, which I imagine would annoy the bejesus out of most Muslims. And, in this instance, *I'm Halal* even displays a "blasphemous" cartoon into the bargain!

Robert then did a search on "how to make a bomb". *I'm Halal* yielded several pages of hits and obliged with several more when asked to search for "how to kill infidels". One site it flagged up helpfully suggested that infidels might be slowly poisoned with faecal matter, and reported two instances of Muslims contaminating food with human faeces. In February last year, in Cardiff, Saeed Hasmi, 25, and Syed Jan Yadgari, 23, were fined £1,500 for selling food unfit for human consumption at the Italiano Pizzeria. They sold chocolate cake covered in shit.

The second case involved Behrouz Nahid-mobarekeh, who was sentenced in Dallas, Texas, to five years in jail for selling pastries sprinkled with his own dried faeces. A jury decided that his complete absence of remorse merited a harsh sentence.

Robert then tried "Bacon sandwiches". This provoked the following warning: "Oops! Your search inquiry has a haram level of 1 out of 3. This means that the results fetched by *I'm Halal* could be haram!"

"Koran is bollocks" got 2 out of 3. "But what might trigger that elusive Level 3?", Robert wondered. "If it's not bomb-making, poisoning infidels with faeces or mocking the Koran, it's got to be something far, far worse. You know, like nudity?"

Yes, the word "nudity" gets 3 stars: "Oops! Your search inquiry has a haram level of 3 out of 3! I would like to advise you to change your search terms and try again."

"Pig" has a haram level of 1, but "Jewish Pig" turns out to be OK! There's a surprise!

I'm Halal, incidentally, offers a forum which enables users to suggest improvements or ask that certain subjects be declared haram. One user didn't like the fact that a search for the word "Jew" threw up no warnings. "The word Jew should be a concern, as Muslims we don't like Jews and we don't want to do any searches on them. Please give it at least level one haram".

As one might expect, the words "gay" and "homosexual" trigger three-star alarms – something which greatly displeased another *I'm Halal* user, who declared: "Are you trying to tell me that there are no lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender Muslims? Are we haram? I don't think this site promotes community in a healthy way. By leaving out realities of life I'm afraid this site is doing more harm than good."

This infuriated some numpty called Anwar, who responded: "Homosexuality is Haram and END of Discussion. U cant question the Creator. HE said its Haram!!! There is no such thing as homosexual Muslim."

When I posted details of *I'm Halal* on the *Freethinker* blog, I predicted that readers would have a great deal of fun putting it to the test – and, boy, was I right!

The results they reported had me creased up with laughter.

Here are some anatomical words that triggered haram warnings: "foreskin", "anus", "breasts" and "nipples". "Breast-feeding" is also haram. However, "knockers" is halal – yet the very first site offered to users is headed "breasts, tits, jugs, funbags, hooters, knockers!" – and contains many lurid pictures of these parts of the female anatomy.

Certain animal and bird names trigger an alarm: "Ass", "shag" and "cock" being the most notable, but curiously "boobies" are OK. However, the phrase "great tits hunt for bats" is totally haram!

It's no surprise that anything to do with sex – including the word "sexy" – sets off loud alarm bells, so anyone planning to use *I'm Halal* to do searches on "dildo", "orgasm", "fellatio", "vibrator" or "anal beads" should return at once to Google.

"Prostitute", by the way, is totally haram, but "rent boy" is halal. Major fail there!

Oh, and "Big Bang" sets off a two-star warning. "Fanny Craddock" earns a one-star alarm, but "Dick Tracy" gets two!

Drugs and booze? "Cocaine" and "whisky" both get one-star alerts, as does "wine gums", but "marijuana" is halal.

Commented one visitor to the *Freethinker* site: "Brilliant! – 'suicide bomber' is rated 1 out of 3, but 'homosexual' gets the full 3 out of 3, reflecting a truly Islamic sense of moral priorities."

Seriously, silly things like *I'm Halal* make one wonder what sort of person would ever want to cripple him or herself with a religion as patently irrational, infantile, and downright dotty as Islam. It sure as hell beats me!



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Brazilian secularists alarmed by a 'secret' concordat signed with the Vatican

This summer it was revealed that Brazil would hold congressional hearings on a Vatican concordat it signed last November. According to Scots writer and secularist Muriel Fraser, writing in the National Secular Society's *Newsline*, the decision thwarted attempts by the Brazilian Bishops' Conference to have the agreement rushed to a vote under an emergency procedure for urgent matters of national defence.

But since Fraser reported on what many describe as a "stealth" agreement designed by the Vatican to undermine Brazil's secular status, nothing more seems to have been reported on the concordat, which was signed in 2008.

This is not entirely surprising, as secrecy has shrouded the signing of the concordat since Day One.

Brazilian journalist Alberto Dines has described the performance of the media as "a news embargo or self-censorship". He claims that the agreement was kept confidential because it violates the letter and spirit of the Federal Constitution.

Dines hosted a TV debate on the issue back in November, 2008. One panellist was Roseli Fischmann, a researcher and professor at the University of São Paulo, who said that "the secular state has the duty to preserve the rights of all, regardless of the number of people who choose certain beliefs."

He added that Brazil had a rich religious pluralism. Therefore, an international agreement with a single religion was unacceptable.

But lawyers for National Conference of Brazilian Bishops insist that the treaty was not signed with the Catholic Church but with the Holy See, which is a sovereign state. If, for historical reasons, other religions have no legal standing in Private International Law, they cannot conclude international treaties.

The concordat story began, according to Fraser, with the announcement last November that Brazil's President Luiz ("Lula") da Silva would be stopping by the Vatican "on the way to Washington". However, this turned out to be more than a courtesy call. Once there, the President was ushered into the Vatican's "Treaty Room" where he signed a concordat. The Brazilian Government at first dismissed it as an "administrative agreement". In the words of a Brazilian editor, "There were hugs, there were blessings, there were pictures – but no statement on what was dealt with between the President and the Pontiff".

Critics note that this agreement appears to be a wedge which finds pretexts to introduce a number of basic legal principles that undermine the secular state.

- The concordat imports foreign law into



Brazil's President da Silva enters a pact with the devil

Brazil by stipulating that Canon (or Church) Law be used in Catholic institutions. Because this includes Church-run social services, concordats act to impose Canon Law on both their lay employees and their clients. In Germany this is a widespread problem, particularly acute for anyone, like homosexuals or the divorced, whose private lives do not accord with Canon Law.

- The concordat also acts as a foot in the door to proselytise children in state schools. In Poland it took just 20 years for the establishment of voluntary unpaid catechism in state schools to be transformed bit by bit into lessons in Catholic doctrine which, in much of the country, has become effectively compulsory, is now paid for by the state and even counts in the grade average.

- The agreement commits Brazil to huge

payments to the Vatican. It obligates the Brazilian taxpayer to subsidise Church schools, to underwrite Catholic charities and to maintain Church buildings. At the same time it grants the Catholic Church unspecified tax immunity and even certain exemptions from Brazilian labour laws which could be expanded. In Germany the Church maintains quite explicitly that under God's roof there is no fundamental contradiction between the interests of the employer and employees. Therefore there are virtually no wage agreements with unions, and, of course, no right to strike.

- The Brazilian concordat ends with the infamous clause that any differences regarding it "are to be settled by direct diplomatic negotiations". This sounds innocent, but it is not. It means that there's no appeal to the Constitution and no redress through Brazilian courts. Brazil would have to negotiate with the Vatican and seek its agreement.

One country actually tried this. In 2006 a Hungarian cabinet minister went to the Vatican to try to renegotiate the Finance Concordat. There he found that no one had time to talk to him. This is precisely why concordats customarily snap shut with the "mousetrap clause".

Wrote Fraser: "It's not known how the Vatican managed to get the Brazilian President to sign this stealth concordat. 'Lula' was a union organiser who bravely stood up to the former military dictatorship. This man of action may be simply unable to recognise a creeping dictatorship which is brought about by documents, not guns."

Darwin film is too hot for US audiences to handle

A BRITISH film about Charles Darwin, played by Paul Bettany (pictured on page 1) has failed to secure a US distributor because the theory of evolution is considered too controversial for American audiences, according to a *Telegraph* report last month

Creation, starring Paul Bettany, details Darwin's "struggle between faith and reason" as he wrote *On The Origin of Species*. It depicts him as a man who loses faith in God following the death of his beloved 10-year-old daughter, Annie.

The film was chosen to open the Toronto Film Festival and premiered in the UK in September. It has been sold in almost every territory around the world, from Australia to Scandinavia.

According to a Gallup poll conducted in February, only 39 per cent of Americans believe in the theory of evolution.

Movieguide.org, an influential website that reviews films from a Christian perspective, describes Darwin as the father of eugenics and denounces him as: "A racist, a bigot and an 1800s naturalist whose legacy is mass murder", and claims that his "half-baked theory" directly influenced Adolf Hitler and led to "atrocities, crimes against humanity, cloning and genetic engineering."



Assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia

Continued from page 1

people who are dying are given “terminal sedation” – meaning they are given so many painkillers and sedatives they die.

Figures also revealed an estimated 1,000 people make a secret arrangement with their doctors to be given a lethal injection – and 2,000 are given one without their consent.

Dr Irwin said: “It’s a total hypocrisy – if people have money they can pay to go abroad and have it done legally. The nembutal kills them over the space of half an hour.

“If they don’t have money doctors give them a liberal amount of painkillers and sedatives and they die over the course of weeks.

“Most people in hospital die that way and there are no inquests into those kinds of deaths.”

Dr Irwin was struck off the medical register by the General Medical Council in 2005 after he admitted a willingness to supply his former friend Patrick Kneen with the necessary sleeping pills to help him die.

Mr Kneen never took the pills as he slipped into a coma before Dr Irwin could “treat” him but the GMC still found him guilty of serious professional misconduct and said his actions were irresponsible.

Dr Irwin said he has no regrets about what happened.

He said: “I’m just sorry for Patrick that we got there too late.”

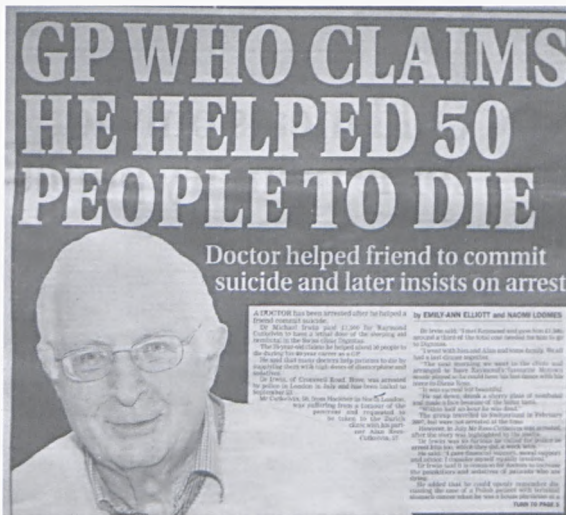
When he was arrested over Mr Cutkelvin’s death he went to police with no lawyer and handed over his bank statement showing the direct transaction from his account to Dignitas.

Adding: “I have nothing to hide – I want to make this a big issue.”

Following its front-page coverage of the story, *The Argus* carried a full-page article written by Dr Irwin in which he appealed for people to “personalise” the issue of assisted dying.

“It is essential to personalise the subject. Many of us will have seen relatives and friends die slowly and perhaps in great discomfort. If we had a terminal illness, would we like the possibility of legalised doctor-assisted suicide or voluntary euthanasia? If the answer is ‘yes’, then we should support a change in the law. After all, are we so different from the Belgians, Dutch, Swiss or those who live in Luxembourg, Oregon and Washington?

The *Argus*’ treatment of the subject was extremely well-balanced – for which it re-



The Argus front page featuring Dr Irwin

ceived a written pat on the back from Brighton & Hove Humanist Society member, Dr Robert Stovold.

A letter he had published in the paper read: “Hats off to the *Argus* for its prominent coverage of Dr Michael Irwin and the important but taboo subject of assisted suicide.

“One objection to assisted suicide is religious and stems from the idea that life, being God-given, is of infinite worth. Because a few seconds of life are of infinite worth, nothing must be done to hasten death.

“However, from exactly the same starting assumption we can calculate that a short life and a long one must both be of infinite worth – which implies a shortened life has no less value than a long one. “Many people believe only religion can offer us ultimate answers.

“They are correct – ultimately useless answers.”

In the same week that Dr Irwin addressed his Brighton audience, it was widely reported that Lord Phillips, President of the newly-established Supreme Court, said he sympathised with those who resort to as-

The Case for Socialist-Republicanism

THE Freethought History and Research Group, in association with South Place Ethical Society, is sponsoring a talk by Steve Freeman, former Vice-Chair of Republic, who will present *The Case for Socialist Republicanism* in the Brockway Room of the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1, at 3pm on October 11. Entrance is free,

sisted suicide when they face a painful and lingering death.

He added that it was a “very difficult area” for the law to deal with.

“I have enormous sympathy with anyone who finds themselves facing a quite hideous termination of their life as a result of one of these horrible diseases, in deciding they would prefer to end their life more swiftly and avoid that [prolonged] death as well as avoiding the pain and distress that might cause their relatives,” he told the *Daily Telegraph*.

Phillips acknowledged that the “strongly held beliefs” of different groups would inevitably cause clashes.

“I don’t believe it’s possible to say one view is right and the other wrong,” he said, adding that he doubted a change in the law to allow assisted suicide would do anything to bring a “more satisfactory answer”.

In July, Phillips, then the senior law lord, ruled that the Director of Public Prosecutions, Keir Starmer, must clarify the law on assisted suicide after Debbie Purdy, who has multiple sclerosis, went to the courts seeking assurances that her husband will not be prosecuted if he helps her go to a Swiss clinic to die.

Phillips insisted that the law lords’ ruling had been about the right of relatives to have clearer guidance, rather than whether assisted suicide was good or bad.

Campaigners want the law to include explicit permission for assisted suicides. David Winnick, a Labour backbencher, has said he will attempt to introduce a private member’s bill to change the rules.

The Royal College of Nursing has become the first major medical institution to withdraw its opposition to assisted dying, saying it is now “neutral” on the issue.

In a unanimous ruling in July, five law lords backed a call by Purdy for the DPP to draw up a policy spelling out when prosecutions would and would not be pursued. It is the first time the DPP has been asked by the courts to outline the circumstances under which he would prosecute.

The guidance will not remove the offence of assisted suicide under the Suicide Act 1961 but make the situation clearer for people who help relatives to die in “compassionate” circumstances.

• Keir Starmer’s guidelines were published the day the *Freethinker* went to press, and will be examined in detail in the November issue.

Tony Blair 'profoundly wrong' to portray religion as a peacemaking tool

Tony Blair's claim that religion can bring peace and prosperity to the world was challenged as "profoundly wrong and counterproductive" last month by the President of the National Secular Society, Terry Sanderson.

The former UK Prime Minister said in a speech that religions must learn to respect each other in order to make the world a safer and fairer place for all.

Speaking at the Royal Society for the Arts in London, Blair admitted that religion has a dark side, and in recent years many had fallen under the influence of extremism. "Even a short stay in Israel and Palestine, where I now spend a lot of my time, would show you that, all too graphically," he told the seminar, which was attended by the usual gaggle of "faith leaders" and some development workers.

"But this, in a sense, is the dark side of strong belief," he said. "People who hold deep convictions about life and its purpose necessarily can be prone to holding those views to excess or the point of prejudice. That danger is inherent in faith."

He also said it was not enough any more to speak of tolerating other religions. "Though we may disagree with those of another faith, though we hold true to our own faith, we should not have the arrogance merely to tolerate a person whose faith is different; but instead respect them as equals."



Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "Tony Blair is on entirely the wrong path if he truly wants the world to progress to peace and prosperity. This obsession with 'faith' has clouded his judgment and brought his reputation to its knees – as well as bringing death and destruction on a major scale to the people of Iraq.

"This idea that religion – if it can settle its differences – has the capacity to save the world is an utter fantasy and completely contradicted by history. Religions have never been able to settle their differences and they never will.

"For every small truce declared by well-meaning people promoting 'inter-faith dialogue' there are a dozen lethal religious conflagrations burning.

"The very nature of religion means that those that fundamentally disagree about what constitutes 'the truth' must always be at war. By constantly promoting the possibility of religion being a force for positive change, Blair stands in the way of the very progress he so obviously desires. It is only by looking at other ways to live together that don't involve religion that we are likely to be able to stop this crazy conflict over 'faith'.

"Tony Blair should be using his influence to promote a secular solution, not encouraging people to put even more emphasis on the religion that causes them to hate each other so intensely."

'If you kill an abortionist or a homosexual, it's not murder', says deranged US pastor

PASTOR Steven L Anderson, founder of the Faithful Word Baptist Church in Tempe, Arizona, said in a recent radio interview that if anyone killed President Obama, or an abortionist or a homosexual, he or she should not be indicted for murder.

Interviewed on the Michelangelo Signorile radio show, Anderson says he would not condemn anyone who killed the President.

"Such a killer would be a vigilante, but not a murderer," he said. He said he also would not condemn Scott Roeder, who recently gunned down abortionist Dr George Tiller, because, according to the pastor, Tiller had "murdered thousands of new-born babies."

Anderson went on to say that he wanted all gay people to be executed "because that's what the Bible teaches".

When the interviewer informed Anderson that he himself was gay, the pastor said: "If you're a homosexual I hope you get brain cancer like Ted Kennedy."

Muslims launch further attacks on Pakistan Christians

IN the latest attack on a Christian community in the Punjab region of Pakistan, a church was attacked and set on fire, Christian protesters baton-charged and fired upon by police, and a young man arrested for blasphemy subsequently died of extensive injuries while in custody. Police claim that he hanged himself.

The incident on September 11 occurred a month after the horrific attacks in Gojra and Korian, which resulted in the death of eight Christians. The pretext for the latest attack was again allegations of blasphemy.

The latest attack took place in the town of Samberial. The church was attacked by local Muslims and set on fire. According to local sources the catalyst was a relationship between a 20-year-old Christian, Falish Masih, and a Muslim girl.

He was accused of desecrating her copy of the Koran.

The Director of Pakistan's Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), Joseph Francis, who arrived as events unfolded, believes the allegations are false. "Our information is that this is an orchestrated attempt by the family of the Muslim girl to discredit the young Christian man and to get him arrested", he said.

"This is another example of allegations of blasphemy and misuse of the Blasphemy Law being used to attack the Christian community", Francis continued. As Christians gathered to protest against the attack on the church, police dispersed the crowd with batons and live ammunition.

Later in the day the young man at the centre of the incident was arrested under section 295-B of the Blasphemy Law, which allows arrest without warrant and carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

The situation in Samberial remained tense after the attacks, and most Christians living in the town have fled the area.

CLAAS UK Co-ordinator Nasir Saeed commented: "The source of much of the Christian community's suffering is the Blasphemy Law. Our aim now is to bring renewed pressure on the government of Pakistan and the international community for the repeal of this unjust law."

Scrutinising the

A GAY JESUS? NOT PLAUSIBLE, ARGUE

As a heterosexual who views sexual preference as analogous to preferring tennis to golf, I have no self-serving reason for wanting Christianity's junior god, Jesus, to be gay. But I would be delighted if a competent scholar could provide plausible evidence that he really was. Such a finding would not be to Jesus' discredit, any more than being a hunchbacked dwarf is to his discredit¹, since neither reality has anything to do with morality.

But it would pull the rug out from under the homophobes of the Christian Taliban who habitually denounce the ten percent of the human race who are gay for obeying Jesus' order to "be like me".

Arguments for a gay Jesus are not new. But in recent times, virtually all claims that Jesus was gay tend to be based on Morton Smith's *The Secret Gospel*, an allegedly newly-discovered excerpt from the gospel called Mark that, if genuine, would strongly endorse the "gay Jesus" hypothesis. In fact, persons who continue to quote Smith's imaginative fantasy either have not read *The Gospel Hoax* by Stephen Carlson, or are impervious to falsifying evidence.

What Carlson proves beyond a reasonable doubt is that Smith not only concocted his pretended gospel to demonstrate how much cleverer he was than the scholars who denigrated him; he also salted it with proofs that it was his own invention, proofs that he knew would eventually be discovered and, once discovered, would be impossible to reject as coincidence.

Smith did not pull his hypothesis that Jesus shared his orientation out of the woodwork. Jesus' sexuality had long been the subject of considerable speculation. A Jew's obligation to marry young and breed more Jews was spelled out in the Talmud: Elohiym utters a curse against those who remain celibate after they are 20 years of age. Those who marry at 16 please him, and those who do so at 14 even more (Kidd. 29b).

Yet despite the tremendous social pressure to marry, Jesus appears to have reached the age of at least 30 without ever acquiring a wife. For an ordinary Essene, planning on leaving the secular wing to join the Qumran monks, such behavior would have been

understandable. But in the first place Jesus remained a secular carpenter long after he would have departed for the monastery had such been his intention; and in the second place, his belief in his messiahship also necessarily involved the belief that he must found a dynasty.

The most commonly postulated explanation for Jesus' unmarried state, endorsed by a bishop of Oxford, was that he was homosexual. The rationale for such a position was that he allegedly travelled with 12 men, that he referred to himself as a bridegroom and his students as sons of the bridal chamber (Luke 5:34), that among the twelve was one, the student whom Jesus loved (John 21:20)² whom he encouraged to lean on his breast at supper, and that in Matthew 26:50 Jesus addressed Judas as *heraire*, a word that commonly denoted a hired catamite. In fact the homosexual thesis does not survive examination.

Jesus lived at a time when, thanks to the priestly author of 621-612 BCE, homosexuality ranked as a grade-A capital sin. While Jesus' claim, recorded in the Gospel of the Hebrews, that in a society that recognized hundreds of victimless sins he had never sinned, need not be taken seriously, the suggestion that he indulged in a capital crime that he could not have kept hidden is untenable.

No Jew would have followed a spokesman who was a known sinner. Since Jesus was constantly surrounded by his chief disciples, it follows that he could not have been homosexual without their knowledge. And since no man of more orthodox leaning would have remained with men whom he viewed as perverted and doomed to Gehenna, it follows that if Jesus was homosexual, then so were all of his apprentices.

It is here that the impossibility of keeping such a situation secret is most apparent. Jesus toured Galilee with his salvation show for several weeks, playing to capacity houses and winning a province-wide reputation as a spokesman. The slightest suspicion of deviant behavior would have ruined him. The claim that a company of touring homosexuals could have remained undetected on the road in a totally intolerant society is untenable.

Christianity teaches that Jesus emulated

Oedipus. After all, if Jesus=God=Holy Spirit, and Jesus' mother was impregnated by the Holy Spirit, then clearly Jesus tugged his mother. But since Paul of Tarsus did not turn Jesus into a Christian until 20 years after his death, and the precursors of Athanasius did not invent the Christian triple-god for more than a century after that, attaching any credibility whatsoever to Christian fairy tales would be plain dumb. If Jesus was indeed a motherfu..., it was only in a metaphorical sense.

That Jesus was a practising heterosexual is more probable. Certainly he was in no position to commit adultery (impregnating

What's new

Now the birth of Amenhotep was on this wise: When a messenger came from on high unto the virgin Mutemua, he said that she would conceive in her womb and bear a child who would be great in the land. And the Holy Spirit, Kneph, came upon her and in due time she brought forth a son as the messenger had foretold ...

And Maia brought forth Hermes and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger ...

And there came wise men unto the birth-



Indra was crucified

sex life of Jesus

E, ARGUES **WILLIAM HARWOOD**

a fellow Jew's wife) or fornication (copulating sacramentally with a fertility goddess's nun) even if he had wanted to do so. But there was no Levitical law or cultural taboo to prevent him from accepting the services of the Jewish prostitutes who featured prominently among his camp followers. He would have been aware that he could not sin without being forced into an early retirement. But tugging a Magdalene, a common commercial prostitute, was not a sin and did not become a sin until long after Jesus' death.

There is no doubt that Jesus preached celibacy. As an Essene, even a renegade

Essene, he was bound to do so. But so did Rasputin. Had a lifetime of celibacy been possible, Jesus may have accepted it as readily as any other fanatic. Since, for a messiah destined to found a royal dynasty, it was not, he would have seen no virtue in delaying recreation to which he was predestined.

His Essene upbringing no doubt caused him to view recreational tugging as an imperfection at best; but as he did not abstain from the imperfection of immoderate eating and drinking (Mat 11:19), it would have been somewhat inconsistent for him to have abstained from the even more satisfying imperfection of copulating, especially

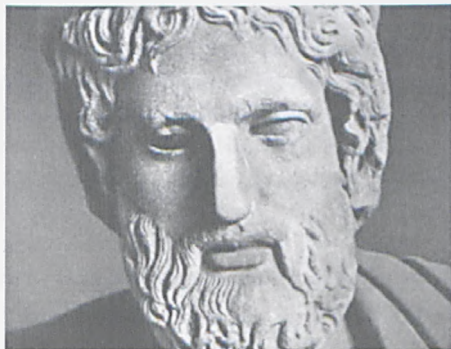
as the Magdalenes in his company would not have charged him. That he rejected at least part of the Essene Rule is evident from his attitude toward hand washing (Mat 15:20). In the absence of evidence that Jesus lacked normal human needs, it must be assumed that such perquisites of his big-frog-in-a-small-pond status as came his way he accepted with thanks.

References:

- 1 *God, Jesus and the Bible* (World Audience, in press) page 259.
- 2 Biblical quotations are from *The Fully Translated Bible*, Booksurge, 2007.

ew, pussycat?

by **NEIL BLEWITT**



Aesculapius: raised the dead

place of Buddha for they had seen his star rise and they presented unto him gifts ...

And shepherds came to adore the new-born Mithra and offered him first-fruits ...

And evil spirits sought the life of Zoroaster; and his mother, Dukdaub, being warned of the danger by the god Ormuzd, fled with her new-born son into another land ...

And Pan took Jupiter to the top of an exceeding high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, tempting him ...

And the first miracle that Baucis and Philemon saw was at the feast they prepared for a stranger who called on them. They placed a pitcher filled with wine on the table but as fast as the liquid was poured out so it renewed itself. And their eyes were opened and they knew that they were in the presence of a god ...

And Thoth applied his spittle to the eyes of

a blind man and so restored his sight ...

And Poseidon strode over the surface of the sea, the ruler of the realm of the billows ...

And Triton, his son, rebuked a tempest and there was immediately a great calm on the sea ...

And Krishna laid his hand on the widow's dead son and said unto him: "Arise!" And straightway he arose and Krishna restored him whole to his mother ...

And the Prince of Bakhtar pleaded with Khons to rid his daughter of a devil which had tormented her for many years. And Khons drove the devil out ...

And Dionysus went into the desert with his followers and they wanted for neither food nor drink while they were there, for corn, oil and wine were wondrously produced ...

And Aesculapius performed many miracles of healing grievously sick persons who were brought to him. He also raised the dead to life ...

And Dionysus rode on an ass, with a second beast in attendance, to the temple of Dodona ...

And Indra, the Saviour, was crucified and, lest there should be those who doubted, images were made of the body showing where the nails had pierced his hands and feet ...

And at the death of Quetzalcoatl there was darkness over all the land ...

And Attis was slain and buried but rose again from the dead after three days ...

And Hercules went to the top of a mountain and lay down on his funeral pyre which



Amenhotep: born of a virgin

was ignited by a thunderbolt. Though consumed by the flames his body rose from the pyre whole, and a cloud descended and took him from the sight of men to be reunited with his father in the skies ...

And after Osiris died, he ascended to the Land of the Blessed where he judged the souls of the dead who came before him. The righteous passed into eternal happiness but the wicked were delivered into the clutches of a monster, there to be devoured ...

And, in Ecclesiastes, the Preacher says: "And that which is to be hath already been."

Which is, being interpreted, "What's new, pussy-cat?"

ANALYSIS

Honest serving men

John Radford adds his thoughts to the Religion v Science debate

I KEEP six honest serving-men / (They taught me all I knew) / Their names are What and Why and When / And How and Where and Who.

Kipling should have written “all I know”, but that would not have rhymed (in his day poems rhymed, and scanned). Religious apologists, in their wrangles with science, are fond of singling out two of the men. Science, they say, tells us how, but only religion can tell us why.

My first objection to this is that I do not regard either science or religion as an agent. Neither tells us anything. It is scientists and religious people who tell us things. Each group consists of individuals who vary widely. And they overlap: some people belong to both. However, scientists are probably more homogeneous than the religious. There is broad consistency among scientists about methods and findings, whereas the religious notoriously disagree.

A second objection is that the religious view of science often seems to refer to particular disciplines, especially the physical sciences. Science to me is not a set of facts. Rather it is an approach to understanding, which seeks as far as possible to be objective, rational, empirical (based on observation), and preferably experimental (systematically testing hypotheses). This approach can be applied to any problem or any phenomenon, although with varying degrees of difficulty. Religion I consider as a polythetic concept. There are various characteristics such that the label “religion” is appropriate if several are present. One that is perhaps always found in some form, is the conviction of contact with some “other reality”, though this is again very variously defined, from god or gods to a non-personal state of consciousness beyond normal life. “Religion tells us why” means that some people offer explanations of a religious nature, which may vary considerably. What the “how versus why” proponents

generally seem to mean by religion is monotheism, usually Christianity (itself a very mixed bag, of course). The monotheist answer to why the universe exists is that it was created by God. That is not the answer of many other religions. For Hindus and Buddhists the universe has always existed, and for Buddhists there is no personal god.

“Science tells us how” means that scientists give, as far as they can, an accurate account of what occurs. But that is not all they do. They also seek to give explanations, that is, why things occur as they do. Very many scientists would say, I think, that they are answering “why” questions. In my view, “science” means any enquiry insofar as it follows the general principles I have mentioned. Historians, for example, strive to be objective, are certainly empirical, and can do experiments in a sense, by stating what could be expected to have been the case given an actual outcome (or *vice versa*), and then searching to see if this was so. They then seek to say why it happened. Henry VIII’s desire to be free of papal control, and to possess the wealth of the Church, tell us why he dissolved the monasteries (though there is more to it). The presence of a particular bacterium tells us why a

patient is ill (again more factors come into it, such as the individual’s susceptibility and so on). Scientific method has provided many “why” answers, though perhaps only a fraction of those still to be found.

This is where the religious person steps in, claiming, for example, that there is no scientific answer to why the universe exists. The current “Big Bang” story tells us how, not why. To this there are at least two answers. One is that indeed science has still far to go, though we understand vastly more than we did (while the religious answer seems to have remained more or less stationary). Another is that this may be a question that does not require a “why” answer. There is no logical reason to think that existence is less likely than non-existence: maybe the universe just does exist (as God is supposed to).

A more sophisticated version is offered by the religious philosopher Richard Swinburne, and others. He argues that there are two sorts of explanation. One is scientific, or “inanimate”, that is, essentially, stating the conditions under which a phenomenon occurs, and showing that they did occur in the particular case. The other is personal, that is, that the event is caused by a rational agent.



An extract from True Belief Comics

An analogy (mine) might be why a snooker ball goes into the pocket. The inanimate answer is that it responds to the impact of the cue, or another ball, according to the principles of physics. The personal answer is that the player decides on a shot and how to make it. In fact, the nature of explanation, and particularly scientific explanation, is much more complex than this. But one can agree that both these can be appropriate in some cases. The bacterium case above is the first, Henry VIII's case is the second. But it is false to equate this with "scientific vs non-scientific", at least in my view of science. Both inanimate and personal explanations can be either scientific or unscientific. The supposed efficacy of prayer is an unscientific personal explanation of a cure. The once standard method of blood-letting relied on an unscientific inanimate explanation. A personal explanation need not be rational, it could be the action of a madman. "Rational" is presumably specified in order that God can be invoked. It would not do to suggest that God is mad, or even highly capricious, though this would actually make better sense of some events such as natural disasters. (Classical Greek polytheism readily accommodated such wilful or malicious divine actions.) As it is, convoluted arguments have to be produced to show that arbitrary disasters are consistent with a rational (and all-good and all-powerful) being.

It is often not easy to say which sort of explanation is appropriate; or both may be. A scientific account can often not state all the conditions, but only the general principles. Thus viruses certainly cause influenza, but why does X get it when Y, in the same house and similar in age, health etc, does not? The scientific method would enquire further into individual differences in susceptibility and behaviour. A personal explanation on the other hand may be magical: someone has put a curse on X, and a witch-doctor must be sought to detect the culprit and counteract the spell. (Which is quite rational, if you believe in witches.) This (it seems to me) merges into religious explanation. God visited Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans in response to abortion, or homosexuality, or the United States' presence in Iraq, or its urging Israel to leave Gaza, etc (all found on the internet, though not necessarily the same god in each case).

Swinburne argues that there are some things science cannot explain, even in principle, such as consciousness, or the basic laws of physics (apparently because they are respectively too strange and too all-pervasive).



One might say, rather than How or Why, we must ask Who? This for him is the ultimate explanation, when the person is God. And it must be, he says, because a simpler explanation is better than a more complex one, and the simplest you can get is a single agent that is eternal, unembodied, omnipotent, omniscient and all-benevolent.

One could suggest that even simpler would be no agent at all. And, as others have pointed out, it is extremely difficult to see how God can be a person and yet of the utmost simplicity. Personhood is intrinsically complex – acuter feelings, more knowledge, wisdom, intelligence and so on. Complete knowledge cannot be simpler than partial, any more than advanced mathematics is simpler than the two times table. Further, though it is generally desirable for explanations to be simpler, that is not sufficient for preferring them. Scientific explanations are selected on grounds not only of simplicity but also, and essentially, of predictive power combined with refutability. The god theory is not predictive, because God can by definition do anything at all. As Karl Popper pointed out, a concept that "explains" everything, explains nothing. If there were an entity that caused everything, then of course it would be the cause of everything. And there is no way to refute it. Whatever the phenomenon, it is caused by God. There is no alternative to test it against. Further, there is no evidence that God is involved, other than the events for which he is supposedly responsible. God is simply added, because he seems to Swinburne "the best stopping point". To be fair, he does argue that the existence of God is "highly probable" on various grounds, too



detailed to discuss here. He argues further that "science" can only explain by reference to natural laws, and thus cannot say why there are such laws. They must be created by some agent. And that must be a particular god.

As A C Grayling puts it, "we don't know who did it, so it must be Fred". But natural laws are descriptive, not prescriptive. They are not created by a law-giver, but merely systematise the observed regularities of nature. To say that someone must have ordained such regularities is a version of the hoary old argument from design. This has been endlessly debated, but it is pointed out in particular, first that "design" is a human judgment, not a given, and second that we can only rightly make it when we already have justification for it.

In William Paley's famous "watchmaker" example, we could infer a maker when finding a watch only because we already know how watches come to be. Someone with no knowledge of marine life might suppose that an intricate sea-shell was made by someone (which of course is what "Intelligent Design" fans do).

Personally, although they are fascinating questions, I don't know the cause of the universe, or how many universes there are or will be, or whether there is a cause at all, and I don't think anyone does. I am confident, though, that the only way to find out is to keep asking why and how and who, and indeed what and where and when, and to do so appropriately. Stopping short at an imagined creator will not help.

Kipling's men serve us very well, we need them all and doubtless always will.

Mary Whitehouse: still reaching out (feebly) from beyond the grave

LINDA VAN DAM discovers that the self-appointed Nanny to the Nation is not entirely forgotten – and that life with the snobbish clean-up campaigner was no bed of roses for her family

Almost eight years have elapsed since professional prodnose, Mary Whitehouse, upped and joined the Choir Invisible at the age of 91.

Known by many as Scary Frightmouse, the former sex education teacher at Madeley Modern School in Shropshire in the early 1960s, gained notoriety as founder and first President of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association. The NVLA changed its name to Mediawatch-UK in 2001 – the year that she died – and has since been headed by Whitehouse devotee, John Beyer, whose total absence of charisma has taken the organisation to the brink of extinction.

For unlike Mary Whitehouse, CBE, who had the media truly under her spell, Beyer's prissy squeaks have largely been ignored by the press. But he has had some brief moments in the spotlight, thus managing to keep the memory of his heroine more or less alive.

Earlier this year, the whingeing little smut-hunter got a brief mention in the London *Evening Standard* when he complained bitterly that his idol had been "besmirched" by acclaimed portrait artist Jonathan Yeo. Yeo had created a joint portrait of virginal Christian singer Sir Cliff Richard and Whitehouse out of pornographic cuttings from mucky magazines. From a distance, the collage looks harmless. Even benign. But up close one can see intimate body parts and various sexual poses.

The 42cm-square portrait went on display with a price tag of £25,000 at a new West End gallery in May.

The artist, Jonathan Yeo, told the *Standard* that he had chosen Whitehouse because he "always had a problem with her". Sir Cliff was targeted because "anybody who has lived in apparent abstinence deserves a bit of ribbing".

Yeo, 39, added: "If Mary Whitehouse was still around I hope she would treat this picture as an insult. She equated nudity, bad language and violence as if they were all equally dangerous." He thought, however, that "Cliff will have a sense of humour about it."

Beyer was definitely not amused. "To have her memory besmirched is contemptible and passé. He needs to grow up."

he huffed.

What grabbed my attention was a five-word quote from Whitehouse's son Richard. "It is quite witty really."

Whitehouse had a son with a sense of humour? Indeed, she had five boys – two of whom, twins, died in infancy.

So what was it like to have Mary Whitehouse for a mother? In May 2008, on the eve of a BBC TV drama about the infamous bigot, her youngest son Chris launched an astonishing attack on the mother he didn't speak to for 15 years.

According to the *Daily Mail* writer Helen Weathers, the two hadn't spoken to each other following Chris's 1983 arrest for cannabis possession – and he was stunned to discover shortly before she died that age had not mellowed her. "She was 91 years old, but she was still convinced she could make a difference, she still thought that all

'It seemed bizarre to me that she was going against everything that was happening in the world'

of society's ills could be undone and that we could return to this forgotten, golden time which ceased to exist long ago."

"To me, it all seemed so pointless. She was so frail, but she could still spit feathers. She remained fixated on the morals of the nation. She was still reading the papers, watching the news, bubbling and absolutely focused. She didn't really relate to me at all. It was a very difficult, one-sided last conversation."

Although she and Chris, now 62, were reconciled before her death, Chris still hadn't quite come to terms with the conflicting emotions she still has the power to arouse in him.

Certainly, in the years before her death, he tried to put as much distance as possible between himself and the steely, helmet-haired crusader with the thick-rimmed

glasses, whose 30-year Clean Up TV campaign – launched in 1964 when Chris was 17 – attracted as much ridicule from the left as it did admiration from her fans.

A part-time lecturer in mental health issues at Wolverhampton University, Chris now believes his mother's obsession with morality was part swansong for an older generation yearning for more orthodox times and part fear over the effect the Swinging Sixties were having on her youngest son.

"It was only recently that I read some of my mother's diaries, in which she seems to be particularly worried about my moral health. And yet when I was 16, I feel she cast me adrift. We had never seen eye to eye.

"I realised from an early age that my mother's moral view of the world did not match mine. She resisted change, but I was a baby-boomer, a product of the 60s. I found it exciting.

"I was a typical young man of that age. I was interested in poverty, the Vietnam War, world issues – and I just couldn't relate to my mother's narrow view of the world and desire to cling onto values from an past age.

"It seemed bizarre to me that she was going against everything that was happening in the world."

Growing up in Wolverhampton, Chris was aware from an early age that his mother was deeply religious.

She'd met his father Ernest at a Christian meeting and theirs was a marriage based on shared traditional values.

Although older brother Richard recalls a fun, easy-going mother who was so relaxed she ignored neighbours' complaints when they saw the Whitehouse boys larking about naked on a first floor balcony at their home, Chris appears to have found the atmosphere at home oppressive.

"If you were to ask all of us what it was like growing up in our family, I don't think you'd get a consensus," says Chris.

"I think I found it much harder to be in that family than my two older brothers, who as children at least absorbed my parents' views much more easily. I questioned everything."

His mother's deeply Christian world view took on a whole new expression



Chris Whitehouse, photographed when he was young

when she returned to work as an art teacher at secondary school, when Chris had just entered his teens.

There, she was asked to take on the responsibility of sex education and became increasingly concerned about the “corrupting” messages influencing the young through the medium of television. This concern quickly converted into a messianic zeal.

Is it a coincidence that it was at this time that Chris started to go off the rails? “I was a bright boy, but at school my work started to suffer because I wasn’t interested.

“My parents became increasingly worried about my moral welfare and these New Age influences.”

He pauses, before adding: “But whereas my mother thought kitchen-sink dramas were a corrupting influence, I thought they were a revelation. I wanted to watch them, I wanted to know about what was really happening in the world. We just never saw eye to eye and it felt very tense being in the family. It affected all of us in different ways.

“The more hostile I became towards my parents, the more hostile my older brother Paul became towards me – we still don’t really talk to this day, so I don’t know why or what I did to annoy him, because it was my parents I had an issue with.

“In the end, I felt cast adrift. It soon became obvious that I wasn’t going to pass any O-levels at my school if I continued there, so at 15 they packed me off to a boarding school in Wales where I managed to scrape one O-level. At 16 I left school and never went home.

Chris fully indulged in what was described at the time as a free-living, bohemian lifestyle, never settling into any one job for long and dabbling with soft drugs. In the 1970s he ran a pop group called Faith Healer for a while, and worked as a

financial journalist and an antiques restorer.

When Chris did return home to visit his family, nothing made him want to rebuild their relationship.

After the launch of the Clean Up TV Campaign, his mother was suddenly a huge public figure, having taken on the director of the BBC, Sir Hugh Carleton Greene, whom she blamed for opening up the sluice gates to “a tide of filth”.

Coachloads of supporters would turn up to rallies, wildly applauding Mary Whitehouse as she took to the podium and attacked the permissive TV she passionately believed was damaging the nation’s morals.

All of which Chris found extremely embarrassing, to the point where he would pretend he was no relation when people stopped him in the street.

“I don’t think any of us was particularly surprised with the direction she’d taken or the topics she chose to attack, because it was completely in keeping with what she and people of her generation believed in, and clearly there was some part of her that wanted to be famous,” said Chris.

“She never discussed it with us, or the effect it might have on our lives. The worst thing was when people – realising I was her son – would rush up to me in the street gushing “Your mother is doing such a wonderful job.”

“I felt that after the campaign started she, figuratively speaking, disappeared from the family, and yet we were drawn into her public life without any consultation.

“All her energies were elsewhere. As a result, she became extremely worried about the effect I, as her son, might have on her public image and the way she presented her own family. We were all aware that she was very sensitive to any form of embarrassment.”

Chris’s estrangement from the family

came in the mid-eighties, a year or so after he received a suspended prison sentence in 1983 for possessing cannabis.

Mary Whitehouse never quite recovered from the embarrassment. At the time, both she and her son tried to play down the family rift looming. In a statement Mary said: “Christopher is our much-loved son and we are standing by him.”

Chris, meanwhile, insisted he was his mother’s number one fan. “Quite simply, she’s the best mum in the world and I’m very proud of her and the fight she’s engaged in. I accept her view totally,” he said at the time.

Today, however, he is more frank. After the cannabis conviction, the already strained relationship worsened and they simply stopped talking – an arrangement which appeared to suit both of them.

“When I got busted for cannabis possession, it was just the end for her really. It brought together all her fears. She was very aware of her image, but if you are going to set yourself up as a public figure then you are going to have to take the rough with the smooth.

“There are going to be consequences, accidental or not, and her decision to become a public figure was made without consulting us.”

While his older brothers married and had children, free-spirited Chris never settled down.

Although he and Paul no longer talk, Chris has stayed friendly with Richard, who remembers his mother as being warm and fun-loving when he was child, but admits that her becoming a campaigner took its toll on the whole family.

“My mother was extremely charismatic and very good with people. She was incredibly popular with people who knew her on a personal level. She was always well-dressed and wasn’t this fuddy duddy as she was often portrayed.

“But there were also times when she could be very difficult to talk to and it could be tense. We had no say in her crusade, and as an artist who believes in self-expression, I found it very hard at times to agree with her views.

“But she was a committed Christian and believed society could and should be based on those values. The worst part of her campaign was how mentally exhausting it was for her. Sometimes she would be in complete mental collapse, to the point where she lost her memory.

“She found gardening very relaxing at those times. In later years, of course, we tried to persuade her to give up, but she wouldn’t listen.”

The later years of Mary’s life were in-

(Continued on p13)

The Six Ways of Atheism

Barry Thorpe reviews a book published earlier this year by Geoffrey Berg

The introduction, a kind of pre-capitulation, summarises the six arguments, beginning with definitions of a monotheistic god, including, but dismissing, modern ones such as “God is the ultimate reality” which try to avoid the contradictions of the traditional views of God.

In what follows I bring up some points I found troubling in the author’s presentation.

Mr Berg does not mention the possibility of the creator god of the Deists without a personal interest in its creatures, but goes on to accept for the purposes of his argument the standard 3 x O God (omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent) who is supremely good and our purpose-giver.

Berg then asks how hugely improbable it is that an already improbable omnipotent being is also all-good. Is it necessary for a 3 x O god to be all-good? (more on this below).

Next he appears to throw away an argument when he says:

However I am not convinced that immutability need in fact be an essential characteristic of God ... and then appears to be saying that the changeable universe disproves God’s immutability, so this line of argumentation that God’s essential qualities conflict with each other ... is as I see it not validated in practice and so is not logically proved ... which does not sit easily with the claim of strict logic in the approach.

Finally in this section Berg argues that omniscience is *inherently impossible primarily because there is no possible means of being certain of one’s own omniscience especially regarding the future*, which ignores at this point, and in the later full development, the one quality of God which the author has not so far mentioned – transcendence, that seems to mean being present in past, present and future simultaneously, not in physical space.

The first chapter is devoted to the aggregate of qualities argument, in which Berg looks at the various qualities attributed to God not as mutually contradictory – the usual approach – but as highly improbable in aggregate: start with an omnipotent entity, already extremely improbable, and multiply that successively by the improbability of the other attributes being present in the same entity. In a structure used in all the chapters, the argument is stated quite clearly in part A, summarised in part B (useful enough), elaborated in part C and possible objections discussed in part D. While some of the material in C would be useful in lay-

ing the ground for A, most of it is repetitious, as is much of part D.

This chapter would stand well enough without this:

... God must be supremely good or else he would not exist as God ... supposed to be worthy of voluntary admiration and worship ...

and later

... I think supreme goodness is a natural quality not a chosen quality.

What is good? in this context, surely, whatever God wills, as in the old argument.

In chapter 2, *The Man and God Comprehension Gulf Argument*, Berg argues that given the nature of an omnipotent, eternal god it is not possible for limited, mortal humans to comprehend such a being and yet say, “I am aware of God”; indeed, a human could not distinguish between God and a very powerful daemon. He concedes the counter-argument that this is merely an admission of human limitations, and does not disprove of itself the existence of God but: *Sensible people would not worship a possible entity whose existence ... they are necessarily incapable of determining... it is not logical .. to hypothecate the existence of an entity whose existence it is inevitably beyond our scope to substantiate.*

As before there is a great deal of re-explanation that many readers would find unnecessary. For example, in this chapter, part A could have been omitted entirely.

Occam’s Razor is pressed into service in Chapter 3, combined with a basic scientific principle that one should be reluctant to adopt a hypothesis that has no explanatory value. If the universe was created by God, then who created God? God, the alleged explanation for the universe, has no explanatory value, since God itself requires an explanation in an infinite regression, so breaching Occam’s principle of not creating entities unnecessarily. The author quotes Hume, who said that since religion explains everything through God, whose incomprehensible will is the cause of everything, how is this distinguishable from chance?

Objections to this argument include ones which use an *ad hoc* definition of God (the uncaused cause), and those which claim that God is special and falls outside normal rules of logic. Berg asks, in that case, what are the rules for theological discussion? Why should they be different from those in

other types of discourse?

Once again, the author concedes that this argument by itself merely makes the existence of God highly improbable.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the best of all possible worlds – if ours isn’t, then there is no god. If he realises that he is restricting himself to one type of god, one that is good, such as the Christian god (page 76), Berg does not say so:

If God exists, his qualities necessarily include being all-good and all-powerful

and, sweepingly,

Nobody of importance denies that God is essentially both all-good and all-powerful.

I grant that a god who creates universes must be a 3 x O god (with all its contradictions), and even that such a god may be a personal god, but it does not follow that this god has to be good, for, as I asked before, what is good? Berg goes on (page 78-9, my query and emphasis)

My innovative (?) insight is to assert that to exist God must not be just good but supremely good. God must be the best possible entity, otherwise he would not be God.

Why? a personal god could just as well be, in human terms, a psychopath. Indeed, by reversing this chapter’s argument, one could say that given the conditions in the world, any personal creator god has to be a sadist. In fact, the chapter is a detailed argument against the existence of the Christian god, or one similarly defined. Unfortunately it also shares the characteristics of the ontological argument by relying on assertion. And yet, although regularly associating goodness with God in this book, in an apparently irrelevant aside in chapter 5 Berg says:

(and there are grounds for saying that such an entity even if it did otherwise exist could not be supremely good anyhow!).

The universal uncertainty argument, Berg’s favourite, occupies a lengthy chapter 5. Here Berg looks at the qualities of a god candidate from the point of view of human beings: supposing such an entity publicly claimed to be God, how could it prove its omniscience, omnipotence and so forth to limited human intellects? It would take to the end of the universe to prove immortality, for instance.

Next Berg reverses the viewpoint to that of the god candidate: how could it know that it was omniscient, or eternal or possessed any of the other divine qualities? In

doing this Berg relies heavily on analogy with a human in isolation (isolated from what?), human ways of acquiring knowledge, for example (page 108):

How therefore can even a potential God be sure that its memory is not also a complete void before a certain time and thus that it, too, did not at some time arise (like we humans do) in a way unknown to itself? I don't see how a potential God can conceivably have any means of being completely certain that this is not the case!

The whole chapter wrestles with a divine form of the epistemological deficit; the idea of divine transcendence is mentioned briefly (page 115) only to be dismissed with *Their argument is perhaps ingenious but is surely fallacious*, so it is only here that we learn the book intends to disprove a non-transcendent god.

This chapter would be improved with the removal of several self-congratulatory paragraphs, and the rewriting of those parts of the argument that rely too heavily on human analogies.

In the final chapter (ignoring the final conclusions and then a final summary), the author looks at the qualities usually assigned to God and asks whether any of them is in fact logically impossible – if so, the God does not exist.

At last he turns to what is meant by “God is good”:

The first premise that God must be supremely good, otherwise he would not be God is a necessity for making the concept of God significant in a moral and religious way ...

He considers this point and the possibility of redefining what is meant by good, contrasting justice with mercy and admitting that these are subjective matters. He then leaves the question in the air (his words), and moves on to another divine quality, omniscience, which he has already discussed exhaustively in the previous chapter. In practice, of course, the subjectiveness of “good” is that of God, or rather what the priests say God means by it.

Another quality of God is that it provides ultimate purpose to the world. Is this an essential quality of God? It may have its own purpose, but does it follow that this divine purpose endows us with a legitimate and meaningful purpose? In saying the lack of ultimate purpose in the world shows that God does not exist, Berg seems to think so.

It is fairly apparent that Mr Berg did not submit the text to others for helpful suggestions before publishing it. If he had, suggestions such the following might have been made:

- Have a clear idea of the readership – young people in general, existing atheists who want to clarify their ideas, believers on the brink of losing faith?

- Take a look at the chapter structure, and see to what extent it forces unnecessary repetition.

- Look again at those parts where you congratulate yourself on the originality of your ideas – do they put the reader off?

- Think again about the title, reminiscent as it is of the various paths and ways in religions, and the twelve-step path to sobriety, and consider the trouble we already have with fundies labelling atheism as just another religion. (Berg says it is a challenge to Aquinas' Five Ways but this is too esoteric.)

- Remove all exclamation marks, of which there are many in the introduction alone, distracting the reader from the arguments.

- On the other hand, a few more commas in the right places would improve the readability.

And while I am being picky, it is surely standard practice among freethinkers to abandon BC/AD in favour of BCE/CE, which Mr Berg seems not to have noticed. (Potential Christian readers can surely read an explanatory footnote.)

This book could have been the basis for an introduction to arguments for atheism aimed at the sixth form and undergraduates; there are large stretches of clear and detailed argument suitable for this readership and Berg certainly has the knack of shining an oblique light on some standard arguments. But there are some holes in the logic as indicated above.

- *The Six Ways of Atheism* (self-published 175 pp paperback) costs £9.50 exc postage. Available from www.thesixwaysofatheism.com. ISBN 978-0-9543956-6-7

The Mary Whitehouse Experience

creasingly difficult as her husband succumbed to senile dementia.

Too frail to look after him on her own, she relied heavily on Richard and a succession of carers who often left because they couldn't stand Mary's imperious ways. “It would be an exaggeration to say they hated her,” says Richard, “but while my mother was very good with certain people, she was not very good with ordinary people.

“In short, she was a bit of a snob. She'd grown up in a house with live-in servants and she had this rather Victorian attitude towards people.”

While Richard did not entirely agree with his mother's campaign and says it took precedence over family life, he admires her passion and achievements, most notably the 9 pm watershed, as well as her influence on legislation such as the Broadcasting Act and Protection of the People Act, which attempted to curb the pornographic exploitation of minors.

Chris, however, struggles to see any point to his mother's campaign, and he appears to regard her as a deluded King Canute figure trying to hold back the sea.

“When I saw her after she died, the look on her face was not happy. Because, let's face it, her campaign to clean up television was ultimately a failure. For 30 years she'd more or less cast her family adrift while the campaign consumed her life.

“I have no animosity towards the woman, but what was it all for? Has she stopped swearing on television? No. Has she stopped violence? No. Has she stopped pornography? No. If anything, she possibly made people want all these things more.”

- **Editor's Note:** Shortly after this article was penned, Mediawatch-UK announced that John Beyer was to retire at the end of September, 2008. In his farewell report, Beyer said that since he began working with Whitehouse in 1976, “there have been some exciting times but there have been a lot of disappointments along the way”.

One of those disappointments surely must be the dwindling number of people visiting the Mediawatch-UK website – fewer than 1,000 a month, down from 1,750 in March 2006. Contrast that with the number of visits the *Freethinker* site has been receiving since the beginning of 2009: around 4,200 a DAY!

It is also amusing to note that Mediawatch-UK inspired the creation of the highly regarded Mediawatchwatch blog, an uncompromising anti-censorship site devoted to exposing the absurd and often despicable tactics of busybodies intent on controlling what we read and watch.



Jonathan Yeo's portrait of Sir Cliff Richard and Whitehouse

points of view...



A DIG IN THE POST BAG... LETTERS FROM OUR READERS ...

ADDRESS LETTERS TO BARRY@FREETHINKER.CO.UK.
THE POSTAL ADDRESS IS POINTS OF VIEW, FREETHINKER,
PO BOX 234, BRIGHTON BN1 4XD.

ARTICLE IN PRISON PAPER WAS OFFENSIVE

“PRISON newspaper pulped for carrying a column deemed offensive to Muslims” (*Freethinker*, August 2009, p6)?

Having read the article which caused that issue of *Inside Time* to be pulped, I found it to be offensive to me, as a rationalist and a freethinker. Why? because the author evidently felt nothing was too bad to be said about Muslims, and he did not have a shred of evidence to support his claims.

Anyone should rightly be offended by a tirade of unsubstantiated abuse, and many Muslims would be offended by the insinuation that puritanical Wahhabi Muslims are standard-bearers for Islam as a whole. Islam is not monolithic or coherent any more than any other religion.

One of our roles as freethinkers is to get believers to think straight and to go with the evidence, and we must constantly bear in mind that while there are plenty of legitimate criticisms to be made of Islam and of Muslims, we must support our own claims with evidence and avoid crooked thinking and poor argument. Too often freethinkers appear to believe that provided they avoid racism, they can say whatever they wish about believers and religion. In this they do the freethought movement a great disservice.

While I am on the matter of going with the evidence, the “Jesus & Mo” cartoon on the opposite page appears to promote the image of conflict between religion as a whole and science as a whole. This is not a position that is supported by the evidence, any more than that there is no conflict at all between science and religion. Many believers work as scientists and engineers, and many believers are prepared to accept scientific theories such as evolution. One position that can be sustained by the evidence is that there is no necessary conflict between science and religion: evidence for conflict between the two can be got by turning the page to George Taylor’s article “ID, Creationism & Science: Cutting the

Gordian Knot” (pp 8–10).

The point here is that many believers repudiate creationism and intelligent design, and the conflict is between dogmatism and science rather than between religion and science. A position similar to my own was set out by Andrew Dickson White in *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896); 2 vols. New York: Dover, 1960. White was, of course, necessarily unaware of Lysenko’s hegemony in the Soviet Union during the Stalin era, which owed more to political-ideological dogmatism than to religious dogmatism.

Colin Mills
Amersham

DE-BAPTISM CERTIFICATES

IN his letter (September *Freethinker*) decrying the practice of “debaptism”, Derek Fane is, of course, correct in saying that an action cannot be undone – but not in his corollary that “it can be made of no effect by ignoring it”.

We who have outgrown infantile theology do indeed release ourselves from it, with or without the concurrence of the church – though some of us resent being dubbed “lapsed” as if merely apathetic.

More to the point, the words of the sacramental ritual make it clear that it is not, as Fane probably supposes, simply a welcome into membership of the church: it is, outrageously, the specific deliverance of the newborn from original sin and demonic possession, which traditionally ban for ever its immortal soul from heaven.

Needless to say, a public declaration of debaptism has no retrospective magical effect – but, besides being a bit of fun and a good excuse for a party, it is a way of “coming out” for those who need that. Moreover, it can help challenge the statistical claims of church membership. Derek Fane’s dismissal of the significance of counting baptised heads is to overlook the social and fiscal privileges that this enables the churches to obtain. Though stating that it uses attendance figures rather

than baptisms, the C of E has reverted to baptismal statistics to secure the continuance of the reactionary Bench of Bishops in our legislature and to bolster the proliferation of “faith” schools and other political plunder.

It is decades since I drafted the first (distinct) Catholic and Protestant *pro-forma* debaptism certificates and was interviewed on “Woman’s Hour” (Radio 4) about them. I then produced a form of wording suitable for repudiating any sect that practises infant baptism. This appeared in the *Freethinker* of January 2000 and in my book *Freethoughts* (still available at £10 post free!). Now that debaptism has taken off, I am pleased the National Secular Society continues to use my wording on their certificates declaring it.

Barbara Smoker
Bromley

JEWISH NUTTINESS

AS a secularist brought up as an Orthodox Jew, I thank you for your editorial, “Nuttiness Jewish-style” (July *Freethinker*), but I wonder if you realise just how far the “nuttiness” goes.

When I was younger I holidayed regularly at the Royal Beach Hotel in Eilat. It had eight storeys, and five lifts were provided for guests. There was a “Sabbath lift” which Orthodox Jews would enter – then have to wait for someone else to press a button to activate it!

On my first visit to Israel I became embroiled in a row with the management because I wanted cream in my coffee. I was told that the sight of a Jew consuming a milk product after a meal containing meat would be offensive to the observant. I asked “What will you do if I bring cream into the dining room?” The manager begged me not to do so, or he may have to involve the police – and he pointed out that I had signed to observe the rules when I booked into the hotel.

Israel justly boasts of her tolerance to other religions, but this tolerance does not extend to Jewish secularists.

On the Sabbath I ordered a cold drink. I was told it would be a violation of Jewish law to pay for it, since the use of money on that



day was forbidden. So I had to sign a slip of paper to pay for it later. I then pointed out that writing one's name on the Sabbath was a violation of the law. The waiter then realised I was pulling his leg.

Orthodox Jews of my acquaintance whose purses permit it keep not one but FOUR dish-washing machines in their kitchen: one for milk dishes, one for meat derivatives, and two for Passover.

This is among a community noted for its learning and intellectual prowess. How on earth does this happen?

Derek Wilkes
London

ASSISTED SUICIDE

I WONDER if I can prevail upon my fellow *Freethinker* readers to write to their MPs urging them to give all possible support to the Labour politician, David Winnick, in his bid to get an Assisted-Dying Bill on to the Statute Book some time during the next Parliamentary session.

We are all aware of the great step forward in the Debbie Purdy case, when the Law Lords decreed that the DPP must clarify the 1961 Suicide Act and declare categorically and unequivocally when someone could be prosecuted for accompanying a terminally-ill patient to the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland in order to secure a doctor-assisted suicide. Nevertheless, I understand that however the DPP re-phrases the 1961 Act as to rid it of any ambiguity or equivocation, he will still retain the statutory power to prosecute someone if he considers that the circumstances warrant such legal proceedings.

It would seem, therefore, that the only way to circumvent this horrendous scenario is for all MPs of whatever persuasion to stand rock-solid behind Mr Winnick in his attempt to get an Assisted-Dying Bill on the Statute Book with the very minimum of delay. I believe that if the DPP should ever proceed with a prosecution of someone who had performed an act of transparent love and supreme charity, it would be the last word in obscenity. I firmly believe that this country would be debased and degraded in the eyes of the entire international community.

I would apologise in advance if the DPP (Keir Starmer) would consider it presumptuous of me to counsel him to tread very warily indeed in this extremely sensitive area, for his action might provoke an unprecedented backlash of rage and fury from the great and good people of this country, three-quarters of whom have expressed their wish to see a doctor-assisted suicide legalised as soon as possible.

If there are some Freethinkers who have

certain reservations on the legality or morality of such a Bill, I would ask them to reflect deeply and at great length on the wonderful words of the great Victorian novelist, George Eliot. A life-long rationalist and uncompromising atheist, she once said in conversation with a friend: "What do we live for if not to make the world less difficult for each other."

I have believed for many years that the Eliot statement should be adopted as the International Humanist credo.

Martin O'Brien
Caldicot

WAR ON THE RELIGIOUS?

MY Highland neighbours will think I'm waging a general war on the religious. Well, to an extent, maybe I am, but if it were not for an inexplicably influential minority among church leaders here who claim to be commendable teachers and trustworthy stewards of the people's morality, but in reality persistently peddle dangerous rubbish that demands equally persistent exposure and correction, I would probably find better things to do than send letters to the editor of my local paper.

I've been shocked into writing to *West Highland Free Press* again, this time by reading the following in *Free Church Witness*, July-August 2009, p 12, published by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), editor Rev. William Macleod (who I suspect was also the author of this nasty piece).

"South African Bishop Desmond Tutu was given a standing ovation by the Church of Scotland General Assembly after his speech supporting homosexual ministers where he said that he found it amazing that churches are discussing 'who goes to bed with whom' when people are dying of starvation, AIDS, and in wars. But why is there misery in the world? Surely it is because there is sin in the world. Is it not the false prophet who lays stress on feeding the hungry while God's law is trampled under foot? Man's greatest needs are spiritual and eternal, not physical and temporary."

I had to read the passage several times before I was satisfied that I hadn't misinterpreted the author's actual message. I was flabbergasted. The sentiments expressed are massively out of kilter with our nation's altruistic concern and care for humanity.

I say Bishop Tutu (Nobel Peace Prize for his role as Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa) is one of the world's wisest and most compassionate men, described by his equally wise and compassionate friend Nelson Mandela as, "Sometimes strident, often tender, never afraid and seldom without humour."

False prophet indeed! Sin? Humbug!

Why is there misery in the world? Because thanks to a variety of awful circumstances, millions of people are suffering from poverty, starvation, conflict, oppression, disease and utter, painful pain.

These are facts of life that need our active concern and charity, not the unhinged ravings of a handful of Mad MacMullahs, who interpret their holy book, not literally as they vociferously pretend, but according to expediency.

They seem to have overlooked one deservedly favourite Bible passage even I have enjoyed all my atheistic life, 1 Corinthians Ch 13. Its tender message is crystal clear. Paul the Apostle, speaking on behalf of the late Jesus, unequivocally advises that love is first among the human qualities (charity in the King James translation). I'm with Paul on that one, but not so, apparently, the Free Church (Continuing), which is an extreme faction of the "Wee Frees", created through acrimonious schism in the year of Christ's 2,000th birthday, unheard of in the rest of Britain or assumed to be innocuous, harmless or perhaps just comical. They aren't – and, to their detriment, there's not a trace of merry Desmond's meritorious humour about them. "Dour" really suits them; we're not here to enjoy life!

I wonder what proportion of the population of the Highlands and Islands is aware of the ease with which ministers of this crack-pot church, every bit the equal of the most conservative US Southern Baptists, insinuate themselves into our schools?

Dr James Merryweather
Kyle of Lochalsh

'KEEP US LAUGHING'

EVERY time I read the *Freethinker* I burst out with laughter – and if you want a really good laugh read the Bible, Koran and any other religious tome. I just love humour.

My old neighbour Pat has been praying with his wife every Sunday for the last seventy years and not one reply. And yet Pat doesn't understand my laughter.

Keep up the good work – and I would like to remind you we haven't had a really good, weeping, stone virgin for years now.

We had a spate of them 30 years ago. Perhaps we might have a flatulent one for a change, that farts every hour to bring in the crowds, nose pegs a pound each.

Please keep us laughing.

D Begg
Brighton

the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

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

Birmingham Humanists: **i** Tova Jones 021454 4692 **w** www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk. Friends' Meeting House, George Rd and St James's Rod, Edgbaston. Thurs, Oct 22, *The Genius of Darwin*.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404 **w** <http://homepage.nflworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Oct 7, 8pm: Peter Vlachos: *Challenging Religious Privilege*. Wed, Nov 4, 8pm. Terry Sanderson & Derek Lennard: *Celebrating the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species*.

Bromley Humanists: Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. **i** 01959 574691.

w www.slhg.adm.freeuk.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: 01296 623730.

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** www.phil-cork.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/humleft.htm

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 Pinel 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. Oct 14, Michael Imison: *An Ethical Jury*.

Hampstead Humanist Society: **i** N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP. Tel: 0207 328 4431.

w www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk

Harrow Humanist Society: Meets the second Wednesday of the month (except January, July and August) at the HAVS Centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow at 8pm. October 14. Graham Smith: *Why Britain can't afford the monarchy*.

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagamba@hotmail.com

Humanists of Havering: **i** Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Cres, Gidea Park. Meetings on first Thursday of the month, 8pm. Oct 1, Brian Samuels: *Life of Brian – Altar Boy and After*.

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern

Ireland: **i** Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 **e** brianmccinton@btinternet.com.

w www.nirelandhumanists.net

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 or visit www.humanism-scotland.org.uk

uk Media: media@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

Perth: 07017 404776, perth@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 **e** davidb67@clara.co.uk

Jersey Humanists: Contact: Reginald Le Sueur, La Petella,

Rue des Vignes, St Peter, Jersey, JE3 7BE. Tel 01534 744770

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.

w 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

Lewisham Humanist Group: **i** Denis Cobell: 020 8690

4645. The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford SE6. Meetings on

third Thurs, 7.30pm. Oct 15, Ron Heisler: *Atheist Freemasonry*

– *Alive and Kicking in 1860s London*.

w www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com

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

w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/

e lhghumanist@googlemail.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** Vince Chainey,

4 Mill St, Bradenham, Norfolk IP25 7QN. Tel: 01362 820982.

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 (ex.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

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.

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

07818870215.

Sheffield Humanist Society: **i** 0114 2309754. University

Arms, Western Bank. Public Meeting first Wednesday of the

month, 7.30pm. Wed, Oct 7. *Current Issues of Interest to the*

Secular Humanist Movement.

South Hampshire Humanists: Group Secretary, Richard

Hogg. Tel: 02392 370689 **e** info@southhantshumanists.org.uk

w www.southhantshumanists.org.uk

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Memorial Lecture:

Thurs, October 8, 7pm. Professor John Hedley Brooke.

Darwin's Religious Journey – How Darwin Changed his Attitude

Towards Religion over his Career. Main Hall, Conway Hall, free

entrance. Tel: 0207242 8037/4

e library@ethicalsoc.org.uk. Monthly programmes on request.

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in

Yeovil from Edward Gwinnell on 01935 473263 or

e edward.gwinnell@talktalk.net

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** Alan Grandy: 0208 337 9214. **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.wmhumanists.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:

Listings, the Freethinker,

PO BOX 234, Brighton, BN1 4XD.

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