

Ethical Record

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OUTSIDER WINS PAPAL CONCLAVE STAKES



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ITALIAN TEACHERS VISIT CONWAY HALL

For the last several years, a group of 40 to 50 Italian teachers of English, visiting various religious and secular organisations in London, have included the Ethical Society and its building, Conway Hall. Their latest visit was on Saturday 16 March. On arrival here at 5.30pm, they were welcomed into the Brockway Room and offered tea, coffee and biscuits. They were then given a potted history of the evolution of the Society by Norman Bacrac. They then each perused a sheet summarising the main principles of Humanism before engaging in a short but intense discussion of it with me. Afterwards, they trooped up to the Library where they were awed by its scholarly atmosphere and impressed by the numerous portraits of the heroes and heroines of freethought looking down at them.

Before leaving, they examined the merchandise displayed in the foyer and bought 14 copies of Barbara Smoker's book *Humanism*. They expressed themselves as altogether very satisfied with their visit. NB.



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CHES Member Ralph Ison, 1929 - 2012

Ralph died on 29 December 2012, aged 83. Along with CHES member Antony Chapman, he was one of the four founder members of Chiltern Humanists in 1991. Ralph was on its committee from the start until 2007, and was Chairman from 1992 to 1994, and again from 2001 to 2004.

Ralph was an outstanding teacher of Biology and Zoology in colleges of Further Education. He published two books, including a remarkable biography of John Howard, the prison reformer. Ralph lectured to the Ethical Society on Darwin and contributed articles to the *Ethical Record*. He also wrote articles and letters for *The Freethinker*.

Ralph died after a long illness which he approached in his usual scientific style, delighting in discussing biology with nursing and medical staff — an enthusiast to the end. We extend our sympathies to his family.

CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY

Reg. Charity No. 251396

Founded in 1793, the Society is a progressive movement whose aims are:

**the study and dissemination of ethical principles based on humanism and freethought
the cultivation of a rational and humane way of life, and
the advancement of research and education in relevant fields.**

We invite to membership those who reject supernatural creeds and are in sympathy with our aims. At Conway Hall the programme includes Sunday lectures, discussions, evening courses and the Conway Hall Sunday Concerts of chamber music. The Society maintains a Humanist Library and Archives. The Society's journal, *Ethical Record*, is issued monthly. Memorial meetings may be arranged.

The annual subscription is £35 (£25 if a full-time student, unwaged or over 65)

If you have any suggestions for speakers or event ideas, or would like to convene a Sunday afternoon informal, get in touch with Sid Rodrigues at programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk or 020 7061 6744.

INTERCULTURALISM – FOR THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION, COHESION AND DIVERSITY

Ted Cattle, the iCoCo Foundation

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 27 January 2013

Every society around the world is becoming more and more multicultural and super diverse. This is the inevitable result of globalisation and the technological changes we are now experiencing. Although some multicultural policies have been helpful, they have remained rooted in the 1960s and 1970s and failed to adjust to the new era. They now need to be set aside and there is an evident and pressing need for new and progressive conceptual framework, based on *interculturalism*. This is essential to reflect the reality of increasingly super-diverse and globalised communities.

Other academics have begun to recognise some of the very different tenets of interculturalism:

First, as something greater than coexistence, in that interculturalism is allegedly more geared toward interaction and dialogue than multiculturalism. Second, that interculturalism is conceived as something less ‘groupist’ or more yielding of synthesis than multiculturalism. Third, that interculturalism is something more committed to a stronger sense of the whole, in terms of such things as societal cohesion and national citizenship. Finally, that where multiculturalism may be illiberal and relativistic, interculturalism is more likely to lead to criticism of illiberal cultural practices (as part of the process of intercultural dialogue).

(Meer and Modood, 2011)

Time to Rebrand Multiculturalism

Whilst Meer and Modood would prefer to stick with the multicultural label, there is a timely and obvious need to develop a progressive re-branding of multiculturalism. For many reasons, not all of which are in any way based upon a fair assessment of the gains made over the last 40 years or so, the multicultural brand has become toxic and enjoys little by way of popular or political support. A recent and significant report, commissioned by the Searchlight Educational Trust (SET, 2011) set out to explore the issues of English identity, faith and race. It is one of the largest and most comprehensive surveys to date. It showed how limited the support for multiculturalism is at present. ‘Confident multiculturalists’ were found to be only eight per cent of the population. ‘Mainstream liberals’ made up another 16%. This Report therefore, somewhat alarmingly, suggests that only one quarter of the population are comfortable with our present model of multiculturalism.

It concluded that:

There is not a progressive majority in society and it reveals that there is a deep resentment to immigration, as well as scepticism towards multiculturalism. There is a widespread fear of the ‘other’, particularly Muslims, and there is an appetite for a new right-wing political party that has none of the fascist trappings of the British National Party or the violence of the English Defence League.

Matt Goodwin (2011) confirms this rather depressing attitudinal picture, with a review of the opinion polling on migration and race related issues over the last 10 years or so. This indicates that immigration in particular has been a totemic issue for race relations and consistently opposed by around 80% of the population in the UK (and mirrored in many European countries). No wonder the Commission for Integration and Cohesion and the Council of Europe both declined to use the ‘multicultural’ concept in their reports.

The Future is Interculturalism

The shift to interculturalism is not, however about re-branding - though this frankly would help the debate to move on – it is a more profound change based upon the need to address at least five conceptual problems with the present basis of multiculturalism.

1. National to international drivers of difference. Multiculturalists assume that ‘difference’ continues to be driven by the minority-majority relationship within nations. Whilst largely true in the 1960s, globalisation and super diversity have meant that the influence of diasporas, transnational communications, social media and international travel, has created entirely new relationships. ‘Difference’ is no longer determined within national borders. And it is no longer based upon the majority/minority relationship – there is now a multiplicity of tensions within and between minorities. The black-white binary divide is no longer central and cannot continue to underpin our view of ‘difference’.

2. New power and political structures. Globalisation has brought many new international agencies and structures into being and fundamentally altered power relationships. The new agencies have responded to a range of issues from international finance, crime, environmental concerns like climate change, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and many more. The European project perhaps stands out most in this regard. This, together with the process of Western de-industrialisation, the growth of global business and brands and international migration on a new scale, has created a popular sense of political powerlessness and alienation. This has also had a profound impact upon the way people see themselves and the claim of nationalistic identities has inevitably been weakened. The growth of regional and separatist appeals as people ‘hunker down’ is a further expression of this trend.

Castells (1997) supports the view that the state has been bypassed by networks of wealth, power and information and lost much of its sovereignty. In later work Castells (2006) draws upon the research of Professor Norris of Harvard University who has analysed the *World Values Survey* to show that regional and local identities are trumping national loyalties. Professor Norris calculated that for the world as a whole, 13% of respondents primarily considered themselves as ‘citizens of the world’, 38% put their Nation-State first, and the remainder (i.e. the majority) put local or regional identities first.

None of this should suggest that national identity could or should be downplayed. In fact, there is a great danger in suggesting that the one area of identity that many working class people feel able to cling to in a time of uncertainty should be wiped away. The reality is however that national and

cosmopolitan identities do now need to sit alongside each other – they are not opposed – something that multiculturalism has never acknowledged.

3. Identity is a dynamic concept. Multiculturalism positioned identity as static and bounded – or ascribed and fixed. The reality for many people today however, is that it is transitory and, at least partly, chosen. The growth of mixed race, intermarriage across national, faith and other boundaries means that ‘You can’t put me in a box’ (Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah, 2011).

‘You Can’t Put Me In A Box’

‘In an age of super diversity where people do not identify around single identities and feel conflicted allegiance (if any allegiance at all) to pre-defined groups, activism around particular ‘strands’ seems irrelevant to many people and may not even be that effective in addressing the true causes of inequality. Even the very categorisations that we rely on (For example, ‘black’, ‘gay’, ‘Asian’ or ‘disabled’) no longer seem to be able to tell us much about who people are, what lives they lead, who they identify with, or what services they need from government and society. And the tick box approach seems to be missing out on growing numbers of people who fall outside or across standard classifications. Yet society seems to treat ethnic identities as if they are clearly bounded, static and meaningful, and public bodies insist on a tick box classification’

(Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah, 2010 p11)

Multicultural theorists have never accepted this perspective and attempted to reinforce past conceptions of identity, supported by systems of over-protective community leaders and single identity funding which have homogenised and hardened in-group boundaries and stereotypes.

4. From ‘race’ to all other forms of difference. Multiculturalism revolved around race and failed to take account of other forms of difference that have moved firmly into the public sphere – particularly sexual orientation, gender, faith and disability. This has had profound implications as race has been defined in relation to social class and therefore racism is inextricably bound up with economic issues. This still has some salience, but difference – and the prejudice which it has created – is founded on relational bases too. Identity is now a hybrid concept for many people – particularly younger people and combines faith, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and other ideas.

5. An inter-disciplinary understanding is now required to allow multiculturalism to move on from a purely class based structural approach to one where multi-faceted relationships are understood. Many multiculturalists have insisted that divisions revolve around structural divisions and see ‘relational’ concerns as a smokescreen designed to hide the more fundamental problems. Most of the principal multicultural texts have failed to even consider the contribution of social psychology, hardly mention contact theory, or any other concept of in-group and out-group divisions. It would also appear that social psychologists and sociologists have been living in ‘parallel lives’.

Social psychologists are beginning to provide a better understanding of inter-relationships, challenging some of the structural basis of the sociological approach. In reality, we need both. New and pervasive experiential learning opportunities need to be created to combat insular communities and extremist views. This has never been part of the multiculturalist approach and rather, past attempts at tackling racism and resolving inter-ethnic divisions have revolved around legislation and punitive measures to control behaviours. That will undoubtedly have to continue but now needs to be supplemented by measures which address the causes and understand why and how such attitudes are formed in the first instance.

In an era of globalisation and super diversity, relational issues have become as much, if not more important, than structural divisions, simply because there are now many more cross cultural and multi-faceted inter relationships which arise within and between communities on an everyday basis. However, it is also necessary to avoid equating intercultural dialogue (or ICD) with that of interculturalism. ICD is rightly criticised as ‘relatively apolitical, offering civil society-based local encounters and conviviality in everyday life to critique multiculturalism’ (Meer and Modood, 2012). ICD needs to be part of a broader programme to tackle disadvantage or inequalities and foster unity. Such programmes should, however, be based on need, cutting across cultures, rather than relying on crude categorisation based on socially constructed divisions.

Interculturalism as a New Idea

Branding is important. We need to be able to talk about race and diversity in a new way. Interculturalism is likely to be much more readily accepted at a popular level – it is associated with more positive language of ‘inter-dependency’, ‘integration’ and ‘internationalism’. It represents a break with the past.

It also represents a break with the tired old identity politics which younger people are already rejecting – the huge growth in mixed race/dual heritage relationships is testimony to this. There is a well of untapped desire to dispense with past language and fears about difference and to recognise that the world is made up of just one human race. Younger people – particularly those that have grown up in diverse areas – reject such ideas. Small projects like the *Luton in Harmony* pledge, signed by 60,000 people are beginning to endorse this intercultural view of the world.

The London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics created a period of ‘accidental interculturalism’ in which athletes, irrespective of background and identity, were supported and in which the unity of Team GB and of sport in general allowed a common identity to sit alongside nationality and heritage. The Paralympic focus was also firmly on capability rather than disability. We need to capture and sustain such developments and recognise that whilst the focus on the pros and cons of multiculturalism in previous debates has not been productive. The rights and wrongs of immigration, the supposed political correctness of the mythical ‘banning of Christmas’ and the constant vying for attention between various identity groups, has had a negative impact. Interculturalism can be positioned as a future orientated debate, recognising all aspects of diversity in an ever-

changing environment. It will be challenging, but will also become acknowledged as a progressive attempt to create a fairer society and a modern conception of difference fitting for an increasingly globalised world.

For more discussion of interculturalism see Ted Cantle's new book *Interculturalism: for the era of cohesion and diversity*. Published by Palgrave Macmillan, 2012

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CONWAY HALL EVENING CLASSES, MAY 2013

Historic Holborn venue Conway Hall is running the following evening classes which have been specially developed for a general audience by members of the Humanist Philosophers' Group: Brendan Larvor, Peter Cave and Prof. Richard Norman:

Exploring Humanism: a 6 week basic introduction to what Humanism is and what Humanists believe and do.

Aspects of Humanism: an 8 session, 16 hour in-depth course on the history and philosophy behind Humanist beliefs.

Applied Ethics: a 5 part look at differing approaches to moral thinking and action throughout history.

Death and Dying: 4 sessions exploring the significance of death, from murder and suicide to terminal illness; the meaning of life and immortality.

Each course will be tutored by members of the London School of Philosophy. The second round will run from 1 May until 19 June 2013. Each session will be priced at £10, but there is a discounted rate of £7 per session if two whole courses are booked.

To make a booking or for more information about dates, tutors and further details on course content, please email programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk or call 020 7061 6744 or look up www.conwayhall.org.uk/courses

AN ATHEIST'S GUIDE TO THE ALPHA COURSE

Simon Clare

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 3 February 2013

In 2011 I signed up to the Alpha Course at Brighton's St. Peter's Church. As a committed atheist, I was curious about the content of this Christian course and how it was taught.

I had spoken with many believers over the years and our conversations about religion would usually end at a similar point every time. After describing all the reasons behind their faith, I would still remain unmoved and just as atheist as before. Sometimes they would recommend that I go on the Alpha Course if I really wanted to know what was behind their faith. If I went on the course, I was assured, all would be made clear. Normally I did not decide to take their advice; I felt that I already knew enough about Christianity and the Christian version of faith, but then I asked myself 'Why not' and couldn't think of a good answer. I signed up to my local course in Brighton.

Origins of the Alpha Course

The Alpha course was born in 1977 at Holy Trinity Church, Brompton (HTB). Rev. Charles Marnham, a curate at the church, wanted to provide a course detailing the basics of Christianity, specifically for the faithful who wanted to brush up on their knowledge. Eventually the aim of the course was broadened so that it would also teach anybody who was interested, whether they were a believer or not. The Alpha Course still has this dual purpose but the content of the course has come a long way since 1977.

The course was developed into a ten week format by the Very Reverend John Irvine and then in 1990 the running of Alpha was taken over by Nicky Gumbel, a former barrister and a curate at HTB. He was responsible for the modern-day incarnation of the course. He developed a concise, detailed script which was made available to any groups that wished to offer the course. Under Gumbel's leadership, the newly refreshed and easily replicable course began to spread not only across the country but across the world.

Gumbel's succession to the post of controller of the Alpha Course was prompted by the Vicar of HTB at the time, Sandy Millar. At around the same time, Rev. Millar supported the ordination of one of his congregation, one Justin Welby. Welby had been involved with HTB since 1983 when he found his faith and began worshipping there. Welby's recent accession to the post of Archbishop of Canterbury marks, I believe, the moment the Alpha model matured from being a novel, evangelical curiosity, to become a central part of the mainstream church's proselytizing mission.

HTB has been responsible for a programme of 'Church plants' whereby a clerical team are sent to failing parishes to breathe new life into them. One of the churches to benefit from this programme was St. Peter's in Brighton. The building had been closed in 2007 and faced being sold off. In 2009, HTB parachuted in a team led by vicar Archie Coates which reopened the church,

undertook renovations and grew what is now a thriving, young church community.

On the course, Archie Coates was very welcoming indeed, even after I told him I was a devout atheist. In fact, he went out of his way to thank me for coming along and I had several rewarding conversations with him throughout the course. He is genuinely one of the most gracious and sincere people I have ever met. Even after a year, when I invited him to hear my *Atheist's Guide to the Alpha Course* talk, he remembered things I had told him about my life. A remarkably professional priest, I wouldn't be at all surprised if he knew his entire congregation to a similar level of detail.

Archie's version of the Alpha Course consists of 9 weeks of normal Alpha sessions, plus a residential weekend away. The weekly sessions, held on a Wednesday evening, are free to attend but they do ask for a donation if you partake in the meal. The meals were always very good and with generous portions, including good vegetarian options. I did not usually choose to eat so this part of the evening was a good time to talk to my fellow students about faith and my lack of it - partly because they couldn't respond as they were eating.

After the meal, Archie would welcome us and introduce the evening's subject. Each session was based around a chapter of the Alpha handbook which had been given to all of us. These chapters highlighted the salient points and made suggestions for further reading, both in the bible and from popular religious books. Many of these books were by C.S. Lewis or Nicky Gumbel. (Gumbel has written 20 such books and sold over a million copies in total. During my lecture at Conway Hall I mistakenly said he had sold 20 million.)

So far, the typical Alpha sessions were not any different in their structure from a Skeptics in the Pub meeting. Before I started the course I really had no idea what to expect. I feared that there might be some devious attempts to brainwash me using the methods of Scientology, or the techniques seen in *A Clockwork Orange*. Thankfully, no such overtly manipulative methods were used on me - not during the normal sessions at least.

An Unsophisticated Theology

After the Vicar welcomed us, we were invited to sing a couple of hymns. This surprised me at first, as I had expected that most people on the course would be non-Christians and unfamiliar with such activities as hymn-singing. I was very wrong. Out of around 100 attendees, only two of us remained seated and did not join in. I cannot say this means all those people were already Christian but it did suggest to me that far more of them were at least 'cultural Christians' than I originally suspected. The lyrics to the hymns were projected on a screen and we were accompanied by a man playing a guitar.

After the singing, the main lecture started and would last thirty minutes or so. Normally the Vicar would deliver these but for some subjects they would be delivered by other volunteers. Whoever gave the lecture, they used the central, standard Alpha script.

The theology of the lectures was not particularly sophisticated and this is a criticism of the course that has been levelled at them by some Christians. There was a reliance on personal testimony and often platitudinous analysis of biblical stories. There was potential for greater depth in the post-lecture discussion but this potential was rarely if ever realised. If a question could not be answered, a book would be recommended. The absence of definite answers was one of the first things that disappointed me about the course. While they claim, truthfully, that all questions are welcomed, it can never be claimed that all these questions get a satisfactory answer. I was not hoping for factual answers necessarily - we are dealing with theology after all - but I at least thought we would get a clear idea of how Christianity itself responds to the tough questions. For a course that bases much of its advertising around the question 'What is the meaning of life?' and 'Is there more to life than this?' it offers very few straight answers to all but the most trivial questions.

Once I adjusted my expectations, I came to find the group discussions to be the most rewarding aspect of each session. As the group got to know each other, the topics of discussion became more personal and would go off on tangents that had nothing to do with the evening's official subject. By the end of the course, I had a real affection for the people in my group. When pondering day to day problems, I would ask myself what the members of my group would think. When the course came to an end, I felt a real sense of loss. No longer would I have my Wednesday evening chats about faith and life. I considered going along to church on Sundays so that our friendship would be maintained; it turned out that all the people in my group that made it to the end of the course were already regular churchgoers and members of the St Peter's congregation.

My overall impression of the majority of the course was that it was being run by sincere people and that on the whole it is a force for good. I came across the exception to this when I attended the residential weekend away towards the end of the course. The Brighton group teamed up with the HTB group and together we all went to a holiday park in Bracklesham Bay for two nights. The days were full of Alpha sessions that focused on the Holy Spirit, interspersed with worship and group discussions. It was very intense but the atmosphere was friendly.

The climax of the weekend was the Saturday night session, hosted by Nicky Gumbel himself. He hosted a session entitled 'How Can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?' In a very calm, reassuring voice, he told us that the Holy Spirit could show itself to those who had faith in it. He said the Spirit could manifest itself in many ways and that each of us might feel it right there and then. One's palms may feel warm or we may feel a tingling in our spine. The Spirit may even fill us and make us speak in tongues.

Speaking in Tongues

Speaking in tongues, we were told, can mean a few different things. It is an angelic language that sounds like random gibbering to the rest of us. Speaking in tongues in this way allows you to express your love for God without your language being held back by the coarse, clumsy words we normally use. Our love emerges in the form of these sounds and God understands what it is we are saying.

The other, more commonly known type of speaking in tongues is when we are given the gift of speaking or understanding languages that were hitherto unknown to us. Indeed, he told us that only the previous week, he witnessed someone start to speak Russian spontaneously. Someone in that audience understood Russian and heard someone utter some Russian words whilst speaking in tongues. This would have been rather remarkable if it were true but Gumbel's faithful audience did not examine his claim further. He was not even challenged by those that had been on the course before and seen him tell the same story of 'someone the week before' every single time. *The reason he mentions this story each and every time is that it is part of the official Alpha Course script!*

The Saturday evening is structured in such a way that the audience seem to be guided, step by deliberate step, into a state where they begin to sing in tongues. This is the entire purpose of the evening; to show that this God we have been discussing, this creator of the universe, is here with us now and is making us feel him. This preparation includes the part of the script I mentioned above; designed to convince us that the gift of tongues is not uncommon. Eventually, after Gumbel has primed us to accept the Holy Spirit into ourselves, a man goes up on stage with a guitar and begins softly strumming. Gumbel tells us that singing in tongues may sound a little like this as the guitar player starts to mutter some harmonic syllables. Sure enough a few members of the crowd started making similar sounds until the room resonated with the sound of a choir of the faithful, singing a stream of seemingly random phonemes. It was a masterclass in how to induce speaking in tongues in an audience that trusts you.

To their credit, they didn't kick me off the campsite the following morning when I told them what I thought of the previous night's performance. Archie accepted my observations graciously. At the end of that particular session, my group said they wished every group had a Simon in it, asking hard questions and cheerfully challenging their faith.

I would urge you to go on the Alpha Course yourself if you possibly can. If you behave yourself you can not only spread some ideas to people that might not have come across them before, but you will learn something about the faith of the individuals you are with too. It would be good if there were a widespread humanist version of the Alpha Course* but until that happens, let's use the Alpha Course's own group discussions to show them what the alternatives to Christianity are.

* Some of us have already thought that humanists should put on an Omega Course. It would not include speaking in tongues, though. {Ed.}

THE HUMANIST LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

The Humanist Library and Archives are open for members and researchers on Mondays to Fridays from 0930 - 1730. Please let the Librarian, Catherine Broad, know of your intention to visit. The Library has an extensive collection of new and historic freethought material.

Tel: 020 7061 6747. Email: library@ethicalsoc.org.uk

UNIVERSITY SHAMBLES: HOW TO RUIN THE BEST UNIVERSITY SYSTEM IN THE WORLD

Chris Rhodes, Director of Fresh-lands Environmental Actions

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 3 March 2013

Tony Blair, shortly after his inauguration in 1997 as Prime Minister of Great Britain, famously said that we needed, “Education, Education, Education” and that 50% of our young people should attend university. It is not clear exactly what analysis produced this proportion but currently the figure is 47%, so the wish has almost been fulfilled. The expansion of the university and higher education sector began long before Mr Blair, and by the time Harold Wilson came to power as Prime Minister in 1964, a wave of new universities had already been initiated, including Sussex, York, UEA, Kent, Warwick and Essex, the so called ‘plate glass’ universities.

In 1992, shortly after Margaret Thatcher had stepped down as leader of the Conservative party and Prime Minister, with John Major assuming that role, the binary divide between the universities and the polytechnics was abolished, and the expansion of the entire university sector on an unparalleled scale was urged-on in earnest. It is of historical interest and germane to this discussion to look to the roots of the various universities, which initially were Oxford and then Cambridge, followed by the other ‘ancients’, e.g. St. Andrews, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dublin, acknowledging others, such as Durham and Manchester Victoria in the nineteenth century, and the creation of the red bricks in the first decade of the 20th century.

The University of London was created in 1836 by the merger of University College and Kings College. Imperial College, though with older roots, was formally established in 1907. In the East End, the educational part of the People’s Palace was admitted on an initial three-year trial basis as a School of the University of London on 15 May 1907 as *East London College*. In 1910 the College’s status in the University of London was extended for a further five years, with unlimited membership being conferred in May 1915. The polytechnics were institutions of a different kind, but some can trace their roots back to the Mechanics’ Institutes of the 1820s, and the London Polytechnic to 1838. Around 30 new polytechnics were formed in the 1960s expansion of higher education, and it was Tony Crosland – Secretary of State for Education and Science (1965–67) – who created the ‘binary system’.

The Filling of University Posts

Polytechnics focussed more on ‘high quality vocational work’, initially on engineering and applied science. Their awards, from B.Sc. through to Ph.D., were validated by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). They introduced ‘sandwich degrees’ and part-time courses, which were especially appropriate for ‘professions’, such as engineering, town planning, law, architecture, science technicians. There was far less emphasis on research than in the universities, tending to be ‘applied’ and often connected to local industry.

By about 1973, practically all the university posts had been filled, in many cases by protégés of the great and the good, often with no formal interview, with little

demographic chance for new blood for many years to come. The 1970s saw a rise of militancy and industrial strife which culminated in the Winter of Discontent in 1979, with rubbish piling up in the streets, bodies going unburied, and power being seized from Labour by the Conservatives, led by Margaret Thatcher, 'The Iron Lady'. As part of an effort to control the trade unions, which had run amok in the previous decade causing Britain's competitiveness to decline, especially against the ascending Far East, the Thatcher government began to cut subsidies from industries that were deemed unprofitable, e.g. coal and steel production. The result of this was that the number of unemployed rose to 3 million, and as a countermanding measure, during the 1980s, some 2.5 million were taken from this register and placed on invalidity benefit, thus setting the seeds of the current 'benefits culture' in an act of political manoeuvring but with dire social consequences.

The university cuts began in 1981, with four technological universities, Salford, Bradford, Aston and Brunel, each losing more than 30% of their funding. This rationalisation process would continue under Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education and Science. In 1985, Mrs Thatcher was ignominiously denied an honorary degree from her *alma mater*, the University of Oxford, but in the subsequent rationalisation of the universities, a substantial number of small chemistry and physics departments were closed, and now many universities have neither.

Polys Abolished

1992 was a momentous year for two reasons: (1) the binary divide between the polytechnics and the universities was abolished and, (2) the format of the later Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) was introduced. This would ultimately multiply the number of students attending 'university' by nearly 400% (2010/11, 47%). However, it also created a bottom layer in a league of (now) 116 universities, while the effect of the RAE concentrated most of the research funding in the top 10. Formerly, the polytechnics received their own funding from local authorities, but now, along with the other universities, were funded by the HEFCE once all had been awarded university status. So, what was the real reason for re-branding the polytechnics as universities? Was it all aimed in the service of inclusiveness and greater opportunities for the nation's youth? Not entirely. The collapse of the 'old' manufacturing industry in 80s, then recession, meant that record numbers of unemployed 18–24 year olds were projected, a huge embarrassment for a government that wanted to be re-elected. In parallel, due to the decline in British industry, the polytechnics effectively lost their original role. Through the expediency of renaming the polytechnics as universities, and expanding the student population by a factor of four, vast numbers of young people were kept from the unemployment figures, being in education instead. The expansion was however not funded accordingly, and spending per student fell by 40%.

The quality of professors in the enlarged corpus of universities is hardly uniform, since in some (mostly new) universities, there are many 'professors' with practically no published work. In some subjects, e.g. 'pharmacy practice', awarding a professorship irrespective of their academic quality is the only way candidates can be paid sufficiently to attract them from the private sector. With

such large numbers of students to teach, the character of the job of an academic has changed immeasurably, and there are many now employed on teaching-only contracts. All universities have also become much more bureaucratic than they were, in part stemming from the local-authority roots of the polytechnics.

It is concerning that 36% of those graduating since 2005 were employed in sales and customer service roles in 2011, including sales assistants, cleaners, waiters, shelf-stackers, bar-staff, hotel porters and call centre staff, while 14% graduating since 2005 were unemployed in 2011. So, of those graduates who are employed, 42% are in low-skill jobs. One in three applications for this year's graduate vacancies are from students who had graduated last year, or before, and while there are 10 million graduates in the U.K., there are only 9 million graduate level jobs. The question arises then, is it really worthwhile to incur a debt of £30,000 to end up working in a job that a school-leaver could have done? It is likely that the increase in fees from £3,000 to £9,000 in 2012, raising that debt to perhaps £50,000, will prove to be a critical element. Certainly, 18 year olds to whom I have spoken are not taking going to 'uni' as a right of passage, but considering other options, including apprenticeships. The recent indicators are consistent with a progressive drop in the number of applications, and a declining number of applicants actually taking up university places.

From Good Polys to Bad Universities

A major fault was that the system was over-expanded and too rapidly and with scant regard to the subjects being studied. The introduction of a 'bums on seats' funding policy forced 'universities' to accept the vast additional numbers of students, but the system is now producing more graduates than there are graduate-level jobs. The polytechnics adopted the trappings of universities, but with neither the traditions nor the standards, and tragically, in so doing, *good* polys lost their strong vocational role in education and society and became *bad* universities. The bottom half of the league table of universities is all ex-polys. The quality of the system has been eroded further by a lack of proper standards being implemented over academic promotions: professorships and readerships.

The universities have also been over-bureaucratized, with support staff becoming managers over the academic staff, and hence a significant shift in their power base has occurred. By way of remedial action, Professors and Readers should re-apply for their titles against proper national standards for which an independent body is necessary to validate the quality of such candidates, who should be demoted or removed, if found wanting. E.g., to be a science professor, you should be of the quality to be awarded a D.Sc. The system overall needs restructuring, with the former polytechnics in part looking to their roots as good local colleges, providing more work-related and practical training.

Professor Michael Brown, a former Vice-Chancellor of Liverpool John Moores University, stated that the current system was "not fit for purpose", in regard to fitting graduates for the work-place, and introduced a 'World of Work' or WOW certificate. WOW runs in parallel with the student's degree programme, and provides training in teamwork, negotiating skills, and a whole host of potentially very useful abilities. It is well regarded by the CBI and by potential employers. Professor Edith Sim, the Dean of Science at Kingston University, has stressed

the importance of universities, particularly those such as Kingston, in improving their relationships with business. This is particularly significant since it is universities like Kingston, ex-polytechnics and being mainly teaching-led, who are likely to suffer most under the government austerity cuts, removing 80% of their teaching funding, in comparison with 40% being cut from university research budgets overall.

For a while, Reading College was part of Thames Valley University, following a merger between the two institutions, but TVU has since been disbanded, and RC has gone back to its former name. RC runs apprenticeships with local businesses: catering and hospitality; travel and tourism; motor vehicles; hair and beauty; plumbing, gas and heating; bricklaying; electrical installation and design; barbering; horticulture. It is surely not necessary that every subject should be taught in a university, or that there should necessarily be degrees in catering, tourism, golf-course management and hotel management. Some degrees fare worse than others, especially in such a tough market, e.g. media and communications, for which employment is down 40% on last year. Not all courses described as apprenticeships are the same, and Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, has emphasised the necessity of raising the bar on all such schemes to a common and high standard, perhaps on a par with Germany and Switzerland, nations where technical training is taken very seriously.

The Game-changer: Peak Oil

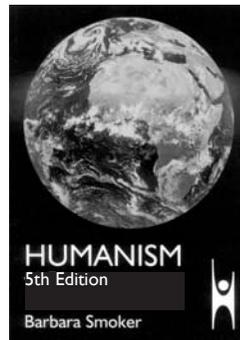
In respect of how our future education system and universities will be, the unseen game changer is *peak oil*, which the Canadian economist Jeff Rubin has described as “running out of the oil we can afford to burn”. The cost of fuel will continue to rise, meaning the kiss of death to the global economy. The U.S. now makes little of its own steel, and instead, ore is mined in South America and brought to China, where it is turned into steel, and the steel is then transported to the U.S. Cheap labour and cheap fuel make this strategy possible, but as fuel costs rise, it will become cheaper to do the mining and processing in the U.S., thus rebuilding the U.S. steel industry, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs. Many industries could be home-grown and we will need many practically trained people, meaning a requirement for fewer universities in their present form, but more colleges. Hence universities must adapt, and are probably entering another transitional phase, no less dramatic than that beginning in 1992.

HELP SPREAD HUMANISM IN AFRICA

Leo Igwe of Nigeria will distribute copies of Barbara Smoker’s *Humanism* to schools and groups in Africa which are desperately short of text books expounding the history and concepts of humanism.

We have spare copies but need help with the postal charges. Send £10 to Conway Hall Ethical Society to send 10 copies or £20 for 20 copies (marked ‘Africa’). Thank you.

SPREAD ENLIGHTENMENT!



REAL IRAN SOLUTION IGNORED

Masoud Ahmadi

A group of Iranian exiles, former academics, professionals, activists and thinkers who oppose the brutal dictatorship in Iran are being strangled en-mass by Iraqi soldiers on the behest of Iran's rulers. They are 3200 residents of Camp Ashraf who are now incarcerated in a place ironically called 'Camp Liberty'. The pity is that the UN top official in Iraq, Martin Kobler, has been collaborating with Iraqi authorities to do Iran's bid of eliminating its organized democratic opposition who represent the real solution to the Iran problem. Such worries are not out of place after the assault on the camp on Saturday 9 February 2013. Seven defenceless residents were killed and over 66 seriously injured as a result of this cowardly attack which draw serious criticisms from all corners of the world. But nevertheless their plight and the solution to the Iran problem continues to be ignored.

In December 2004, Mrs Maryam Rajavi, the president elect of National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the democratic opposition to Iranian dictatorship, in a conference in the European Parliament, warned world leaders about Iran as a growing international problem. She told them that war with Iran is not a solution and appeasement, the current approach to Iran, will only delay the war to a more disastrous stage. We are hearing the drums of that war loudly now. She said then that the problem of Iran, its nuclear ambitions and export of terrorism and fundamentalism, has an internal solution – democratic change by the people of Iran and their resistance movement.

La Crème de La Crème

An important pillar of this solution was, and still is, the resilience and perseverance of the brave residents of Ashraf now in Camp Liberty. The residents of the camp are *the cream of the cream* of Iranian society, the survivors of a perpetual massacre in the 1980s based on Khomeini's fatwa (decree) which led to the murder of 120,000 members and supporters of the main opposition to the regime. A movement that has 3,200 likes of Nelson Mandela, who endured long years of suffering without bending, is the main source of inspiration for millions in Iran who cry freedom. The west should make sure their voice is heard instead of suppressing it.

When the US decided to leave Iraq in 2009, the security of Ashraf and its residents who were recognized as protected persons under Geneva Conventions, was delivered to Iraqi government that was under the influence of Iranian regime. When the June 2009 uprising in Iran took place the Tehran regime blamed the PMOI (the main force within the NCRI), and the residents of Ashraf were targets of a barbaric assault that resulted in 11 deaths and hundreds wounded. In 2011 there was a repeat of the assault with armoured vehicles running over the residents and machine guns mowing them down. Thirty six were killed and hundreds more were seriously injured. Instead of investigating the atrocity the UN fell into the Iran-Iraq trap of relocating the residents inside Iraq to this new camp incongruously called 'Liberty'. According to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, 'Camp Liberty' is a prison where most basic rights of the inmates are being neglected. Iran Liberty Association, a

British human rights organization, is involved in helping the situation and providing protection for the residents by continuously keeping an international spotlight on the situation.

The events of especially the past 4 years since the security of Ashraf was given to the Iraqis by coalition partners prove that the real solution to the Iran problem has been ignored. It is time that we give it voice. Please visit the site and help them save our world.

Masoud Ahmadi is an Iranian academic and human rights activist in the UK

VIEWPOINTS

On Looking into Catholic Teaching

Following the recent article in the *Ethical Record* on ‘Religious Organisations’ Role in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights’, I thought it might be helpful to add a few notes of my own. In his Christmas address for 2011, the Archbishop of Granada, Javier Martinez, said that a woman who had an abortion “gave a man an absolute right to abuse her body without restriction.”

This triggered me into looking into the whole teaching of the Catholic Church on sexual matters. It was worse than I had anticipated. Masturbation is still regarded as a disorder so the psychological pressure is for men and women to have normal conjugal relationships. From then on however the woman is totally at the mercy of what might happen. Only recently, Pope Benedict declared in the case of a woman for whom a pregnancy could prove fatal that it was still not appropriate to use contraceptives. In addition to this she must not be sterilized even if, again, a pregnancy could prove fatal.

Marge Berer (*Ethical Record*, April 2013, p 16) cites the recent case in Ireland when a woman died because an incomplete spontaneous abortion became septic. This complication is well known and terminating the pregnancy is standard practice, but those caring for her followed hard line Catholic thinking. While a full report by the Irish authorities is awaited I suspect that a similar incident in the UK would be regarded as medical negligence. I do not think the somewhat sophisticated statement by the Catholic Bishops of Ireland really helps. Doctors and hospitals need clear guidance and it has always amazed me that the Catholic Church does not seem to grasp the simple fact that if the woman’s life is at stake so is that of the foetus.

To sum up then, the Catholic Church is not the defender of the unborn as it so often claims but an organisation that puts the lives and welfare of women at risk. In our part of the world many Catholics either ignore the Church or find ways round its teachings. The incident in Ireland and in other parts of the world suggest that the sooner society can be taught the real damage of this inflexible and destructive thinking and legislate accordingly the better.

John Edmondson, Consultant Psychiatrist (retired) - Louth, Lincolnshire

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

The Oxford University Humanist Group's Archives

Nigel Sinnott (*Half a Century Later*, *Ethical Record* Jan/Feb 2013) recollects briefly joining the Oxford University Humanist Group in 1962. I was its president in the term he joined when we had over 1,200 members in a university of about 8,000 students. Nigel – and others of your readers – may be interested to look at a website I have just created.

This consists of the archives of the Group – www.ouhg.org.uk – which demonstrates the impact that it had in those benighted times, with outright opposition to Christian missions and open discussion of dangerous topics such as abortion and homosexuality. The national press coverage of OUHG was considerable – and some of the hoax letters to the right-wing *New Daily* are hilarious.

David Pollock, Trustee, BHA, 39 Moreland Street, London EC1V 8BB

Papal Nepotism

The letter from Jennifer Jeynes (*ER* March 2013), recalling her instructor priest's distinguishing between the office and the man in the well-documented cases of wicked popes, reminded me of innocently receiving the same explanation in my convent school nearly eighty years ago – presumably as an inoculation against later historical knowledge.

At the same time, we were taught that cardinals electing popes are guided in their choice by the Holy Ghost (now re-named the Holy Spirit), however bizarre the choice seems to us. ('God moves in mysterious ways'.) The same person of the triune godhead then preserves papal infallibility by preventing popes from making false doctrinal declarations *ex cathedra*. Incidentally, Jennifer could have put quotation marks round the word 'nephews', as in that context it was generally a euphemism for the illegitimate sons of bishops and popes. (And it is, of course, the derivation of 'nepotism'.)

I am mortified that in my article on the papal election, in the same issue of the *Ethical Record*, I gave your readers the losing tip of Angelo Scola to be the new pontiff – and I only hope that none of them backed him too heavily.

Since the result of the conclave's election is supposed to be guided by the Holy Spirit, perhaps my failure as tipster on this occasion was divine retribution for the 64 years (so far) that I have renounced and attacked the faith. If so, I can look forward to meeting Jennifer in the section of Hell reserved for 'lapsed' Catholics, with which she recalled her instructor priest had threatened her. (What loving kindness!)

Barbara Smoker – Bromley, Kent

The Mistake of Interculturalism

Ted Cantle's exposition on interculturalism as a growing phenomenon (see his article on page 3 in this issue) stressed the need to educate people to distinguish between the few fundamentalist bigots and the many tolerant, normal individuals in any given religious, ethnic or other group. Where he is mistaken, in my view, is to write off Marxist, socialist and class-based formations.

On Saturday 26th January, I joined a march through Lewisham to save Lewisham Hospital from government cuts. This was attended by many thousands of people from a wide variety of ethnic, religious and other groups and none. The unifying feature was their need to keep the hospital open; and it is around humanitarian causes such as this that a new consciousness will form. This will become more widespread and develop as the triple dip recession gains momentum and the socio-economic crisis deepens. Marxists were out in some numbers on the demonstration and their analyses were tailored to the particular situation.

UKIP, which Ted Cante correctly exposed to the criticism that they are totally out of touch with the growing reality of a diverse, high-tech, internationalised, interconnected world, was nowhere to be seen on the demo. This was because they had no answers to the problem which the people of South East London face: a devastating attack on their National Health Service.

Chris Purnell – Orpington, Kent

A JOURNAL OF THREE YEARS' LABOUR IN THE ARCHIVES **Carl Harrison, CHES's Hon Archivist**

Conway Hall Ethical Society is probably the oldest freethought community in the world. This proud heritage is embodied in its archives, which form part of the Humanist Library and Archives at Conway Hall. These unique historical records are the authentic witness of the Society's evolution from the radical dissenting congregation of the 1790s, through the nineteenth century challenges to thought and belief, to the creation of Conway Hall in the 1920s and the educational charity of today. In 2011 an inspection by The National Archives noted that the 'collection also reflects the wider secularisation of society and the relative rarity of such material makes it a particularly valuable resource for the research community. The holdings of personal papers further add value to the Society's archive, notably to take a recent accession, the papers of HJ Blackham (1903-2009).'

For several years, in parallel with the cataloguing of the Library's book stock, work has been in progress to bring together, physically protect, arrange and catalogue the archives. Conway Hall is a rambling building and bringing the records together involved searching basements and offices throughout the site, with minutes, accounts, files, correspondence, plans, publicity materials, photographs, sound recordings etc turning up from all sorts of places. The process is still not fully complete! As we brought them together work began on re-boxing the records into acid neutral archive boxes supplied from the conservation studio of London Metropolitan Archives.

A safe home for the gathered archives was the next priority. A temporary store was established in the South Basement while options were assessed for a permanent strongroom (as archivists traditionally call the archive store). Advice was commissioned from the National Conservation Service, who monitored the environments in the North, South and East Basements over a full year to identify the space with the most stable temperature and humidity, most closely in line with the British Standard on archive storage. The best option proved to be an

East Basement room let to the National Secular Society, which readily agreed to exchange this for another space to allow the creation of a strongroom for their and the Ethical Society's archives.

Once empty the room was gutted and repainted, the raw concrete floor sealed and a fireproof door installed. Archive quality steel shelving was erected, specified to accommodate the archive boxes in the most space efficient way. At the time of writing the room is ready and, with re-boxing well advanced it is hoped to move all the collections in by the time this issue of *Ethical Record* appears.

As this work has gone on, arrangement of the archives into a rational order, and the beginnings of detailed cataloguing, have also begun. While many of the records are still in 'as found' (dis)order, a very rough and ready survey has allowed a preliminary classification scheme and 'high level' summary description of everything found to be created. The latest version is attached as an appendix to this account (but note it will be subject to further revision as work progresses).

The summary description, while useful in indicating the overall 'scope and content' of the archive is of limited value to researchers. Cataloguing at a more detailed level, down to the content of individual volumes, files, letters etc is essential if the full richness and variety of the resource for a range of studies, is to be revealed. Nowadays any library or archive catalogue must be available online to reach the widest audience, so some tweaking of the Library's cataloguing database was necessary to enable it to better reflect the nature of the archival documents described. In the process catalogue entries for the deeds of the Conway Hall site (from 1685/6), early minutes of the predecessors of the Ethical Society (from 1807), letters of Moncure Conway (from 1871), records of the South Place Sunday Concerts (from 1887), and the Blackham archive (from 1919) were created on the online Library catalogue (access it via the Conway Hall website).

A Joint Bid called 'Alternatives to Religion'

This work was undertaken by the writer and Anita Miller, another Conway Hall volunteer with archival experience. In the process the scale of the task became apparent; to complete the detailed cataloguing at the present rate would take decades. The answer, obviously, was more (people) resources so at this point work began on an application to the annual round of the National Cataloguing Grants Programme for Archives. Under this scheme The National Archives channels charitable funds to make accessible archives of national significance that would otherwise languish uncatalogued. As we drafted an application to catalogue the archives of the Ethical Society and National Secular Society at Conway Hall, we became aware that Bishopsgate Institute was working on a parallel application for the archives of the British Humanist Association housed there. The grants scheme is heavily oversubscribed and clearly it made no sense for such closely related bids to compete against each other. Very quickly we came together to mount a joint bid under the heading of 'Alternatives to Religion'.

Although our initial application in 2011 was unsuccessful the assessment panel commented favourably on ‘the potential of the collections ... to transform research and understanding of the alternatives to religion’ and invited us to submit a ‘fast track’ reapplication in 2012. This we did and the revised application, with strengthened project management (including a memorandum of understanding with Bishopsgate Institute on ‘cooperation to develop the Archives of Humanism’) and proposals for enhanced outreach and online presence (including an Alternatives to Religion website), was successful in obtaining a grant of £41,250. The partners are now in the process of recruiting a suitably qualified archivist to work for a year and a half at Bishopsgate and Conway Hall to complete the task.

So looking back on the ‘three years’ labour’, while at times it seemed that we were pursuing a number of work strands as tortuous as the basements of Conway Hall, actually they are all beginning to come together quite nicely. And the next couple of years should see a great leap forward in both accessibility and visibility for the archives at Conway Hall.

A SUMMARY OF CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY’S ARCHIVES

Carl Harrison, CHES’s Hon. Archivist

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY

Conway Hall Ethical Society began as a radical nonconformist congregation, founded in London c.1787 by an American, Elhanan Winchester (1751-1797). It acquired premises in Bishopsgate in 1793, and in 1824 built a new chapel in South Place, Finsbury. Over the course of the 19th c., the congregation, guided by a series of charismatic leaders, notably William Johnson Fox MP (1786-1864) and another American Moncure Daniel Conway (1832-1907), evolved continuously away from religious observance towards freethought and rationalism. In 1888 it followed a third American, Stanton Coit (1857-1944), into the Ethical Culture movement and adopted the name South Place Ethical Society.

From the latter half of the 19th c. the Society’s meetings have been a forum where ‘they publicly debated most of the issues of the day’, from what became an essentially ‘humanist’ stance – setting the pattern that still shapes the Society’s public meetings today. Eminent lecturers who have stood on the ‘South Place platform’, and subsequently at Conway Hall, have included Robert Browning, TH Huxley, GJ Holyoake, Charles Bradlaugh, Annie Besant, Bertrand Russell, Fenner Brockway, CEM Joad, Jonathan Miller, Richard Dawkins and many others. South Place also became a centre of musical activity in the 19th c. with concerts and soirees, and from 1887 a series of Sunday chamber music concerts which continues to attract established performers.

In 1926 the Society sold South Place Chapel and in 1929 opened Conway Hall, in Red Lion Square, which remains the London base for its own activities and those of its ‘kindred’ secularist and humanist bodies. On 11 Nov 2012 the Society’s name was changed to ‘Conway Hall Ethical Society’.

SCOPE AND CONTENT OF THE ARCHIVES

Records of Conway Hall Ethical Society under its various former titles: Parliament Court Chapel (1793-1824), South Place Chapel (1824-1926), Finsbury Unitarian Congregation (c.1802-c.1834), South Place Religious Society (1879-1888, etc), and South Place Ethical Society (1888-2012). Records of Conway Hall (opened 1929). (NB. More recent records are not yet open to public inspection.) Also some personal papers. Includes:

Minutes

Minutes of general meetings of the congregation / Society, 1807-1998; minutes of the general committee, 1807-2006; minutes of finance and fundraising committees, 1817-2007; minutes of programme, activities, music and publications committees, 1879-2007; minutes of library committees, 1893-1976; minutes of the building committee, 1895-1903; minutes of trustees, 1920-1940; minutes of development committee, 1985-1987; minutes of associated groups meeting elsewhere, 1877-1896

Financial records

Financial records including treasurer's accounts and balance sheets, reports, invoices etc, 1815-1881; papers re minister's salary, 1826; subscribers and accounts for repairs and new chapel, William Johnson Fox memorial, Conway Hall building fund, c.1815-c.1930; mortgage redemption fund accounts and papers, 1882-1900; trustees' accounts, c.1921-1930; correspondence re share certificates, 1925-1931

Membership and personalities

Papers re rules and membership, c.1823-1857; membership records including 'Finsbury Chapel register', 1825-1864; register of seatholders and payments, 1852-1860; marriage registers, 1889-1980; 'address book' (members, contacts etc), c.1971-1980; autograph albums

Correspondence

Correspondence re congregation and society business, c.1817-1969; includes personal and semi-personal correspondence of William Johnson Fox, c.1823-1851, and Moncure D Conway, 1871-1905; correspondence re the controversy over William Johnson Fox and Eliza Flower, 1834-1835; correspondence between James Waterlow (treasurer) and Newenham Travers and others, re Travers' lectureship at South Place, etc, c.1849-1851; South Place Chapel letter book, 1873-1877; correspondence with lecturers, 1936-1944

Deeds

Deeds of properties at 14-20 Lambs Conduit Passage, 1685/6-1968, 25 Red Lion Square, 1876-1951, and 49&51 Theobalds Rd, 1882-1925, incorporated into Conway Hall site; copy Land Registry certificates for Conway Hall, 1933-1984; South Place Chapel and South Place Ethical Society trust deeds, 1825-1933

Legal papers (other than deeds)

Papers re legal issues, other than property and trust deeds, including opinions on charitable status, 1906-1930; court papers in Chancery case re Society's

charitable status, c.1980; counsel's opinion re letting Chapel for music and dancing, 1880; papers re Lambert bequest, 1991

Buildings and property

Papers re building of South Place Chapel, including plans, contract papers, accounts, debentures, mortgages and mortgage redemption fund, repairs and alterations etc, 1822-1939; correspondence re South Place Chapel property, 1913-1921; plans of Conway Hall, 1927-1963; papers re Conway Hall war damage, c.1941-1950; inventory and valuation of Conway Hall, 1950; plan and correspondence re 49 & 51 Theobalds Rd, 1923-1926; papers re repairs of 14 & 15 Lambs Conduit Passage, 1932; documents re Theobalds Rd shopfront, 1960, and conversion of 51 Theobalds Rd into flats, 1961

Activities

Papers re the Infants' Friend Society, Mutual Improvement Society, Sunday School, library etc, c.1821-1851; proposal for lectures by William Johnson Fox, 1822; programmes and publicity material for congregation and society events and activities, 1876-1936; report on Chapel music, 1874; correspondence and papers re dispute with Musical Director, 1877; Sunday concert programmes, annual reports and accounts etc, 1887-2005; programmes and handbills for children's activities, 1875-1911; address book and papers re Thomas Paine exhibition, 1895, Paine Commemoration / Holyoake Reception, 1903, and Paine centenary, 1909; correspondence and contracts re Conway Memorial Lectures and Trust, 1893-1949; correspondence and papers re meeting in support of Francisco Ferrer, executed in Spain, 1909; meetings and discussions record book and associated papers, 1966-1987

Administration

Administrative papers and files c.1817-1994; papers re registration of South Place Chapel as a place of worship, c.1870-1890; draft 'Aims of South Place Ethical Society', c.1890; Society rules and draft revisions, 1947-1949

Photographs and prints

Photographic portraits of notable figures in the ethical, secularist and humanist movements including Moncure D Conway, Charles Bradlaugh, Felix Adler, Stanton Coit, etc, c.1873-c.1935; album of portraits of persons connected with the Chapel and Society, and of Conway Hall; lithographic prints of South Place Chapel, 1924, and Conway Hall, 1931

Published reports and journals

Annual Reports, 1871-date; South Place Magazine / Monthly Record / Ethical Record, 1895-date; South Place Chapel centenary souvenir, 1924

Personal papers

Ms autobiography and journal of a visit to Scotland by William Johnson Fox; address from the members of South Place Chapel to William Johnson Fox, 1842; ms autobiography of William Lovett (Chartist), c.1853-1876; mss of lectures by Moncure D Conway, c.1874-1896; letters of William Morris, nd, and George Bernard Shaw, 1926; correspondence, draft articles and personal papers of Harold Blackham, 1919-2003.

PRINCIPIA MATHEMATICA, THE MUSICAL
Performed at Conway Hall, 20 February 2013
Review by Steven Bishop, Mathematics Department UCL

I am not much of an algebraist and even less of a philosopher, so seeing the title of this musical I challenged myself to recall passages from long forgotten books on the history of mathematics to prepare myself for this performance by ‘The Conway Collective’. But perhaps I shouldn’t have bothered. Rather than preaching to the converted (that is, only to those people fully conversant with the theory of logic), maybe the idea was to introduce the concepts to anyone, so not requiring any knowledge of rigorous mathematics.

Talking of preaching, it is probably no coincidence that this musical performance was held at the Conway Hall since the building is the home of the Ethical Society, which advocates secular humanism. Bertrand Russell, on whose work this musical is based, had similar ideals and, since there is a bust of Russell in the square I guessed that he had some earlier involvement with Conway Hall. Sure enough, inside Conway Hall there is a room named after Russell, so my guess was right.

The performance of ‘Principia Mathematica, the musical’ is a world premiere of a ‘fascinating and unusual’ new work by Tyrone Landau which is based on the 3-volume *Principia Mathematica* written by Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, the last volume of which was published 100 years ago this year. This should not be confused (as internet searches often do) with Isaac Newton’s *Principia, Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* written some 226 years earlier. If I mainly refer to Russell alone then I apologise to Whitehead who must have also played a significant role.

Building on Aristototle’s reasoning and Frege’s earlier ideas on analytic philosophy, Russell was convinced that arithmetic and indeed all mathematics could be constructed from a series of axioms or logical arguments. Logic was and still is the cornerstone of mathematics, allowing us to move from a hypothesis to a conclusion by incorporating proof, which is a logical sequence of steps that allows us to deduce new concepts from ones that we already know to be true. In their work, Whitehead and Russell used the language of abstraction and wrote their text using the notation of symbolic logic — but to many (and I include myself) this made the text almost impenetrable (see [youtube.com/watch?v=BE657F9sqyQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE657F9sqyQ) for how it was portrayed on the television programme QI, although I did not find this overly funny; while you are on the internet, look at a clip that I did find funny -- the [youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2un9rO2ZF4g) clip of Fry and Laurie which parodies early Open University outputs [youtube.com/watch?v=2un9rO2ZF4g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2un9rO2ZF4g)).

Gö del – Neither Provable True Nor Provable False

It is reported (I have not read it) that in *Principia Mathematica* they took many pages even to get to the conclusion that $1+1=2$ (either 200 or 362 pages depending on who you listen to, but whichever it is, it seems drawn out to me). For an applied mathematician like myself, this obsession with moving away from the visual towards rigour, while laudable, was at the cost of meaning and

understanding (although my pure mathematics colleagues will no doubt tell me that it was understanding that they were after and that I am the one that does not have it). The tragedy is, that despite all their efforts it was not long before Gödel showed that, based on the axioms of the day, there were some results that could neither be proved to be true, nor false. So, although their central idea was to use logic to make mathematics certain, they failed to make it certain.

Interestingly, in the hall where the performance took place there was an inscription above the stage - 'To thine own self be true', which I thought was appropriate to Whitehead and Russell's search for truth. The writing of *Principia Mathematica* must have taken its toll on both authors. It has been compared to preparing a vast overture without actually writing the opera - so all the more interesting that this has spawned a musical. *Principia Mathematica, the musical* is scored for singers, dancers, musicians and philosophers. We were told to prepare to be astonished (better than being admonished). I tried to do my homework and found some clips of an opera based on Nikola Tesla with Tyrone Landau playing Thomas Edison so I was not expecting a Lloyd Webber extravaganza. This was a world premier but as far as I could ascertain there is no immediate plan to repeat the performance.

Intimacy of Cast and Audience

On entering the performance hall I was struck by the intimacy of the cast with the audience. I sat in the front row (there were only 2, but they snaked around the side of the room) and next to me were 4 or 5 actors sat at a desk. At first I thought it might be a bit like Bouncers, the John Godber play, where the audience suddenly become the performers. These actors were a sort of interview panel, so it felt a bit like a panel to review a proposal. The show starts with introductory piano music leading into opera singing from the 'star' (well the writer of the musical at least), dressed all smartly in his tux (was he Russell? maybe he was Whitehead - I never did find out but I am guessing it was Russell). Like most opera, without an intimate knowledge of the script you cannot make out the exact words of the song. Moving, yes, but it would have been nicer to know the detail and there was no other movement from the cast to give me a hint (usually in opera there is the archetypal heroine or mother figure feigning injury, love or a mixture of both). So it was a bit like my reading of the book *Principia Mathematica* - I got the gist but could not follow it exactly.

There followed a bit of dialogue about the use of Peano's notation, soon accompanied with some discordant piano. I later discussed this with Landau and he explained that the atonal score represented the abstraction of thought and writing in the text of *Principia Mathematica*. Next, two female performers, who had sat quietly on the stage, take to the floor and become dancers engaging in a long, courtship-like ritual, rather like Strictly Come Dancing, accompanied by sound from what sounded like a scratchy 78 record. A fight ensues, which must relate to the angst of writing such complex text in the days before word processing, as Russell was himself a pacifist who was put in prison for campaigning against the war effort during the World War I.

The fight ends with one of the dancers thrown onto the review panel's table - in some rather good acting. One of the panellists joins the fray. He then takes to the

floor and stands as still as the statue in Red Lion Square, arms out ready to take up a waltz while one of the female dancers cavorts (but slowly mind you) around him. The statue pose is clearly an attempt to demonstrate how much thought must have gone into the writing of *Principia Mathematica* while all around the world was still spinning. There is a later dance similarly with waltz statue man and the second female dancer (slightly more erotic this time). I only saw one flex of the foot, but this was contemporary and not ballroom dancing.

Dancing to ‘Function of a Function’

What follows is an interesting mix of dance and dialogue to expose the audience to the paradoxes that Whitehead and Russell faced. ‘Viscious circles’ was a theme at one point. Then up pops singer Jenny Patrone with a West End type belter called ‘function of a function’. No, I can’t believe it either. There she was, like Roxy from Chicago, singing about ‘single valued functions’ {a mathematical term. [Ed]}. Actually it was quite good. The singer has obviously performed before, and, on this showing, will perform again. I was intrigued when the number finished with ‘Roxy’ taking the Chair of the panel off into a back room - I have been on panels before but it never happened to me! Landau created further piano music to link pieces together. Some playing reminded me of the music from Cats, which is not to say that Landau has plagiarised since a lot of Lloyd Webber’s other material itself has its base selected from classical pieces. It was pleasant enough. Then Landau - or was it Russell? - stepped into the limelight and had what looked like a dance version of a ‘mé nage a trois’ with statue man and a female pannelist. There was a lot of tenderness shown and discussions about collections accompanied by the scratchy 78s again (Landau could not dance and play the piano at the same time, you understand). ‘Roxy’ returned with another tuneful number about Socrates being wise before some narrative on ‘if and only if’ which I suspect left the unknowing audience as cold as it leaves our fresh intake students.

The show ends rather suddenly with the panel’s verdict that “our world is not bound by logic - and nor are we”. I say suddenly because the show was only 45 minutes, which is probably a good thing. I asked Landau later how or why he thought of *Principia Mathematica* as a concept for a show. He said that he’d become fascinated by the book when he was a teenager after a father figure had given him the ‘youth of today’ speech saying that “none of them can even be bothered to read anything deep like *Principia Mathematica*”, which spurred him into action - well reading the first few pages at least. Landau was struck by the structure of the symbolism, rather like the symbolism of the music he was also studying. He was also quite taken with the acknowledgements in *Principia Mathematica* that noted earlier contributions, a bit like Newton’s “on the shoulders of giants”. I also asked Landau how he constructed the physical sequences and here he said that although he had suggested structures to the dancers, many of the sequences came from the dancers own choreography, a full



Final bow. Or is it the final bow?
Watch this space to see if they will perform again

cast involvement that they seemed to enjoy.

There were people alongside me who had no detailed knowledge of mathematics and I didn't need to have done my homework to enjoy the performance. A few more background notes would have been useful in a longer programme. It was an interesting mix of song, contemporary dance and drama. If done again, I think that they should make more of the 'afterwards' because everyone actually did want to talk about it.

ON CONWAY HALL

Barbara Smoker

After the first world war, South Place Ethical Society took the decision to move its premises a couple of miles westward, since the City had become a purely financial area. The opportunity was to be taken to make the new building a larger hall with ancillary rooms – purpose-built for the society's own activities, though lettings would also be allowed, as before, to kindred organisations and causes, at the discretion of the General Committee.

The extra cost, beyond the proceeds of sale of the South Place premises, was to be met by the then members' donations, which were collected over the next few years. By 1929 the new hall was ready for occupation, though not completed. (In fact, the original plan never has been completed.)

While the hall was named after the Society's much-loved late minister, Moncure Conway, the architect was instructed to preserve the name SPES in the actual fabric of the building – as can still be seen. Conway Hall thus clearly belongs to the Society. In the last few years, however, the opposite idea seems to have taken root: that the Society belongs to Conway Hall – and this obliquity was subtly confirmed by the change of name last year.

I have now learned that the Society's website advertises New Age events – which are actually contrary to our established ethos – though it does not advertise our own publications.

THE 80th CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE

JEREMY BENTHAM: PROPHET OF SECULARISM

by Philip Schofield

Copies available at £4 inc post from the
Conway Hall Ethical Society



VIRGINIA WOOLF AND MADNESS: TRAUMA NARRATIVE IN *MRS. DALLOWAY*

by Suzette A. Henke

A monograph based on the Virginia Clark Memorial
Lecture delivered on 9 July 2008 to the Ethical Society.
£5 inc post from the Society.

BOOK REVIEW – CRUEL BRITANNIA: A SECRET HISTORY OF TORTURE

by **Ian Cobain** Portobello Books, 2012 £18.99

Review by **Chris Purnell**

Ian Cobain's book is primarily concerned with instances of physical, and mixed physical and psychological, torture perpetrated unlawfully by British officials and their agents during the period from World War II to Iraq *et sequitur*. It is a well-researched book containing much frightening material but is not marred by any kind of sensationalism.

In the earliest part of the book there is documentation of British direct use of torture during and directly after World War II. By the time of Iraq and Afghanistan we had become more careful in general. Cobain records, at page 219, referring to MI6 and MI5 written guidance,

“So MI5 and MI6 officers should not be seen to condone torture and must certainly not torture any prisoners themselves. But, crucially, they could continue to question people whom they knew were being tortured”, (by the US authorities or Pakistan's SIS, for example).

Torture “Outsourced”

In the later stage of *Cruel Britannia*..., Cobain outlines the “outsourcing” of torture by the British security services. Thus, Mohamed, an Ethiopian, “Was not tortured while Witness B was in the room: the [British] officers' Standing Orders were that he could not be seen to condone torture. Instead, [he] was questioned..... over a cup of tea”. However, Mohamed was subsequently rendered to Morocco where “Moroccan interrogators beat [him].... and subjected him to loud noise for days. Once a month ... his torturers used scalpels to make shallow, inch-long incisions on his chest and genitals ...”. Reports of what Mohamed said under torture went back to London (although this, initially, was denied in Court). [Page 229]

However, British intelligence officers who do use torture or kill people abroad have (or had) ‘extreme legal cover’ under Section 7 of the 1944 Intelligence Services Act which reads, “If, apart from this Section, a person would be liable in the UK for any act done outside the British Islands, he shall not be so liable if the act is one which is authorised to be done by virtue of an authorisation given by the Secretary of State under this Section.” This amounts to the ‘licence to kill’ (or torture) beloved of James Bond fans!*

The reader should note that this ‘legal cover’ does not extend to agents operating in the UK who, when seeking to extract information for or ‘turn’ a political dissident, would tend to stick to techniques such as ‘interrogation’ between bouts of souped-up electro-convulsive therapy which can be presented as ‘legitimate medical treatment’. [This approach, in fact, if repeated, is a good way of reducing a political dissident to years of quiescence but a very bad method getting any relevant, useful intelligence.]

It's worth pointing out, however, that Cobain does not neglect the involvement

of medical personnel in torture. Ahmed, for example, had his finger nails pulled off by pincers in Islamabad (by Pakistan's ISI). Cobain writes at page 260, "While he was being asked these questions, the nail was slowly removed from his ring finger. Then the doctor appeared; Ahmed was given the pain-killing injection and his new wound was dressed and he was permitted 48 hours rest."

Apart from the WW II instances and Northern Ireland, almost all the particularly horrifying examples that Cobain gives are 'abroad'. Younger members of CHES who buy and read his book may reflect that, even if they become involved in left-wing politics or convert to radical Islam, they are comparatively safe from torture unless they emigrate to one of the world's trouble spots, or are 'rendered' thereto. Political 'old hands' reading the book may reflect on how lucky we are all are to live in the UK (at least for the time-being under the current 'liberal', albeit imperialist, regime).

*It's not entirely clear to me from reading *Archbold* for 2013 whether Section 7 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994 has been repealed, as one might expect from Lib. Dem. participation in the coalition government. Certainly, most of the Act *is* still on the statute book. Fortunately, so is Section 9 of the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, whereby if a British subject "in a foreign country, within the dominion of a foreign power" unlawfully commits manslaughter or murder upon anyone at all (including a foreigner), he or she is tryable in England. British agents abroad, including, in particular, those working for private security companies, should please take note. [CP]

BOOK REVIEW - ETHICS AND SCIENCE - AN INTRODUCTION

by Adam Briggles and Carl Mitcham

CUP. ISBN 978-0-521-70267-6 ppbk 370pp. – CHES library catalogue no 174.93 BRI

John Edwards

In the twelve chapters, each containing examples and arguments, ending with 'Questions for research and discussion' and a short reading list, the work presents vast number of instances and other source material.

In Ch 1, the book boldly claims to be different from others in that it is not so much claiming to present an orderly summary of current knowledge, rather to open up the discussion, and subsequently does tend to jump into examples too quickly before setting out the basic premises, though Ch 2 presents a good summary of moral philosophy and Ch 3 a brief account of the history of natural philosophy. Ch. 4 criticises Chinese policy for conflating science and technology and but the authors tend to do this implicitly throughout the book.

The work does cover a vast range of issues; the ethics of the conduct of scientific research; the ethics of the application of scientific results; the present day scientist as employee/worker rather than the independent 'natural philosopher' of the past.

For the scientist there is a clear responsibility to the specialist community through the medium of peer review. For the engineer, is his primary responsibility towards his own organization or to the wider society? Are the authors supporting the 'whistleblower' or not?

Are values extrinsic to science? or is science now essential in formulating goals because of its ability to predict consequences? Have scientists merely been 'wheeled in' to give support to goals that have already been decided?

Closing the 'is-ought' gap

Ch 7 discusses the possibility of developing a strong science of normative ethics - closing the 'is-ought gap'. Science has worldwide acceptance - what about applying it to ethics? It begins reluctantly to see there may be a role for science in formulating ethical goals, but does not really go far enough, though Einstein is given credit for his ethical insights.

In Ch 9, Vannevar Bush is quoted as upholding the need for scientific autonomy and funding. Whilst rightly critical of scientists making exaggerated claims of utility to secure funding for their projects, the authors may agree that commercial successes have been based on the legacy of publicly funded research, but still presents contrary arguments from market protagonists.

In Ch. 10 there is even-handedness bordering on naivete in dealing with climate change 'skeptics'. Where there is clearly an organized campaign against climate science, the people who exposed this (Naomi Oreskes et al) are referred to as 'muck-raking science historians'. Also, it seems odd today to quote Hobbes as having anything relevant to say about science and ethics.

Ch 12, on engineering, the authors rightly criticise the precautionary principle which, taken to its logical conclusion, would result in complete inaction or presupposes there is some zero-risk alternative.

This a valuable source book, but the authors leave open the question of whether the scientist can be responsible for the uses to which his knowledge may be put, unless he occupies a position of power. I am not sure the book 'sticks up' for science sufficiently, though it does finally make a plea for better general understanding of science to enable us to ask the right questions.

Appendices

A list of 16 formal ethical codes; extensive bibliography; over 330 references [but not referenced to footnote numbers in text] ; full alphabetic index.

Authors

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Carl Mitcham is Philosopher of Science and Technology; Division of Liberal Arts and International Studies, Colorado School of Mines.

SANTAYANA AND RELIGIOUS CULTURE

Tom Rubens

George Santayana (1863-1952) held views on religious culture which are highly pertinent to anyone today with a humanistic and naturalistic perspective. Santayana, like his contemporaries Weber and Durkheim, was deeply interested in religion, without himself being a believer. His overall outlook was naturalistic in the neo-Darwinian sense; hence the idea of deity was seen as at best a symbol

of nature's tremendous plasticity and creative power. Religion as a cultural phenomenon was an index of man's evolved complexity, intellectual and emotional. Religion's ontological doctrines – though, contrary to the view of believers, not literally true – were a great imaginative achievement, with a potent poetic force. Also, religious ethics, while not emanating from the supernatural source which believers ascribed to them, did largely reflect the lessons of humanity's moral experience.

A very important aspect of religious culture – art – was viewed in like fashion, as containing both imaginative-poetic elements and moral ones. So, for example in Christianity, depictions of a virgin woman holding her natural child did not describe a literal situation, but could nevertheless be valued as conveying the ideas of extreme gentleness and maternal tenderness, with the concept of physical virginity doing duty for that of moral purity. Likewise, depictions of Christ as risen from the dead and appearing before his disciples were, though lacking literal validity, significant as presenting the idea of a collective moral commitment which could outlast the physical death of an individual who had been part of the collective.

Also, over and above the content of the artwork – and this point applied to arts in addition to painting e.g. music, poetry, architecture – was its aesthetic calibre. Again, humankind's evolved powers were the thing to note: in this case, artistic ones.

Santayana was an Epiphenomenalist

An additional consideration in Santayana's view of religion and religious art is his naturalistic approach to the philosophical issue of the mind-body relation. In this regard, he was an epiphenomenalist. That is, he regarded consciousness as a passive, non-causal effect of states and operations of the evolved physical brain. Hence religious doctrines and art were not the product of consciousness, (although compatible with our reasonings) but of the brain-factors which caused consciousness. It followed that, had the brain-factors been radically different — had, then, the course of physical evolution been radically different — there would probably have been no religious culture. Further, this situation would have meant that the kind of consciousness produced by the different type of brain-factors would have been alien to the kind we associate with religion. In Santayana's evolutionary naturalism, everything was dependent on physical process.

According to this way of thinking, the experience which underpins religious culture is, in all its unquestionable richness and intricacy, the experience of the evolved human animal: who, if Santayana's naturalism is correct, can never transcend the physical world. Thus the entire realm of religious culture is circumscribed by the physical conditions of existence, and therefore is, philosophically, contained within the naturalistic outlook.

To share this very plausible perspective on religion, one does not necessarily have to be, like Santayana, an epiphenomenalist. Any physically-based view of the source and scope of human experience will provide a foundation for such sharing.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn, WC1R 4RL.

Tel: 020 7405 1818 Registered Charity No. 251396

For programme updates, email: programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk

Website: www.conwayhall.org.uk

Admission to Sunday morning lectures is free for members of CHES and £3 (£2 conc) for non-members. For other events, no charge unless stated.

MARCH 2013

Saturday 30 Centre for Inquiry UK, BHA and Conway Hall Ethical Society
1100-1600 present **TRICKS OF THE MIND**. Discussion will include magic, time distortion, hypnotism and past-life regression

Sunday 31 No Lecture - Easter Sunday



Stations of the Cross Purposes

14 March 2013 - 14 April 2013

Lawrence Mathias explores the conflicts of rational thought and religious belief in his new show, with larger than life models, drawings and paintings. The various Stations of the Cross are presented in black and white images, with all the main participants visiting as giant junk material sculptures

APRIL

Sunday 7 **'JUST SUPPOSE'** A film on the questioning of religion,
1100 written and presented by **Michael Lawrence**

Sun 14 **BEWARE! THE VACCINE**
1100 a brief history of anti-vaccinationism. **Rob Brotherton**

Saturday 20 FREETHOUGHT HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP
1400 **TERRY LITTLE MEMORIAL MEETING**
Speakers, refreshments. Brockway Room. All welcome.

1430 PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF ENGLAND
WHY WE NEED PHILOSOPHICAL SCEPTICS
a lecture and discussion led by
George Macdonald-Ross, University of Leeds
Bertrand Russell Room. All welcome.

Sunday 21 **IRRATIONAL BELIEFS IN THE NHS**
1100 **Edward Presswood**

Sun 28 **ADVENTURES WITH THE ENEMIES OF SCIENCE**
1100 Journalist and author, **Will Storr**

CHES's SUNDAY CONCERTS

Artistic Director: **Simon Callaghan**

Doors open at 1730 Concerts start at 1830 Tickets £9; students £4; under 16 free

Full details on: www.conwayhallsundayconcerts.org.uk

Hi everyone, I have a question regarding Record Retention (Standard VI A). In the CFA Institute book, I found "Records created as part of a member's or candidate's professional activity on behalf of his/her employer are property of the firm." Hi everyone, I have a question regarding Record Retention (Standard VI A). In the CFA Institute book, I found "Records created as part of a member's or candidate's professional activity on behalf of his/her employer are property of the firm." The latest Tweets from Ethics Records (@Ethics_Records). Ethics Records is a new indie record label based in Los Angeles. Home to @MistahMota @leigh_thrift. Los Angeles, CA. You blocked @Ethics_Records. Are you sure you want to view these Tweets? Viewing Tweets won't unblock @Ethics_Records. Yes, view profile. Close. Ethics Records followed. Ethics Records @Ethics_Records 3 Feb 2015. More. As a matter of law and ethics, patients have a right to the information in their medical records.¹² EHRs can increase participation and engagement in health care through patient access,⁴¹ empowerment, and improved communication.⁴² However, patients may not be aware that they can access their records.⁴³ ACP supports direct patient access to test results but cautions that patients should discuss results with their physicians.⁴⁴ Sulmasy et al.: Ethical Implications of the Electronic Health Record. REFERENCES.