EDITORIAL - THE FUNCTION OF AN ETHICAL SOCIETY TODAY

When people ask what is the purpose of the Ethical Society today, they sometimes give the impression that they themselves cannot really think of one. They may go on to suggest that it should perhaps confine itself to purely local issues, or become a charity for the relief of poverty rather than for education and research into ethics. This dumbing down is regrettable. Of course, ethical societies have always been more than just debating societies. They have always been a community, ideally a caring community, whose members work constructively together for their mutual benefit and for the benefit of the wider society in which we all live - 'the cultivation of a rational and humane way of life', to quote one of our aims.

In this respect the Ethical Societies, here and in the USA where they began, differ from other national organisations, such as the National Secular Society or the Rationalist Press Association, which employ more specific methods to advance the cause of humanism, by campaigning and publishing respectively. Their nearest equivalent in this country would be the local Humanist societies, the oldest of which began as independent ethical societies, then, in 1927, came under the aegis of the Ethical Union, which in turn metamorphosed into the British Humanist Association in 1965.

South Place Ethical Society remained and remains independent, with a national membership (although heavily weighted towards the home counties), overseas members, and a journal taken by humanist and rationalist organisations throughout the world.

Perhaps those who query the Society's function (usually from a distance) might be helped to make relevant contributions towards an answer by participating in some of the varied events organised by the Society and described in the programme. The meeting planned for the 17 January will provide an opportunity for all views to be aired.

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REPORT OF SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY, 20 DECEMBER 1998

The October 1998 Annual General Meeting of the Society resolved to change the name of the Society to The Ethical Society. As this requires a Rule change, the decision of a Special General Meeting was thought to be necessary. An SGM was therefore called to debate the motion that the name of the society, stated in Rule 1, be changed from South Place Ethical Society to The Ethical Society. Lionel Elton was elected chairman. The motion was proposed by Barbara Ward and seconded by Terry Mullins.

An amendment, proposed by Barbara Smoker and seconded by Donald Rooum, read: That the name of the Society be changed to SPES (Society for the Promotion of Ethical Studies). The amendment was debated first and when put to the vote was lost by 18 votes to 9.

When the original motion was put to the vote, it was passed by a small majority, 17 for and 14 against. As a rule change requires a two-thirds majority to be effective, the official name of the Society remains South Place Ethical Society and the status quo is unaffected. This means that, as was previously established several years ago following a similar debate, variants of the name such as SPES and Ethical Society could be used where appropriate.

WINTERVAL PARTY

Following the SGM, a social was held in the library: Terry Mullins set a general knowledge quiz and Marina Ingham arranged excellent refreshments. A very enjoyable event.
Modern Christian apologists, among whom the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, Keith Ward, is fairly typical, often seem to suggest that serious criticism of their faith began in the eighteenth century. It is further suggested, quite preposterously - by both Christians and New-Age pundits - that much of this Enlightenment criticism is based on a mere prejudice against supernaturalism and the concept of miracle. While I have no wish to underestimate the intellectual revolution we call the Enlightenment, nor the permanent value of much that was achieved during that period, it is important to recognise that serious and indeed decisive criticisms of Christianity had been made by both pagan and Jewish thinkers in the first three centuries of our era. We shall discover that much of the criticism associated with the Enlightenment is largely a refinement and extension of criticism that had already been voiced fifteen centuries earlier, and which is still valid today.

Let us begin with the concept of miracle. Long before David Hume’s classic critique, indeed a full century before the appearance of Christianity, we find one of the greatest and most learned Roman orators and statesmen, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE), saying:-

Nothing can happen without a cause; nothing happens that cannot happen, and when what was capable of happening has happened, it may not be interpreted as a miracle. Consequently there are no miracles... We therefore draw this conclusion: what was incapable of happening never happened, and what was capable of happening is not a miracle. (De Divinatione 2.28)

The eminent New Testament scholar, E.P. Sanders, until recently Dean Ireland’s Professor at Oxford, concedes: ‘This view espoused by Cicero has become dominant in the modern world, and I fully share it.’ (The Historical Figure of Jesus, p.143). It is a great pity that his fellow Oxford Professors of Divinity, Keith Ward and Richard Swinburne, could not take a similarly enlightened view: but alas, they remain wedded to that degraded and degrading programme known as Christian Apologetics, an enterprise long recognised as inimical to the unfettered and unbiased pursuit of truth.

The Earliest Roman Notices of Christianity
As I have given this essay a title taken from a letter of Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Trajan written about the year 112 CE, I had best begin my survey with the three roughly contemporary Roman authors who refer to Christianity in remarkably similar terms in the early decades of the second century: Tacitus, Suetonius and Pliny. All three held important posts in the Imperial administration, and were thus jealous guardians of the Pax Romana and the ancient and honourable traditions, including religious pluralism, that characterised Rome at its best. Roman religion was always as much a matter of sociability and civic responsibility as of individual piety. New-fangled doctrines were suspect as much for their seditious potential as for their inherent silliness; especially when, as with the Christians, irrational enthusiasm was combined with sectarian exclusiveness, disdain for traditional religious piety and contempt for the civic institutions that were rightly seen as important for social cohesion.
The earliest probable reference to Christians in a Roman author is in Suetonius (75-160 CE). In his life of the Emperor Claudius (reigned 41-54 CE) he mentions the Imperial Edict (49 CE) expelling Jews from Rome, noting this was related to 'constant disturbances among them 'at the instigation of Chrestus' (impulso Chresto). It is widely accepted that the reference is to 'Christus', and that it is thus an indication that even at this early date there were disputes in Rome between Orthodox Jews and converts to the Christian heresy. This is by no means unlikely, but it is not the only possible interpretation.

The first unequivocal reference to Christians in Rome by a non-Christian author takes us to the reign of Nero (54-68 CE). Though the early years of his reign were promising, his unstable character and increasing paranoia led to a reign of terror in which Christians suffered a terrible retribution. Both Suetonius (Nero 16) and Tacitus (c.55-120 CE) refer to this event, but as Tacitus (Annals xv. 44) gives the fuller account, I shall turn to him.

In the year 64 CE, a dreadful fire broke out in Rome, and much of the city was destroyed. Some accused Nero of causing it - he was known to have favoured radical redevelopment in the affected area - others blamed the Christians, a secretive, unsocial and despised sect. Whether to divert attention from himself, or because he believed them culpable, or merely to scapegoat a hated minority, Nero fixed his attention on the Christians. Tacitus, who clearly did not believe the Christians were responsible for the fire, nevertheless considered them 'notoriously depraved'. He records that they took their name from 'Christ (who) had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate'. (This is the only mention in a Pagan Latin author of this action of Pilate). He continues: 'in spite of this temporary setback the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only in Judea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome'. A comment in passing shows that he includes Christianity among 'all (the) degraded and shameful practices (which) collect and flourish in the capital'. (ibid.)

Following the fire, Nero first had self-confessed Christians arrested, then, on the basis of their information, many others were condemned. 'Their deaths were made farcical. Dressed in wild animals' skins they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutes for daylight'. (ibid.) Although he dismissed the idea that these hapless sectarian were guilty of incendiariam, Tacitus believed their very profession of the Christian faith sufficed to justify the punishments inflicted. But it all backfired, and he comments ruefully that they ended up being 'pitiied'. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man's brutality rather than to the national interest.' (ibid.)

Pliny's First-Hand Account
Pliny the Younger (62-113 CE) was one of the most brilliant lawyers and able public administrators of his day. A nephew of the soldier and natural historian Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE), he was adopted as son by his uncle who sadly perished while investigating the great eruption of Vesuvius that destroyed Pompei and Herculaneum. Just a year later, young Pliny was, at 18, one of the youngest ever public orators in Rome. He went on to become first a quaestor, then praetor, then consul. After sorting out the army's finances in Syria, and serving as Clerk of Works for the Tiber Flood Defences in Rome, he was posted by Trajan to be Governor of Bithynia-Pontus in Asia Minor. This combined province extended along the whole southern shore of the Black Sea, and included much of what is today Northern
From one of the coastal cities of Northern Pontus in the autumn of 112CE, Pliny wrote to his Emperor seeking advice about how to deal with the Christians who were causing a great deal of public disquiet in the area. It may be that their condemnation of sacrifices to local gods had disrupted trade and led merchants to file complaints against them. We know from Chapter 19 of the Acts of the Apostles that something similar occurred in Ephesus as a result of Paul’s preaching there about 60 years earlier. In any event, Pliny advised the Emperor that he had already sentenced to execution those brought before him (other than Roman citizens) who had persistently and stubbornly maintained their Christian allegiance. He had, however, refused to pursue those named in an anonymous pamphlet circulated subsequently. Those who had recanted and reverenced with incense and wine the Emperor’s image, he had let off with a caution. He wondered if he should continue to punish those who simply declared their ongoing Christian beliefs, or whether they would also need to be found guilty of a criminal offence. It is significant that Pliny discovered a number of former believers who had rejected the faith, and he was hopeful that he could persuade many others to abandon this unworthy superstition. In the so-called Second Epistle of Peter, a pseudonymous NT work written roughly the same time as the Pliny-Trajan correspondence, there is further evidence of widespread apostasy among those who had given up believing in the Second Coming of Jesus, an event which had been declared imminent for some eighty years, but clearly now a promise that had been welshed on!

From his enquiries Pliny discovered that Christians ‘were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before sunrise and reciting an antiphonal hymn to Christ as (to a) God (Christo quasi deo), and binding themselves with an oath - not to commit any crime, but to abstain from all acts of theft, robbery and adultery, from breaches of faith, from denying a trust when called upon to honour it. After this... it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.’ Even after submitting two deaconesses to torture, Pliny was able to discover nothing more than a ‘depraved and extravagant superstition’. We may be sure, then, that had there been accusations of cannibalism or lewd conduct - which we know were sometimes levelled against Christians - Pliny found them here entirely without substance. But though he considered them deluded fanatics, it was not safe simply to dismiss them as harmless cranks. Their disdain for the usual decencies of society, and their arrogant dismissal of the traditional religious beliefs and customs of others, was bound to lead to civic strife. Indeed, all unregulated associations were seen as potentially seditious, and even trade guilds had at times to be proscribed, lest their factional demands lead to a destabilising of society. In his brief reply, Trajan commends Pliny’s action, agrees that Christians should not be ‘ferreted out’, and that they should be pardoned if they recant. He agrees that no credence should be given to accusations in anonymous documents: but when duly charged, tried and convicted, Christians should indeed be punished. (Pliny, Epp. x. 96, 97.)

**Early Apologists and Their Critics**

These brief, early Roman notices do not, of course, engage in debate about the substantive beliefs of the Christians. It was their seditionary ways which brought them to official notice. A little later, around the middle of the Second century, we find the Samaritan-born but Rome-based Justin Martyr (c.100-c. 165CE) defending the faith in two Apologies ostensibly directed to the Emperor (addressing pagan
objections) and in a *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (which, as the title suggests, attempts to answer Jewish objections). That there would be powerful Jewish objections to the new doctrine is obvious, and many are found in the New Testament itself. Jews, quite naturally, felt that their monotheism was compromised by the elevation of Jesus to the realms of divinity. They also resented the misappropriation and manipulation of their scriptures to lend credence to outlandish beliefs and they rejected the wholly unacceptable notion that the crucified Galilean was their long-awaited Messiah. Most hurtful was the cavalier attitude of Christians towards the Torah, the traditional Jewish festivals and customs, and the idea that the Mosaic covenant was now obsolete and to be set aside.

The first Christians had, of course - like Jesus - been Jews; but the new faith made little headway among orthodox Jews. It was, however, soon found that, in amalgam with heterodox Judaism and elements drawn from Hellenism and Eastern mystery religions, this wild and essentially syncretistic faith was more palatable to uneducated pagans. Even so, it attracted few converts in its first hundred years. At the time of Pliny and Tacitus, it is estimated that the total population of the Roman Empire was about 60 million, of whom roughly 8 to 10% were Jews. Fewer than one tenth of one per cent were Christians, and they were to be found in congregations numbering from a few dozen to a few hundred in perhaps 40 or 50 cities throughout the Empire. At this early stage there was little uniformity in their beliefs, and only gradually, as the discipline imposed by monarchical bishops and general councils became widespread, did anything resembling a universal catholic faith began to emerge. Even then, there were many dissident or ‘heretical’ groups. A monolithic catholicism - always an unstable construct - was only slowly imposed in the century and more after Constantine first made Christianity a *religio licita* by the Edict of Milan in 313CE, two hundred years after the death of Pliny.

**Galen Criticises Dogmatic Theism**

By the end of the Second century, however, Christianity was beginning to attract attention from pagan philosophers. This was no doubt in response to attempts made by Justin Martyr and other Apologists to lend their faith a measure of intellectual respectability. The Greek physician, Galen (c.130-201CE) hailed from Pergamum in Asia Minor, where, after completing his medical studies in Alexandria, he became chief physician to the gladiators. (Pergamum, you will remember, was one of the cities to which the author of the Book of Revelation had written around the end of the First Century.)

Galen later settled in Rome, where he became personal physician to the Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. Among his voluminous writings we find a few passing references to the Jews and Christians. In one he dismisses the views of another physician on the subject of the pulse, saying this writer based his views on dogma, not empirical observations. It would be as profitless, says Galen, to try to engage him in serious discussion as the rival ‘followers of Moses or Christ’, because their minds were equally closed to evidence and reason. Elsewhere he considers at length the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) which he likewise criticises as irrational. Galen took issue with the doctrine that God could do absolutely anything, without restraint. He reveals that his own views resemble the rational deism of the Enlightenment, and rejects as arbitrary and unphilosophical the dogmatic theism of Christians and Jews. The satires of his contemporary, Lucian of Samosata (c.117-c.180CE), make similar points more amusingly, particularly in relation to Christian gullibility.
Next we come to the Greek philosopher, Celsus, author of the first systematic critique of Christianity, *On the True Doctrine*. We know almost nothing about Celsus, though his work must have been written about 178CE. Once Christianity became the only religion permitted in the Empire, all copies of Celsus' work, along with all other critical and 'heretical' writings, were condemned to the flames. After 448CE it became a capital offence to possess any of these writings. It is thus only by the merest good fortune that an estimated 70% of Celsus' treatise has come down to us in the form of extended quotations in a massive work devoted to its refutation commissioned from the Alexandrian Christian Platonist, Origen (c.185-c.254CE) in the last decade of his life. That a work on such a scale should have been thought necessary some seventy years after Celsus's treatise was written demonstrates that it was seen as a serious and long-standing thorn in the Church's flesh. In the *Introduction* to his magisterial edition of Origen's *Contra Celsum*, Henry Chadwick says, with some justice, that there are 'few works from the early Christian Church which compare (with it) in interest or in importance... (it) stands out as the culmination of the whole apologetic movement of the second and third centuries'.

The modern author, Robert L. Wilken, aptly describes Celsus as a 'conservative intellectual': he has also been described as 'the Voltaire of the Second century'. It is clear from what survives of his treatise that he had a thorough knowledge of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, including the writings of dissidents and heretics. He knows, for example, of at least half a dozen such sects led by women, and he is fully *au fait* with Marcion, the son of a Bishop from Pontus who made his fortune in shipping but broke away from the Roman Church. Marcion was a radical Paulinist who rejected the Old testament and its God, attributed the creation to a demiurge, and regarded Christ as man's saviour from crass materialism. He led one of the most successful schisms in the middle of the Second Century. Indeed, it is a mark of his success that he is singled out by orthodox critics at the end of the century, like Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hegesippus, for their most vituperative attacks. In parts of the Empire, at least, the Marcionite church attracted more converts than 'orthodoxy'; for a time some even feared it may become the dominant form of Christianity, but its asceticism and rejection of sex was finally the cause of its downfall.

To return to Celsus: he first criticizes the clannish exclusiveness of the Christians, and their contempt for all outside their movement. He finds nothing of value that is original in their teachings, no defensible rational basis, nor any unity of belief, custom and history. He deals *in extenso* with the absurdities and inconsistencies in their teachings and is particularly critical, not only of the fantastic legends concerning his origins and status, but also of the persona of Jesus, whom he considers a peddler of the magic arts he had learnt in Egypt. He draws attention to the absurd and mutually contradictory accounts of his birth as described by Matthew and Luke, and describes Jesus as born of an adulterous union between a Jewish peasant-woman and a Roman soldier name Panthera. This charge was commonly advanced and is found in early Jewish polemic such as that of Rabbi Eliezer. Morton Smith, in his valuable book *Jesus the Magician*, argues that this charge goes back to early Palestinian sources and further that it remained such a persistent embarrassment to Christians that the Church Father, Epiphanius (c.315-404CE) eventually sought to defuse it by claiming that Panthera was Jesus' 'paternal' grandfather! If there is any truth in the Panthera tradition and if he can be identified with the Sidonian archer named Tiberius Julius Abdes Pantera who served in Palestine around the time of Jesus' supposed birth, and later saw service on the
Rhine, then it is just possible that his tombstone found in Bingerbrück is our only genuine relic of the Holy Family!

A Dangerous Emphasis on Faith
Celsus goes on to remonstrate with Jews who have abandoned their ancestral faith to become the slaves of a deceiver. Even from the Christian writings, he says, it is clear that Jesus was an unworthy object of their devotion. Though no great admirer of Judaism, Celsus argues that it is in every way superior to Christianity. In comparing Christian doctrines with those of the Greeks, Celsus once again finds the former derivative of the latter. He dismisses the Gospel miracles as low-grade sorcery, and finds the factionalism and rivalries between countless Christian sects - he likens them to 'a bunch of frogs holding council in a swamp' - as telling evidence against their claim to be soundly based. He finds no moral spine in this religion: it appeals only to sinners and the lowest of the low whom it commends above those who attempt to lead ethical, useful and industrious lives. It believes, pathetically, that this world is worthless and soon to be replaced by a better model that God will hand down on high, thus devaluing thrift, prudence and all efforts to improve the common lot of mankind. Its emphasis on faith is positively dangerous. The Christian 'healer' is 'a charlatan who promises to restore sick bodies to health, but discourages his patients from seeing a first-class physician with a real remedy, for fear superior skill and training will show him up.'

In his critique of Christian claims, Celsus is as sharp and perceptive as any Nineteenth-century rationalist. The idea that God should have kept himself hidden from mankind and remained indifferent to their sufferings and the triumph of wickedness for countless ages, only lately to come down to earth in human form to deliver a remedy, Celsus finds a revolting and demeaning doctrine. The anticipated 'second coming' when the faithful will be delivered and the wicked consumed in a universal fire he also shows is based on ancient fables and thus unworthy of serious consideration. 'It is equally silly of these Christians to suppose that when their God applies the fire (like a common cook) all the rest of mankind will be thoroughly roasted, and that they alone will escape unscorched - not just those alive at the time, mind you, but (they say) those long since dead will rise up from the earth possessing the same bodies as they did before. I ask you: Is it not the hope of worms?' So repulsive, indeed, that many Christians - then as now - reject it.

In his criticism of the Jewish and Christian view that God created the earth for the benefit of mankind, Celsus takes a surprisingly modern standpoint. Drawing on Pliny the Elder's empirical observations, he describes the life of social insects - ants and bees - and shows that these lowly creatures have their own highly developed social structures, even seeming to know by instinct things which man has to learn by long and patient study. This suggests to Celsus that these creatures may be closer than man to God. Clearly we have here a foretaste of Darwin's more extensive undermining of the idea of human uniqueness.

Celsus reserves his sharpest criticism for the Christians' claim that they - and only they - are right in their beliefs. Each nation, he says, has its own customs, laws and gods, and it would be foolish to seek to impose uniformity upon them. So a degree of mutual tolerance - of live and let live - is necessary if people of different backgrounds are to co-exists in mutual harmony and respect. It is precisely against this pluralist principle that the Christians offend, with their strident and arrogant exclusivism.
Porphyry’s Against the Christians
That most learned early critic of Christianity, Porphyry (c.232-c.305CE), a native of Tyre in Syria, studied philosophy with Longinus in Athens and became, like his teacher, ‘a living library and a walking museum’. Aged 30, Porphyry went to Rome to study with Plotinus, the founder of neo-Platonism, whose star pupil and later literary editor and biographer he became. His commentary on the Categories of Aristotle long remained the first work that students of philosophy were required to master.

Among his vast output was a three-volume work Philosophy from Oracles and a fifteen volume work Against the Christians, the last copies of which probably fell victim to the bonfires of Theodosius II at the height of Christian triumphalism in the mid-fifth century. Also, no Christian writer attempted a refutation on the scale of Origen’s Contra Celsum, so the only traces that have come down to us are fragments of Philosophy from Oracles quoted by a range of apologists, including Jerome and Augustine. But it is widely believed that an obscure work by the Fourth-century theologian Macarius Magnes is an attack on Porphyry’s Against the Christians, though he is not actually mentioned in it by name. Many scholars - including R.J. Hoffmann - believe that we can reconstruct from it at least some of his arguments.

Porphyry was immensely skilled as a literary and historical critic. He argued that the Pentateuch was written, not by Moses but after the Exile by Ezra. The Book of Daniel was very important to Christian apologists in promoting their arguments from prophecy. Daniel purports to be writing during the time of Nebuchadnezzar, the 6th century BCE King of Babylon, and to predict events which actually came to pass under the Selucid King, Antiochus Epiphanes, in the 2nd Century BCE. He also refers to ‘one like a Son of Man’, which Christians saw as a further prophecy that had been fulfilled by their Christ. Porphyry was able to demonstrate - to the fury of Christians - that the book was actually written in the 2nd century, and far from predicting what was to happen in a distant future, described what had happened in a recent past. Porphyry had heard Origen lecture when he was a young man, so was already aware of his allegorical sanitizing of those scriptures which were, on the face of it, cruel, unedifying, patently false or otherwise unacceptable. Such sleight of hand, Porphyry argued, was fundamentally dishonest.

In his extensive criticisms of the Gospels, Porphyry argued that the evangelists were not witnesses of the events they described but had fabricated their portraits of Christ. Not until the Eighteenth century was this line of criticism - clearly distinguishing faith from history - again taken up, by German scholars. It has proved fruitful and valid right up to the present, and Porphyry may therefore be considered the father of biblical criticism.

In some ways Porphyry may seem an enigmatic figure to the modern mind: a strict vegetarian, he nevertheless approved of animal sacrifice as a part of religious ritual. But this is best seen as all of a part with his conservative pluralism: he supported the ancient and traditional customs which Christianity wished to abolish in establishing its own intolerant monopoly on religion. He was happy to accept Christ as one important figure among others in the religious firmament: but this was, of course, anathema to those who saw Christ as the ‘only-begotten son of God’ and were the sworn enemies of all rival faiths. Porphyry further exhonorated Jesus of the charge of practising magic that had been accepted by, among others, Celsus and Hierocles (the latter had compared Jesus unfavourably with the popular First-century wonder-worker, Apollonius of Tyana). But such a concession was, of course, not enough for those who maintained that salvation was to be found in Christ alone.
The Triumph of Christianity and the Pagan Reaction

In 313CE Constantine first made Christianity a religio licita, a legal faith. Gradually, by degrees, it became the only legal religion, though not without a fight on the part of the Pagans, who nevertheless steadily lost ground as a triumphalist Church, with imperial support, remorselessly removed all their rights and privileges, confiscated or demolished their buildings, desecrated their shrines and burned their books. But there was to be one last brief ray of Pagan hope before the sun finally set on the Empire and the Christian Dark Ages set in. This was the reign of Julian 'the Apostate' (c.331-363CE), who was Emperor for less than two years before his untimely death at the age of 32.

Julian was a nephew of Constantine the Great. His mother died a few months after his birth, and when he was six Constantine's long reign came to an end. In the struggle for succession, Julian's father and eight of his relatives were murdered on the orders of Constantine's Christian sons. Only Julian and his half-brother Gallus were spared on account of their youth. Julian's childhood was spent on the estate of his maternal grandmother in Bithynia, and while little personal attention was given to his upbringing by the Emperor Constantius, steps were taken to keep him socially isolated from any factions that might have wished to promote him as a rival to the Emperor. This lonely and self-sufficient child was nevertheless provided with able tutors and from one of these, the eunuch Mardonius, he learnt a love of the Greek classics, Homer and Hesiod. Later in Pergamum, Julian sat at the feet of Aedesius, a pupil of Iamblicus who had himself studied with Porphyry. A deeply studious young man, Julian thus absorbed the whole tradition of Greek philosophy. He went on to experience the mysticism and ritual of Greek religion, to which, notwithstanding his Christian upbringing, he found himself increasingly drawn. For some ten years he conformed outwardly to Christianity, while at heart he knew himself to be a Pagan. In 355CE he was appointed a commander of the Roman Army in Gaul, where he was loved and respected by his men, who wanted him as their Emperor. On the death of his cousin Constantius in 361CE Julian succeeded him.

Though not slow to purge his enemies, Julian at once set about forming alliances with former partisans of Constantius who were ready to join him in a new administration. His dream was to revive the ancient splendours of the Pagan empire, and remove the monopoly of the Church. He reopened the old temples and restored their worship: he even had plans for rebuilding the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, but did not live to see it through. By allowing banished heretics to return to their homes he infuriated the Church. His laissez-faire and undogmatic approach to religion was, of course, anathema to Christians who had come to expect the Emperor to intervene in their disputes on the side of whatever was locally regarded as the orthodox version of their faith.

Julian's plans to rebuild the Jerusalem temple were aimed as much at discomfiting the Christians as encouraging the Jews. Julian was, of course, aware that Christians regarded the destruction of the Temple in 70CE as a fulfilment of prophecy and as a divine punishment of the Jews for their rejection of Christ. While it remained in ruins they could point to it as a proof of the superiority of their own religion. But Julian was well aware that Judaism thrived in cities throughout the Empire, and had its own developed culture and vigorous institutions as well as a venerable learned tradition. He - like many Jews - saw Christianity as essentially a degraded apostasy from Judaism, rather than as a new and superior faith. So by rebuilding the Temple he could, with one blow, both restore the heart of a venerable religious tradition and remove from the Christians the ground of their smug delusion.
that they were now the ‘true Israel’. If the temple were rebuilt, Jesus’ prophecy that ‘no stone will be left standing on another’ would be proved false!

In his own writings Julian further sought to show that Christians had systematically misunderstood and distorted the Jewish scriptures. No doubt he was familiar with and drew upon the extensive works of Porphyry then still available, which makes it easy to understand why, after his death, and with the restoration of Christianity as the religion of the Empire, the Church was ever more determined to root out and destroy all reasoned criticisms of its faith by educated pagans, including the last Pagan Emperor. It very nearly succeeded.

I find myself having to agree with Gore Vidal, who has written a sensitive novel about Julian, that the conversion of Europe to Christianity was the greatest intellectual disaster that has ever befallen the West. More than that, it has had the most socially and culturally divisive - not to say bloody - consequences of any mass movement in world history. It is also, alas, a disaster from which we have by no means fully recovered.

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(Hoffmann's book on Celsus and the book by Wilken are particularly recommended).

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY
Registered 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,
the cultivation of a rational and humane way of life, and
the advancement of research and education in relevant fields.

We invite to membership all those who reject supernatural creeds and find themselves in sympathy with our views. At Conway Hall there are opportunities for participation in cultural activities including discussions, lectures, concerts and socials. The Sunday Evening Chamber Music Concerts founded in 1887 are renowned. We have a library on subjects of humanist concern. All members receive the Society's journal, Ethical Record, eleven times a year. Funerals and Memorial Meetings may be arranged.

Please apply to the Admin. Secretary for membership, £18 p.a.

Ethical Record, January, 1999
THE 160TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ABOLITION OF
SLAVERY: THE CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCE

Vidya Anand
Lecture to the Ethical Society, 29 November 1998

Allow me, from the outset, to thank you, the members of the South Place Ethical Society, for doing me the honour, once again, of inviting me to address you, on this occasion on the subject of the One Hundred and Sixtieth Anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery and the Caribbean Experience. Whenever I have stood here in the past, to speak on various subjects, I have stood in humility, for I have always been conscious of the great and the learned who have lectured and continue to lecture here every Sunday, disseminating and sharing their wisdom and knowledge.

My subject for today deals with both man’s inhumanity to his fellow men, as well as his humanity towards his fellow beings. The practice of slavery, human bondage of the weak, traded as chattel at the will of the strong, has been with us since antiquity. Alas, in parts of the world, it remains to this day.

We cannot forget that many wonders of the world, like the pyramids of Egypt and similar great edifices elsewhere, are products of the toil, sweat and blood of the countless human beings who had no control over their lives from the proverbial cradle to the grave. So, whenever we cast our eyes upon the wonders of ancient industry, we must spare some thoughts for those who created them.

Mother nature, with its capricious hostility to some and its benevolent generosity towards others has created two types of perceptions among people. On the one hand, the very quest for survival has led, of necessity, to a conscious and tenacious struggle against certain of its elements. Yet, on the other hand, this has gone alongside the tendency to worship, admire and fear those very elements, not to mention the whole corpus of nature itself.

The struggle for survival, in particular, served to generate two distinct sets of values, one for the people inside the cave and the other for those who were outside. Both classical Greece and ancient Rome possessed such double standards, separate value systems and separate attitudes towards those in the fold and those beyond it. The often quoted talk of democracy, human freedom of action, and the respect for life were only meant to be applied to the citizens and not to the people living beyond the pale of their highly circumscribed worlds.

While the great debates of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle were being carried on in ancient Athens, dealing with such timeless subjects as the rights of man, there existed, in Athens itself, one of the biggest markets in the then world, where fellow human beings were bought and sold like chattel. It is chastening to recall that, at this time, the freedom to own slaves was considered an essential attribute of democracy.

Likewise, in ancient Rome, there existed different bodies of law, one for the citizens, the other for those other beings considered as objects to be bought and sold. But when Christianity, after its early and ghastly persecution, came to be recognised as one of the accepted faiths of ancient Rome, its avowed principle of equality of all human beings, regardless of their birth or status, brought it into direct conflict with the great commercial interests which thrived on trading human beings as slaves.
Consequently, a deal had to be struck, whereby the Christian leaders of the day gave in to these immoral pressures, accepting that those people living beyond the frontiers of the Roman Empire could still be enslaved and traded as such by those professing to be Christians, without compromising their so called Christian conscience.

It is sad that the 'SLAVS', who were one such people living beyond the frontiers of the Roman Empire, could be made 'SLAVES'. The word 'SLAV', which originally meant glory, thereafter came to be identified with and assume the connotations of servitude.

The Romans, when they came to these isles of Britain, encountered fierce opposition from the native inhabitants. They were freedom loving spirits, not easily broken down into the docility of servitude. It was this strength within the British character of antiquity that prompted Cicero, the famous Roman, to write his famous advice to a fellow Roman slave trader. I quote: 'Please do not obtain any slaves from Britain, because they are stubborn and cannot be converted into docile beings worthy of serving an honourable household in Rome.'

The history of how Europeans of later centuries came to trade in products like metals, agriculture and other produce from Africa, and then proceeded to trade in human ebony from this most rich, beautiful, cultured and civilised of continents is one of the saddest, most sorry, darkest and most evil chapters in the history of humanity and the world. It represented a throwback to the barbarism and pre-medievalism of antiquity at a time when man’s conscience and consciousness should have been keeping pace with the undoubted leaps being registered in science, technology and the whole gamut of human culture and wisdom.

Yet despite their protestations and veneer of civilisation, Europeans looked upon the black people they had enslaved as simply nets with which to catch loads of money. The slave masters peddled the perverted ideology that black people were not human beings. And in every conceivable despicable way they tried not to treat them as human beings. But in their hearts they knew. And they feared.

They knew and feared very well that the great sons and daughters of Africa were very human. They possessed in abundance the most essential attribute of humanity, what the Irish call 'The Spirit of Freedom'. And they never forgot it for even a single moment; just as we should never forget that those Irish are, in large measure, the descendants of the same Celtic people that Cicero warned his fellow slave traders to avoid at all costs.

From the standpoint of the peoples of the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, South America and the South Pacific, the human majority that is sometimes termed ‘people of colour’, it seems that the Europeans have always prided themselves on the fact that when they leave their respective countries, most of them also leave their morality and religiosity behind. The very few who do not manage to do so are seen by their fellow Caucasians as a nuisance or embarrassment at the very least.

It was against such a background that, in 1741, the distinguished Ghanaian scholar, Johannes Captien, presented his thesis, 'Is it compatible with the laws of Christianity to make slaves of others?', at Holland's Leiden University, then one of the world’s greatest seats of learning. Not only did Captien present his thesis in Latin - for five days he defended it in that ancient European tongue. One wonders what
twisted intellectual sophistry the learned dons of Leiden deployed in their no doubt futile attempts to refute our brilliant Ghanaian scholarship.

Indeed, most so-called European scholars and men of the cloth have always felt free to ignore their ten commandments abroad and to therefore treat the rest of humanity, for example the people from Africa and the Indian subcontinent, whom they forcibly brought to work their plantations, as little more than nets with which to catch loads of money. This wealth was, in turn, transferred to Europe to enable the elite to live a life of luxury.

Those who had the misfortune to work for these Europeans, from the cradle to the grave, had no rights, only obligations, which were enforced with the lash, the branding iron, the gallows, and by other despicable and inhuman means.

Such also were their nefarious disguises that some of them even went to the extent of preaching that, if their slaves could serve their white masters without giving them any cause for concern, and without any thought of self, then the Lord, in his infinite mercy, would, in the next lifetime, allow them to be born into white households.

It was the forced labour of kidnapped black slaves that created and built the enormous wealth of Europe and North America. As Karl Marx put it in his seminal classic, 'Das Kapital', whose originality and profundity stands in ever sharper relief with the march of globalisation, capitalism, in its period of primitive accumulation, turned the continent of Africa into a 'commercial warren for the hunting of black skins'. A truly nasty phrase for a truly nasty business. Equally important, Marx pointed out that, 'labour in the white skin can never be free when in the black it is branded'.

It was from the intellectual discoveries and fearless scholarship of Marx, that the great Dr. Eric Williams, the fine scholar who led the people of Trinidad and Tobago into the realms of independent nationhood, creatively advanced and developed the analysis contained in his classic and timeless work *Capitalism and Slavery*. It is on Dr. Williams' shoulders that new generations of decolonised scholars were able to stand, leading to such ground-breaking works as the late Dr. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and *Groundings with my Brothers*. Rodney inspired Grenada’s gentle revolutionary martyr, Maurice Bishop, whose attempts to put power into the hands of the people, under the watchword 'Forward Ever - Backward Never', were so cruelly destroyed by the deadly combination of internal intrigue and external assault.

As you know very well, for a long time the peaceful sons and daughters of the African continent were kidnapped and forcibly carried to the so-called ‘New World’, and even to the port cities of these islands, to be sold and branded with the initials of their master’s name and with a load of iron hooks hung around their necks.

They were loaded with chains and often instruments of torture were added: the iron muscle, thumb screws, and many others impossible to describe, often for the most trivial of reasons. The eminent author, Gustavus Vassa, writes: ‘I have seen a man beaten till some of his bones were broken for any little thing such as letting a pot boil over.’
The families of black people were often split asunder. Some black men had to travel miles to see their wives for a short time; they were considered the fortunate ones. Vassa, when questioned as to why these black people did not marry black women of their master’s household, said that they answered ‘that when the master or mistress chose to punish the women, they make the husbands flog their own wives and that this they could not bear’.

In the 1860 London publication, *Running a thousand miles for freedom; or the escape of William and Ellen Craft from slavery*, the remarkable William Craft who, together with Ellen, outsmarted the ingeniously cruel bounty hunters and slave owners, with the help of Quakers, to reach the northern states, and who then crossed the Atlantic, not only to reach freedom, but most importantly to spread the gospel of liberation, writes:

‘I have seen slaves tortured in every conceivable manner. I have seen them hunted down, and even burned alive at the stake, frequently for offences that would be applauded if committed by white persons for similar purposes.’

He was writing about the southern United States. But every word applied to the Caribbean with equal force. In passing here, let me note that it is surely one of the greatest ironies of the history of the United States, that the very first person to lay down his life in the great cause of American independence was none other than Crispus Attucks, a ‘runaway’ slave, in the city of Boston on 5 March 1770. The historian Daniel Webster wrote: ‘From that moment may we date both the birth of United States of America and the severance of the British domination.’

Faced with such a degree of wanton sadism and inhumanity, as described by William Craft and many others, is it really surprising that there were many who sought refuge in death from such evils as had rendered their lives unbearable?

As one of the bravest black poets put it:

_O lead me to that spot, that sacred shore_
_Where souls are free, and men oppress no more_

No wonder, too, that, according to historical records, the average working life of a black man was no more than sixteen years.

On 21 March 1788, it was our Gustavus Vassa who petitioned the Queen to enlist support for ending the whole inhuman practice of slavery, endured by ‘millions of my African countrymen, who groan under the lash of tyranny in the West Indies’. Later, after the struggles symbolised by William Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson and others, the anti-slavery bill was passed in 1838. It was 160 years ago that the compatriots of Milton once again could rightly believe in the following universal dictum of the great poet:

_God gave us only our beast, fish, fowl,
Domination absolute: the right we hold
By his donations. But man over man
He made not Lord: such title to himself
Reserving, human left from human free._

The commitment and contribution of Wilberforce, Sharp and Clarkson should never be slighted or forgotten. If you look at the merciless and pitiless way in which ETHICAL RECORD, JANUARY 1999 15
these men were caricatured in the press of the time, you can see that the scurrilous nature of the tabloids is not a recent invention. But more importantly still, let it never be forgotten that what was most fundamental in the abolition of slavery was the resistance of the slaves themselves. African people never accepted slavery. They fought and they died; ultimately they emerged victorious.

Meanwhile, in 1857, similar inhumanities of the British imperialists in India culminated in an uprising and war of independence that shook the very foundations of this jewel in the British Crown.

A new form of servitude was invented to circumvent the passage of the Slave Act, in the form of indentured labourers. They were brought from India by fair and foul means, by abduction, greed and deceit of the highest order, to work the plantations. Some were sent as punishment for their participation in the war of liberation. Others by kidnapping, force, trickery and the most bitter of economic necessity.

It was, indeed, not for nothing that the system of Indian indentured labour in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Guyana, and elsewhere in the Caribbean, has been labelled as another system of slavery.

Yet through common suffering on islands far from their original homes, a bond was forged. Many of those brought from my mother India came with experience, direct and indirect, of the first War of Liberation. Once they had arrived in the Caribbean, the newcomers from India could stand on the shoulders of the successive, heroic and brilliant struggles of generations of African people. Despite every overt and covert attempt to inculcate the nefarious concept of 'divide-and-rule', the African and the Indian have stood together on Caribbean soil, in wave after wave of mighty struggle, not least in the labour struggles of the 1930s.

The Caribbean labour struggles of the 1930s, in which Trinidad and Tobago were to the fore, shook the mighty British Empire, so that its servants and lickspittles, from the colonial commissioners to the labour aristocrats of the Trades Union Congress, came rushing from London to attempt to pacify the workers of the oil field and the cane field, who had risen as one under the inspiring slogan: Let those who labour hold the reins.

This struggle produced many great heroes. I want, however, to pay particular tribute, just as I did before his statue during my lecture visit to Trinidad and Tobago in the Summer, earlier this year, to Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler, oil field worker, political prisoner of the colonial authorities, and friend and teacher to lovers of liberty, from all parts of the world gathered in the heart of empire, in London.

It was the struggles of Trinidad and Tobago's Oil Workers' Trade Union (OWTU), in particular, that made the living link between the labour upsurge of the 1930s and the popular uprising of the 1970s. In such ways, the Africans, Indians, Chinese and others have made in Trinidad and Tobago a reality of that quintessentially Caribbean motto: Out of Many, One People.

From my observations and experiences in Trinidad, I came to appreciate more keenly and acutely just how essential such a standpoint is for Trinidad and Tobago, and other countries in a similar position and with a similar make-up. For a peaceful, prosperous and happy future, it is vital that the descendants of African slaves and
Indian indentured labourers must stand together, united not divided. As, I suppose, with any country, there are certain rich and selfish elements who shortsightedly think only of their personal interests and not those of the society. To further their perceived personal interests, they do not hesitate to stoop to racism and to misuse of religion in the guise of so-called ‘fundamentalism’. This is dangerous and irresponsible. And it has nothing to do with genuine religious feelings or sentiments. Whatever name it is called by, it is blasphemous worship of the profane God of Mammon. It is a game played with fire whose flames will not discriminate as to who they consume.

An official guide to Ghana states:

‘West Africa was the hub of the slave trade and by the time slavery was abolished in the late 19th century, an estimated 30 million men, women and children had been shipped to work under foreign masters. From the moment when Europeans first set foot in what was to become known as the Gold Coast, people were bought and sold.

‘Men, women and children, their hands and legs shackled, would have been led down into the large dungeons to await the next ship bound either for Europe or the new colonies of North America, South America or the Caribbean. Visitors can read a report of a captain sinking his ship and its captives to collect the insurance - a common practice, it would appear.’

Sufficiently common, in fact, to have been a central part of the plot in the drama series shown on BBC television earlier this year, which many of you might have seen, ‘A respectable trade’.

The Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh was no stranger to suffering. But he was once moved to remark that no people on earth had been so cruelly treated as the African people. Who can doubt his words when we look at the evidence: To the slave trade and colonialism, we must add the Berlin Conference, which carved up Africa like so many slices of cake, leaving wounds that still fester so terribly to this day, from Liberia to Rwanda and from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Sudan.

And Africa was made to suffer again, both during the Cold War and today under globalisation. As the Swahili speaking peoples like to say, when elephants fight, the grass suffers. But when elephants make love, the grass still suffers.

I might quote here from ‘The Uplift of the Negro’, a speech by Booker T. Washington, delivered at the Alumni Dinner of Harvard University on 24 June 1896, when he was awarded an honorary degree:

‘In working out our destiny, while the main burden and centre of activity must be with us, we shall need, in a large measure in the years to come, as we have in the past, the help, the encouragement, the guidance that the strong can give the weak.’

Of course, we, the global poor, must become and be our own liberators, but the sentiments, if not necessarily all the language expressed by Washington surely retain their validity. We should all do our best to eradicate such evils, which debase the humanity of all of us.

As we prepare to enter the next millennium, it is inevitably a time for reflection. More than two millennia have already passed since the timeless hero
Spartacus inspired countless of his enslaved brethren to proclaim, 'I am Spartacus', knowing that in so doing they might be hastening their deaths, but that, through their sacrifice, others might live. It is also more than two millennia since the Hebrew slaves, immortalised in Verdi's opera, Nabucco, which Haleucco itself demonstrated the timeless and contemporary quality of resistance, rose in rebellion against Roman oppression.

Yet what picture does today's world present? Where it would have taken months for an edict to be conveyed from one corner of the empire to another, today the powerful measure their communications times in milliseconds.

But there is still only one Rome, which expects not only that that which belongs to Caesar should be rendered unto Caesar, but much else besides. There is not a corner of the earth where the tentacles of the multinationals do not reach. They dominate not only the economic and military fields, but also the worlds of ideas and information. To them, knowledge, which should be sacred, is just another commodity, the most valuable of all. With the most modern technology, the self-appointed lords of humankind contrive to reinforce the most backward tools of religious, political, social, gender and caste oppression in pursuit of their insatiable greed for money and boundless lust for power.

Those who have stood and stand against this, and strive to give a voice to the weak and otherwise voiceless, deserve our boundless and eternal gratitude. In this noble work, the South Place Ethical Society and Conway Hall occupies a special and unique place. Be it Marcus Garvey, Jomo Kenyatta, George Padmore, Babasaheb Dr BR Ambedkar, Krishna Menon, Shapurji Saklatvala, Kwame Nkrumah, Walter Rodney, Cheddi Jagan, Michael Manley and countless others, you have fearlessly given them your platform, in both good times and bad. Above the stage in your main hall is written the words, 'To thine own self be true'. In keeping to this motto, you have remained true to the highest ideals of mankind.

Long may you continue this noble work.

REPORT ON THE FATE OF THE MONARCHY DEBATE

On Thursday, 10 December 1998, the Ethical Society staged, in the large hall, an exciting debate on The Fate of The Monarchy. Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland argued energetically in favour of a Republic, while Express writer Peter Hitchens argued conservatively, and unsurprisingly, for the status quo. Peter had turned down a TV appearance on the same evening, so committed was he to speaking at Conway Hall. The debate was competently chaired by Observer writer Jay Rayner (son of Claire). The two main speakers were followed by numerous well-articulated speeches from the floor. Straw polls of the audience conducted before and after the debate both showed a 3-1 majority in favour of a Republic, but there can be little doubt that the would-be citizens will, in the meantime, behave as loyal subjects. NB.
EDWARD AVELING AND ELEANOR MARX

Terry Liddle

Summary of a Lecture to the Ethical Society, 13 December 1998

Just over a century ago in Sydenham in South East London there took place the tragic death of a woman at the height of her intellectual powers. The official verdict was suicide, but many felt that the woman’s lover had more than a hand in her death. The woman was Eleanor Marx and her lover was Edward Aveling.

Edward Aveling was born into a large family of a Congregationalist minister in East London. Educated at the dissenters’ school at Taunton, Edward entered University College, London, as a medical student. Aged twenty he transferred to the Science faculty obtaining a £40 Exhibition to study botany and zoology. In 1870 he obtained his B.Sc, doing so well that he won a scholarship to study for another three years. For a number of years he taught at a girls’ school in Camden and gave public lectures on science. It was at one of these that he encountered Karl Marx and his daughter Eleanor.

In 1872 he contracted a short-lived marriage to Isobel Frank. By 1874 he was lecturing at Regent Street Polytechnic and published his first work Botanical Tables. He then became a lecturer at the Medical School of London Hospital. In 1876 he obtained his DSc. He applied for the Chair of Comparative Anatomy at Kings but withdrew on discovering membership of the Anglican Church was obligatory.

In 1879 Edward joined the National Secular Society and started writing for Bradlaugh’s National Reformer. He formed a relationship with Annie Besant and together with her and Bradlaugh became one of the leaders of Secularism. When G.W. Foote was imprisoned for blasphemy, Edward edited The Freethinker. This prosecution was the work of Sir Henry Tyler who had already tried to ban Edward's science classes. By 1881 Edward was the NSS's vice-president.

Edward contributed a series of articles on Darwin to the National Reformer. Darwin had been keen on these but became alarmed when Edward wanted to reprint them as a book. A meeting was arranged at Downe which proved inconclusive. Eventually the book was published as The Student's Marx but without Edward’s dedication to Darwin.

Edward’s bad habit of borrowing money without repayment led to a rift between him and Bradlaugh. At one time Bradlaugh had to buy him out of Holloway where he had been imprisoned for debt. Finally Bradlaugh was forced to sue him for a debt of £191. Gradually he was eased out of the NSS, resigning rather than be expelled. By now he had renewed his acquaintance with Eleanor claiming to have been at her father’s funeral in 1883.

Eleanor - A Model Socialist

Eleanor was the youngest of Marx’s children and the one nearest to him both emotionally and politically. Eleanor was raised in an intensely political environment with Marx busy at work on Capital and forming the First International. In her early teens Eleanor developed an interest in Ireland, subscribing to The Irishman. The defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871 brought a flood of political refugees, amongst them Prosper Lissageray. Eleanor translated his history of the Commune and had,
despite her father’s opposition, a long, probably unconsummated, relationship with him.

When Marx died in 1883 Edward published an obituary in Progress and in the summer of that year he and Eleanor joined the Social Democratic Federation, Britain’s first Marxist party. They contributed to its publications Justice and Today in which they urged readers to greet Foote on his release from prison. Eleanor was one of the three female members of the SDF’s executive.

When the SDF split in 1884, Edward and Eleanor along with William Morris joined the Socialist League. Eleanor wrote for its paper Commonweal and lectured to its branches. She took an active part in its fight for free speech in East London and helped organise a children’s Xmas party at its offices. In addition Eleanor undertook the translation of Madame Bovary and acted in productions of Ibsen’s plays. Together with Samuel Moore, Edward translated the first volume of Marx’s Capital and popularised Marx’s difficult economic theories in his The Student’s Marx.

As a result of a meeting with a young labourer, Will Thorne, Eleanor played a leading role in the foundation of what is now the giant General Municipal and Boiler Maker’s Union. Within three weeks the union had grown to three thousand. Its demand for the eight-hour day was, surprisingly, granted. Eleanor helped draw up the union’s rules.

During industrial disputes, Eleanor spoke at the factory gates. In 1890 she formed the union’s first women’s branch and was elected to the executive. When workers at a rubber factory in Silvertown struck for an increase in pay to sixpence an hour, Eleanor spoke at factory gate meetings three times a day. She also aided a strike at Kellers Jam factory and helped Hammersmith shop assistants win a reduction in hours.

**Formation of the Labour Party**
The Legal Eight Hours League was formed to fight for the eight-hour day. Edward and Eleanor were joint secretaries. In this struggle they worked hard to win support from the Radical Clubs which formed a working class left wing of the Liberal Party. In doing so they laid important foundations for the later formation of the Labour Party.

By 1884 Edward and Eleanor were openly living together. The Socialist League was increasingly coming under anarchist control and eventually Edward and Eleanor returned to the SDF. When the Independent Labour Party was formed, Edward became a member of its National Administrative Council - only to be expelled as a result of faction fighting.

A legacy from Engels enabled Edward and Eleanor to set up home in Sydenham. From there they continued their political work, Eleanor singing in the Lewisham Socialist Choir. In 1897, Edward’s wife died and under the name Alec Nelson he wed a young actress. The exact circumstances are unknown but it seems likely that this was a major factor in Eleanor’s untimely death.

Today, Edward and Eleanor are but little known. Yet their contributions to the causes of secularism and socialism were on the grand scale. At the very least their lives and works should be commemorated and some of their works republished.

The views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Society
Jeremy Hayward and Gerald Jones teach philosophy at various Further Education Centres in London including the Mary Ward Centre and Morley College. What is distinctive about their approach is the incorporation of philosophical activities into classes. Hence the title - *Philosophy For Fun* - and the consensus was that the evening was both fun and enlightening.

Gerald was teaching that night, and joined us halfway through the evening, so it was left to Jeremy to provide a brief description of their teaching methods before actually demonstrating them at work. It soon became clear that, like many of us, Jeremy is evangelical about philosophy. Part of the idea of using games is to make philosophy as accessible to as many people as possible. Another advantage of using games is the more pragmatic aim of breaking up the formal part of lectures (essential since most people 'time out' after less than 20 minutes talk, myself included!) Practising what he preached, Jeremy kept his preamble to less than 20 minutes so we could get on with the main business of the evening - for tonight the play was the thing.

We started with a type of activity called an ‘Opening gambit’. Thirteen statements were given, and we split into groups with the task of deciding whether each situation described was good, bad or morally neutral. For example the statement ‘A tree falls in a forest crushing a cute deer’ was readily agreed to be morally neutral. The main benefit was in extracting the principle we intuitively use to make our decision - in this case we decided that ‘a moral act requires a moral agent’. Other situations illustrated other features of moral acts, such as ‘a moral act requires a moral patient’. Some of the scenarios saw a division between those who thought that the agent’s intention was the most important factor in determining rightness and others who thought that consequences were more critical.

Perhaps the most entertaining statement we had to consider was ‘A builder shouts ‘Nice legs’ to a person walking past’. This not only brought out the issue of whether political correctness was more morality or fashion but also tested the prejudices of participants (who said the builder or the person walking past was male?) The whole exercise was very interesting and useful - as one participant pointed out, many books start straight off with what is right or wrong without dealing with the prior question of what puts a situation in the ethical domain in the first place. As to be expected this activity - which Jeremy calls an ‘intuition pump’ - led to some heated discussion amongst the audience, but then as someone said ‘We are the most argumentative society in London’ (to which another in the audience inevitably replied ‘Oh no we’re not!’)

The second activity involved us trying to decide whether qualities such as smoothness, heaviness and value were primary or secondary. The group I was in found this exercise harder and less fruitful than the first, but this may have been because there wasn’t time fully to explain the differing theories of Locke and Berkeley. The moral for me was that the games should not be used as the only teaching method - but neither Jeremy nor Gerald would claim they should. Games
are however very useful in illustrating a theory and allowing students to engage with the material if combined with more traditional methods.

We finished with a role-playing game, ‘the Util game’. Participants had to imagine they were act-utilitarian administrators of a hospital. We had $4200 to spend over the two rounds and had to decide which patients to spend the money on. Would we save the poor chap needing a leg operation, or splash out on a fur operation to keep the Blue Peter cat and millions of children happy? The dilemmas proved to be far from easy - how do you compare the pleasure gained from watching soap-operas to that gained from poetry? Could you justify saving four lives if it meant actively ending one life? The exercise certainly succeeded in its goal of making us think about the difficulties of utilitarianism.

A short but lively question and answer session followed, by which time Gerald had joined us. Questions and comments ranged from bemoaning the lack of philosophy in the national curriculum to controversies over how points were awarded in our games. All in all a stimulating evening - I for one eagerly await our speakers’ forthcoming book on the use of games in teaching philosophy.

Visit the London Group Web Site at http://members.aol.com/timlebon/philsoc.htm Contacts:-Tim LeBon 01483 852937 or email timlebon@aol.com

The Philosophical Society of England

Monday, 18 Jan 7pm. The Value and Uses of Philosophy (Discussion)
Monday, 1 Feb 7pm. A Darwinian View of Philosophy (Neil Munro)

Meeting at the Slurping Toad, 35/6 Ludgate Hill, London.

THE OPEN SOCIETY: USEFUL PROJECT OR EMPTY CONCEPT?

A Report by Ian Buxton

Lord (Ralf) Dahrendorf paid homage to his mentor, the patron saint of the London School of Economics, Sir Karl Popper, on 1 December in an address which - exuding hagiographic reverence - struck this listener at least as having decidedly more ‘drone’ than ‘bite’.

The ‘Open Society’, he explained, was a continuation in the social/political realm of the notion of ‘falsification’ with which Popper established his supposedly iconoclastic academic credentials in 1934 with his ‘Logik der Forschung’ (‘The Logic of Scientific Discovery’ 1959) and which remains - alongside the predominantly American ‘Social Constructivism’ - the prevalently fashionable view in philosophy of science.

Dahrendorf explained that he would develop his critique under three headings: 1 ‘The Gellner Problem’, 2 ‘The Kolakowski Problem’, and 3 ‘The Dahrendorf Problem’, although despite - at least as I thought - listening attentively, I was unable to extricate the entangled skeins of distinctly characterised reasoning.

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Ethical Record, January, 1999
To be positive, though, it was made clear that Popper accurately recognised a fundamental distinction between scientific progress and social ‘progress’, the difference being that the former progresses in a linear (though not necessarily unequivocal) fashion by appealing to standards of empirical disproof, whereas the latter cannot establish an obvious succession of triumphs (as does science) by showing that each achievement, if not exactly ‘right’, is at least ‘less wrong’ than its predecessor. The necessary factor in both the scientific and the social cases, however, is the possibility of replacement. What, therefore, Popper was appealing to in his perhaps misleading scientific analogue of political change was democracy.

Part of the ‘Gellner Problem’ was that the very ‘openness’ of the open society contains the seeds of its own destruction in two diametrically opposed forms. This is not the notion of ‘tyranny of the majority’, nor the dilemma: ‘should democracy tolerate movements which, if empowered, would not tolerate democracy?’ Rather, it is a tension that exists in any political scenario wherein the State does not intervene in a ‘balanced’ way. The idea is that the State has a range of options between absolute intervention (i.e. totalitarianism) which may paradoxically be encouraged by humanitarian, welfare-orientated economic measures which necessarily entail obligations borne by those assisted, on the one hand, versus the formation of autonomous, economically (or otherwise) individualistic castes or cabals who will organise matters political in a self-serving, inequitable and non-transparent way. Either extreme will provide what Dahrendorf (and perhaps Gellner) describes as ‘closure’.

Dahrendorf evinced - possibly as a component of his ‘Kolakowski problem’ - a recognition that absolutist ‘traditionalist’ movements such as Fascism are distinctly modern, not traditional, and although Popper (rightly, I agree) praises the decentering, cosmopolitanising movement from Gemeinschaft (family, tribe) to Gessellschaft (society) as an advance away from tradition, he recognised that certain traditional virtues of group determination, autonomy and protection were distinctly absent despite the traditionalist pretences of such political modernists.

In response to questioning, Dahrendorf expressed the belief that the greatest contemporary threat to the open society project is, not totalitarianism, but a ‘creeping authoritarianism’ encouraged by mass apathy. On a different point - and encouragingly from my point of view - he recognised certain incoherencies in falsificationism as a global intellectual position, but shied away from the offer of detailed analysis saying ‘I am not a philosopher’, and jocularly deferred to the Chair, Bryan Magee.

In conclusion, Dahrendorf displayed what I interpreted as ‘liberal right’ colours by averring that socialism is incompatible with the open society project, but pointedly distanced himself from the economic individualism of George Soros, who apparently represented the opposite horn of what I took to be ‘Gellner’s Dilemma’.

Although I have been repelled by the stridently anti-logical empiricist stance of Nancy Cartwright - Professor of the Natural & Social Sciences at the LSE - in the past, I must credit her keenly critical final audience question concerning an explanatory ‘gap’ between Dahrendorf’s assertion of the menacing ‘closure potential’ of State socialism and the thesis’s actually being true. Since he had 45 seconds to answer before Magee’s winding up, he could not respond convincingly.

Ethical Record, January, 1999
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JANUARY 1999

Sunday 10
11.00 am THE ‘GHOSTING’ OF MARX: A Refutation of Jacques Derrida’s attempt to dismantle Philosophy of Karl Marx. Christopher Hampton. [The talk by Niran Abbas has been postponed]

3.00 pm TOPICAL DISCUSSION with Terry Mullins, Hon. Rep.

Sunday 17
11.00 am THE MENACE OF THE MULTINATIONALS
Tom Rubens suggests ways of overcoming this danger.

2.30 pm THE FUTURE OF THE SOCIETY AND CONWAY HALL Members only.

Sunday 24
11.00 am HOW TO MAKE MONEY FROM FRAUD

3.00 pm CAMPAIGNING IN BRITAIN FOR FREEDOM IN POLAND:

Sunday 31
11.00 am ‘HOME ON EARTH’.
Capitalism threatens biodiversity argues Dinah Livingstone

3.00 pm THE WORK OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (video)

FEBRUARY 1999

Saturday 6
7.30 pm Launch of WORK Anthology. Edited by Dinah Livingstone. Wine.

Sunday 7
11.00 am THE GENETIC MODIFICATION OF CROPS - A CAUSE FOR CONCERN? Science writer Terry Mabbett examines the issues.

3.00 pm TOPICAL DISCUSSION with Terry Mullins, Hon. Rep.

73rd CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE
Professor FRED ROSEN, The Bentham Project, University College London
PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS IN POLITICS - Bentham, Blair and Beyond
7.00 pm Thursday, 25 February 1999
(Professor Rosen is a leading authority on Bentham’s utilitarian ethics)

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January 10 CHAGALL PIANO TRIO
January 17 EROICA STRING QUARTET
January 24 MAGGINI STRING QUARTET
January 31 MAINARDI PIANO TRIO

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