

Hastings Humanists *Newsletter* March 2009

Our member Raymona Ann Barnes-Crowe wrote to the Advertising Standards Authority about the bus-ads by the Christian Party (also the Trinitarian Bible Society and the Russian Orthodox Church), that were allowed to claim that there definitely is a God. The reply said the ads were "likely to be seen as reflecting the opinions of the advertisers", and that the Christian Party ad was exempt as being electioneering material. It seems the law has holes that religions can drive a bus straight through!

Sir Ian Wilmut on BBC news (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7918033.stm>) and in the Guardian reports how British and Canadian scientists have found a way of treating skin cells from adults, effectively winding the clock back until they are in embryonic form. Eventually this should eliminate the need for human embryos as a source of stem cells, which has ethical problems especially for many religious people.

Theos the "theology think tank" (<http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/>) conducted a survey of 2000 people into public opinion on evolution and human origins, and found, according to the Guardian headline, that "Four out of five Britons repudiate creationism". This is good news, but young-earth creationism is still strong among evangelicals, pentecostals and muslims, which are the most actively growing religions, particularly in Northern Ireland and London.

A BBC Poll, of 1045 people, found that most want religion or "religious values" to play a larger role in public life. But the BHA's Andrew Copson queried the wording of the questions. If the poll had suggested "religious values" such as no divorce, no sex outside of marriage, no stem cell research, freedom to discriminate against homosexuals, would the responses have been the same? (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7906595.stm>).

The Quilliam Foundation (<http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/>) the "counter-extremism" think tank, conducted a poll of British mosques, and found that 97% of Imams were from overseas and fail to reach out to young British muslims. Also 50% of mosques do not allow access for women. I wonder what the position is locally? Hastings has only one mosque (Mercatoria) and the 2001 census listed only 635 muslims (0.7% of population).

"The Spirit Level", subtitled "Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better" is a new book (<http://www.penguin.co.uk/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9781846140396,00.html>) by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, which seeks to demonstrate that unequal societies are bad for almost everyone within them, the well-off as well as the poor, in terms of almost every modern social and environmental problem: ill-health, lack of community life, violence, drugs, obesity, mental illness, long working hours, big prison populations.

The Rev John Polkinghorne was interviewed about his new book "Questions of Truth" (http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_7918000/7918145.stm). He claimed science involves an "act of faith" - committing oneself to a belief that the world is intelligible - but how would one make sense of anything by assuming that it was unintelligible? The Foreword, by Tony Hewish (<http://www.questionsoftruth.org/>), gives some account of quantum theory and concludes with what seems to me to be a non-sequitur: "When the most elementary physical things behave this way, we should be prepared to accept religious mysteries such as the existence of God and that God became Man around two thousand years ago." You could just as well use this argument for belief in absolutely anything!

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Hastings Humanists

The Notley Room, White Rock Hotel

6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Second Thursday in the Month

The formal meeting begins 7 pm

You don't have to be a Humanist to come along

Programme

9 April: *Discussion on Human Rights.*

It is 200 years since Tom Paine died, and last December marked the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Currently there are efforts at the UN by Islamic countries to curtail the right to freedom of expression by passing resolutions to make defamation of religion illegal. Human Rights law is increasingly influential.

14 May: *How I Became a Humanist Celebrant*

Our member Lesley Arnold-Hopkins is Accredited by the BHA to conduct Humanist funerals. Humanists also conduct weddings and baby-namings. She will tell us something about the courses provided, and entertain us with anecdotes of her experiences.

11 June: *Evolution Implies Atheism*

Dean Morrison will present the case, to be followed by a Question and Answer session. This presentation returns to the original Darwin Day subject of our first meeting, in February, which got side-tracked by other discussions.

9 July: *Discussion on Religious Education.*

There will be a short report on the 7th July meeting of the East Sussex SACRE, followed by a discussion of issues relating to religious education in general.

13 August: *History of Humanism Part 2*

George Jelliss, continues the History from 1800, where we left off in March.

10 September: *Annual General Meeting.*

The wording of our Constitution will be decided, and nominations for Secretary, Treasurer and Speaker will be voted on. We can also discuss the aims of the Group, and ideas for our future programme.

Find out more about us at:

<http://hastingshumanists.blogspot.com>

Programme may be subject to change.