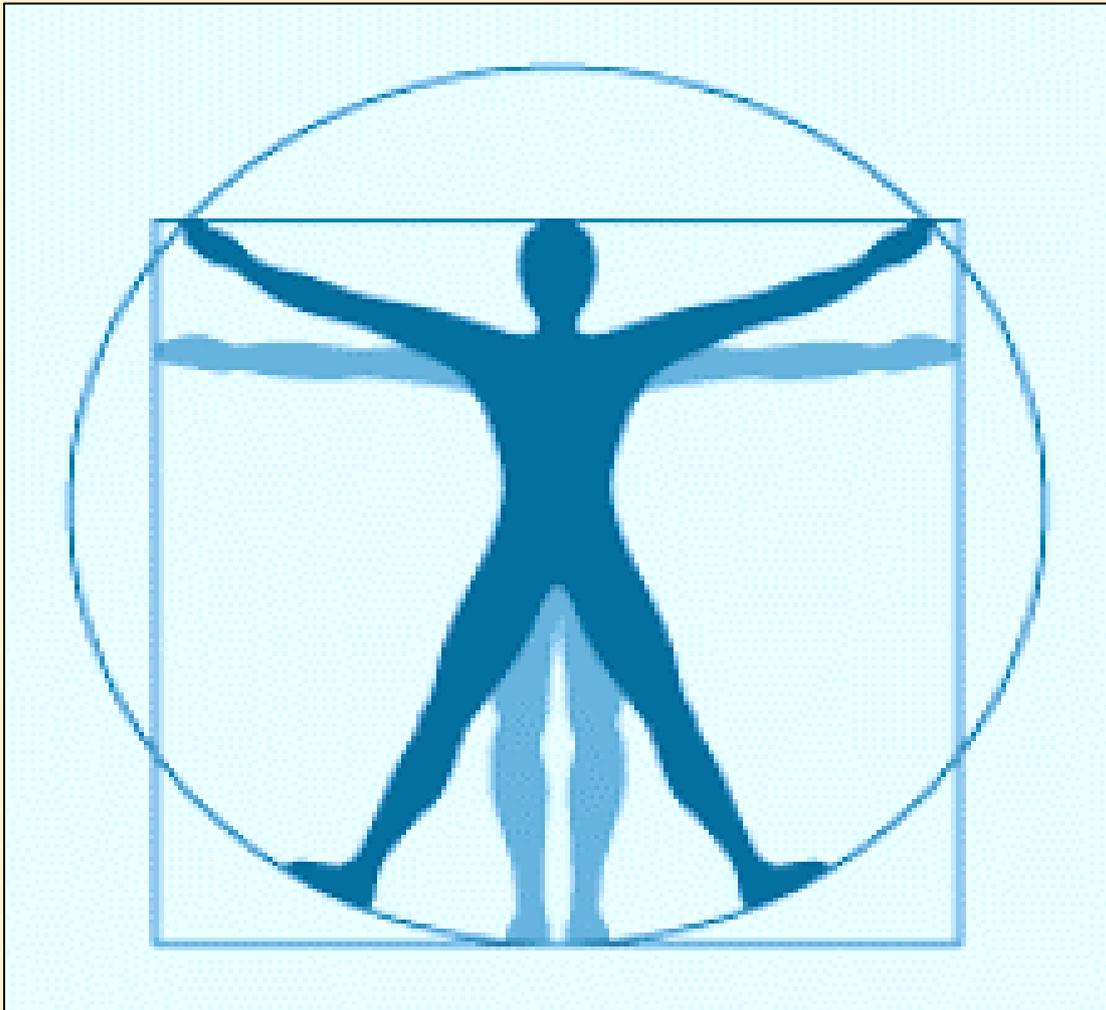


Irish Freethinker

And Humanist irishfreethinkers.com Sept-Oct 2022 No. 195 £3.00/€3.00



Submission on Constitution

***Also* : After God - Positive Existentialism - Remembering Brian
- The North: Which Way Forward? – Potentiality – Jazz: Birth of
the Cool! -- Morality of Institutions: An Exploration - John
Toland: The Forgotten Philosopher – Francis Hutcheson -
Humanist Meetings in Ireland**



Freethinker: a person who forms his or her own opinions about important subjects (e.g. religion or politics) on the basis of logic, reason, and empirical evidence rather than authority, tradition, revelation, some particular dogma, or simply accepting what others say.

Website: irishfreethinkers.com

Facebook: Irish Freethinkers and Humanists

Founder-Editor:
Brian McClinton

IRISH FREETHINKER & HUMANIST

An Saorsmaointeoir

ISSN: 2399-7621 09>

Periodical by post & mly news bulletin by email

Sub.: £40/€40 per annum

Cheques, postal, orders, payable to:

Roger Kelly, Treasurer,

8 Eastleigh Drive, Belfast, BT4 3DX

Bank Transfers - IBAN:

GB84 ULSB 9809 6013 2238 97

roger.kelly.2@ntlworld.com

028 9065 6738/077 858 3435

Subscription Form on back page

CONTENTS

Submission on Constitution

Alan Tuffery.....3

After God

Joe Armstrong.....5

Positive Existentialism

Daltún Ó Ceallaigh.....6

Remembering Brian

Colin Corkey.....8

Transhumanism

Tom White.....8

Atheist & Rationalist Poetry

Noel Byrne.....9

The North -

Which Way Forward?

Roger Kelly.....10

Potentiality

Noel Byrne.....11

Jazz - Birth of the Cool!

Owen Morton.....14

Morality of Institutions -

An Exploration

Alan Tuffery.....16

John Toland -

The Forgotten Philosopher

Daltún Ó Ceallaigh.....17

Francis Hutcheson

Owen Morton.....18

Humanist Meetings

In Ireland.....20

MEMBERSHIP FORM.....20

ARTICLES AND DISCLAIMERS

Articles will be accepted for publication, in part or whole, according to the space available and the Editor's discretion. A page approximately amounts to 800 words. Only rarely are articles accepted of more than 2400 words.

Please note that this magazine is not the mouthpiece of any particular group, but a forum supplied by Irish Freethinkers and Humanists for relevant ideas.

The views expressed in contributions are thus those of the authors and are not necessarily also those of any Irish humanist organisation. Material should be addressed to the Editor, 26 York Road, Rathmines, Dublin, D06 C6E4.

LETTERS

Letters to the Editor are welcome and need not be from humanists. They may be edited for quality and space. Names and addresses will be published unless otherwise requested. Please do not send attachments to letters.

SUBMISSION ON CONSTITUTION

Alan Tuffery

Introduction

The national aspiration for the island of Ireland is unity by consent. In order for consent to be achieved, the Constitution should be acceptable to all members of the society in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. It is this acceptability in respect of freedom of belief that I wish to address.

In any State the most fundamental document in support of human rights is the Constitution. The Constitution of the Irish Republic was framed at a time when the Republic was overwhelmingly Christian and the Roman Catholic Church in particular had great authority in secular matters. It is my contention that the overall Christian tenor of the Constitution is inappropriate in a modern, diverse society and does not reflect current views about freedom of belief.

International Agreements about Freedom of Belief

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 18 asserts the freedom of “thought, conscience and religion”:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

This is supported by the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*, Article 18.1:

“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice ... ”

EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of the Freedom of Religion and Belief.

“The EU ‘focuses-on the right of individuals, to believe or not to believe, and, alone or in community with others, to freely manifest their beliefs’. Such beliefs may be theistic, non-theistic or atheistic in nature, or may concern the individual’s right not to profess any religion

or belief at all, or to change or leave a certain conviction. In upholding the rights of individuals, the EU is impartial and not aligned with any specific religion or belief.”

Diversity of Belief in Ireland

The 2021/22 census results are not yet available, but data from 2011 confirm the trend to increasing numbers of people with no adherence to religious belief.

In the Irish Republic, the 2011 census showed a further fall to 78.3% in the proportion of Roman Catholics and a rise of those with 'No Religion' to 9.8% (468,421 people). The 2022 census can be expected to show a further significant rise in the number with no religion, because of both the well established trend and the more equitable rephrasing of the question on religious affiliation.

In Northern Ireland, the 2011 census shows 10% of the population with 'no religion' and a further 6.8% did not state a religious affiliation: that represents over 305,00 people.

There is increasing diversity in Ireland because of immigration and it cannot be assumed that all immigrants are affiliated to a Christian

church.

Marriage statistics also reflect the increasing secularisation of society. In the Irish Republic, the latest figures (CSO, 2020) show virtually equal numbers of religious and non-religious marriages (50.2% and 49.8%, respectively). In Northern Ireland, in 2019, almost 40% of marriages were in Registry Offices (secular marriages were not then legal in Northern Ireland). This is an increase from about 30% of marriages a decade earlier.

Specific Articles of the Constitution to be Addressed

Preamble. The opening of the preamble reads: 'In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred, We, the people of Éire, Humbly acknowledging all our obligations to

Seanad Éireann has established a Public Consultation Committee on the Constitutional Future of the Island of Ireland. Herewith is the submission to it by a leading Irish humanist.

our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, ...”

This is clearly a specific statement of Trinitarian Christian belief and is not inclusive of those citizens who do not share that belief. (Not all Christians are Trinitarians.) As the censuses show, the numbers of people without religious affiliation are rising and this is greatest in the younger age-groups which has clear implications for the future.

I therefore suggest that the Preamble be deleted or replaced by an inclusive, secular statement referring to the principle that the democratic will of the people is the basis of the State's authority.

Religious Oaths of Office (Articles 12,8; 34,6.1; 31; 6,4)

The constitution states that the President (Article 12,8), all judges (Article 34, 6.1) and members of the Council of State (Article 31,4) must swear a religious oath (“In the presence of Almighty God”) before taking office. Both the President and judges are also required to say “May God direct and sustain me.” A judge who does not make the religious declaration within a prescribed time of being appointed “shall be deemed to have vacated his office.” (Article 6,4).

This submission argues that the requirement of a religious oath for public office is discriminatory and in breach of UDHR, Articles 18 and 19 (the right not to be compelled to reveal one's thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief in public).

In particular, the religious oath precludes in principle those who do not subscribe to a monotheistic religion from taking important roles in the governance of the nation. It is submitted that this also violates the right to equality before the law protected by Article 7 of the UDHR.

At the very least, it seems wrong that those entering the highest offices in the State should be compromised by swearing an oath based on a religion to which they do not subscribe.

The United Nations Human Rights Commission has repeatedly (1993, 2008) expressed concern about judges being required to take a religious oath. In 2022, in its comments on the *United Nations Periodic Review of Ireland*:

“The Committee reiterates its previous

recommendations that the State party should:

(a) Consider taking concrete steps to amending articles 12, 31 and 34 of the Constitution that require religious oaths to take up senior public office positions, taking into account the Committee's general comment No. 22 (1993) on freedom of thought, conscience and religion, concerning the right not to be compelled to reveal one's thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief in public.”

Oaths - General Points

Reid, in a review of oaths and oath-taking, remarks that “the degree to which a witness considers their conscience bound by the procedure is the criterion of validity.”*

Further, “The fact that a deponent took an oath when they, in fact, had no religious belief at the time does not affect the validity of the oath (section 5 of the 1881 act).” This appears to show a fundamental hypocrisy at the heart of the legislation intended to establish the authority of oaths.

Reid also points out that, in 1990, the Law Reform Commission described the forms of oath prescribed by law as “at best embarrassing and at worst offensive to the religious beliefs of the persons to whom they are meant to apply.” It recommended that the oath should be abolished and replaced with a solemn statutory affirmation for witnesses, jurors, and for deponents submitting affidavits in all civil and criminal proceedings.

It is probably fair to say that courts have become more sensitive in relation to offering the choice of an affirmation or a religious oath, although this sensitivity may be dependent upon particular judges or court officials. This sensitivity is presumably based upon the right not to be compelled to reveal one's thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief in public.

However, even that choice is fraught because it is easy to see how an individual might be unwilling to risk prejudicing a case in the eyes of a judge or jury by revealing their beliefs. The only way to remove that fear is to replace hypocritical, embarrassing and possibly offensive oaths by a solemn affirmation, including a reference to it being 'binding on the individual's conscience'.



* Reid, C. *Nothing But the Truth*. Law Society Gazette, 5/16

Altering the Constitution as proposed here would give an excellent example.

I therefore suggest the all references to a requirement for oaths be removed from the Constitution or replaced by a reference to a

solemn affirmation.

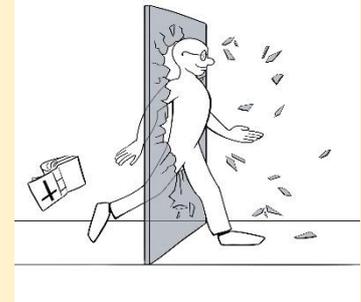
These changes, I believe would remove barriers to the Constitution's acceptability for all citizens of the island of Ireland.

Aug 2022



AFTER GOD

Joe Armstrong



A lot of hugging went on in the Marists. We hugged confrères at the sign of peace at mass. We hugged when we returned to Milltown. Maybe it was an extension of the charismatic maxim to hug everything that moves and, if it didn't move, hug it until it moved.

New Experience

And there I was, a naïve 20-year-old seminarian, hugging my confrère one night, who had visited my home two weeks earlier, and I was aroused and I wondered if he was too. Though I reflected and questioned, I did not feel guilty about anything. It felt like an authentic overflow from our friendship. He had been sharing some upsets and concerns, I listened patiently, and it terminated in the embrace. "There's a lot in the above. Don't just gloss over it," I recorded in my journal.

"He is beautiful physically, is comfortable to be with, likes me and being with me," I journaled. "I am sexually responsive in his presence. My desires in his presence. My fantasies. This is me. I'm convinced I'm 'normal'. That one was ironed out in noviciate with the Superior. It is now a question of being more sexually self-conscious."

This was a new experience for me. I needed to accept myself and integrate this into my sexual identity. It involved pain and mortification for me. "In light of my commitment, I must refrain and restrain."

Journal

"It is probably not right for me to indicate to him how I respond to him," I journaled, as it would "make our relationship too high-powered...when the 'crush', for want of a better word for it, goes away. I do not know if it is what people call 'falling in love'. I know it

is quite normal to fall in love with men or women."

Telling him, I reckoned, "would help neither of us. But the impulse is strong and greatly absorbing. I sometimes wonder how I can refrain from at least telling him; though I suspect he is aware or has clues to how I may feel." I wondered if he felt the same.

I wrote: "He is beautiful and I long for him," adding, "I felt I had to write that as I do feel it. I find it hard to have written it. It is, quite evidently, bluntly honest and uncensored."

Acceptance

I felt I could write it because "intellectually I have accepted it and see it as 'normal' yet at a gut, non-cerebral, level there's something in me that cries out it's sick, maybe perverted, dreadful and enough to disqualify me for priestly ministry."

The Superior had told me during noviciate to "Lie in bed Joe, and thank God for your body, your penis." He had said this to me before making me Monitor after Christmas in noviciate, adding: "I'm convinced there is no perversion there."

"I too am convinced," I reflected. "Yet the fear is present. The fear generated by non-acceptance. The fear I may always carry with me. Maybe this too is just part of me. In conclusion, I feel most men could write the above but may have neither the self-honesty or daring self-acceptance to say it."

Falling in Love

I discussed everything with my spiritual director on 16 December 1982, holding nothing back. I brought my journal and read the pertinent parts of it to him. "I said nothing other than what was in the diary. It was and is

the whole truth,” I journaled.

My director said he was struck by my sense of balance with it all, that it was good to become aware of, and accept, my sexual self and that later, as a priest, I wouldn't have time to do so. He also said, and this surprised me, that as a priest I could fall in love with men, women and children. I have fallen for men and women, but never for children.

He suggested that I should not tell my confrère about my feelings for him and that if he discussed it with me “a white lie might be the order of the day”; and to avoid the occasion of being together too much, particularly at night-time.

In chapel the next day, I was overcome with

POSITIVE EXISTENTIALISM

*Táim ann agus ceapaim, mar sin tá a fhios
agam gur mise.
(I exist and I think, therefore I know that I
am.)*

It seems that humans are unique on the planet in being self-consciously aware. We know that we are, we were born, we live and we die. Ours is a self-conscious existence. For other creatures, existence is unselfconscious. The birth of humanity involved the birth of the self.

The one thing that we do share with all other living things is that, normally, once coming into existence, we seek to exist for as long as possible.

But, during that time, we also reflect on existence. We ask questions about the species, the world and the universe. We ponder if there can be a meaning and a purpose to existence other than survival. As a result, we have science and philosophy.

The Universe

Science has told us, given the latest fossil evidence, that our species is at least 300,000 years old and it is speculated that it may in fact be about 500,000 in all. There has been life on earth for over 3.5 billion years and the planet is over 4.5 billion years old. Jumping to consideration of our universe, it began over 13.7 billion years ago. What came before then is not yet known, but one hypothesis

loneliness and despair at the prospect that never in my life as a priest could I have an exclusive intimate relationship. “Am I to believe despite all? Sacrifice my life in the hope that someone out there *may be consoled by my priesthood while I am beyond consolation?*”

I felt avoided by my confrère and suspected he had been talking to his spiritual director too. I also felt distant from him. I wrote: “It seems that once I named what was physiologically going on in me, the attraction ceased.”

This foreshadowed a period of disillusionment for me, with religious life and with life itself.

(ekpyrosis) is that our universe was preceded by others, in the context of a natural infinity, each exploding and imploding, one after the other cyclically. And so it will be ad infinitum into the future.

Currently, there are 200 billion observable galaxies and, for various reasons, it is believed that there are many more which will be detected by telescopic and radio-detection satellites in the near future. In our own galaxy, there are at least 100 billion stars. A question is the number, probably billions upon billions, of stars in all the other galaxies. Then there is the issue of how many planets each star may have; ours has eight. Apart from all that, what if there is not only an observable and an unobservable universe in which we live, but other universes altogether?

Human Presence

The sheer vastness in time and space that we are talking about is truly awesome. For some people, it makes them feel depressingly insignificant to the point of virtual nothingness. But why should it? Why not just accept it as a magnificent fact which still leaves us with the certainty of our own existence in the here and now. Philosophy then enters the scene to wonder about origins, meaning and purpose.

As for origins, an infinitely cyclical cosmos as a manifestation of nature at its grandest no longer requires creation stories as such. However, some philosophers still suggest that there is an overlying supernatural explanation for even an ekpyrotic cosmos, whereas others see no need for such an explanation. Along with Parmenides, they maintain that it is simply a matter of what is, is, which is much the same attitude as that of Kong Fu Zi (Confucius).

What is generally agreed is that philosophy

is necessary in relation to moral behaviour, life's significance and our set objectives.

Angst and Dread

In previous articles (*The Case of Humanism Restated*), I addressed these considerations.

What I want to examine in this article are the responses to existence of some philosophers in terms of angst and dread. One thinks of the likes of Nietzsche and Sartre. In their personal lives and social setting, they were post-religious, disaffected bourgeois whose response to the death of god generated a high degree of philosophical neurosis. Yet for others the demise was like the expiry of a theological tyrant leading to a feeling of intellectual liberation.

Mortality

There is little doubt that the grip of religion on most arises not from searching for a first cause of the universe or from the dauntingness of accounting for the complexity of the world, but from the finality of death. In line with what we said to begin with, no other creature has a sense of its own end as distinct from the danger which might objectively result in that situation. In the pulsating moment of our existence, it is hard to envisage what is in effect a return to non-existence or to avoid a fear of it coming about. Among other things, what success religion has had with people is largely due to convincing them that there is a life after death and, even better, that they will live forever, hopefully in bliss.

Whatever about immortality, it is perfectly understandable that people would like to live longer than they usually do, especially when the quality of life has been so much improved by science and a discrepancy has developed between mental vitality and physical longevity whereby the latter cuts short the former. In due course, this discrepancy will be greatly diminished as science advances further. But, today, we have not arrived at that point.

Fantasy

So, what do we turn to in this predicament? One path is fantasy. Fantasy is part and parcel of the human condition. When life is inadequate, we naturally fantasise. We

fantasise about the love we don't experience, the sex we don't get, the jobs we don't obtain, the money we don't have, and so on. And when it comes to death, we are tempted to fantasise about an afterlife. Religion depends on this phenomenon and feeds it relentlessly. In the process, it either distracts from existence or diminishes it.

However, as with all fantasies, there comes a point when we appreciate what they are and are compelled to deal with realities. Science and philosophy together have largely come to

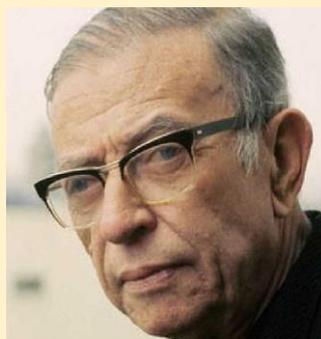


that stage of realisation for a lot of people. We must then ask ourselves what is the most rational way of responding to the reality. Instead of wasting time on and becoming depressed about the what will never be, is it not more sensible to concentrate on the what is and what can be. Should we not exult in existence and make

the most of it? Let the artist be enthralled by art, the public servant feel good about serving the people, the producer be proud of his/her produce, the lover be entranced by love, and so on throughout society.

Realism

That is not to say naively that life can be all plain sailing. Of course, not. There will be inescapable suffering in life and premature death from disease and accident. Even later in life, the passing of a partner or friends means grief and bereavement. One has no alternative but to cope with the ineluctable, while most of disappointment fortunately is not the everyday



norm. There are also the inequalities and injustices which are met with in society. But one does not have to be stoical about the status quo. That is where change can and should be brought about. The overall point is that the existence which endures throughout all does not have to be miserable because it is not endless. One sometimes has to look at the bottle as half full or half empty. And

there is nothing to be gained from the latter perspective.

Fulfilment

The most ridiculous attitude is to react in a state of dejection to the post-religious age because it no longer contains the promise of paradise. There never was a paradise and there never will be. There is only existence. It

is the only certainty and the only source of possibility. We have to choose to live or to hallucinate. And to live, individually and together, can mean so much more when we apply our talent and creativeness to it.

In place of acquiescing in the negative existentialism of angst, let us live the positive existentialism of fulfilment.

Daltún Ó Ceallaigh

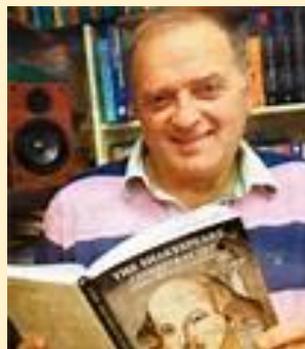
REMEMBERING BRIAN

As a fellow dog-walker, I first met Brian McClinton in our local park about sixteen years ago. We met up regularly ever since, discussing just about everything from classical music and art to politics and religion, and virtually anything else in between that needed sorting out!

Our childhoods were spent in north Belfast not many miles apart, and Brian would have been proud of his working-class background, but at the same time critical of the 'ghetto mentality' of blindly following extremist controls.

He possessed a wealth and depth of knowledge on a host of topics and had profound insight into social and political matters. I saw at first hand his deep concern and strong empathy for others.

A truly inspirational person, he opened my eyes to the characteristics of humanism and I soon recognised a distinct



commonality between humanist and Christian character.

Some years ago, he asked me if I would contribute something to the *Irish Freethinker* magazine, along the lines of a satirical political image or cartoon that would have some relevance to the contemporary political climate. I was pleased to be offered the opportunity, but had to reluctantly decline as I was by no means a cartoonist or satirist. Brian was not to be put off and instead gave me freedom to submit a work of my own choosing, along with an accompanying text. As an artist, I have been contributing to the *Irish Freethinker* magazine ever since.

I am privileged to have benefited from his inspiration and generosity.

We miss him deeply.

Colin Corkey

TRANSHUMANISM

Unfortunately, there is no escape from definitions in attempting to be constructively coherent in what I intend to write. My apologies!

Freethinkers

Let's start with ourselves. We identify ourselves as "Freethinkers" and/or "Humanists"; if challenged as to what we actually believe, I think most of us would explain that we recognise that our species is alone and solely responsible for the future, not just of humanity, but also for life on our planet. In no sense do we worship our own species, but we do recognise that our species has some wonderful characteristics - intelligence, rationality and compassion.

Religion & Conflict

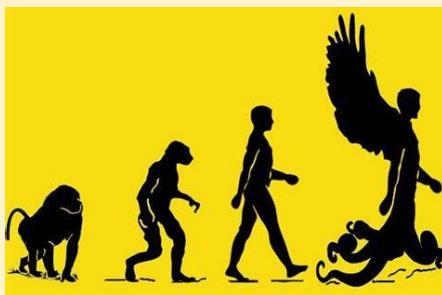
Humanists and Freethinkers look at the record of most organised religions with horror - wars, suppression, pogroms and holocausts; if these things were indeed the will of an omnipotent deity, then why should we worship that deity? If, instead, these things were the work of believers in an omnipotent deity, then surely those believers were in error?

Nevertheless, there are pockets of organised religion which Humanists can and do respect. Quakers, from the Christian tradition, are one such; but probably the biggest group within organised religion where we are likely to find allies is what I would term "Secular Buddhists" - those Buddhists who regard the Buddha as a great teacher rather than a God. If they are pressed as to what exactly they are worshipping, then Secular Buddhists are likely to reply: "the concept of compassion." Humanists and Freethinkers

can and should relate to that.

Transhumanism

Transhumanism is the belief or theory that the human race can evolve beyond its present physical and mental limitations, especially as a result of future scientific progress. For example, we might soon be able to use tiny brain implants to enhance our IQ or find new cures for currently fatal illnesses. Evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley wrote (in *New Bottles for New Wine*, 1957): "The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself, not just sporadically - an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps 'transhumanism' will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature. 'I believe in transhumanism': once there are enough people who can truly say that, the human species will be on the threshold of a new kind of existence, as different from ours as ours is from that of Peking Man. It will at last be consciously fulfilling its real destiny."



Dangers

Sceptics might question Huxley's concept that Man has a destiny, but I digress. The trouble for Huxley (and transhumanism) was that both had been associated with eugenics, a pseudoscientific doctrine of selective breeding, prevalent in the early 20th century, which had been seized on by Nazis to justify policies around the concept of a "master race" and mass extermination. Suspicions that transhumanism is again being used by racists (or others) as a vehicle to world domination remain.

Another drawback for transhumanists is the unequal state of our species - abject poverty for the many, super wealth for the few. Surely the few will monopolise the first benefits of transhumanism and leave the rest of us floundering? At worst, we could evolve into

two separate species - something H G Wells envisaged when he wrote *The Time Machine*.

Impact of Science

Today, a lifetime after Huxley wrote those words, science is working ever harder on medical breakthroughs, robots and supercomputers. Human rationality is already no longer the smartest thing on the planet. Can our species use that soon-to-be, inevitable scientific wave to advance to better things - or are we doomed to become slaves of a dystopian computer/robot dominated future?

Transhumanism or self-enhanced annihilation seem the two stark alternatives for our species in the 21st century. My own view is that transhumanism is inevitable, and that it is almost certain that some individuals, companies or countries will try to misuse the new scientific progress for immoral ends. The base desire to dominate others is part of the nature of the ape-brains we use at the moment.

The Future?

I am an old man now, having spent my entire life in the shadow of nuclear annihilation. My generation will leave our grandchildren with the added extinction option of global warming. We have always been subject to another pandemic or planet earth being struck by a meteor. All of these annihilation events could be eliminated or greatly reduced if only we can use transhumanism for positive ends.

Let us finally shun the petty spites and tribalism that have threatened us. Rationality alone cannot save us; let us hope that the future we weave for our species will have compassion at its centre. As Humanists and Freethinkers we must recognise and embrace our friends to build a better future. We will need an awful lot of rationality and compassion to see us through.

Tom White

ATHEIST & RATIONALIST POETRY

In Godfrey Stein's *Second Anthology of Atheism and Rationalism*, there is a section on Atheist and Rationalist Poetry. A list of some of the poems and the authors in the anthology is given below. They may be available online, as most are out of copyright.

City of Dreadful Night (Sel.), J Thompson.

Queen Mab (Selection), P Bysse Shelley.

Why don't he Lend a Hand, Samuel A Putnam, 1838-1896.

The Freethinker's Plea, Voltairine de Cleyre, 1866-1912.

The Confessional, Robert Browning, 1812-1889.

There is no God, Arthur Hugh Clough, 1819-1861.

The Last Decalogue, Arthur Hugh Clough.

Heaven on Earth, W J Linton, 1812-1898.

The Serpent in the Wilderness (Selection), Edgar Lee Masters, 1869-1950.

Before a Crucifix, Algernon Charles Swinburne, 1837-1909.

Hymn to Man (Selection), Algernon Charles Swinburne.

Priestcraft, John Dryden, 1631-1700.

Reason, John Dryden.

God's Funeral, Thomas Hardy, 1849-1928.

An Atheist's Thoughts, William Platt Ball, 1844-1917.

The Freeman's Resolution, William F Denton, 1823-1883.

The Devil is Dead, William F Denton.

There are no Gods, Euripides, 480-406 BCE.

The Carpenter's Son, Alfred Edward Houseman, 1859-1936.

Sonnet Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition, John Keats, 1795-1821.

Manufactured Goods, Carl Sandburg, 1878-1967.

Invictus, William Ernest Henley, 1849-1903.

Prometheus, George Gordon Noel, Lord Byron, 1788-1824.

Evarra and his Gods, Rudyard Kipling, 1865-1936.

A Coney Island of the Mind (Selection), Lawrence Ferlinghetti, 1920- 2021.

Lyrics of a Lost Soul, Wheaton Hales Brewer.

The Agnostic, Granville Lowther, 1848-1933.

The Blind Men and the Elephant, Godfrey Stein.

Noel Byrne

THE NORTH – WHICH WAY FORWARD?

Roger Kelly

It is ludicrous to say, as some political commentators have been saying, that everyone who voted for a Unionist party in the last Northern Ireland Assembly elections, in May this year, was also voting against the NI Protocol. I would suggest that a sizeable proportion of Ulster Unionist Party voters are pro-European and voted against Brexit.

The Majority & the Protocol

Overall, the majority of parties - Sinn Féin, Alliance, SDLP, and the Greens - accept that the Protocol is not perfect and needs to be amended through negotiations between the British government and the EU. The stalemate for establishing a new Executive and functioning Assembly at Stormont created by the DUP, until the Protocol in its present form is scrapped, is a denial of the democratic process.

It is ironic that after the Brexit vote remainers were castigated for being moaners, it now appears that the DUP and other hard-line Unionists have fallen into that camp over

the Protocol.

Added to this is the current shambles, within what is becoming an increasingly English national Tory party, in electing a new leader and Prime Minister. And no matter who it is, he/she will continue to blunder through the post-Brexit Tory government mess.

Good Friday Agreement

To a large extent, Sinn Féin played a blinder during the recent NI Assembly elections, concentrating on policy issues around health, education, and economic concerns, leaving the DUP scaremongering about a Border Poll. Unionists, and in particular the DUP, still haven't accepted the principle of the Good Friday Agreement that anyone has the right to advocate Irish unity through the democratic process. It is rich that the leading Unionist party states that it has a mandate from its voters to stymie the democratic process until it gets its way regarding the Protocol. The DUP is now portraying itself as a minority party singing the praises of the GFA (which it never supported)



to justify this warped position.

Unionist Conduct

Lest we forget, Unionism ran Northern Ireland as a statelet for decades as the majority, and gave little consideration to other groupings - throughout its history using discrimination, and maintaining basically an apartheid statelet. So now we have a party with 21% of the vote dictating to us again.

First Minister & GFA Reform

Added to this arrogance is the DUP's reluctance to accept Michelle O'Neill as the designated First Minister. The mentality, as usual, is 'if not Top Dog we won't be Deputy Dog'. The DUP is playing a risky game in holding Stormont to ransom over the Protocol, as most opinion polls show that a large percentage of voters surveyed want a functioning new Assembly and Executive,

especially in the worsening economic situation exacerbated by the energy crisis.

However, have Stormont's institutions outlived their purpose, and is there still a need for a mandatory coalition government? Some of the parties at Stormont have been calling for a debate as to how best to amend the Good Friday Agreement, which would mean that the two leading parties (Sinn Féin and the DUP) would not have the exclusive power to pull down the Stormont institutions. I would argue that Sinn Féin, in particular, needs to seriously consider working with other parties in reforming the GFA institutions, and that this could mean a significant shift in creating a more grown-up, just, and stable government, which a mandatory coalition can never deliver.

< POTENTIALITY >

Noel Byrne

*Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow.*

T S Eliot (*The Hollow Men*)

Potentiality refers to any possibility that a thing can have. Aristotle first used the concept in the 4th Century BCE in his *Metaphysics* to distinguish it from Actuality. The two concepts are closely related. Actuality represents the fulfilment of Potentiality. For something to achieve Actuality, it must already have existed in Potentiality. Potentiality relates to anything which is not impossible. Stone is the potentiality, sculpture is the actuality. Something cannot exist without potentiality. Aristotle also used a concept he termed Entelechy as that which realizes the actual from mere potential.

I am dealing here with potentiality as it relates to matter and not to individual potential.

Big Bang Theory et al

The generally accepted Western paradigm for the creation of the Universe is called the "Big Bang Theory". There are other Western scientific theories of creation such as the Steady State Theory, the Multiple Universe

Theory and the Oscillating Universe Theory. These are hypotheses with less evidential backup. The one generally expounded upon is the "Big Bang Theory".

If we accept this paradigm of the "Big Bang", then everything material in the Universe, including us, must have been in the singularity *in potentia* prior to the explosion from whence the Universe first came into actuality. Western science tells us the singularity created both time and space. As such, we must presume the singularity was in existence prior to time and outside of space. In the paradigm, the singularity is believed to have included all the energy and space-time of the Universe.

The law of the conservation of matter states that matter is neither created nor destroyed. All matter and energy were in the singularity and that quantity does not change. It remains constant. Matter can change form through physical and chemical changes, but the amount of matter remains constant. Cosmologists currently believe the Universe contains 68% Dark Energy, 27% Dark Matter, Normal Matter 4.9%, Neutrinos 0.1% and Radiation 0.01%.

The Potential

If we accept from general relativity theory that,

prior to the initial eruption of the singularity, its size was zero, and we look at the universe now with its vast size and complexity, then we must be in awe and wonder at the latent possibilities, unimaginable potential and vast probabilities that were within the singularity. If the universe is also isotropic and homogeneous, as theorized, then the same potentiality should be available everywhere in the universe.

The paradigm envisages there was nothing before the Big Bang apart from the singularity itself. The singularity is understood as a unity which expanded and so everything material is one and has come from the singularity. The fact that what was a singularity has continuously spread out and expanded does not take away from the basic fact that the universe is actually just an expanding singularity, but with vast potential to change into many forms, on an ongoing basis.



The Big Bang released only energy, some of which condensed into matter. Matter and energy are interchangeable as per Einstein's $E=mc^2$. There is no evidence that the singularity released or contained anything immaterial such as consciousness. Consciousness, being completely subjective and non-material, could not have been *in potentia* within the singularity.

Humanity & Complexity

Matter has continuously evolved since the Big Bang and increases in complexity as time goes on. At this point, we believe that the human species is the apex of complexity. According to current scientific belief, this universe will continue expanding for several billion years. We have no reason therefore to believe that further evolutionary complexity may not arise in the near future. In fact, such superior complexity may already be in existence elsewhere in the universe. Alan Watts says: "We do not 'come into' this world; we come out of it, as leaves from a tree. As the ocean 'waves', the universe 'peoples'." The Universe, no doubt, has potential to 'people' elsewhere than earth. Gregory Bateson referred to "the pattern which connects the orchid to the primrose and the dolphin to the whale and all four to me."

Contrary to what Einstein said, god does

appear to play dice with the world. Potential in matter at the cosmic level often comes to actuality through cataclysmic events such as supernovae explosions, asteroid collisions and other major chance events. At the macro level it can come through the mutation of chemical DNA, and at the micro or atomic level change occurs when particles interact, bonds break or atoms or ions regroup. For Homo Sapiens, the apex of actuality, to arrive has taken 13.7 billion years of cataclysms, catastrophes and mutations by way of the evolution of the universe, the galaxies, stars, planets, abiogenesis and biogenesis.

In the natural world science has explanations for the increase in complexity due to the will to survive. In the western scientific paradigm there is no such will or desire outside of life. In the universe before life evolved, it was supposedly sheer chance and randomness that brought about

actuality.

Accounting for Potential

So how do we account for potential? Materialist science will not permit a teleological explanation. Chance, randomness and purposelessness within the known laws of physics are the scientific explanation. Science may find and explain the workings of the laws of nature, but it does not know why they are as they are, or how they came to be.

Many, even in the scientific community, ponder the coincidences, fine-tuning and inherent organisational principles required for Homo Sapiens to have evolved from an explosion of energy. The singularity has now evolved to the point where it is aware of itself and attempting to understand itself. In other words, the universe is now becoming aware of itself through humankind. Carl Sagan said "we have become star stuff pondering the stars"!

Within the Western scientific community, the primary cause of everything is the presumed singularity. However, there must be a reason for the continued complexity of the universe, which science believes has currently peaked with Homo Sapiens. We ourselves believe we have huge further potential. Whether we will achieve it or not is another issue.

Future of Potentiality

Western Science's insistence that the Universe is non-purposive is coming under severe stress - certainly, at the leading edge in physics and philosophy. A teleological explanation is gradually being advanced. At the quantum level, it is now shown that actuality is produced by consciousness.

If energy/matter equals potential, and in view of the fact that there is so much matter and energy available, as well as vast amounts of profligacy and fecundity, then, as we have already seen from the prodigious amount of potential which has become actualised, we can readily assume there is still even greater potential to be actualized. Energy, as we know, achieves actuality through various forms; it can be chemical, kinetic, electrical (electro-magnetic), gravitational, nuclear, or thermal.

Here on planet Earth, a second level of actuality has evolved from the initial potentiality whereby humanity, through its ingenuity, is now capable of deliberately bringing forth potential from matter. By so doing, we are bypassing the supposed chance and randomness of the inherent potentiality. So, within the potential of the singularity was a further potential to evolve to a state where a second level of potentiality evolved which was itself capable of actualizing further potential. There may in fact be a third level of potentiality when humanity raises artificial intelligence to another level.

Potentiality must come before actuality, chance, randomness or change. To alter, amend or mutate requires the potential to do so. Why are there such opportunities in potentiality? Why does effect not directly follow cause sequentially? Why options, choices and alternatives?

Entelechy

Efforts to explain entelechy have been in progress in the West since the time of Plato and in the East for over five thousand years. Among the theories and explanations used in the West are Plato's theory of ideas and forms, Kant's noumena and phenomena, and in recent years, Bohm's implicate and explicate order, Sheldrake's morphogenetic fields, Wheeler's participatory universe, Teilhard's

cosmogenesis and noosphere, Zurek's quantum Darwinism, Stapp's mindful universe and Goswami's self-aware universe.

Whilst mainstream Western science remains generally materialist, there is a genuine revolution and paradigm shift going on, based on the primacy of consciousness. The numbers of scientists and philosophers involved in the paradigm shift is increasing annually, as is obvious from the number of books and articles from extremely eminent scientists and philosophers being produced on this subject. They are being forced into the paradigm shift due to the evidence becoming overpowering. This is mainly due to the fact that they have come to accept the reality of quantum physics that consciousness brings about reality. The modern quantum paradigm now validates Bishop Berkeley's "to be is to be perceived".

Why Order & Potentiality?

Meditating on potentiality leads on to the question as to the why of the inherency of order and potentiality? This follows on from the question why is there anything at all? Why the increase in complexity which arises from potentiality via cataclysms, catastrophes, randomness and chance? Why do we continue to march towards increased

complexity and greater levels of consciousness? What is the cosmos being sculpted for? We too have become sculptors of the universe. Why should matter or energy want to become more complex? Why should nature be creative?



Potentiality and entelechy are at the extreme boundary of science where it segues into metaphysics and philosophy. Western science is being forced into metaphysics and philosophy, because it has found, at its basic quantum level, that consciousness causes potential to be realized through the collapse of the wave function, and, as science does not yet know what matter, energy or mass actually are, these now also become metaphysical and philosophical questions.

Answers?

Are the answers teleological? Is there such a thing as randomness and chance at all? If one

is a complete determinist, then there is no such thing as randomness and chance. Every effect has a cause. There is no evidence anywhere of an effect without a cause where matter is concerned. Is the universe unfolding to a plan? There must have been a field of almost infinite potentiality which contains its own method of unfoldment within the singularity! Einstein asked at the conclusion of

A Brief History of Time: “what is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe”. Perhaps there is a universal reality, a cosmic or controlling force which is amoral.



Jazz – Birth of the Cool!

Owen Morton

**Jazz invites us to lend an ear
on its terms, because it’s worth it.**

Come to think of it, André Rieu, too, invites us to listen, only just maybe he’s wired to deliver on our terms. That’s show business: delivering a glittering, shimmering formulaic Viennese waltz to a fawning captive audience is child’s play compared to winging it, night after night, with just your wits, your creativity and virtuosity to summon in the moment. And since you’ve never played the next piece in quite the same way before, who knows how it will all fare. Comparing a jazz recital to a Rieu extravaganza is akin to comparing a stand-up comic at the Edinburgh Fringe to an autocued Bob Monkhouse laugh-in, if it might be so described.

Acquired Taste

Like Guinness or a classy Burgundy, or a good Irish whiskey for that matter, by dint of the experimental licence it nurtures, jazz is an acquired taste. It’s about the piper rather than who pays the piper. It’s largely improvised, for which reason virtuosity is a given, a prerequisite. Jazz invites us into listening mode with an open agenda. It is the freethinker’s musical art form of choice, one might argue.



Uniqueness of Jazz

In its DNA, jazz is a uniquely African-American musical expression born of subjugation and of despair, even carnival-style, as it rises above the melancholy of its bleak origins; it’s never far removed from “the blues”. Described in a recent book, *Jazz and Justice - Racism and the Political Economy of the Music* by aptly named Gerald Horne, as “a Black American contribution to global arts and culture; the

story of a beautiful lotus, growing from the filth of the crassest form of human immiseration”. It wasn’t always so poetically portrayed.

Reactions to Jazz

In celebration of liberation from the horrors of WW1, ‘the Jazz Age’ came to town, if not to everyone’s liking; reactionary forces denounced Harlem’s musical deliverance with its sexy jive routines as “the devil’s music” - a slippery slope. Hitler denounced it; even de Valera got in on the act, rowing in behind Leitrim curate, Fr. Peter Conefrey, whose 1934 “down with jazz!” campaign sought to stem the tide of “this music, borrowed from the savages of Africa by the anti-God society, with the object of destroying morals and religion”. Father Ted was never going to let this one go, as his “down with this sort of thing” protest mischievously lampoons. Is the US Supreme Court taking notes, one ponders?

Unappreciated

It’s an art form that isn’t universally appreciated, as alluded to. In the early Seventies, I’d give neighbouring Ann a lift into the City to work. On one such occasion, on the tape deck (yes at 7:30 am) is Oscar Peterson’s deftly delivered ‘Sandy’s Blues’ - a miscellany of cascading musical perfection and of mesmeric virtuosity. “Is he practisin’?”, enquired my disinterested passenger whose musical antennae, in the manner of

Big Tom McBride, were tuned in somewhere along one or other of the four roads to Glenamaddy, if not halfway between Nashville and Carrickmacross - to borrow Frank Kelly’s playful parody. Not that jazz itself escapes parody: “those jazz guys just make it up as they go along” asserts Homer Simpson, knowingly if disapprovingly. “Jazz is an experimental musical genre where you never play the same note once”, chimes another po-faced clever clogs.

A Comeback?

I had first pondered a Freethinker submission along these lines in the Summer of 2020 in the wake of the George Floyd killing and the resulting Black Lives Matter mass protests. As the demonstrations raged, I had envisaged the come-uppance facing Trump in the months ahead, drawing inspiration, in some measure, from the fact that the Kamala Harris household, under its roof, accommodated teenage siblings named Ella and Cole - the latter a nod to the great saxophonist John Coltrane. Pursuant to a hiatus from the days of Clinton and Obama, in short order, jazz would be returning to the White House. Ahead, music aside, one wondered if a Biden administration would trigger its very own Jazz Age economic miracle along the lines of a 20th. Century post WW1 revival.

Renaissance?

Two years on, however, the jury is out as regards this renaissance, what with rising concerns that the free world paragon might as readily face into civil war at the instigation of alt-right conspirators presenting in an unholy alliance of debased Republican politicians, second-coming fundamentalist Christians, lawless racist rednecks, and a reactionary Roman Catholic-dominated Supreme Court. 'The Land of the Free', eh?

Who would say that Trump created this appalling vista? Didn't he merely expose raw nerves? And who'd have thought that it's the black vote that would step up to the plate in safeguarding American democracy, at least for the time being?

The Best of Jazz

I deviate! Not only do Black Lives Matter, in a jazz context, they present as a *sine qua non*. If opinion-based Honour Rolls are subjective, here then, subjectively, is a listing of formative movers and shakers in the jazz scene, in no special order: Edward Kennedy 'Duke' Ellington, Charlie 'Bird' Parker, John 'Trane' Coltrane, John Birks 'Dizzy' Gillespie, Louis 'Satchmo' Armstrong, Miles Davis, Sarah 'the Divine One' Vaughan, Billie 'Lady Day' Holliday, Art Tatum, Ella, Thelonious Monk, Lester Young, Bill 'Count' Basie, Oscar Peterson.

And were I to introduce, say, a South African to the mix - Abdullah Ibrahim (formerly, in Capetown, nicknamed 'Dollar Brand' by dint of his early capitulation to 'hip' American music) - he, like the others, is black. And I haven't ventured to include influencers born later than the Thirties - Herbie Hancock, for example (12.04.1940). Even Ray Charles was born in 1930.

Listings

So much for history and trail blazers; let's draw towards an up-beat finale having a musical rather than literary flavour, affording the reader something to hang on to: an induction into the sisterhood/brotherhood?



Fine and Mellow: Easy-listening Bebop (1957) featuring among others, Billie Holiday Lester Young, Ben Webster, Gerry Mulligan. Observe Holliday's admiration of 'Lester @ 1:50'. Perhaps they were lovers; she named him "Pres"; he named her "Lady Day". Pres coined "cool" as meaning, like "cool", and "bread" as in

money.

Hyperlink Info

Google Fine and Mellow YouTube, or:-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKqxG09wIIA>

Bonita Cuba: (a) a promo video that spawned this collaboration between Chicagoan vocalist Kurt Elling and Cuban Trumpeter Arturo Surdival <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9cmpRTyoGY> (b) the resulting duet. Let no-one tell you, just because it's melodic and accessible, that this isn't jazz in its purest manifestation. Google Kurt Elling Bonita Cuba. Or:-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMnmXq2z82U>

Kind of Blue: Consistently voted the greatest jazz album of all-time is this Miles Davis 1959 recording featuring, among others, John Coltrane referenced in our hall of fame above. It gets better with each hearing, believe me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9QXpfgSVk>

HUMANISTS REGARD MORALITY AS ESSENTIALLY HUMAN AND SOCIAL. WE ARE EXTREMELY SOCIAL ANIMALS AND HAVE EVOLVED TO CO-OPERATE WITHIN OUR GROUP. WE ARE SENSITIVE TO THE APPROVAL AND DISAPPROVAL OF OUR FELLOW GROUP MEMBERS AND GROUPS GENERALLY REWARD THOSE WHO CONFORM TO THE PREVAILING MORALITY.

Objectives & Responsibilities

In modern societies, complex institutions have formed for religion, trade, government, knowledge acquisition and dissemination and other functions. The interests of institutions often do not coincide with those of the wider society. In particular, they see themselves as having the primary function of ensuring their own survival.

Commercial institutions have an almost equally important priority of making a profit. While these priorities are understandable, I suggest that there are higher social priorities. I want to explore some of the implications of this separation of objectives and briefly consider the moral responsibilities of individuals within institutions.

Some institutions, such as churches and youth organisations have admitted 'failings' in relation to child protection, resulting in sexual abuse of children. (They will admit 'failings', but will rarely admit liability or responsibility, for fear of the apparatchiks of law, insurance and accountancy.) The response has most often been prevarication and legalistic delays in an attempt to minimise the damage to the institution. In terms of the institutions' frame of thinking, 'damage' means financial cost which will damage the institution or even prove fatal to it.

Appropriate Response

What would be an appropriate moral response of an individual or a smaller group guilty of wrongdoing? I suggest that it would be to admit the fault and make speedy and generous reparation. Such a response by an institution would go far to restore its reputation - and might even reduce the final 'damage'. Instead, we see pettifogging, expensive legalist points being made with long, detailed and even more expensive enquiries - all beyond the means of individual sufferers. All

this takes place before any form of reparation occurs and results in bitterness and delayed reparation; we have seen cases where affected individuals have died before receiving any reparation. All this suggests that institutions have become separated from the values of social groups - and arguably have perverted the morality of the society in which they operate.

Individual Responsibility

Now we turn to the moral responsibility of individuals within institutions. To what extent is the 'company man' (proverbially kind to dogs and children) responsible for the moral lapses of the institution which employs him? (Let us

remember that the 'apparatchiks' are also individuals and are not absolved from their moral responsibilities.)

Most individuals in an institution are almost powerless because of the hierarchical nature of the institution and their financial dependence upon it. Individuals may see the institution as an important social group to which they owe loyalty and from which they seek approval - and seek to avoid disapproval. (We have seen the ostracising and even imprisonment of 'whistle-blowers' who publicly voice moral objections to the behaviour of institutions.)

A few powerful individuals in an institution are, in principle, in a position to influence critical decisions, but even they are constrained by the moral climate of the institution. Sometimes, they are corrupted by the culture and see their personal enrichment as its primary function, as shown by the public quotation: 'Self first, [company name] second, customer third.'

Wider Viewpoint

By taking a wider frame or viewpoint of the moral responsibilities of institutions, we can see that it would be better for society as a whole if institutions faced their social obligations honestly and promptly and made genuine attempts at reparation. It might even be better for the institutions themselves. For example, would it be so bad if a small proportion of prompt interim payments, pending full settlement, went to the 'wrong people'?

If institutions will not adopt these 'higher'

MORALITY OF INSTITUTIONS An Exploration

moral imperatives, it will be left to the state to regulate them. In most capitalist societies, the State generally favours the institutions and prefers 'light touch' regulation leaving the suffers of their wrongdoing vulnerable and with no efficient means of redress.

I realise that I shall be accused of pie-in-the-sky thinking and being utterly unrealistic.

In my defence, I say that if you don't have aspirations and ideals, you are unlikely to achieve them. As Rutger Bregman said in *Utopia for Realists*, today's utopia is tomorrow's commonplace.

Alan Tuffery

JOHN TOLAND

THE FORGOTTEN PHILOSOPHER

In Belfast, at a session of Feile an Phobail on 11 August 2022, Daltún Ó Ceallaigh gave a paper on the topic of *John Toland - The Forgotten Philosopher*. It was originally intended that this subject would be addressed at the Feile by Brian McCinton, but unfortunately he passed away in June. He had already written a two-part article on John Toland for the nos. 193 and 194 editions this year of the *Irish Freethinker*, and Daltún proceeded from there with his own research and presentation. Below, we give his concluding remarks. (It is hoped that the full paper can be published in due course.)



Politics

My conclusion is that Toland politically was, like James Harrington, a virtual republican. In the course of promoting him and others like him, he recorded himself to be a tolerant liberal (except regarding 'papists', and indeed 'atheists' by which he meant what we would call nihilists). He also had a cosmopolitan bent, while at the same time he recognised the base of society in his time as consisting of the uneducated masses. He did comment, in quotation of an old saying: "We must talk with the people and think with the philosophers." But the 'people', as is often the case, were, at best, the bourgeoisie. He was not, he said, "for a ['pure'] democracy which I think to be the worst form of a commonwealth." In short, it

may be taken that his perspective was that of a Lockean, property-owning polity. But he displayed scorn for the ivory tower of universities and any academic obscurantism, while stressing the need to communicate clearly with ordinary persons.

Philosophy

Philosophically, while appearing publicly to be just concerned about restoring pristine Christianity, he basically rejected the religions of his day, proceeding initially from deism to ultimately a naturalistic inter-pretation of the world, which he characterized as pantheism.

In fact, it is difficult, in broad terms, to distinguish between the core of this and what would later be called a modern humanist world view. He first thought himself out of Roman Catholicism in his youth and then, in his adulthood, also critiqued Protestantism to the point of transcending both perspectives in the general direction of Spinoza. His further promotion of Giordano Bruno and regard for Lucretius consolidate our view of his effective apostasy and seemingly 'deified materialism'.

Reconstruction

In regard to both religion and politics, unlike some of today's cognoscenti, he realised that deconstruction has to be complemented by reconstruction, and that, if we cannot achieve perfectibility, we need to fulfil possibility. Thus his proposals for developing civic constitutionality and promoting pantheistic sodalities, as he called them, which make one think of current humanist associations and secular rituals.

Finally, here, I would comment that a key late text of Toland in 1720 which is often either ignored or not fully appreciated is his *Clidopherus* (i.e. 'Bearer of the Key', subtitled 'Of the Esoteric and Exoteric Philosophy'). Therein, is a terse and favourable reference to the Stoics who, he recalls, "reduced all the

fabulous and popular theology to the natural; ...". This reflects the overall tone of one of his most sceptical texts.

Intellectual Stream

Earlier in this talk, I dwelt on the intellectual environment in which John Toland emerged and, in order to fully understand his place in intellectual history, I think one should refer briefly to developments which occurred following his death. It was 57 years afterwards that David Hume's work entitled *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* was posthumously published. This carried the rational critique of religion much further. Although there is some dispute about his disbelief, I fail to understand how it cannot be accepted that Hume was in fact a discreet and somewhat dissembling atheist, given the admission of this conviction to James Boswell in the days before he died.

Hume and Kant

The extent of his influence on the metaphysician Immanuel Kant was, in arousing that thinker from his "dogmatic slumber", as Kant himself put it. Thereby, it forced Kant to accept that none of the three principal rationalizations for theism was provable, as Hume had effectively asserted, namely the ontological, the cosmological and the schematological, in other words - innate predisposition towards belief in a divine **or** a transcendent first cause for the universe **or** a godly design of the complex world in which we live. Kant then rested on the idea of a god as necessary for underpinning moral behaviour and guaranteeing an afterlife to allow for justice after death when it had not been realised in life.

But he was left a somewhat insecure theist and a dubious Christian who admired Jesus but did not view him as the son of a god. As a result, he fell out with the Prussian State and was for a while silenced. His posthumously discovered papers, published as *Opus Postumum*, suggest that, towards the end of his days, he doubted that there was a personal

god as distinct from an ideal concept. This is the philosophical stream to which Toland belongs.

Belated Recognition

People generally have heard of Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Hume, and Kant. But, while Toland was widely recognised in his day, and has never been forgotten on the Continent, only comparatively recently has he been increasingly seriously addressed in learned discussion in anglophonia. Although his corpus was not of the same calibre as that of the others, he can be seen as featuring adjunctively to that group. That is so, because, with Spinoza and Hume in particular, he could be viewed as helping to pave the way for the secular humanism of our time. This was signalled to an extent when he provoked Molyneux, in a letter to Locke, into neologism through inventing the term 'freethinker' to describe him.

However, it must be stressed that the tendency of which Toland was a part was not just about theism or a critique of specific religious formulations and practices; it was about placing humanity at the centre of philosophy and of rationally defending and promoting free thought, morality, civil liberty, and tolerance throughout the human race, although qualified regarding what he viewed as subversive moral and political elements.

Place in History

Toland's place in history is that of an Irishman, who unfortunately was not among those who strove for self-determination and reconciliation in his own country, or for full democracy anywhere, but, nonetheless, made a marked contribution to the emancipation of intellect and to the encouragement of broad philosophical thinking. One might end simply by a concluding remark of Toland from *Christianity Not Mysterious*:

"I acknowledge no orthodoxy but the truth." ♦

Francis Hutcheson

Owen Morton

Readers of humanist journalism are in need of introduction neither to 'freethinker' as a concept, no more than to Irishman

Francis Hutcheson as a personality.

Hutcheson is "the most influential Irishman you probably never heard of", says Frank McNally in his *Irishman's Diary* of Aug 8th 2019. In the lively and engaging piece, yours truly is acknowledged as the source. For my part, quite unexpectedly, on Howth Pier I encountered this County Down born (1694) unlikely hero when Fergus Whelan delivered a

captivating lecture on an under-the-radar Irishman of Scots-Presbyterian parentage.

Unsurprisingly, 'Freethinker' and Hutcheson are inexorably linked - a connection that is exploited later in the narrative. A freethinker is defined as "a person who thinks freely or independently; one who forms opinions on the basis of reason independently of authority, especially one who rejects or is sceptical of religious dogma". Whereas Hutcheson studied theology and embraced ministry, by any definition he was a freethinker, as we'll show.

Philosophy rather than Theology

His association in Glasgow with non-establishment ideology cast him in a shadow, such that he chose, instead, a career in academia and moved to Dublin where ("without episcopal licence") he established a school in Drumcondra. Here he moved in Presbyterian, Dissenter and Unitarian circles - even if, by dint of his intellect and general deportment, he was able to keep 'respectable' Establishment channels open.

Philosophy rather than theology commanded his attention, as outlined in his essays; one collection is titled *Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* wherein he explores our aesthetic and our moral abilities, and he espouses "the dignity, or moral importance of persons." He held that "every person has an innate moral sense of virtue", which guides them in making moral choices. There is little if any reference to the supernatural or to faith vis-à-vis making these choices.

Following a 10-year Dublin stint, he would assume the position of Professor of Moral Theology in Glasgow University.

Career Highlights

In Glasgow he mentored Adam Smith (*The Wealth of Nations*) who would henceforth describe him as "the never to be forgotten Hutcheson".

In Dublin, he was a close friend of Thomas Drennan, father of William Drennan (poet, physician, founder of the Society of United Irishmen).

He coined the phrase "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" that Benjamin Franklin, who met him, condensed for inclusion in the American Declaration of Independence as "the pursuit of happiness".

He believed that schooling should be a

happy experience for children.

Contravening received wisdom vis-à-vis original sin, he posited that children are born with a blank canvass. This wasn't well received.

He is described as "the Father of the Scottish Enlightenment." A plaque so describing him is situated outside the Church Restaurant in Dublin's Mary St, - formerly St Mary's Abbey, where he is buried.

A descendant of Cromwellian settlers, he has, in addition, been described by historian Fergus Whelan as "the Father of Irish Republicanism."

Enlightenment Influences

Francis Hutcheson, for such reasons, and on a world stage, is a standout exemplar in freethinking and of embryonic modern secular Humanism.

Burgeoning Enlightenment values emerged in France (Voltaire, Montesquieu), in England (Locke, Paine) and in Scotland (Hume, Smith) in the 18th Century. They were inspired by

forerunners Socrates, Cicero and Lucretius in antiquity, and later by luminaries like Spinoza, Montaigne, Toland and Hutcheson. Collectively, they had the "shoulders of giants", on which stand the McClintons of modern vintage and around which Humanism as we know it, evolved.

Readers having an appetite for the fascinating stories of Unitarian (Robert Emmet etc) and dissenter

and republican freethinkers of 18th century will glean much from Whelan's *Dissent into Treason* followed by *God Provoking Democrat* (Archibald Hamilton Rowan) and *May Tyrants Tremble* (biography of William Drennan). Much of his material emanated from exclusive access the author-historian enjoyed to vaults in the Unitarian Church on St Stephen's Green.

Brian McClinton

A modern-day freethinker, Brian McClinton, has just recently left us. From the Shankill Road, he would find himself embracing republican idealism in debating circles in Trinity College in the 1960s. John Taylor (Baron Kilclooney) would come through the same academy, only mixing in different circles.

HAI Honorary President David McConnell, too, was distinguishing himself in these academic and debating circles.



Brian would go on to spend his career as a teacher in the Friends' School in Lisburn. His republicanism was demonstrably pacifist, non-militant in humanist fashion; he denounced paramilitary activity unreservedly. Overriding all of this, of course, he was stridently averse to the dehumanising influences of religion. It is telling that, in the manner of Montaigne, his brand of Humanism extended in practice and in ideology to animal welfare.

The common denominator and the moral of the story, if you will, is that the evidence points to the track record of your freethinker, viz., all of the above, as portraying not just someone who eschews dogma and who downplays religion, but as one, over and above, intellectually, and personal cost notwithstanding, who is energised by ideals that might serve to prioritise and to promote and to advance the integrity of the human condition. 'The devil take the hindmost' is anathema, to

dabble mischievously in religiosity. Doesn't Humanism present with the self-same freethinker ideology?

Brian had sought an all-Ireland freethinker-Humanist alliance. With this in mind he established the first Humanist Summer School in Redcastle in Donegal in 1998 - naming it to commemorate Donegal's freethinker front-runner John Toland. It then moved to Carlingford in Co Louth where it retained its northern flavour.

Given its absence of sectarian baggage, he felt that the energy driving an all-Ireland Humanist momentum stands head-and-shoulders above any other persuasion that might set about a hearts-and-minds initiative to draw conflicting sides in the north together without preconditions. He would be disappointed that his overtures didn't capture Southern empathy in greater measure.

HUMANIST MEETINGS IN IRELAND

Irish Freethinkers and Humanists

2nd Thursday of month, 8pm.
Holiday Inn, University St, Belfast.
Contact: Roger 077 858 3435
roger.kelly.2@intlworld.com

North Dublin Humanist Community

3rd Monday of month.
Contact: Alan Tuffery
atuffery@tcd.ie

South Dublin Humanist Community (SDHC)

Contact: 086 8572005
Janielazar@gmail.com
Mailing List: southdublinhumanistcommunity

Humanist Association of Ireland

Monthly meeting at rotating venues, mostly Dublin.
Details of next meeting at humanism.ie or HAI Facebook Page.

Westport Humanist Group

2nd Sunday of month at 12 noon, via HAI Zoom facility.
Contact: Seamus O'Connell 087 245 3536
shayoc37@gmail.com

Cork Humanists

Contact: Geraldine O'Neill 086 812 8892
<http://corkhumanists.weebly.com>

Humanists West (Galway)

Last Sunday of month, 12 noon.
Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Rd., Salthill, Galway.
Contact: Garry O'Lochlainn 087 2222726

Kilkenny Humanist Group

2nd Sunday of month, 11.00am.
Langton House Hotel, Kilkenny.
Contact: Patrick Cassidy 0894630005;

patrickacassidy@gmail.com

Mid-West Humanists (Limerick, Clare, Tipperary)

3rd Wednesday of month in Limerick.
Contact: Peter 086 8155102
info@midwesthumanists.com
Also check <https://midwesthumanists.com>

North West Humanists

2nd Tuesday of month.
Radisson Hotel, Sligo.
Contact: Gill Bell 087 295 8206
humainstgb@gmail.com

Waterford Humanists

3rd Monday of month, 7.30 pm.
Phil Grimes Pub, John St, Waterford.
Contact: Teresa graham22@gmail.com

IRISH FREETHINKERS & HUMANISTS

Subscription to periodical £40/€40 per annum

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

.....

Email.....

Tel Nos:

Landline.....

Mobile.....

For sub & contact details, see inside cover