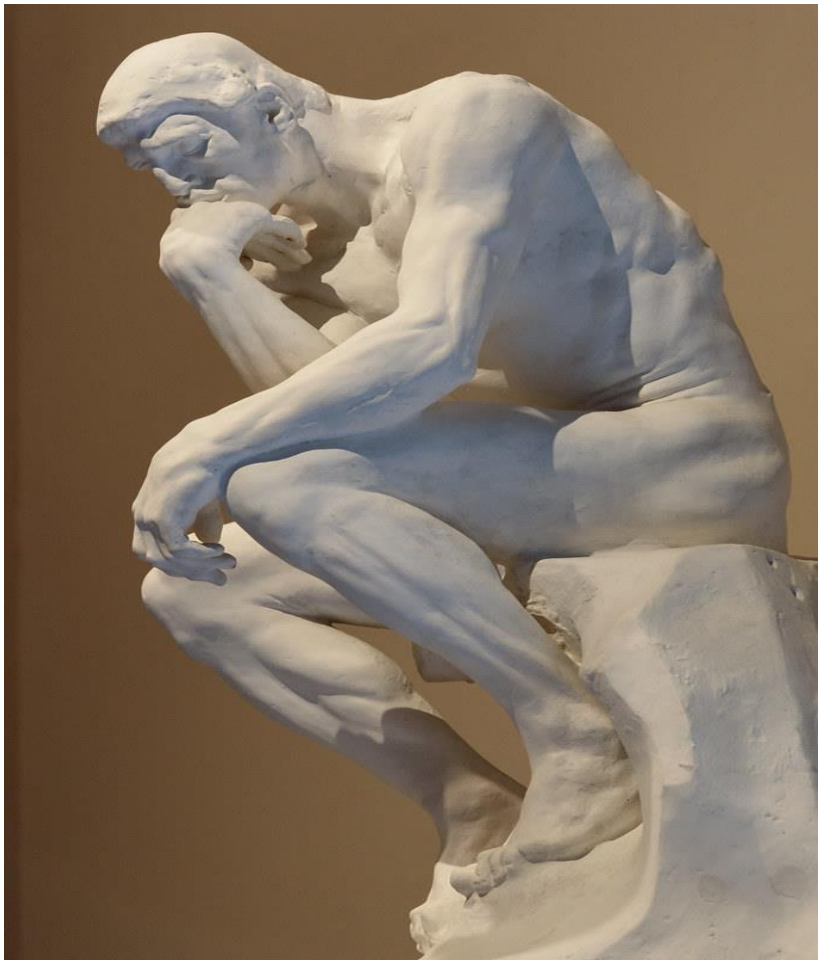
IRISH FREETHINKER

And Humanist irishfreethinkers.com Nov-Dec 2022 No. 196 £3.00/€3.00



Democracy in Action

Also **: After God – The End of Christianity in Europe? – Brian McClinton – Male Culture & Females – Ulster Defence Regiment: A Loyalist Militia? - The Anthropic Principle – Transhumanism: Further Thoughts - Humanist Meetings in Ireland**

IFH
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AND HUMANISTS

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IRISH FREETHINKER & HUMANIST
An Saorsmaointeoir
ISSN: 2399-7621 09>
Periodical by post & mly news bulletin by email
Sub.: £40/€40 per annum.
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ARTICLES & 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, ifh.sde@gmail.com

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.

Democracy in Action

Alan Tuffery

In the last issue of *Irish Freethinker and Humanist*, there was a copy of my submission to the Seanad Public Consultation Committee on the Constitution in relation to the island of Ireland. I saw this as an opportunity to raise the secularist argument about the divisive nature of the Christian provisions of the Constitution, especially the Preamble and insistence on religious oaths for certain important Offices of State. It was obvious that the main thrust of the discussion would be the constitutional relations between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, with a focus on the possibility of some sort of coming together in the future. Here are some notes of the procedure and my impressions.

Attendance

I was invited to attend, along with another 15 members of the public (including journalists, academics, commentators, trade-unionists and historians). Each was asked to make a three-minute presentation based on their written submissions. All the sessions of the Committee are recorded and are available on Oireachtas tv. I appeared on the afternoon of 30th September 2022 (4:25::59 and:50:51.

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

Selected submissions will also be available on the Oireachtas website https://www.oireachtas.ie/.../seanad-public.../videos/).

Religion & Identity

I was very impressed by the variety and generally high quality of the presentations, mostly from speakers from Northern Ireland or the border counties. Several took account of the recently published results of the 2021 Northern Ireland census results, especially in relation to religious affiliation, choice of national identity and even the massive increase in the number of those with 'no religion'. Identity seems no longer monolithic, but 'hybrid'.

Inclusion & Social Dimension

The senators were listening carefully and words like identity, respect, conversation, dialogue and inclusion were very prominent. There was also a clear realisation of the necessity of careful choice of language and the need for compromise from all parties.

There was also a general view that social change should not be delayed in either polity. Social improvements would help to make them at least not less attractive to one another. Key areas for change were the removal of religious influence from education and health. My argument for removing the Christian elements from the Constitution would be very much part of that idea.

Democratic Exercise

My first viewing of democracy in action was very encouraging and, in this discussion of this most vexed and seemingly hopeless topic, there were glimmers of hope and the prospect of much more serious mature dialogue, if not a prospect of an early resolution. Indeed, there was a strong feeling that rushing into a 'Border Poll' could only be disastrous. Any proposals must be well thought out and receive general support before being put to a referendum. (The recent examples of the Brexit referendum (explicitly) and the repeal of the 8th amendment (implicitly) were very much in mind.)

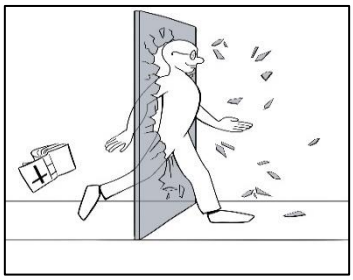
I came away much encouraged by the maturity of the discussions and feeling that perhaps now is a good time to start gentle, respectful conversations about the constitutional positions of the two polities.

Remember your humanity and forget the rest.

Bertrand Russell

AFTER GOD

Joe Armstrong



"Thanks be to God I got out of that hellhole," **I journaled on 3 January 1983, upon my return to Milltown, having spent some days after Christmas at home with my mother. I regarded the house in which I grew up as *'a den of hate, resentment, secrecy'*; from which Paul had been banished, David had vanished for a decade, my father had died with resentments untold, and I had escaped hoping to lead a meaningful life.**

Earlier and Present Me

"I am abhorred by myself often these days," I wrote, finding myself seething with anger, disaffected with relationships, overeating and succumbing to solitary pleasures. *"But this is me,"* I reflected, taking solace from Leonard Cohen's song 'Suzanne', which spoke to me of the wisdom of finding beauty and hope even in our failures.

On 7 January, I recorded my *"terror to go to bed"*, my superego losing the battle against the id. It was difficult for my idealistic celibate self to come to terms with my cravings, urges and appetite for food and sex. And yet, making my confession, I did not feel contrite. My spiritual director counselled it didn't matter that I didn't feel guilty.

He said: "It's the sacrament of celebration of God's forgiveness in Jesus. Feelings are a distraction.'"

Two days later, I journaled: *"An earlier me is shocked by my present self."* But I also wrote: *"My present 'me' feels I am more real than ever before."*

Self Confidence?

I sought a new understanding of celibacy by reading *The Sexual Celibate* by Donald Goergen. My spiritual director advised me, after completing it, to study the spirituality of celibacy. He consoled me: "Don't be vexed at not yet being master of yourself - you're not yet old enough to be."

But my confidence in myself and in my ability to sustain relationships was at a low ebb. Tense, disheartened and unsettled, community life became a burden and several relationships were strained. For example, historian Father Donal Kerr, with whom I normally got on well in community, asked: "Do you not love me anymore?" He meant fraternal love - nothing inappropriate was intended.

Another journal entry reads: *"I stared angrily at [named confrère] the other day at Morning Office as he did his usual stint of shouting down his side of the chapel and dictating a rapid recitation. I wish to God he'd leave."*

Cycling for miles alone in the Wicklow hills was my favourite healthy escape for my mind, mood and body. During a 90-minute prayer in the chapel on 16 January, I silently, *"thanked God for day spent on hills"*.

Dejection and Recovery

But the *'crucifixion of community'* continued. I tried my best to be helpful to a confrère, whom I felt was isolated within the community, and he responded by cutting me to the quick with cynicism, attacking my motivation for talking to him. I broke down, flummoxed by how nasty he was to me.

Days later I drew a picture in my journal of a man with a closed plastic bag over his head, doubtless an image for myself at that time. The eyes are sad. The lips are a focal point of attention, like I'm trying to show myself that I was sexual and suffocating. I was basing my life on religious faith, in the hope of reward in this world and the next, but forfeiting the one and only life I could be sure of in the here and now. It was a period, as I journaled, of *"weariness, uncertainty, confusion".*

I was saddened when a popular confrère left in February 1983. We were thirty-eight students in Mount St Mary's after I had entered in September 1980. Now, two and a half years later, almost a third had gone.

But my gloom lifted in late February 1983 - I thought my confrère had fallen in love with me…….♦

THE END OF CHRISTIANITY IN EUROPE?

Religion is not dead in Western Europe, but is clearly moribund as the statistics about practice and belief show in the various countries concerned, not least Ireland (see endnote). It seems to endure more in Central and Eastern Europe, to some extent due to its previously symbolic quality in the hostility to Stalinist regimes. Although, the signs there of ongoing decline are already evident, particularly among young people. The latter phenomenon is possibly only the beginning of a pattern, which may come to match that of the West.

Levels of Religion

Religions typically have three main levels - magical, transcendental and ethical. These become manifest and develop in a number of ways. We consider Christianity here in these respects, because that is the religious tradition which is overwhelmingly predominant throughout Europe.

The magical is the most immediate and striking element of a religion. In Christianity, one has the virgin birth and the avatar Jesus who performs miracles ranging from walking on water to reviving corpses, and finally is himself resurrected and ascends into heaven.

Of course, there is nothing original in all this, taking account of tales such as those of Gilgamesh, Horus, Dionysus, Krishna and the mahayana Buddha. If you want to think of events that mark out the divine from the mundane, then beginning with parthenogenesis, incarnating the deity, proceeding through counternatural episodes and ending with rising from the dead, you have pretty much got what is needed. If you can then persuade people to actually believe these things, you're more or less there in having them accept your religion. And when initially dealing with the uneducated and fearful masses of two thousand years ago, that is not all that difficult. But when you are gifted a possibly opportunistic 'convert' in the shape of a Roman Emperor, Constantine by name, you have really arrived.

Incarnation

And it has to be observed in particular that godly incarnation was especially important in winning over to Christianity, because it goes a long way towards bridging the gap between the omnipotent overlord in the sky and the ordinary human here on earth. Christianity was markedly adept at convincing people about this when the story was based on a real historical person. In other words, the process seemed to be that, instead of just envisaging god as a superhuman in the heavens, you bring him down to be a superhuman on terra firma and walk amongst us mere mortals. Rather than us just being a reverential extension of him, he becomes an idealistic extension of us.

Equality & Autocracy

Christianity also initially preached the equality of man, if not quite the person, and this was certainly attractive to the 'plebs', but it did not last long. Within a hundred years or so, and even before Christianity's official endorsement, class difference asserted itself and the ordinary believer often had to stand at the back of the ecclesial assembly, while their 'betters' occupied the forward positions. By the time of imperial establishment, the long journey had begun of Christian backing for the ruling class of the day and instruction of the masses to be duly obedient. Pristine democratic ethos had soon given way to autocratic alignment. And the initially attractive pax vobiscum quickly transmuted into inquisitorial persecution.

The Transcendental

The next step up from the magical is the transcendental. By definition, you cannot see

the dimensions of this. You are told that there is a supernatural with a heavenly father to start with and, in time, you come to discover that this other domain is populated with all sorts of posthumous souls, as well as angels - and demons, the acme of which is the devil. Of course, it is not just a case of celestial demography. There are distinctive attributes of these entities, notably the mercurial god who is both loving and punishing, depending on how you conduct yourself, in particular sexually. One interpretation also has him effectively evincing a multiple personality, known as the trinity This is the divinity proffered as the object of adoration. While some people then worship a nonexistent god, there are eccentrics who alternatively worship the devil, i.e. the alter ego of nothingness. Such a perspective will of course be hotly contested, especially by salon theophiliacs who usually cannot understand each other and on recollecting their own disquisitions rarely understand themselves.

Immortality

And you're told that you yourself can have access to this other realm after death in which there is the possibility of blissful immortality. So, if your lot in the here and now personally disappoints, it will be compensated for in the hereafter. That also helps greatly in fatalistic acceptance of the hand you are dealt socially in life, no matter how unjust.

There has latterly been developed a refined version of Christianity which tends to put forward in some measure a metaphorical rather than a literal understanding of certain teachings, but it still holds to a supernatural explanation of cosmic origin and continues to promise spiritual perpetuity.

It is generally agreed that either the basic or revised version of Christianity cannot be proved or disproved; it is a matter of mystery and faith. Some would say that this 'faith' might otherwise be more appropriately and simply described as wishful thinking.

Christian Ethics

But Christianity does not only have us believe in the magical and transcendental. On the basis of this it also assumes authority to tell us how to behave, namely how to be ethical. It endorses some universally accepted principles such as 'thou shalt not kill'. Also, it seems to advocate pure benevolence in saying 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mark 12:31), but in practice Christian societies accepted a literal rereading of this as capable of describing the phenomenon of the altruistic narcissist.

It is when it gets into certain specifics that its neurotic and anti-human side fully comes out. Most of this is obsessed with the erotic and related. The following are deeply sinful: nudity, sexual fantasy, masturbation, premarital sex, contraception, abortion, divorce, and homosexuality, to start with. Then, there is the detail of exactly when and how sex is to be engaged in, even within marriage. Of course, it is to be always kept in mind that it is then for procreation rather than pleasure. Abstinence and denial are the orders of the day. In the Christian mind, copulation is associated with contamination. If some of this is difficult, it can be offered up as a penance and help to diminish the torture of purgatory.

Negativity of Christianity

Naturally, very few people, apart from desert-dwelling anchorites, can adhere to all these strictures. But if you can't be frightened into actually behaving properly, you will then be made to feel guilty and sullied. The result is prevention of tranquility and contentment. This is all consistent with the teachings about original sin, covering one's nakedness and us all being persistently sinners and in need of redemption. The flesh is corrupt, life is a valley of tears, the mental focus should be on the postmortal. It is a depressingly miserable, life-denying creed. The alleged joys of Christianity are akin to the euphoric episodes of the bipolar in what is otherwise made to be a wasteland of existence.

Retreat

Christianity began to retreat, notably from the 18th century onwards, with the vigorous assertion of scientific and philosophical rationalism. Today, in Western Europe anyway, it has been widely seen through as not only false, but absurd with its primitive superstitions concerning virgin birth, 'miraculous' happenings, and walking dead, et cetera. What has been gradually taking its place is a conscious or de facto secular humanism.

Religious involvement may still occur with the use of church rituals by some on occasions of birth, marriage and death as a matter of convenience. There may even be an amount of attendance at services for reason of social

contact or keeping up appearances. But religious belief is another thing. There is often just a quiet abandonment of the incredible.

From the Atlantic to the Urals, finality may at last be coming, at varied rates, to what is basically an unnatural and reactionary supercult. Christianity in the region seems to be gradually moving into the back room of history along with the euro-imperialism that it so brazenly fronted. In an altogether new sense, it is perhaps a case of 'today Europe, tomorrow the world'.

ENDNOTE Those sure about existence of a god as percentages of population: Fin 23, Swed 14, Nor 19, Den 15, Ger 10 , Neth 15, Bel 13, Fr 11, Br 12, Ir Rep 24, Sp 25, Port 44, It 26. The pattern in Central and Eastern Europe is mixed, rising from a low of 13% to a high of 66%, although in the majority of cases below 50%. (PEW RESEARCH CENTRE).

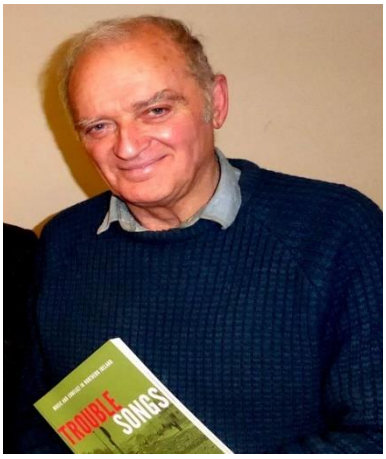
Daltún Ó Ceallaigh

Brian McClinton

This is an extended eulogy that I gave at this year's Feile an Phobail lecture about John Toland in St Mary's College, Belfast on the 11 August 2022 that Brian was to deliver, and was given in his place by Daltún Ó Ceallaigh to whom I am grateful for an excellent talk.

Background

Brian was born on Shankill Road and attended Mayo Primary School and passed the then 11+ thanks to the urging of his mother that her sons would 'get on' and have a better life. His father's attitude was "School's a waste of time, let them get out to work". Brian often commented that he was eternally grateful for her superior wisdom. His mother apparently applied for him to enter Belfast Royal Academy Grammar School, but was informed that they could not take him. The family always said that this was due to his working-class background. Brian subsequently attended the Boys Model Secondary School in north Belfast and transferred to Royal Belfast Academical Institution where he obtained excellent 'A' Levels.



On to TCD

At 17 he told his parents that he was leaving the Boys Brigade, because he was becoming sceptical of its religious tenets. He also remembered at this age, his father watching Ian Paisley on the TV in the Sixties and shouting 'hear, hear' at some anti-Catholic rant from the 'Big Man'. Yet his father had no religion in him at all and Brian found his attitude puzzling.

He was not certain on reflection why he wanted to go to Trinity College, Dublin. One reason, he certainly said was a desire for some sort of independence. However, he recalled standing on the front porch on the first day and feeling like the loneliest person in the world. A working-class Prod arriving to mix with the Anglo-Irish gentry and the failed Oxbridge English students. Yet he also remembered crying on his last day, four years later for he grew to love the place and to love Dublin.

Birth of a Republican

Brian had written that he became a republican at Trinity, a republican in the tradition of Trinity republicans like Wolf Tone, Robert Emmet, and Thomas Davis. However, he was critical of the subsequent military campaign pursued by the Provisional IRA and argued that the tragedy of the Troubles was that persuasion and argument might have succeeded far better than the armed conflict that resulted.

Nevertheless, Brian regularly said he wanted to see Ireland united politically and peacefully and fulfil the noble vision of Wolfe Tone to break down the brazen walls of separation, abolish the memory of all past dissensions and substitute the common name of Irish men or Irish women in place of the divisive labels that have plagued us down the centuries.

Partition & Education

Brian often said that a partitioned Ireland made no sense to an atheist/humanist, as each religious sect could dominate its own bit and impose its will on the people. The Republic he viewed as a Catholic theocracy and the North as a Puritan theocracy. While he

often said that Humanists seek unity of philosophy and outlook irrespective of borders, he also believed that there is a real alternative beyond Orange and Green which can bring all Irish people together in pursuit of their common secular interests.

A political liberal he believed that too many from his working-class Protestant upbringing voted and acted against their own interests. As a teacher, he was saddened by the low educational achievement of children like himself from the Protestant working class. He felt that loyalist culture was a large factor where education was generally seen as not cool, school is regarded as a bit of a lark, and in his experience as a young man, clever kids are mocked and bullied.

As a teacher, Brian taught history and economics at Friends Quaker School in Lisburn for over 36 years.

Brian, the Humanist

Brian will be remembered for his prolific, fearless, and intellectual contribution to Irish Humanism. He first became active in the Ulster Humanist Association and then the Northern Ireland Humanist Association in 1984. For decades he voluntarily edited, designed, and published bi-monthly humanist magazines such as the *Ulster Humanist*, *Humanism Ireland*, and latterly the *Irish Freethinker*. His books and pamphlets were *Ulster's Third Way*, *Humanist Handbook*, *The Humanist Alternative - Beyond Orange and Green*, and *The Shakespeare Conspiracies*.

Brian was often the public voice of Humanism in the north of Ireland and was a regular contributor on BBC Radio NI *Sunday Sequence* and *Talkback* programmes.

Like all human beings Brian had many foibles; he could be cantankerous and acerbic, but in the main was also good company and a decent person.

Sadly, Brian left us on the 3 June this year at the age of 77. He will always be remembered for his outstanding contribution to Humanism in Ireland.

Roger Kelly

Male Culture & Females

Peter O'Hara

The part of male culture that treats girls and women as things

I lived as a child mostly with boys only. So I learned a model of humans, and how they relate to each other, without any idea that boys are different from girls. As a child, I heard other boys talk of boys' talk, with girls as in some way different from boys, but I never found any difference. I did not see sense in that view.

Some people, with knowledge or supposed knowledge that another group of people are different, move to think that the other group is inferior, and then treat people in the other group as inferior. From boys and men treating girls and women as inferior, some come to treat them as things rather than people - some treat them very badly, as is in the news.

Life as a child until I left primary school

I am in my 60s.

I have five brothers and no sisters. In early childhood, most of our friends were the children of our parents' friends. There were families of only boys and families of only girls. We went to the houses of both kinds of family.

Girls wore dresses and had dolls, but I don't recall thinking that girls had minds that were different from boys.

My primary school had only boys.

Between about the age 10 and the age of 12, I was a bit less in the houses of girls, but I still had no model of girls having different thinking.

At Secondary School

I attended a boarding school for boys from age 12 to age 17. At the start, some boys made sure that I knew that, while I was smart at lessons, I was not good at street knowledge (which they thought was more important than classroom learning). After two years, I saw that this meant knowledge of the culture of boarding schools. It ceased to bother me. Part of this culture was that the boys already at the school would make a newcomer aware of his place and, to show the new guy that he was inferior in something, contributed to making him so aware.

Culture in boarding schools also included

boys occasionally making a mess of another boy's bedclothes, or of the books in another boy's desk. The culture also told you not to complain about this, and boys were likely to do these things again to those who complained. The boarding school culture said that you should tolerate these bad acts towards you.

When at secondary school, I thought every boy had at least one sister: only 1/4 of boys in families of three have no sister, and only 1/8 of boys in families of four have no sister.

In my middle years there, some boys talked about how a boy talks to a girl, and I thought they knew a bit about this, as they had a sister. They never described this style of talk, but they managed to give me the impression that such a different mode of talk existed. This was what the boys thought was true, and they were not trying to make me feel inferior. I was sceptical that such a different mode of thinking or talk existed, but I could not knock this hypothesis completely as I had no personal knowledge of teenage girls then.

At University and Later

At university, I met men and women. There was no difference between how I talked with men and how I talked with women. My sceptical view had been correct.

I heard in secondary school and in college a bit of boys and men talking about women, largely about how to approach them and how to get to have sex with them. This included mentioning their female parts, about one woman's or girl's particular part being better, or worse, than the average. In this type of talk, it seemed that men and boys aimed to have sex with women, and this was like an achievement as in other things. This talk did not include anything about a boy's or man's relationship with the female person.

I did not associate with fellows who talked a lot about women as things. But I heard this talk from friends of friends who joined the company.

I recall only once criticising a man after hearing him talk about women's body parts, including some derogatory language about their parts, meaning he viewed women as things. I was 36. It was in a staff break room: the staff included men and women. This man was in the same grade as me. He was a nice and decent person apart from this talk. He had talked thus a few times - only when there were no women present. On this occasion, he talked thus a bit longer and I got fed up with it. I told him that I did not approve of this talk and I left the room.

From Viewing Women as Inferior to Mistreating Them

So, I heard the talk of some boys and men about women being different, and to those boys and men this meant inferior, and sometimes that girls and women are things. I am fairly sure that the principal way in which they come to think this is from boys or men of their own age, or only slightly older. This attitude is portrayed sometimes in TV fiction. Numerous informal conversations between men who believe this reinforce this culture.

There are common habits of choice of clothes, of other parts of appearance, of favourite activities, and of body and personal communication styles, which differ between male humans and female humans. There is a part of culture that says that this difference is a fairly essential feature of the sexes and not driven by culture. As a supposed sharp and permanent difference between men and women, this combines with the culture about women being things, or inferior, or in existence just for some of men's purposes, to let some men approve of hitting, raping, and killing women.

Changing this Piece of Culture is Hard

Perhaps a modest minority of adult men (could be a lot less than half) approve of the talk about women as things and treating them so. I have not noticed a piece of popular culture that says that this is wrong - I have not read or heard a man describe this attitude and say that it is wrong. It is hard to see that any woman approves of it, but parts of the culture for women's behaviour makes it harder than it should be for them to complain and to assert their rights. Our culture includes women being quiet, or not complaining, or allowing a lot of quarter to behaviour that is not right - many people judge that a woman who makes what are in fact quite reasonable complaints is too

fussy or too intolerant.

How to Change this Bad Part of Culture

This piece of culture can be reduced, in the next generation of young adults, by all schools from now on not segregating children by sex; and by the classes in school about relationships and sex having educational movies that show loving and consenting sex explicitly.

To change this bad piece of culture, before the next generation, needs more than classes in school and college about consent. This change will happen with a large amount of government publicity that states that this piece of culture (viewing women as things) is wrong. The publicity should be similar to what our government has done about not driving with alcohol in you, smoking only outdoors except in your own home, and using face masks and keeping a distance to reduce the spread of coronavirus.

Publicity Subjects

These should be about all humans being persons with rights, about having sex and other body contact when you want it and not otherwise - that a person who says "No" does indeed not want to do what the other person asked, and that to complain about what some people think are small breaches of your rights is not too fussy but is very reasonable.

There will still be a large effect from the piece of our culture that says that the features of people that differ by sex are fairly essential features of the sexes and not part of culture (clothes, other parts of appearance, activities, and communication style) - even with the public information as above. This piece of culture marks the female group as different from the male group, and will still lead some male humans to count the females as inferior, and this will at least delay (if not prevent) those men changing so as to not mistreat women.

The publicity from our government must include saying that these typical differences are part of culture, and that it is entirely reasonable for all genders to behave in all the ways that the present culture distinguishes between male and female humans. That is, that both genders may have the clothes, other parts of appearance, activities, and communication style that people now count as either solely for male or solely for female humans.

More to be Done

I say all that I have written, because I think that the job of changing the culture, so as to reduce men verbally abusing, touching without consent, hitting, raping, and murdering women, can be done: but it will require more than I have heard planned in public, such as by our government.

♦

ULSTER DEFENCE REGIMENT: A LOYALIST MILITIA?

There is no doubt that most of the soldiers who wore a UDR uniform were thoroughly decent people, professional, and dedicated to protecting the community as a whole, some paying the ultimate price in the process. Nevertheless, it is important to debunk the myth that abuses by members were solely the work of rogue elements.

From its formation in 1970, the UDR was in continuous service for 22 years and numbered at its height 8,900 soldiers. For the nationalist and republican community, encounters with the UDR were frequently hostile, often brutal and indeed sometimes fatal. For many, it was simply a loyalist militia similar to the B Specials.

The Ulster Special Constabulary ('B Specials') was set up in 1920 at the time of the partition of Ireland as a reserve, part-time paramilitary force, drawn almost exclusively from the ranks of the Orange Lodges and was feared and despised by Catholics and the nationalist community, with a deserved reputation for sectarian brutality, while policing their own Catholic neighbours. Harold Wilson, a British Labour Prime Minister, described the B Specials as the Unionists' own private army. The Hunt Report, set up in 1969, envisaged the disbandment of the B Specials and the formation of a new force from the outset, the Ulster Defence Regiment. (UDR)

It is clear from British files that recruitment to the UDR was a major worry. Seven battalions were organised and ex-commandants of the B Specials were given to all seven, resulting in ex-B Specials joining the UDR almost en masse. It is estimated that not

more than 16% were from a Catholic background.

Polarisation of UDR

During "Operation Motorman" in 1972, in the assault on "No Go" areas in Belfast and Derry over 5,000 UDR soldiers were used, resulting in an increase in Protestant recruitment and a decline of Catholic members, with only 389 remaining. Was this because of hostility towards Catholics by UDR members or threats from the IRA? Probably a bit of both. Catholic members of the UDR were certainly considered legitimate targets by republicans.

Another uncomfortable reality for the UDR was infiltration by Protestant paramilitaries. The Ulster Defence Regiment (UDA) was the biggest paramilitary organisation in the Western world with 26,000 men in 1972. The commanding officer of the UDR was Brigadier Ormerod who reported that certain recruits were motivated by the wish to obtain access to arms and that a minority of UDR soldiers were also active members of the UDA. Not only had paramilitaries access to weapons, but were taught in the use of them. On top of that, lots of weapons went missing and you ended up with the absurd situation that the British Army was fighting troops trained by their fellow officers armed with British arms and radios.

UDR & UDA

While the UDR was taking a moderate line towards UDA supporters, the UDA was busy killing people. Mary Holland, writing in 1980, estimated that, ten years after the UDR's inception, the regiment had trained 21,000 loyalists in the use of weapons. In 1985, the Security Service assessed that 85% of the UDA's intelligence originated within the security forces. A stunning admission was that 15% of UDR soldiers were also in loyalist paramilitaries. John Hume memorably described the UDR as a group of Rangers supporters, put in uniform, supplied with weapons and given the job of policing the area where Celtic supporters live.

Assassinations

One of the most notorious killings of the Northern Ireland troubles was that of the Miami Showband, flagged down by an apparently military checkpoint as they travelled home to Dublin after a gig. In fact, the roadblock was operated by the loyalist paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) some of which were in the UDR. When two members of the roadblock team were planting a bomb in the band's minibus, the bomb prematurely went off, killing them both. The band members then bolted for their lives across fields, but most were shot down using high velocity rifles, though two survived to implicate the UVF gang including the UDR members.

Eddie McIlwaine, one of the "Shankill Butchers" was also a member of the UDR which only came to light when Secretary of State Roy Mason was questioned about his membership. The Glenanne gang, which operated near the border, were involved in the murder of over 100 Catholics and were responsible for the Monaghan and Dublin bombings. It had security force personnel in its ranks, including Robin Jackson, a notorious murderer, and a UDR man.

The British army agent and UDA quartermaster, Brian Nelson, who was involved in the murder of solicitor Pat Finucane, said in a statement to Police investigators that ,of the UDA's intelligence material, 99% involved the UDR.

Investigation

The British Government appointed Commissioner John Stevens to head an investigation into State forces and loyalist paramilitaries, which highlighted collusion, failure to keep records and absence of accountability. The impact of his work was seismic and the reaction of the UDR hostile. His team in 1989 arrested 28 full time and part-time members of the UDR. From that time, the future of the regiment was in doubt and it was disbanded soon after.

Andy Barr

Repay injury with justice, and kindness with kindness. *Confucius*

THE ANTHROPIC PRINCIPLE

"The more I examine the universe, and the details of its architecture, the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense must have known we were coming."
Freeman Dyson. Physicist.

It was the Australian astrophysicist Brandon Carter who in 1973 first coined what is now termed "the Anthropic Principle" in a presentation he made in Kraków at a five-hundred-year celebration of Copernicus's birthday. The term comes from "anthropos" which is the Greek word for man or humanity. Carter was reacting to the Copernican principle which had moved science from where it had previously been, with the Earth and man in a privileged position at the centre of the universe. Carter was now articulating that our science had once more brought us to the situation where it was showing that the universe, and our place in it, are privileged to some extent, though not necessarily central.

WAO & SAP

What Carter said was: [1]: "We must be prepared to take account of the fact that our location in the universe is necessarily privileged to the extent of being compatible with our existence as observers and [2]: The universe (and hence the fundamental parameters on which it depends) must be such as to admit the creation of observers within it at some stage." These two statements are referred to, respectively, as the Weak Anthropic Principle (WAP) and the Strong Anthropic Principle (SAP).

The Anthropic Principle is basically a set of concepts stating that man is adapted to the universe and the universe is adapted to man. It is not actually a principle as such, it is more about facts to be explained; nor is it a basic law of physics or biology. It is to an extent tautological.

Since Carter's original rendition, there have been many elaborations and versions of the Anthropic Principle. At this point over thirty anthropic principles have been formulated including a "Participatory Anthropic Principle" and a "Final Anthropic Principle". The astronomer John Barrow and the mathematical physicist Frank Tipler in 1986 elaborated on it hugely in their massive seven-hundred-page tome, 'The Cosmological Anthropic Principle'.

Contentious Issue

The Anthropic Principle is a very contentious issue, particularly in science. By a scientist introducing "the observer" into the impersonal scientific world, it thereby becomes a linkage between science, philosophy and theology with each discipline or "magesterium", to use Stephen J Gould's term, using it for its own benefit. Due to this interdisciplinary connection, there is currently a vast scholarship and bibliography dealing with the Anthropic Principle - its analysis, elucidation and understanding. What the Anthropic Principle has principally done is brought discussion in several academic disciplines to the fore, regarding how or why the universe is so precisely fine-tuned that carbon-based life could evolve.

All of the constants of the standard model of matter as well as the four fundamental forces of nature are extremely finely tuned and, without this extraordinary and confounding precision, carbon-based life could neither evolve nor exist.

Steven Weinberg, a Nobel Laureate in Physics, wrote: "how surprising it is that the laws of nature and the initial conditions of the universe should allow for the existence of beings who could observe it. Life as we know it would be impossible if any one of several physical quantities had slightly different values".

Testability & Falsifiability

In his 1988 book *A Brief History of Time* at page 138 Stephen Hawking stated: "The laws of science, as we know them at present, contain many fundamental numbers, like the size of the electric charge of the electron and the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron. The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life."

As it is neither testable nor falsifiable, the Anthropic Principle cannot explain any of the parameters of the laws of nature and physics,

or the reasons for the extremely fine tunings involved for life to have evolved from the Big Bang. However, by reasoning anthropically some scientific discoveries have been made.

Anthropic Reasoning

Using anthropic reasoning, Steven Weinberg predicted in 1987 the non-zero value of the cosmological constant. The cosmological constant controls the expansion of the universe. It refers to the balance of the attractive force of gravity with a hypothesised repulsive force of space. These two forces must be nearly perfectly balanced and very close to 0. To get the right balance, the cosmological constant must be fine-tuned to something like one part in 10^{123}, that is at least 123 places of decimals followed by a 2 (·00000000000000000----------2). Were it slightly more positive, the universe would fly apart; were it slightly more negative, the universe would collapse. This is way beyond fine tuning - it is inexplicable. There are only around 10^{81} atoms in the universe. Accordingly, the cosmological constant is probably the most precise fine-tuning issue raised by the Anthropic Principle and also one of the biggest problems yet to be explained in physics today.

Another one of the scientific successes which has come from anthropic reasoning is the astronomer Fred Hoyle's prediction of the properties of the carbon nucleus that make possible the synthesis of carbon in stellar interiors - properties that were later discovered, as predicted. From Hoyle's reasoning, science has now uncovered how the heavy elements in the universe were created in nuclear reactions within stellar interiors. Hoyle later wrote: "A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology."

Inflation

Another fine tuning relates to cosmic inflation. Inflation is a separate concept from the cosmological constant referred to above. Inflation took place for just a momentary fraction of a second, whereas the cosmological constant refers to the present rate of expansion of the universe. Referring to inflation Stephen Hawking, at page 134 of *A Brief History of Time* says: "If the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million million, the universe would have recollapsed before it reached its present size". On the other hand, if it had been greater by a part in a million, the universe would have expanded too rapidly for stars and planets to form. Inflation only took place for a fraction of a second, from between 10^{-36} and 10^{-32} seconds after the Big Bang. Putting it slightly differently, in the first second after the Big Bang, if the universe had been less dense by just one digit in the 14th of decimal places it would've been largely empty. This is because there would have been less mass to put the brakes on at expansion. On the other hand, a slightly denser universe would have expanded too slowly, leading it to collapse in on itself in a big crunch.

Three Solutions

I have just briefly mentioned above a few of the very many fine-tuning coincidences involved in the evolution of life. To deal with them all would require a book. The number of fine tunings or coincidences required for life are so many and so extraordinarily fine and knife-edge that there are only three possible solutions. The first is brute fact, which I am not aware of anyone in academia accepting; two is a designer which suits the theologians; and three a multiverse which is the solution science is being forced into.

With regard to brute force, we cannot logically say that the universe made itself exist, as an entity cannot do something unless it actually exists in the first place.

Leaving out brute fact, the next possibility is that of a designer. This is definitely a logical option and the evidence certainly points in that direction. But as there is no contact with or knowledge of the designer, what are we to surmise regarding this designer? Disregarding the anthropomorphic, mythical god of religion, which has long been disproved and rejected, what are we left with?

Such a designer would not be a religious or anthropomorphic being, but an abstract

creative or controlling force, "a ground of being" or a "god" in the neoplatonist sense, or what the philosopher Derek Parfit called an "impersonal force or fundamental law". This axiarchic View which Parfit takes from Plato, Plotinus and others, at its simplest, is "that god is good" and that the universe exists because god caused it to exist.

The problem of evil and suffering however contradicts this view. Why would a designer have put in a cosmological constant at all? An all-powerful or controlling designer or force could just create a steady state universe with no expansion or contraction and a much simpler universe with not quite so many extremely fine-tuned laws, parameters and constants.

The third possibility, and the one science posits, is a multiverse solution, whereby eventually one universe amongst millions, with all the correct parameters occurred, in which carbon-based life could evolve. This does away completely with the need to explain fine-tuning. But this hypothesis offers no explanation or evidence for the existence of multiple universes.

Against Occam's Razor

A multiple universe theory implies that there are different parameters and constants in the different universes and that one just happened to have the correct constants and parameters as well as events in the correct order, which allowed life to evolve in our universe.

Such a theory is completely against Occam's Razor and the immutability of the laws of nature, and is incapable of being either tested or falsified. If we cannot yet explain how or why our own universe came into existence, then it is rather pointless positing multiple universes as an answer to why life evolved in our universe. It is simply adding to the complications. In fact, the eminent philosopher Thomas Nagle, at note 9 on Page 95 of *Mind and Cosmos*, states: "There is a hypothesis that this universe is not unique; but that all possible universes exist and we find ourselves, not surprisingly, in one that contains life. But that is a copout, which dispenses with the attempt to explain anything".

Philosophically the simplest explanation of fine-tuning is undoubtedly a designer. But science of course "has no need of that hypothesis".

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Anthropic Principle is not scientific as it is neither testable nor falsifiable. It is a philosophical or metaphysical issue. However, at the leading edge in science, many would hold that physics must now merge into metaphysics as physics itself has reached its boundary as a science.

So is the universe custom built for us, or are we just rather haphazardly built from it?

Noel Byrne

TRANSHUMANISM
Further Thoughts

In the last issue of *Irish Freethinker & Humanist*, Tom White started a discussion about Transhumanism. Tom White and I also led a discussion for Humanist Network Ireland on this topic in mid-August. These together generated the following reflections about the origin of the term "Transhumanism" and its much later development to refer to a very different form of human 'enhancement' by a frankly sinister use of technology.

In this article, I examine Huxley's use - and almost immediate abandonment - of the term, followed by a description of its new meaning. I then touch on some hazards of this new "Transhumanism". Finally, I briefly explore some accessible alternatives to such drastic and elitist proposals.

Huxley's Transhumanism

Tom White started by citing Julian Huxley, who coined the word in his essay *Transhumanism*, which appeared in his 1957 collection of essays, *New Bottles for New Wine*. In that very short essay, Huxley outlines the ideas that he set out at much greater length in his 1962 essay *The Humanist Frame'* from the book of the same name (also in *Essays of a Humanist*). However, in that elaboration, Huxley no longer used the term "Transhumanism", but instead uses "psychosocial evolution", which is what we would call "evolutionary humanism" or just "humanism".

Essentially, Huxley recognised three phases of evolution. The first was the inorganic phase, when different types of atom were formed in stars. The second was biological evolution - the development of life. Finally, he recognised "psychosocial evolution'" when humans had evolved the capacity for abstract thought, language and reasoning, enabling the rapid transmission of ideas and technology. Crucially, each phase is much faster than the one before and leads to much greater complexity. For Huxley, humans uniquely have the capacity to choose their 'destiny' and to act deliberately to move towards it.

On this humanist view, humans are the 'sole agents' of evolution' - we have the *responsibility* to the whole planet to manage our development and our effects benignly. I think most humanists would broadly agree with this view about our position in the world as part of nature, but with our extraordinary power and our responsibility to use it for the benefit of all living things.

Tom White did refer to the aberration that was "coerced eugenics" that has sometimes been associated with "evolutionary humanism", but in fact greatly predates Huxley's essay. Coerced eugenics is the forcible prevention of breeding of the 'unfit'. (see Noël Byrne's *Liberal Eugenics'*(*Irish Freethinker*, May-June 2021). That form of eugenics as a method of trying to improve the species is based on at least two major misunderstandings - but that's a discussion for another day.

Silicon Valley Transhumanism

If the term 'Transhumanism' only had an ephemeral existence in 1957, it has acquired a new meaning and a new life in recent years. Transhumanism has now come to mean the improvement of humankind by the enhancement of individuals through technological means, whether genetic or by some kind of fusion with artificial intelligence (AI).

This looks like a kind of science fiction exploration and it may be no surprise that these ideas flourish in Silicon Valley. This 'Transhumanism' has been described by Irish writer Mark O'Connell in his (2017) book *To Be a Machine* (and in a panel discussion in the Trinity Long Room Hub, http://bitly.ws/vce3, 15 min). One form of this idea is that of escaping death, usually by freezing a body until there is a way of 'curing death'. An extreme form is to upload an individual's brain (that is, their essential being) into some type of AI device. This is called "The Singularity" or "The Rapture of the Nerds".

On this view, the body is seen as obsolete, merely 'the fleshy container in which the software of our mind is contained'. The body is very fragile and has 'expensive maintenance routines.' This form of 'Transhumanism' is seen by its proponents as just another stage in evolution like the ones that went before.

At this point deploying the *ad hominem* argument is irresistible. This is not a respectable logical tool. Essentially, the *ad hominem* argument says that we can discount an argument because of *who* says it. Employing it would suggest that Silicon Valley techies and Elon Musk can perhaps be discounted as a bit weird. But it does not deal with the substantive issues. We can more plausibly argue that the values behind this 'Transhumanism' are wrong and the 'obsession' with evading death is part of a vain, materialist culture. Further, the means to use 'Transhumanism' will always be restricted to a wealthy elite and that may have extremely undesirable implications for the politics of the future.

However, the futuristic, speculative element of this 'Transhumanism' is all very well, but we have plenty of experience to show that if something can be done, some of those who have the power to do it will do it. There are places with cryogenically frozen bodies awaiting the day when they can be resurrected: there is one such "patient care bay" in a business park on the outskirts of Phoenix, Arizona. We already know that some parents are selecting the sex of embryos to be implanted. Who knows what other traits are being selected - or will be in the near future. We also know of one shocking and deeply unethical attempt to genetically modify embryos in a way that would be heritable. Those embryos have since developed into children.

What is to Be Done?

Trying to improve our species (as well as the state of the planet) is no doubt a worthy aim.

But the choice of methods is critical. I argue that there are several other things we can do which will have important and useful effects, before we start using 'transhumanist' methods the results of which are difficult to predict and may be profound and irreversible. This offends the principle of 'first do no harm'.

For example, we can enhance our species by enabling greater numbers of individuals to fulfil their potential. This can be done by improving living conditions, leading to better health, education and contribution to society. (It was the realisation of the importance of this environmental mechanism that led to the rejection of eugenics by some of its more liberal adherents.)

We could improve our use of our brains by education, enhancing critical thinking, and abstract reasoning - without losing empathy and awe. The methods used are benign and capable of being modified in the light of experience, unlike those proposed by Silicon Valley transhumanists.

Various thinkers from the early 19th-century Auguste Comte, to mid-20th-century Huxley and early 21st-century Steven Pinker have argued that once such enhanced modes of thinking have been widely adopted, humankind will make rapid progress because there will be more agreement and we will be on Pinker's 'Escalator of Reason'. (More work for another day.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. Thanks to Tom White for initiating an interesting discussion and for the participants at the Humanist Network Ireland meeting for valuable insights.

Alan Tuffery

HUMANIST MEETINGS IN IRELAND

Irish Freethinkers and Humanists
2nd Thursday of month, 8pm.
Holiday Inn, University St, Belfast.
Contact: Roger 0777 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,
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

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ISSN 2399-7621
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