

Suffolk Humanists and Secularists

Newsletter February 2017

Darwin Day Dinner

Our next get-together will be to mark the birthday of Charles Darwin who was so influential in changing our understanding of the origins of human (and other) life.

It will be at 7.30 on Wednesday 15th February at Arlington's restaurant in the Darwin room.

A menu is available on their website <http://arlingtonbrasserie.co.uk/menu/> and as well as individual dishes a set menu of two courses for £14.95 or three for £18.95 is available.

We can probably still squeeze in two or three more people. For more information or to book please email denisjohnston@btinternet.com or telephone him on 01394387462

January meeting: "Ten Minute Topics"

Our January meeting spanned a wide range of topics suggested for discussion by those present but restricted to a ten minute limit. Below gives the flavour of some questions posed....

Topic: Should humanists join/support charities that are basically run by religious people?

Context: Currently faith based organisations/charities are being encouraged by government to undertake roles previously 'state' organised. This may be on a commercial basis. Also many charities that perform a useful service have been started by religious groups esp. for example Quakers.

Discussion covered a wide range of issues e.g. motivation of those who started it, proselytisation etc. Should we donate to foodbanks that are

organised by religious organisations who then sometimes seek to take the credit? The general view was that it was best to support clearly non-religious charities but that if a religiously founded charity was clearly doing good things then we should be comfortable supporting it.

Topic: Are Monarchies a good idea?

Context: In view of the number of revolutions, coups etc. that have overthrown monarchies does the institution of monarchy actually confer stability as its apologists claim?

Discussion: Perhaps unsurprisingly the conclusion from this was a series of "Dunnos". The discussion was not so much on political level but more on a cost/benefit analysis looking to see what alternatives worked better. The "Head of State" model as used in Germany where the President has no real power and is akin to the UK monarch was contrasted with the "Presidential" model of the USA and other countries. Did the monarchy pay for itself in terms of added tourist interest as claimed (probably not)? It was pointed out that countries with former monarchies e.g. France actually are more attractive to tourists.

Topic: What more should we do to oppose faith schools?

Context: This arose because of the issue with Article 26 in the UN Declaration of Human Rights "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."

Discussion: Universal agreement that this was a bad idea - no surprise there. Should we oppose privately funded faith schools (and how) raised more questions concerning the balance of rights of parents and children.

Topic: Should prominent people e.g. actors use award ceremonies to make political statements?

Context: This referred to Meryl Streep recently criticising Donald Trump.

Discussion: Raised issues as to the legitimacy of anyone criticising politicians e.g. the press (and press barons) generally. Is it not the duty of those who the public (or some groups of the public) clearly admire - from rock stars to

business leaders to footballers - to give a political opinion? If they should not what would the penalty be? What of the 'cult of celebrity?' Conclusion was that it was fine. Question raised was should a Vox Pop be used for 'balance' in such cases ?

Topic: How do you feel about singing Carols at Christmas?

Context: Several present admitted to having done this recently!

Discussion: The issue was not just one of being dishonest but of feeling guilty for being an intruder at a service for the faithful. Some said that their strategy was to use alternative words and just enjoyed a good singsong.

Holocaust Memorial day

This years event was held at University College Suffolk and was jointly organised by them and the Ipswich Faith and Community Forum. It included readings, presentations by schools and a particularly moving talk by Vernon Katz who now in his 90's is one of surviving Jewish children who made it to the UK under the KinderTransport programme. The attendance this year was much greater than last year indicating that the lessons of the Holocaust are as relevant as ever.

Future Events

Wednesday 15th February

Darwin day Dinner (see front page)

Tuesday March 14th 7:30 p.m. (Arlingtons, Ipswich)

"The Unitarians and Humanism"

Rev. Lewis Connelly

Tuesday April 11th 7:30p.m. (Arlingtons, Ipswich)

"Voltaire and Candide"

A talk by George Bethell on the philosopher Voltaire and his major work.

Lunchtime Meetings

The next of these will be held at the Duke of York in Woodbridge from 12:00 noon onwards Saturday 25th February and Saturday 25th of March. Please let Richard (richard-layton@zen.co.uk) know at least by the Thursday before if you are planning to attend.

Finally, just in case you had forgotten....

Poetry Corner

CHARLES DARWIN—BORN 12/02/1809

We're celebrating Darwin's Birth,
With Juices from the Grape;
And Lunch to mark that Humans are,
Descended from the Ape.
So come along to Arlingtons,
Because we're all resolved,
To honour Darwin's Theory on
How all of us evolved!

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