

# Suffolk Humanists and Secularists

Newsletter January 2017

## Ten minute Topics

Our next meeting on Tuesday 10th January will give you the opportunity to raise a topical, amusing or even just plain daft issue (and there is no shortage of those in the news today) and explore how others feel about it.

The formula is simple: we each write a topic title on a slip of paper and drop it into a hat.

A slip is picked out at random and the one who wrote the topic has one minute to introduce it and give a little background. The topic is then up for discussion for 10 minutes after which another topic is chosen.

As usual we meet in the Darwin room at Arlington's Brasserie in Ipswich at 7:30 p.m.

## November meeting on "Gospel Truth?"

Following in the tradition of Thomas Paine (see panel top right) Richard Layton began his talk highlighting many of the inconsistencies and errors that appear in the Old Testament (OT) explaining that these occurred because it derived from two legends from two quite separate earlier polytheistic religions.

One account originating from Judah was based upon their main god known as Jahweh but the second came from Israel whose chief god was called El. These different mythologies with their myriad stories of incest, polygamy, concubinage, human/animal sacrifice laced with

### Thomas Paine

Born in Thetford in Norfolk in 1737 Thomas Paine was an English-American political activist, philosopher, political theorist, and revolutionary who was one of the founding fathers of the United States.



In his most famous work "The Age of reason" he comments on theology as follows. "The study of theology, as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and it admits of no conclusion. Not anything can be studied as a science, without our being in possession of the principles upon which it is founded; and as this is the case with Christian theology, it is therefore the study of nothing."

astrological and other rather dubious prophecies were rather clumsily bundled together to form the OT.

Moving on to New Testament (NT) and the four gospels Richard explained how these were written after the Roman-Jewish War in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and banished the Jews. The authors of the gospels regarded the authority of the books of the OT as fundamental to their beliefs and these had to be built upon rather than discarded. This meant not just adopting the various

prophesies but contriving stories showing that they had been fulfilled. For example the so-called prophecy of Isaiah which supposedly referred to the virgin birth had to be sustained.

Similarly the Ten Commandments, the Original Sin story of Adam and Eve and the need to prove that any messiah was traceable back to King David had to fit in as seamlessly as possible. The fact that a virgin birth actually broke the all-important male blood line seems to have passed them by.

They were also probably written because of a need to distance a nascent Gentile Christianity from Judaism. That explained why the Gospels whitewashed Pontius Pilate and blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus and also why they ended up with errors, contradictions and inventions. They had been written by those who were not eyewitnesses but did have a theological axe to grind.

Richard then focussed on the passages in the 'First Epistle to the Corinthians' (the oldest book in the New Testament) which describes the Resurrection of Jesus as a spiritual event rather than an actual physical act as the Gospels described some twenty years later. It was not just that there were discrepancies regarding details within and between the gospels and Corinthians but the many historical claims there did not stand up to scrutiny either. For example the claim that "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves many hundreds of saints rose out of their graves at moment of the resurrection" went by completely unnoticed by other contemporary writers.

He concluded with Bertrand Russell's observation regarding a line in Luke's gospel "But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God." - and the 3 other gospels make the same claim. This clearly

showed that Jesus was expected to return within a generation but didn't. In summary: 'GOSPEL TRUTH' is a complete myth.

## Human Rights Events

Instead of our regular meetings in December we took part in two shared events in the centre of Ipswich. The first of these was the United Nations Association celebration of Human Rights held at the Quaker Meeting house on 9th December. This years theme was Article 26: The Right to Education.

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

This year our presentation was given by John Mellis who said that while the first two items were unarguable the third objective was worthy of more inspection and debate. For example, what if parents do not want their children to be educated and more broadly how can we protect our childrens' education against dogma and indoctrination by vested interests?

John stressed the importance of teaching Critical Thinking which involved both the ability to reason well and the disposition to do so. There is such a thing as objective truth and there are such things as verifiable facts, that are supported by clear evidence. Moreover there is the inter-linked edifice of scientific knowledge built over centuries by enquiring men and women and which gives us our modern technologies and our insights into the grandeur of the Universe.

These human achievements are the fruits of open-minded enquiry and critical thinking. Instead of blind faith and supernatural mythologies, these are the habits we must teach our children.

## Rights and Humanity A Celebration

Founded by Suffolk resident Julia Häusermann, Rights and Humanity is an international not-for-profit organisation promoting human rights, sustainable development and peace. For 30 years it has helped poor and disadvantaged people across the world to realise their human rights and dignity. Focussing on empowerment, especially that of women, it "brings together people of diverse faiths and cultures to support a legal framework and moral compass for global action for progress."

*From Rights and Humanity website*

"Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for life".  
*Chinese Proverb*

"Teach a woman how to fish and she will feed her family for life and teach the next generation."  
*Rights and Humanity*

The candlelit celebration took the form of readings based upon the articles of the UN declaration of Human rights and the similar objectives of rights of humanity. Over a hundred people attended with readings from the articles of the United Nations Declaration of Human rights and the Objectives of Rights and Humanity being read by representatives of over 50 organisations within the Ipswich area. These included religious, political and charitable groups and amongst these attending and taking part were recent refugees from Syria.

## Darwin Day Dinner

We thought it would be appropriate to mark the occasion this year by having a Darwin day dinner instead of our usual monthly meeting.

As we generally meet in the Darwin room of Arlington's and take advantage of their hospitality it seemed only right that we should support them by holding our dinner there.

Unfortunately the second Tuesday of the month this year coincides with Valentines day so we have arranged for the dinner to be on Wednesday 15th at 7:30 p.m.

A menu is available on their website <http://arlingtonsbrasserie.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.

For more information or to book please email [denisjohnston@btinternet.com](mailto:denisjohnston@btinternet.com) or telephone him on 01394387462

# Future meetings

Except were shown all meetings are held in the Darwin room at Arlington's Brasserie, Museum St. Ipswich starting at 7:30 p.m.

Elm Street Car Park is 200 yards away and costs £1 after 3pm

## **Tuesday 10th January**

Ten minute Topics  
(see first page)

## **Wednesday 15th February**

Darwin day Dinner (see panel on previous page)

## **Tuesday March 14th**

"The Unitarians and Humanism"  
Rev. Lewis Connelly

Although originally a mainly Christian group Unitarians embrace a wide range of beliefs including some who have Humanist and Atheist perspectives.

Unitarians characteristically:

- base beliefs on rational enquiry rather than external authority;
- beliefs can change in the light of new understanding and insight;
- form principles from conscience, thinking and life experiences;
- hold reverence for the earth and the whole natural system of which we are part.

As these correspond with what most humanists believe we clearly have a lot in common. At this meeting you will have an opportunity to hear more about Unitarians, their origins and beliefs and explore our similarities and differences.

## **Tuesday April 11th**

"Voltaire and Candide"

A talk by George Bethell about the philosopher Voltaire and his major work, *Candide, ou l'Optimisme* which is a satire which ridicules religion, theologians, governments, armies, philosophies, and philosophers.

# Monthly Lunch Meetings

Starting this month (January) we plan to have monthly lunches on the last Saturday of every month throughout the winter and not just every other month as before.

These will be held at the Duke of York in Woodbridge from 12:00 noon onwards on January 28th, Saturday 25th February and Saturday 25th of March.

Please let Richard ([richard-layton@zen.co.uk](mailto:richard-layton@zen.co.uk)) know at least by the Thursday before if you are planning to attend.

# Poetry Corner

COME AND MEET THE HUMANISTS!

Come and meet the Humanists,  
Engage in the 'jaw-jaw';  
A pint of beer, a glass of wine,  
Why who could ask for more?!  
Good conversation, social life,  
We welcome everyone;  
Don't be a fuddy stay-at-home,  
Come join us in the fun!

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## Suffolk Humanists & Secularists

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