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Putin's Pestilence

Also: John Toland 300 • Assisted Death • Football Crazy
The Paradox of Tolerance • School of Philosophy



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“War does not determine who is right – only who is left”

– Bertrand Russell

ARTICLES AND DISCLAIMER

Articles will be accepted for publication, in part or whole, according to the space available and at the editor's discretion. 800 words is roughly a page, and so on. Only rarely are articles accepted at more than 2400 words.

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LETTERS

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Orwell and Russia Today

Roger Kelly

THE whole barbaric mess of Putin's and Russia's war on Ukraine reminded me in many ways of George Orwell's novel *1984*. Orwell's genius was to encourage readers of his novels to develop critical thinking and to be sceptical of any form of 'ism' that manipulates truth through the misuse of language and political propaganda. *1984* has not lost any of its power as the world portrayed in which 'War is Peace', 'Freedom is Slavery', and 'Ignorance is Strength', sounds like news from *Russia Today* and also similar to Trumpian sound bites via *Fox News*. It rings truer now more than ever.

Orwell understood that oppressive, totalitarian regimes always needed enemies and that these can be created arbitrarily by whipping up popular feelings through propaganda – something that Putin has done, claiming that he is liberating Ukraine from a fascist dictatorship. Orwell's iconic dictator Big Brother could be Putin as they share the need to crush opposition, a fanatical terror of dissent, and the misuse of the strong man in power.

Putin's crazy propaganda machine was recently illustrated when *BBC Radio Ulster* interviewed Sergei Markov, Putin's former spokesperson, who argued that people were fleeing Ukraine in terror of the fascist regime and that the recent atrocities in Bucha were self-inflicted. These claims have been refuted by Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's secretary general, whose members on the ground in Ukraine have collected testimonies that unarmed civilians are being killed in their homes and streets in acts of unspeakable cruelty and shocking brutality. Amnesty International, as we know in Ireland, is a credible organisation. It is a global movement of more than 10 million people in over 150 countries

which campaigns to end injustices and abuses of human rights, so I know whose version I would accept as being factual. Also, I would have more faith in *RTE* and the *BBC*'s news coverage of events in Ukraine than *Russia Today*.

For the refugees who have arrived in Ireland over the last month, the main reason that the Ukrainian women and children have given for leaving their country is the hellish, indiscriminate bombing of their towns and in particular Mariupol where thousands of civilians and hundreds of children have been killed. No one has mentioned that they are escaping a totalitarian neo-Nazi regime.

Putin in particular has mentioned the Azov Battalion as proof of neo-Nazi influence in Ukraine. Yes, it does exist, yet Al Jazeera, which has investigated this notorious group, reported that it is small in numbers, probably 800 members, and is considered a fringe element in the overall democratic national structures within Ukraine.

What Putin has failed to acknowledge is his own neo-Nazi mercenary group which is integrated within the Russian army, the Wagner Group. This group was founded by Dimitri Utkin in 2014 in St Petersburg and its insignia is the valknut, an old Norse symbol appropriated by white supremacists. Utkin has been identified to be a neo-Nazi when photos of him appeared last year with tattoos with Waf-fen-SS inked on his shoulder. So who is Putin trying to fool?

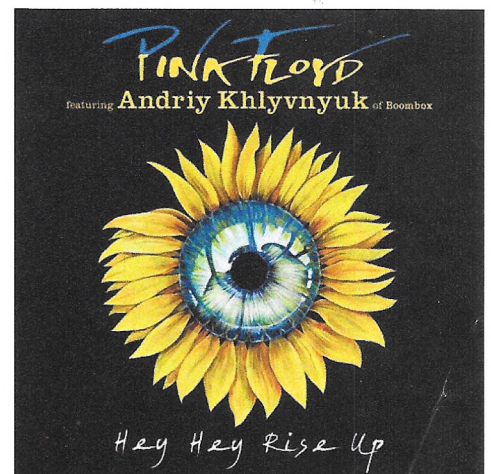
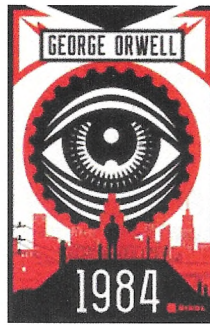
Sadly, Russia has become a less tolerant and open society over the last few decades under Putin's leadership. I recall a series of television programmes on the *BBC* in 2019 by the DJ and television presenter Reggie Yates

called 'Far Right and Proud'. He interviewed knife-wielding far-right nationalists and neo-Nazis who believed that if you were not white then you had no place in Russia. He also interviewed LGBT activists who were in constant fear of persecution and heard horrific stories of those who had survived vicious racist and homophobic attacks.

There are of course neo-Nazi groups in many European countries and an increasing number of far-right political parties which Putin himself is alleged to have supported financially. It is a ridiculous slander to call the democratically elected government of Ukraine 'fascist' to justify his invasion of Ukraine. It is also an insult to the memory of the Soviet Army which played a major role in defeating Nazi Germany in the Second World War.

Once upon a time, Putin would have called himself a communist and an adherent of the Marxist philosophy of dialectic materialism. Look at his belief system now as we would say in the North he has been born again, having found god in the bosom of the Russian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Krill, head of the church, blessed the Russian army at the start of the war in Ukraine.

It is difficult and frustrating to witness this extraordinary crazy, unjust attack by a major power on an independent, peaceful, democratic nation. It is great to hear that the rock band Pink Floyd has released a new single called *Hey Hey, Rise Up* in support of the Ukrainian people with proceeds going to the Ukrainian humanitarian relief, so why not buy it in solidarity? □



Putin's Pestilence

Brian McClinton

ON 1st March, Russian schools introduced new lessons in which teachers were instructed to explain to their students that Russia was forced to start 'a special military operation' against 'a fascist regime in Ukraine'. Many posts have also appeared on Russian social media in which schoolchildren pose for pictures forming Z signs, the military marking that has become a symbol of public support for the invasion. The irony is that Russia is now the real fascist state and the Z sign is the modern equivalent of the swastika.

A stated rationale by Putin for attacking Ukraine is to 'denazify' the country. This is Orwellian language as in truth Putin is a modern Hitler seeking a greater Russia, just as Hitler sought a greater Germany. Indeed, the opposite of what Putin and his spokesmen currently say is generally the truth. But then, of course, **systematic lying** is itself a feature of fascism.

Another basic component is **strength through unity**. The individual is nothing, the state or community is everything. The ideal individual is motivated by duty, honour and self-sacrifice and dedicates his life to the glory of his nation or race. Hence Putin's March address at a patriotic rally in Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium when he praised the 'unity' of Russia's troops and paraphrased the words of Jesus (John 15:13) "There is no greater love than giving up one's soul for one's friends". To many, Putin's use of the Gospel to justify rape, torture, death and destruction and the placing of nuclear forces on special alert is a travesty of Christianity. They point to other words of Jesus, such as: "Blessed are the peacemakers". Perhaps Shakespeare explains it well in *The Merchant of Venice* (1:3): "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose".

Another essential characteristic is **aggressive nationalism/imperialism** that seeks to expand a country's influence and power. Fascists see national strength as the key feature that makes a country 'great'. There is often a nostalgia for a mythic past in which the 'nation' – narrowly defined in terms of ethnicity, race, language, culture etc – had an empire. Putin has declared that the collapse of the USSR was the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century, but he seeks to resurrect the bones of the old imperial Russia set in train by Ivan the Terrible even further back in the 16th century. Putin dreams of a revived slavonic motherland under Russian hegemony ruling over countries like Ukraine as vassals.

National strength, is above all, demonstrated in military terms and the **glorification of war and terror**. Fascists generally believe in the **myth of redemptive violence**. It is the belief that not only is it somehow 'beautiful' but also that evil and chaos can only be defeated through the use of violence to establish peace and order. The evil is often an ethnic or religious minority, which is represented as a disease that must be eliminated. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler called the Jews a 'dangerous bacillus'. In Putin's mind evil is all the people of Ukraine who wish to maintain the country's independence. In the town of Bucha a Russian soldier told a Ukrainian woman: "You are the dirt and we are cleaning the land of the dirt". Putin calls it a 'noble' cause, but the real pestilence here is his illegal and barbaric onslaught on Ukraine, which has deliberately targeted homes, hospitals, schools and train stations. The aim is to terrorise the population into submission and to this end women and children have been particular objects of Russian barbarity.

The fascist perception of an enemy as 'evil' is often bolstered by, or perhaps even derived from, religion. In fascist states, **religion and government are usually combined** to combat the 'evil'. Thus Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* that "by defending myself against the Jew, I am doing the

Lord's work". Patriarch Kirill, leader of 110 million Russian Orthodox Christians, who called Putin's election a 'miracle of God', justified the invasion of Ukraine by saying that it is a spiritual battle between the East and the ever encroaching liberal consumerist West and its depraved values, such as gay rights, which Ukraine was embracing.

In Russia there is a ban on the promotion of 'non-traditional sexual relations' and persecution of gays has increased.

So fascism is also a **rejection of modernity**, specifically in its espousal of the Enlightenment, pluralism, individual rights, checks and balances on executive power, diversity and democracy. In 2019 he told the *Financial Times* that liberal democracy has 'outlived its purpose' and that liberalism as an ideology has 'come into conflict with the overwhelming majority of the population'. Tim Costello, a fellow at the Centre for Public Christianity in Sydney, quotes Putin in *Eternity News* (28th February): "We see many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying the moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual". Putin, like Kirill, believes that the West is decadent and has turned away from God.

A rejection of modernity connects with a further key fascist feature, **dictatorial power**. A fascist state may have a few trappings of democracy, but it is essentially a totalitarian society in which there is an all-powerful leader, suppression, imprisonment and killing of opponents, the banning of strikes, control and censorship of the media, regimentation of society, and disrespect for intellectuals and the arts. The cult of the leader is seen in portraits, parades, march-pasts, slogans, songs and uniforms, —>

and the cult of physical strength, violence and brutality. All these elements are clearly present in Putin, who is regarded in Russia as the embodiment of the spirit, will and virtues of the people. His brutality is demonstrated by the treatment of opponents. Navalny was the latest in a long line allegedly poisoned on Putin's orders. Earlier victims included Verzhilov, another opposition activist, in 2018, Anna Politkovskaya, a journalist who was poisoned in 2004 and gunned down two years later, Tsepo and Litvinenko, both of whom were poisoned and died in 2004 and of course Skripal and his daughter in 2018.

Putin is even admired in democracies by people such as Trump, Farage and Le Pen. He likes to be seen topless on horseback and has – or rather had until it was revoked – an honorary black belt in taekwondo. He has already been in power for 22 years and under the new constitution to be introduced in 2024, where a President can serve a maximum of two terms of six years each, he could theoretically be Russian President until 2036.

It is tragic that Russian people are still in thrall to 'strong men' and are so brainwashed that they view Putin as a hero. They see Ukraine as the very fascist state that their own country has become. Yet in that country a coalition of three right-wing parties received only 2.4% of the vote and no seats in the Ukrainian parliament in 2019, and the far-right candidate for the presidency also gained a poor percentage and came in ninth place. Both President Zelenskyy and Prime Minister Shmyhal are Jews.

As for the Azov regiment in the Donbas, around which accusations of Nazism have often centred, most experts say that the neo-Nazi core of Azov has been diluted by new recruits who have increased the regiment's size to 5,000. Like Ukraine's other soldiers, they are fighting the real Nazis, who have already invaded and laid waste Georgia, Chechnya and Syria. Indeed, as Lara Marlowe, quoting a Ukraine expert in the *Irish Times* (2nd April) notes, there are far more right-wing Russian extremists fighting on the side of the Russian-backed separatists in the Donbas region than there are neo-Nazis in Azov.

There are those who will maintain that there are two sides to every conflict and that the West is partly to blame for seeking to expand NATO and thus threaten Russian security. Yet the fact is that if Ukraine had been allowed to join NATO, Russia would not have invaded it. And, as a result of the invasion, other countries in Europe, like Sweden and Finland, are now thinking that they are exposed to Russian aggression and perhaps should seek to join as well.

Like Bush and Blair about Iraq, Putin believed that conquering it was doable because Ukraine was weak and would not resist. This was clearly a mistake. Many of Russia's former client states including Ukraine have tasted 30 years of independence and have no desire to rejoin

a greater Russia. They have also become burgeoning liberal democracies, seeing it as the fairest and wisest political system yet devised. They understand that it is a necessary compromise which ensures that individuals and minorities have some fundamental rights as well as majorities, and that political life is a constant negotiation between them.

Last year Putin wrote an essay entitled *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, outlining his belief that they are one people divided artificially by borders and outsiders. He has now repeated this claim on Russian TV.

It is true that in the early 1990s Russia and Ukraine were friendly neighbours. In the 1994 Budapest Memorandum Ukraine actually gave up the nuclear weapons on its territory, the third largest nuclear arsenal on earth. In exchange for this major concession, Russia and the West pledged to respect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia has now proved that its promise was empty.

Relationships soured after Putin came to power, especially when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. The Russian President's aggressive approach created a strong sense of

Ukrainian national identity imbued with deep anti-Russian sentiment even before the current 'special military operation' began. So bombing and shooting people into unity is likely to be entirely counterproductive, as the IRA eventually realised here.

In the modern world, invaders often make this same mistake, as Russia, the US and the UK found in Afghanistan and the 'coalition

of the willing' discovered in Iraq. Initial military conquest may be easy but maintaining control over the defeated country can become an insurgent quagmire which ultimately leads to a humiliating withdrawal.

The last thing that Ukrainians desire is to return to autocratic Russian rule. Sure, they will probably pay a heavy price in lost lives for their adherence to western values, and Putin may win his brutal war if only in the Donbas, but ultimately he will lose the peace.

The sad truth, though, is that ruthless warmongers – not to mention their appeasers – are very slow learners who are not always prevented from wreaking havoc on the world. It may take years for the penny to drop in the crazed brain of Vladimir Putin or his successors in the Kremlin.

At the time of writing, Russia's onslaught on the Donbas is imminent and, if successful, it will claim a victory, even if it has not conquered all of Ukraine. Putin's style of leadership may gain more imitators, leading to more dictatorships, military threats, land grabs and assassinations. The West will need to show that liberal democracy is not weak and out of date. That is the challenge that Putin's barbaric aggression has created. □

if Ukraine had been allowed to join NATO, Russia would not have invaded it. And, as a result of the invasion, other countries in Europe, like Sweden and Finland, are now thinking that they are exposed to Russian aggression and perhaps should seek to join as well

A Commonwealth of Ireland?

Daltún Ó Ceallaigh

IT has often been stated that if the cause of Irish unity is to be advanced (for unionists in particular and people generally in Ireland and in Britain), specifics need to be spelled out about what the content of such unity will be. It is understandable that the parties that are likely to be engaged in negotiations about the shape of Irish unity (if there is a pro-unity result from a border poll) are unwilling to commit themselves to much detail at this stage.

However, it could be helpful if political commentators and analysts made an effort to suggest models in order to encourage debate. The first consideration which is likely to arise is that of the system of governance on the island. Various scenarios have been looked at in the past, but in a somewhat abstract manner. A more concrete approach would be to examine what might be built upon existing structures.

The Good Friday Agreement provided for a number of structures. First of all, there is a Legislative Assembly and an Executive covering the six counties of Northern Ireland. Then there is a North-South Ministerial Council involving the administrations in both Belfast and Dublin. Furthermore, there are all-Ireland Implementation Bodies dealing with various sectors of social and economic life, which can be added to.

There are also provisions for other all-Ireland institutions such as a Joint Parliamentary Forum, a Civic Forum and a Joint Committee on Human Rights. And of course there are the long-standing parliamentary and executive institutions already in place in the twenty-six counties of the Irish Republic.

Taking account of realities on the ground and the need to proceed cautiously in the process of Irish reunification, it would seem prudent to build on these structures, notably having regard to unionist sensitivities and apprehensions. A way of doing so is outlined as follows.

A confederal arrangement could be instituted on the island. This could see the Legislative Assembly and the Oireachtas continuing to function under the statutory direction of a confederal Convocation based on the Joint Parliamentary Forum. The North-South Ministerial Council could be transformed into a confederal Administration under which a northern Executive and southern Government would also continue to operate.

The all-Ireland Civic Forum could be developed as a confederal Senate. This would mean the transfer of reserved powers for Northern Ireland at present held by London under the Northern Ireland Act to these institutions along with similar powers being transferred from Dublin by way of amendments to the Irish Constitution. Those powers cover matters such as defence, treaties and international trade.

Within the new confederal administration and confederal Convocation, rules would have to be agreed for safeguards by way of appropriately weighting representation, officerships and voting procedures, with precedents existing at present in the north being looked at. Local Government should be reviewed and strengthened, particularly in the north, perhaps including some form of cantons there, thus giving increased assurance to unionists, especially in a situation of a growing nationalist population in the six counties.

The confederation could be officially titled the Commonwealth of Ireland along with a similarly designated Commonwealth Convocation and Commonwealth Administration. The Commonwealth's constitution could be termed a Covenant and its two (6 and 26 county) units described respectively as Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic (latterly as distinct from Republic of Ireland). There could be a rotating Commonwealth Premier functioning as head of Administration.

A new flag and new anthem could be sorted out in due course, with the tricolour being left as the emblem of the Irish Republic and an internally agreed emblem decided for Northern

Ireland, taking account of current flags there. English and Irish could be given equal official language status and a matter of choice as to use. Underlying all of this would be the desirability of a Bill of Rights for citizens under various headings.

As for the issue frequently raised of the existing Commonwealth headed by Queen Elizabeth, an Irish Commonwealth Association could be set up, with people throughout Ireland individually joining as they wished, along with corporate membership being open to institutions and local councils as desired, and provision made for this Association to participate in some manner in the existing Commonwealth. In that way, nobody would be forcibly kept out of the present Commonwealth or so included in it.

We put the above forward as one possible basis for discussion. This could be elaborated on and discussed in all sorts of ways. And, no doubt, there will be several other models for contemplation. But the point has been reached where one can no longer simply intone about Irish unity. It has been firmly placed on the agenda and the time has arrived to start designing the vessel for possible construction in due course and eventual launch should a border poll opt for a united Ireland. □



A Report from the Front Lines of the War on Superstition

Fachtna Ó Rua

I RECENTLY attended a meeting on the future of our island. While organised by Sinn Féin, it was not a Sinn Féin meeting. It was held in Monaghan town, which was a longish distance for me to drive, but this is a topic that concerns me. I worry about the subject, that kind of 'concern'.

To be clearer, I am less apprehensive about unity as a possibility, since I consider it a certainty to occur at some point, than I am about the mechanism of it and the nature of any resulting Republic. After that meeting the question I pose now for the next 100 years is: "Will we leave the children in charge?"

I don't mean that negatively, in that my hope for the outcome of that questioning is positive. But I accept that those who are in charge will doubtless take offence, so let me explain.

I had an unusual experience when I attended that meeting. I had intended to sit back and absorb, with a view to making the smallest possible input of energy, but in such manner as might have the greatest possible effect. I am a fan of the Law of the Lever, and other real Laws. And I am a fan also of sheepdogs, partly because they are dogs, and partly because they make a living from that particular Law. So when I say 'smallest input', please bear that in mind.

The experience came after the panel had spoken, and the first audience member stood to speak. He almost began by outlining his republican credentials, which seem all to have rested on the actions and dispositions of others, primarily of family. But where he actually began was by identifying himself as a former District Court judge.

Now, I'm quite willing to stipulate to the possibility that there are other groups who are 'a bigger bunch of criminals' than District Court 'judges', but we'll have to have a discussion between us as to where on the number-line-axis for such matters we place the divisions before we can delve into that, so obviously I'll hold off on the assertion, and allow that as a discussion for another day.

In any event, when the gentleman continued, it became clear that, apart from thinking himself a gift to the world – which I'm sure he is – he also thought he was a Republican – which I'm equally sure he was not.

It seems that among the people who quote Wolfe Tone's 'Catholic, Protestant, and Dissenter' are those who seem unaware that he also suggested: "let us overthrow the official church, and not raise another in its stead". United Irelanders were fairly direct about their demand for a secular state. Many also forget that of the three aims of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the aim of "a free church and a free state, where each is free from the other" is one shared by freethinkers.

You'll understand, when the same Judge grandly burnished his 'republican' credentials by declaring that it was his view that

"every single person born in the image of God on this island is equal under the law", I quickly abandoned my intended low-calorie, carbon-neutral approach. The thing is, he looked at me as he said that. As I have managed to accumulate a certain measure of notoriety, I am not able entirely to convince myself that the glance was an accident. Also unsettling is that, just like for many, that experience isn't unusual. This time, though, it really felt like a challenge. Or at the least, a reminder.

While you can be certain that I was soon on my feet to put our view, that's not the purpose of my report. The purpose is to remind you that while there are undoubtedly matters that justifiably take up a greater portion of our day-to-day attention, the question of the constitutional and political future of the island advances whether we attend to it or not. If those of us who are experienced at standing our corner and at reminding others that non-believers do exist, choose not to engage, then the younger people attending can't always be expected to take on their elders. The pressure to conform that most of us experienced growing up is reduced for today's young, but it is not gone.

When the day comes we should not be surprised if the theists sort things out amongst themselves to our continued detriment. They made a *praiseach* of it the last time, and they'll do it again given a chance.

Nationalist and republican are not the same. Because both words have been as closely associated as they have, and for so long, it is too easy to confuse them. While there are so many obvious and reassuring parallels between humanism and republicanism, nationalism must be kept under review. Nationalism is not automatically toxic or otherwise harmful, but it does invite casual discrimination. It is a natural bedfellow for Knights of Columbanus, for example, who brought us the murderous 35 years of the 8th Amendment.

It is far too easy to sit back on the unity question. When the day comes that realignment of both jurisdictions on the island occurs, it is far better that we were involved than not. Even if it is not their intent, it is very apparent that those who will make a point of participation can quite easily build momentum that will be both harder to stop and will continue to keep non-believers relegated.

For anyone wondering about attending any such meetings in the future, you can take heart that you will be welcome, and probably feel at home. For my part, no one else repeated the remarks of the former Judge, or otherwise casually offended at the meeting, and when I pointed out that "if someone stands up and says that everyone born under god is equal, then they're not equal, and they never can be equal, because some of us are atheists and humanists", I received generous applause. It is important to be heard to speak against such casual relegation to lower status.

I'd like to think that my somewhat direct rebuke to his Judgey-ship did something to ensure a better consideration of us. I don't know that. But I do know that if I had not been in attendance no one else would have responded as I did, and the casual treatment of us would have continued as it always does, as un-remarked-upon background noise.

And I also know that [Roman] Catholics and Protestants of various hues, left to themselves will not take us dissenters into consideration. Considering some of their beliefs, I think it right that humanists, atheists and every contrarian free-thinker who's available should attend such meetings, if only to make sure there's a grown-up present. □



Joe the Human (-ist?)

Joe Armstrong

AT this time for me of disillusionment with Humanism, Dr Teresa Graham (pictured), by her example, inspires me.

She embodies the Humanist philosophy of asking questions, thinking for oneself and challenging assumptions. A person of conscience and integrity, like Socrates she sticks her neck out, fearlessly critiquing those in authority who exercise power and control over others.

'I grew up in a really poor family,' she said. 'There were twelve of us.' Born in 1944, she got a great Leaving Cert, attaining 100 per cent in algebra. Her first job was as a librarian. 'I read a book every day.' Having moved to the civil service, she had to resign when she married, as was then required. She and her husband Dermot started a garden centre. But petrol shortages in the 1970s made it expensive for customers to get to it. So they started Graham's Pets and Plants in Waterford.

'We did that for four years, living over the shop. Then we bought a pub here in Tramore, the Three Swans – and we had our name in Irish over the door: Greacháin. I had never stood behind a bar before. And I never drank alcohol at all. I will never forget the first night! We ran the pub for 14 years.'

While doing so, Teresa trained as a counsellor, reading psychology and sociology at DCU. She qualified in three years, doing four modules per year 'which I wouldn't advise any student to do now'.

After her MA in sociology at WIT – studying alcoholic consumption in an unnamed pub in Ireland! – she got a scholarship to do a doctorate at UL. She began tutoring there. She also took courses with the Open University to qualify to do psycho-

metric testing. And she became a mediator.

'Unfortunately, my husband started to get sick.' He was with her when she graduated with her PhD on her 59th birthday but 'eventually when he collapsed, he had so much cancer that some of his pelvis had disappeared'. He died in 2004.



'We had the pub sold at that stage. I started working for DCU, teaching on the sociology courses, on the same course where I had done my BA. I loved it.'

'I had moved away from the Catholic Church. I'd been in the choir. I'd been a pioneer. I'd set up a branch of the Legion of Mary.'

'After my first child I had to be "churched". I remember it from my mother. She had my brother Ciaran. And she had to be churched. I went with her. The priest came to the back of the church and blessed her. And I was thinking: why isn't my father here?'

Her brothers were altar boys. Aged eight, she asked: 'Why can't I do

that?' Only boys could be altar servers at the time. 'So my feminism started early.'

When Teresa saw Humanist celebrant Susie Kennedy contribute to the inauguration of Michael D Higgins as President of Ireland, she thought, 'That seems to be somewhere I belong. And when I started looking at Humanism, it crystallised the ethos that I had.'

'In Humanism, I found an expression of all the things I had been thinking about. Equality, feminism, all that. And I joined the Humanist Association of Ireland. And in the first meetings I went to I thought, I have finally found my tribe. Here's where I feel at home. And then I applied to be, and became, a celebrant.'

'The joy, the absolute happiness, of doing a wedding or a naming ceremony or whatever. It was amazing. And I thought, Wow! How could I not know that this was there all this time? The joy of it!'

'And then in January 2019, a huge damper came on that. Because I couldn't believe that the organisation that supported the Amsterdam Declaration, that espoused equality, respect and inclusivity, could actually produce a document like the draft contract that was sent to all celebrants. It was like hitting a stone wall and being really hurt.'

I tell Teresa that I'm questioning Humanism, just as I did Catholicism. Is it just as big a pup as the pup I sold when I was in my twenties? Teresa responds: 'I don't see it like that. I think Humanism is still a valuable philosophy to live by. I'm alienated from the Humanist Association, totally alienated. And I know that some of the groups around the country don't want to be part of a hierarchical organisation. We want a much more fluid organisation.'

At a time in my life when I feel so tempted to walk away from Humanism, I remain inspired by the dignity, authenticity and courage of Teresa Graham. □

Assisted Death

Caroline Villar

LET me begin with a single word – ‘death’. It is amazing how much discomfort that one word can make us feel. I remember someone suggesting to me that I hadn’t yet accepted that my mother was going to die. After some debate they challenged me to say ‘my mother is dead’ as opposed to ‘my mother is dying’ or ‘my mother is terminally ill’. Just that change of language made it impossible for me to say the words without considerable upset. So why share this story with you? I believe that as a society, we are not very good at talking about death. The fact that we call it ‘passing away’ alludes to our discomfort. We want to believe that all people die calmly, passing away gently.

I believe that our reticence as a society to talk about death more openly means that assisted death has not always received the attention and prioritisation that it deserves. Often the people campaigning for assisted death have either witnessed unbearable deaths or are themselves facing imminent death. So even though we know that the majority of the UK public (as high as 80%) are supportive of assisted death, relatively few campaign for its introduction.

So why me and what is my experience? My mother was diagnosed with cancer when I was 11. She had an unusual type of cancer called a liposarcoma that grows in the fat tissue. She had various tumours over the years and finally her diagnosis became terminal around 6 years ago when she was 63. She was a very intelligent, bubbly and candid individual who didn’t shy away from the hard questions. She knew that her death would be unpleasant.

She had researched in detail what was required to go to Switzerland and had spoken at a debate in Antrim in favour of assisted death. The biggest barrier in her mind was the fact that her family could be prosecuted for travelling with her. With my father being a lawyer and me having my own children, Mum was very unwilling to expose us to police scrutiny.

In the event, Mum’s cancer advanced too fast. She had drivers to administer the pain relief and so travelling to Switzerland would have entailed a private air ambulance and the assistance of healthcare professionals. She told me that she felt that she had left it too late; and (as was often the case with my mother) she was right.

Mum tried to stay at home as long as she could but her bladder started to block and she ended up in hospital. My mum was in so much pain that I slept in a chair at the Ulster Hospital one evening so that I could call the nurses when the pain got too much. My mother was cry-

ing out for pain medication (as was I) but we were told that she had received her maximum dose. When they arrived the next day the palliative team were sympathetic but unable to give more medication.

When Mum asked if she could be sedated, one particular doctor said that she was ‘not at end of life’ yet. My poor mother was in agony and distraught. She tried to take an overdose and for 48 hours she was unconscious and at peace. Then she woke up very confused. She died a few days later in the hospice.

So was my mother just unlucky? I suspect that many people believe that when we are near death, painkillers will numb any pain and we will (to use another euphemism) ‘slip away’.

However, partly due to Harold Shipman, this is simply not the case. Perhaps if you are lucky enough to die at home, your longstanding family doctor may feel that they know your family well enough to ‘up the painkillers’. Speaking to my father, he believes that perhaps my grandfather was given a little extra morphine towards the end.

However, if you are in a hospital, pain medication is strictly controlled as the hospital does not want to be accused of killing you. Palliative care simply does not work for some extreme situations such as motor neurone disease or throat cancer to name but a couple. The age of the patient also has a significant effect and young bodies with strong hearts do not die easily.

Dignity in Dying is a UK campaigning organisation, funded by voluntary contributions from members of the public. According to their research, around 300 terminally ill people choose to end their own life in England every year. I read one harrowing story about a terminally ill young man throwing himself in front of a lorry outside the hospital. The desperation that he must have felt is heart-breaking. In addition to those who choose to end their lives, *Dignity in Dying* say that around a further 17 people every day suffer as they die even with access to the best end of life care. Interestingly, studies have shown that doctors often use their access to drugs to ease their own deaths. Self-poisoning with drugs is almost twice as common with doctors and retired doctors than in the general population.

Many people who oppose assisted death argue that good palliative care is what is required. That if the government invested in palliative care, assisted death would simply not be necessary. Having campaigned for assisted death for several years, I have read too many accounts of very bad deaths. I also witnessed my own mother receiving the full attention of the palliative team and yet they were unable to alleviate her pain, so in my view, palliative care alone is not enough.

Of course, we could sedate people so much that they are not aware. But what value is there in a person being technically still alive if they are sedated to the point of oblivion?

Many accounts talk of people trying to hasten death by starving. Yet offering assisted death is infinitely more —>

kind than gradually and cruelly starving a dying person to death.

The current lack of assisted death in the UK and Ireland in my view results in many people dying in discomfort, pain or lacking the dignity that they desire. I believe that social history will judge us harshly for allowing people to experience such prolonged agony prior to an inevitable death.

So what is assisted death and why are we not offering it as an option? Let me deal briefly with terminology. I have been referring to 'assisted death' not euthanasia or assisted suicide. 'Assisted death' is the campaign for dying people to be given the right to end their lives. In the proposed UK legislation, dying people would need to be an adult with less than six months to live, mentally competent, informed of the alternatives and making the choice through their own free will.

Doctors would then prescribe a lethal dose of drugs to the terminally ill patient, which they would administer themselves. Two independent doctors would be required to agree that the patient was within 6 months of the end of their life and had made an informed decision. In addition, a High Court judge would review each case.

The reason that the words euthanasia and suicide are avoided is largely due to the negative connotations surrounding the terms. Suicide occurs when the balance of an individual's mind is disturbed, and they end their life prematurely. When an individual seeks assisted death, it requires great determination, bravery and soundness of mind. In the UK campaign, we want to make it clear that the proposed law is for terminally ill people and it is about the manner of their inevitable death.

Why are we not offering it in the UK? Assisted dying is prohibited in England and Wales under the Suicide Act (1961), and in Northern Ireland under the Criminal Justice Act (1966) which states that anyone who "encourages or assists a suicide" is liable to up to 14 years in prison. Those opposed to the legalisation of 'assisted dying' cite various objections. One of those is that people do not need to die in pain. I hope that I have already covered that point to show that palliative care is not sufficient in some cases.

Other arguments against assisted death include:

1. Sanctity of life
2. Switzerland is already available
3. Worries about the wider implications of changing the law in this area or the 'slippery slope'
4. Concerns for the medical professionals who might carry out assisted death.

Let's consider sanctity of life. Firstly, I should state that I am an atheist. However, having been raised a Christian, I find it hard to believe in a God who would require the most extreme suffering to shore up their own sovereignty over life. Also, I do not believe that holding on to life at

all costs is the uncontested goal of humanity. The official position is that the Church is firmly opposed to assisted dying. However, various senior figures such as Desmond Tutu and Lord Carey, the former archbishop of Canterbury, have both argued in favour recently.

So is the fact that assisted death is already available in Switzerland enough? On average, every ten days one Briton travels abroad to die. Around 350 Britons have now ended their lives at Dignitas in Switzerland. There is a cost of around £10,000 and many people travel at a point when they are in great pain and distress. Those who go with their loved one and are present during the process face the risk of prosecution for assisting a suicide and face a sentence of up to 14 years in prison when they return to the UK. Also, to go to Switzerland, you must travel early, whilst you are physically able. As my mother found out, sometimes our thirst for life makes this early decision difficult.

Polling has found that over 50% of people in the UK would consider travelling abroad for an assisted death if terminally ill and two-thirds would consider breaking the law to help a loved one do so, yet only a quarter would be able to afford it. Outsourcing assisted death to Switzerland is simply not an effective solution, and makes assisted death the preserve of the wealthy.

The 'slippery slope' argument can be made about many things in life. Take, for example, drugs. We permit alcohol and tobacco but not other recreational drugs. Lines and limits are constantly drawn and regulated

So would changing the law lead to a slippery slope? Many people such as Tammy Grey-Thompson argue that assisted death could lead to people feeling pressurised to die. The proposed legislation is limited to the terminally ill. The elderly, disabled and mentally ill would not meet those criteria. In addition, controls are in place as two doctors and a judge would be signing off.

No doubt there will be examples of state sanctioned assisted death systems going wrong. But given the high

level of conscientious commitment among the professionals involved in providing these services, it is likely that these instances will be rare. It is also worth highlighting that the 'slippery slope' argument can be made about many things in life. Take for example, drugs. We permit alcohol and tobacco but not other recreational drugs. Lines and limits are constantly drawn and regulated. And there is intense debate when change is mooted.

People have talked about the slippery slope being evident in countries like the Netherlands. However, the law in the Netherlands was drawn more broadly from the outset. Also, many defenders of a legal right to die would deny that those instances of euthanasia are wrong. In Oregon, assisted dying has been legal for 20 years but the law has never been extended beyond the terminally ill.

In countries where assisted death is already legal, such as Switzerland, there is no evidence that the elderly are being targeted and both old people's homes and hospice care is of a far better standard than anything we offer. Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence that offering assisted death leads people to have more open discussions with their families regarding their death and their wishes. —>

In Canada, where assisted death is legal, only 2% of terminally ill people make a request for an assisted death. A subset of that 2% are found eligible, and an even smaller subset of those individuals receive an assisted death - some dying before the procedure can be arranged. The evidence shows that few people actually avail of the procedure but its availability provides comfort and choice.

So what about the people who would administer assisted death? In September last year, following a survey of their members, the British Medical Association voted in favour of changing their position from opposition to a change in the law on assisted dying, to a position of neutrality. This represented a huge change. The Royal College of Nursing similarly takes a neutral stance as does the Royal College of Physicians and Psychiatrists. The Royal College of GPs remains opposed to a change in the law.

Some people contend that assisted death is contrary to the Hippocratic oath. Medical ethicist, Daniel Sokol said:

“Every day, doctors make decisions knowing that they will shorten their patients’ lives. A doctor withdraws life support from a terminally ill patient in the knowledge that the patient will die sooner than he otherwise would; a surgeon decides against an operation to remove a brain stem tumour because, although the patient might live a little longer, life after surgery would be terrible. Yet, no one asserts that these actions are contrary to the ethics of medicine.”

What is missing from the reasoning of the opponents of assisted dying is the realisation that a key purpose of medicine is the relief of human suffering. As technological advances allow us to delay death even in the most dire of circumstances, the issue of assisted dying becomes more pressing. Prolonging life can extend suffering.”

A doctor who provides a lethal dose of drugs to a terminally ill patient should no more be criticised than a doctor who switches off a ventilator. Both are acting in accordance with the Hippocratic commitment to alleviate suffering.

So what is the current position in the UK? Three jurisdictions are due to debate prospective assisted dying legislation this year. In England, a bill was introduced in the House of Lords by Dignity in Dying Chair Baroness Meacher. Data on the impact of the assisted dying ban in England and Wales is also due to be published in the autumn, after the former Health Secretary Matt Hancock expressed concern at its potential effect on suicides by terminally ill Brits at home and abroad. In Scotland, a bill was introduced by Liam McArthur and it attracted more public responses than any other bill in the history of the Scottish Parliament.

In Jersey, a citizen’s jury recommended law change on the island, with an in-principle debate at the States Assembly scheduled for September.

It is also worth considering the position in Ireland. An assisted dying bill was introduced to the Dáil in October 2020. A majority of TDs spoke in favour of legal change

and voted to progress the bill to pre-legislative scrutiny by the Justice Committee. Last July, the Justice Committee recommended that assisted dying should undergo detailed examination by a Special Oireachtas Committee.

This is what happened with abortion in Ireland so although hopeful, this process could take years rather than months. It is worth noting that the original bill would have enabled residents of Northern Ireland to make use of assisted death in Southern Ireland.

In summary, parliamentarians are increasingly recognising what the public have long known – that current end-of-life options do not provide sufficient choice or protection to dying people. Reform is needed. True choice and control at the end of life is now the hallmark of compassionate, progressive societies the world over.

So in conclusion if we accept the position that some doctors make decisions to withdraw care or administer pain relief above the recommended dose, then assisted death is already happening. So, the choice is not whether we should permit assisted death. The choice is whether we should have assisted death with or without regulation.

My mother had no choice about dying. However, she would have liked to have a choice about the manner of her death. That’s all this proposed UK bill is offering – a choice.

To use the words of Lord Falconer: *“The law on assisted dying in Britain is an incoherent, cruel, hypocritical mess.”* Someone diagnosed with a terminal illness can request palliative sedation, refuse artificial nutrition and hydration, or request the removal of life-sustaining medical treatment. But British law denies them the right to assistance in ending their own life.

It simply cannot be right that terminally ill people are denied choice based on the argument that the proposed safeguards aren’t enough. The current law lacks popular support and is inhumane.

Dying people deserve control over their own deaths. So surely it is time for a change? If you want to increase the pressure on the UK to take action, you can sign the Dignity in Dying petition on the Government website.

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/604383>

This article is a transcript of a talk given by Caroline at the 24th March meeting of the Irish Freethinkers and Humanists □

**“None of us have
the right to tell
another how much
suffering they can
and should bear.”**

**CAMPAIGN FOR
DIGNITY
IN DYING.**

John Toland, 1660-1722, Part 2

A national celebration of Ireland's first modern freethinker, who died 300 years ago in March 1722, is long overdue

Brian McClinton

AS we saw in part 1, John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* was publicly burned in Dublin in 1697. What, then, was all the fuss over the book about? Part of it was that he had written an anticlerical polemic against all forms of priestcraft. William Molyneux, whose own work advocating legislative independence for the Irish Parliament was ceremonially burned at Tyburn by the public hangman a year later and who had told Locke that Toland was 'a candid free-thinker, and a good scholar', later wrote that the clergy were "alarmed to a mighty degree against him" and that "the poor man, by his impudent conduct, has raised against himself so universal a commotion that it was dangerous to be known to have spoken with him even once".



tional Christianity, it was only because he was raising a fundamental question about its rationality.

Back in England after fleeing Ireland, Toland had busied himself in both theological and political controversy. For him, bishops and kings were as bad as each other. In 1700 he published James Harrington's *Oceana*, which he regarded as a republican textbook. In the Introduction he recommended the careful perusal of Greek and Roman historians to discover republican theory: "I have always been, now am, and ever shall be persuaded that all sorts of magistrates are made for and by the people, and not

the people for or by the magistrates ...and consequently that it is lawful to resist and punish tyrants of all sorts ...I am therefore avowedly a Commonwealth's man".

Toland made no secret of his antipathy towards 'the idolatry and tyranny of the Romish clergy', but he didn't stop there: a wise and good man, he wrote, "knows no difference between Popish infallibility, and being oblig'd blindly to acquiesce in the decisions of fallible Protestants". He referred to the Protestant Parliament which banned the book as 'Popish Inquisitors' and later wrote that "there may very well be such a thing as Protestant popery" (*A Memorial for the Earl of Oxford*, 1711). To claim that the Irish ruling class were as 'popish' as Catholics was to undermine the entire basis of Protestant rule in Ireland.

Controversy also arose from what Toland omitted as much as what he said. He wrote that *Christianity Not Mysterious* was the first in a series of three books he intended to write, and in the second he would specify which Christian doctrines should not be accepted because they contradicted human reason. But of course this only encouraged speculation. Was he denying all miracles? Was he attacking the whole basis of Christianity? Was the whole idea of the divine nature of Jesus being dismissed as just an invented 'mystery'?

Swift, in his *Argument Against Abolishing Christianity* (1708) denounced Toland as "the great Oracle of the Anti-Christians". Was Toland indeed out to destroy religion? The answers are not clear, but Toland gave the distinct impression that he was sceptical of the entire Christian myth, although he respected Jesus as a person, and his subsequent writings bear this out. Whatever the truth, the fact remains that if he was trying to undermine tradi-

In 1701 he went to Hanover as part of an official delegation to present the Act of Settlement which decreed that Anne, Mary's sister and sister-in-law of William, would succeed William to the throne. William and the Parliament accepted this settlement because it prevented the Stuart princes from demanding the Crown at a future date, while Toland and his supporters were satisfied because it placed most of the real power under the control of Parliament. Another objective of the delegation was to explain the Act to the Electress Sophia of Hanover, who was to succeed Anne (she died months before she would have become Queen), and during his stay Toland developed a friendship with her and her daughter Serena, the Queen of Prussia, and discussed philosophy with Gottfried Leibniz. On his return the following year he recorded his impressions of the courts of Prussia and Hanover and noted that in both there was an absence of sectarian divisiveness and "the clergy seldom appear at court in either Hanover or Berlin".

As a result of his relationship with Sophia and her daughter, he produced a book entitled *Letters to Serena* in 1704, which indicates that by this time he had moved on from the deism of *Christianity Not Mysterious*. In the first three letters he examined superstition, prejudice and notions of an 'immortal soul', and sought to demonstrate that the supernatural is shown to be mere human invention. In the final two letters he addressed the ideas of the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, who argued that God and Nature are two names for the same reality. Although Toland criticised Spinoza, it is —>

clear that he too, like the Dutchman, now espoused pantheism, a term first used in Latin as 'pantheismus' by the mathematician Joseph Raphson in his work *De Spatio Reali seu Ente Infinito*, published in 1697. Toland had also found and translated Giordano Bruno's *Lo Spaccio de la Bestia Trifontane*, known in English as 'The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast'.

In his works Bruno, the first modern pantheist, argued that God is in all things, that the sun is one of an infinite number of stars, and also that life may exist elsewhere in the universe. Bruno's ideas impressed Toland, but he was not so taken by Spinoza. His preference for Bruno relates to a distinction made by Raphson between atheistic 'panhylists' (from the Greek words pan, meaning 'all', and hyle, meaning 'matter'), who believe everything is matter, and 'pantheists' who believe in "a certain universal substance, material as well as intelligent, that fashions all things that exist out of its own essence".

We might say that, in terms of this distinction, Toland believed Spinoza was closer to atheism than pantheism, even though he effectively labels him a pantheist. His beef with Spinoza was over the nature of matter. For Toland, it was not 'an inactive dead lump in absolute repose' but instead is active or dynamic. Following the Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius, he suggested that all parts of the universe are in a constant motion, one thing living by the destruction or decay of another. Of course, if motion is essential to matter, then there seems to be no need of a presiding intelligence or First Cause. But this was not Toland's conclusion because he maintained that motion by itself could not create the order and variety that exists in the world, "nor cause the organisation of a flower or a fly". This appears to be an acceptance of a god through the argument from design.

Yet a year later in 1705 Toland produced *Socinianism Truly Stated*, which included on the title page the words 'recommended by a pantheist', and in the work he refers to pantheists, "of which number I profess myself to be one". This was the first use of the word in English, and Toland later explained in a letter to Leibniz (1710) that a pantheist was someone who believed "in no other eternal being but the universe". @Kpyrotic

Later again, in *Pantheisticon* (1720), originally published privately in Latin and only translated into English in 1751, he asserted: "The universe is infinite, with infinite stars and inhabited worlds: in an infinite space there can be no up or down, no centre or extremities... There is an infinite number of other worlds similar to the earth we inhabit, circling around their suns (which we call the fixed stars)... The Universe (of which the world we know is only a very small part), is infinite in extent as well as in potential. By the continuity of all and by the contiguity of its parts it is one. In its totality it is immobile, having no space outside of itself, but in its parts it is mobile by infinite intervals. The universe is a unity: Every material thing is in all things... All things come from all, and all is in all things. The universe is divine: The power and energy of all, which has created all and which governs all,

having always the best goal as it aim, is God, whom we call the mind, if you please, and soul of the universe".

The title page of the work named 'Cosmopolis' as the place of publication, and this is explained later when he told the story that, when asked by an inn-keeper what country he came from, he had replied: "the sun is my father, the earth my mother, the world's my country, and all men are my relations".

This early fusion of the Gaia hypothesis with cosmopolitan humanism raises the question whether Toland was really an atheist in disguise. Of course, when accused of irreligion, Toland always denied the charge, but he often wrote about the need for dissimulation in dangerous times, and the fact that *Pantheisticon* was published anonymously and distributed privately supports the view that his public declarations of Christianity should be interpreted only in an ethical sense. The fact is that in at least two (anonymous) writings he called himself a pantheist and expressed a pantheistic philosophy.

Whether this, in turn, is a disguise for atheism is a tricky question because some have argued that pantheism IS atheism. Schopenhauer thought it was a euphemism for atheism, and in *The God Delusion* Richard Dawkins writes that "pantheism is sexed-up atheism". On the other hand, others suggest that pantheism is actually a kind of theism because it claims that the universe is imbued

with some of the characteristics normally ascribed to a God and therefore our attitude to it is akin to a religious experience. The universe is in a real sense holy or sacred and we should regard it with awe, or even fear. It is unlikely that Toland would

have been afraid of the universe and there was nothing supernatural about his God-universe identity. Therefore sexed-up atheism seems a fair description of his position.

Toland died in 1722 in a carpenter's house in Putney where he had lodged for the last few years, having lost what little property he had in the financial collapse of the South Sea Company in 1720. One report said that "he died... as he had lived, in great poverty, in the midst of his books, with his pen in his hand". Just before his death, he composed his own epitaph: "He was an assertor of liberty, a lover of all sorts of learning ... but no man's follower or dependent. Nor could frowns or fortune bend him to decline from the ways he had chosen".

Toland's writings have been largely suppressed or ignored in his own country for centuries and, whenever mentioned, have often been distorted in order to discredit him. Yet he was well ahead of his time. Many of his ideas have become mainstream. He was a pioneer of the basic principles of Humanism and indeed of a modern scientific approach, especially that we should think for ourselves and respect truth, reason and evidence. He also pioneered a cosmopolitan European outlook, advocated giving Jews full citizenship 170 years before it happened, and was a proto-feminist who promoted women philosophers and scientists. In this time of irrationality, we should celebrate the life of a man who taught the importance of reason as a key mark of civilisation. □

HOT topics

RELIGION AND GROUPTHINK

ARCHBISHOP Eamon Martin wrote a piece in the *Irish Times* in April arguing that religion was an antidote to uncritical groupthink. It was an edited version of an address opposing the motion that "This house would move beyond organised religion" at a recent Oxford Union debate.

To an atheist or agnostic, Martin's argument seems bizarre. If we define groupthink as a phenomena in which a group of people with a desire for harmony or conformity reach a common opinion without critical reason or considering the consequences or alternatives, then traditional religions have groupthink written all over them.

Firstly, they have a set of beliefs, or dogmas, which they expect believers to follow. Dissidents are generally under pressure not to express their opinions, or they are censored, dismissed from their jobs, or even, at least in the past, tortured or killed. Bruno and Galileo are prominent examples of thousands censored or martyred by the Catholic Church because they deviated from orthodoxy. Has Archbishop Martin never heard of the Inquisition?

Second, groups with opposing dogmas are generally stereotyped as an enemy of religion. Think of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of French Huguenots. Or even the Kingsmill Massacre of Protestants (1976) or the Loughinisland Massacre of Catholics (1994)? To many Protestants in Northern Ireland, the Catholic Church is idolatrous and its head is the anti-Christ. And it was only after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) that the Catholic Church for the first time recognised non-Christian religions as entities which the Church should respect and with which Christians should enter into dialogue. Indeed, it is

only in recent times that most Christian religions have tried to dispense with the in-group, out-group mentality that characterised their attitude for more than a thousand years. For the fact of the matter is that an increasing number of thinking people are rejecting religion because it is the very embodiment of groupthink.

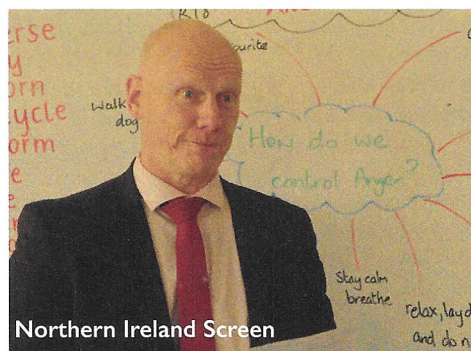
The religion that a person espouses almost invariably depends on where and to whom they are born. There are few Catholics on the Shankill and few Protestants on the Falls. In other words, people are brainwashed as children. The Archbishop thinks that religion is an antidote to uncritical acceptance of facile groupthink. But simply following the religion of your background is the epitome of an uncritical acceptance of facile groupthink. Archbishop Martin should watch *Young Plato* and learn something.

**Archbishop Martin
should watch *Young
Plato* and learn
something**

SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

IN MARCH President Higgins sent a letter to Kevin McAreevy (below), Principal of Holy Cross Boys' Primary School, congratulating him and the makers on winning the ICCL Human Rights on Film Award 2022 at the recent Dublin International Film Festival. He referred to the work they have done in highlighting philosophy as a cornerstone of education and personal development.

The winning documentary, *Young Plato*, was released in cinemas in



March and shown on BBC Northern Ireland on 18th and 19th April. It is quite remarkable, demonstrating that primary school children can understand some of the most important philosophical questions if they are explained to them in a lucid and involving manner. And philosophy is important because, among others: it questions prejudice and dogmatism; it promotes tolerance and empathy; it encourages humility; it forms the basis of logic and reason; it develops our ability to think for ourselves; and it provides a sketch map to guide the ways in which we decide right and wrong and how we live our lives. In short, it provides the basis of the critical thinking that Martin speaks about.

If that all sounds abstract and theoretical, then watch *Young Plato*. Observe McAreevy discuss Seneca's techniques to control anger with a class. Note two answers he received when asking children if Heraclitus was right in saying that everything in life changes, just as you cannot step into the same river twice. One child said he was wrong because DNA doesn't change; another said that the past doesn't change.

Much of McAreevy's effort is directed at controlling children's anger and promoting their mental health and well-being. As a counter to all the paramilitary murals in the area, he has added the school's mural on a wall outside the school gates. It depicts a pupil called Conor in the pose of Rodin's sculpture *The Thinker*, surrounded by paintings of Aristotle, Socrates and Plato.

Two aspects of the school are ignored, however. It is a Catholic school and it is all boys. Segregated and single-sex schools remain as marks of our backwardness. How much of the religious ethos cancels out the critical thinking that is also encouraged? How much of the single-sex nature of the school fails to challenge the sexism and mistreatment of women prevalent in Northern Ireland society?

Finally, in view of the film's success at promoting Philosophy as an essential educational tool, why on earth is it still not a CCEA GCSE or A Level subject but is only covered within Religious Studies? That's a glaring irony in itself. EDITOR



After ⊖ God

Joe Armstrong

explores the religious mindset – once held by its author – and examines transitioning from belief to unbelief, a journey that involved rethinking everything



Ch. 29

OUR Superior Father John Hannan had warned us in novitiate that celibates needed human love and friendship: ‘Non-exclusive, non-genital spiritual friendships are good for celibates, so long as the relationship remains open and honest. There are risks. When you’re nineteen, a sexual attraction can occur.’

‘Are you saying we could fall in love with one another?’ asked a novice.

‘Yes,’ he had said. ‘Freud taught us that relatively few people are exclusively heterosexual or homosexual. Most people are somewhere along the spectrum. Even if this is theoretical to you now, before long it won’t be.’

In winter 1982, it happened to me. My journal of that autumn shows an earnest 20-year-old struggling with religious endeavour: *‘disappointed with meditation’*; *‘Meditation difficult’*; *‘Distracted a fair bit. Ended by thanking God for the day...not very successful.’*

I visited my father’s grave on All Souls Day – I may still have been having the recurring dream of his being about to tell me something important but culminating with the silence of the grave. I wrote to the Salvation Army missing persons office letting them know that we had found my brother David.

I had a new spiritual director, an honourable Marist. On 5 November, after making my confession to him, we discussed my occasional *‘atheistic tendencies and views’*. However, I remember being underwhelmed by his argument that I could doubt God ‘but that doesn’t alter his existence’. Applied to the proverbial flying pink elephant, doubting the airborne proboscidean doesn’t ‘alter his existence’ either: he still doesn’t exist and no sensible adult stakes his life on belief in Dumbo.

My new pastoral work was to befriend two long-term inmates in Arbour Hill prison. I found it intimidating walking into the austere building, its massive steel doors clanging shut – locked behind me. We had privileged access to the men, meeting them alone in their cells. Unlike the ‘string them up’ brigade, I realised that I was no better than these prisoners, just luckier.

Although I have in recent years won awards for public speaking, I was far from that in my early years in Milltown. Faced with a packed congregation during novitiate, my legs used to shake dramatically, my mouth dried, my lungs clamped and I blushed like a beacon. The problem remained two years later. I journaled in November 1982: *‘On Saturday at Eucharistic adoration I’d a near heart attack prior to reading.’*

An entry for 24 November reads: *‘Almost vomiting with nerves about driving test.’*

But the mood changes with an entry of 30 November. *‘Lord, praised be your name, now and forever.’*

My pastoral work at the prison had gone well the previous night, I passed my driving test and I thanked God for *‘the pleasure and the company and the companionship of home on Sunday’*. For sure, this could not refer to my mother. And so I deduce that a confrère had accompanied me. *‘And then Saturday. Alleluia, Amen,’* effuses the journal. *‘Thank you, Lord. I praise you for the beauty and the treasure of my precious hours and moments spent in deep intimacy.’*

Lest the reader think I had just lost my virginity, I had not. Far from it. The intimacy in question was the first budding of a short-lived six-month on-off affective and emotional crush; but something nevertheless more real than cultivating a relationship with an imagined pink elephant.

My journal records my *‘inner certainty, stability and delight’* and my awareness of *‘beauty and love’*.

When you take twenty virile young men, most of them aged between 17 and 19, and leave them together for years in a seminary, sexuality will inevitably manifest. I was on a diet of celibacy and loneliness. I had a need for affectivity that was not being met. I desired an exclusive relationship which wasn’t permitted in a Church that valued celibacy above the priesthood. And in this emotional barrenness, I got a glimpse of what my life could be like, freed from isolation and religious constraint.

On 1 December 1982, I recorded: *‘I’ve read over 100 pages, indeed closer to 120 pages, of An Experience of Celibacy by Keith Clarke since bedtime last night.’* That recently published book, which had just arrived in the Milltown library, was a big hit among seminarians.

I was experiencing my loneliness. My desire for sexual pleasure was heightened. I craved an emotionally interdependent, physically expressive relationship. I realised that these normal yearnings could not be fulfilled while committed to the vow of celibacy. On 5 December, I felt the solution was *‘praying and presenting myself to God at such a time as tonight when I want so much to touch another’*.

Humbled, I prayed that my celibacy could *‘testify to the primacy of the love of God in my life’*. But all I felt was a lonely burning desire.

Prompted by the *After God* column in *The Irish Freethinker and Humanist*, Joe Armstrong’s acclaimed memoir *In My Gut, I Don’t Believe* is available as a paperback, Kindle and audiobook on Amazon and Audible.

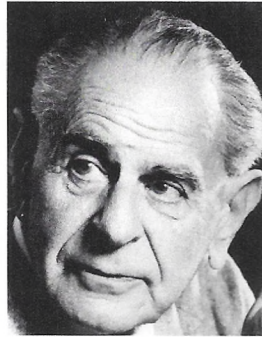
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The Paradox of Tolerance

Noel Byrne

IN a footnote in chapter 7 of his celebrated 1945 work *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Karl Popper (below) wrote:

“Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them.—In this formulation, I do not imply, for instance, that we should always suppress the utterance of intolerant philosophies; as long as we can counter them by rational argument and keep them in check by public opinion, suppression would certainly be most unwise. But we should claim the right to suppress them if necessary even by force; for it may easily turn out that they are not prepared to meet us on the level of rational argument, but begin by denouncing all argument; they may forbid their followers to listen to rational argument, because it is deceptive, and teach them to answer arguments by the use of their fists or pistols. We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant. We should claim that any movement preaching intolerance places itself outside the law and we should consider incitement to intolerance and persecution as criminal, in the same way as we should consider incitement to murder, or to kidnapping, or to the revival of the slave trade, as criminal.”



The philosopher John Rawls at page 220 of his 1971 work *A Theory of Justice* also outlines this paradox: “A society must accept the intolerant and unjust, for if they did not, they themselves would be unjust”. But, like Popper, he concluded there must be a ‘self-preservation’ clause — i.e. if the intolerant are intent on destroying a society, that society has the right to suspend tolerance in order to preserve itself.

‘Popper’s paradox’, as it is called, refers to tolerance only as it relates to nations and states. Tolerance as a general concept also applies in simpler and more mundane situations, such as in the office, or at home where parents have to tolerate some of the carry on of teenage children.

By tolerance we generally mean respecting and recognising the opinions, practices and behaviours of others. Respect in the context of toleration does not mean reverence or veneration, but the avoidance of interference. It does not mean accepting or believing everything that

others say, believe or do. It is an acceptance of diversity at a practical level. It is often putting up with something we totally disagree with or detest. We have no need to embrace or celebrate everyone’s beliefs or opinions to be tolerant, nor does it mean subscribing to those beliefs.

Tolerance is more about what we don’t do – it is not just about acceptance. We can detest certain people, practices or behaviours and wish they would go away or didn’t exist but, once we leave them in peace, that is tolerance. We must accept that what is to be tolerated is not simply those things we find bearable, but also those things we find insufferable, if toleration is to work.

Tolerance is an important concept which allows people of different backgrounds, beliefs, opinions, religions and races to work and live together peacefully. It is a barrier against discrimination but it does not insist on unity, compliance or social pressure, it asks us to think about why we should accept ideas, cultures or beliefs which we disapprove of, rather than insisting people relinquish their deeply held beliefs or values. By so doing, tolerance mitigates the risk of conflict in a pluralist or multicultural society. Tolerance is a protection to minorities. Maintaining a free, liberal, peaceful society requires considerable tolerance as a type of formal truce with those elements of society with which we might otherwise be in conflict. One of the basic features of human nature is our propensity to differ and differing is a condition that we can assuage but not cure.

In the modern world we promote respect for human rights for all through the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, and at the same time we also promote respect for all cultures, which obviously involves different worldviews.

‘Popper’s Paradox’ has repercussions in relation to the boundaries of many of the principles of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the European Declaration of Human Rights and various other rights declarations, in relation to issues such as freedom of speech and censorship.

The case for tolerance is that in an intolerant society we would be left with a homogenous citizenship and a culture accepting only full conformity. There would be no place for minority opinions, beliefs, creeds or cultures. It would be a dogmatic and totalitarian society. North Korea comes immediately to mind.

In a modern pluralist or multicultural society we do face conflicts of cultures, ideas and opinions, and so we must promote tolerance. Yet as Postmodernism has spread its influence of equal value to all world-views, cultures and norms, we must question the limits of tolerance. We must distinguish between intolerance and intolerable.

In an open society leaders must listen to opponents and minorities if they wish to reduce societal problems. But they must only listen if the views being expressed are reasonable and are an aid to society. Unreasonable views should not be tolerated. “That which may be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence.” A truly pluralist society rests on listening to a diversity of opinions. But not all opinions are equally valid. —>

A just and fair society must accept diversity, practise tolerance, and allow freedom of speech and opinion. The difficulty arises if we accept or tolerate all diversity of action and opinion. It implies that we must be accepting of those people that don't want to accept others they disagree with and who are themselves intolerant. Yet in the modern world, where the movement of people of different nationalities, cultures, beliefs and ethnicities, whether for economic, social or refugee reasons, is continuous and increasing, toleration must exist.

Mixing of cultures is a good thing, on the whole, as we see new ways of doing things or new ideas and eventually the cultures evolve and a certain merging and adaptation takes place within a society. Liberal societies reach a plateau of differing but tolerable ideas, cultures and opinions within a tolerable range. No extremes would be allowed and a certain integration takes place.

However one of the problems of a free, liberal state, is that it makes it easier for those who want to undermine it – easier for terrorists, extremists, the prejudiced, the bigoted and other such-like, because people are free to move around within such a society and are not being continuously checked and monitored.

Although it is most important to uphold toleration against the prejudiced, the bigoted, the terrorist and the extremist, we do not have to tolerate the intolerant.

There is absolutely no reason or excuse for intolerance of culture, gender, colour, race, ability or opinion and, although everyone has a right to their opinions, whether true or false, they do not have the right to foist them on others. Tolerance demands that we put up with difference and diversity but not criminality or irresponsibility.

Tolerance cannot be completely indiscriminate, as this in its extreme form could lead to the acceptance or recognition of human rights violations or questionable practices such as child marriage or hate speech. An excess of tolerance would include the toleration of evil.

From the above it is quite obvious that toleration is a good and necessary virtue, but is it an absolute virtue? This is the point Popper and Rawls are making. If left as a virtue it can become intolerant in that not all beliefs, practices and opinions are tolerant and a distinction needs to be made between what a society considers tolerable and what is intolerable.

What is illegal in a democratic society cannot be considered tolerable, nor can what interferes with the rights of others, nor that which might overthrow a lawful government or interfere in lawful elections. If we wish to control our futures and our environment then we must be intolerant of those who might by their actions destroy or interfere with the rights of others or upset a nation's peaceful state.

So what are the limits of tolerance? As Popper points out, there must be a limit. A policy of complete tolerance would amount to anarchy. Should we give a platform to those who don't themselves respect tolerance and human rights?

This paradox of tolerance is becoming a major issue in modern liberal societies where disinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories are abounding and negatively impacting such societies. When Rawls and Popper were writing their books, the internet and social media were not around.

There is absolutely no doubt that the internet and social media have been a wonderful boost in bringing people and information together and overall of great benefit to humanity. However, through them everyone who wishes has access to worldwide media platforms to expound and propagate their beliefs, whether they are rational, bigoted, prejudiced, sexist, racist, misogynistic or just plain stupid. Social media makes it easier for the intolerant to meet others of a like mind and to spread their intolerance.

It's the global reach of the internet which is a major cause of worry today in this regard. Nations and states can make just laws to regulate improper use of the principle of free speech and expression, but to regulate the internet is a much more difficult issue. How can it be regulated? We have names and faces for the traditional print and broadcast media and they can be made accountable, but in many cases on social media the purveyors of information are anonymous.

The other problem of the internet and social media is freedom from repercussions – the intolerant can say what they want often free of consequence. These social platforms operate worldwide and as such are extremely difficult to regulate. Although some regulation is presently being enforced, such regulation is not yet sufficiently robust to outlaw extreme intolerance. This is now becoming a major issue due to the power, range, anonymity and impact of social media.

Where and how do we draw the line, and in the case of many of the social media platforms can we draw the line? In reality toleration will only work completely when everyone is tolerant and everyone respects the rights of all others within the law, but unfortunately human nature has not yet evolved to that state.

At the end of the day we cannot have a fully tolerant society as to do so would include the intolerant who by definition would exclude the tolerant and thereby make society intolerant. Tolerance cannot be an absolute. No free society can be maximally tolerant. Limits must be put on tolerance. To establish that balance, on the limits of tolerance, is one of the big issues in our modern liberal societies. □

We cannot have a fully tolerant society as to do so would include the intolerant who by definition would exclude the tolerant and thereby make society intolerant

Dear Eddie, where did it all go wrong?

Owen Morton

A difference of opinion, in no small matter, would recently play out between two school pals now of an age. “Why do you take issue with religion at every hand’s turn?”, is the gist of the email challenge emanating from Eddie, pointedly classified as friendly banter, and clearly accepted as such. It was prompted by some *Freethinker* pieces I had penned.

Here’s what his 25th February email had to say, noting that Putin invaded Ukraine on Feb 24th:

“What strikes me is the ingrained/indoctrinated tendency among humanists and atheists to ascribe all and every bad thing in the world to religion. Surely, we know enough from our OCS education and life experiences that the ruthless pursuit of power/riches etc ignores ethics, laws or morals. Over the last few days, an atheistic regime did just that. You must be pausing for thought and questioning the belief in atheism as a panacea? Surely it sends shivers down the spine to see what happens when an atheistic regime controls the levers of power?”

Now to respond stridently, reproachfully, along the lines that Putin is a card-carrying Christian, feted by Orthodox Russian Patriarchs insofar as he is on a righteous mission to deliver Ukraine from liberal, Godless Western decadence, would be to stymie debate, to forego the opportunity to embrace an argument that has plagued the Universe since forever. In one corner are those believing that faith in the supernatural keeps us on the straight and narrow; brings reward in afterlife; meanwhile sinfulness is an innate human condition, redeemed only by the grace of God – never mind that “which god?” has served as the root cause of untold atrocity down the ages.

In another corner we find the humanist who believes that God’s grace is a distracting human invention; that innately we know right from wrong and that, as such, a decent, ethical moral code is more likely to play out against an informed, compassionate, secular backdrop. No divine grace. We can thus have the good bits that religion has to offer, without the not inconsiderable baggage, whilst the loss of an eternal life may well be a bonus, not least in inviting us all the better to enjoy the lifespan nature bestows on us. “*Let life itself be the answer*”, opined 16th century humanist Montaigne (inspired by Roman scholar Cicero and by 14th century Italian humanist Petrarch).

So where did it all go wrong? Or *did* it all go wrong? The answer very much depends on one’s position in the religiosity/secular binary debate that finds Eddie and me in opposite corners.

Atheism, as a concept, serves only to complicate things; it stands less for a belief in something, more for non-belief

in something, and, covering a broad canvas, is hard to pin down. Nihilism is somewhere in the mix, perhaps at the opposite end of the non-belief or atheistic spectrum to humanism. It’s likely, one supposes, that my school friend falls into line with fashion that labels all non-believers as nihilists, having little or no moral compass.

Another concept that complicates things is *faith*. Faith is an orchestrated phenomenon; a clever, catch-all, circular logic of sorts draws the susceptible mind into believing in a supernatural creator/guardian that bestows the prerequisite gift of faith. If not in all cases, for the most part, this “*gift*” is an accident of birth. It’s noted, with a sense of the absurd, that Joseph Smith’s Mormon Tabernacle, established in 1830, clocking in at more than 16m. in number, boasts a larger worldwide congregation than that of the Jewish fraternity, and they “*God’s chosen people*”!

Interlude: American physicist, Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg may have had compatriot Bible-belt white supremacists in mind in observing that: “*Religion is an insult to human dignity. Without it you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion.*”

Witness xenophobia, homophobia, patriarchy, racism, among other such “isms” that permeate the globe and having God on their side, inspired or validated as they are by theology and by scriptures. Contrast, then, recent French Presidential rivals Le Pen and Macron, the latter seeking “a France that is faithful to humanism and the spirit of the Enlightenment.”

Round two: Which God?

It’s ironic – the more so if one subscribes to the notion of a loving God – that the most savage of wars over the centuries have been fought not just by believers in God, but because of said belief in God, and even more ironic that the flag bearers, for the most part – the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims – avow worship, supposedly, to the self-same God of Abraham, the God of the Old Testament.

Noted 19th century French novelist and humanist Gustave Flaubert, reflecting on a special rich interlude in our history when philosophers of antiquity had sought to lead us towards greater self-determination and greater appreciation of self-worth, observed poignantly, nostalgically: “*Just when the gods had ceased to be, and the Christ had not yet come, there was a unique moment in history, between Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, when man stood alone. Nowhere else do I find such grandeur*”. Flaubert (more anon) also found inspiration in the thoughts and writings of Cicero.

The thing is, religion *per se* isn’t the problem, is it? – barring fundamentalist and dogmatist exceptions, no more than we could do without cheesy, money-grubbing TV evangelists. It’s how it’s interpreted and disseminated. You’ll not hear a word of criticism on the part of this observer of those adhering to the Quaker tradition; their demonstrable humanitarian goodwill and charity are exemplary; most significantly, they’ll allow me to pursue my own agenda without interference. —>

Round Three: The Oxford Union debate and the New Statesman unholy Alliance.

Inasmuch as everything in the religious canon is centred in “faith” and “revelation”, allow me to open round three with short extracts from Matthew’s Gospel:

On Easter Sunday Jesus rose from the dead, as the Evangelist reveals in Chapter 28. Just as “*Mary Magdalene and the other Mary*” arrived on the scene there was an earthquake and an angel appeared and rolled back the stone, to tell them that Jesus wasn’t there, he had risen.

Embellishing the story, Mathew 27:51-54 tells of more earthquakes and resurrections on the same occasion: “*and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.*”

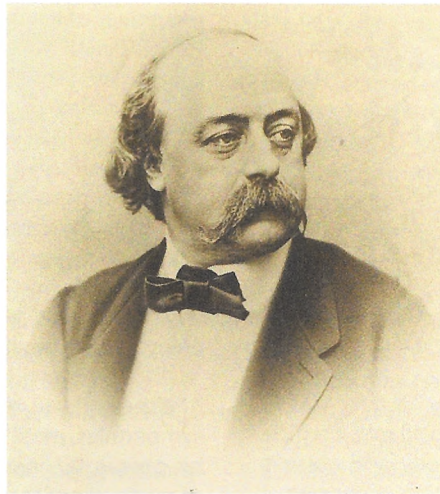
Not surprisingly, this challenging extract from God’s word has puzzled scholars through the years. The best Aquinas (1225-1274) could come up with was that the holy city in question was unlikely to be Jerusalem, more likely a city called heaven. Now just which segments, above, on the part of Matthew, might I take as gospel?

Moving along, it happens that my weekend reading at the beginning of April, in timely and strategic fashion, delivered diverse expert opinion as regards the issues to hand. Extracts from All-Ireland Catholic Primate, Archbishop Eamon Martin’s delivery to The Oxford Union Debate, as summarised in a “*Rite & Reason*” Irish Times feature, would conclude in revealing that the motion: “*this house would move beyond organised religion*” was defeated.

Engaging in meaningful debate with men of the cloth has always been problematic not least given a predisposition to deliver stumbling blocks and *non sequiturs*. “*Our love for our neighbour is inspired by God’s love for us*”, posits the Primate, authoritatively, sanctimoniously; now tell that to the Children of Abraham. To perceive oneself as “*spiritual*” without the support and accompaniment of community, is to be rudderless; prerequisite guidance and direction is to hand only through “*Revelation*” and informed interpretation thereof, argues His Eminence. His Roman Church has its own special take on this.

This is about as much sense as I can glean from the opposing side as I’d now turn to Julian Barnes in aiming to overturn the Oxford Union debate ballot. Here I draw on a *Sunday Times* April 3rd book review highlighting a compelling extract from the writer’s latest offering *Elizabeth Finch*, a “*slim, puzzling, philosophical volume*”: “*Religions that worship only one god are very dangerous and very distorting.*”

Barnes cut his journalistic teeth, all the while himself suffering from debilitating shyness, in the flamboyant



company at *the New Statesman*, of Christopher Hitchens and Martin Amis. Of Flaubert (left) Barnes observed: “*He’s the writer whose words I most carefully tend to weigh, who I think has spoken the most truth about writing*”, and the Englishman’s *Flaubert’s Parrot* was published in 1984 to great acclaim, especially in France, helping to establish him as one of the pre-eminent writers of his generation.

In expanding on his rounding on “*one god*” religions, Barnes reminds us how “*they involve continual policing of heretics*” and he reflects on advances in the offing in Greek

and Roman times towards tolerance and plurality that would recede in short order. He decries Europe’s conversion to Christianity as a mistake – “*the moment history went wrong*”, no less. He ponders: “*imagine, no Spanish Inquisition, no witch burnings, no Mrs. Brown’s Boys Christmas Special.*” Let’s then reconvene the Oxford Union assembly, revisiting the motion, above.

G.K. Chesterton, unwittingly, fuels both sides of the argument in asserting: “*the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried*”, as Archbishop Martin had pointed out, with a certain authority. And who, pray, would argue with the Christian ideal? The humanist will not disagree with Chesterton; the ideal has indeed been left untried despite centuries of dedicated ecclesiastical forensics, supervised from on-high, apparently. Time then, is it not, and on reflection, to revisit the motion that “*this house would move beyond organised religion*”?

It’s both rewarding and comforting to seek out the cosy embrace of freethinkers harking back to antiquity – uplifted by their collective compassion, humanity, inquisitiveness, integrity, no less their courage in rowing against the tide

For my own part, facing into my Eighties, it’s both rewarding and comforting to seek out the cosy embrace of freethinkers harking back to antiquity – uplifted by their collective compassion, humanity, inquisitiveness, integrity, no less their courage in rowing against the tide. No divine grace. An exemplar gallery presents in the likes of Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Petrarch, Montaigne, Spinoza, Hutcheson, Voltaire, Paine, Wollstonecraft and all the way to modern-day Hitchens, Barnes, Chomsky, Dawkins. Sadly, not until they would command pride of place in the classroom, might we envisage a better world beyond organised religion, I propose. □



Classical Collection

A series which traces the history of classical music through some key works

4. The Classical Era

THE term 'classical era' is misleading mainly because 'classical' is also the general term used to refer to all music which uses an established form such as a symphony, and which is intended for a formal setting such as a church or concert hall. The specific term relates to classical music written between the Baroque and Romantic eras, covering roughly the years 1750 to 1830. The best known composers of this period are Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert, though the last two can also be regarded as transitional.

In the mid-18th century, Europe developed a new style in architecture, literature and the arts, generally known as classicism. It sought to emulate the ideas of classical antiquity, especially Classical Greece. Philosophers like Rousseau and Voltaire tied music to the ancient classical notion of order and balance and believed that access to higher forms of learning for all citizens would usher in an Age of Reason, which would create peace and democracy throughout the world. For these reasons the new music favoured simplicity rather than complexity, clarity rather than opacity and elegance rather than rugged counterpoint.

New forms included symphonies (from the Greek meaning an agreement or concord of sound, and an extension of the overture into three and then usually four movements); concertos featuring specific instruments; and the string quartet. New instruments included the piano, invented by Bartolomeo Cristofori around the year 1700, which largely replaced the harpsichord. The piano could be played either soft or loud whereas the harpsichord had a narrow dynamic range. Also, the orchestra itself expanded. In the baroque era it was usually a modest strings-only group with occasional woodwind and harpsichord, but as instruments like the clarinet, flute, oboe and horns improved, they began to bag their very own section in a standard orchestra.

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Like Handel, Joseph Haydn had no background in music. His father was a wheelwright and his mother was a cook in the village of Rohrau in Austria. Yet they noticed that their son was musically gifted and accepted a proposal from the choirmaster in Hainburg that he should live in his home and train as a musician. Haydn never lived with his parents again. It was his singing that initially impressed when he became a chorister in St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. But when his voice broke he had to rely on his own resources.

He borrowed money to rent an attic where he practised the harpsichord and violin. He soon became an assistant to composer Nicola Porpora in exchange for lessons, and in 1761 he was named Kapellmeister, or "court musician," at

the palace of the influential Esterházy family, a position that would financially support him for nearly 30 years. Isolated at the palace from other composers and musical trends, he was, as he put it, "forced to become original." As a result he became in his time the most celebrated composer in Europe. He said that he wrote music so that "the weary and worn, or the man burdened with affairs, may enjoy a few moments of solace and refreshment".



At Eisenstadt Haydn composed 80 of his 104 numbered symphonies, most of his 83 string quartets and nearly all his operas. By one estimate, he composed about 340 hours of music, more than any other composer. He is known as the 'father of the symphony' and 'father of the string quartet' and, although he did not create either form, his inventiveness and influence justifies the titles.

A good starting point is the Symphony No 22, known as the *Philosopher*. The title, not the composer's own, is appropriate given its thoughtful atmosphere. There is a lovely performance, especially of the opening adagio, by **L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, conducted by Ernest Ansermet** (Decca). The Symphony No 26, known as *Lamentatione*, is also one of his best, while the top of many lists is the No 49, *La Passione*. Both can be found on an Archiv recording by the **English Concert, conducted by Trevor Pinnock** (it also includes *No 58*). Alternatively, the Nos 44, 45 and 49 are recorded by the **Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra under Ton Koopman** (Erato). The so-called *Paris symphonies* – Nos 82-77 – have been recorded several times, notably by **Ansermet and the Suisse Romande** (Decca), the **Orchestra of the 18th Century under Frans Brüggen** (Philips) and the **Heidelberg Symphony Orchestra under Thomas Fey** (Hänssler Classic). Symphonies 88-91 are contained on a double CD by **La Petite Bande conducted by Sigiswald Kuijken** (Virgin Veritas). Finally, the *London symphonies*, 93-104, can be heard on a 2CD set and a single CD by the **Royal Concertgebouw conducted by Colin Davis** (Philips).

Of Haydn's other music try:

String Quartets, Op 20 and 33: **Quatuor Mosaiques** (Naive)

Piano Trios: **Beaux Arts Trio** (Philips)

Piano Sonatas: **Alfred Brendel** (Decca).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)

Mozart, who died when he was only 35, crammed more music – over 600 works – into a couple of decades than many composers managed in a lifetime. Born in Salzburg, he was a child prodigy who learned how to play the keyboard at the age of three and was composing from five. From the age of six to ten, he toured Europe with his father Leopold, also a composer, and his elder sister Maria Anna, and played for some of the world's most powerful figures including Louis XV at Versailles and George III in London.

For much of his early life he worked for the Archbishop of Salzburg, but in his twenty fifth year he resigned and decided to make Vienna his home, a move which marked the beginning of his golden years as a composer. The cause of his death is not certain: there were rumours at the time that he was poisoned and in the play and film *Amadeus* →

Peter Schaffer promotes the story that Antonio Salieri, a rival composer, did the deed. Modern theories include rheumatic fever or a kidney infection. As was the custom of his era, he was buried in a common grave in St Marx's Cemetery on the outskirts of Vienna.



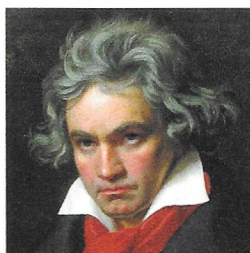
Mozart provides us with a veritable treasure trove of beautiful music which, with a few exceptions, conveys the shadow of depth rather than the substance. Space permits only a select list of some of the best recordings.

1. Symphonies 25, 29, 38, 40: **English Chamber Orchestra conducted by Benjamin Britten** (Decca).
2. Symphonies 36 (*Linz*) and 38 (*Prague*): **Prague Symphony Orchestra conducted by Charles Mackerras** (Telarc).
3. Symphonies 40, 41: **Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Leonard Bernstein** (DG).
4. Piano Concertos 5-27: **Alfred Brendel, ASMF, Neville Marriner** (Decca) – fantastic 10 CD bargain, £26, Amazon.
5. Violin Concertos 1-5 ; Sinfonia Concertante K364: **Arthur Grumiaux, LSO, Colin Davis** (Decca) – divine performances.
6. Clarinet Concerto; Clarinet Quintet: **Thea King, ECO, Jeffrey Tate, and Gabrieli Quartet** (Hyperion).
7. String Quintets: **Arthur Grumiaux** and others (Philips).
8. String Quartets 20-22: **Quatuor Mosaïques** (Naive).
9. Piano Sonatas 1-18: **Mitsuko Uchida** (Decca).
10. Requiem: **John Eliot Gardiner, English Baroque** (Decca).
11. *Best Mozart 100* (Warner Classics).
12. *Yehudi Menuhin Conducts Mozart* – 5 CD bargain (EMI).
13. *The Very Best of Mozart* (Naxos).
14. *The Very Best of Mozart* (Virgin).
15. *Amadeus: The Essential Mozart Collection* (Philips).
16. *The Mozart Collection* (Sony).
17. *Mozart: The Singles* (Decca).

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Beethoven, who was born in Bonn, was initially trained in music by his father Johann who also beat him, but when Johann descended into alcoholism the teenager became the virtual head of the family. Eventually he left and settled in Vienna, where he was taught by Haydn but claimed that he never learned anything from him. He soon established himself as an outstanding pianist. Then, from as early as 1797, he began to be troubled by hearing difficulties. He contemplated suicide in 1802 but through sheer strength of will decided that it was impossible to leave the world “until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me”.

What was within him was one of the supreme creative geniuses of history, up there with Michelangelo, Leonardo and the mastermind behind Shakespeare. Before him, western music tended to place style over substance. Much of it is tuneful and well crafted but emotionally reticent. In short, secular classical music before Beethoven was conservative and narrow in its ambitions. He freed music from its earlier constraints and it would never be the same again. A key aspect of his ultimate superiority was his radical originality in reaching dramatic and emotional depths within the classical form.



The following recordings are, as with Mozart, selective.

1. Symphony No 3 (*Eroica*): **Cleveland Orchestra conducted by George Szell** (Sony).
2. Symphony Nos 1-4, 7, 8: **London Classical Players conducted by Roger Norrington** (Virgin).
3. Symphony Nos 5, 7: **Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Carlos Kleiber** (DG).
4. Symphony Nos 5-8: **L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande conducted by Ernest Ansermet** (Decca Eloquence).
5. Symphony No 9: **Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Herbert von Karajan** (1977, DG).
6. Symphony No 9: **L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande conducted by Ernest Ansermet** (Decca Eloquence).
7. Piano Concertos No 5; Grosse Fugue in B Flat, op 133: **Stephen Kovacevich, Australian Chamber Orch.** (EMI).
8. Piano Concertos Nos 1-5: **Alfred Brendel, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Simon Rattle** (Philips).
9. Violin Concerto; Romances: **Arthur Grumiaux, New Philharmonia conducted by Alceo Galliera, etc** (Philips).
10. Violin Concerto: **Yehudi Menuhin, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler** (1954, EMI).
11. Piano Trios: **Vladimir Ashkenazy, Lynn Harrell, Itzhak Perlman** (Warner Classics).
12. Piano Sonatas (all 32): **Stephen Kovacevich** (EMI).
13. *Beethoven: Favourite Piano Sonatas*: **Alfred Brendel** (Decca).
14. String Quartets (complete): **Quartetto Italiano** (Decca).
15. String Quartets, Op18: **Tokyo Quartet** (Harmonia Mundi).
16. Late String Quartets: **Takács Quartet** (Decca).
17. Late String Quartets: **Busch Quartet** (Warner Classics).
18. Bagatelles: **Alfred Brendel** (Philips). Beautifully Shaped.
19. Diabelli Variations: **Mitsuko Uchida** (Decca). Just out.
20. Complete Violin Sonatas: **Isabelle Faust, Alexander Melnikov** (Harmonia Mundi).

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Born in a suburb of Vienna, the son of a schoolmaster, Schubert could play several instruments by the age of 10. He was taught, among others, by Salieri, who declared him a genius. At first he followed his father's profession but could not keep discipline in class and was more interested in composing music. During his short lifetime of 31 years he composed more than 600 songs, as well as symphonies, chamber music, piano sonatas, and much more. As with Mozart and Beethoven, his later years saw him reaching ever higher levels of achievement. His death was officially attributed to typhoid fever but some historians think that it was syphilis. Some also suggest the he was gay or bisexual.



1. Symphony No 8 (*Unfinished*): **Cleveland Orchestra conducted by George Szell** (Sony) – powerful, perfectly paced.
2. String Quintet in C: **Stern, Schneider, Katims, Tortelier, Casals** (Sony) – incomparable.
3. Piano Quintet (*Trout*), String Quartet (*Death and the Maiden*): **Clifford Curzon, Vienna Octet** (Decca).
4. String Quartets: **Belcea Quartet** (EMI)
5. Piano Trios: **Beaux Arts Trio, Grumiaux Trio** (Philips).
6. Impromptus: **Maria João Pires** (DG).
7. *Die Schöne Müllerin*: **Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Gerald Moore** (EMI).
8. *Die Schöne Müllerin*: **Bostridge, Johnson** (Hyperion).
9. *Schwanengesang*: **Goerne, Brendel** (Decca).
10. *Winterreise*: **Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Jörg Demus** (DG).

EDITOR

Football Crazy

SOME PEOPLE think football is a matter of life and death. I can assure you, it's much more serious than that". The famous remark of Liverpool's legendary manager Bill Shankly is demonstrated every week by millions of football fans cheering on their favourite team.

If you despise football and can't see the point of all that energy wasted on 22 men and a bag of wind, then sometimes you must feel like the loneliest person in the world. But to the musically deaf a violin is only four strings attached to a piece of wood. And Shankly was right – football is indeed the new religion.

It engages people in a mass display of faith and collective strength. And it has all the trappings of religion in that the players are the gods, the opposing teams are the devils, the stands are the pews, the anthems are the hymns. Followers make pilgrimages to its sacred temples like the San Siro, the Bernabeu or Wembley. And they often pray for miracles, like England winning a penalty shoot-out. In Argentina, there is even the Hand of God Church, a religion dedicated to the worship of Diego Maradona.

The similarities run deeper. Soccer offers the same kind of communion and transcendence that religion has always provided. For we should be clear that religion is not just about belief and dogma. The Latin verb 'religare', from which the word may derive, means to connect or bind. Religion has served the function of giving people a sense of belonging, identity and purpose for thousands of years. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim maintained that



the power of society over the individual so transcends individual existence that people collectively give it sacred significance. In worshipping God people are worshipping the power of the collective over all – they are worshipping society.

Yet religion is in long-term decline in the UK and Europe. Less than half the population of Britain now belong to any religion, and a recent Manchester University study found that parents have only a 50-50 chance of passing on religious belief to their offspring. Are young people becoming faithless heathens, or are they finding alternative gods?

European teams are prominent in the World Cup and of course there is also a European Cup competition. Is it because football has replaced Christianity as the religion of the masses in those countries? Perhaps the passion for the sport builds on a void at the heart of our existence in a society of fragmenting communities where more and more people feel alienated and alone. For millions, football would seem to be the heart of a heartless society in the same way that, according to Karl Marx, religion once was.

Of course, Marx also described religion as the opium of the people, a drug which blunted their critical faculties. Stripped of its spiritual trappings, religion as he saw it was little more than a powerful agent of social control. The same may be true of football, and it is sad that people who are capable of clinically analysing the deficiencies of management in their failing team do not exercise their brain on a similar dissection of the world's defective economic and political system.

On balance, perhaps, the gains outweigh the losses. Yes, football stirs up belligerent nationalism and xenophobia. Yes, it is often accompanied by hooliganism, riots and foul language. Yes, the World Cup is an orgy of tribal feelings. Yes, there IS too much football on TV. Yet, by and large, today's organised game channels these emotions into relatively peaceful paths, unlike the havoc that has often been wreaked in the name of religion.

And the game often subverts these negative emotions. Fans everywhere can appreciate the skills and poetry of Ronaldo or Messi. And the diverse make-up of many national teams themselves are the ultimate answers to the racism of Marine le Pen or the National Front. It is surely the beautiful game's ultimate humanist triumph that, in the final of World Cups, about a third of the human race are glued to their TV sets supporting France or Germany or Brazil – in most cases someone else's country.

Yes, there is cheating in football. Yes, there is racism. Yes, there is rampant commercialism. Yes, some teams are financed by ruthless dictators or oligarchs. But serious attempts are now addressing racism and sexism in the game, so some progress is being made, though sponsorship and salaries clearly need to be urgently tackled.

On a flippant note, we shall leave the last words to the singer Bjork: *"Football is a fertility festival. Eleven sperm trying to get into the egg. I feel sorry for the goalkeeper"*.

EDITOR

THE UKRAINE WAR

The news media said more Ukrainians were shot dead
Leaving us all in shock
Over 4 million had to flee from Putin to safe refuge
Such news has stopped every clock
So many injured and bombed from their homes
As I sip my coffee and cry
Asking for answers and none have made sense
Just for the Russian Flag to fly
Putin has blood on his hands these innocents will have their day
Putin cant keep fuelling his planes, and as they land
Showing no mercy, as a War Criminal before the court he will stand
We can't sit and allow such murders to take place
While for years the Russians found for their dirty money
A safe and secure place
London was calling London would serve
Now these decisions makers may be invited to exit
Getting what they truly deserve

Rosaleen Rogers (Dr)
5 Glenvarna Court Newtownabbey,
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TESTAMENT

When I die,
let me rest, let me lie
amidst Ukraine's broad steppes. Let me see
the endless fields and steep slopes I hold so dear.
Let me hear
the Dnipro's great roar.
And when the blood
of Ukraine's foes flows
into the blue waters of the sea, that's when I'll forget
the fields and hills
and leave it all
and pray to God.
Until then, I know no God.
So bury me, rise up,
and break your chains.
Water your freedom
with the blood of oppressors.
And then remember me
with gentle whispers
and kind words
in the great family
of the newly free.



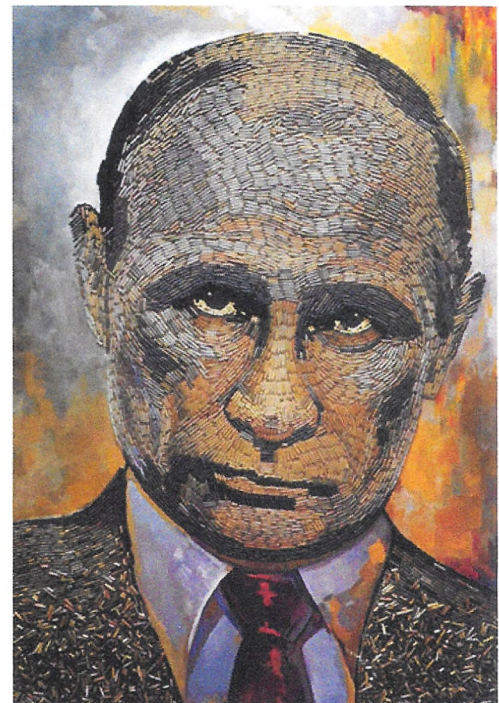
Taras Shevchenko (1814-61)
Translated by Alexander J. Motyl



Street artist MyDogSighs from Southsea in Hampshire: "I do not have influence apart from using my art to make people stop and think"



Tom Booth



The Face of War, a portrait of Vladimir Putin created by Daria Marchenko using bullet shells.