

Suffolk Humanists and Secularists

Newsletter November 2017

"Speaking Darwinian"

Tuesday 14th November, 7:30 p.m.
"Speaking Darwinian".

by George Bethell.....

"Since the publication of 'On the Origin of Species' in 1859, the scientific, religious and lay communities have had to find ways to describe and explain Darwin's ideas. Constrained by a language which evolved (sic) to reflect and serve a human-centric worldview we often make mistakes. This short talk looks at the difficulty of 'speaking Darwinian'."

As usual we meet in the Darwin Room, Arlington's Brasserie, Museum St., Ipswich

Our October meeting on "Scientology and Going Clear"

At this meeting, John Mellis introduced us to the Church of Scientology – a religion that makes the Mormons look positively sane. Invented by the successful pulp fiction writer and failed US Navy captain, L Ron Hubbard, Scientology builds on Hubbard's pseudo-scientific theory of 'Dianetics'. His seminal, and commercially successful, self-help book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* suggests that emotional problems are caused by bad memories or 'engrams' which can be revealed and 'cleared' through a process of 'auditing'. From these seemingly innocuous roots, Hubbard developed his ideas into a spiritual theory that became Scientology. Amongst the weird and wonderful beliefs of Scientologists is the idea that each "human is an immortal alien spiritual being, termed a 'thetan', that is presently trapped on planet Earth in a physical 'meat body'" (Wikipedia).

According to Hubbard, humans can achieve spiritual awareness and release hidden abilities through the processes of auditing and clearing provided, at considerable cost, by the Church of Scientology. So far so good...

John then used excerpts from the HBO documentary *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief* to reveal the darker side of the Scientology cult. This describes how celebrities – most notably John Travolta and Tom Cruise – interact with the church. It also includes testimonies of ex-members as to the abuse that they saw and experienced within the organisation, now headed by Hubbard's successor David Miscavige. The reaction to John's thought provoking presentation was a strange mixture of incredulity and uneasiness. We wanted to laugh at the ridiculous aspects of the history and beliefs of Scientology but, at the same time, we were chilled by the dark power wielded by demagogues and their cults.

Since our last meeting, the BBC has shown Louis Theroux's film, *My Scientology Movie* in which he works with disaffected former members of the church to recreate, using actors, some of the more unsavoury practices alleged to have taken place within the organisation's Gold Base headquarters in California. It paints a dark picture of David Miscavige's paranoia and the resulting abuse of senior Scientologists at the base. It also highlights the harassment of apostates and the extreme lengths that the church will go to discredit any critic – including Louis Theroux! The film is well worth a watch and is available on the BBC iPlayer till Tuesday, 5th December.

Report by George Bethell

Do you still get the News by Post?

At our recent committee meeting we not only began planning our full programme for next year which we hope to publish next month but also reviewed our communications with members.

You have probably noticed that over the past year you have been receiving Newsletters every month - usually a few days before meetings. At the same time the Newsletters have been generally fairly brief, typically a couple of pages reporting on past and upcoming meetings for the benefit of those who cannot make them.

Next year we hope to change this slightly. The monthly version - a bulletin - will continue summarising past meetings and informing/reminding members of future meetings and events. We will then supplement this with a quarterly Newsletter containing more 'in depth' articles.

This of course relies upon members contributing ideas and articles and if you feel able to contribute either a newsworthy or general interest article we would be glad to receive contributions.

Also on communications....

Most of you reading this receive this by email which is both quick and almost at zero cost but I still send out a few dozen copies by post. Obviously many still prefer the posted version and some do not have access to, or are unable to use electronic media.

If, however you are reading a paper version and would be happy to get this by email in future please let me know by emailing denisjohnston@btinternet.com.

Future meetings-

Tuesday 14th November: George Bethell: "Speaking Darwinian" (see front page)

December: We do not usually have a meeting in December because our usual venue at Arlingtons, is busy with Christmas parties - although this year we are exploring some other possibilities and will let you know. We do however take part in the annual United Nations Association event which will be held on Friday 8th December at 8:00 p.m. at the Unitarian Meeting House. It will be based upon Article 1.- 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood'. All welcome.

Monthly lunchtime meeting:

November: Saturday 25th

As usual at 12:00 noon at the Duke of York in Woodbridge.

Please let me know if you are going to attend by Thursday 23rd November.

email: denisjohnston@btinternet.com or phone 01394387462.

December: No lunchtime meeting

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