



Monday 7th May 2018
The Lion Hotel

Summary

o Introduction

There were 13 members of the Café Society group present at this bank holiday meeting. Apologies had been received from Tim D, Libby P, Margaret T, Viv S and Ken C. Thank you to Phil K for organising the drinks order. Phil K will not be present at the June and July meetings and it would be appreciated if a volunteer from the group would contact the coordinator Vivienne B to oversee the drinks orders. As we are once again short on future discussion topics, members are encouraged to forward suggestions to Vivienne B in advance of our next meeting. A summary of the meeting's discussions follows.

Mike S

o Discussion Topics

Do we have 'unreal' expectations of ourselves?

- The member who introduced this topic explained that in therapy counselling, the issue of expectations is commonly raised and often leads to disappointment
- It was noted that expectations can both help and hinder us but that general Buddhist philosophy would encourage the individual to 'expect nothing and find gratitude in everything'
- With this in mind, it was pointed out that we can learn just as much when our expectations are not met as when they are. Each time you have an experience in life, you learn something new and important about yourself
- It was (controversially) suggested that the universe keeps sending you messages until you are ready and willing to understand them
- Some members of the group felt that their levels of expectation had reduced over the years or that their outlooks had simply become more realistic. Having said that, with regards to world change and the bigger picture, most members believed their expectations were still high (and optimistic)
- Although there was some debate about the matter and certainly many isolated exceptions, it was generally agreed that the world is becoming a better place. Despite bigger armies and more devastating weapons, it was agreed that there are fewer wars, causing fewer deaths
- Nevertheless, individual happiness was thought to be on a decline with one in four British people subscribing to antidepressants. Is this due to expectations or social pressure and should society be medicalising unhappiness?
- Are our expectations for society simply too great? Shouldn't we be content to have an influence in our own sphere - within our friends and our families?
- The structure and flexibility of our education system was brought into question. Is it the educational conveyor belt that places too much emphasis on aspirations, aims and goals?
- The group decided that they had to 'just learn to let it go'

Can men be nursery teachers too?

- *This topic had been suggested in response to a BBC News article reporting that two in three council nursery services do not employ any men: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-43386250>*
- The report expanded on further statistics that 98% of these educators are female and that the starting salary is £18,000
- The group felt that the reasons for this situation were cultural, yet unhelpful. Role models from, and interaction with both genders was felt to be important, especially for those children who might not have exposure to both in their home environment
- The discussion expanded to other jobs and careers that have been dominated by one gender and the group believed that our society is making progress to address this unfairness

Can we change a system in which short term profits go to individuals whilst costs are placed on society as a whole or on future generations?

- This big topic was introduced in a small way. Potholes in the road were causing problems for drivers in a small community. The potholes weren't caused by the local drivers but by the big trucks from the giant companies (the likes of Amazon) delivering online purchases which were putting local shops out of business. Are we living in a society where all the profits go to the giants and all the problems and losses go to the individual?
- One opinion tabled was that we now live in an integrated world and that we have gone beyond the point where we can hope to fix a problem with the wheel, we have to try to fix the problem with the engine, or indeed the whole car
- Many group members reluctantly felt that this situation is inevitable as it is those with greatest amount of money and power that make the decisions. It was further believed that the gap between the decision-makers and everyone else is getting wider and it was quoted that a mere 65 people 'own' half the world
- Some members went as far as to say that capitalist societies actually depend on the injustice of a division between the rich and the poor
- Politicians were criticised for pursuing careers rather than a need to improve and govern and Margaret Thatcher's philosophy was questioned for implying that 'greed was good'. Sainsbury's boss Mike Coupe didn't impress members of the group after being caught on camera singing "We're in the Money": <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-43959687>
- There was additional discussion about the lack of accountability at high level in British society. In Iceland, it was pointed out that that bankers were put in jail for catastrophic financial failure whereas in the UK, their counterparts were rewarded with bonuses
- A group member made the point that human nature often compels us to argue for what we personally seek to gain and that the more one has, the more one believes they deserve it

A London hospital has banned patients from wearing pyjamas during the day in order to speed up their return home. Is this progress?

- *This topic was introduced in relation to news about an initiative to get hospital patients more mobile during their stay as inpatients: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-43793896>*
- The group was quick to dismiss the topic as being over sensational. Members who had done their own research explained that the 'End Pyjama Paralysis' campaign had good intentions and was not intended as a way to speed-up patient discharge
- After a short discussion, it was agreed that this could be a good policy

Will you be signing off Facebook after the data mis-use scandal?

- *This topic was introduced in relation to the international data misuse by Facebook and Cambridge Analytica: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-43465968>*
- Since the eruption of the scandal, it was noted that news articles have reported that Facebook's popularity and reputation has actually prospered
- Most members of the group declared that they make use of social-media services like Facebook (only one didn't at all)
- Group members had contrasting thoughts about what they thought was right to publish on social media. Some members thought it inappropriate to post pictures of children while others specifically made use the likes of Facebook to see grandchildren
- There was general unclarity about the way social media sites function in that some group members were not certain about 'who can see what'
- In response to the question, "What does Facebook know about you?", a group member replied, "What you tell it" - explaining that Facebook doesn't fabricate your personal information, so if you don't want to broadcast it, don't
- In a climate of clampdown regarding data privacy, the group couldn't really come to conclusion as to whether the public is becoming warier or more negligent about sharing their personal information via social-media

Can torture ever be justified?

- *This topic was introduced as a last-minute time-filler*
- The group's immediate reaction was "No", but then...
- Hypothetical scenarios were introduced. What if a child had been kidnapped and the abductor was in custody? If the life of the child could be saved, would torture be an acceptable means of achieving this? If the location of a bomb could be extracted by torture and a whole building of people could be saved, should we start water-boarding?
- There was some discussion about the definition of torture (imprisonment, for example)
- The majority of the group believed that torture is unacceptable as it would be engaging in the same behaviour that was trying to be eradicated but there were strong opinions for both sides of the argument

What book has had a big influence on your life?

- *This topic was introduced as a last-minute time-filler*
- 'The Book Thief' (Markus Zusak) was the first to be mentioned. "It upset me," said a group member, "it gave me an understanding of what German people, and others, suffered during the war"
- 'Of Mice and Men' (John Steinbeck) was mentioned
- The Bible was listed. Described by a group member as, "being with you forever"
- 'The Pillars of the Earth' (Ken Follett) was nominated as a great story of human lives
- 'The Machine Stops' (E.M.Forster) was cited as a visionary short story being highly relevant in today's artificially intelligent world
- 'Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind' (Yuval Noah Harari) was put forward by one group member as "a book that changed my understanding of life"
- 'Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine' (Gail Honeyman) was suggested as a great story about coping with life

○ Future Topics

Below is a list of topics that have been forwarded for future discussion. If you have any additional suggestions, especially last-minute topical issues, please email vivienne.barker@gmail.com

- We have run out of topics again - please forward your suggestions to the group coordinator

○ Next Meeting

The next Café Society meeting will be on Monday 4th June 2018 at 10.00am at The Lion Hotel (Tudor Bar room).

