



Monday 1st August 2016

The Lion Hotel

Minutes

o Introduction

Libby sent her apologies.

Members present were:

Pam, Margaret H, Margaret T, Viv S, Viv B, Helen, Marilyn, Ken, Harold, Sue and Irene.

Harold reminded us that several members withdraw to the Coach and Horses pub after our meetings to enjoy a light lunch and that everyone is welcome.

o Discussion Topics

A short summary of the subjects and discussions follows:

Can drones replace delivery vans?

- A topical subject as recent news tells us that a pizza firm in London have started delivering by use of robots or UAVs (unattended. Automatic vehicles) and that Amazon have announced they can soon deliver orders straight to your home using drones within 30 minutes. They are aimed at landing mats which recipients install in their gardens which means that residents of flats will need to make other arrangements.
- As yet there are very few rules regarding drones apart from having to be within sight and drones are already hitting planes in flight and dropping in private gardens. They can be used to take intrusive photos too.
- It is not much reported but drones are already being used surreptitiously to bomb areas in the Middle East. Since there are no 'feet on the ground' they are hardly mentioned.
- On the other hand, they could be very useful in remote areas to deliver goods at a much lower cost than by road. Even the GPO could make excellent use of them - although this would mean fewer jobs. They are a boon to farmers, enabling them to oversee the state of their fields.
- As usual, with any new invention, they are pluses and minuses. Used sensibly, they could be very useful but they will certainly not help stall the move to online shopping. Harold pointed out that research shows shopping locally results in 50p – 70p of every

pound staying in the local community whereas shopping online makes only 5p in the pound for the local community.

Democracy? Is there a better system?

- Denise introduced the topic and said that it interested her because she remembers Yugoslavia under Tito the dictator, where, after years of war, death and destruction, where 'democracy' was said to have been established, we have a fragmented group of states still badly-ruled and probably worse than under Tito. Other members weighed in with similar examples in the Middle East and Northern Africa.
- Marilyn cited Turkey as a good example of the moment. Erdogan the President isn't popular and seems to want more and more power yet he quelled the recent military coup and the West realise they need him to maintain order and certainty in Turkey which is the principal buffer between the West and the Islamic East.
- Perhaps democracy can be described as an evolved political system of governance, which cannot be forced upon societies which are not ready for them. If democracy is introduced too quickly, it can become a 'regressive democracy' in which the population are still influenced by early belief systems.
- Even in our own western democracies, there are different ways of interpreting the 'government of the people, by the people and for the people'. We have just had a referendum in the UK, in which the majority of the people who voted, voted to exit the European Union. A referendum is a right to vote by each individual, so this is an example of participatory democracy. Nevertheless, there is an outcry to have another referendum, because a lot of people are not happy with the result.
- The voting system at election times can vary. Here in the UK, we vote for an MP in our locality, who is supposed to be charged with representing our views. This is representative democracy. However, at parliament, the MP is affiliated to a party which largely dictates which way the MP should vote.
- Furthermore, ministers appear to have the power to institute or change practices without the approval of parliament. Michael Gove made sweeping changes to Education and Chris Grayling to prison practices in this way.
- Denise summed up by saying that we were having two discussions: one about introducing democracy in place of dictatorship, and the other about 'evolved democracy'.
- Even a well-evolved democracy is far from perfect. As Churchill said, 'Democracy isn't a good system, but I don't know of a better one'.

Euthanasia / Is eternal life desirable?

- Pam kicked off with a quote from Stevie Smith. '*Thank God for death! Where would life be without it?*'
- Followed by a recent experience of Ken's where there was an old lady of nearly 100 years old in hospital, blind and in a coma and with an infection. The doctor was not going to give her antibiotics. Was this euthanasia? No-everyone agreed, because there was no action made – death was simply allowed to happen. One person observed that withholding medication can cause pain, which is an unnecessary cruelty in this sort of circumstance. Euthanasia means 'good death'.

- Margaret H felt it was appalling that people have to go to Switzerland and pay a lot of money for this 'good' death.
- However, whilst everyone seemed to feel that some humane means of ending life painlessly when the patient is ready, is the kindest and most dignified way to end life (when it doesn't happen naturally), we were all aware that killing someone is a huge decision and may be motivated by all sorts of evil feelings. Margaret T told us that an Age UK survey showed that greed was the biggest motivation of abuse of the old. So, protection is needed. One way forward may be to have a local tribunal give a decision, so that one person does not shoulder all the responsibility.
- As for 'eternal life' – the idea was received rather cynically. No-one wanted an eternal life on earth, sadly, as they felt that the world was not improving – quite the opposite – a few members felt that life for their children and grandchildren will go from bad to worse with global warming, escalating wars, and a weak economy in the UK where they won't be able to buy a home. As for eternal life after death, the prospect of sitting on a cloud for ever didn't seem remotely exciting.

Which should have priority on a bus – a wheelchair or a pushchair?

- This subject arose because of an incident on a bus where a mother with a buggy in the one place set aside for disabled, refused to move when a wheelchaired person wanted to get on the bus.
- A child can always be picked up and carried by its parent but there is no alternative for the person in the wheelchair.
- The discussion was fairly evenly-balanced but we ended up deciding there should be more places for the disabled and for buggies anyway as these are proportionately large sections of society who use the bus services.

○ Future Topics

- Drugs and the Olympic Games
- What is the purpose of art?
- Do we choose who we love?

If you have any more to offer, please email me at:

vivienne.barker@gmail.com

○ Next Meeting

The next Café Society meeting will be on Monday 5th September 2016 at 10.00am at The Lion Hotel (Tudor Bar room).