



Monday 2nd October 2017
The Lion Hotel

Summary

o Introduction

There were 13 members of the Café Society group present at the meeting including one prospective member. A summary of the meeting's discussions follows. Thank you to Phil K for organising the drinks order.

Mike S

o Discussion Topics

Should IVF treatment be available on the NHS?

- The topic was introduced with initial opinions that this type of treatment was a personal issue and the NHS was under demand more crucial services. It was pointed out that the qualification criteria for such treatment was subject to age requirements and varied across regions in the country, with some areas restricting the length of the treatment
- An argument was put forward that the condition of being unable to produce children was a disease and the question was asked whether the wish to have children was a human right. In cases where other medical conditions or diseases were preventing the conception of babies, it was questioned if it seemed fair for the NHS to ignore the treatment when smokers and drinkers are routinely provided with health care
- It was highlighted that, of all the criteria used to determine the suitability of IVF treatment, the suitability of the applicants as potential parents is not currently considered. On the other hand, members of the group reported that it has become increasingly difficult to qualify for this treatment on the NHS as the hurdles keep getting higher and higher
- Comparisons were made to cosmetic surgery and members thought that a decision about IVF treatment was a similar dilemma. "Is the treatment necessary?", being the question in hand. If someone was considered disfigured or to be in a distressing situation, for example, then cosmetic surgery might well be considered correct NHS treatment. The organisation NICE was mentioned as the advisory body for overall NHS treatment policy recommendations
- The problem that this issue was 'money determined' caused concern for the group and this matter was raised several times. The general feeling was that decisions like this should come down to ethics not money and that it would indeed be unfair if those with money could access this treatment whereas those without could not

Was it acceptable for police to pay a rapist to inform on a gang of sex criminals?

- The topic was opened with the question, "Which would you prefer - serious crime or convictions?"
- A group member highlighted the word 'rapist' and pointed out that the sensitivity of this issue revolved around the seriousness of the witness' crime rather than the issue of money being paid

- The custom of offering rewards for bank robberies and financial crime was mentioned as a comparable practise
- It was pointed out that members of the underworld who provide critical information might be putting themselves at great risk and that financial compensation might well be necessary
- Another group member wondered whether financial rewards might set a precedence and generally encourage individuals not to provide information to the police unless there were financial benefits
- In general, the members of the group seemed to accept that this practise was acceptable

Should boys and girls wear the same school uniform?

- Although members of the group attended school at times when strict uniform policies were not in place, many thought that school uniforms were beneficial. It was thought that adhering to uniforms makes life easier for both parents and pupils and avoids the pressures of having to be fashionable and competitive
- France was quoted as an example of a country that doesn't enforce uniforms and the benefits and effects of such foreign approaches were merited
- It was widely thought that general guidelines about clothes, colours and styles were appropriate and old-fashioned practises of schools nominating a particular clothing supply shop or brands was unacceptable
- With regards to both genders having the same uniform policy, it was believed that there are huge arguments in favour of such methods and only one member of the group thought that boys and girls should be issued with different uniform policies

Two homeless men were charged with trapping pigeons to eat. Where do your sympathies lie? With the homeless men or with the pigeons?

- Members of the group were not aware that it was a crime to kill a pigeon but were advised that a vermin execution license is in fact required. This enlightening led to the raising of bigger questions like, "What kind of society do we want? Do we want rules" and, "To what extent do we want to be free-for-all or repressive?"
- It was noted that at the time of introduction, some rules and laws appear to be quite bureaucratic yet develop into strong morally-enforced etiquette like those concerning dog-fouling and smoking

A couple are charging their guests £150 each to attend their wedding. Is this going to catch on?

- Many members of the group were aware of similar practises used by couples who were getting married and didn't regard this as a particularly new trend. The group quoted several examples over the years where wedding guests had contributed or paid for food or accommodation in some manner and it was felt that such guests were usually happy to do so
- One group member however, had previously received a birthday party invitation which asked for a £20 contribution and the member thought that this was inappropriate. Many members of the group expressed the opinion that they would far prefer to contribute towards food and accommodation than to buy an expensive wedding gift
- The couple involved in the media story behind this topic were quoted to have said, "Everyone concentrates on the £150 but assuming we hadn't charged our guests in this way, they would have had to have spent much more than that on hotel bills"
- A member with church involvement commented that the most enjoyable weddings are often the simplest, smallest affairs. Some members thought that ostentatious wedding celebrations were a nonsense of a capitalistic society and that there will be a trend towards more discrete weddings in the future
- A group member fondly recalled her simple wedding which was followed by a weekend trip to Paris, all costing fourteen old pounds and sixpence

Should America get out of Afghanistan?

- The overall feeling on this topic was that the American government couldn't 'win' and that such tactics are not having the desired effect. "Can you win against an ideology/religion", was a question posed by a group member, "especially when the western world actively supports other extreme factions?"
- There was a great deal of discussion about the geography and history of this Middle East region and how territorial disputes have been ongoing for thousands of years. It was clarified that this isn't a fault of geography but a problem with human nature and the people who live in the area. A member suggested that a more modern reason for conflict and power lied behind the strategic positioning of the region regarding hydro-carbons, resources and pipelines
- It was noted that the US was not at war with Afghanistan as the presence of the American military was at the invitation of the Afghanistan government. It was also noted that the UK and other countries also have invited military presence
- Some members suggested that the presence of western military forces might be antagonistic and that the action of withdrawing troops might reduce the need for revenge aggression overseas. It was pointed out that on the day of the recent flawed tube bombing, western forces dropped 80 bombs in Afghanistan and the associated troubled countries
- Opinions about military action in Afghanistan were nevertheless quite divided and many members thought that they received very little information about such events, being bombarded instead by propaganda about Brexit
- The consensus on this topic was that there are no obvious answers and that society's mind-set needs altering with education – a process that might take hundreds of years

Will we need a hard border between Eire and Northern Ireland after Brexit?

- The group wasn't aware of the precise intentions for a European customs and immigration border between Eire and Northern Ireland but there was much speculation that it might be a high-tech, electronic system
- It was generally thought that it would be impractical to have a secure border without resorting to a 'Trump Wall' scenario. It was noted however, that the UK population voted for Brexit with immigration on their minds and presumably desired more secure borders

○ 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

- Should judges be allowed to let ex-offenders hide their criminal record from employers?
- Should Catalonia become independent from Spain?
- Is nationalism a positive thing?
- Is it more important to do work you enjoy or earn more money?
- Is church a positive factor in our society?
- Is it helpful or foolish to give money to street beggars?

○ Next Meeting

The next Café Society meeting will be on Monday 6th November at 10.00am at The Lion Hotel (Tudor Bar room). Ken C has kindly volunteered to compile the discussion summary at this next meeting.

