**Radlett and District U3A Philosophy Group** Notes from meeting April 2013
**Subject for discussion: -**
**As we cannot prove or disprove the existence of God, have we 'invented' God to provide us with a moral code?"**

The discussion tended to revolve around several main issues: -

1. The need for a moral code
Some felt that we need to have a belief as it gives us a moral code and invisible support. Others questioned that we need to believe in order to have a moral code and others questioned that we need a moral code at all.

2. The existence and nature of God
The group ranged in belief from atheist, through agnostic to strongly held belief. Some of the comments and questions raised were: -
What we believe in can be called anything, God is just a name.
We don't have to think of God as living in the clouds, but can see him in wonderful things.
Would God want humans to worship him?
We are made in God's image and morality is hardwired into humans and primates.
Why didn't God send his daughter?
Before people had scientific explanations for creation people invented God.
A huge proportion of this planet's population believes in some sort of god.
All of us are insecure. Not knowing brings anxiety and discomfort. We all need support.
We can never prove or disprove God. We need a core belief.
The older I am the less I understand.

One member, a scientist, explained his agnosticism along these lines:-
There are good and scientific reasons to believe in God. There are spiritual or mind qualities in nature. Quantum mechanics explains why communication is part of matter. Consciousness and self-reflection, maths science and music are not related to matter. In chimps these qualities are diminished. Amoeba has some consciousness and even viruses respond to the environment.

3. Morality and moral codes of other groups
Other groups considered included: -
Humanists who don't need a god; their morals are based on rights of self and others. They have trusted to the scientific method, evidence, and reason to discover truths about the universe and have placed human welfare and happiness at the centre of their ethical decision making.
Taoists who have no moral code preferring the individual; to be morally self-governing.
General points on morality included: -
Moral people may have different behaviours.
Our moral choices are controlled by the law of the land. This works against the religious argument against secularism.
Do we need laws?
Are there rules we should follow or are they guidelines?

4. Philosophers' ideas on the subject
Philosophers mentioned included:-
Aristotle whose moral teachings such as 'The Virtuous Life' were used by early Christians.
Lao Tzu in ancient China wrote on moral questions.
Spinoza said "By God I mean an absolutely infinite being, that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence"

David Humes (18thC) believed the presence of evil proved that God is either all powerful but not completely good or well-meaning but not all powerful.

Frankl said that man cannot live in a satisfactory way without a meaning for existence.

Richard Dawkins' idea called Memetics considers ideas evolving in the same way as organisms with the strongest surviving, but however wide and robust the idea is, it may still not correspond to reality.

## 5. The role of Religion

I don't need religion to believe in God

Religion is a comfortable club – or a bed of nails

Religion is often driven by fear.

Many seek power in the name of religion.

Religion and attachment theory are linked. There is community in religion.

It feels lonely to lose faith.

Church attenders do not necessarily have faith. There are a lot of hypocrites in churches.

Deathbed confession is not usual.

Religion brings conflict.

We don't need religion to have wars. Wars have much to do with male egos

There is always danger if any group adopts the attitude that they alone have the truth.

Where the 10 commandments written by Moses from God or was it a decision by the leaders to control the people?

## 6. The role of the family

We need some way of bringing up children. The way the family lives gives an example to follow. Families have a culture to pass on.

Where else but churches and synagogues do we get taught right and wrong? It should be the family.

We need to belong to a certain group as children, but can change as we get older. That group doesn't need to be religious it can be school or another organisation.

Schools tied to a church have entrance requirements for families to attend church. Some parents choose not to do this because of their principles, even though it means their children will not be able to attend that school. One family member had achieved huge unexpected solace through attending church because of a school's entry requirements.

Whilst no one's position on morality or the existence of God was altered, we had an interesting discussion that led us to consider how so many civilizations had come to such similar moral codes, with or without the aid of God. Despite these codes war and atrocities continue, whilst we as individuals try to lead moral lives that keep us able to sleep at night.