*Café Philo*

Tuesday 3rd July, 7.30 p.m.

The topic, introduced by Sir Christopher Frayling, formerly Chairman of the Arts Council and Rector of the Royal College of Art, will be:

*What good are the arts?*

There was a time when it was taken for granted that the arts were an essential part of culture, conceived “as a harmonious perfection”, as Matthew Arnold argued in *Culture and Anarchy* first published in book form in 1869. He thought “that beauty and sweetness are essential characters of a complete human perfection” and contrasted this with the primacy given by Mr Gladstone to “wealth and industrialism” and the “material well-being” of society. The failure of art and culture to prevent or diminish the horrors of Stalinism and Nazism led to despondency about the effectiveness of the arts in spreading Arnold’s “sweetness and light”, and gradually replaced the cultural optimism which had inspired so many admirable movements (like the Workers’ Educational Association) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An anarchic sense that the arts could neither improve nor damage humanity further encouraged a sense of bold experiment within established genres, from literature to public sculpture.

Yet, recent studies have found that poetry can help people cope with grief and stress; Shakespeare can open up new horizons to prisoners; music can soothe children traumatized by war; choirs can lift the spirits of men and women in deprived areas, and painting help victims express all their innermost anger. At the same time, many have protested that as education has become a “material” commodity in the market-place, so the arts risk being moved into the margins, with inadequate support and funding for music and drama in our schools. Should we return to a more traditional value placed on the arts?

To older questions about who should fund the arts has been added a profound debate about their value to individual human life and to society. Underlying the insistence on the importance of access by the most disadvantaged (expressed in the continuity of free museums and galleries) has been a sense that the arts are not simply another form of pleasure, like ice-cream or cake. The dissemination of culture beyond what is sometimes called the “metropolitan elite” is rightly seen as vital. If the arts are central to a civilized society, should we not, as a society, spend as much on them as on material well-being, aircraft-carriers and medicines? Museums and galleries have been inventive in making exhibitions attractive to children and informative for adults, but it all costs money. If we could recover our sense that literature is improving, art is enlightening and music the source of inner harmony, we might be more willing to set aside millions to promote and encourage the arts. We might at least be minded to keep the public libraries open.

So, what good are the arts? Should we return to a sense that they are improving? Is this another area where the public good has been privatized? How much value should society put on the arts, and how should we fund them?

The discussion will be chaired by Professor Gerard Kilroy.

In order to encourage a convivial atmosphere, wine will be available at a reduced price from 7.00 p.m., and the discussion, open to all, will start at 7.30 p.m. Entrance will be £2 for members of BRLSI, and £4 for non-members. ***BRLSI****:*

*[admin@brlsi.org](mailto:admin@brlsi.org )* 01225 312084.

PHILOSOPHY CAFÉ PHILO

Discussing

*What good are the arts?*

INTRODUCED BY SIR CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING



There was a time when belief in the beneficial effect of the arts could be taken for granted, but the last century saw a steady growth of scepticism about their effect. Should we return to a more traditional confidence in their power to influence individuals and society for good?

Chaired by Professor Gerard Kilroy

Tuesday 3rd July 2018, 7.30 p.m. Wine will be served from 7 p.m.