

The Society at its February meeting was honoured to be addressed by Lord Dick Taverne, author and member of the House of Lords who spoke on "The March of Unreason" which is also the title of one of his books.

Lord Taverne regards the worst aspect of what he considered the public ignorance of science is not knowing how science works and not realising its importance to our civilisation. Science relies on an evidence based approach and therefore is not based on intuition and subject to manipulation by politicians. Ignorance and prejudice cause much suffering in the world today. Lord Taverne believes that the rejection of GM crops for example is based on the dogmatic rejection of the overwhelming scientific evidence that they are safe. This opposition has delayed the introduction of crops that require less irrigation at a time when water will be one of the world's greatest problems due to global warming. With the need to feed 3 billion more people in the next few decades, the world needs every tool that science and technology can provide to improve the efficiency of agriculture. When considering organic food there is no scientific evidence that it is more nutritious. In fact the lower yields increase the acreage needed to provide the same amount of food and this cannot be sustainable.

Lord Taverne feels that society in general is ignorant of scientific principles and as a consequence the media distorts the facts. The negatives are accentuated and hype does not help. We tend to believe reports that confirm our prejudices. In his view the pharmaceutical companies should be respected for the good they have done rather than vilified. There appears to be a general anti-corporate feeling in this country.

In conclusion Lord Taverne urged society not to go back to nature but to embrace all that science has to offer to improve our civilisation.