

The Freethinker

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MOST CLERGYMEN still assert that the existence of a God can readily be proved by an appeal to reason. The two principal arguments they employ on this basis are the argument to a First Cause and the argument from Design in nature. But each of these ancient proofs of a God was long ago demonstrated to be unsound from a logical point of view.

The argument to a First Cause asserts that inasmuch as the universe could not have brought itself into being out of nothing, it must have been created or produced by a supreme intelligent being which has always existed. But we are not compelled by any necessity of logic to proceed in thought from natural causes to a first and uncaused cause which is supernatural. To say that a God produced the universe, or, rather, its fundamental substance, either out of nothing or out of himself is to account for a certain great wonder, which is obviously actual, in terms of another and much greater wonder which is merely *assumed* to be real. Is it more logical to say that the universe must have had a maker than it is to say in reply that, by the same logic, the supposed maker of the universe must also have been made?

"Design"
The argument from Design in nature postulates the existence of a supreme intelligent being who is the architect and engineer of the universe and the designer of all its inanimate objects and living organisms. It makes this assumption mainly because of the order that obtains in much of the observable universe, and because of the many living organisms on the Earth that exhibit a marvellous adaptation of structure and function to definite ends. But this argument for a deity offers, at most, a manipulator of mass-energy (or matter-energy), not a creator or producer of that fundamental substance of all living organisms and inanimate objects. Unlike the argument to a First Cause, it attempts to prove the reality of a supreme intelligent being or God from the *character*, not the existence of the universe. Hence the argument from Design in nature, like the argument to a First Cause, leaves it open to be maintained that the universe is self-evident, self-evolved, self-evolving, and self-sustained.

These two arguments in proof of a God are not only futile from a logical point of view, they also must be rejected because of what we know of natural objects and processes, both living and non-living; *for each of these arguments necessarily includes all that is bad as well as all that is good in nature.* Moreover, while there are many things in nature that scientists have not explained, there are many things in nature that scientists have explained, and in every instance the explanation has been along purely natural lines.

The atheist freely admits his never-ceasing wonder that the universe exists. How is it that there is this *something* instead of nothing? No one knows. But the physicist has demonstrated that matter-energy (or mass-energy), the

basic substance of all natural objects and processes, is indestructible, and, as the great American atheist Robert G. Ingersoll said, that which cannot be destroyed is unlikely to have been created. It is therefore both illogical and absurd to assume that the universe had a maker notwithstanding its many features, both inanimate and animate, which are hopelessly irreconcilable with the belief in a God that is supremely wise and good and powerful. This

holds true not only of the belief in a God that is "impersonal" and omnipresent but also of the belief in a God that is omnipresent and also "personal", that is to say, a bodiless intelligence that sees without eyes, hears without ears,

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

An Atheist Speaks —on U S Radio

By ROBERT H. SCOTT

and thinks without a brain!

As proof that there is a God, Colonel John Glenn, the first American to orbit the Earth, has pointed, first, to the orderly revolution of the Sun and billions of other stars round the centre of gravity of our particular galaxy or "island universe"; second, to the orderly revolution of the nine planets of the solar system round the Sun; and, third, to the orderly revolution of electrons round the nuclei of the countless atoms of the galaxy and the solar system. All this, he has said, is part of "a definite plan" that shows "that there is a God, a power that put all this in orbit and keeps it there".

"Order"

Colonel Glenn is universally and deservedly admired for his heroic and outstandingly competent exploit in outer space; but his argument for the existence of a God is seen to be worthless under the rigorous scrutiny of reason and the impartial light of science. It is true that there is an orderly revolution of suns and planets and satellite-electrons throughout the observable universe, but it also is true that an overwhelming majority of astronomers, astrophysicists, and physicists of the first rank do not believe that this order proves, or indicates, the existence of a God, either "personal" or "impersonal".

Physical scientists of the first rank know that most of the order in the observable universe serves no demonstrably useful purpose and that therefore any part of that order which is of benefit, either actually or potentially, to human beings or other living organisms may not be intentional. They also know that the galaxy, including that part of it called the solar system, contains a vast amount of *disorder*. Some of that disorder is seen in the catastrophic collisions or explosions of stars or suns. Some of it consists of asteroids, meteors, comets, and other celestial debris; and some of it takes the form of massively destructive earthquakes, storms, and floods. To say that the order which obtains in the observable universe is proof of a God is to invite the embarrassing question: "What, then, is proved by its disorder?"

The greater astronomers and astrophysicists know that, given gravitation and billions of years of evolution, along with the fact that like causes necessarily produce like effects, cosmic order on a vast scale and in great variety

would inevitably result, even though devoid of meaning or utility. The present form of the Milky Way system which is our own "island universe", including the solar system, is the necessary outcome of billions of years of interplay, counterplay, and adjustments of innumerable gaseous and solid masses, both large and small. The billions of suns and planets and satellites that move in orderly orbits within the galaxy are not "guided". Their orbits were not "laid out". Those orbits are simply the ones which have survived the great elimination-contest in time's stellar arena, a contest that was and is wholly blind and mechanical.

True it is that the scientist speaks of "natural laws"; but, as every scientist knows, the various uniformities or regularities we call natural laws do not prove or even imply a lawmaker. As every scientist knows, the term "natural law" is nothing more than a convenient formula or statement for an observed invariable behaviour, physical or biological, which occurs under like conditions, a behaviour which is invariable simply because like causes necessarily produce like effects.

It is because natural laws, so called, are not God-made laws that mankind is frequently scourged by storm and flood; by earthquake and drought, and by various other natural evils which, impartially, afflict or destroy the God-believer as well as the atheist, the babe as well as the parent.

Nature's biological realm furnishes even stronger evidence than does its inorganic domain, that no God exists, either as a "personal" or as an "impersonal" power. Biological evolution involved and still involves an appalling amount of atrocious suffering. It has brought forth upon the Earth many creatures that must kill and feed upon other creatures in order to live. This is because natural selection, not supernatural selection, has operated, as Charles Darwin proved, in the production of species. As Darwin showed, every living species on the Earth, including the human race, had its origin in a process of evolution, through many millions of centuries, in which natural selection, by preserving favourable genetic variations of structure or function, determined which plants and animals should survive. And, because natural selection is a blind, unconscious, automatic process, the phrase "survival of the fittest" has the meaning only of "fittest for the environment".

Truly, when one reflects open-mindedly upon the past and present end-results of the Earth's biological process and the nature of the evolutionary agencies that brought them about, it is easy to understand why Darwin wrote in a letter to the botanist Joseph Hooker: "I can see no evidence of . . . design of any kind in the details of the universe".

He who says that evolution, both inorganic and organic, has been and is purposive and therefore that there is a God, almost invariably points to the admirable, the beautiful, the beneficial, and the orderly in nature as proof of his contention. He does not realise, or he pretends not to see, that the opposites of these qualities in nature are at least as convincing proof or evidence that no God exists. The atheist, however, sees with equal clarity *both* sides of existence. He knows that *any* world, if it were habitable by human beings, would necessarily exhibit these various contrasts and contradictions if it had been moulded by unguided energies and materials. Science and reason and human experience combine to tell us that, apart from the purposive actions of human beings, evolution has always been a ruthless, aimless, unconscious, non-moral process. Purpose is a *product* of evolution, not its cause.

The evangelist Billy Graham has said: "The evidences of the fact of God are so overwhelming that only a fool will deny his existence". It is certain that the man who made that inexcusably discourteous assertion had not consulted beforehand a number of leading scientists. Thomas Jefferson himself, though he lived at a time when science was still in its infancy, did not find "overwhelming evidences" that there is a God either "personal" or "impersonal". In a letter to his young nephew, Peter Carr, on August 10th, 1787, Jefferson, who rejected as false the supernatural doctrines of Christianity; who did not believe that the Bible is or contains God's revelation to mankind, and who, in his later years, came close to being an atheist, gave his nephew the following advice: "Question with boldness even the existence of a God. because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear".

The phenomenon called life is a result of evolution. Practically all living biochemists agree that this is so. After all, considering the manner, the known details, and the end-results of biological evolution on the Earth, it is a logical conclusion, to say the least, that life had a natural origin.

One of the natural evils that serve most to discredit the belief in a God is the fact that lower animals as well as human beings may suffer greatly and undeservedly. It may be true that the disease and hardships and sufferings of non-human beings are not so great and not so varied as our own, they are none the less real. The clergy tell us that much of human suffering is intended for man's moral discipline and improvement in preparation for a better life to come, but it is obvious that none of the lower animals is capable of being thus benefited and, notwithstanding the well-established fact that man and the ape have a common ancestry, very few clergymen have suggested that some of the lower animals, if not all, will have an after-life.

The most gruesome feature of animate nature is the killing and feeding upon certain forms of animal life by certain other living organisms, frequently with the accompaniment of atrocious suffering. Many God-believers justify this ghastly fact as being necessary to preserve what they call "the balance of nature", but it is certain that while no God would be human, any God, if completely good, would be humane. Most certainly such a being, in order to preserve "the balance of nature", so called, would not resort to the hideous device of tooth and claw, a procedure which has as one of its most distressing spectacles the dreadful running crouch of a hungry lion to place itself for its assassin's leap. Most certainly such a God would have employed the simpler and painless alternative of limiting the reproductive capacity or ratio of animal organisms on the land and in the sea that commonly reproduce their kinds to excess.

Another of the several natural evils that serve most to discredit the belief in a God is the presence on the Earth of the bacillus of the deadly bubonic plague. In Europe in the 14th century, in the space of only thirty-four years, this terrible pestilence, which was appropriately called the "Black Death", killed more than twenty-five million people. Throughout recorded human history it has taken a toll of more than 150 million lives. And it was owing to medical science alone, not to intervention by a god, that this murderous plague, with its several attendant horrors, has been localised and controlled.

While natural evils testify that there is no supreme intelligent being or God, either "personal" or "impersonal",

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Contemporary China

By F. A. RIDLEY

ABOUT THE BEGINNING of the present century, the late Dr. Sun-Yat-Sen, then an exile in Malaya, but nowadays revered as the father (or perhaps, stepfather) of present-day China, gave an interview to a Western journalist. Hair-raising speeches were being made by the Kaiser *et al.*, about the imminence of a Chinese onslaught upon the West, "the Yellow Peril". When, asked what he thought about this "peril", the future President of the Chinese Republic responded that he had never heard of any "Yellow Peril", nor had he any information about any past invasion of Europe by Chinese armies or fleets. For the previous half-century, he and his countrymen had been too busy attending to "the White Peril" on their own doorstep.

That both Sun-Yat-Sen's contention and that of the Western pessimists whom he criticised, were supported by historic facts or by authentic contemporary probabilities, is lucidly indicated by the eminent orientalist and rationalist, Dr. Victor Purcell, in a recently published book, *China* (Ernest Benn, 37s. 6d.). In this heavily documented summary, the author, a former civil servant in China and Malaya, and at present lecturer in Far Eastern history at Cambridge, gives us an illuminating survey of past Chinese evolution and developments in the present Communist regime, under the dynamic guidance of Mao-Tse-Tung.

To all present appearances and—or so I would gather—in Dr. Purcell's own view also, this regime has come to stay. But whatever may be the views of the Chinese leaders upon the feasibility of continued co-existence with the bourgeois West (and on this point there are said to be differences between Mr. Khrushchev and the present leaders of the Chinese Communist movement) it seems indisputable that, under Communist leadership, and for the first time in its millennial history, China is at long last emerging from the medieval into the modern world.

In my (and Dr. Purcell's) youth, one recalls alarmist cartoons depicting China as the sleeping giant straining at his Western-imposed bonds. Now that the giant is actually awake, the future of China, the oldest surviving civilisation, the most populous and hard-working population in the present-day world, is surely a matter of immense importance to us all. Will the "Yellow Peril", military, atomic or economic, ever become translated from the realm of scared anticipation into that of actual future fact?

Students of China will find most of their queries answered in Dr. Purcell's pages, containing a précis of Chinese affairs from Confucius to the victory of the Comintern in 1949 and its aftermath. Indeed, Confucius (to whom our author only briefly alludes, but whose basic ideas will be familiar to readers of this paper from the recent series of articles by Mr. Adrian Pigott) is quite a modern figure in Chinese annals. For what is 500 BC—when the Chinese sage flourished—compared with the vast antiquity of the prehistoric Peking man whose mortal remains as first excavated by Fr. Teilhard de Chardin, SJ (presumably a better palaeontologist than theologian) also figure along with other heroes of Chinese pre-history in Dr. Purcell's vastly learned but (if a reviewer stunned by an author's super-erudition may venture one timid criticism), at times over-loaded pages?

For the only valid criticism that I can think up as relevant to Dr. Purcell's encyclopedic summary of practically

every phase of the Chinese scene, is that he crowds so many relevant and informative facts into his pages that it is at times a trifle difficult to see the wood on account of the multitudinous trees conjured up in this one-volume survey.

Incidentally, the famous dictum of Karl Marx (who, in a kind of non-theological trinity along with Lenin and Mao, has now effectively superseded Confucius as China's national prophet) that history repeats itself first as tragedy and then as farce, is amusingly exemplified in the beginning and end of the 2,000-year-old Chinese Empire which began (c 300 BC) with the erection of that most stupendous collective creation of pre-industrial technique, the Great Wall (still stated to be perhaps the only human creation visible from the moon) and ended with the comic opera career of Pu-Yi, the still surviving last Manchu Emperor of China who having succeeded to the Dragon Throne (at the ripe age of 2) in 1908, was deposed by the Chinese Revolution in 1910; was reinstated by the invading Japanese as Emperor of Manchuria in the 1930s; was imprisoned by the Communist regime after 1949 and recently wrote a humble letter of apology (upon his release) to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist party thanking them for "re-educating him" in Socialism!

Truth is stranger than fiction. This Chinese emperor surely outshines Sir W. S. Gilbert's Japanese Mikado—or even perhaps, the present Mikado, who has been transformed via the agency of American atomic bombs in 1945, from a prehistoric deity into a democrat! However, as Dr. Purcell demonstrates, the continuity for so many centuries of the Chinese Empire and civilisation, was ultimately due to the continuous existence of a class (or rather caste) of non-hereditary mandarins, a kind of permanent civil service recruited by examinations in the Chinese classics, who ensured the stability of China through intermittent foreign conquests and repeated dynastic changes.

Dr. Purcell deals mainly with China's Red present, rather than with her merely yellow past. He gives us a great deal of relevant data respecting the present Chinese regime, and upon its present herculean—and according to our authority—largely successful contemporary efforts to clean up the Augean stables of medieval inefficiency and corruption. He makes an interesting comparison between the conception and practice of personal freedom in the West, the Free World, and that actually operative within the Communist universe, including China—a comparison which would not, we fear, please the John Birch Society, or even President Kennedy. For freedom is, after all, a relative term. As Pascal remarked, "Truth differs on either side of the Pyrenees".

A point of particular interest to modern humanists which Dr. Purcell discusses in some detail, is the controversial problem of over-population, particularly apposite to China (present estimated population around 700,000,000) as the most populous country in the world. According to the Chinese Prime Minister, Mr. Chou-En-Lai, this problem is not immediately urgent in a still only partly-developed Chinese terrain, but when all the available space is used up, no doubt the Chinese Communists will apply Marxist theory to the Malthusian problem: i.e. by solving problems only when they become urgent. Unless a world war intervenes to solve this problem, one

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This Believing World

One of the Roman Church's show pieces was the more or less well known Therese Neuman, a Bavarian peasant who, every Easter proudly bore the "stigmata", that is, wounds on her hands and feet and one on her body exactly like those which Jesus must have suffered—if the story of the Crucifixion is true. Although Therese is said to have shunned publicity, everybody knew what happened, though often the stigmata appeared on ordinary Fridays as well. Therese died on September 18th, but no doubt her case will be considered and reconsidered by her Church. She may even become a recognised saint.

★

As far as it is possible to say for we have no first-hand information, Therese was considered by doctors to be a classical case of "hysteria", and the power of mind over the body. But who are the doctors who say this? We do not know. In reporting her death, the *Daily Mail* says, "No one ever doubted her personal sincerity nor the fact of the wounds that appeared". But does anybody in the Roman Church doubt Bernadette's sincerity about Lourdes? Did "sceptical" doctors ever examine Therese, or were the doctors always Roman Catholics?

★

It will be a dreadful blow to all good Christians if the proposed life of Buddha really will be screened. So far it has always been the life of Christ, with or without Jesus appearing, but a rival "Lord"—the Lord Buddha—means that a good deal of publicity which so far Jesus has almost uniquely obtained, will have to be shared. The papers will be full of the difficulties of finding the right actor to portray such a holy Prince as Buddha—or, just as some people say *the* Christ, should it be *the* Buddha?

★

In the past riots occurred when a producer tried to film the life of Buddha in Ceylon, but it is doubtful if any will occur now. For one thing, this later producer is going to "spotlight" Buddha's head so as to show that he is a Holy Man. Well, from the way Buddhists always prostrate themselves before a statue of Buddha, there is no doubt—for them—he really is a Holy Man. Just like Jesus.

★

We were not, unfortunately, able to listen to the broadcast address from Radio Luxembourg, September 21st last, at 7 p.m., but it must have been thrilling. It was called "The Lutheran Hour", and no doubt it was meant to bring Christians into unity with Lutherism, which in England is hardly known. The address was, "Bringing Christ to the Nations", which has so far failed after nearly 2000 years of indoctrination. But what is more intriguing is that its title was "Faith for the Space Age". Well, why not? After all, did not both Jesus and Mary traverse the "heavens" to be with God Almighty, not as mere man has to do if he wants to go "up there" in a space ship, but by merely flying "upwards"? Is it not a fact that now Jesus can add to his many other titles—the greatest of all Spacemen?

★

We wonder what Christians have to say in reply to the article in *The People* for September 23rd? There in a bold headline, we have, "Christian Landlords—but they show so little mercy", and in the article is, "When it comes to the precious possession of a house, I am forced to the conclusion that Christian principles often count very little among landlords". Note—not "so-called" Christian landlords, but the real thing. And why should anybody be surprised? In the past, there isn't a century of our era which isn't packed with what G. W. Foote called the "Crimes

of Christianity". And leopards simply can't change their spots.

★

Once again, all champions of the Design Argument used by all Theists—Jews, Christians, Unitarians, Buddhists and other believers—as the one infallible argument for the existence of God, have the chance to explain the tragic havoc of the floods in Barcelona, where more than 1,000 people have died, or have been injured, together with the loss of millions of pounds worth of their property. After all, God must have "designed" these floods, or caused conditions which brought them about, leading to such a heartbreaking loss of life. Why is it that when floods, earthquakes, tempests, and volcanoes do their worst in destroying human beings and their towns and cities our pious religious leaders are so silent about the Design Argument?

CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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must assume that China will inevitably end by combining Malthusian practice with Marxist theory.

In the closely related problem of the emancipation of women from a medieval to a modern social status, the Chinese Communists are seeking to free women from the domestic drudgery that has enslaved them down the ages, by co-operative schemes of associated labour, which are now taking shape in the system of communes—autonomous economic units set up under governmental supervision and staffed by voluntary labour. Labour which is actually voluntary in, at any rate, the vast majority of cases.

Not only is Chinese civilisation the oldest surviving in the world, but it would also be probably true to say that China has usually been the greatest world power. Medieval travellers like Marco Polo, were astounded at the wealth and power of the Chinese Empire. The present re-emergence of China as a modern great power after the century of defeat and humiliation inflicted upon her by European Imperialism armed with the techniques of the Industrial Revolution, constitutes assuredly an event of the greatest significance for the present and still more for the future of the world. Dr. Purcell's book, written by an expert who has collected his facts not only from books, but from first-hand knowledge of the Far East where he lived for so long, represents an invaluable précis of the present as well as of the past Chinese scene and of its attendant problems. It represents a contribution to contemporary world history that no one interested in current problems—and what Freethinker is not?—can afford to miss. I recommend it without reserve.

[Next week, Mr. Ridley will offer his first thoughts on the Council of Rome.]

WITHOUT COMMENT

As a Christian nation can we not have a day of prayer to be directed on this great question of whether or not to enter the Common Market?—Letter in the *Evening News* (27/9/62.)

SPECIAL OFFER

Rome or Reason by R. G. Ingersoll.

Thomas Paine, by Chapman Cohen

Marriage: Sacerdotal or Secular, by C. G. L. Du Cann.

Robert Taylor and What is the Sabbath Day? by H. Cutner.

From Jewish Messianism to the Christian Church

by Prosper Alfarcic

Chronology of British Secularism by G. H. Taylor

Lift Up Your Heads (Anthology for Freethinkers) by W. Kent.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. P. MURACCIOLE, J. A. MILLAR (Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch NSS (Platt Fields), Sunday afternoons. (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

INDOOR

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, October 16th, 7.30 p.m.: DR. F. H. HILLIARD, "Teaching Children About World Religions".

Ilford Humanist Group (Friends Meeting House, Cleveland Road, Ilford), Monday, October 15th, 7.45 p.m.: J. B. COATES, "Personalism and Existentialism".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 14th, 6.30 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "The Twist".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, October 14th, 7.30 p.m.: D. H. TRIBE, "Science and Secularism".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, October 14th, 11 a.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, "The Divided Self—A Study in Self-Deception".

Notes and News

"It is notorious that agnostics, sceptics and scoffers are rarely offered the freedom of the microphone. Yet it is equally notorious—as churchmen themselves admit—that England is crowded with agnostics, sceptics and scoffers". This is a brief excerpt from J. B. Priestley's brilliantly perceptive essay on the BBC, the latest of his "Walks round Topside" (*New Statesman*, 28/9/62), which followed an equally penetrating article on the Church of England. Topside, Mr. Priestley continued, "is Christian in a gentlemanly sort of way, thoroughly English and none of your Middle Eastern mystical nonsense. And in this matter, as in many others, the BBC takes the Topside line. It is the Voice of Britain—but not my Britain and probably not yours, really a small, smug, complacent, central Britain in black coats and striped trousers, Top chaps".

★

IN THE United States things are rather different, though often as difficult. But for our Views and Opinions this week we print a slightly abbreviated version of Robert H. Scott's broadcast over the Californian radio station, KEEN of San José. It is reprinted by courtesy of Mr.

Scott and the American Freethought paper, *Progressive World*, in whose September issue it first appeared. Mr. Scott made a previous atheist broadcast over a San Francisco radio station in 1946, thereby causing lively nationwide discussion. This second broadcast is the culmination of untiring efforts to gain freedom of the air in the USA for unbelievers.

★

MR. SCOTT later reported that not one of the many letters and postcards that he received after the broadcast was disapproving. Indeed, all but two were "highly commendatory", and those two were requests for copies of the talk or for the source of statements made therein.

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AND NOW, we can announce an atheist broadcast in Britain. On Wednesday, October 31st at 9.30 p.m. on the BBC Home Service, Colin McCall, Secretary of the National Secular Society and Editor of THE FREETHINKER, will appear in the programme, "What's the Idea?", when he will be questioned on "Atheism" by two Christians. The discussion will be live and unscripted, and Mr. McCall assures us that he will not be wearing black coat or striped trousers.

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THE HUMANIST COUNCIL has arranged a meeting in the Library of the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1, on Monday, October 29th at 7.15 p.m., when members of the Ethical Union, National Secular Society and Rationalist Press Association will hear details of two projects for the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, originated and sponsored by Humanists. They are in Bihar (India) and Bechuanaland, and if approved will represent the Humanist movement's contribution to the Campaign.

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DESPITE THE MANY outbursts of American senators and representatives against the now famous US Supreme Court prayer decision, the "Prayer Room" is (according to *The Montreal Star*, 22/9/62) "one of the least-used rooms in the honeycombed capitol". Set aside in 1955 "to provide a quiet place to which individual senators and representatives may withdraw a while to seek Divine strength and guidance", it is much quieter than intended. "Its thick, blue carpet is scarcely worn", and on a day when two reporters kept vigil, and when both chambers were in session (with a total membership of 537), "not a single representative or senator came for the 'private meditation and prayer' for which the room was designed".

★

SPAIN, we read in the *Daily Herald* (1/10/62), has "ended a two-month blockade which threatened 6,000 inhabitants of the little Pyrenean state of Andorra with starvation". The reason for the blockade? The Spanish bishop who shares the "throne" of Andorra with the French President was "annoyed by plans for an elected Parliament".

★

WE READILY sympathise with the ex-Roman Catholic priest, Father Alexander Rea, now married to one of his parishioners, in refusing to open the door of his caravan near King's Lynn to inquisitive callers (*The Guardian*, 5/10/62). We have some appreciation of the problems involved in leaving the priesthood and starting a new life. There are now fortunately, a number of organisations specifically designed to help in the difficult adjustment, and we hope that Mr. and Mrs. Rea will be able to get in touch with one of them. For ourselves, we offer our sincere good wishes for their future happiness.

An Atheist Speaks on US Radio

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such testimony is borne with even greater force by the grievous sufferings and injustices which have resulted from human ignorance, human prejudices, and human bigotry. One of these man-made evils was the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, an instrument of coercion which, for more than five centuries, imprisoned, tortured, and burned alive men and women for the imaginary crime of "heresy". Another of these man-made evils was the witchcraft persecution in Western Europe from the beginning of the 15th century to the close of the 17th, a three-hundred year period of mass-terror, mass-mania and unreasoning ferocity during which several million persons, mostly women and girls, were savagely tortured and put to death. Still another of these man-made evils was the systematic killing of millions of European Jews of all ages and both sexes during the Second World War. No God would have allowed, if he could have prevented, these three monstrous man-made evils. To believe otherwise is to sacrifice good sense, sound logic, and compassion on the altar of a hypothetical deity.

Let no believer in a merciful and omnipotent God say to me in justification of the shocking array of natural and man-made evils of the present and the past: "God's thoughts are not our thoughts nor his ways our ways". This time-worn biblical argument rests on the mistake of pre-supposing that a God exists. And let no apologist for natural and man-made evils say to me: "God is all-wise and all-good but is not all-powerful". A deity who could not, within the space of billions of years, have made a much better world than the one in which we live, and, on the whole, much better human beings, would have too little power to justify the undertaking.

Many persons say that the Bible, at least in part, is God's revelation to mankind, but this belief is disproved by the Bible itself. The Bible contains numerous self-contradictions and discrepancies. It contains various statements which are irreconcilable with modern science. It contains many accounts of barbarous cruelties and injustices which the allegedly existing God is said to have committed or ordered or approved or condoned.

That the Bible is not in any part or in any sense a God-made book is made all the more certain by the fact that the tortures and killings of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages and of the associated witchcraft persecution were justified by the inquisitors and witch-persecutors on the authority of certain biblical verses. Truly, considering the combined array of natural and man-made evils of past and present, the fact that no God has ever in any way made himself unmistakably known to every man and woman of sound mind in every generation amounts, I submit, to positive proof that there is no such being.

To say that there is no God is also to say, of course, that there is for human beings no life after death, either with or without a physical body. But why should any intelligent person wish for himself or herself or for anyone else a post-mortem existence? After all, there is great consolation in the knowledge that an everlasting extinction of one's personal self would be equivalent to a dreamless sleep with no awakening. To die thus is to become as one who is unconceived, for a post-mortem non-existence can be no different from a pre-natal non-existence. And the unconceived have no need and no wish for life even on the best of terms.

It need not be feared that world-wide atheism would result in world-wide moral decadence. Avowed atheists

and even avowed agnostics are rarely to be found in prisons and reformatories. All but one or two of the many men who, after the Second World War, were put to death for war crimes or crimes against humanity made professions of religious faith shortly before they were executed. Adolf Eichmann himself said on the scaffold: "I have believed in God all my life, and I die a believer in God".

Atheists have, on the whole a splendid record of service to their fellow men. One such atheist was Culbert L. Olson, who made a distinguished record as a Governor of California and who had an enlightened and active social conscience. Among other unbelievers who were or who are a credit to the human race, there may be named the Roman emperor Hadrian and Pericles of Athens; Mark Twain and Henry L. Mencken; Guiseppe Garibaldi and Simon Bolivar; Clarence Darrow and Maynard Shipley; Robert G. Ingersoll and Charles Bradlaugh; Fridtjof Nansen and Bertrand Russell; J. B. S. Haldane and John Burroughs; Ellen Key and Vashti Cromwell McCollum; Charles F. Steinmetz and John Dewey; Marie Curie and Frances Darusmont; Pierre Curie and Ernst Haeckel; Ernestine Louise Rose and Mathilde Blind; Francisco Ferrer and Benito Pablo Juarez; Georges Clemenceau and Kemal Ataturk; Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Mao-Tse-Tung; Robert Owen and George William Foote; Alexie Gorky and Julian S. Huxley; Emile Zola and "Lawrence of Arabia".

Russia today is governed throughout by atheists and, as Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt said upon her return from a visit to Moscow and vicinity in 1956: "All that is good in the life of the ordinary Russians has happened to them since the Revolution". Moreover, the Russian people as a whole are demonstrating for all the rest of the world to see that atheism is a sound basis for good social behaviour and personal character. This is evident to the evangelist Billy Graham himself. Shortly upon his return from Moscow in 1959 he said: "I have found that the Russian people have a high standard of morals, especially in regard to sex", and that "Russia's current crime record is better than that of the United States".

When the militant atheist is asked what he has to offer in place of the religious hopes and convictions he would destroy, it would be enough for him to reply that to free a person from error is to give, not take away. The militant atheist uses the cleansing waters of science and reason to wash away the accumulated misconceptions, principally religious, that clog the brain of the average adult human being and seriously retard human progress.

There are, however, several greatly needed social reforms that would be put into practice by mankind as a result of a general repudiation of the God-belief and the immortality hope. The greatest of these reforms is the legalisation of voluntary medical euthanasia, a "mercy death" which would be given to free a person from intolerable physical suffering for which there is no present remedy. It would be a peaceful and painless release from life, at the request of the sufferer, with, to be sure, suitable safeguards against fraud and abuse. And, of course, this forward-looking humanitarian reform would be extended to include infants that are incurably blind or irremediably deformed or who have grave cerebral deficiencies.

Dr. Pamplin's Dilemma

By COLIN McCALL

DR. BRIAN R. PAMPLIN has kindly sent me a copy of the second edition of his *Draft for the Book of Creation* (The Paperback, 36 Saddler Street, Durham, 2s. 6d., plus postage), which caused such a sensation in religious circles, and which I commented on in THE FREETHINKER (July 6th). The first edition had been sold out, and I wrote on the basis of the newspapers reports, but now, with the text before me, I see no reason to alter my view.

Dr. Pamplin wrote here last week, that it was not his intention to rewrite the Bible, but to encourage people to want to read it. Yet he went on to say that it needed "editing and rewriting in the modern idiom", and his booklet is, in fact, an attempt to bring Genesis up to date; to reconcile it with science. Of course, the task is impossible. "I have chosen the language of the Old Testament—the prophetic idiom", he says in his introduction. "This is emphatically not the language of science, thus science in this account has been necessarily distorted".

But it is not merely the biblical (or Authorised Version) language that is responsible for the distortion, it is the incompatibility of the ideas of evolution and creation, of nature and God. His book is, he tells us, "an attempt to unify two very different kinds of Truth—revealed and discovered". But it is really an attempt to reconcile truth and error, which just can't be done. At best, "the Spirit of God" moving "through the Universe" is superfluous; and the trinitarian "Love, Reason and Truth" and "Light, Energy and Matter", inaccurate. "The Word and the Spirit", who bring "order, symmetry and beauty into the systems of the physical world" are scientifically meaningless. And whereas the biblical form sometimes *sounds* all right, as:

In the beginning God thought out the pattern of creation, or
And the Universe was formless, void and dark,
there are times when it is less successful.

Dr. Pamplin admits that the origin of sin presents a "major difficulty", and that the story of Adam and Eve is "quite unacceptable scientifically". For him, "original sin stems from our animal nature". Yet this is, presumably, the "nature" that God gave us, for Dr. Pamplin told us last week that he finds it "very difficult to believe in the Devil". So God is responsible for sin.

Dr. Pamplin is "sure that it is God's plan that evolution should ultimately, lead up to the perfect spiritual man in the perfect world"—a "New Jerusalem" here on earth with the Lamb on the throne", though "it seems that this End is still a great way off". Not only is it a great way off, it is unattainable. For the problem of evil—or better, the problem of pain—concerns not only man, but all sentient animals (though only man recognises it as a problem, because only man posits a god). The lion will never lie down with the lamb—or with the Lamb. One might induce *one* lion to do so with *one* lamb in a circus, but another lamb will have to be killed to feed even that lion. Carnivores are carnivores, and that is that. If Dr. Pamplin believes in creation, he must accept that they were created that way, and can live no other. And he should ask, not only *why* an almighty Creator, a perfect being, should make things that way, but *how* He could: how omnipotent perfection could create imperfection. There is only one way out of Dr. Pamplin's dilemma: to surrender the belief in God.

PENGUIN REFERENCE BOOKS

Roget's Thesaurus, 6s. plus 8d. postage.
The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations by J. M. and M. J. Cohen.
10s. 6d. plus 1s. postage.

CORRESPONDENCE

SPANISH APPEAL

We have received alarming news concerning the situation of the Spaniards detained in Madrid and Barcelona, accused of subversive activities. A Military Tribunal has demanded the death penalty for one of them, a young student. All of them are young libertarians (Youth Movement of the CNT).

These trials by Franco's regime are direct attempts against the freedom and dignity of the Spanish people. We are conscious of the reasons that allow the continuity of this regime, but we rely on the humanitarian feelings of those who defend the elementary rights of justice.

The young student, Jorge Conill Vall, is in danger.

We appeal to you and your friends to make every possible effort to save his life.

In solidarity with the Spanish people, we need your support, either using your known influence by writing to the Press, to the United Nations or any other means available.

A. RUIZ (Secretary),

Spanish Confederation of Labour (CNT) in Exile,
Relations in Great Britain, 84 Illex Rd., London, N.W.10.

NOT DEAD

As a former Atheist (and still a regular reader of your paper) I was interested in reading your comments on the so-called "dying" Church of St. Luke, Downham. By the grace of God I was converted by an Anglican mission to this church about a year ago and am one of the 40 members that make up the congregation. To my mind a church that still brings unbelievers back to the fold cannot be dead or dying. F. NEAL (Miss).

[We should be interested to learn Miss Neal's intellectual reasons, if any, for relinquishing atheism in favour of Anglicanism. ED.]

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

In answer to J. G. Goodwin's criticisms of "What Should Children Learn at School?" let me point out that the difficulties of teaching religion have never been concealed. The HMSO publication, *Primary Education*, speaking of the right of withdrawal of teachers, admits that the subject should be taught to young children by their form teacher, but "it is in the interests of the children to choose some other teacher rather than to entrust this responsibility to one whose reluctance springs from more than the natural diffidence which all must feel in this particular matter". Later, it confesses, when children ask "Did this really happen?" or "What really happened?", "difficulties are presented by the details of the various records". Agreed Syllabuses try to resolve them, but they vary from education authority to authority so that "it is a difficult subject on which to offer generally applicable suggestions". There must be "interpretation" or "doctrinal teaching", but it is supposed to be "undenominational". The largest Christian denomination—Catholic—and a number of fundamentalist Protestant denominations not surprisingly reject the possibility of this compromise. No wonder there is "wide diversity of expression" on "the end which it is intended to serve".

Religious education "is the only subject in which there is a binding syllabus prepared outside the school", yet the teaching scheme "must meet the needs of the school in terms of the time and teaching skill available". Though "religious education is the only one laid down as statutory, to be taught in all schools aided or maintained by the state" (*Religious Education in the Primary School*, by Norman Bull, MA, St. Luke's College, Exeter), "only a small minority of teachers will have made a serious academic study of the Bible at college" and so there will be much "diffidence which springs from ignorance" (*Primary Education*). The diffidence is unlikely to be dissolved by Mr. Bull, who has discovered in the Bible five different kinds of "truth"—history, legend, myth, fable, parable. Imagine teaching five different kinds of truth to a primary school child—likely to be even harder than teaching three kinds of God as a monotheism.

Mr. Goodwin's satisfaction is not shared by the Rev. John Gibbs, Vice-Principal and Chaplain, College of St. Mathias, Bristol, who in "Conviction the Key" (*Times Educational Supplement*, June 8th, 1962), finds "the alarm has already been sounded that all is not well with RI teaching in schools". Standards he says, "can be abysmal". Yet this indispensable conviction is supposed to be "objective" and "non-denominational", in perfect accord with the particular Agreed Syllabus laid down for the area taught in, and, according to Mr. Bull, avoiding "the passion for intelligibility" which school children have learnt to expect in other subjects. So pupils show, even to the Sermon on the Mount, "either no response at all or a lively barrage of awkward questions", according to Miss Margaret Avery, OBE, BA, STh, who suggests omitting this heritage (*Religious Education in the Secondary Modern School*), or they react with

