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HUMANIST HERO FOR OUR TIME

WHATEVER Christian propagandists (on or off the BBC) try to claim, one of the greatest men of our century, Fridtjof Nansen, was a Secular-Humanist. Proof? Well, who would know better than his daughter, Liv Nansen Hoyer.*

Nansen was born in 1861 of parents who had a "deep rooted Christian faith". His interests at school were divided between art, the sciences and philosophy. He settled for zoology, and by the age of 21 he was on his first voyage to the Arctic. It was as Keeper of Zoology at the Bergen Museum that he came under the influence of the Rationalist Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) and the Catholic apostate Louis Pasteur (1822-95). Nansen's Christian faith began to crumble.

"He wrote nothing of this in his letters home. To his father Christianity was truth, and there was no reason to hurt him by attacking it."

But Nansen wished that his father could have found more comfort in his religion. The melancholy old man (who had no opinions beyond those he found in the Bible) relied on his sons to cheer him up.

We may learn at school how Nansen crossed the Greenland icecap in 1888, about the "Fram", and about his North Polar expeditions in the 90's, but what of his personal philosophy? It was simple enough:

"The world was created without any actual purpose; people inherit their qualities, and their actions are dictated by instinct, emotions and needs. The mind is an insoluble part of all organic life. **God does not exist, and there is no life hereafter. There can be no purpose in life other than to use one's faculties and exploit one's opportunities for the benefit of future generations.**" His daughter continues, "His first reaction had been violent, and he had called himself an atheist. Later he used to say that he was an agnostic. He never ceased to seek further after truth . . ."

It was this attitude of mind that made him so attractive to Eva Sars, the singer, who was to become his wife. Nansen wanted only a civil marriage ceremony, but, although Eva supported him in this, they were married in church because of family pressure. Eva herself was no ordinary woman. A friend wrote that she was

"one of the very few people (and still fewer women) who never had a childish faith to contend with, and this had given her a

pagan innocence and a freedom from conscience, the effect of which was like a refreshing bath. She was upright and fearless, free of mysticism and of any suggestion of qualms of any kind".

Their first baby died. While her husband was away on his expeditions, Eva dedicated herself to her music. When he returned it was to nation-wide celebrations, one lasting expression of which was the "Nansen Fund" (for the encouragement of scientific research) to which Nansen bequeathed a quarter of his estate.

Nansen's part in Norway's struggle for independence from Sweden is also well known. He had by this time resigned from the State Church, and refused to rejoin it so that he could be made a Minister of State. In 1905 he was sent as the first Norwegian Ambassador to London. Nansen lectured as he travelled, speaking always against war and warning of the dangers, being "fairly severe", too, about "missionaries and the spread of civilisation". When Eva (who had stayed in Norway) heard that he was to lecture in London to the Political and Social League on "Science and Morality"—

"she was a little nervous . . . for she knew how radical and uncompromising he was in his belief that ethics and religious dogma belonged to two distinct spheres", and she warned him to be a "little careful. Don't irritate the English public too much . . . Remember that considerable weight is attached to what you say . . ."

In one of his lectures (published by the RPA in 1909) he claimed that "the religion of one age is, as a rule, the literary entertainment of the next".

Eva died while he was in England. Cremation was forbidden in Norway, so they took her body to Sweden. She has no grave, and only her husband knew where her ashes were scattered. Nansen's grief was overwhelming. "The sun has gone . . ." he wrote. For a while his introspection robbed him of purpose and security, but his daughter believed

"that these years when he felt so uncertain and took such a black view of everything, somehow paved the way for the humanitarian and humanistic work he was to undertake later."

And so Nansen returned to science, to the sea and to politics. He was soon to face personal suffering again when his youngest son died, a victim of congenital cerebral paralysis.

Liv Nansen Hoyer writes that "**the success of Nansen's work for the League of Nations can be attributed directly to his personal philosophy and to the administrative experience he had gained as scientist and polar explorer . . .**" In all his battles, whether they were against colonialism or slavery or war, Nansen called always for *action*—not words. But few men of action have had so much vision, imagination and compassion.

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REVIEW

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In 1920 Nansen was asked to organise the repatriation of the prisoners of war who were dying in their thousands in Russia, Siberia and Turkestan. "Nansen Help" was the Oxfam of his day, with its HQ in Berlin. After six months Nansen reported to the League that some 200,000 prisoners had been returned to their homes. In 1919 Nansen was forecasting the Russian famine that threatened the lives of nearly 30 million people two years later, and it was the "Nansen Mission" which was behind the Red Cross relief during that famine. After some member governments of the 1921 Brussels Conference had procrastinated (because they would not recognise the Soviets) Nansen did not hesitate to go to the League and blame the conference for the death of at least two million people in Russia. Nevertheless, Nansen himself was saddened by

"the way the Russians could never express their gratitude to him without at the same time attacking 'capitalism' and the League of Nations".

And he, of course, was condemned by some for being too much a friend of the Soviets! Nansen's work, however, was essentially for humanity and quite beyond the petty barriers of political propaganda.

Then there was the "Nansen Passport" of 1922, by which hundreds of thousands of refugees found a legal identity in a world where they were stateless and homeless. In that year Nansen received the Nobel Peace Prize. The 122,000 crowns (doubled by a generous Danish publisher) went to help refugees. Even after Nansen's death the Nobel Prize went to the "Nansen Office", which continued with his work.

Nansen's over-riding faith was in altruism:

"I see no other salvation for mankind", he wrote. "There has never been any scarcity of fine words, what we need is a

practical policy . . . Altruism is a practical policy—the only possible one . . . A cultured, social person feels instinctively not merely his right of self-assertion, but also his duty to others . . . Without altruism all real social life is unthinkable."

Nansen believed that the basis of all ethics was the love of truth. "Either we seek the truth and take the consequences," he said, "or we don't seek it". The only salvation for the world, he insisted, lay in the development of an international spirit without any double morality. In 1924 he called upon the universities to lead a movement to "educate the new generation to one morality only; the Christian morality of brotherhood and love of one's neighbour". His daughter writes:

"Many people took these and similar statements to mean that Father had 'been converted' after seeing the misery and suffering of the world. That is to misunderstand him. His philosophy remained unaltered, and if the difference between religion and ethics is appreciated, that is understandable . . ." she goes on, "his attitude was not just that of the scientist; his imagination was equally in league with the artist in him. He was very receptive to any form of beauty, to all good and tender feelings".

Fridtjof Nansen died aged 69 in 1930. There were no speeches at the crematorium, and no religious service, but there was music, Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" quartet.

If the label "Humanist" means (as I suggest it does) a person who not only rejects religious beliefs and condemns organised religion but who is, above all, a *whole* person, then Nansen can be singled out, even amongst the Humanist great. He loved and was beloved; he suffered and eased suffering; he was scientist, artist, philosopher; a man of action and of ideas and imagination. Few have been so rich in human qualities or so generous in their giving.

* *Nansen* by Liv Nansen Hoyer (Longmans Green & Co., 1957).

A DOG'S LIFE

David Collis

TODAY I heard a dog whining and scratching at the front door. I opened it and saw him, quivering, cringing away somewhat in apprehension. We are not allowed to have pets in the flat, so, rather than flirt with the impossible, I tried to persuade the creature to move on; move on to another point of rejection, too, perhaps, but what could I do about that?

Clearly I was not heartless enough. He sensed that if he looked at me steadfastly with sorrowful eyes he might win out. He did. He was still quivering, still apprehensive, and probably still hungry and thirsty when my wife appeared on the scene and Mother Superior took command. The dog entered the abode of humans and was given a pint of milk and some biscuits. No longer did he quiver. No longer was he apprehensive. He simply lavished his gratitude and concomitant affection with wagging tail, excited clawing paws and loving licks. He looked as though he had found home.

How do you tell a dog that he is living in a world of daydream, that this isn't paradise, that heaven is not to be his? And it's not just your problem, dog, it's mine. It's not just to be your sorrow, your heart-rending, mind-bending let-down, it's to be mine too. I just can't keep you.

Now if somebody had asked me at nine o'clock this morning, would I like a dog, the answer would have been No. Think of all the trouble, the mess, the preliminary chaos, the damaged possessions, the parting at holidays,

the amatory, copulating antics that breed more trouble, more chaos. Oh no, thank you very much. By the way, dog, are you a boy or a girl?

Hell, what does it matter? And in a way it is hell. Because now at ten o'clock I would like to keep you. Your sleekly black frame is full of affection, fun and frankness. You might, at the beginning at any rate, do the dirty in the lounge, but you would never do the dirty on me. And that alone means a lot in this world master-minded and soul-driven by humans who are difficult to trust, for good reason. You can be trusted to be faithful, given the chance. But, friendly affectionate dog, I cannot give you that chance, because I live in a flat.

You don't know what a flat is, do you? I mean, you don't understand the organisational difference between a flat and a house. In point of fact it's all the difference in the world for you. For you it may be the difference between life and death. You forget fear so quickly, don't you, and suspicion runs away as soon as you wag your tail. So what's the use of my explaining that you must probably die?

Look at it this way, man's best friend. Why were you scratching and whining at my door? Why are you so keen to stay with me now? Because your former owners have had enough from you. Perhaps it's like this. They saw you when you were a sweet tiny little puppy in a pet shop. And the kiddies said I'd love to have a little puppy like

that, Dad, and Mum thought isn't he cute, and Dad calculated it wouldn't cost much to feed, being so small, and it would keep the kids quiet, at least until the novelty wore off. And it's only thirty bob to buy. And the licence is only seven and a tanner. And in any case who's he to worry about taking out a licence? That was a year ago, trusting dog, and now you're bigger and cost more to feed, and you're no longer as cuddly or cute as you once were, and you no longer pamper to Mum's motherly feelings as you once did, and the kids have grown tired of you. Grass snakes now occupy their petty interest. And so you were excommunicated.

Oh, don't get me wrong. It wasn't because you had done anything bad. No. It was just that you were no longer wanted, you no longer fitted into the scheme of things. In short you were in the way and a nuisance. So here we are. You have no dog-collar with name tab so that your owners may be identified. You won't be claimed from the Lost Property Book, because you are a former possession they no longer want to own. And when you are put in that kennel with the mass of other dogs who have also outlived their man-made purpose in life, be realistic; what are your chances of being adopted by another two-legged, two-faced creature, let alone by a true-hearted human being?

It's no use. I put you outside the door, but you won't go away. You've sat there for hours now whining and still

A VENAL PRESS?

WHEN I WAS A MEMBER of the Ealing Parliament over 40 years ago, I heard the Editor of the local newspaper give a talk on corrupt practices in the press of that time, which made a deep and lasting impression. Years later this information was confirmed by a sub-editor on one of the National Dailies, who gave a specific illustration of the way a straightforward item of news might be "slanted" in a particular direction. Both men were speaking of facts within their own professional experience, and the burden of it was that some (though not all) English newspapers present news, and more particularly their comment, so as to suit their readers, and even more important, their advertisers' prejudices, or owners shareholdings.

In those days this was a serious handicap to the theoretical working of the democratic system. Its importance has been greatly reduced by the assumption by the BBC of the prime responsibility as the purveyor of reliable news. Here I should say that I have never heard any imputation made against the integrity of *The Times* in this respect.

One way in which newspapers tend to suppress free speech and free expression of opinion is in their "Letters to the Editor" column. They confine their limited space to chatty gossip about what little Willie said when he was four or the charms of a pet Poodle. This is quite an advanced technique in the art of editorial suppression, since to object to the content of the letters that do get printed is like fighting a feather pillow. Even in the "serious" national dailies and weeklies, such as the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, it is hard for any private person to get a letter published unless he is either a recognised authority or a PRO. A private person with no special claim stands little chance. Diane Munday of the Abortion Law Reform Association has said that she had

hoping. Come on, my four-legged bit of exploited flesh. We'd better get it over. Your stay at the police station will be brief. Soon you will no longer feel apprehensive, fearful. Soon you will no longer feel. You will be dead.

This tragedy does not appear in the Holy Bible, but it does have a moral of a sort. Invariably when the question of alleviating suffering by abortion or euthanasia crops up we hear pious outcries about the Will of God or the sanctity of human life. How many of these soul salvationists step forth to save the lives of animals? They step forth in the press and in the television studios to propagandize the masses. And they step forth in their Churches and Missions to master as much of mankind as they may by Feeding the Minds with threadbare platitudes from their pious hotchpotch of Holy Scriptures, paradoxes on the sanctity of human life abounding.

Don't forget, "The Lord is thy Keeper; the Lord is thy Shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore".

Most interesting. Most edifying. Most conducive to salvation. But since dogs don't have a soul to save, who cares about preserving them?

W. Bynner

to write 50 letters to the press before she could get one published. On the other hand I recently had a very different experience in writing to the American press about the war in Vietnam. The first letter I sent to the *Birmingham News*, Alabama, was published on August 16th, although I realised afterwards that I had omitted to make use of the obvious gambit that I am a native of their namesake city, Birmingham, England.

Is it really easier to get opinions published in America than in our own country? I don't know. The only letter I have had published in this country was in the *Bournemouth Echo* about the Aldermaston Marches; this I acknowledge with thanks, as the paper is Conservative in outlook.

The complete triviality of theme of the published material in the popular "Sundays" is really an insult to the intelligence of the readers. It also acts effectively as a ban on informed and serious discussion on matters of public concern. This has to some extent been remedied by the BBC's correspondence programme, but here the danger of censorship by selection is the obvious one to be avoided as well, as the more subtle one of the announcers' personal choice. It is all good clean hearty stuff which sometimes seems a little immature.

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The FREETHINKER, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1

NEWS AND NOTES

DID ANYONE in 1945 really imagine that Nazi-Fascism had been defeated? No matter what propagandists would have us believe, there never was any real war-time German "underground" of anti-fascism. The "plot against Hitler" was not a plot to end the war, but an attempt by a few Generals to run it and win it their way. The official processes of "de-nazification" provided no sound foundation for belief in a new German attitude of mind. This could clearly only come through gradual and essentially honest education, in which youth would learn exactly what had been done in the name of "racial purity". Only eight years ago it was not unusual to hear a German teenager asking, "Well, what would you British have done with all those Jews? We had to do *something*." Few Germans seemed conscious even then of the thousands of non-German DPs in Germany, waiting for compensation for what they had endured as slave labour or in Hitler's concentration camps; many of them are still waiting there today.

Der Spiegel (Nov. 7) reports that the National Democratic Party was founded in 1964. It aimed to please not only those who hanker for all they enjoyed under the Hitler régime, but also the young who have caught the nostalgia of their elders, and have not been given enough information to realise that it is suspect. Although history may not blindly "repeat itself", nevertheless, similar conditions, education and traditions can cause similar effects. The NPD is racialist and Protestant-led, although Franz Florian Winter was accused of being a Vatican spy because he stated that the party would be ruined by its "godless fanatics". His chief opponent was a theist, Eberhard Engelhardt, who left the church in 1936. In June this year, Winter demanded a declaration supporting "western Christian culture" while Engelhardt insisted that Christianity was the "greatest national misfortune that ever befell the German people" and resigned. A campaign was launched against Winter, which made much of the fact that his wife was "non-Aryan". His resignation was finally accepted because he argued strongly for Church schools while the NPD's policy is against them. History is clearly not just "repeating itself". Indeed, the Catholics (who have their own CDU/CSU parties to vote for) are not (as happened in the 30's) being told to vote for the NPD to keep out the socialists. And this may well be because of critics like Hochhuth who have given so much publicity to the RC responsibility for the massacre of six million Jews. And it is encouraging to read that so many students are staging demonstrations against the neo-Nazis. Anne Frank has not been forgotten. All those who stand firm against the drug of German nationalism that is again on the market, deserve all our support. To mix metaphors, it would be a pity to cry "wolf", but it will be infinitely more disastrous if we repeat any of our own blind mistakes of the 1900's and 1930's and allow the wolves to get anyone by the throat again. The spotlight must remain on Germany during the months and years to come.

Wogs are different . . .

"GIVE North Vietnam a basinful of bombs . . ." New Zealand's Defence Minister, Mr Dean Eyre (National Party) told an election meeting (*Guardian*, Nov. 24), "What about the children?" shouted a heckler? Mr Eyre replied, "We are not dealing with ourselves, we are dealing with oriental people. They are different from ourselves". Indeed they are. They are going through all the horrors

which we merely look back on or wonder if we shall see again in the future. They are being burned, sliced, tortured to death and mutilated by those "basinful" of bombs. Nothing whatsoever can be said in "defence" of Mr Eyre, or of the American policy he defends.

Atheist Allegro

DOCTOR John Allegro is called, by the *Sun* (Nov. 15), "the most powerful scourge of Christianity since Pontius Pilate", and he certainly came over magnificently on David Frost's programme. Allegro changed his mind about going into the Methodist church when he started learning Hebrew after the war. Having studied the Dead Sea Scrolls, he (like many Rationalists) doubts if the gospel Jesus ever existed at all, but *he*, at least may be taken seriously, because his is "parchment evidence". (What about making the teaching of Hebrew compulsory in schools?)

Enough to make anyone hysterical . . .

AN EPIDEMIC of dizziness, fainting and moaning which affected nearly 200 schoolgirls last year has been diagnosed as hysteria (the *Guardian*, Nov. 25). What brought it on? Well, the girls were from a school which

"prided itself on being seen to be Anglican, and went in a body to a service to which Royalty was to come. Royalty was late, and many of the girls, standing outside the church for as long as three hours, took to fainting. The idea caught on".

Bully for them . . .

The men of Switzerland decide

WHILE women in the UK have been fainting, standing for the Presidency of the Oxford Union, becoming Editor of the *Granta* and being elected as first woman secretary of the Cambridge Union Society, in Switzerland the all-male electorate have decided in their wisdom not to allow women the vote, by 107,773 votes to 93,372. Far too many Swiss women accepted their position of inferiority as inevitable, but then it must be absolute hell at home for those who don't. In a recent "Analysis of Slavery", Lord Sorenson said (talking of the Southern States of the USA)

"It is still mentally assumed . . . that certain human beings are inferior and therefore do not intrinsically possess the same rights as do their masters . . ."

Uncommon sense

PARENTAL repression and too many prohibitions and reproofs against "sin" in childhood can lead to racial prejudice, said Mr Kenneth Pease at a student conference in Manchester (*Guardian*, Nov. 21). One wonders how long it will be before this lesson is fully understood. Victims of the "heavy father" (be he traditional German or British Victorian) are the most likely to turn their bitterness against the minority groups of Jews, negroes (or just orientals and women).

The anti-clerical deity

"LAST YEAR in Durban a priest drowned while baptising new converts. The onlookers let him drown. They thought it must be an act of God . . ." (*Sunday Times*, Nov. 27).

The price of conversion

IT IS reckoned that only about 5,000 of Billy Graham's (sorry, Christ's) converts from last June have stayed converted, which works out at about £60 per head. The Crusade made a profit of £54,428 on a total income of £336,460; as a result, Britain has got to face the same old circus again in 1967. Americans called the last Crusade the "biggest TV hook-up outside a national disaster" in the States. What do they mean, "outside"?

THE RIGHT TO DIE

Michael Gray

LIFE is the most precious thing we possess. All people have the right to live, but, should life lose all its meaning, then they also have *the right to die*. This is one of the basic rights of Man, which society must recognise. It should be self-evident, but to the muddled, bemused minds of many it is not.

The Christian religion teaches that a man's life is not his own property to do with as he will, since it is a gift from God and only God has the right to take it away (though this does not prevent many Christians from clamouring for the re-introduction of capital punishment!) Christianity, therefore, offers to a person suffering from an incurable, agonising disease only one alternative to a lifetime of suffering in this world—the prospect of an eternity of suffering in the next as punishment for the "sin" of suicide.

The Atheist, having no irrational fears of vengeful gods or eternal hells, can see life as it should be seen—as the only existence known to Man. He wants a society based on human values and adopting humanitarian policies, *not* on policies dictated by the so-called Christian Ethic.

A great milestone in the history of the fight for freedom in Britain was reached with the 1961 Suicide Act, which brought to a successful conclusion the long and often bitter struggle to abrogate the arrogant law which branded suicide as a crime against society. The only crime in suicide is the crime of society against the individual for driving him to such an act. In his book *Suicide and Attempted Suicide* (Penguin Books, 3s 6d), Professor Erwin Stengel refers to E. Durkheim's monograph "Le Suicide" (published in 1897) as

"the most important sociological contribution to the problem" (of suicide) . . . "Durkheim's main principle was that social facts must be studied as realities external to the individual . . . Suicide, although apparently a highly personal act, was explicable only by the state of the society to which the individual belonged. Each society had a collective inclination to suicide expressed in the suicide rate, which tended to remain constant *as long as the character of the society did not change* (my italics). This inclination of the 'collective mind' influenced the individual and could coerce him to kill himself".

Although the law now recognises the right of the individual to take his own life, it still does not go far enough. If we concede Man's right to die, then how can we deny this right to those who are unable, either for physical or psychological reasons, to be the agent of their own death? Many people suffering from incurable diseases would rather die than groan on in pain; must they be condemned to a lifetime of intolerable suffering simply because they haven't the ability to end their own life?

Voluntary euthanasia

Opponents of euthanasia often try to propagate the myth that those who are in favour of it are advocating the indiscriminate slaughter of the sick and aged. Like the opponents of legal abortions they appeal to an emotional public for support by crying "murder!" This is as ridiculous as it is untrue. What is in fact being advocated is that those who live in unceasing pain may be given the chance to obtain the merciful release of death *if they wish it*. This is Voluntary Euthanasia, and it is merely the equivalent of suicide. The only real problem occurs in those cases where the sufferer is unable to make such an important decision for himself, e.g. in the case of children, or those unconscious of everything except perhaps the constant

torture in which they live. In these cases it would be necessary for expert medical opinion to be consulted as to whether there were any reasonable chance of recovery, and, if not, the permission of the next of kin obtained before the merciful act was performed.

Medical centres for would-be suicides

In a previous article Charles Hennis suggested that euthanasia might be extended to criminals serving a life sentence that really meant "life", if they wish it. I would go further and suggest that it should be made available to any adult person of sufficient intelligence to realise the magnitude of the decision he is making. Ideally, medical centres could be set up where people wishing to utilise this service of euthanasia could go, but only on condition that they agree to undergo a complete examination, physical and psychological. In this way potential suicides would be given the time and opportunity to reconsider, and many of their problems, real or imaginary, might well be solved under treatment. I believe that this would lower the suicide rate as well as present a human service to those who have a genuine need of the merciful release of death. Many who have committed suicide for what seem inadequate reasons might have been saved if psychiatric treatment had been available, especially for those who suffered from depressive illness (melancholia) which is the mental disorder with the highest suicidal risk. At the moment only a very small percentage of these cases get the treatment they so desperately need.

Common sense about doubts

It will no doubt be argued that making euthanasia available by request would increase the number of suicides, by providing an easy method. Professor Stengel writes "it is often thought that if a common poison or some other method of suicide were made unavailable, the suicide rate would markedly decline". But he refutes this idea by showing how in this event other methods simply take their place, and refers us to the city of Basle in Switzerland which "for a long time had a high incidence of suicide, with domestic gas at the head of the list of methods. Its detoxication a few years ago reduced the suicide rate only transiently. After a year it reverted to its previous high level, drowning having taken the place of gassing at the top of the list". It is a tragic fact that in Britain alone 5,500 people kill themselves every year, and a further 30-40 thousand at least attempt it. The great majority of these suicides *could have been avoided*, had the right treatment been available.

The first aim of Voluntary Euthanasia however must be to offer some other alternative to a life of suffering to those who are in this unfortunate position. Death is always a tragedy, since it means the total extinction of a human being. But compelling those whose lives can never be anything but hopeless travesties of life to go on living, is an even greater tragedy. A humanistic attitude must be adopted by any humanitarian society, and we must recognise that it is our duty to help to relieve the suffering of our fellow men wherever possible, not to prolong it. Every man has the right to choose to die, and it is the duty of society to respect that right. No man has the right to condemn another to death; what man then can claim the right to condemn him to an existence which can only be described as a living death?

SOME PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN ETHICS

Isobel Grahame

As a result of correspondence in the Observer, Isobel Grahame has drawn up the following summary:

THE TASK of formulating the principles on which correspondents seem to have based their suggestions for an up-to-date ethical code is formidable. With one exception there was general agreement that the Christian Bible's version of the Decalogue is now inadequate and misleading. A few put their faith in the "Golden Rule", but others think it capable of misinterpretation and even misrepresentation. Personally, I am a bit nervous at the prospect of having things done to me because somebody else likes having them done to him or her.

The actual suggestions submitted were too various and too specific for general human application in the form in which I received them, but there was a very definite trend underlying them, which I have endeavoured to condense into some basic and fundamental ethical statements of principle.

It seems rather naïve to expect a set of simple commandments to be capable of application to a complex and sophisticated civilisation. Human behaviour is something each individual must think seriously about, and always be prepared to take responsibility for the consequences of actions.

The object of my request for suggestions was to collect data about the fundamentals of human behaviour with a view to writing children's stories based on these principles, but exemplifying them by presenting various situations in simple language and, if possible, introducing some interest and excitement.

The principles as set out below are necessarily very condensed. Ethical principles are for adults, and it is the duty of the adult population to transmit them to children through story and example. Over simplification leads to ambiguity as in the "Ten Commandments".

Terminology

Three words used below need explanation as to the precise meaning they carry.

Ethology is the science of behaviour both animal and human, so the word *Ethics* is used to mean the principles of human behaviour.

The word *World* is used as a comprehensive term for everything which an individual or a community is capable of being aware.

The word *Proof* is used to mean the result of testing something, it does not signify certainty.

Principles

1. Commandments are too inflexible, but there must be principles—anarchy is inimical to the life of social animals.
2. Behaviour is governed partly by the nature of individuals and communities and partly by the nature of their world and the challenges and opportunities it presents.
3. No amount of proof can provide absolute certainty, so the only absolute is the constancy of change.
4. A constantly changing world demands constant adaptation of individual and social ethics together with the laws, policies, beliefs and opinions based on these ethics.
5. Successful adaptation depends on accurate information about how the world is, as distinct from supposition about how it ought to be or how it was.
6. Altruism is essential to the survival of social animals. The solidarity of the community and the services it can provide secure the individual; services and innovations provided by individuals secure the community.
7. Individual freedom depends on ability, opportunity and social tolerance. Social tolerance depends on the ability and opportunity of the community to be free from the consequences of individual freedom.
8. Ignorance, injury, disease, poverty, etc. impair the functioning of individuals, thus it is of paramount importance for the safety and survival of the community that distress be immediately relieved and its sources discovered and removed.
9. The world of human beings includes the sources of Earthly life and of civilisation. It is essential that these sources be conserved.

NB.—The word *love* is purposely omitted from the above. Its meaning has been debased by current usage and its inclusion would make for ambiguity.

THOUGHTS ON DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

Rae Melamed

I WAS listening recently to lectures and discussions on various aspects of divorce from the legal, the psychological and the religious points of view. I looked around at the scores of men and women in the audience, long, short, fat, thin, old, and young, all ordinary people like myself, but each secretly grappling in his or her own way with the misery of marriage breakdown.

Why does a failure in marriage lead to such feelings of inadequacy, rejection, and to so much heartache? When a job fails we can look around and fit into another. When we buy a house and find it unsuitable, we can change it without a qualm. When we find a country unsuitable to live in we can emigrate hopefully and without any sense of shame. Why, then, in the field of marriage only is there this sense of shame and social stigma?

The answer must surely be in the inadequacy of our preparation for the most important step in two people's lives. We spend about twelve years in schools cramming our minds full of useless information, Virgil and Ovid, the Roman wars, history and algebra, grammar and declensions, literature and poetry. But not a word do we learn about human relationships. To the adolescent about to embark on his career and his life, the values he has learnt in our society are false or lop-sided. He has read too many stories that end up "And so they got married and lived happily for ever after". He soon falls in love, with no criteria to guide him but an instinctive attraction and a sexual drive. He knows about the honeymoon—sure he does—but does he know anything about marriage which must be nurtured and tended like a delicate plant to keep

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it alive and growing? For marriage does grow all the time. There is the mutual give and take, the mutual adjustment, the uphill striving to understand a partner's moods, whims, personal habits and needs. How many of us visualise the day-to-day irritations, upsets, quarrels, financial troubles, and other realities to be faced after the honeymoon in the close contact of marriage? Situations that may tax a partner's strength, patience and love to the utmost limits. Sometimes the marriage survives in spite of it all; sometimes it breaks down.

More realism in primitive societies

I think primitive tribes who have initiation ceremonies in which the elders instruct the young on sexual matters, paternity and maternity, and other responsibilities, deal with the situation far more realistically than we do who live in a civilised society.

Indeed, I am surprised that there are not more divorces and separations than our statistics show. Of course there are numerous marriage breakdowns that never come to the courts, because the couples concerned are trying to hold things together, to save face, or out of cowardice, or "for the sake of the children". I don't blame them; divorce as it is in our country is so heartbreaking and so traumatic an experience that many simply fear it. The financial aspects of costs, maintenance, allowances for children and so on, are so grisly, and the separation of children from one parent so dreadful, that even though we know *theoretically* that children are more damaged by an atmosphere of tension than by the disruption of their daily lives that divorce brings about, to make the irrevocable break requires more courage than many of us have.

We shall only make progress in this sphere when shame and stigma are removed from marriage failure; when divorce is made easier and without all the terrifying publicity which now accompanies it, and when our values are so changed that we can realistically and squarely place greater value on human happiness than on what the Joneses will think.

From WINIFRED M. ROUX, Johannesburg.

DEFINITION OF HUMANISM ON A POSTCARD

HUMANISM is belief in man: I am a member of the family of man. We have made for ourselves speech and languages, clothing, shelter and supplies of various foods, hospitals and knowledge of medicine and surgery, swift transport, books for our thought and all the careful morality of our communal life. As in the past we have done this alone, so in the future our survival—if we survive—must be by our own efforts, with no help from outside but by rational thought and action still hindered by irrational fantasy inherited from the childhood of our race. In this adventure I am involved. I care not that we do not know and shall never know how or why we are here. Here in fact we are, in some triumph and much jeopardy, the human family. All men are my brothers. I believe in man.

*[Your own definition in not more than 150 words is invited.
Please send it to the Editor.]*

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REVIEW

David Tribe

LATEST in the Hampstead Theatre Club's Living Theatre Series is *The Silence of Lee Harvey Oswald* by Michael Hastings. "Each of these productions attempts to examine through the medium of the theatre urgent moral problems of our times. Each production poses the question, 'Who is my neighbour?'" It is also Peter Coe's latest essay in "the theatre of fact".

Mr Hastings has few facts, none unique. He has read the Warren Report, seen some TV. Historians will come away empty-minded. Pundits with pet theories will rage "Why does he sit on the fence when the truth is obvious?" Communists and anti-communists will both sneer "I told you so": "What a mess of a country" or "What a mess of a life". The company will do well to ignore the critics.

The theatre is no more fact than *Whitaker's Almanack* is theatre. It is a poem on life, where the poetry is in the pity. There are no final judgments. There are no drip-dry realities. We do not turn to *Hamlet* for Danish history or to *Under Milk Wood* for Welsh sociology. We may learn something of these but they are merely bonuses. So here I glimpsed odd things hitherto visible in the Warren Report had I troubled to read it (I do not consider it necessary for a secularist and libertarian to dart upon every American official document with righteous indignation), but these were non-essentials. We do not know the full story and perhaps shall never know it. After Jack Ruby struck, the rest was indeed silence.

Though technically sitting on the fence the dramatist has scripted on the assumption that Oswald (Alan Dobie) was the disintegrating psychopath of FBI orthodoxy and we get a brilliant study of the ideological *ménage à trois* he occupied with his wife (Sarah Miles) and mother Marguerite (Bessie Love) as spotlighted by Interrogation (Ronan O'Casey). Videotapes and *concrète* sound dramatised without dwarfing the human characters, though there was rather too much stage business with rear doors. It's a frightening prospect to act against blown-up originals but a brilliant cast "related" and grew thereby in stature.

Almost equally daunting was language. In life Marina understood little English and spoke pidgin, while she and Lee always spoke Russian together. The play's attempt to capture all three without becoming incomprehensible or tedious was, inevitably, not entirely happy. Only the rare professionalism of Bessie Love naturalised the conventions adopted. Alan Dobie had difficulty with a Texan-cum-Russian accent and probably would have done better with the TV American of the real Oswald.

I don't give a damn about conventions or "facts" when I have a magnificent two and a half hours in the theatre.

LETTERS

Sovereignty and World Government

I DON'T think there is any real conflict between the views of E. C. Macfarlane and Glenn P. Turner, JP, about local or national sovereignty. But I must differ from Glenn P. Turner on a point of wording which is more important than it seems at first glance. He says "We (the citizens of Wisconsin) have given up sovereignty over a few matters to the Union". When you join a federation, like a World Federation, you don't give up sovereignty, you merge it. Wisconsin cannot have an army; but the people of Wisconsin have a certain amount of control over the United States Army, which is bigger than a Wisconsin army could be. And if Britain joined a World Government we would not have unlimited control over British economic policy but we would have some control over world economic policy—in other words we would have more control over our destiny than we have now.

In other words World Government is the logical extension of the idea of Democracy "government by the people".

As regards Glenn P. Turner's suggestion that the United Nations be expanded into a World Government, there is something to be said both for and against the idea. In its favour can be said the fact that the World Government would need civil servants, organised bodies of people with supplies of money to enable them to carry out their work—and in the UN such things exist in embryo already—for instance the Secretariat. Against it is the fact that the Governments of the nations of the world will never agree to give up their power to a real World Government until they are forced; and the UN is made up of such national governments.

Co. Durham.

I. S. Low

Women alone

I FOUND Mr Hildreth's letter (Nov. 18) most unfortunate and somewhat offensive. He stated "Women are lonely and are aching to meet men for sex and support". This is erroneous and is an obvious restatement of the Victorian concept of the man-women-husband-wife relationship.

There are many women who are self-supporting and who have diverted their energies in far more profitable (and to them) rewarding fields, than in the exercise of basic sex; hence Mr Hildreth's comments are far too unjust and critical.

I do not pretend that women never tend to be bossy, but then men have always assumed that *they* must always be the bosses. The sooner they realise that women have the same right and privilege to form judgments of their own, the better.

Mr Hildreth concludes with "It has always been and will always be; the husband must be the boss". Let me educate Mr Hildreth by informing him that for domestic harmony and soberness, the husband-wife relationship must *never* sink to the level of that of master-servant! in other words there must be no boss. Maybe when men begin to make women feel more wanted and make them aware of their importance and vice versa, there would be less domestic disunity.

Mr Hildreth has been born a Victorian too late! I wonder if he is or has ever been married?

London.

(Mr) C. S. NILES

The Lord Willis v Legerton Debate

UPON receiving my copy of the FREETHINKER today, naturally, my attention turned immediately to the report of the debate between Lord Willis and one who is, to my mind, high on the short list of enemies of Secularism—Harold Legerton, of the LDOS. I feel that "no comment" on this report is the kindest thing to be said, holding, as we do, our editor in the highest regard, but not forgetting that I attended this meeting, to represent my organisation, the Sunday Freedom League. My greatest pleasure was meeting the editor, and, equally, listening to Lord Willis's able address; my deep disappointment, that, due to Secularist lack of numbers in the audience, and the chairman's tendency to bend over backwards to be fair to the opposition, instead of putting Legerton in his rightful place, he and his hordes of supporters—I had 'em all around me, right, left and centre—seized the opportunity to turn a *NSS-arranged meeting* into a near Billy Graham Evangelistic Rally! Shame on all Secularists, who were *able* to attend, but refrained. Secular enemy number one—*apathy!* I am now waiting for Legerton's report in the LDOS mag. "Joy and Light"!

JOHN SHEPHERD

Opportunities needed for ex-priests

IT IS NOW ten years to the day since I ceased to call myself a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, and ceased to perform any of the functions associated with that ministry. Three days later I became a married man. Ten years of married life with all its human ups and downs, has taught me far more sense and sanity than all the previous years of religious obedience to ecclesiastical authority. Ten years voluntary excommunication from the company of "The Faithful" has made me feel sure that I shall never apply for re-admission. Ten years absence from church has made me feel quite sure that I shall never feel tempted to go again to any church, or to waste any more time on "religious observances".

I share with atheists the conviction that all the existing religions of mankind involve a complete falsification of reality and truth. I share with humanists the conviction that Science is only at the beginning of human self-discovery. But I do not really want to call myself either an atheist or a humanist. I prefer to regard myself as an independent human observer no longer attached to any kind of "voluntary association", although I am of necessity involved in that group which is called The Nation. But many times during the past ten years I have wished earnestly and wished in vain that I could find some anti-religious body which could provide suitable employment for an ex-priest. Perhaps the Welfare State is after all, a humanist organism without knowing it.

P. P. CROMMELIN

Hitler's Roman Catholicism

I HAVE just discovered that there is a conspiracy of silence about Adolf Hitler's religion. Most encyclopaedias give no mention of it and lead one to surmise that he was an atheist. In fact he was a Roman Catholic, and it looks as if they have done all in their power to keep this fact a secret. Has he been excommunicated yet? Of course he hasn't. Look at all he did for the Catholic church during his régime.

Yorks.

ROBERT HALSTEAD