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FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,
October 27, 1967**GHOSTS**

Ghosts have won their way on to the official list of further education activities recognised by Swindon Council.

The council decision qualifies the Swindon branch of the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies for grants, and loans not only of money but ghost-tracking equipment—cameras, spotlights, etc. The branch can also rent council property at reduced rates.

A council spokesman said: "We were a bit surprised when we saw their application but saw no reason to refuse". The council has already found the fellowship useful. Officials called it in to exorcise a haunted council house before deciding that it was safe to re-let.

Canon C. F. Harman, a retired Swindon clergyman and fellowship member, said: "We investigate ghosts, mysticism, and discuss spiritual matters generally. When I die I hope I will be allowed to return and help these imprisoned spirits go on to better pastures." (*The Guardian*, October 9th.)

IS your house haunted? Do you have an unwanted ghost residing with you? Are you worried about what he might see or hear or do? And most of all, are you afraid that the ghost may decide to leave you, live next door, and tell your neighbours of your scandalous activities. The only safe way to get rid of your ghost is to have him completely deghosted. Otherwise you will never sleep soundly again.

If there isn't a branch of the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies in your area you should ask your local Council to have one formed. It is imperative that expert ghost trackers and exterminators should be readily available. You never know when you may need them. That you have not been troubled by ghosts so far doesn't mean that you won't be vexed by them tomorrow or even today. A ghost exterminator is as important to the community as a refuse collector. Make sure your Council either has one or procures one immediately. If they say they haven't got one and can't afford one, tell them to get hold of a retired clergyman who knows all about ghosts and spirits and who will be glad of the extra money. Finance is no problem. He can be paid out of the rates. If the

Council protests, ask them what on earth they think rates are for if not to provide needy services for the community.

I must confess I hadn't worried about our flat being haunted until my wife read this piece in *The Guardian*. Unfortunately it alerted her to the very live possibility of an intruder. My wife, like most women, is particularly averse to peeping toms and subsequently complained of noises in the bedroom at night. I tried to assure her that it must be the people next door but she was still apprehensive. She argued that if a council house could have a ghost, why couldn't our flat? It really was most troublesome. I rang the Council just a week ago and reported the matter. I admitted I personally thought it must be the people next door but pointed out that my wife wasn't satisfied by this explanation. Could they send a ghost expert round, I asked. They hadn't got one, the man from the Council said. He was sure it wasn't a ghost and how about checking with our next door neighbours.

So, rather reluctantly, I broached the subject with them. Had they been moving about in their bedroom between ten and twelve at night? The man and woman, both in their eighties, looked at me as though I weren't well. I explained the whole matter to them and said that I myself didn't think we had a ghost in our flat but could they help me to reassure my wife. Would they, just for the next three nights, knock three times if they moved about in their bedroom any time between ten and twelve. If we heard a noise in our room and they hadn't knocked we would knock twice and if it really had been them and they had simply overlooked it they could then knock their three times so that we would know. For my wife's sake they agreed to co-operate. I assiduously kept a record of every knock. All the best ghost trackers do, I'm informed. The man next door knocked fifty-nine times three times over the three-night period and that included twenty-six times three times when I had to knock twice to indicate we had heard a noise but they hadn't knocked. On each occasion the old man responded in the appropriate manner necessary to reassure my wife. After three days I called on him again to thank him for his help and told him my wife was now satisfied we had no ghost. He said he had been glad to help as his own wife had suffered from ghost trouble many years ago. Fortunately, she had since learned to live with noise. If others could learn to do the same, he said, retired clergymen would have no cause to go charging or creeping about with cameras and spotlights looking for ghosts in allegedly haunted houses. And if my wife hadn't read about this nonsense his right hand wouldn't have become so painfully sore. I commiserated with him and left.

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PROBLEMS OF ADOPTION

Margaret McIlroy

IN 1955 Dr Alexina Mary McWhinnie asked family doctors in South-East Scotland to put her in touch with adults who had been adopted. This appeal yielded 52 adopted people, as well as six who though at least originally fostered for payment, looked on the foster-parents as their only mother and father. Not all the adopted people had been legally adopted, many of them having grown up before legal adoption existed. Their ages ranged from 18 to 60. They were interviewed at length, most of them two or three times, in order to discover how well-adjusted they were, and what childhood experiences had been important to them. Where possible their adoptive parents were also seen. The outcome is a valuable piece of research into the results of adoption from a hitherto neglected angle—that of the adult who was adopted in childhood—and this has now been published: *Adopted Children—How They Grow Up* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 42s.).

Of the 52, it was concluded that 15 were well-adjusted and happy, and six reasonably so. However the largest group, 21 people, had serious difficulties, most of them both in their personal relationships and in health, where they frequently had troubles of psychological origin. Eight of the 21 seemed to be improving as their unhappy childhood experiences receded. Ten were definitely maladjusted. Adding the first and second groups together and the third and fourth groups together, we find that only 21 were free, or comparatively free, from problems, whereas 31 were troubled.

These conclusions make depressing reading, and would be terrifying to a mother who has given up a baby for adoption, thinking that she was ensuring a happy home-life for it. However an encouraging feature is that the most unhappy people were nearly always the older ones. The increasing social acceptance of adoption, the greater discrimination shown by adoption societies and the more understanding attitudes to all children of the present day seem to be operating to give the more recently adopted child a better chance of happiness. Adoption has been recognised legally only since 1926 in England and 1930 in Scotland. These Acts have been both a result of greater public interest in adoption and a cause of further social recognition for it. Adopted children have been given greater legal protection, and have appeared less like freaks to neighbours and schoolmasters.

Dr McWhinnie found that many of the criteria by which adoption societies and public officials most frequently judge prospective adopters—income, social status, religion—have little relevance to the happiness of a child. Religious enthusiasm in particular was often associated with disastrous attitudes to illegitimacy, leading to criticisms of the biological mother—always most hurtful to the child—and morbid fears that the child might have inherited a moral weakness from the biological parents; such fears could wreck an adolescent's relationship with his parents. Clearly, rather than insisting on religious affiliations as a prerequisite for adopters, child care authorities should be examining religious applicants with particular care to make sure that they are not too puritanical to be affectionate and relaxed parents to a child probably illegitimate in origin.

It emerges that almost the only essential for adopters should be a loving and understanding attitude to children; but Dr McWhinnie has discovered that some adoption

societies show astonishingly little interest in the personalities of those to whom they entrust children. One has even placed babies after interviewing only one of the adoptive parents.

Telling the child of its adoption showed up as a serious problem. Their barrenness often aroused such painful feelings of inferiority in the adoptive mothers that they pretended, even to themselves, to be the biological mothers of their adopted children. Children not told of their adopted status in infancy, as most were not, were frequently told with deliberate unkindness by other children or relatives during quarrels. Some had already acquired an impression that adoption and illegitimacy were shameful, and were therefore deeply distressed at discovering themselves to be adopted, and very often illegitimate too, so it is important that the child should know his history before he has time to absorb these prejudices. Sometimes a parent denied the truth when the child first asked whether it was adopted, with the result that the child never trusted the parent again. Most children found it impossible to question their parents. Thus one boy worried about the possibility of being adopted from the age of 6, when children at school commented on it, until his mother told him when he was 18. Evidently advising parents to tell the child is not enough. They need special help with what they clearly find a terrible task.

Dr McWhinnie's book is essential reading for all concerned with placing children, and it is to be hoped that many adoptive parents will read it too. However, it has a wider interest, and any parent could learn something about children from it. Much of the insensitivity to children's needs which has caused such unhappiness to adopted children can cause equal unhappiness to biological children. After all, children who feel themselves the odd one out in a family sometimes imagine themselves wrongly to be adopted. Many adopted children were intensely curious about themselves, while the parents assumed that they suspected nothing, or were too young to understand or be interested. This inability to ask for anxiously desired information is paralleled by the inarticulate desire of many children, not adopted, for information about the facts of sex, and about family problems which parents fondly imagine their children unaware of. Similarly parental preference for one child in a family over another can be just as devastating when it is based on the child's sex or intelligence as when it is the result of the adopted status of one child.

One hopes that this illuminating book, with its abundant information about the life-long unhappiness which can result from unsatisfactory adoptions, will help social workers to understand better what to look for in prospective adopters.

Bible Reading Campaign

THE National Secular Society's press statement on The Word programme of public Bible readings has prompted several attacks. The *Methodist Recorder* devoted an editorial to it and Peter Simple was in form in the *Daily Telegraph*. The *War Cry* is offering prizes in a competition for the best replies!

"SEEING IS NOT BELIEVING"

THE ABOVE "Flashback" (FREETHINKER, October 6th) interests me for the following reasons.

On the 22nd November, 1963, the President of the United States was assassinated. During the next few years many reports, articles and books were written about the event. An official Commission made a report, a professional historian gave an account of the happenings during the days immediately before and after the event and other equally able writers made their contributions. However, after all these enquiries by efficient reporters who had culled their evidences from assumedly educated (or nearly so) witnesses, the truth about the murder of Kennedy has not yet been clearly established; the main central facts are more or less well known, viz. that he was indeed assassinated on a certain day at a certain place and at a certain hour. Since the event took place, witnesses have contradicted one another: they did not see the same things happening; some say they were at a certain place while others deny this; notes made by the medical witnesses have been mislaid or destroyed and in some parts contradicted by other medical witnesses; while much of the Police and Secret Service evidence is in shambles. There are many other very peculiar things such as certain known witnesses not being seen or heard by the Commission. All this in the middle of the twentieth century and in a democracy of the Western World in which education is claimed to be very far advanced.

Almost two thousand years ago a man was allegedly nailed to a cross in a Holy City. Some fifty, sixty or seventy years later the story of this particular crucifixion was set down on paper by various writers who must have taken evidence from the lips of other people who, in turn, may have been in some way directly connected with the event or, more likely, who were only able to give hearsay evidence. It may be possible that there were some earlier writings but there does not seem to be any exact proof of this and no part or parts of them have ever been discovered. At the time the great majority of the people were completely uneducated and were very, very superstitious. The writers themselves must have been thoroughly indoctrinated with all kinds of auspices, foretellings, hopes of a better life to follow, credulity, gullibility, self-deceptions, bigotries, misjudgments, superstitions, misconceptions, fears, misconstructions, delusions, errors of all kinds, religious untruths from many quarters and all the other failings which are conceived and spread by an uneducated people themselves and by their semi-educated leaders.

If it is not possible to get very clear evidence of a tragedy in this day and age how much more impossible was it two thousand years ago when even the educated few were reading Homer as if his stories were all based on fact and not merely on a few facts to which the poet had added his emotional and poetical genius to make his stories more palatable. How easy it must have been for the people, gathered round the accomplished reader, to accept such as *The Golden Ass of Appuleius* as being "Gospel Truth".

Today events can happen in home, street, office or playing field without the natural excitement there would be at an assassination or a crucifixion and yet the reportage can vary from witness to witness. A simple affair like a big-time football match can lead to very different reports from

neutral spectators standing at different parts of the ground and even experienced reporters working for different newspapers can write their descriptions of any one game in such a manner that one is inclined to wonder if it was really the same game they attended.

In face of this, how can we be expected to take what are called the Gospels as being true reports of what happened two thousand years ago? How much wishful thinking was written into those books? What part did dreams, reveries, hallucinations, imaginings, witchcraft, stories culled from other religions and mental indoctrinations play in directing the pens of the scribes? How many mistaken translations from language to language were made both intentionally and unintentionally we will never know despite the seeming scholarly efforts which have been made by apologists throughout the centuries.

It seems to me that we can put some actual facts about Kennedy's assassination for future historians but the scribes of two thousand years ago were not able to perform the same service for our historians today.

D. Molyneux

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SOCIAL AND MORAL EDUCATION

PUBLIC MEETINGS

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3rd

MICHAEL DUANE

(College of Education lecturer; former Headmaster of Risinghill School)

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17th

DIANE MUNDAY

(Member of the BHA Executive Committee)

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1st

MAURICE HILL

(Author "Moral Education in Secondary Schools—A Suggested Syllabus")

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15th

DAVID TRIBE

President: National Secular Society
(Author "Religion and Ethics in Schools" and "100 Years of Freethought")

MEETINGS COMMENCE at 7.30 p.m.

Organised by the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1
Telephone: 01-407 2717

KNOWLEDGE TO LIVE BY

Clifford H. Knowlton

THE writer is an American engineer who is slightly irritated by the agnostic's condescending denunciation of what he pleases to call "dogmatic atheism" and by the perpetual censorship of any spirited reply that some impatient atheist might attempt to present. It is the writer's timid opinion that truth stands no chance unless *all* are allowed to speak.

Atheism is not dogmatic but factual. It takes the scientific approach and accepts the fact that we live in an uncontrolled universe. We see this universe as an explosion of particles which find their way together in bunches by such things as attraction, repulsion and the laws of probability. Some may not accept the uncontrolled universe as a scientific fact, so let's spell it out. We begin by defining a fact.

A FACT IS A CLOSE AGREEMENT OF A SERIES OF OBSERVATIONS OF THE SAME PHENOMENON BY TRAINED OBSERVERS AND VERIFIABLE AT ANY TIME. Does the concept of an uncontrolled universe conform to these specifications?

We have had scientific successes all the way from Thales, in 500 BC, right down to Einstein in 1950, and all of them succeeded while ignoring the possibility of a guiding influence in nature. A law of nature is man made. It is a formula or an equation which men have devised to describe the way that matter/energy acts. Millions of these equations have been developed accounting for many processes from the orbit of planets to the flow of sap up the trunk of a tree. If there really were a guiding influence in nature, there would be so many unknown factors in these equations that none of them could give dependable answers without a direct revelation from God in each specific instance. Yet

AGNOSTICS ADOPTION SOCIETY

MUCH HARD WORK has been done, with limited financial resources, in developing this organisation. During the past eighteen months help has been given to 63 unmarried mothers and 53 couples have been accepted as adoptive parents—though many more applications are being carefully investigated. 24 of these couples have already received babies for adoption.

It is virtually impossible for those professing no religious faith to obtain help from the traditional adoption societies and our Society aims at finding good homes for babies among those for whom the existing societies are unable to provide.

The well-being and happiness of the child must be the first consideration and therefore our standards for prospective parents are high.

Although we have been helped by some generous supporters and are gradually adding to our small income, we are as yet "running on a shoe-string" and are in urgent need of funds if our work is not to be temporarily halted.

Here is an opportunity to support practical Humanism. We need to develop our activities, to employ more case workers and to carry out our obligations to the prospective parents and to the mothers and babies already on our lists. It will be impossible for us to accept any more applicants unless we can find money for our immediate needs. A sum of about £3,000 is required at once if we are to continue our present work.

Will you please help us either by becoming a member of the Agnostics Adoption Society (basic annual subscription £1), or by sending a donation to the Honorary Treasurer at 69 Chaucer Road, London, SE24.

I make this special appeal to all Humanists. Our need is urgent and your help now will be most gratefully received.

ERIC C. O. JEWESBURY, *Chairman, Executive Committee.*

these equations, which ignore any non-material influence, are constantly being verified all over the world.

To recapitulate, a fact requires two things: (1) a close agreement of observations, and (2) current verifications. For (1), we have 2,500 years of scientific observations, and for (2), perpetual verifications by scientists and engineers.

The agnostics will say that this *still* does not *prove* the concept of an uncontrolled universe. No, we will never satisfy the agnostic's thirst for certitude, but it *does* make the uncontrolled universe the most solidly substantiated *fact* in the whole field of scientific knowledge. The agnostic must accept the uncontrolled universe as a basic fact of existence or stop claiming to think scientifically.

It is said that scientists can only measure *material forces*. This is true, but if there really *are* any non-material forces influencing matter, it would have been discovered long before now by measuring the resulting changes in matter. Any such forces would render the laws (action patterns) of nature quite unpredictable. Since the laws of nature still stand, we may say with confidence, "IT IS A FACT THAT THERE ARE NO NON-MATERIAL FORCES"—only the forces of matter/energy—no mental or spiritual forces in nature.

Thus the atheist is an individual who, rather than waiting for metaphysical certitude (which is unattainable), decides to build upon the facts of science. He wishes to design a society which operates to produce world peace, better men and better environment.

Such activities as praying for better things, loving our fellow Man, "standing for world peace" (without learning and removing the causes of war), waiting for certitude, standing in awe of nature and denouncing the atheistic approach, do not even scratch the surface of Man's problems. Worse than this; they turn Man's attention away from the possibility of designing a better future for himself. They turn our attention back upon the obsolescent, emotional idealisms which historically have never accomplished anything for Man except enslavement to religious and political tyranny.

The acceptance of scientific facts cannot be called dogmatism, for scientific facts are perpetually subject to modification by later findings.

The metaphysical agnostic, who regards reason and logic as the ultimate test for truth, must do two things. He must, more or less arbitrarily, choose for himself a life-time prejudice (which he calls "his faith") in order to have a premise from which to reason, and he must hold his resulting conclusions in the face of all observable evidence to the contrary. By this method he is enabled to attain a rather fictitious certitude. From this questionable platform, he accuses the atheist of dogmatism! From this position he says that every man must have a "faith (a prejudice) to live by".

It seems very strange that so many of us, even scientists, have never noticed the error in this type of sophistry. In a scientific age, do we not have enough *knowledge* to live by? What need have we to assume a personal life prejudice unless we intend to reason ourselves into fields of the imaginary and the unverifiable? We all have our philosophy of life, but this is a very different thing from what the religious person means when he says "faith". What is the matter with KNOWLEDGE to live by. We can be gathering more of it all the time.

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

Dr D. A. Rickards

[Part of a lecture given recently by Dr Rickards in the USA.]

AS AN INTRODUCTION to the subject, nothing could be better than a passage from a poem written in the 16th century by Sir Henry Wootton. It reads as follows:

"How happy is he born or taught
Who serveth not another's will,
His armour is his honest thought
And simple truth his utmost skill."

The first problem which must be tackled is one of definition. I shall try to define precisely what I mean when I use certain words such as Humanism — Morals — Ethics — Values — Religion — Freedom — and Responsibility.

I shall begin with Humanism. Looking at the world in terms of Man's relationship to his fellowman, people can be classified into three types.

Firstly, the Theist or **Super-humanist**. That is to say, a person who claims to have super-human values and one who puts a "God"—an admittedly unknown and unknowable figure—ahead of his country, his family and his fellowman.

Secondly, the **Inhumanist**, one who devout or otherwise, has no consideration for the individual feelings or rights of other members of the human race, and thirdly, the **Humanist**, the kind of person who puts humanity first, because he is a human being who takes pride in being human; the kind of person who would agree with the poet who said: "For in this life so filled with strife, we do the best we can—and in the end we must depend upon our fellowman . . . where every prayer is wasted air and answers come there none—with God things may be possible, but *Man* must get them done . . ." This is what I mean by **Humanism**.

When I use the word **Morals**, I refer to the local standards which a particular society has decided are most suitable for the conduct of life. One society's morals may be considered highly "immoral" in another society. For example, polygamy is perfectly moral to certain Mohammedan sects and yet it is unacceptable to Christians and present-day Jews. In some primitive societies, such as the Auca Indians in Ecuador, head hunting is still in vogue.

During the middle ages most Christians used to believe that it was moral to torture and burn people at the stake. They were convinced that these activities met with God's approval, because they were only killing people with different *religious* convictions.

Present-day Christians are for the most part still unmoved by burning and torturing their enemies. Men, women and children have been savagely bombed with phosphorus and jellied gasoline. However, such actions are considered moral because, in this case, they are only killing people with different *political* convictions. Morality, it must be conceded, is based more on custom than on principle.

For the word **Ethics**, I imply the more universal moral principles that have been evolved in some social groups and which are, or could be of value to all societies. These include such things as honesty, justice, loyalty, cleanliness, respect, decency and so on.

For **Values**, I would say that value is the term we use to measure how much we want something, how much we need it and how much it helps us.

The values which a man uses are acquired by him through his contact with Society by seeing and appreciating other men's values and also by personal preference.

I must stress that so far as I am concerned—morals, ethics and values are man-made—they have no extra human source or quality.

I use the word **Religion** in its basic form which means "tied down" or "tied back" (from "re"—again, and "ligere"—to tie). Religion is an abstract noun which normally refers to a system of theology, a dogma, a creed. Since I believe that all theistic religions are based on ignorance and perpetuated by fear, I deplore the use of the word Religion when it is applied to a personal philosophy or a way of life which is devoid of supernaturalism.

This leads me to the two final words which are freedom and responsibility.

Freedom is a difficult word to define because it means so many things and perhaps the best way to start would be to point out that it is an adjectival noun derived from the adjective *free*. An adjective, you will all no doubt recall, is used to qualify or limit a noun and the word *free* has to be set on the scale somewhere in relation to *not free*. Abstract freedom does *not* exist without its counterpart—slavery. There can be no "hot" without "cold"—no "high" without "deep"—no "dry" without "wet"—and no "freedom" without at least the concept of "bondage" . . . When the word is used alone it is meaningless . . . as for example, when the Bible says (John 8 : 32) "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free".

To be exact and academic, it should be noted that "perfect freedom" of any kind is not attainable due to the limitations of space, time and opportunity. I shall nevertheless proceed to examine the nature of freedom in the three following forms:

Freedom of thought, freedom of speech and freedom of action. I believe that only the first of these can be close to absolute. A man should be completely free to think anything he pleases, anytime he pleases, anywhere he pleases. His thoughts are his own and suppressing them because they are pure or impure—weird, violent or unconventional, could easily destroy his creativity and in all probability lead to some type of neurosis.

Speech, however, cannot be and should not be as free as thought. There are obvious limits to candidness, obscenity and slander at which most normal societies would draw the line. To tell a hospital patient, for example, that he looked worse than you had expected would be to add insult to injury; to make obscene suggestions to a stranger over the telephone is a punishable offence and, of course, to shout "fire" in a crowded theatre is a favourite example cited against the absolute freedom of speech. It must be pointed out that nothing can prevent a person from saying these things if he really wants to, but society frowns on freedom of speech where it hurts, offends or may damage the hearer.

Freedom of action is more limited still and for many of the same reasons. A man can think about how pleasant it would be if his business rival were to expire. He can say, to his wife, perhaps, that he wished that old so-and-so would drop dead! but let him put his thoughts or words into action and introduce a few drops of cyanide into his competitor's martini and right away he will be accused of

murder! Freedom of action does not include the right to kill or punish violently—the right to damage property, the right to steal, etc. Why is this so? Why does society prohibit certain types of action? Is it because there is a law on the books which prevents a man from taking anti-social actions? Is it because the Americans adopted the old system of English Common Law? And because the English were for many years a Christian monarchy? (Where by the way, blasphemy was punishable by death!) Is it because a fabulous young rabbi called Jehoshua (later to be known as Jesus) allegedly gave a famous sermon from a mountain-side? Or is it due, perhaps, to a Jewish gentleman by the name of Moses who climbed Mt Sinai to receive the ten commandments from Yahweh himself? Or is it due to the Code of Hammurabi, King of Babylon in 2100 BC who, by some strange coincidence, had enforced almost the same set of laws 600 years before Moses? Where do these social laws come from? Is their origin human or divine? These questions *must* be answered before we can proceed further. They can be tackled in the following manner from the evolutionary point of view. Evolution, as it is understood today, takes three forms: (1) Cosmic or inorganic; (2) Biological or organic; (3) Cultural and social.

It is the third of these evolutionary trends which concerns us here. The social evolution of Man—a slow and laborious process which has developed by trial and error. Freedoms are exchanged for rights—violence is exchanged for protection—the laws of necessity replace the barbarism of anarchy. Give—Get . . . give—get. The basis of the value system comes into being.

You must give up time to work in order to get compensation. You must give something of value to get something in return which is considered of equal value. Society is the superstructure which men have built over their lives. It is thoroughly human through and through. Most men have come to love and to hate it at the same time. They can love it because they are well aware how much they need it; but they hate it because they realise that it stands in the way of primal instincts.

Wrapped up with society we will find the true meaning of the word *responsibility*. Once again we are trying to define an adjectival noun. This one is derived from the adjective *responsible*. The word “responsible” comes from “re”—again, and “spondere”—to pledge. It means basically—to “re-pledge” or to “promise in return”.

Responsible can be found on the ladder at the opposite end to the word *irresponsible*. To whom is an individual responsible for his behaviour? The answer can only be to society and to his fellowman. How can men be made more responsible for their actions? Only by making them more fully aware of their position in society and by awakening their social consciousness. Lessons in responsibility can vary all the way from a lecture on social hygiene in which it is carefully explained, let us say, that garbage must not be thrown on to the front lawn; all the way to punishment by loss of liberty for robbery with violence. Every person capable of being educated into the ways of social behaviour and responsibility has to be trained, encouraged, corrected and helped.

Those who show marked anti-social trends should be studied carefully to determine the cause of their behaviour. Those guilty of overt anti-social action should be warned or punished with the idea of aiding them to avoid recidivism—that is to say, a repetition of criminal offences.

Finally, those who are totally incapable of learning social behaviour and who are a menace to the normal functions of society should be put where they can do no harm.

I am convinced that the truly responsible citizen can only be motivated by an awareness of his role in society. As a Humanist, I look at the world from the basic premise that “Man is on his own”. As a Humanist I would agree with Terence—the Roman philosopher—who in the second century BC said, “Nothing human is alien to me”, and as a Humanist I would concur with Robert Burns the Scottish poet, when he declared that “A man’s a man for a’ that and a’ that”.

What is it that motivates the Humanist? The answer is humanity. A man’s a man for all that and all that—regardless of his skin, colour or nationality.

The time has come to examine the theological doctrine of free will. It goes like this: in the beginning God made man in his own image but—and this is a big BUT—He gave him a will of his own. Let us state as all Theists do, that God is omnipotent—in other words all-powerful. Let us also observe that he is omnibenevolent—that is to say—all good. Finally, let us add that he is omniscient, which is another way of expressing that he knows everything, past, present and future. Such a God—almighty, all good and all knowing, is a suitable model for any theology. You will find that he has all possible qualities except for one thing. Responsibility. The Gods of Man—all shirk responsibility. If God made everything, then where does evil come from? And by evil, I mean all forms of misery, suffering and pain which torment humanity—things like drought, flood, pestilence, earthquakes, famine and disease. If God made this kind of evil, then he is not all-good . . . but if something else, let us say the devil, made evil, then God did not make everything. Or, if he did make everything originally, then, of course, he made the Devil, too. In this case God still does not qualify for the title of being all-good. I will repeat this question for the Theists because it must be answered . . . where does Evil come from? It can be demonstrated clearly that there are only two ways in which Deity can escape from the horns of this dilemma. One is by virtue of the Devil, and the other is by giving man a free will. Without these two devices, God Almighty is in a most uncompromising position but with them, he can remain all-wise and all wonderful, while the evils of the world are blamed upon the subtleness of Satan and the Wickedness of Man.

This enables the preacher to relieve the Lord of responsibility for ever and ever and to lower the burden of sin on to the shoulders of his parishioners.

It is interesting to study the phenomenon by which people are persuaded that they should thank God for all of their good fortunes—while they must blame themselves for all their failures. In my youth, I attended a church which specialised in this form of brain washing. We used to sing a little hymn which went like this: “All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small; All things wise and wonderful the Lord God made them all...”

But what of the things which are not “bright and beautiful”? What about a “thing” like a tornado? What about a “thing” like polio virus? Who made them? In a God-centred world, who is responsible for the deformity, the misery? the pain? Who made children and animals that come into this life with twisted limbs and half-witted brains? An all-wise, all loving and almighty God?

I would rather believe the nihilism of the poet who said:

"Where in the endless depths of space
Is the Cosmic Shepherd to grant them grace?
Where in the sacred Heavens above
Can you find, I ask you, an ounce of love?
Plead with the Universe—see if it cares
To heed your blessings or hear your prayers."

Responsibility can only be found in man. It is a form of social consciousness and like Shakespeare's quality of mercy, it is twice blessed—it blesses him that gives and him that takes—it can be encouraged—it can be enlarged—but from beginning to end, it is a quality of man.

Don't look to the Gods of Orthodoxy for responsibility—for they are too busy with dogma and besides, they will refer you to the devil and to your free will. Don't look to the reformed Gods for responsibility because they have been "liberated" from their role as Deities—they are far too busy with bridge clubs and bazaars. Besides, when pressed, they too, will refer you to your free will. Don't look to the Gods of Deism for responsibility because they are too obscure. If you could ever find them, you would realise that they are unconcerned with the welfare of mankind. Don't look to the Gods of the Bible for responsibility for the word "responsibility" never occurs once either in the Old Testament or in the New. Don't look to the Gods at all for "they are such stuff as dreams are made of—full of sound and fury signifying nothing". Don't look to the Gods at all—but look to Man for this is where responsibility will be found. No, Man is not responsible for the cruelties of Nature. This is merely a part of our evolutionary heritage. Nature, the word which is used for all the substance and qualities of the Universe, is blind, deaf and inanimate. In the words of Robert G. Ingersoll: "Nature creates without intention and destroys without regret". Man has the ultimate responsibility *to* and *for* his fellow-man. He alone can create and destroy with a purpose in mind—he alone can assume the full responsibility for social progress.

THE HUMAN UNBORN

A. C. Thompson

(A reply to the editorial of October 13.)

I APPRECIATE the editorial of October 13, which attacks my position on abortion. I have no wish to be contentious about this question and I shall applaud anyone who argues against me. But I cannot refrain from replying.

Indeed, I once shared Mr Collis's belief on abortion. I then regarded the question as not even a moral one, but purely a matter of choice, as a decision whether to have one's hair cut. But in attempting to construct a general system of ethics, I realise the need for two indispensable elements: principle and consistency. If morality is not based on some recognised principle—even though a false one, as religious morality has followed—there can be no morality at all. If the principle is not applied consistently, then morality can break down. If a developing foetus can rightly be killed a month or a day before its expected birth, then one can argue that it may rightly be killed a day or a month after it is born. Then why may not one argue that anyone, at any age, may be killed at someone else's pleasure? Either we follow a moral rule consistently, or we have no rule at all.

The point at issue between Mr Collis and me, appears to be whether a growing human embryo or foetus is a human being. He says it is not, and I say it is. Mr Collis does not question the argument that if the embryo is truly a human being, then it would be wrongful, indeed criminal, to kill it. Because he does not question this point, I assume that he agrees, and hence the point that we are left with is the factual one whether a human embryo or foetus is actually a "human being", an "unborn baby", a "developing child", a "person" and the other things I called it.

Now Mr Collis's main argument is that the foetus is utterly dependent for its life upon the pregnant woman who carries it; if she dies, the foetus dies, although after the baby is born, the mother may die and the baby still live.

But surely this is due only to the method of reproduction which is peculiar to viviparous animals, including almost all of the mammals. If we reproduced as birds do, then every woman from 15 to 45 would give birth, every month, to a packet of 7 or 8 lb. of the very best food materials, enough for a nine-month development of an embryo, probably encased in a shell and surely larger than a baby is at birth, larger than an ostrich egg. It is a question what we should do with all the many millions of unfertilised ones which cannot develop: whether to have them for breakfast, offer them to God, or let them rot. But the fertilised ones would surely be "alive" although they would be as separate from the mother who laid them as a chick developing in an incubator is from a hen. If the mother died, the embryo could continue to live. Mammalian reproduction is economical. It differs from avian or reptilian reproduction in the way food is supplied to the embryo as it grows, and in this respect the baby mammal is still dependent after its birth, more dependent, in fact, than many baby birds and all baby reptiles, amphibia, fishes, etc.: if it is not fed, it dies.

An embryo is not an "appendage" of the mother. Anatomically, it is quite distinct. All its organ systems, including its circulation, are separate from those of the mother. It may have, and often does have, a different blood type from that of the mother. It is well known that many parents are unfit as blood donors for their own children. No, the embryo or foetus is really a "separate person", as separate as an egg is from a hen.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Telephone HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service. For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

OUTDOOR

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

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.; Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Margaret Street), Sunday, November 5th, 6.45 p.m.: DEREK SOUTHALL, "Buddhism".

Bristol Humanist Group (Kelmescott, 4 Portland Street, Clifton), Sunday, October 29th, 7.30 p.m.: A meeting.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 29th, 6.30 p.m.: Dr G. H. SULLIVAN, "Some Aspects of Drug Addiction".

Manchester Humanist Society (Geographical Hall, Parsonage Gardens), Sunday, October 29th, 6.30 p.m.: PETER JACKSON, MP, "This is Humanism".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, October 29th, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "The Open Society"; Tuesday, October 31st, 6.45 p.m.: HARRY KNIGHT, "Social Responsibility".

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, London), Sunday, October 29th, 6.30 p.m.: Arriaga String Quartet. Beethoven, Shostakovich, Debussy. Admission 4/-.

Worthing Humanist Group (Morelands Hotel, The Pier), Sunday, October 29th, 5.30 p.m.: TERENCE HIGGINS, MP, "The Work of Parliament".

West Ham Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead, London, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

LETTERS

Atheist or Agnostic?

I CANNOT agree with the findings of Mr Snow in his article on this subject (FREETHINKER, September 15th). It seems to me that he is so preoccupied about the word 'god' that he criticises agnostics for not specifically announcing that such a person or thing does not exist. He apparently accepts that the agnostic is one who holds that we know nothing of things beyond material phenomena. It surely follows that he does not believe in a Christian or any other god as taught by any of the religions. The confusion in Mr Snow's mind, I suggest with great respect, is what is meant by the word 'god'. If someone uses it as meaning a First Cause he should not blame agnosticism. The atheist's and agnostic's view seem to me to be fundamentally the same, but in the average Christian's mind, the word agnostic is somewhat less disreputable than atheist! I suggest that the British Humanist Association is more likely to make rapid progress by projecting an agnostic image rather than an atheistic one. Both these groups have basically the same philosophy, and it seems a pity that anyone should exaggerate any of the more or less theoretical differences between them. We all wish to see *homo sapiens* grow up as soon as possible, and so let us devote our energies in that direction.

DAVID C. GREENE (*Chairman of Belfast Humanist Group*).

World Citizens

MAY I inform E. G. Macfarlane (and others) that a movement of world patriotism, supported by Bertrand Russell and Lord Boyd-Orr, already exists?

Membership of the International Registry of World Citizens costs five shillings (per lifetime, though one may contribute more) and enquiries should be addressed to I.R.W.C., British Section, 43 Parliament Street, London.

I have so far enrolled only five members. Will my fellow Secularists and Humanists help me to increase the figure?

R. BEARDMORE (*World Citizen 15295*).

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