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Friday,
November 24, 1967**HUMANIST LAW REFORMS**

IT is still anyone's guess which of the various Humanist concerns regarding law reform will feature most strongly in near-future Parliamentary debates.

Reports suggest at least three issues which will be given priority; they are the laws relating to Divorce, Religious Instruction in Schools, and Sunday Observance. Not far behind comes the subject of Voluntary Euthenasia.

'Religion in Schools' will be the subject of a debate in the House of Lords on Wednesday, November 15. Those taking a Humanist standpoint will be Lord Francis Williams and Lord Willis and, possibly, Lord Ritchie-Calder. The debate has been initiated by Lord Aberdare from a neutral standpoint. It follows press reports this summer of a Humanist campaign to change the law on religion in schools, and the later setting-up of a Church of England commission on the subject.

More likely to take priority, perhaps, is the new Divorce Bill which will come before Parliament this session. The Bill will be moved by William Wilson, Labour back-bencher, though it really results from discussions led by Humanist Leo Abse and the Bishop of Exeter, Dr Robert Mortimer. This Bill makes provision for only one ground for divorce, that "the marriage has irretrievably broken down".

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**YOUTH COUNCIL DONATES
£100 TO AAS**

AFTER hearing three representatives speak on behalf of as many organisations, the Haringey Youth Council decided the Agnostic Adoption Society most deserved their £100 award in view of the excellent report by Henry Silver the AAS's Honorary Treasurer. The other contenders were the Abbeyfield (Hornsey) Society and the International Voluntary Service.

In his five-minute talk, Mr Silver described the real need for such an organisation as AAS, the tremendous

work it was undertaking, the praise for its fine case-work received from various courts and the desperate need for funds.

The AAS is sponsored by the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society, and was brought into existence through a recognition of the absurd situation met by those wishing to adopt but unable to do so through unwillingness to declare a religious faith.

The AAS is not concerned with religious questions, but with the happiness and well-being of the child; atheists and agnostics who satisfy the very high standards of the AAS are given every assistance. Unlike many other adoption societies, the AAS gives special concern to both natural parents as well as to adoptive parents.

The Haringey Youth Council, having heard all the relevant details, had no doubt that here was a deserving charity.

If the Youth Council, with no affiliations to the Humanist Movement, can see the importance of helping the AAS, Humanists can see it even more clearly; but can they be as generous? Of course they can, and they prove it by subscribing to AAS membership (£1 annual minimum) or by donating through the Honorary Treasurer, 69, Chaucer Road, London, SE24.

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**DRUGS AND CIVIL
LIBERTIES**

A REPORT on Drugs and Civil Liberties from the National Council for Civil Liberties' Advisory Committee has

been published at 5/- by the NCCL this November. This report, which treats with drugs from a medical, legal and social viewpoint is factual and entirely objective. It is simple, concise and comprehensive and will be eagerly sought by every organisation, speaker and individual for whom the problem of drugs are of concern or interest.

The NCCL Advisory Committee was set up in 1967 and consists of medical, social and other workers particularly experienced in the field of drugs, and some members of the Council's Executive Committee.

The report's contents include sections on Amphetamines, Barbiturates, Cannabis, LSD 25 and Opiates and Cocaine, each section including a description, an account of the medical effects, the legal position, illicit sources, social implications, and civil liberty aspects.

A clear distinction is implicit in the report between the so-called 'soft' and 'hard' drugs.

During the last two years it has become quite clear that the use and misuse of various types of drugs has certain consequences from the civil liberties point of view. These are mainly associated with the Government's attempts to control drugs and stop their use spreading. Unfortunately there has been a tendency to use the repressive measures which have failed so abysmally in other countries such as the United States.

So far public debate on the subject has usually been conducted on a purely emotional level and far too little attention has been given to the facts which are already available. The NCCL's Advisory Group have tried to approach the subject objectively and to define some of the more immediate problems.

The main conclusion was that there should be a clear differentiation between different categories of drugs and that there was little justification for applying the law with equal severity with regard to 'hard' and 'soft' drugs.

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Editor: KARL HYDE

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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, SE1. Telephone HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). 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, MCRAE 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

The Cambridge Humanists, 27 Portugal Street, Wednesday, November 29th, 8.30 p.m.: Dr A. HAMMERTON, "Original Sin—a Christian Doctrine Considered"; Mill Lane Lecture Rooms, Thursday, November 30th, 8.30 p.m.: Rev. WERNER PEL, "Beyond Good and Evil".
Bristol Humanist Group, Kelmescott, 4 Portland Street, Clifton, Sunday, November 26th, 7.30 p.m.: R. NETHERCOTT, "The Function of Present Day Trade Unions".
The H. G. Wells Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Thursday, December 7th, 6.30 p.m.: H. G. Wells Memorial Lecture, LORD RITCHIE-CALDER, "Human Rights". Tickets 3/6 each from the Secretary, The H. G. Wells Society, 21 Fawe Park Road, London, SW15.
Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Sunday, November 26th, 6.30 p.m.: C. B. HOLLIDAY, "A Visit to East Berlin" (colour slides).
Redbridge Humanist Society, Wanstead House, The Green, London, E11, Monday, November 27th, 7.45 p.m.: Informal meeting at which local Humanists will explain their views and answer questions.
South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, November 26th, 11 a.m.: Dr JOHN LEWIS, "The Jewish Problem in Eastern Europe"; Tuesday, November 28th, 6.45 p.m., "Youth and Social Responsibility", speakers from London University.
South Place Sunday Concerts, Conway Hall, London, WC1, Sunday, November 26th, 6.30 p.m.: Alberni String Quartet. Haydn, Britten, Brahms. Admission 4/-.
Worthing Humanist Group, Morelands Hotel, The Pier, Sunday, November 26th, 5.30 p.m.: DENIS CHESTERS, "The Humanistic Approach to Psychical Research".
West Ham Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead, London, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

EDITORIAL

IS the debate between atheists and agnostics really meaningful? Is there an essential difference between the two? Much will depend, of course, on how the terms are defined, and there are a number of definitions—only slightly varying—from which we may choose. Certain definitions which I have come across, and which seem to me wholly valid, should make my questions not quite so silly as they may sound.

Chamber's Encyclopaedia* distinguishes between three forms of atheist, the *Dogmatic*, the *Sceptical* and the *Critical*. The *Dogmatic Atheist* asserts positively and outrightly that there is no God (god, "procreative intelligence", etc.); the *Sceptical Atheist* takes the view that any speculation upon the existence of a God (etc.) is a waste of time because such knowledge must always remain uncertain (the 'finite' uselessly endeavouring to comprehend the 'infinite', etc.); the *Critical Atheist* simply insists that the evidences adduced in support of a reasoned belief in a God (etc.) are wholly inadequate. For the individual, each standpoint leads to living as though there was no God (etc.) if not actually denying such existence. Be it remembered, each of these positions is defined as 'atheist'.

Most *atheists* would agree the position of the *Dogmatic Atheist* is out of place except where the way in which the God (etc. for the last time) is defined contains a contradiction (e.g., 'all-merciful and vengeful'). In such a case he would almost certainly be supported by *Sceptical* and *Critical Atheists* also.

For a definition of the word 'agnosticism' let's turn to T. H. Huxley, the man who first coined the term. Huxley first used 'agnostic' and 'agnosticism' while at a friend's house in Clapham Common in 1869, but it wasn't until 1889 that frequent misrepresentations forced him to define these terms more exactly. In *Christianity and Agnosticism*, Huxley wrote:

"It is wrong for a man to say he is certain of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty. This is what agnosticism asserts, and . . . it is all that is essential to agnosticism."

It seems clear to me that agnosticism is an intellectual discipline in perfect accord with the scientific method of enquiry. It's a rule which may be employed in the widest possible research; the attitude which one should take to the 'God proposition' is implicit; not explicit. (An agnostic may never have considered the concept of God).

It follows that an agnostic who considers the evidence for the existence of God could, in theory, become at the same time either a theist or an atheist. Hence, 'Christian agnostics'. This latter intellectual disaster, however, has brought unfair criticism to bear upon the normal agnostic who, in the vast majority, would share the view of the *Sceptical* or *Critical* atheist.

In brief, the majority of agnostics—if we permit these definitions—are also atheists of the *Sceptical* or *Critical* school. Surely the quarrel should be between agnostics who claim God exists and agnostics (= atheists) who reject such a belief; not between atheists and agnostics.

* *Entry Atheism*; 1906 Edition.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

F. H. Snow

WHERE is secularism going? A good many freethinkers are asking the question. They see religion still strongly entrenched, in spite of modern thought and educational progress. Positive unbelief is still rare in the Western democracies, and fundamentalism by no means defunct. Positive belief is not represented by the number of church attenders. Very many whose acquaintance with 'God's House' is virtually confined to christening, marriage and death, believe in the reality of an Almighty and the truth of scripture concerning him, not through intelligent study of the subject, but through ignorance of sound objections to the creed of their infancy. They believe because they have always believed, and their dormant critical faculties have not been subjected to reason's stimulating appeal. The voice of Freethought has been faintly heard, if heard at all, and they have merely turned over in their complacently uncritical slumber.

As for the millions forming the body of churchgoers, a ripple on a pond would be analogous to the effect on their faith of organised secularism, which the Churches regard as almost innocuous, because the principal sources of public information, the Press and broadcasting services, rarely concede opportunity for the expression of atheism, because of the tame nature of the humanism that has largely replaced it, and because of the diminutive circulation of secularist literature.

Not long ago, Roman Catholic Father Corbishley expressed gratification at the tone of certain humanist talks which, he said, carried no threat to Christian belief. The Churches have no objection to criticism so mildly sceptical as to imperil nobody's faith. Indeed, they welcome humanist co-operation in social and ethical projects, and are not averse to opposition, so long as their creed is not subjected to the analysis of reason. They have worked assiduously to achieve a sceptical stalemate. For decades they have played down controversial discussion of the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, as outmoded and inapposite to the mental complexion of the times. They have called the tune, and many secularists have fallen in behind their piper. Should the trend gain impetus, it is conceivable that broadcasters of forthright scepticism could be reduced to speakers from open-air rostrums, who reach so small an audience as to be rather like voices crying in the wilderness.

The recent debate between Quintin Hogg and John Mortimer, on the motion "That God does not exist"—astonishingly sanctioned by the BBC—has emphasised the need of a militant policy by our secular societies. The defeat of the motion by a mere one vote majority, though indicating progress of sceptical thought amongst the intelligentsia, as represented by the jury of young lawyers, was answered, through the columns of the *Sun* newspaper, by an overwhelming countervote, nearly eighty per cent of the thousands who registered their views on the subject, averring belief in God's existence. The published extracts from believers' letters implied ignorance of the intelligent objections to divine reality that form rationalism's case.

What clearer illustration is needed of the necessity for insistent exposure of the vulnerabilities of the faith injected into little children? Is secular-humanism unaware that the shortest route to the realisation of its ideals is through the obliteration of religious belief, and that that should be its paramount objective? Has it lost sight of

the fact that the Churches see in our connivance at the intellectual immaturity of the masses, their guarantee of great longevity? The lamp of Reason is burning dimly because of Freethought's failure to adequately publicise the many cogent reasons for disbelief in the supernatural, and will continue to, unless its policy is shaped in accordance with the necessities.

Unless it is to languish, and if it is to be the instrument of religion's decease, secularism will have to shock the people out of mindless tolerance of the set of ancient fables masquerading as God's Word. It will have to make a big noise. It will need to be sensational. It must aim at a publicity as great as Billy Graham's. It will have to create a stir that will vibrate in every home.

How can that be accomplished? In the threadbare state of Freethought finances, it is impossible, but it is a live, near-future possibility, if secularism possesses the imagination and determination to lay the foundation for the immense funds necessary for the conduct of a great sceptical mission, with meetings on a Graham scale, nation-wide distribution of rationalist literature and town-to-town campaigning, in an all-out effort to acquaint the people with the anti-theistic case. Once it was seen that it was a powerfully-proselytising force, secular-humanism would become news, and its spokesmen would be heard far beyond their auditoriums.

How can the funds for a project of this magnitude be acquired? By the harnessing of our cause to business, like the big religious bodies. There must be within our ranks, those with the brains and experience to organise commercial or industrial enterprises, and a sufficiency of moneyed enthusiasts to finance their launching. A gentleman to whom I broached the subject at this year's NSS Dinner, expressed readiness to invest ten thousand pounds in any business venture to furnish income for the massive propagation of sceptical ideas. Many others would assuredly subscribe, according to their means.

By every observable sign, the Churches greatest dread is of a mightily articulate atheism. If secularism is not to fall down on its avowed task of educating the people as to the fallacy of religion, it must construct a financial powerhouse to ensure that articulation, and the triumph of truth and commonsense over superstition.

Has it the will, vision and courage for the job?

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By DAVID TRIBE

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AGNOSTIC OR ATHEIST?—a flux of meanings

E. Hughes-Jones

INTERMINABLE arguments often stem from the inadequacies of language; time-honoured terms are used to convey varying nuances of meaning. An understanding of this will help to promote greater co-operative sympathy among all non-theists in efforts to build a rational society. I agree largely with much that proclaimed atheists state, yet agnosticism is nearer to an acceptable designation of my avowed Secular Humanism. Why?

(a) because studies of ultimate beliefs go beyond questions of whether a person accepts or rejects theism into problems of origins of the Cosmos; and

(b) language is a flux with changing connotations.

Concerning (a), we do not yet know sufficient to *prove* any theory of first beginnings though there is much to favour a naturalistic inference. A person who evolves to agnosticism by long study is often humble and tolerant enough in spirit to frankly acknowledge this, but at the same time able to say firmly that, in the light of modern scientific knowledge, he rejects all the interpretations of revealed theistic religions as primitive and credulous. Concerning (b), T. H. Huxley disclaimed atheism but said that though there was not sufficient evidence before the human mind to come to any final conclusion about the real nature, origin, and destiny of the Cosmos, science was gradually accumulating overwhelming evidence in favour of a continuous evolution under natural agencies, and also that the actual origin of life from inorganic matter under similar natural agencies was becoming more and more a legitimate inference. Since T. H. Huxley's day of "the unknown and unknowable God" the accumulation of evidence for the natural agencies has greatly increased. This had led to a different connotation and emphasis of agnosticism which now submits that it is beyond the bounds of experience and reason to assert anything about God.

Gradually over the years the designation 'agnostic' has evolved to have a meaning truer to its derivation than the original one. The gnostics pretended and asserted special mystical insight and knowledge. An agnostic accepts no belief which is beyond proof of at least empirical authority; he holds all subject to challenge and refutation; thus the term now indicates a basic attitude of mind, the scientific temper and approach. Thus while he firmly rejects theistic 'revealed' interpretations of the beginnings of the Cosmos and of life as incredible primitive imaginings, and whilst he emphasises the increasing evidences for natural agencies as a legitimate inference of origins, he nevertheless logically acknowledges that **the way and whence** of the natural agencies is an unsolved mystery; *that* is the nub of modern agnosticism. **We do not know.** When I designate myself agnostic in relation to such Origins I am saying not only that I do not know nor understand, but also neither does anybody else as far as my researches can discover.

Words necessarily adapt their connotations as knowledge increases because we cannot always find an appropriate new term to convey exactly what we mean and be readily and generally understood. Much time and use is required to make a new term familiar and meanwhile the old term may evolve towards the desired nuance of meaning, just as 'agnostic' has done over the years. The term 'atheist'

seems to have hardened to convey much more than a rejection of theism and to imply a negative dogmatic assertion, as if indeed all concerning origins of the Cosmos and of life were infallibly known. (Even the late Archibald Robertson agreed that logical proof of atheism was impossible.) Many proclaimed atheists would protest outrage at this extended interpretation. I sympathise, but find that this diffused dogmatic interpretation is prevalent and provokes those holding it to resentment and combativeness against an apparent arrogant assertion rather than the reasoned reflections we wish to promote. Thus I find 'agnostic' the more logically viable, defensible and promotable term. The agnostic does not wish the public ignorantly to think that he considers the first 'Why?' and 'Whence?' are yet explained; but he is all for further explorations and he hopes in the interests of non-theistic progressiveness that both agnostics and atheists will stress their agreements rather than their subtle differences. Surely both have tolerance and humility, apprehending how little we really do know with certainty against a background of space and time, sharing with Einstein a cosmic awe: Man is only a tiny speck on a small planet of a minor sun, which itself against the immensities appears as no more than a feeble, transient, shooting star, a brief flicker of light and flutter of movement over the illimitable, majestic, appalling Cosmic night. There is room, is there not, for intellectual humility as well as for justified pride of intellectual **integrity** even among Secular Humanists?

HUMAN RIGHTS

First H. G. Wells Annual Memorial Lecture

THE FIRST H. G. Wells Annual Memorial Lecture will be given at Conway Hall, London, 6.30 p.m., December 7, on 'Human Rights'. The lecture will be given by The Rt. Hon. Lord Ritchie-Calder, CBE, MA, Professor of International Relations at the University of Edinburgh and Member of the United Kingdom Committee for Human Rights Year. (Ritchie-Calder—as he then was—acted as Secretary to the drafting committee for the 1940 Sankey Declaration of the Rights of Man, in which H. G. Wells played a prominent part, and was also a close friend of Wells.)

Lord Ritchie-Calder will be introduced on behalf of the Trustees of the Memorial Lecture Fund by Dr Hugh J. Schonfield, DS.Litt.

The lecture will be followed by a discussion, with particular reference to the fact that 1968 has been designated 'Human Rights Year' by the United Nations Organisation. To give as many people as possible the opportunity of hearing what Lord Ritchie-Calder has to say, members and representatives of many organisations have been invited to participate.

Following Lord Ritchie-Calder's lecture, Mr Gordon Evans (Secretary, UK Committee on Human Rights Year) will speak on 'Human Rights Year 1968'.

Applications for tickets (3/6 each) should be made to the Secretary, The H. G. Wells Society, 21 Fawe Park Road, London, SW15.

SWIFT: IN OPPOSITION TO THE HUMANIST TRADITION

A Tercentenary Essay

Denis Cobell

WHEN George Orwell compared Swift to people like Sir Alan Herbert, as a silly-clever Conservative, and wrote concerning Swift's essay, *An Argument against abolishing Christianity*, that it was on the same level as an exposure of Bertrand Russell's errors by Father Ronald Knox, he did not also wish to belittle Swift's great literary genius, as particularly exhibited in *Gulliver's Travels*. Few readers of English literature can fail to enjoy the fine satire in this latter work, although remembering that they are in fact having a laugh with Swift at their own expense! Herein lies Swift's opposition to the Humanist tradition; in many of his other works, where the message is not cloaked in fairy-tales, his belief in the omniscience of God, who thrives without aid from 'miserable mortals', rings out clearly.

This blind belief in God's omnipotence, led to a certain stupidity in Swift, as evident in the following passage he wrote to a mourner: "God, in his wisdom, hath been pleased to load our declining years with many sufferings, with diseases, and decays of nature, with the death of many friends, and the ingratitude of more, sometimes with the loss or diminution of our fortunes, when our infirmities most need them; . . . yet they were intended by the author of our being to wean us gradually from our fondness of life, the nearer we approach towards the end of it".

Furthermore, Swift is entirely opposed to the spirit of Voltairian liberty which allows free-speech to one's political and religious opponents; in *A Project for the Advancement of Religion* he argues, "It cannot easily be answered to God or Man, why a law is not made for limiting the Press; as under pretence of Freethinking, it endeavours to overthrow the tenets of Religion".

Hobbes, in company with Swift, believed in absolute authority within the State. Although Hobbes, who ardently supported the Monarchy, did not agree with Swift's opinion that power should rest with parliament. At this time, a century following the Reformation, Roman Catholics possessed little influence, and Swift's main intention was to see that protestant dissenters did not intervene in politics. Frequently linked with these protestants, in Swift's mind, were atheists and free-thinkers.

Swift's 'whiggish' opinions were not the current ones of his day. His denial of privileges to Non-conformists made him a High Tory in practice. To Swift, religion was politics, and he demanded that the Church of England have power over and above the State, which had to receive the doctrine and practices of the Church "as a divine law . . . and consequently, what they could not justly alter, any more than the common laws of nature". It is easy to see why he opposed the dissenters—virtually all he believed was that God made the rules of the universe then left mankind to get on with life, in strict, thoughtless adherence to these rules.

Nevertheless, a major force to reckon with in England for three hundred years, as Kingsley Martin poignantly observed on the occasion of the *New Statesman's* fiftieth birthday, has been Non-conformity.

Swift rejected the Churchmen's explanation of God's mystery, and abused his lesser brothers: "the bulk of mankind is as well qualified for flying as thinking". His belief in man's depraved nature, and the difficulties encountered in trying to improve it, is propounded with far more wit than Billy Graham can muster in *An Argument against abolishing Christianity*. Lord Orrery praised it by writing "he judged rightly in imagining that a small treatise, written with a spirit of mirth and freedom, must be more efficacious than long sermons, or laborious lessons in morality".

In common with this essay, *The Tale of A Tub*, an admonition to those who sought to alter or embellish the words of Holy Writ, is delightfully amusing; both employ the philosophy of rhetoric in ironically exposing false belief. Of the former, one of its chief purposes was to defend the Sacramental Test Act, which barred anyone, who refused the sacrament of the Church of England, from civil or military office.

Milton's request for greater freedom of divorce has won him unpopularity with Roman Catholics, right up to our own day. Swift's dismissal of Milton's 'right' to discuss the subject appears in his *Remarks upon a book entitled, The Rights of the Christian Church*. Milton had married a 'shrew', and as he sought personal gain out of the legal changes proposed, his opinions became worthless in Swift's eyes.

It is not difficult to see why Swift believed of Free-thinkers in his day, that they wished to subvert all religion to free themselves from moral restraints, in the light of his quoted remarks. His wish to see their freedom of opinion restricted finds few sympathisers in this country today.

One of the few merits that can still be appreciated in the twentieth century, was Swift's gift of prescience and prophecy. The changes in religion and politics which he opposed have come to pass, generally in the manner which he foretold: "I have given up all hopes of the church or Christianity. The Christian religion will not last above three hundred and odd years. There will always be Christians, as there are Jews: but it will be no longer a national religion". Written in 1704, this comment strikes of the truth.

Of all the discussions surrounding Swift's mad genius, his abnormal reactions to women have been a commonly cited symptom; it is assumed that he was impotent and only sought women for intellectual comfort. His friend Vanessa left half her property to Bishop Berkeley. Berkeley who was earlier presented at court by Swift, wrote *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, and devised an ingenious metaphysical theory that objects only exist when they are perceived.

As he became older and indifferent, Swift sympathised with Hobbes, "that self-interest is the prime motive in all men". In *A Project for the Advancement of Religion*, Swift attacks the moral standards of his day, but persuades readers that the only way to improve virtues is through

(Continued on page 375)

CAN INTELLIGENCE BE UNINTELLIGIBLE?

H. Rich

INTELLIGENCE manifests itself by an awareness that the processes of natural phenomena conform to uniform principles, by a desire to acquire and utilise a knowledge of such principles, and by purposive activity in conjunction with such knowledge. The general mental attitude with which these principles have been sought has been largely responsible for the paucity of knowledge during the major part of the history of mankind. It is mainly because the study of the natural phenomena on which such principles are based has been confused with primitive beliefs and religious dogma that so little progress was made for such a long time. The surge of scientific advancement in the last century was the culmination of a struggle lasting hundreds of years to release the stranglehold maintained by religion on all enquiries which tended to upset its cherished concepts of man's relation to the universe. As soon as it could be proved that the laws which appear to control the universe are discoverable and that man could use a knowledge of such laws with advantage, the idea of a deity who was the master of all ceremonies became less acceptable. Man could, outside irrelevant doctrine, achieve the power to change his subjection to the vagaries of nature through his own intelligent activity, thus rejecting the humble status alleged by religion to have been allotted to him by his creator. The greater the control man could obtain over his environment, the less credible such a control under a super-intelligence became.

When there is nothing to be perceived and nothing takes place, there is nothing to which the questions "What?" and "How?" can be applied, apart of course from the fact that there would be nobody to ask them. For instance, the recognition of the presence of sun, earth and rain is an

essential prerequisite to an understanding of the forces they exert to promote the growth of plants, trees and flowers. There must be some source from which knowledge can be gleaned in order that intelligence can get to work on it. When the question "Why?" arises there is a presumption that some form of intelligent life exists which is concerned with having a reason or a purpose. Since man is the only known intelligent form of life, only man can require and furnish an answer. When the reason for man's behaviour in a particular manner is consistent with the available knowledge of the principles with which such behaviour is associated, then it is intelligent behaviour. Any reason, in order for it to be understood, must therefore be related to a knowledge of whatever principles are involved. The greater the intelligence, the greater the knowledge of the probable effects of direct action on the phenomena concerned and the more appropriate such action is to the ends which are desired to be achieved. For man to seek a reason from either a physical, immaterial or hypothetical being who is not motivated by any comparable desire for knowledge or its application, is consequently quite futile. To suppose that any such being would be capable of setting the laws themselves in motion, or of controlling or changing them, simply means that the normal criteria for intelligence could not be applied. The very need for intelligent activity would vanish should this be possible. Many types of literary art, among them fairy-tales and science-fiction, describe characters who possess magical powers in this direction. The intention is the quite worthy one of stimulating the imagination through the use of "make-believe". Any mature person who went as far as to believe in the veracity of such stories would be classified as *non compos mentis*.

Intelligence becomes illuminated only when the answers to "What", "How" and "Why" are sought in the various fields of enquiry which inspire the raising of the questions. As soon as question and answer have no significance, intelligence has no function. At one extremity, knowing everything would render intelligence superfluous, and, at the other, a lack of desire to acquire knowledge would completely negate it. It is somewhere between these two poles that intelligence can be said to have any function at all, and standards set for identifying it.

The essence of the knowledge which intelligence endeavours to discover is that the light it sheds holds good for all relevant times. There are, of course, reservations on the extent to which knowledge on matters of all kinds has developed, but even these reservations are symptoms of intelligence. The relationship between the sun and its planets, as far as is known, was just as valid two thousand years ago, although not then established, as it is today; a molecule of water has always consisted of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen; the fertilisation of the female ovum by the male spermatozoon was just as essential then for the procreation of the human species as it is now. Conversely, in order for something which is alleged to have been true two thousand years ago to be accepted as being equally true today, it must be equally self-evident. Failing this, those who hold it to be just as true are in duty bound to show in some indubitable manner that the natural laws which pertained two thousand years ago do not apply today, and how this change came about. Intelligence will not accept a substitute for the discharge of its obligations

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London, WC1

SOCIAL AND MORAL EDUCATION

PUBLIC MEETINGS

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
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to demand an unbroken sequence in any proposed chain of events, nor will it lower its integrity by professing knowledge when it is ignorant.

Is it possible to imagine intelligence existing in any form without some form of phenomena on which to exercise it, when even fairy-tales and science fiction cannot dispense with it? This is the question which must be satisfactorily answered by all religious institutions presenting an all-powerful, all-knowing, self-sufficient deity who was responsible for bringing the universe into being without apparent cause or reason. The inference underlying such a belief is that it is possible to think without having anything to think about—that it is possible to have a desire when nothing is desirable—that knowledge as such is meaningless because, although it is an open book, the contents are known before it is read and might just as well have remained unwritten. Such a concept must surely be self-defeating owing to self-contradiction. An unchanging lump of stone in some inaccessible part of the universe could be attributed with a super intellect and would comply with the same conditions. It would remain unperturbed and imperturbable, it would have no specific desires (other possibly than its own continued existence), the universe could be alleged to have been caused through some mysterious power it possessed, and all the qualities vested in a deity could equally be vested in it with equal response to appeals to them. The only problem which could give it any concern would be its own cause. Regrettably, such a problem would have to remain a perpetual and insoluble one, because, as soon as it was resolved, its self-sufficiency would be refuted. Appealing as the idea of self-causation might be, it could not be retained without evoking the repugnant memory of the manner in which it occurred. Psychologically, the suppression of this memory would inevitably be accompanied by a distaste for knowledge of causes and effects of any kind because they would eventually lead back to their origin and the same question would arise. By some strange coincidence the appellation "Rock of Ages" would be just as descriptive.

REVIEW

The Secular Responsibility

MARGHANITA LASKI'S Conway Memorial Lecture has now been published as a pamphlet (*The Secular Responsibility*, South Place Ethical Society, 2s). It gives those who were not able to hear the lecture an opportunity to read it, and offers those who did hear it an almost equally welcome opportunity to go over it again at leisure and assimilate Miss Laski's closely packed reasoning.

Particularly useful is Miss Laski's warning that unbelievers should not employ themselves in working out new orthodoxies—a series of sterile arguments as to whether one should describe oneself as atheist or agnostic spring readily to mind—and her reminder to utopian social theorists that most people are more interested in a pleasant life for themselves and their families than in an ideal society. Interesting, too, is Miss Laski's analysis of ecstatic experiences, which she shows to be independent of religion, and quite explicable without recourse to the supernatural.

However, Miss Laski's portrayal of Christianity as the performer of a useful function in satisfying religious needs is very one-sided. It is of course true that Christianity has brought happiness to many people, but Miss Laski does not mention the cost. If the churches have brought happiness to some by promising heaven, they have added immeasurably to the terror of death by threatening hell. They have encouraged charity, but also xenophobia. They have burned more witches than they have cared for lepers; their orphanages have often been little hells for the orphans; and the

casualties of their holy wars are numberless. Miss Laski says that unbelievers should open their minds to the beauty of Christian images as myths, but this is scarcely feasible as long as the most beautiful image of all, the Madonna and child, is still used to entice young girls to become nuns, to be deprived of the joys of motherhood, and simultaneously to deny other women the use of contraceptives, and force them to have so many children that motherhood becomes a nightmare. Modern Christianity is very different from the traditional brand, and today many clerics are doing valuable social work. But there are also such Christians as the Catholics who recently exploded with indignation in a local newspaper because a magistrate recommended a family planning clinic to a poverty-stricken woman charged with neglecting her four children, all under school age.

In a long and interesting argument, Marghanita Laski explores the sources of ideals and of morality. She seems to find the origin of ideals in individual ecstatic experience, and the origin of morality quite separately in the herd instinct and in the need of every group to find an acceptable code of conduct to unite its members. Ideals provide a basis by which the minority of individuals concerned with ethical problems judge the accepted morality—frequently without much practical insight into ordinary people. Thus utopian communities have regularly come to grief because they have failed to allow for the realities of human nature. It is perhaps a weakness in Miss Laski's argument that she does not consider the role of the family in ideal formation. She sees on the one hand the individual ecstatic experience, and on the other hand the collective morality of the herd. Is there not something between, arising neither from the individual nor from the impersonal herd, but from the intimate relationships of a few people in the family group? If ideals arise from a desire to extend the care for individual welfare naturally found within the family to the wider community, perhaps the prospects for the moral improvement of society are more hopeful than Miss Laski believes. The problem in that case is not to impose on the mass of the population an idealism of which their limited natures renders them incapable, but to encourage them to extend the concern they naturally feel for people they know to people they do not know, and to provide an institutional framework which can make their concern effective.

Many other interesting and controversial points are considered, and every *Freethinker* reader should find this pamphlet stimulating. There is a foreword by Sir Peter Medawar.

Note: *The Secular Responsibility* by Marghanita Laski is available from the *Freethinker Bookshop*, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. 2s plus 5d postage.

SWIFT : A Tercentenary Essay

(Continued from page 373)

bribery. Admitting this is hypocritical, he continues to prefer it! It seems that Nigel Dennis was correct in describing Swift's religion as similar to that of great headmasters: deriving its authority from God, yet punitive in its own right.

The disease, known since 1861 as Ménière's syndrome, from which Swift was undoubtedly a sufferer, was the cause of his melancholic moods which used to last for several days, when he was Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin. Ménière's disease consists of severe vertigo, nausea, hissing sounds in the ear and some deafness; the giddiness often recurs at frequent intervals after an original attack. No account of Swift can ignore the misery associated with this disorder of unknown origin, unless its author maliciously wishes to impute the symptoms to syphilis.

Whatever excuses we may allow Swift as a person, we cannot permit his writings to pass uncriticised. Humanists can find little to admire in the dishonesty of one who wrote that, happiness is a state of being "perpetually well deceived".

LETTERS

Rights and Duties

I HAVE just finished reading A. C. Thompson's lengthy treatise *Rights and Duties*. Whilst many of these citizens' 'Rights and Duties' are attractive to the Humanist, I am unable to comprehend by what rational method Mr Thompson reaches a number of his conclusions. Also, I object to the dogmatic way he assumes that these rules should be imposed on the individual and society, as if they were laws imposed by the gods. Many of the duties he requires of the individual are more stringent than those imposed by the Catholic Church upon its members.

I admire Mr Thompson's writing ability and have enjoyed his past articles, particularly the *Law of God* series. However, I feel that in his *Rights and Duties* essay he has not argued his case as well, or as rationally, as he usually does. Indeed some of his assumptions are, to me, irrational and abhorrent. I disagree strongly with the thesis that (a) abortion is *not* the right of a mother; (b) the State has the right to impose a code of morality upon its citizens; (c) the death penalty *should* be retained by the State; and (d) voluntary euthanasia is *not* the right of the individual or society.

These are personal ideas and beliefs which I wish to have the right to follow, I do not seek to impose these ideas on others (with the exception of the abolition of the death penalty), but request Mr Thompson does the same, and not claim his ideas are based on rational reasoning. There is no black and white in social morality.

CLIVE H. GODFREY.

"... make them see where they are wrong"

I WAS very interested in the article by F. H. Snow. These are the kind of articles we want. Concerned with everyday problems of Humanists. Easy to read, and no words one has to look up in the dictionary.

I agree with much that he says but not all. I do not go out of my way to seek out religious people in order to convert them, but I do try to bring the subject round to religion and to state my own beliefs and try to make them see where they are wrong. I try to keep before my mind: "Never argue for victory but always for truth". Those who agree with us, except that they believe in an after-life, can do so without much harm providing they are tolerant and their tolerance doesn't permit injustice and cruelty. They must of course be pacifists; none can call themselves Christian and be otherwise. As I tell them all, Jesus said we should fight evil but *not* by *killing* people. His "turn the other cheek" and "the meek shall inherit the earth" seems to fall on deaf ears as far as his followers are concerned; if they think he was wrong, how can his followers believe him to be God?

Let us by all means fight any evil superstitions; but believing in an after-life is not evil, only misguided and rather absurd. It will go in time, when the other absurdities have been thrown out. And let us—in season and out—proclaim our struggle against superstition by means of reason. After all, our reason evolved in order to be used.

LILIAN MIDDLETON.

Universal Affirmation

HAVING just read David Tribe's pamphlet on *Universal Affirmation*, it occurs to me Freethinkers may be missing the wood for the trees.

I put it to readers that a case for appeal or re-trial could be forced by defending counsel if it could be demonstrated that some material evidence was given on oath by a witness for the prosecution who knew himself to be a non-believer. As I see things, there is nothing to stop a non-believer from giving evidence on oath, but the defence could surely insist that such evidence was invalid if at some later stage it could be demonstrated that the non-believer did not know that he could affirm instead. This latter point would seem material in the event of the judge ruling contempt of court for a witness thus giving evidence on oath.

The long and short of my point is that a modest campaign of following up prosecution witnesses in long and expensive trials may well procure many who are thus situated. The state must surely blanch at the prospect of a large number of re-trials thus demonstrated as being necessary by virtue of the defence's claim that evidence on oath by a non-believer could not be admitted.

Or am I wrong?

CHARLES WILLIAMS MARSHALL.

BOOKS OF INTEREST

- 100 Years of Freethought *David Tribe* 42s. (post 1s. 6d.).
 Why I am Not a Christian (book) *Bertrand Russell* 8s. 6d. (post 10d.).
 Why I am Not a Christian (pamphlet) *Bertrand Russell* 1s. (post 4d.).
 Religious Education in State Schools *Brigid Brophy* 2s. 6d. (post 4d.).
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