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Friday,
December 1, 1967**RI IN THE LORDS**

THE result of the debate in the House of Lords (November 15) on religious education/instruction/indoctrination in schools perhaps perfectly mirrored views outside the Lords; the majority thought reviews and changes necessary; a Humanist minority thought radical changes were essential and a reactionary minority thought the present situation required reinforcement.

The debate was initiated by Lord Aberdare who, though far from calling himself a Humanist, nevertheless took into account many Humanist views. Lord Wade said he was suspicious of any attempt to impose views on adults or children. He didn't consider it the proper or necessary function of the state to defend the Christian faith. He saw a place for education in religion at schools but would like to see a more open approach than at present. Lord Raglan thought it quite wrong that Christianity should be taught as undisputed truth. By abandoning compulsory religious instruction the Church would draw converts rather than indoctrinates; a more healthy situation than at present.

Humanists Lord Francis Williams and Lord Willis were not opposed to the teaching of religion in schools but to the way in which it was presented. They felt it necessary, at least for the older child, to be taught the facts about various religions; it was wrong, however, for indoctrination of the child to a particular religious view to have any part in education.

Lord Butler, who was mainly responsible for the compulsory religious clause in the 1944 Act, Lord Sackville and the Bishop of Chichester thought the present system required reinforcement rather than amendment.

* * *

NSS FORUM

A FORUM, in which the topic will be euthanasia, is being organised by the

National Secular Society to be held at Conway Hall, London, on February 1, 1968. The title for the meeting will be *The Right to Die*.

The Chairman will be Archdeacon Carpenter of Westminster Abbey and the speakers will include David Tribe (President, NSS) and Norman St John Stevas, MP. Two other speakers are also being considered.

* * *

NEW BHA CHAIRMAN

AFTER nearly four years as Chairman, first of the Ethical Union (now defunct) and later of the British Humanist Association, Graham Kingsley declined to stand for re-election at the meeting of the new Executive Committee on Tuesday, November 14.

Mr Kingsley was elected as Chairman of the EU in April 1964 (the Office had previously been held by Michael Lines the present-day BHA Executive Officer) and retained his Office until January of this year when the EU finally wound-up. He then transferred to the BHA's General Purposes Committee, taking over from Harold Blackham who had chaired the temporary committee during the transitional stages between the organisation with charity status and the new BHA. This committee became officially the BHA Executive Committee when he declined to stand for re-election.

Throughout this difficult period, Mr Kingsley held his Office impeccably.

His brilliant management and fine grasp of technical subtleties, his democratic impartiality and professional demeanour were a great credit to the BHA. He also took part in several other committees including the Group Development Committee and the Publicity Committee and probably did more than anybody to organise the London Young Humanists.

His place as Chairman of the BHA EC is now taken by Dr Peter Draper who was unanimously elected to the Chair on November 14. He had once before held the same Office when the BHA was jointly sponsored by the Ethical Union and the Rationalist Press Association. He is generally felt to be the most fitting successor.

**IS YOUR NEWS
ON THIS PAGE?**

The editor of the *Freethinker* welcomes reports of meetings, activities and any newsworthy items of Humanist interest. National organisations, local groups or individuals are all invited to submit copy. Be a reporter for the *Freethinker*, and make sure your honorary secretary knows of this way to publicize your organisation.

Reports should be addressed to (or further information sought from): The Editor, *Freethinker*, 103 Borough High Street, EC1. The *Freethinker* editorial office's new telephone number is 01-407 1251.

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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

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Margaret Street), Sunday, December 3rd, 6.45 p.m.: A. F. M. BRIERLEY, "The Psychology of Morals".

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group (Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton), Sunday, December 3rd, 5.30 p.m.: LORD SORENSON, "Human Liberty and Democracy".

The Cambridge Humanists (27 Portugal Place), Wednesday, December 6th, 8.30 p.m.: A meeting.

Dover Eighteen-Plus Group (The Priory Hotel, Dover), Thursday, December 7th, 8.15 p.m.: Forum: NSS speaker GERALD SAMUEL.

Havering Humanist Society (The Social Centre, Gubbins Lane, Harold Wood), Tuesday, December 5th, 8 p.m.: A talk by a member of the Simon Community.

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, December 3rd, 6.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Man's Place in the Modern Universe".

Redbridge Humanist Society (Wanstead House, The Green, London, E11), Monday, December 11th, 7.45 p.m.: PETER FRYER, "Censorship".

The Seymour Gallery (94 Seymour Place, London, W1), presents A One Man Mixed Show of oils, drawings, collages and 3-D pictures by Oswell Blakeston, December 9th until December 15th

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, December 3rd, 11 a.m.: PROFESSOR PHILLIP GRIFFITHS, "Abortion — an Atheist's View". Tuesday, December 5th, 6.45 p.m.: DR. PAPPERWORTH, "Human Experiments — the Ethical Problems".

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, London, WC1), Sunday, December 3rd, 6.30 p.m.: Members of the London Octet. Strauss, Schonberg and Brahms. Admission 4/-.

EDITORIAL

A READER insists I define my terms in order to clarify my ideology and sympathies. Fair enough. It should be emphasized, though, that the views and definitions expressed here are not necessarily acceptable to the majority of those who also subscribe to these ideologies.

Secularism: Rejection of supernaturalism and exclusive concern with this life in this world—and its improvement.

Rationalism: Reliance on reason and rejection of teachings unverifiable by reason.

Ethicisism: Recognition of the general desirability of ordered behaviour guided by consistent principles aligned with reality and best human interests.

humanism: Traditional recognition of the essential dignity of man as a being born into this world with a right to use it and enjoy it.

Humanism: A modern attitude, deriving from traditional humanism, but founding itself on Secularism ("this life is all we have—make it good to be alive"¹; "... the Humanist is concerned with man's welfare and happiness in this life alone, . . ."²; "... it is this secularism . . . which has come to be called Humanism."³), going on to embrace the scientific method of enquiry and modern Rationalism ("... Humanism may broadly be regarded as concordant with modern rationalism . . ."⁴; "Humanists are committed to reliance on reason as the only test and guide"⁵) and aspiring to formulate ethical principles and values as guides to the way we live ("... Humanism is concerned with the welfare of all, and recognises that each of us is morally responsible not only for his own personal conduct but also for all human behaviour."⁶; "In determining the foundations of morality and the ultimate objectives of social policy, the Humanist is concerned with man's happiness and welfare in this life alone, and with the development of each and every individual's maximum potentiality for the good life conceived in these terms."²).

The (British) **Humanist Movement**: A general term to describe a number of associated organisations and their supporters comprising the British Humanist Association, National Secular Society, Progressive League, Rationalist Press Association, South Place Ethical Society and numerous smaller organisations such as the Agnostics Adoption Society, Humanist Letter Network and the University Humanist Federation.

Freethought: Rejection of any coercion, from authority or tradition, which seeks to prevent or inhibit the individual's right to freely question, examine and draw conclusions. Freethought is embraced by all sections of the modern Humanist Movement.

This is perhaps not as I would strictly define these terms were I to compile a glossary; nevertheless, it is sufficiently close to what I mean when I use the terms to enable those interested to understand what I mean. I am a Secularist, a Rationalist, a Freethinker and an 'Ethicist'; hence, a Humanist in the modern sense as defined above. (At least, I try to be.)

Although I once thought differently, I cannot now see the need to qualify myself as a Secular-Humanist or a

Rational-Humanist or an Ethical-Humanist. In practise, the majority of those who belong to the various sections of the broad Humanist Movement also consider themselves as Humanists. I leave it to the transcendental-humanists and the Christian-humanists to qualify their humanism.

REFERENCES

- ¹ A BHA motto.
- ² *Humanist and Social Pathology*: Lady Barbara Wootton (from *The Humanist Frame*, ed. Sir Julian Huxley).
- ³ *The Sufficiency of the World*: Harold Blackham.
- ⁴ *Humanism in Practice*: M. Roshwald.
- ⁵ *The Standard of Reason*: Harold Blackham.
- ⁶ *What is Humanism?* Barbara Smoker.

DINNER COMMEMORATES JOSEPH McCABE CENTENARY

Report from B. Landry (USA)

"A TOAST," gentlemen, "to the memory of the greatest atheist of all time, JOSEPH McCABE." On Saturday, November 11, a small group of American admirers of Mr McCabe, gathered in Los Angeles, to honour and keep alive the memory of the man "whose pen and tongue ever went together".

For more than fifty years Joseph McCabe was the titan of biblical as well as historical scholars and his numerous writings of nearly three hundred books attest to this monumental task by one man. Born in Manchester, England, as a young man he entered the franciscan monastery and in the year 1895 broke with the Church to become the greatest rational writer of all time.

One of the group, a professor of anthropology said: "The memory of a man who fought more than fifty years for truth and the suppression of superstition ought not to be forgotten by this, or any generation. It is my highest hope, gentlemen, that one day a statue or monument recognising the greatness of a mind such as Mr McCabe's will be elevated for all the world to see."

Joseph McCabe, master of pen and tongue, born 1867 died in 1955, was one of the most prolific opponents of the Roman Catholic Church and all its ridiculous superstitions. With pen and tongue he won every major battle against the Church because he was a man of integrity, truth, and intellectual honesty. "I am but a pedlar of culture", once said Joseph McCabe, who knew nearly twenty-two different languages. If this Englishman stands untarnished in American midst, England ought not to hesitate to enshrine the memory of her greatest scholar of scholars.

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FROM FOREIGN PAPERS

A Report from Otto Wolfgang

"Abraham's Fraternity"

Le Droit de Vivre (The Right to Live), a French magazine, reports the foundation of a 'spiritual' association under the name of "Abraham's Fraternity" comprising Jews, Mohammedans and Christians claiming descent from the, originally, Mesopotamian moon-god ABRA(ha)M. In France they enjoy the patronage of Cardinal Feltin, besides the president of the French Protestants, Jacob Kaplan, the French Chief Rabbi, and the Rector of the Islamic Institute of the Paris Mosque. A theological commission will study how much unites these three monotheisms, with a view to creating a feeling of an all-embracing human unity, not excluding agnostics. In an appeal, the president of this association asserts that his novel organisation could be of great assistance to solving the crisis in the Middle East, and he concludes: "Are these not targets which could even be of interest to our agnostic friends?"

* * *

What use a Church ?

Obviously to support the local timepiece. However, in *Etudes*, the journal of the French branch of the Company of Jesus, a Father P. Antoine proposes they should be used as museums. However splendid the architecture of a convent hospital from the Middle Ages, it cannot serve to house modern hospital equipment. Why then use ancient church buildings for modern religious services? "The cathedral is already a museum, and it is visited as such by hardly anybody else but tourists; it is annoying to suffer the interference of its functions as a museum with the survival of a home of service. If the church were used for serious concerts, dramatic performances and contemporary picture exhibitions, it could far better contribute to the cultural manifestation of a town." And, may we add, less glaringly demonstrate the loss of appeal of religion to the broad masses of the population.

* * *

Theology and Science

In *Le Monde*, M. Francois Russo reviews three new books on this theme, one by a Dominican, Father D. Dubarle, another by the Jesuit Karl Rahner, and a collection of Christian reflections on biology. "In science", he writes, "human reason feels adult for it has grown beyond the initial and naive steps of man to explain, in an idealistic way, what he otherwise could not fathom. Science gives a greater feeling even than religion of being one with the world motivating force, because you are able to prove and to change the world around you. Faith has nothing better to offer than ideas which you can or cannot accept but which you cannot prove by experiment; it had been a temporary stop-gap for science. Therefore, theology, as an arbitrary agglomeration of announcements without proof can no longer be considered a branch of science".

The reviewer concludes by saying: "reading these works goes to show how deeply scientific progress has affected religious thinking, by forcing it to discard and shed views which no longer fit into modern society and, at the same time, to search for a new image if it wants to survive".

JEWISH MYSTICISM AND THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

Jean-Pierre Schweitzer

Part One

IN his *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932), Henry Bergson differentiates between "Static" (or official) Religion and Dynamic Religion (or mysticism); the function of the former being "to resist the temptations of the individual to put his interests before those of the community" (p. 177); "of all the creatures that live in Society", he adds, "man alone can swerve from the social line, by giving way to selfish preoccupations when the common good is at stake; in all other societies the interests of the individual are inexorably subordinate to the general interest. This shortcoming (*sic*) in man is the price paid for intelligence" (p. 174). On the other hand Dynamic Religion or mysticism is an individual effort, an attempt to explain and rationalise a numinous—or ecstatic experience.

It is my contention that such experiences must have occurred, at first, purely accidentally, mainly through food poisoning: hallucinogenic mushrooms, such as the *Amanita Muscaria*, known today as Psilocybin, or ergot (diseased seed of rye or barley), better known as LSD 25. Having enjoyed the experience the "mystic" learned to repeat it, both by the ingestion of hallucinogenic potions, philtres and charms and by more sophisticated methods of concentration, known today as transcendental meditation. (On the nature of mysticism see my article in the *Freethinker* (November 10, 1961)).

The rivalry between static and dynamic religion appears in all the great religions, but it is particularly well illustrated in Judaism, where the Rabbis constantly denounced mystical Jews, the "minim", and excluded as much as possible, references to Jewish mysticism in the Talmud (this was done particularly by Jehuda ha nasi, ACE 135-217, when he edited the Mishna).

Mysticism and Gnosticism

We have defined mysticism as an attempt at interpreting a subliminal or ecstatic experience (see A. Huxley: *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*; M. Laski: *Ecstasy*, etc.), we must now introduce the word "gnosticism" (from Greek, *gnosis* = knowledge, science). This is a religious philosophy, akin to mysticism which advocates the acquisition of a "knowledge" of an esoteric (secret) and soteric (redeeming) character: in other words salvation is not to be achieved through one's deeds but by the possession of a higher "knowledge" of things heavenly and divine.

Both mysticism and gnosticism are based on an ecstatic experience, but of a different kind. The mystic claims to unite with the Godhead, whilst the gnostic is only allowed to behold it.

Gnosticism, thus, is a lower form of mysticism and I suggest that this is due to the methods used in trying to achieve the ecstatic experience. The mystics undergo a long course of meditation and practise a very strict asceticism, whilst the gnostics use short-cuts like drugs or self-hypnotic methods and thus fail to achieve the full experience which is the Union with the Divinity—or the Inner Self.

The Books of the Dead: vade mecum for the departed souls and manual of initiation

Until fairly recently it was believed, on one hand, that

only the Egyptians had produced the kind of literature known as the "Books of the Dead" and, on the other hand, that it was merely a guide for the souls of the deceased to enable them to get through the seven gates of heaven and to reach the Hall of Osiris. We know today that most of the early civilisations produced such books (we know of Tibetan books of the dead, Babylonian funerary tablets, etc.). We also realise now, that these books had a dual purpose; they were indeed meant to provide a *vade mecum* for the dead, but they also had an esoteric meaning, understood only by a few initiates, and were used as a manual, or guide, for the living, describing the methods to be used and the various stages of the mystical experience (see T. Leary, *The Psychedelic Experience*), which allowed the ecstatic to see in his lifetime what other people see only after death.

The Jewish Books of the Dead

The Jews who shared the belief, common to all the peoples of the ancient Near East, in the "twin" soul, the vital soul (Hebrew: *nefesh*; Egyptian: *ka*) and the spiritual soul (Hebrew: *rouah*; Egyptian: *ba*), also had their books of the dead, but they have been suppressed or discredited by official (or Talmudic) Judaism, and although the manuscripts have been known to scholars for quite a long time, it is only recently that it has been admitted by some, that they contain very ancient doctrines, going back, probably to the first century BCE. It is in fact Professor Sholem, of Jerusalem University, who was the first scholar to recognise their antiquity and to make a serious study of the problems they raised. (See G. G. Sholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1957), *Jewish Gnosticism* (1960).) These books are generally referred to as the "Hekhaloth" books (the only English translation is by H. Odeberg: *3 Enoch* (1928)) as they describe the Seven Houses, or Palaces (Hebrew: *Hekhaloth*), through which the soul (or the mystic) has to journey before he reaches the seventh Palace (or Heaven) where he will behold the Face of the Lord, sitting on his throne-chariot of fire, which is supported by the "four living creatures" (*Hayyoth Ha Kodesh*) see Rev. 4:6, and surrounded by the Seraphim and the Cherubim singing, in one voice, the "Thrice Holy" (*Kedushshah*). This "Gnosticism" is called "Merkabah" gnosticism as it also refers to the chariot (Hebrew: *merkabah*) of God to which gnostics would descend (thus their name "Yorde" merkabah).

Despite the efforts of the Rabbis, at least one important passage from the Babylonian Talmud—referring to Merkabah Mysticism—has survived (Hagigah 14b: "Four men entered Paradise . . ." (in the Third Heaven)). The Council of Trent (1546) was not more successful than the Rabbis in suppressing such references since they included the Book of Revelation in the Canon, despite the fact that Chapters 4 and 5 describe a Merkabah vision. Finally a Merkabah fragment was found at Qumran (see *Angelic Liturgy* in G. Vermes' *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*).

The Devices They Used to Trigger Off the Ecstatic Experience

The very nature of their experience—a vision, and not a union—suggests the use of hallucinogenic drugs and hypnosis-inducing practices, and we must now turn to the

question of how much the Hebrew actually knew about such plants. They certainly studied botany, and we know of a now lost treatise on plants, *Megillat-Sammanim*. Of all the "magic plants" they certainly knew the most famous, the mystical plant *par excellence*, the Mandrake (*Mandragora Officinarum*), which is probably both the "Dudaim" mentioned in Gen. 30:14 and the "Baaras", "a root of a flame-like colour used by exorcists to drive out evil spirits" as Josephus puts it in his *Jewish Wars* (vii, 6, 3). This mandragora (from the Sanscrit *agora*: substance; *mandros*: sleep) is now known to contain two hallucinogenic substances: Hyoscyamine and Scopolamine.

Incense, known today as "Joss" sticks (Frankincense and Myrrh coming from the Kingdom of Saba) was made great use of and the Jews were well aware of its psychodelic effects: "R. Ishmael b. Elisha said that when he was offering incense in the Temple, as high priest, he beheld the angel Akatriel (= the wreath-binding one, probably Sandalfon) sitting on the throne and asked him for a blessing" (extract from Hekhaloth literature).

UNTAPPED ACTION

THERE are a great many Humanists and potential Humanists in the country, but their force cannot be fully measured because, in areas where there are no local groups, there are few ways of calculating their numbers in terms of Humanist Action. What can the *individual* do to put Humanism on the map in his area? And how can the part the *individual* plays in the life of the community, be seen as Humanist Action?

A churchgoer, acting for the good of the community, will be called 'a good Christian'. But his action will also be seen as 'Christian Action', he will in fact be a representative of the Church. A Humanist, acting for the good of the community, will be seen either as a 'good citizen' or a 'good Christian'. Although a 'good citizen' is a Humanist endeavour and Humanists don't *seek* recognition, they don't want to be thought of or referred to as a 'good Christian'—which seems to be the only measurable standard. Nor do they in either case carry the weight of Humanist Action in the same way that Christians represent Christian Action.

For after all it is individual action which ultimately creates the image of the group. And individual action without the backing of a group is looked on as eccentric, cranky or plain odd.

A group organising a 'Keep Britain Tidy' campaign in a local area, will have many individuals working towards this aim. Each one will endeavour to clear as much litter and rubbish from a given area. Some may work in twos and threes, while others may work alone. If questioned as to their motive, the lone workers say that it is a campaign organised by this or that group—and all is well. But if the individual is working from his own initiative—because there is still a *need* but no group to organise it—the action is viewed with considerable suspicion.

How can Humanists who realise a need and have time and energy to right it, do so individually, without appearing a crank? (For few of us, however individualistic we may like to be, really want to appear too eccentric.)

One answer lies in regional groups covering a wide area. A small village or town may have only a handful of active Humanists, but several such communities together, would form an effective group. And with the backing of this group, much useful work can be carried out.

Apart from plants they also used physio-psychological exercises such as concentration on amulets or seals containing mysterious names—some bore geometrical figures very similar to the mental images used in Yoga transcendental meditation: the yantras. We learn from the Hekhaloth literature that the merkabah mystics had to provide themselves with such amulets in order to get through the seven gates of Heaven. Many of those amulets were found on bodies in Jewish tombs (see T. Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets* (1966)). Finally, the singing of hymns like the "Song of the Angels" or the repetition of certain phrases like the "Kedushshah" or trisagion, was used to induce prehypnotic auto-suggestion. Several of those hymns are to be found in the Hekhalot books, they are the ancestors of the synagogue "piyut"; these solemn and vacuous hymns—Rudolf Otto would have called them "numinous"—by the monotony of their cyclical rhythm and their progressively sonorous incantation, induced a state of mind bordering on ecstasy (they are probably the ancestors of the Gregorian plain-chant).

(To be continued)

Margaret Green

I have often been asked why Humanists, who like to be individuals, want or need to belong to a group. The answer is because a group can do so much more than an individual, and an individual can do so much more in the name of a group. If the untapped sources of individual Humanist action can be gleaned in this way, a more accurate picture of Humanism will be seen.

CPAG CONFERENCE

THE Child Poverty Action Group, to which organisation the National Secular Society recently became affiliated, is to hold a large-scale conference, 2.30 p.m.—6.30 p.m. on Saturday, December 2, at the City Temple Hall in London. The title of the conference is *People's Rights in a Responsible Society*. The chairman will be Charles Ringrose a committee member of the London Co-operative Society Education Department which supports the CPAG. Speakers and their subjects are:

Professor Titmuss: *The Right to Social Security*.

Michael Zander: *Poverty and the Legal Profession*.

Reverend Geoff Shaw: *Social Justice and Community Action*.

There will be a welcome from the chairman at 2.30 p.m., an interval for tea at 4.30 p.m.—5.0 p.m., and questions and discussion from 5.0 p.m.

The CPAG was formed in 1965 to bring together the growing number of people concerned with the plight of families living on or below the official poverty line in Britain. A recent official survey shows that half a million families with 1½ million children had incomes below Supplementary Benefit level in June 1966. Research and publicity are the Group's main activities. For further information and tickets for this conference, telephone Tony Lynes (CPAG) 01-242 3225.

Professor Titmuss, Professor of Social Administration in the University of London at London School of Economics, is author of *Essays on the Welfare State* (Allen & Unwin) and of contributions to *The Times*, *Lancet*, the *Listener*, *New Statesman* and *New Society*.

MORALITY AND "SIN"

Michael Gray

CHRISTIANS often inform us that "sin" is responsible for all the evils in the world, and to a great extent I would agree with them. Not because the sin of Adam first brought suffering into the world; nor because Lucifer, having been deported from heaven for his sin of rebellion, is whispering in unsuspecting ears in an attempt to ensnare our souls. Dismissing these hysterical phantasies taught to me in childhood, I maintain that the very concept of sin—this heinous doctrine that morality consists in blindly obeying the capricious commands of some Supernatural Despot, regardless of consequences—is in itself responsible for much of the evil that exists in the world.

"Sin," I was taught at school, "is an offence against God by any thought, word, deed or omission against the law of God." No mention here of any offences against man who must therefore, if he is to be considered to possess any rights at all, be considered only second to God. (Here we have a direct justification for the Inquisition.) Of course the existence of any god cannot be proved, and it follows that neither can the existence of any divine law—and even those who claim it can be proved cannot agree about its correct interpretation. Regardless of all this we are still expected to accept the existence of sin as an absolute fact. And, unhappily, even Secularists at times talk of it as though it had some empirical meaning outside the murky realm of theology and supernaturalism, no doubt because sin has been for so long regarded by our Christian society as synonymous with immorality.

Christians sometimes use this misconception of the meaning of sin to confuse debate about the existence of their god. Pointing to all the immorality in the world (which still flourishes despite two thousand years of Christianity) they inquire how we can deny that sin exists. Because many people are confused about meanings they accept sin as an *explanation* of immorality when it is only in reality a *description* of it, and an invalid one since it derives from an assumption based on ignorance. Whereupon our wily theologians, reverting to correct definitions, declare that since we accept the existence of sin, which is an offence against God, we must acknowledge the existence of God, *Q.E.D.!*

In order, therefore, that Secularists should not further add to the trapping of innocents into belief, they must exclude the word sin from their vocabulary and re-establish the separate identity of immorality. It is then our responsibility to explain what we mean by immorality, and consequently what we consider to constitute true morality. We must establish that morality is social in origin; that is, it only applies in our dealings with other people. It does not exist to please God, but to enrich the lives of men. What is to be considered immoral therefore is any action which we may take that causes unjust injury to our fellow-beings. Personal behaviour which effects nobody other than ourselves can *never* be considered immoral. Thus David Tribe, in his excellent book *100 Years of Freethought*, quotes Glanville Williams (President of ALRA and committee member of the Homosexual Law Reform Society) who stated in his address to the 1965 AGM of the Euthanasia Society:

"But utilitarians assert that purely private behaviour is not subject to morality. It may be subject to aesthetics. You may pronounce conduct as repulsive, unwise, self-stultifying when it is performed in private, but you do not pronounce it as being

immoral, because the whole concept of morality concerns social relations." (My italics.)

It must be continually emphasised that the only criteria by which to judge the morality of an action are the consequences of that action. Only in this way can we ensure that more and more persecutions do not occur, either on a large scale as with the religious Inquisition in the past, or on a smaller scale such as we have today with the passing of vicious prison sentences on the takers of soft drugs like marijuana. We may say that a marijuana smoker is foolish, we may consider he is likely to do himself harm (though neither of these assertions can be proved) but this is irrelevant argument. What *is* relevant is that the soft drug taker can in no way be said to be harming any other member of society. The purpose of crime punishment and the function of the police is to protect the public, not to persecute it. How can we justify the punishment of someone who has not attempted to harm anybody? If we take the position that members of society should be protected from themselves as well as others then we must be logical and agitate also for the return of attempted suicide to the status of a crime, and I am sure no thinking, humanitarian person would advocate this. Certainly it cannot be the view of the Secular Humanist, who was at the forefront of the battle to remove attempted suicide from the statute book which was brought to a successful conclusion with the 1961 Suicide Act. If we are to have a principle by which to determine morality it must be consistently applied or else it is no principle at all. We cannot adopt it where it suits our purpose and disregard it where we wish to make people conform with our own ideas. This way lies tyranny. The whole point of the principle of the Utilitarian is to prevent the unjust interference with individual liberty—and interference *can* only be justified when its sole purpose is to prevent us from harming someone else.

It becomes obvious that much of what Christianity teaches to be sinful is in fact *not* immoral, since it is harmless; blasphemy and pre-marital sex for example. Conversely, what it has often considered to be highly moral conduct, for instance the persecution of heretics, is grossly immoral. This is inevitable since when Christianity preaches morality it does not, as does Utilitarianism, have the happiness of mankind as its motivation. It concerns itself primarily with placating the supernatural, with pleasing God—not man. It is clear therefore that those Christians who are now attempting to cash in on the newfound popularity of Humanism are doing so only by bastardising its philosophy. Their position is demonstrably untenable since Humanism by very definition asserts that man's first duty is to his fellow-man, whereas the Christian insists man's first duty is to God.

Only when we realise that the true basis for morality lies in this philosophy of the Utilitarian, judging by consequences not dogma, will we be able to rid the world of the untold misery caused by the infliction upon the masses of obscurantist and superstitious codes of morality. We must adopt the open-minded, scientific outlook at all times and on all subjects, echoing the words of Bertrand Russell, the greatest philosopher of our time, in his essay on *Our Sexual Ethics (Why I am Not a Christian*, Unwin Books, 8s 6d):

(Continued at foot of next page)

BOOSTING SUPERSTITION WITH FREETHOUGHT

Peter Crommelin

A Reply to Gonzalo Quigue

IT has never been my intention to make use of the *Freethinker* in order to "boost superstition", nor do I believe that the editor of this journal would tolerate any such pranks.

If I am prepared to defend the thesis that God is a possible existence, it is simply and solely to stimulate rational argument, an exercise of the intellect fundamental to all would-be freethinkers. If the rejection of God is due to a blind prejudice against religious individuals, it is no more rational than religion itself. It has never seemed logical to me to say that the rejection of religion must involve the rejection of God. It would certainly be absurd to cultivate religious worship in a godless universe. Religion without God is absurd. But it does not involve any logical absurdity to acknowledge the existence of God as a First Cause, without acknowledging any obligation to subject oneself to the dogmas or disciplines of any particular religion. One of my objections to religion has always been that there are so many of them. I have never been able to understand why Christianity should have a privileged position among the religions of mankind.

For me, the existence or non-existence of God is a matter of purely academic interest. The conclusion of the argument, if ever there can be such a thing, can make no material difference to the needs and wants of mankind. The only people who make a living out of God are the professional clergymen, and I have long ago ceased to be one of them.

For many years belief in God involved me in a particular religion, and that religion involved me in ritual observances that I have come to regard as totally superstitious. I believe that I have liberated myself from all the superstitions that normally accompany religious belief. But I should regard it as totally irrational to deny the existence of a First Cause, merely because a false image of God has caused me to waste a lot of time in superstitious rites such as the Mass and the Sacraments.

If it will please Gonzalo Quigue or any other atheist, I am quite willing to discard all use of the word 'God'. It is not the word that matters, but the concept of a First Cause that is non-physical and non-human in character. As I believe that God and the Universe are indivisible it does not make much difference whether we attribute creation to God or Nature or the Universe. The important thing is that there is Something that creates everything, and the only alternative to being created is non-existence. That is what is meant by saying that everything has been created out of nothing. Various theories of evolution can help to explain the mutation of species. No theory of evolution can even begin to explain the origin of life or the origin of the material environment within which life appears.

Mr Quigue thinks it "wrong and superstitious" to talk of "creation by a God", but perfectly right and rational to talk of "continuous creation by nature". I simply do not follow the logic of this. What does Mr Quigue mean by "nature"? Is it something less than God or more than God? What is it that performs the unceasing miracle of "continuous creation"? I should have thought that such a marvellous force and power might at least be given the honorary title of God.

I certainly cannot accept it as a rational use of language that God should be classified as a "nonsensical idea". An

idea that causes so much anger to atheists can scarcely be called "nonsensical". It is the existence of God that cannot be classified. If God exists, God does not conform to any known genus or species. If God exists, God must be regarded as the unique source or origin of the "monotheistic universe". Of course if God is classified as an idea, the idea of God may be extremely fanciful, as it frequently is in the mind and imagination of religious individuals. I would not agree that the idea of God in the mind of Plato, Aristotle or Aquinas could be fairly described as "nonsensical".

Lastly, I do not like the suggestion of Mr Quigue that I have been "trampling on religions". This has not been my intention. Religious beliefs should always be respected even by their opponents. It is a great mistake in any war to under-estimate the intelligence of the enemy. For many years I practised a religion with fervour and devotion. In the course of time I came to abandon that religion, and I have not felt any obligation to subject myself to any alternative religion. Neither do I regard atheism as a satisfactory alternative to religion.

But if secular humanism will permit metaphysical speculation on the nature of existence, I can see no reason why secular humanism should not provide an extremely rational alternative to religion.

MORALITY AND "SIN"

(Continued from previous page)

"Those who have a scientific outlook on human behaviour, moreover, find it impossible to label any action as sin; they realise that what we do has its origin in our heredity, our education, and our environment, and that it is by control of these causes, rather than by denunciation, that conduct injurious to society is to be prevented."

We should at all times apply the test of reason to our ideas, and those of others, and not make emotional judgments. In this way we will learn to become tolerant of the views of others, however much we disagree with them. We will also learn that understanding displaces anger, which incites intolerance, and replaces it with sympathy and a real concern for the sufferings of our fellow-man. For in the final analysis all human conflicts can be reduced to one cause, *ignorance*, which can only be combated by knowledge, not superstition.

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REVIEW

Oswell Blakeston

Looking the Gift Horse in the Mouth!

IN the Spring of 1967, Rediffusion Television broadcast eight programmes of open dialogues between Christians of different traditions and humanists. Those involved included Barbara Wootton, Hugh Montefiore, Michael Foot, Alex Comfort and David Tribe. The discussions are now reproduced in a book called *Dialogue With Doubt* (SCM Paperbacks, 8s 6d).

Because so many accept anything they hear on TV as the voice of the new god, it's a very good thing indeed, in the context of what we endure, that these talks happened. Lots of people were suddenly presented with the fact that it is quite a respectable thing to express doubt about the worship of a God All Mighty. On the other hand, when one reads through the talks calmly, one cannot help feeling that unscripted debates are one of TV's many weapons for reducing everything to mediocrity (like the uniform emphasis given to a cereal advertisement or a news-shot of the Vietnam war). One knows that all those taking part could have done better for themselves and for us if they had read carefully prepared statements and answers to fixed questions. The quick response, demanded in unscripted dialogue, is so often the cliché or some politeness conditioned by the fact that the engineers might pull the switch if one offered anything else at that point. The result inevitably is superficial. One should not read this book to find any startling new ideas; although one knows, from the fine performance David Tribe put up within the limitations, that he could really stir us if given his head in a prepared statement.

The TV people protest the usual defence of "freshness" of unscripted conversation. They mean they hope to get "a show" and that they know viewers look in with a happy anticipation of awkward moments rather than of experiencing a profoundly argued philosophy. So, finally, if TV insists on a "show" one wonders why they do not use some originality. An interview with a priest being questioned while under the influence of the truth drug—that would be something, and something we couldn't arrange for ourselves. Naturally, we know, on second thoughts, why we can't get it. It wouldn't be politely mediocre. And that, finally, is

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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
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1
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why so many of us fear that TV itself is almost as dangerous as religion, another mass producer of citizens punch-drunk with soporifics.

LETTERS

Double-wreath-wraiths

ON Sunday, November 12, we were treated to the edifying spectacle of seeing the representative of Rhodesia laying *double-wreaths* at the Cenotaph—apparently the reward for double-cross. What a mockery! The holy shades of Rhodes and Jameson must have split their wraith-like sides with laughter. GEORGE R. GOODMAN.

Wagner

ALTHOUGH I have not the time to go into all the hasty and specious conclusions in Peter Crommelin's article *Reductio ad Absurdum* (November 10), as a militant atheist I cannot let pass his praise of Wagner which appears in the same issue.

In two *Freethinker* articles (January 8 and 15, 1950) entitled *Nightcap and Halo*, I depicted Wagner as the arch-reactionary, the Mastersinger of der German Bourgeoisie and of their inferiority complexes. Not before he left school did he call himself Wagner—he was considered the illegitimate son of a Jewish actor, Richard Geyer; hence his Aryan racism for which he was beloved of Hitler and his ilk. A dwarf in body, he indulged in phantasies of Teutonic gods and heroes. He fleeced his friends to satisfy his craving for luxury.

He was born into an era of industrial boom of unparalleled speculating, gambling and profiteering, when capital superseded the feudal barons; his Superman is nothing but the glorification of that cold and brutal type who considers it his divine right to exploit the 'underdog'. The glory he borrows from a Teutonic Christendom around the mysticism of the Holy Grail.

"In *Parsifal* [I wrote] he wallows in false humility and suffering like an ageing whore, withdrawing into a pretentiously pious repentance now that life has nothing left to offer."

Where in all this pantomimery is that criticism of life which is the essence of real art? Musically he reflects the disintegration of the old order through Free Competition under the Profit Motive; hence, the negation of the old melodious pattern, rebuilt around a leitmotif.

Mr Crommelin asserts that Wagner has "influenced all dramatic production, musical and non-musical, since his time . . .". In fact, we find the very same ideas in other composers of that era; as example, the Russian Dargomyjky, and it was through him—not through Wagner—that this new type of opera composition made its way in Russia.

Stravinsky went even so far as to call Wagner "that Lucifer who dragged down with him in his great fall the whole proud art of music". Whether or not one can agree with this dictum, the tag of 'atheist' for the bard of the Holy Grail is definitely more than misapplied. P. G. ROY.

I DID not think the time would come when I would see it stated, and by a sceptic, that the existence of the Olympian gods, and the other gods that peopled the ancient world, is no more than improbable. Mr A. J. Lowry, in his article of November 17, likens them in this respect to unicorns, which he isn't sure do not exist. He ought to have included dragons, centaurs, gryphons and triple-headed giants, surely?

He stated that it was easier to believe in the Greek pantheon than in the Christian god. Whatever the truth of that, it is current belief that counts, and who, save Mr Lowry, regards Zeus and company as no more than improbabilities, like his unicorns?

Mr Lowry said that it was time man grew out of his supernatural beliefs for good. Why not do just that, Mr Lowry?

CORRECTION

I WOULD like to correct an error in my article "A Needed Dictatorship". The sentence: It is for lack of the Divine Dictator imagined by the ghost of a god—should read 'imaged'.

F. H. SNOW.