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THE RIGHT TO DIE

IN its concern over the great problems of famine and thirst, disease and war, the National Secular Society has always called on the resources of science and commonsense to support the right to live. But it is essential to clarify what we mean by that 'life' on which we lavish infinite affection. If it is no more than certain biochemical processes then plants and disease-producing organisms are as sacred as human beings. In adopting this view the Jains are at least logical, though we see in India the deplorable human suffering to which their genial pantheism has contributed. Many in the West who would describe this outlook as superstitious have an attitude to life which is just as mystical and more muddled.

Christian civilisation, based on the stories rather than the Sixth Commandment of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures, has never outlawed killing. Apart from brutal hunting of animals for sport, it has found many occasions suitable for human slaughter: 'just' wars, crusades, witch-burnings, the eradication of heretics. It is only where science and the human conscience are involved that the Church has 'humanely' intervened; to outlaw family planning or abortion, to declare suicide a *felo de se*. Up till 1823 the unfortunate person was obscenely buried if successful and savagely punished by state and society if unsuccessful. Indeed it was as recently as 1961 that suicide and attempted suicide ceased to be criminal offences.

Naturally we regret the circumstances which lead someone to suicide. Sometimes it may be loneliness or financial desperation, things for which the community must take its share of blame. At other times it may be over-powering suffering, physical and mental, accompanying accident or disease. Quite properly, what had once been liberal minority advocacy of humanity in recognising the ultimate right of the oppressed individual to take his own life is now established in the law of the land.

Yet suicide remains an unpleasant business. Many of the afflicted who would take this way out are deterred by other than religious reasons. They may fear bringing 'disgrace' on their families or jeopardising life assurance policies. They may find it difficult to get reliable means of killing themselves or lack courage to use them. Sometimes they are utterly paralysed and helpless. This is the time when they may well say to their doctor, 'Please help me to escape'. In these circumstances it is certain that some doctors out of deep compassion already assist them. Many will not, and understandably so, for they may be charged with murder, or under Section 2 of the Suicide Act with aiding and abetting in self-destruction. Society cannot expect each doctor to be his own lawgiver while it turns aside pretending the problem does not exist.

THIS is the second statement made by the National Secular Society as a contribution to Human Rights Year. The first was entitled "The Rights of Children". Both were drafted by a NSS Working Party under the chairmanship of David Tribe, NSS President. Further copies of each statement may be obtained from the NSS Secretary.

There are, we recognise, rational arguments against voluntary euthanasia which must be considered. Numerous analgesics are now available for those in pain. This is true; but tolerance rapidly develops and the patient may well find drug addiction added to his other troubles. Nor are drugs able to alleviate the worst pain short of unconsciousness. And in the terminal stages of many illnesses there are signs and symptoms which may be as distressing as pain and not subject to alleviation: incontinence, inability to swallow, suffocation, constant cough, bed-sores, itching, suppuration, vomiting, mental change. But, it is protested, medical knowledge is constantly changing and what is incurable today may be curable tomorrow. The sad truth is that medicine does not advance as rapidly as popular newspaper accounts of the claims of ambitious laboratories might suggest. Organ transplants are effective only when the basic metabolism of the body is satisfactory, and there are many tissues where there is no encouraging prospect of replacement. In the terminal stages of most organic diseases it is wellnigh certain that no medical marvel will be conceived and brought into standard practice within the prognostic period. But if there is an element of doubt it is surely for the patient himself to make the choice.

It is also said that the introduction of bureaucratic formulae into the sickroom, with the implication that the patient must face up to the fact that he is doomed, can be very distressing, and it may be very difficult to decide whether a heavily sedated patient is able to make a fully rational decision. We see a large measure of truth in this, and welcome the new legislative proposals of the Euthanasia Society, whereby a healthy person would be able to lay down the broad conditions under which he would wish his life to be terminated, leaving it—as it must inevitably be left—to two doctors, one of them a consultant, to decide whether the conditions are satisfied in the circumstances of each individual case. But there would also be provision for those who had not made prior arrangements to decide when a fatal disease was actually upon them. Some critics insist that this might lead to untoward pressure being brought to bear on an unwanted relative to 'sign up'. If however the

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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

Enfield and Barnet Humanist Group, 52 Freston Gardens, Cockfosters, Saturday, January 27th, 8 p.m.: Social evening and a talk on Art by EDWARD WELCH. Visitors 2/-.

The Cambridge Humanists, Mill Lane Lecture Rooms, Cambridge, Thursday, February 1st, 8.30 p.m.: Professor BERNARD WILLIAMS, "The Poverty of Humanism".

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, January 28th, 6.30 p.m.: R. S. MCGOWAN, "South Bank Christianity".

The 59 Society, Kensington Central Library, Campden Hill Road, London, W8, Thursday, February 1st, 8 p.m.: Members' Brains Trust. Any Questions?

The Progressive League, Weekend Conference at Eastbourne, February 23rd-25th. Subject: "Public Law and Private Morality". Speakers include LENA JEGER, MP, H. A. HAYDON, AVRIL FOX, AMBROSE APPLEBE. Bookings and enquiries: Terry Gabriel, 9 Russell Gardens, London, NW11.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, January 28th, 11 a.m.: Professor HYMAN LEVY, "Science and Ethics—Challenge and Counter Challenge"; Tuesday, January 30th, 6.45 p.m.: Synthesis on the Population Explosion and World Resources, PETER JACKSON, MP, and Dr JOHN DAVOLL.

South Place Sunday Concerts, Conway Hall, London, WC1, Sunday, January 28th, 6.30 p.m.: The Boise Trio. Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms. Admission 4/-.

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

West Kent Branch NSS, Public Library, The Drive, Sevenoaks. Public meetings on the first Wednesday of the month at 8 p.m. Worthing Humanist Group, Morelands Hotel, The Pier, Worthing, Sunday, January 28th, 5.30 p.m.: Speaker, KATHLEEN NOTT, essayist and critic.

NSS: WEST KENT

AT their meeting on Wednesday, December 13, the West Kent Branch of the National Secular Society heard a talk by Mrs Ruth Hancock entitled 'Moral Education'. Mrs Hancock thought that a great deal could be done to develop a sense of personal worth and personal responsibility where the school environment encouraged questioning and thought was not inhibited by dogma. In the Senior School, emphasis should be placed upon discussion of human problems in the widest terms. The feeling of the meeting was that religious instruction had no bearing on the matter as morals did not stem from nor were in any way dependent upon, religious belief.

Report from Mrs Beryl Samuel, NSS, West Kent Branch.

* * *

MARRIED CLERGY

IN his opening address to the Pastoral Council of the Dutch Catholic Church at Noordwijkerhout in Holland, Cardinal Alfrink, Archbishop of Utrecht, said: "The Pastoral Council of the Church in Holland intends to be the fertile soil out of which must grow the kind of management the Church needs today—an open dialogue; no one-way traffic. That's what everybody wants."

The Council's 168 delegates, including all nine Dutch bishops, and two delegates from the Dutch Humanist Association, unanimously supported a resolution in favour of married clergy.

* * *

NEW VATICAN APPOINTMENTS

FOLLOWING the appointment of Yugoslav Cardinal Seper to succeed Cardinal Ottaviani as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Holy Office), and the appointment of Cardinal Gut as head of the Commission on Liturgical Reform and as prefect of the Congregation of Rites, there now follows the appointment of Cardinal Dell'Acque as Vicar of Rome. At the time of going to press it isn't known who will succeed Cardinal Cicognani as Papal Secretariat of State.

IS RELIGION DECLINING IN THE WEST?

Jean Straker

THE decreasing size of congregations and the shrinking numbers of candidates for the Christian ministry suggest a sharp decline in the practice of institutional religion throughout Europe. Secularists and secular humanists see this as vindicating their own convictions. Yet some Christians interpret the decline in the opposite light.

Who is right? If there is a decline, can it be arrested or is it inevitable? How is it connected with belief or disbelief in God? THE DECLINE OF RELIGION IN THE WEST on the Third Programme on Friday, January 26, is a two-hour discussion between Dr Margaret Mead, the well-known anthropologist; sociologist Bryan Wilson; the Rev. Albert van den Heuvel, Director of the World Council of Churches Department of Information; and Canon Basil Moss, who is concerned with training for the ministry in the Church of England. Professor Bernard Williams of King's College, Cambridge, will be in the chair.

THE RIGHT TO DIE

(Continued from front page)

unfortunate patient should be so much under the influence of unscrupulous beneficiaries that the supervising doctors are unable to discover his real wishes, it is likely they would under existing conditions be able to persuade him to take an overdose of sleeping tablets. At present there are many sufferers who have as an additional motive for ending their lives a wish to release loved ones from an intolerable and fruitless burden, and their desire merits consideration.

Some fear that the scheme would be unworkable because of doctors' religious beliefs or obligations under the Hippocratic Oath. We are most anxious that nurses and doctors' conscientious objections be respected. We merely point out that many, perhaps most, doctors would not feel themselves so inhibited. Though religious and moralistic minorities have entrenched themselves in certain medical bureaucracies, religious belief does not seem to be conspicuous throughout the profession. The Hippocratic Oath is passing out of fashion, or its clause dealing with the giving of poison modified. Where it is subscribed to, the dedication to 'Apollo the Healer' does not seem to cause conscientious qualms or the rest of the oath to prevent research in bacteriological warfare.

In our opinion the majority who oppose voluntary euthanasia are not motivated so much by rational as irrational objections. Sometimes these are cloaked by a simple religious motto, 'Thou shalt not kill', even though the Book of Common Prayer and the Revised Version of the Bible translate this as 'Thou shalt do no murder'. Happily today there are increasing numbers of Christians who place more reliance on the text: 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy'.

There are those whose primrose path has never been sullied by the need for an aspirin, who talk of the sanctifying power of pain. This is simple nonsense. While a certain amount of struggle in life can be beneficial to the individual, a ceaseless battle against nagging pain is life-diminishing, embittering and ultimately degrading. But if there are any who imagine they will benefit in this way, there will be no obligation on them to avail themselves of the provisions of a Euthanasia Act. But they are not concerned with real situations. Their view of the world is both arbitrary and illogical. They regard euthanasia as an impiety, an intrusion of mankind into the divine world of natural processes. Somehow it escapes them that the whole art of medicine is such an intervention. Then they protest that life itself is 'sacred', whatever its nature, so that it is all right to prolong it but not contract it. Whether they take the same view in Vietnam is open to question.

What makes life valuable is its quality, not its quantity, the immensely rich and varied sensations and appreciations, sympathies and conceptualising. It is surely more than so many centimetres of blood pressure and litres of vital capacity. To say that the burdensome life of a terminal cancer victim is valuable in the sight of God, while the active life of a soldier in Vietnam in his prime with dependants is not, is an untenable position. The uniqueness of a human being is held, theologically, to be his soul, and the fate of this cannot depend on a slight shortening of the body's span. In the great secularised world the value of life is moral, aesthetic and intellectual, and the person himself is more likely to overrate than understate it. If he wishes to end it, who else should presume to intervene? It is true

that many of us get fits of depression from time to time, as in influenza, but under the Bill proposed by the Euthanasia Society and endorsed by us, two doctors will investigate this possibility and there is a period of a month before the decision becomes operative. The decision can of course be reversed at any time. We stress that voluntary euthanasia must not be regarded as an excuse to limit medical research and that what is now wasted on other items must be diverted to preventive medicine.

There is another matter which may be outside the scope of the Bill. It is an increasingly common phenomenon in hospitals for patients to 'die' temporarily, i.e. for their hearts to stop beating but to be capable of reactivation. Should resuscitation be attempted on every occasion? The issue achieved some notoriety last September, when it was revealed that in Neasden Hospital the physician superintendent, Dr W. F. Twining McMath, had posted up a memorandum, dated 16 May, 1966, listing four categories of patients who were 'not to be resuscitated': over 65, suffering from malignant diseases or chronic chest or renal diseases. We agree with the general view that the arbitrary statement of an age and the display of such a notice where it could be seen by patients and related to 'NTBR' on their charts, were most unfortunate. But the basic issue is whether or not patients with a hopeless prognosis, who have actually 'died', should be brought back to a burdensome existence. We believe that doctors should not 'strive officiously to keep alive'. Very often their motives are of the most selfless and charitable, whether misguided or not, but the suspicion remains that an element of self-indulgence is often present: the nurse or the doctor's religious belief is being arbitrarily transferred to the patient, or he represents a medical 'challenge' to see how long he can be kept metabolising, or his case is interesting to show students or write research papers on. Whatever view is taken of such motives they are certainly not in the interests of the patient, which must be the only consideration of all medical procedures. Similarly, nurses and doctors should not strive officiously to breathe life into grossly deformed newborn babies, which would without such intervention be still-born.

Evidence submitted by the Euthanasia Society and Basil B. Bonner, Esq.

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London, WC1
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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1st, 7.30 p.m.

PUBLIC FORUM

THE RIGHT TO DIE

Speakers include

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THE ORIGIN AND END OF LIFE ON EARTH: II

Willard E. Edwards, Litt.D. (USA)

The End or Solution of Life on Earth

OUR first visit to another inhabited planet may show our present knowledge and achievement to be inferior to theirs. If so, it should not change our respect for the remarkable accomplishments of our own thinkers and scientists. We admire them for the great social advancements and scientific achievements they have already made.

What We Now Ask

However, as humanitarians and rationalists, we ask that physical and social scientists, statesmen and economists do more for us right now. Their work is urgently needed to combat today's population explosion, fear, distrust and opportunism.

Fear is largely engendered by the opportunism and greed of so-called religious leaders. Clergymen have falsely preached the "soon-coming" end of the world ever since the supposed teachings of Jesus. Intelligent people should ask how soon is "soon". Now the opportunist clergymen have adopted a new sermon gimmick, the fear of the atomic bomb.

Religious fearmongers have found they can use the bomb in combination with insane Bible prophecy. They try to scare people into believing that "the end" is now *really* approaching, which greatly helps to lower morality. After instilling as much fear as possible, they offer congregations a "return" to God, Christ, or the authority of the church.

As spiritual panderers, clergymen may gain greatly by such fear tactics. These men include radio preachers who collect millions of dollars from gullible listeners. They include Billy Graham and Bishop Sheen types who take advantage of the emotional, the ignorant, and the naïve. They offer little or nothing practical in curing the world's ills, while the Pope even opposes artificial birth control in marriage. They teach mental self-abuse and often do more to degenerate the mind than to improve it. Religion has caused thousands of broken minds and broken homes. We need to learn to think for ourselves and forget superstition.

Distrust follows national fear propaganda. Nations seem

to fear that neighbours may gain armed-strength superiority, economic advantage, and political or religious domination. They fear a threat to their survival, independence, prosperity, spheres of influence, or culture. This results in an arms race, government propaganda, factional disputes, political and national re-alignments, dictatorships, revolutions, religious and race riots.

Opportunist and so-called emergent nations all want to take advantage of international fear and distrust. They ask for arms, free wheat, other foods, and millions and billions of dollars in gifts, grants and loans. Many of these seem to be neither appreciated nor repaid. Such nations would bleed the great nations and their people white, if they possibly could. World Government or Internationalism *might* be possible, except for *one* thing. That is *human nature*, with its fear, distrust, opportunism, greed and lust for power.

The End or Solution of Life on Earth

Will our social scientists, statesmen and economists discover the means of overcoming these evils? Or will our nuclear scientists first discover how to make our Earth a flaming star? Most of the troubles in the world today are simply 'people problems'.

Our *first* required achievement is that of *birth control*. Opposition to this by the Roman Catholic hierarchy must be either quickly overcome or completely and quickly ignored. We simply cannot procrastinate any longer, especially when ulterior motives may exist in the opposition.

Isn't it insane to base economic, political, or religious progress solely on expansion due to population increase? More people cause more crowding, regimentation, hunger, dictatorships and wars. This causes a lowering of morality and a decreasing satisfaction of human needs. It results in poorer food, health, education and housing; and in less enjoyment of family and social life. We would lose in human dignity and in personal freedom. Why make the world a human ant-hill?

Communism and Roman Catholic hierarchies each seem hopeful of eventual sole control of such a world. This appears to be their "long view" toward world-wide power. Increasing population, unhappiness, misery, hunger, poverty and strife seem the means toward this selfish end. Only a great immediate world-wide social awakening to our present danger and needs can save us from such future calamity.

Our *second* required achievement is freedom from dictatorial religious and communist propaganda, beliefs and dogmas. These retard progress, cause fear and strife, and degenerate the mind. Such beliefs and dogmas encourage unwanted pregnancies, unwanted babies, the propagation of feeble-mindedness and mediocrity. Other religious beliefs and pressures encourage racial and religious wars and strife for the control of people or nations. These may be between Israelis and Arabs. Hindus and Moslems in India, the Catholics and Buddhists of Vietnam, or the Greeks and Turks in Cyprus.

Russia has achieved some advancement through suppressing and discouraging the propagation of religion. The most backward nations are kept that way through domination by their priests and their religions. Look at Tibet,

100 YEARS OF FREETHOUGHT

By DAVID TRIBE

"No small part in the movement for reform has been played by the freethinkers as David Tribe describes in *100 Years of Freethought*. He surveys the battles fought in Britain by the National Secular Society which celebrated its centenary last year."

—*Portsmouth Evening News*.

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India, and the Catholic countries of Eire, Portugal, Spain, Central and South America. All nations need at least the complete separation of Church and State to improve their welfare.

Our *third* required achievement is the *control of opportunism*. It is equally as difficult of attainment as that of birth control or the freedom from religion. Opportunism is a fault of human nature, as is sexual irresponsibility (ignorance) and fear and awe of the unknown (religion). Opportunism is "the taking advantage of opportunities or circumstances, with little regard for principles or *ultimate consequences*". This has been seen in slave trading, dope peddling, and the denuding of forests; in the killing and robbing of neighbouring Jewish tribes noted in the Bible; and in the profiteering, graft, and corruption in all wars. It exists now in business, finance, politics, shysterism, quackery, faith healing and religious fraud. It is seen in the present opposition to birth control and abortion laws by the Roman Catholic Church.

EUTHANASIA — A HUMAN RIGHT

WE all have to die some time, and few people would be foolish enough to worry about it. But the actual process of dying is a different matter; there is now, more than ever before, ample justification for anxiety. Speaking at the Annual General Meeting of the Euthanasia Society last month, Dr Eliot T. O. Slater, a distinguished specialist in the treatment of mental illness, emphasised the reality and magnitude of the problem. "It is now possible," he said, "to keep a dying person alive almost indefinitely, but medical tradition is such that doctors are frightened of an impairment of a patient's right to live, and accordingly people are kept alive against all good sense." Medical techniques had advanced at a "quite frightening rate" during the last few years and this imposed a frightful dilemma on the doctor, particularly the hospital doctor.

Prolonged periods of pain in terminal illness are not the only distress the patient has to suffer; feelings of suffocation, of nausea, misery, or of merely being desperately ill, are not relieved by pain-killing drugs and are not effectively coped with by tranquillisers. It is, of course, possible to drug some patients into insensibility, only to become like the sufferer from severe brain injury who lives indefinitely in a coma but cannot be brought round.

So, whilst it would be foolish indeed to worry about death itself, it would be equally so to be complacent about the fact that dying can be a very ugly business which may come to any of us in its ugliest form unless we have the means (which very few dying patients have) of merciful release or the help of a compassionate and courageous doctor.

When euthanasia is discussed there is no lack of opponents—from some Churches (who claim the right to dictate to the unbeliever as well as the believer) and from some members of the medical profession (who seem to regard the prolongation of 'life' as their own prerogative with little thought of the consequences). Only the Euthanasia Society speaks for the patient, the person most concerned. The Society does not seek to impose its views on others; it advocates only *voluntary* euthanasia—the *right* of the individual, in carefully defined circumstances and with the

Morality Without Religion

The end or solution of life on Earth, and its suffering or enjoyment, may be determined in the near future. It may be resolved by the success or failure of the effort of the world's physical and social scientists, statesmen and economists. Birth control, freedom from religious and communist control, and the control of opportunism are most important.

A sensible world-wide morality without religion, and the making of honesty an international virtue, are greatly required. Until these aims have been attained, Nationalism is far more practical and sane than Internationalism or World Government. The future of civilisation is in the hands of scientists, statesmen, economists, and educators. Their greatest qualifications and assets are intelligence, knowledge, courage, ability, honesty, rationalism, and loyalty to their people; but they must have freedom from religious and political dictatorship and dishonesty, and from the pressure of outdated religious beliefs and dogmas.

(Concluded)

C. R. Sweetingham (Secretary, The Euthanasia Society)

utmost safeguards, to choose a merciful and dignified death.

Opposition to voluntary euthanasia is mainly based on these grounds—the sanctity of life, that doctors would become 'killers', that modern drugs make it unnecessary, that it would be the thin end of the wedge, and that some miracle cure may be imminent. They can be dealt with only briefly in a short article.

The 'sanctity of life' is a strange argument when used by those who support, as some prominent opponents of voluntary euthanasia do, the murder and mutilation of women and children in the Vietnam war and even the re-introduction of the death penalty. It is, I think, well answered by that prominent churchman, Dr Leslie Weatherhead, in his book *The Christian Agnostic*: "I sincerely believe that those who come after us will wonder why on earth we kept a human being alive against his own will, when all the dignity, beauty and meaning of life had vanished; when gain to anyone was clearly impossible, and when we should have been punished by the State if we kept an animal alive in similar physical conditions".

To suggest that a doctor becomes a 'killer' if he administers euthanasia at the wish of an incurable and suffering patient is to abuse language. The disease itself is the 'killer' and death inevitable. A recent Gallop Poll of General Practitioners revealed that 76.2 per cent agreed that some medical men 'help their patients over the last hurdle even if it involves some curtailment of the span of life', and 36.4 per cent indicated that they would be willing to administer euthanasia if legally permissible.

The argument that modern drugs make euthanasia unnecessary has been authoratively answered by Dr Eliot Slater: it is by no means completely true. Furthermore, the administration of sufficient drugs is often no more than inefficient euthanasia.

The "thin end of the wedge" argument is specious. There is no wedge that leads from voluntary euthanasia to extermination camps; humane proposals may lead to more humane ones but not to inhumane ones, and inhumane

practices can never be traced back to humane origins. The abuses that might spring from euthanasia legislation must be tiny and insignificant compared with the immense suffering that results from the forcible sustaining of life on unwilling patients.

As for the 'miracle cure around the corner' argument, surely it is for the patient to decide if he wants to hang on to life in that hope. An elderly person, slowly and painfully dying of an incurable disease is unlikely to find comfort here.

It is 33 years since the Euthanasia Society was founded by the late Dr C. Killick Millard, MD, DDc, under the presidency of the late Lord Moynihan of Leeds, KCMG, CB, DCL, LL.D. In 1936 a Bill to permit voluntary euthanasia was promoted in the House of Lords. Although there was a sympathetic discussion, the Bill was rejected by 35 votes to 14, the principle reason being dislike of the sick room

formalities necessary to provide adequate safeguards. (A new Bill, now in its final stages of drafting, would render these last-minute formalities unnecessary by the provision for an advance declaration.)

Another attempt was made in the House of Lords in 1950, but on this occasion a Motion was withdrawn without a division.

By a decision taken at the last Annual General Meeting, the Society is now committed to a further attempt. Some support in the Lords is already assured but strong opposition can safely be predicted. Should humane legislation again be denied, it will be a battle lost but not a war. The fight for the *right* of the individual to a merciful and dignified death will go on. Your support in that fight would be welcomed by the Euthanasia Society from whom literature and particulars of membership can be obtained from 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8.

"TOWARDS TOMORROW"

Scientific Research, Priorities, Co-ordination and Control

E. Hughes-Jones

THE recent TV showing of the 'Assault on Life' BBC programme, the first of nine under the main title of *Towards Tomorrow*, may have disturbed many Humanists; it demonstrated that modern genetic biology holds forth both a promise and a dread in that the research knowledge now being acquired from university and other laboratories throughout the world may be used to condition, influence, and virtually determine and control, human life in accordance with purposes and images chosen by scientists! Biological science is becoming increasingly capable of intervening in the most critical stages of human life, including the reproductive, genetic and pre-natal. The importance of this, for good or for ill, is paramount as scientists continue rapidly to increase their powers to shape and control men and affairs. I consider that Humanists, severally and collectively, no less than the general public, are giving grossly insufficient attention to this subject. Certain questions arise:

- (1) What guidance or control, if any, is exercised by any government or other authority over the scientific researches done in this field within its territory?
- (2) What priorities, if any, for such researches are fixed, and in the light of what principles, and by whom?
- (3) What co-ordination and coherence, and how much is there, if any, between researchers throughout each country and throughout the world, within this vital field of studies?

As far as I can see, Humanists as yet have given little direct attention to these questions and I suspect that most Humanists, like the general public, may know next to nothing about them, though the researches currently going on may very greatly affect human life. It can validly be claimed that some knowledge emerging from the researches could and should urgently be applied for the benefit of mankind; but on the other hand some of the acquired knowledge could, in the control of a retrogressive dictator or government, be used for power-seeking and even utterly immoral purposes. Mankind needs to take steps to obviate misuse of scientific researches.

What Controls Priorities, Co-ordination?

Is there at present in reality any effective over-all control of the individual researcher or even of the individual university or other laboratory? If so, how much control, how is it exercised, on what principles, and by whom? If not, surely it is high time that there should be adequate broadly-based vetting of existing and proposed researches in this range of studies where the results could be so far-reaching for mankind; it is essential to work out the machinery and drill for this. Concerning priorities, the same kind of questions arise; perhaps some researches might well be stopped or amended in the public interests; others of lesser priority might be postponed and all appropriate special knowledge and skills channelled to those of the greatest priority so that mankind might get earlier and, if practicable, greater benefits from them. Question (3) brings out the great need for the coherence and co-ordination of researches. Is there, I wonder, anything like sufficient of this between the various laboratories even within individual countries, let alone broadly based co-ordination of world science? We know, alas, that atomic scientific research is national and secret, but cannot mankind achieve co-operation and coherence in human-biological studies? The possibilities for good, as well as the dangers, are so great that there should be the utmost co-operation internationally in these studies if *Homo Sapiens* is to be worthy of his capacity for conceptual *sustained* thought. I fear that there is a jumble of researches going on in the world, with waste of work, duplications and lack of well-defined specialisations of effort, and probably some bright minds working on ill-starred and ill-timed projects. The subject is so greatly fraught with high possibilities for human well-being, and is also so loaded with the dreads of misuse, danger and disaster, that it calls for the most careful *world* control. There is need to encourage and nourish world-sanctioned researches according to priorities, to co-ordinate and allocate them over the world and to oversee the proper dissemination of progress reports and results. Scientists should not be allowed any longer to contract out of their responsibilities as political and social animals like the rest of us; they

should be required to join actively with us in deciding democratically on the kinds and priorities of researches most likely to benefit mankind. The inquisitiveness of the scientist in his search for knowledge should not now by itself alone be accepted as self-justification for any studies they choose; they should now join with the rest of us in deciding what kind of a world is best for mankind and condition their researches in the light of the answer. Certainly humanity direly needs to avoid anything likely to be analogous in outcome to Hiroshima and Nagasaki! This article is *not* a plea against science, but would urge the acceptance by scientists of their responsibilities as citizens of our shrunken, speedy, dangerous world and shape their studies, special skills and powers, to subserve the collective good purposes of mankind. It is not the special intellectual interests, knowledge, and aptitudes of scientists that matter most for the future; they should now be required and controlled to devote themselves to serve ultimate human good everywhere as far as it can be competently assessed.

Conclusions

Some of the professors in the 'Assault on Life' TV programme clearly voiced their doubts and fears as well as indicating the good for humanity that may arise from some studies. The programmes in my view will be abundantly justified if they arouse fairly widely the kind of questioning I have tried to raise here. Perhaps that is one of the main intentions of the series; I hope so—the public need to be stirred, even shocked, into concern and vigilance about what biological science, and other sciences, are doing or proposing to do. It is weak, and a dereliction of an individual's responsibility to try to help shape a good human society, if a person shuts his eyes or ignores things likely to lead to a sense of revelation; we do not remove them by self-blindness. We surely have a duty to be watchful, to question, perhaps to challenge if need be, and if our trying to understand leaves us still opposed to certain studies or to the application of their results, we should stand up to be counted and heard in our opposition. Modern man, it becomes apparent increasingly, is indeed the future main agent of evolution, if we can contrive to avoid holocaust. Any studies directed towards acquiring further powers to condition not only environmental influences but also now—and very importantly—genetic and heredity influences should be carried out only under the best world controls, supervision of priorities and co-ordination, and towards the best aims and ends for the collective good of mankind, that world society can contrive. UNESCO should be much concerned with this and mankind would be wise to see to it that it is. Short of that scientists may be tinkering very wastefully and terribly dangerously with dynamite. Humanists should, above all other men, be thinking of how severally and collectively we can promote and sustain something like the controls and general supervision I have here attempted roughly to sketch.

THE FREETHOUGHT-HUMANIST FILM CLUB

(promoted by the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY)

presents

NAZARIN

Directed by LUIS BUNNEL

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London, WC1
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19th, 7.30 p.m.

REVIEW

David Tribe

WHAT a bizarre obsession Christians today show with public opinion polls. How anxiously their god must survey the "charts" each morning to find out whether or not he exists. You know the sort of thing: 54.1% said yes, 36.4% said no, 9.4% didn't know and two people asked if God was one of the Rolling Stones.

In *Sixth Form Religion* (SCM Press, 18s), Edwin Cox analyses the attitudes to religion of a sample of sixth formers and their parents for the Christian Education Movement, and H. W. Marratt adds a chapter on RI. The result is likely to surprise Christians rather than secularists, who have for a long time drawn attention to most of the conclusions and been roundly denounced for their pains. There will also be some surprise for the old-time optimistic rationalist, if any remain.

The sample was made by the Statistics Department of the Department of Education and Science, from an alphabetical list of all maintained grammar schools in England. Sixteen schools did not co-operate. Eventually 96 schools produced written answers from 1,128 boys, 1,148 girls and 76.5% of their parents. The questions were devised somewhat better than in most other surveys and students and parents were promised anonymity (though it is uncertain whether they believed it). It is questionable how useful the overall figures may be. Mr Cox is a little concerned that belief in God is less than that found by Michael Argyle in 1958 or NOP in 1964, and wonders if grammar school pupils are "more intellectually alert" (a curious admission elsewhere denied by the author) or if the difference is to be explained by variously worded questions. Let me suggest that religious belief declines as the years go by and that all figures quoted are too high. But it is hard to relate the students' belief in God—48.3% of boys and 74.4% of girls—to the figures given for regular church attendances: 36.7% of boys and 58.3% of girls. This is well above the national average, if the answers are true. Another curiosity is that only 3.1% of boys and 1.8% of girls are listed as Roman Catholic (with a regular church attendance, by the way, of 69.1%). Either there is a sampling error in the finished results, or grammar school sixth formers are disproportionately Protestant and middle-class.

If the absolute conclusions are somewhat dubious, internal comparison of figures and extracts from the students' answers, which are generously given, are valuable. Comment is generally fair, with a certain Christian bias, the most blatant example of which is: "The number of those who doubted whether there is sufficient evidence to believe in the historical existence of Jesus is rather high, especially among boys, though it is difficult to tell whether this is an informed historical judgment or an emotional decision influenced by anti-religious propaganda and a misunderstanding of terms". There is no mention in the book of "pro-religious propaganda" to explain the contrary answers. I wonder too if it is fair to blame the pupils or their teachers for confusion over the meaning of "Son of God" and the "inspiration" of the Bible, when these terms have been so mutilated in theological circles.

The pupils' beliefs not surprisingly show a relationship with those of their parents. In view of the alleged parental enthusiasm for RI always flung at us, it is interesting to see that only 69.5% are in favour, even though the question was simply "Do you think that religion should be taught at school?" and in that form might well have attracted 100% support, if interpreted as objective history. Taking theism and the divinity of Christ as essential to Christianity, the author has found 36.8% of boys and 62.9% of girls to be "Christians". The girls were generally more mystical and less rational than the boys, though "a few boys were not entirely confident God exists but were completely confident that Jesus was his son". A quarter of all who did not believe in God and half who disbelieved the Resurrection claimed to be regular church-goers. It would be interesting to know why. They were not impressed by their churches' activity in politics or social work, and were particularly disenchanted with the clergy. Most of them they thought bad preachers and unsympathetic to youth, though they were "embarrassed by guitar-bashing parsons". Any moral comfort derived from religion seemed to come from the Bible, sometimes of a curious sort: "It is always possible to find a worse situation in the Bible than the one I am in at the moment".

The young people had some harsh things to say about RI, which in quite a few schools is hair-raising and illegal, even by 1944 standards. It was summed up as "continual brainwashing from a tattered old book" or "the attitude of 'if I didn't have any brotherly love, I would have it knocked into me!'" or "learning word by word of such things as prayers and psalms" or "I was not allowed to give my own opinion and was obliged to agree with the instructor". Some classes, though, had "a tendency to turn into

talks on sex, morals and vice", which sounds much more entertaining. Vast amounts of time were wasted on sketch-maps of Pauline ramblings and the like. As secularists have long pointed out, the only things that were widely appreciated, on the odd occasions they occurred, were the opportunity of sorting out ideas, discussion of ethics and personal and modern problems, searching for a meaning to life. Though religious bodies have pronounced on all these things they are not intrinsically religious, but sociological, psychological and philosophical. If the students wanted to hear the religious answer, at that age they wanted a cross-section of world religions presented. They also complained about the bias of religious broadcasting for schools. In conclusion Mr Cox was obliged to say: "It is therefore almost impossible to make statements about the form and content of religious education in the immediate future". Perhaps his dilemma will be solved by revision of the 1944 Act.

Letters to the Editor

Answers

GEORGE ORWELL is to be complimented for placing Swift's essay, *An Argument Against Abolishing Christianity*, on the same level as an exposure of Bertrand Russell's errors by Father Ronald Knox. Both Swift and Knox possessed a similar literary wit, that concealed the foolishness of their opinions.

Knox answered Russell's *Why I am Not a Christian* in a sermon addressed to Catholic undergraduates at Oxford; it was printed in a volume of collected sermons entitled, *In Soft Garments* (1942). I am not suggesting to J. E. Edwards (FREETHINKER, December 22) that Knox's answer was adequate—it proceeds to take the argument from order in the universe as a portent for a Mind that conceived order, and without which the laws of nature could not exist.

Another attempt to refute Russell's famous essay is contained in *Christianity and Bertrand Russell* (1958) by C. H. Douglas Clark.
DENIS COBELL.

National Sovereignty

PERCY G. ROY'S letter 'Bourgeois Arabs' is so muddled it's hard to know what he really means. But the last sentence in particular and the general tone of the letter suggest he's surprised that the Russians have been carrying out power politics in the Middle East.

Well if he'd kept his ideas up-to-date and realised that national sovereignty is the real cause of war and power politics he wouldn't have been surprised.

As long as the world's divided into different nations with no effective world government there will be power politics. This is because each nation has to rely on itself for its own defence and to get the economic supplies it needs. Inevitably this involves the sort of thing P. G. Roy complains of—trying to get control of smaller nations by armament deliveries and advisers and actually sending armed forces into action as in Vietnam. And it makes no difference whatever whether a nation is capitalist or communist.

It is national sovereignty and the nationalists and national states that are the merchants of death.
I. S. Low.

Bull

MAY I answer a letter which attacks me in your issue of December 22, which has just come to hand? Mrs S. G. Knott is telling lies. They are not her lies, but hoary old lies about the Corrida de Toros, which are still laboriously pushed out by certain curious individuals in Britain. It is lying to imply that 10 men attack the bull at once. It is lying to say that they have deadly weapons—only the final sword is deadly, and only so when used at great personal risk, single-handed. It is a deliberate and emotive lie to say that the horses have their tongues cut out, and that they are disembowelled.

It was to correct some other lies that I wrote to a newspaper here in Belfast. One of these was that the bullfight only continues to cater for British tourists. Another was to the effect that one needed a permit to take photographs in a bullring. It seems to me important to correct these lies, for two good humanist reasons.

It is important, now that we are on a collision course with Spain over the Gibraltar question, that we should not allow false propa-

ganda to make us hate or despise the Spanish people. It is also important that we should put human beings first, and animals second—the reverse order is the rule in high society in England. The word "humane" has come to mean "kind to animals", which seems to me a very significant perversion. My own MP, Tory Rafton Pounder, recently brought a Bill before the House to limit the export of guinea pigs to Europe: whilst he did so thousands of men were being exported from Ulster, many from his constituency, to find work in England. England is notorious throughout the Continental countries for cruelty to children, and for an insane preoccupation with animals.

So as not to involve the Humanist Group with my own views on this subject, I ended my letter to the paper thus: "The Belfast Humanist Group would not agree with my view of the bullfight, nor would its members claim my long experience of it". I was, for seven years, the only accredited bullfight critic in the world.

JOHN D. STEWART.

A reply to Mr Hird

MR HIRD'S attempt to answer my criticisms of the major principles of humanism only confirms my sayings about humanists. The firmness of his views perhaps lies solely with the anvil with which he compares humanism—a very strange comparison—but what has that got in common with an understanding of the real facts of life? A man could remain very firm in his faith yet still remain a blockhead all his life. And that is not a contradiction in terms but a fact.

I thought Mr Hird's comparison of a humanist with an actor very amusing, but the trouble here is that life is not 'play acting'; it is a serious business which ends in the grave. An actor leaving the stage and a man breathing his last are two vastly different things. To draw such a comparison confirms my view about the anti-tragic element in humanism.

Mr Hird believes that to be religious one must believe in supernatural power; this is not true; Buddhists do not worship a supernatural power yet they are religious. The humanist's faith is a faith in humanity. That is their religion. They have only transferred to their new ideal of 'humanity' all the finer sentiments that were once associated with the supernatural. They nevertheless remain religious in spirit. Like the religious man, the humanist thinks he has an answer to human existence.

On the question of censorship, I agree that the editor has been very liberal, but he is an exception to the general rule, that is all.

R. SMITH.

Divorce on Demand

AT our last meeting (Wednesday, January 3) members and visitors had a discussion with the title "Divorce on Demand". Those present agreed that the existing laws relating to marriage and divorce were not only ridiculous but immoral. Marriage, having largely ceased to be considered as a contract with God, has now become a contract with the state. It should be developed into a contract between the two persons concerned containing legally necessary clauses to safeguard the welfare of any children involved.

However, while attempts at reform were very welcome, it was felt that until the financial position of women in society had undergone a drastic change, the breakdown in human relationships between individual men and women, whether terminating in divorce or not, would always bear more heavily upon the woman. This pointed to the need for introduction of remuneration, tenantry, maintenance, taxation and welfare benefits, and also for more effective education in contraception at an age related to marriageable age.

Our next open meeting on February 7, will consist of a "Humanist Brains Trust". Young people will be especially welcome.

Mrs BERYL SAMUEL,

Honorary Secretary, West Kent Branch, NSS.

OBITUARY

ABERDEEN Humanist Group sustained a great loss in the sudden death of their honorary secretary, Edward W. Alexander, aged 65, on December 30, 1967. He had devoted his service to the Group since coming to join his daughter in Aberdeen shortly after his retirement. Deriving great pleasure from the discussions at meetings, he made it possible for the number of meetings to increase, and did much other valuable work of a secretarial and social nature, remaining always friendly and cheerful.

A widower for 13 years, Mr Alexander bequeathed his body to the Aberdeen Medical School for research purposes.

Mrs E. M. GRAHAM.