

# Freethinker

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## A NEW PRIVILEGENTSIA

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS COMMISSION has produced a report, which though making certain steps towards the ending of the privileged elite created by the public school system, leaves a great deal to be desired.

The commission's central recommendation is that public schools could be successfully "integrated" by reserving a proportion, possibly a half, of available places for bursaried Local Education Authority scholars. Setting aside the broad and controversy-ridden question of whether a system of comprehensive education should be brought to apply to every child of school age, regardless of his academic ability let alone the amount of money his parents have, one is still confronted by the question as to whether it is advisable for the state to aid voluntary schools and thus itself help to perpetuate a system which divides schoolchildren into two distinct classes. Even if one is against comprehensive education, one is bound to conclude that a system whereby privileges can be obtained through riches alone must cease.

The Public Schools Commission presumably think that to infiltrate the public schools with boys who obtain their places with their own brains rather than their parents pockets will eventually lead to the demise of a privileged class. But will it?

Further to their original submissions to the Commission last year the National Secular Society has made some additional submissions, provoked by the Commission's interim report. "It is greatly to be doubted whether any system of direct grants provides a real measure of public accountability or does anything to change the basic character of these schools. A certain number of students may be admitted that would not otherwise get there, but they are unlikely to change the essential ethos and snobbery of the institution and will probably be themselves concerned to turn an intellectual advantage into a social one. Alternatively they may be most miserable in alien and condescending surroundings. In either case there may well be problems of adjustment in their homes at vacation times." (This is not to mention the anguish of the parents of state-aided pupils trying to dress and behave appropriately when confronted by peers, baronets and company executives at the Housemaster's parents' day cocktail party.)

"Whatever may be the theoretical justification of direct grants, the practical consequence is, in our opinion, nothing but the public subsidising of the privilegentsia which patronises these schools. They may say, and even believe, that the reduction of their present exclusiveness is a great sacrifice. But they have already offered scholarships without producing democratisation, and it is certain that the proposed changes would be marginal in comparison with the vast economic advantages to be gained at a time of financial freeze. In our submissions to the Secretary of State for Education and Science on the subject of a new Education Act we put forward an argument for completely comprehensive education. This can be achieved only if public money supports schools which are genuinely open to all. Creaming off talent and financial resources into certain schools reduces what is available for the so-called comprehensive schools and makes a mockery of the whole principle of comprehensiveness."

The government has declared itself opposed to the system of streaming, created by the eleven plus examination.



One hopes that they will realise that to accept the existing proposals of the public schools commission will be to create another sort of streaming a little higher up the academic scale. It is time for a reversal of what is described in the National Secular Society's submissions as "the tendency for the state to finance in large measure, even completely voluntary enterprises of this sort instead of taking them over completely or establishing public alternatives while allowing them to sink or swim on the resources they are able to command privately".

It may sound odd but looked at in the long-term it may prove far more dangerous to try to 'integrate' the public schools than to permit them to flourish as they do now. The long term implications of the policy of giving bursaried places to bright children are that we will have public schools filled with an academic elite. We must ask ourselves if it would not be better to perpetuate a financial elite, who are widely known to be of no greater worth than anyone else, than to instigate a class which could be the forerunners of a class system as seen in Orwell's 1984. On these grounds one is led to the conclusion that we must go totally comprehensive or leave well alone. That the present system is far from well is evident to most people.

## A CATHOLIC UPRISING?

THE ESCALATION of civil disorder in Northern Ireland, the severity of which is perhaps pinpointed in the cutting off of Belfast's water supply, is beginning to bear out Miss Bernadette Devlin's claim that there is no hope for that country. During her deservedly acclaimed maiden speech Miss Devlin criticised the Unionist government for dismissing the Civil Rights movement as "nothing more than a Catholic uprising". Her criticism is of course valid, for the Civil Rights movement is campaigning for such funda-

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mental rights as a fair distribution of votes and an unbiased housing policy. That it is the Catholics who are oppressed, and thus in the main make up the Civil Rights movement, does not make their campaign into a crusade directed against Protestant heretics. But that the Civil Rights movement is campaigning for human rights and not the rule of the Pope does not destroy the fact that the original cause of the strife was religion; and that the Protestant Unionist opponents of civil rights are either fanatical protestants, the quintessence of whom is manifested in the person of the Reverend Ian Paisely, or money minded industrialists and land-owners, protestant in name, who use religion as an excuse for perpetuating their profiteering, the quintessence of whom cannot be mentioned here for fear of libel proceedings.

It may be wondered why the FREETHINKER should come in favour of a body largely made up of Catholics. The FREETHINKER will support any individual or body, which

## COMING EVENTS

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 01-407 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 and McRae.

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton: Sunday, May 4, 5.30 p.m.: Tea Party followed by Annual General Meeting.

Bristol Humanist Group: Friday, May 9, 8 p.m.: American Supper at Mrs Jones', 7 Wyedale Avenue, Coombe Dingle.

Cardiff Humanist Group: Glamorgan County Council Staff Club, Westgate Street, Cardiff: Wednesday, May 7, 7.45 p.m.: "What is Humanism?" Four group members answer this and other questions.

Chelmsford Humanist Group: Lecture, Library, Civic Centre, Chelmsford: Tuesday, May 6, 7.30 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

London Young Humanists: 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8: Sunday, May 4, 7 p.m.: "Humanism—the Open Mind, the Open Society, and the Open Heart", Joan Harvy.

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, May 8, 8 p.m.: "Drugs, Liberty and the Law", Peter Frycr.

is fighting for rights which should be common to all men, regardless of religion or anything else. To withhold such support merely because the oppressed body is religious in name would be as irrational as to adhere to that religion. The Catholics in Northern Ireland are fighting for rights which for many years have been withheld from them by the Protestant majority. That we support such a body in no way detracts from the fact that for such a situation to be caused fundamentally, and in the name of, a disagreement as to how people should worship the same unproven God represents the height of irrationality. Those who argue that people who find religion a help towards living should not be discouraged, should take note of the situation in Ulster. It all started with people with people who found religion a help towards living.

## BHA SURVEY

NATIONAL OPINION POLLS have conducted a survey for the British Humanist Association on the teaching of religion in schools. The results, which were published last week, constitute a direct answer to the earlier surveys often quoted by such upholders of the faith as Edward Short. They refute the claim that the majority of parents see the teaching of religion as essential, and indeed the claim that Britain is a Christian country. The report provides the reader with a wide range of revealing statistical information, which will be subjected to closer analysis in a future edition of FREETHINKER.

## OVEREXPEDIENT?

*Talkback* is the programme in which the BBC invites viewers to come along to the studio to criticise and discuss various programmes or programme policies. There is a studio audience, who from time to time are invited to express their opinions by pressing buttons to register for or against certain propositions. A machine, which resembles an outsize amp meter and which the BBC have christened a 'swingometer', is then supposed to determine the percentage for or against.

According to *Private Eye*, the magazine well known for its friends in high places, the 'swingometer' is "nothing more than a collection of torch bulbs hidden behind the set". "When they light up a man quickly calculates the swing and operates the needle accordingly." *Private Eye* goes on to recount how in a recent discussion on Religious programmes the bulbs suddenly fused. "Rather than admit defeat on the technological front, the producer gave instructions to 'fix' the voting, which came out in perfect BBC fashion; Pro-God 51 per cent, Anti-God 49 per cent."

## FREETHINKER FUND

THE FREETHINKER is the only weekly Secularist-Humanist paper in the country. It is still only 6d. How much do YOU care how many people it reaches? To advertise we need money, and our expenses are ever-increasing. Whose copy are you reading now? Have you got a subscription? Couldn't you contribute something to the Fighting Fund, say 6d or 6s or £6 or £60? How much do you really care about Freethought and helping other people to hear about it? Do, please, help if you can. The FREETHINKER, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1

## SOME THOUGHTS ON LIBERTY AND TOLERATION

DENIS COBELL

In 1854, in his book *On Liberty* John Stuart Mill wrote: "The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it". This precise definition surely embodies the basic aim of every freethinker who has lived during the century since its publication. Yet, how far have we been successful in realising the practical implications within this idea?

If Ghandi were alive now, the year celebrated as the centenary of his birth, would he be satisfied with the progress made in abolishing India's caste system, which renders large sections of the population 'untouchable'? What sort of freedom permits advertisements for alcohol and tobacco on London's underground trains, but refuses notices about birth control devices, to satisfy bigoted Roman Catholics?

The idea of freedom of thought is not an end in itself; quite obviously there is no restriction to what one may think, so long as the activity is restricted to thinking. But this is rather like suggesting one may eat what one likes regardless of body metabolism. Thinking, and permission to act on one's thoughts, are an essential part of freethought. For too long, the freethought movement has restricted its criticisms to the impediments placed upon liberty by religion and its followers. The Churches still need to be watched, but today there are far more powerful forces within the State machine that are attempting to stop the pursuit of the sort of freedom described by Mill.

Insidious 'rationalisation' procedures, adopted by technocratic governments today, are not always so easy to track down as the former patronising overtures made to the people by leaders of Church and State. The current evidence of frustration with orthodox methods of changing society—seen in the recent crop of college troubles and unrest amongst 'revolutionary' youth—is a hopeful, if somewhat negative sign, of a fresh approach to liberty. I refer to these activities as 'negative' because solidarity seems to exist in one aspect alone—that of smashing the intolerable and repressive machinery set up by the State to order our lives. The 'system' being attacked by youth, sympathisers will recognise as the syndrome portent upon *Brave New World* or *1984*.

Forthcoming months and years will reveal whether the few who have refused to acquiesce in the current conformist trend can find alternative ideas and policies that are acceptable to many other people. For example, Gallup polls concerning abolition of the death-penalty uncovered a majority in favour of retaining it as a deterrent; before one can progress in such matters as this, the public must be assisted in discarding these ideas, which stem from those they believe 'know best'. The success of other moves toward freedom will depend upon the degree to which the present iconoclasts comprehend the areas to which liberty can be extended, before withdrawing from the complete overthrow of all recognisable institutions, in deference to 'toleration'. To lose sight of the enemy, in this case, conformity, has been the downfall of revolutionary 'liberating' movements in the past; following success at overthrowing an oligarchy, authoritarian regimes more vicious than anything conceived by their predecessors, have been set up in their stead.

The area most frequently singled out for 'liberation', is the economic system. Economic liberty exists in no major

country of the world; whether one looks at the egalitarian motives of the Communist countries or the exertions of western capitalists towards the corporate state, the situation is identical—distribution of wealth and goods is fixed according to nationalistic dictates in each state, as propounded by their economic experts. But to fall into the trap of believing that economics is the be-all and end-all is to accept the international myth and follow the fatal foot-path laid down by revolutionaries in the past. These have sought economic liberty for their followers, and in the retaliatory process of 'grinding the faces of the rich', have signed the death warrant for freedom. Self-aggrandisement of a new oligarchy is an imposition on the heads of the population: this ultimately leads to the destruction of the very idea of freedom's twin—toleration.

The freedom-lover must be prepared to carry out his first task, to spread ideas about the repressive nature of the state: without willing co-operation he will fall into the pitfalls already described. Secondly, he must carefully note the nature of the effects of this bureaucratic society. If it is pulled down, life will inevitably become simpler and less organised. Time which is pre-occupied by our present enslavement to mechanisation will be available for leisure, and a broader, less intellectualised form of culture. The architects of freedom should realise that toleration depends upon the acceptance of people at all levels of intelligence, whatever their particular contribution to culture. A great deal of 'high-brow' culture is of course, only one end of the spectrum of conformity, however progressive it may purport to be. These are ideals, Utopia may not be achieved, but in directing our thoughts and action in this way, we may do something to limit the omnipresent powers that surround us.

The famous anarchist-theorist, Rudolf Rocker put this succinctly: "Freedom is not an abstract philosophical concept, but the vital concrete possibility for every human-being to bring to full development all capacities and talents with which nature has endowed him, and turn them to social account. The less this natural development of man is interfered with by ecclesiastical and political guardianship, the more efficient and harmonious will human personality become, the more will it become the measure of the intellectual culture of the society in which it has grown. This is the reason why all great culture periods in history have been periods of political weakness".

History ought to have taught us that the complete overthrow of one society by violence, and its revolutionary replacement by another set of demagogues has always proved disastrous. But to accept the established channels of protest and reform is also to connive at our own repression. As Rocker has indicated, our task, in seeking liberty and toleration, is to do everything to weaken the hold of governmental institutions. Some potent radicals, not prepared to consider the full consequences of their actions, may think this a lily-livered course. They must remember that the community consists of a large number of people who are desperately opposed to anything but gradualism: I repeat, the first task is to convince these persons of the inadequacies of government. This is neither revolution nor reform, but quite justifiably in the light of prevailing circumstances, an empirically credible way of following the spirit of Thomas Paine: "Government even in its best state is but a necessary evil".

# J. M. ROBERTSON: FREETHINKER AND HISTORIAN

MARTIN PAGE

*Martin Page is preparing a comprehensive biography of J. M. Robertson, on whom he would welcome any information.*

"WE HAD YESTERDAY Miss Creighton and J. M. Robertson, the man on whom Bradlaugh's mantle has fallen. Miss Creighton had to be rescued, because Robertson began to discuss whether God was made of green cheese or had whiskers—infinite for choice." Thus wrote Bertrand Russell in 1902. J. M. Robertson (1856-1933), indeed, was Bradlaugh's greatest disciple. Robertson had been a member of a Presbyterian Church, had taken the Christian Sacrament and had worked as a Sunday School teacher, but the cumulative effect of his own thought and reading from schooldays onwards was first a rejection of orthodox Christianity and then disbelief in all forms of supernaturalism.

The final break with theology came in 1878, when he joined the National Secular Society after hearing Bradlaugh lecture on Giordano Bruno. In 1884, at Bradlaugh's invitation, he became assistant editor of the *National Reformer*, then the leading organ of British rationalism; he became closely associated with CB during the closing years of his titanic struggle for freedom; he was instrumental in getting the House of Commons, even as Bradlaugh lay dying, to expunge the resolutions forbidding him to take his seat; he was one of the pall-bearers at Bradlaugh's funeral; he succeeded him as editor of the *National Reformer*; and in 1894 he collaborated with Bradlaugh's daughter Hypatia to produce a work that remained for over seventy years the authoritative biography of Charles Bradlaugh. In 1895 he unsuccessfully contested Bradlaugh's old Parliamentary seat of Northampton as an Independent (very independent) Radical; but ten years later he was swept to victory as Liberal candidate for the heavily industrial Tyneside division, substantially reversing a Tory majority. The spirit of Northampton had triumphed again!

In 1967 an American historian of British heresy suggested that Robertson might have been a sounder choice than Foote for the leadership of the NSS after Bradlaugh's death. In any event, JMR served the great causes of rationalism and freethought as lecturer, debater, journalist, historian, biographer, essayist, critic and publicist, for more than half a century. An excellent speaker and a formidable debater, he addressed audiences throughout the British Isles; he made a highly successful lecture tour in the United States at a time when America was emerging as a world power; and he also found time to attend International Freethought Congresses held on the Continent. He delivered the discourse at the memorial service to his "dear and honoured friend, Dr Moncure Conway", and he devoted his Conway Memorial Lecture to an account of that gregarious freethinker's "life pilgrimage". The religious cremation service in 1923 of his colleague Lord Morley provoked Robertson to exclaim, "This is bloody hypocrisy". He was present at the RPA Annual Dinner in 1925 when the Chairman, George Whale, collapsed and died; and he was disgusted by the "sulphurous implication" of the headline 'Speaker Dies after Denouncing Religion' issued by one London newspaper reporting George Whale's death. In the same year JMR edited a valuable collection of the heterodox writings of his fellow Scot and life-long friend Willam Archer, the great theatre critic, who had died at the end of 1924.

In *The Perversion of Scotland* (1886), Robertson revealed, from a thorough study of original sources, that the Scottish Reformation, far from being a spontaneous movement, was largely engineered by vested interests that stood to profit by the change which took place. The book was quoted approvingly by Bradlaugh in his *Humanity's Gain from Unbelief* (1889); and its theme of the importance of economic forces in sustaining religious movements and institutions was developed by Robertson in *The Dynamics of Religion* (1897), where he demonstrated, in a survey of English history from the Reformation to the end of the 19th century, that, despite declining Church attendances and the onslaught of science and reason, ecclesiastical organisations had survived not merely by exploiting the primeval instincts of terror and adoration and "a social habit of conformity": above all, "religion depends for systematic survival in any form upon financial endowment, which determines the forms of teaching and worship". JMR thus paved the way for men like Sombart, Troeltsch, Max Weber, Tawney and Hobson to explore further interactions between God and Mammon.

Robertson's *Thomas Paine* (1888) was a devastating yet fair-minded refutation of Leslie Stephen's calumnies against Paine in his *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1881): and after the publication of Moncure Conway's classic *Life of Thomas Paine* (1892), in which the author openly acknowledged his debt to JMR, Stephen confessed: "The account which I gave of Paine in the book upon the 18th century was, I have no doubt, erroneous. My only excuse, if it be an excuse, was the old one, 'pure ignorance'". More than half a century after JMR's *Thomas Paine* had first appeared, that scholarly freethinker Herbert Cutner (later a Vice-President of the Thomas Paine Society) pronounced it "one of the most brilliant controversial pamphlets ever written (I am not sure whether it should not be considered the most brilliant)". Robertson contributed four items to the highly successful Paine Exhibition of 1895; and in 1909 he attended the centenary celebrations at Thetford, during which he paid eloquent tribute to Paine as a pioneer in social progress. Indeed, the erection of a statue of Paine in Thetford in 1964 marked the triumph of the Robertsonian spirit over that of a man like Professor George Catlin, who, as late as 1963, described Paine as "a plausible but deplorable scoundrel" and as "a foul-mouthed rogue".

JMR's *Modern Humanists* (1891, revised edition 1927) is a wonderful collection of studies of J. S. Mill, Carlyle, Emerson, Matthew Arnold, Ruskin and Spencer. J. A. Hobson thought *Modern Humanists* exemplified Robertson's "delicacy of expression"; and more than half a century after its first appearance, Professor Harold Laski of the LSE said the book "contains some of the best work done in Great Britain since Matthew Arnold". Robertson's *Buckle and His Critics* (1895) is a magnificent defence of that immensely stimulating historian and a weighty onslaught on the misrepresentations of his opponents, though at the same time Robertson does not hesitate to expose Buckle's real errors. *Buckle and His Critics* deeply impressed the distinguished historian G. P. Gooch, and as late as 1958 it was still the only full-length book in English on Buckle as an historian. Moreover, JMR's edition (1904) of Buckle, with a substantial introduction and copious annotations and corrections, remains unsurpassed.

In 1902 appeared *A Short History of Christianity and Letters on Reasoning*. The former work had by 1931 reached a third edition, which undoubtedly ranks as one of the most brilliant, thought-provoking and scrupulously fair short introductions to its fascinating subject ever penned by an atheist. *Letters on Reasoning*, which were ostensibly written for his children, amply reflect Robertson's qualities as a thinker and as a man, with a power and charm reminiscent of Diderot or Montaigne. JMR's *Rationalism* (1912) put its case with such magnificent compactness that it came as no surprise when an edition appeared in The Thinker's Forum series after the ravages of World War Two. As Robertson said in the closing pages of his essay: "Rationalism, on the side of thought, must forever mean liberty, equality, fraternity, 'the giving and receiving of reasons', the complete reciprocity of judgment. To all races, all castes, it makes the same appeal, being as universalist as science, naming no master, proffering no ritual, holding out no threat. . . . Of race-hatred he [the rationalist] cannot be guilty without infidelity to his first principles."

Professor Dover Wilson rightly said that JMR's *The Evolution of States* (1912) was as critical from a rationalist point of view as Acton was from a Catholic. It is indeed a masterly survey of European political, economic and cultural development from the days of ancient Greece through the eras of the Roman Empire, the Saracens, the Italian Republics, the Scandinavian peoples, the Hansa, Holland, Switzerland and Portugal, to England of "the constitutional period". Robertson was probably the first British historian who covered this field with such a wealth of learning and intellectual stimulation, within the pages of a single volume. Certainly his book was remarkable, at the time it was written, for its brilliant use of Continental historical sources little known in England.

In 1931 the historian Stirling Taylor called JMR's *Bolingbroke and Walpole* (1919) "the most scientific study of Walpole that has yet appeared, but, though profounder than Lord Morley's book, it is rather an economic and sociological analysis than a biography". Twenty years after Stirling Taylor, the historians Pargellis and Medley regarded *Bolingbroke and Walpole* as "primarily valuable for its social and economic analysis of the period". JMR's *A Short History of Morals* (1920)—one of his most impressive achievements—traces the evolution of morals from primitive man, through the eras of Greek, Roman, Chinese, Buddhist, Christian and rationalist doctrines, to Schopen-

hauer and "subsisting ethical issues". Between 1920 and 1925 JMR produced four delightful monographs on Bradlaugh, Voltaire, Renan and Gibbon, respectively. H. N. Brailsford, in his own memorable *Voltaire* (1935), clearly revealed his debt to Robertson's study (1922) of the great French freethinker.

The Scottish rationalist who was compared on at least three occasions with David Hume appropriately edited Hume's *Natural History of Religion*. JMR also produced an invaluable edition of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*. After reading his essay on Bacon in *Pioneer Humanists* (1907), one of his admirers rushed off to buy his edition of Bacon's works; and 40 years later, Joseph McCabe still regarded his chapter on Mary Wollstonecraft (in *Pioneer Humanists*) as "excellent". Moreover, JMR wrote introductions to various freethought classics, including works by Gibbon, Paine and Winwood Reade; and as the American Professor Homer Smith said 20 years after JMR's death: "To each of these prefaces he contributed richly from the store of erudition and historical perspective with which he was himself so richly endowed by a lifetime of conscientious scholarship".

In 1929 Robertson produced his authoritative, two-volume *History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century*. In this illuminating survey he rightly declared, "In England it was due above all to Shelley that the very age of reaction was confronted with unbelief in lyric form" (p. 93), and he discussed the teaching of Kierkegaard years before he was "discovered" by the Existentialists. Posthumously, in 1936, appeared two more massive tomes: *A History of Freethought to the Period of the French Revolution*. The work which so deeply impressed devotees of scholarship and rationalism began as one volume in 1899 and had become four volumes by 1936—remarkable monuments of remarkable learning, a world survey ranging from primitive man to the founding of the RPA. The very least we can claim is that, for sheer scholarship and breath-taking range, these four volumes are never likely to be completely superseded. As Professor Harold Laski said of the two volumes published in 1936: "They induce in me a feeling of helpless humility. Their range seems to stretch from China to Peru. Robertson was not less at home in the history of Rationalism in America and Spain than he was in that of England or France. The knowledge is sure; the precision is remarkable. With these volumes Rationalism acquires one of its fundamental classics, and the place of Robertson among the outstanding historians of our time is assured".

G. L. SIMONS

## GOD AND LOGIC IN HISTORY

### FIRST OF TWO ARTICLES

TODAY IT IS quite unfashionable, even among theologians, to attempt to *prove* God's existence. If God is to be believed in, it must be for reasons of faith and revelation rather than through logical demonstration. The reason for this change of emphasis is largely the modern successes of science and the spread of rational enquiry. It is useful to look at the historical character of religious philosophical apologetics to remind ourselves how intellectually secure early religious thinkers felt themselves to be, and, by contrast, how insecure they are today.

Early religious philosophy is found, inevitably, among the Greeks. Socrates—if we are to believe Plato's accounts of his dialogues—believed in God, the soul and immortality; he was less enthusiastic about free will, believing that if

men had knowledge they could not help being good. When Socrates was dying, having being condemned to death and compelled to take poison, he introduced arguments to prove that the soul is immortal. The first of these, sometimes called the Argument from Reciprocal Processes, runs as follows (I quote from the *Phaedo*):

' . . . when a thing becomes bigger (says Socrates), it must, I suppose, have been smaller first, before it came bigger?'

'Yes.'

'And similarly if it became smaller, it must be bigger first, and become smaller afterwards?'

'That is so,' said Cebes.

'And the weaker comes from the stronger, and the faster from the slower?'

'Certainly.'

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Having established the general principle to his satisfaction that opposites generate opposites, Socrates applies the notion to the facts of life and death:

'Then what comes from the living?'  
'The dead.'  
'And what,' asked Socrates, 'comes from the dead?'  
'I must admit . . . that it is the living.'  
' . . . Then our souls do exist in the next world.'  
'So it seems.'

I leave the reader to criticise this argument, but although invalid—as it clearly is—it illustrates an important point in religious thought: that by dint of abstract reasoning one can arrive at a concept of reality that includes the existence of God, souls and such like. Socrates' second argument for the immortality of the soul is sometimes called the Argument from Recollection, and it is similar in vein to the first. Towards the end of the *Phaedo* Socrates makes use of the Theory of Ideas, which is purely Platonic. Plato's *Timaeus*, also dealing with specifically religious questions, is less dialectic and more imaginary. Of the *Timaeus* Bertrand Russell has observed that "It is difficult to know what to take seriously . . . and what to regard as a play of fancy".

In the *Timaeus* the existence of God is assumed, but Aristotle believed that sound reasons had to be adduced. In his *Metaphysics* he introduced what became known as the First Cause Argument. (He was not the first: it can be found, for instance, in Anaxagoras, a pre-Socratic.) In the *Metaphysics* we read:

"It is clear then from what has been said that there is a substance which is eternal and unmovable and separate from sensible things. It has been shown that this substance cannot have any magnitude, but is without parts and indivisible . . ."

But Aristotle was not happy that the argument conducted him to one God alone: he added that we "must not ignore the question whether we are to suppose one such substance (unmoved mover) or more than one". There were, of course, Greek sceptics, e.g. Democritus and Epicurus, but it was left to a Roman poet and philosopher to castigate religion in immortal verse. In *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), Lucretius objects to religion on the grounds of humanity and logic: he complains about a human sacrifice and objects, in delightful poetry, to the Design Argument for God's existence.

From a Roman of the first century to a Roman Catholic of the thirteenth . . . Thomas Aquinas, regarded by Catholics as one of the greatest scholastic philosophers, introduced in his *Summa Theologia* five 'proofs' for God's existence. It is significant that in his *Aquinas* Copleston still feels obliged to defend these proofs: Roman Catholics are still made to believe that God 'can be known with certainty by the natural light of reason'. The Aquinas proofs have been repeatedly demolished by non-Catholic philosophers and do not cause freethinkers any trouble.

Modern philosophy is regarded as starting with Descartes in the sixteenth century, and it begins to be hostile to religion in an unprecedented fashion. Descartes himself believed in God for reason of the Ontological Argument, one of the 'standard proofs' (first used by St Anselm in the eleventh century). Descartes' version of the proof appears in his *Discourse on Method*:

" . . . For I saw clearly that, if I supposed a triangle, its three angles must be equal to two right-angles, but I saw nothing, for all that, to make me sure that any triangle existed anywhere in the world. On the contrary, when I turned back to reconsider the

idea I had of a perfect being, I found that existence was included in it, just as the property of having its three angles equal to two right-angles is included in the idea of a triangle. . . . It follows that it is as certain as any geometric proof can be that God, who is the perfect being, is or exists."

Leibniz also believed in the Ontological Argument and also suggested three other proofs for God's existence. These are systematically demolished in Bertrand Russell's perceptive but little publicised *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*. One of the proofs, the Cosmological Argument, is a philosophical variant on the First Cause Argument and is well defended by Copleston in his radio debate with Russell (the whole exchange being printed in Russell's *Why I am not a Christian*—the book, not the pamphlet).

David Hume was a sceptic and his most thorough-going attack on religion is contained in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Owing to the dialogue form of the work it is not always clear which speaker represents Hume's own opinions. As Richard Wollheim observes "Are we to identify Hume with Cleanthes, taking our cue from Pamphilus' closing words in which he is crowning the victor? Or are we rather to identify him with Philo, who in fact gets the better of the argument?" It is likely, bearing in mind Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, that he was a deist in a vague sort of way—like Voltaire and Winwood Reade—but had no time for orthodox religion or the popular arguments put forward in its defence. Most of the *Dialogues* are concerned with the Argument from Design, and Hume often makes amusing reading:

"This world . . . is very faulty and imperfect . . . and was only the first rude essay of some infant deity, who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance: it is the work only of some dependent, inferior deity; and it is the object of derision to his superiors: it is the product of old age and dotage in some superannuated deity; and ever since his death, has run on at adventures, from the first impulse and active force, which it received from him."

In his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Section X) Hume makes many telling points against miracles as a religious phenomena.

Kant criticised the standard proofs for God's existence. He made points about the various arguments, but an important contribution not found in other thinkers is the suggestion that the Ontological Argument is basic to the Cosmological (the First Cause) and the Physio-Theological (the Design). If this attempt is successful it is clear that religious thinkers who reject the Ontological cannot put forward the Design or First Cause Arguments in its stead. Kant's key objection to the Ontological Argument is that 'existence' is not a predicate. This argument, contained in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, is thought by most modern philosophers to be valid. (Of course Kant tried to arrive at God in another way—in *The Critique of Practical Reason*.) Clearly not all thinkers were impressed by Hume and Kant, and it was not until Darwin that the Design Argument was nailed once and for all. In the nineteenth century, Paley was still writing, in his *Natural Theology*:

"Can you look at the different orders and species which nature presents to you, each elaborately designed to fulfil certain functions, and each fixed, as science tells us, in its essential characteristics from the beginning, and doubt that they must have been created for the purpose which they fulfil by a designing mind—the almighty Creator of the universe?"

In Germany, Friedrich Nietzsche would have none of this and confidently proclaimed that 'God is dead'—a mes-

(Continued on back page)

## THE PLIGHT OF THE AGED

R. READER

EVEN TODAY, many Europeans still cling to the idea that over-population is exclusively an Asian problem, having no points of contact with their own lives. Yet ominous hints are not wanting of the fate that awaits many, now in the prime of life and living abundantly, when—and if—they have the misfortune to reach old age.

Even the daily press cannot completely ignore the situation. Many old persons are "having a desperate struggle to keep warm during the winter without spending money, reading library books in store rest rooms, spinning out cups of tea for two hours in cafes, etc.". One "lucky old lady", living partly on old age pension and partly on private means, "has a one-room flatlet, buys the cheapest possible cuts of meat, makes soup from vegetable water, and jam from dried apricots". Another 2,000 lucky old people were given 12s per week each last year by benevolent associations.

Those are the ones for whom the term "lucky", many would think, is too positive a word. The unlucky ones are a hundred times more numerous. Of course, they could go into homes, but the elderly person who has retained mental health finds separation from a familiar milieu the cruellest of blows. Furthermore there is always the fear that one will be put progressively aside in such places, ignored, given no treatment, or even ill-treated. (Has not the avowed wish been expressed that they "drop dead"?)

The real reason for this situation is, of course, that old people, unless very wealthy, are of no further use to the expansionist delirium of religious neurosis. Procreation is a thing of the past—they are incapable of bringing yet more youngsters into the world. Nor are they "interesting" commercially. One cannot do business with them, because they are no longer swayed by the wild hopes, ambitions, phantasies and catastrophes of the commercial bear-garden. They cannot be used up in an aggression because their very presence jeopardises military operations. Some of them cannot even justify their existence by voting! No. Through sheer cussedness, all that these insupportable people ask is to be allowed to live out their lives to a natural end as comfortably as possible.

And—also through sheer cussedness—they obstinately persist in living to greater and greater ages.

Religious neurosis, of course, has given its "reason" for encouraging procreation. "Abundant young arms are necessary to work to pay for the pensions of the increasing numbers of the elderly." *Who, then, we may ask, is going to work for the pensions of the "abundant young arms" when the latter age, in turn? A further, even more numerous, crop of young arms, presumably, and so on, ad infinitum.*

Ineluctably, however, the truth is emerging. Britain had an abundant crop of young arms in 1946-47. But, as the events of 1968 have shown, and as was predicted in the FREETHINKER of December 19, 1958, these abundant young arms, far from being able to find pensions for the elderly, are meeting with insuperable difficulties in finding means to support themselves.

Those who still hesitate to take sides on the population question should take this situation into account in making up their minds. They themselves are, perhaps, in their forties and fifties and old age still seems remote. But, fail-

ing a tremendous awakening and change in human attitudes to human procreation—which change their opinion could help to bring about—religious neurosis will bring about an aggravation, until either the whole crazy edifice metaphorically and literally disintegrates, or our children, on reaching old age, will be fighting to the death for a crust of bread (if such still exists) or a hole in the ground.

## BOOK REVIEW

I. S. LOW

THE WORLD BEYOND THE CHARTER: C. Wilfred Jenks (Allen and Unwin).

C. WILFRED JENKS (who in this book writes about world organisation in general and the United Nations in particular) has been an official of the International Labour Organisation since 1931. In his Introduction he says "I must state clearly my interest and bias. I have a passionate belief in the need for and possibility of effective world organisation".

In reviewing his book I must also state clearly my "bias". I am an uncompromising believer in World Government. I look on all schemes like the League of Nations and the United Nations as shams which kid people there's a sort of World Government while allowing the nations to go on intriguing and fighting against each other as they've always done.

But I want to be fair to Mr Jenks and his book and I sympathise with many of his ideas.

The first part of the book deals with attempts to set up international organisation before 1914 (historical and fascinating) and the second deals with the League of Nations (historical and depressing).

Then—he starts on the United Nations. Mr Jenks thinks it has many advantages over the League. It has more members. The Secretariat has more power. There are more people available to it and more money, and in particular he praises its "resilience" (that is, he claims the members of the UN often show a determination to overcome obstacles created by the text of the Charter. I'm afraid, after studying the examples he quotes, I'm not convinced!).

Mr Jenks mentions an interesting point: that there is no body in the UN dealing with peace as a whole. The Security Council deals with preventing actual conflicts. The Economic and Social Council deals with economic problems which may help to cause such conflicts. Yet "peace-keeping and peace-building are not separate planetary systems". However, he seems to have a lot of confidence in Regional Economic Commissions which deal with different areas of the world.

I think there is one fair criticism of this book. Mr Jenks talks about the UN without discussing actual events in world politics. One breath-taking omission is the failure to mention the clash between the USSR and the USA which started at the end of World War II.

Mr Jenks clearly believes in the UN. So when he says there's something wrong with it, it's likely that there is. There are several such admissions. I shall mention only one. "The resources available (to the UN) . . . still fall far short of the need and . . . are highly precarious: the whole UN system is so financially flimsy that a major political or financial crisis could destroy it".

The most dramatic part of the book is the account of the "seven paradoxes": a world essentially one split into more and more nations, immense military power which is ineffective as an instrument of policy, immense economic resources and a gap between affluence and poverty: and so on. It's a good picture of the mess made by Nationalism.

The best thing in the whole book is the sentence: "There is no greater illusion than the illusion that peace will preserve itself".

After reading this book I felt, more strongly than ever, that organisations like the UN, based on national sovereignty, don't hold much hope. They can only work if the national governments support them. And the national governments only do this if it suits them.

But there is no doubt that Mr Jenks is an intelligent and idealistic person and I unhesitatingly advise everybody to read his book.

Still—we want World Government!

## LETTERS

### Free Will

SINCE Mr Simons returns to the freewill discussion, will you allow me to point out that, whatever their disciples may assert, neither Heisenberg nor Schrödinger claims that the quantum theory proves the existence of free will, but only that it gives grounds for the belief. Strictly speaking, we must be agnostic on the question. But just as we are unable to prove that God does not exist, yet the evidence induces many of us to regard his existence as so highly improbable that we take our stand on a blank denial (and more important, we act on that belief), so the quantum theory leads some of us to believe in free will. Heisenberg states that the results of atomic experiment are unpredictable in about ten per cent of cases; and I daresay that this accords with our experience of men: only about ten per cent of them show originality.

Granted that this unpredictability may some day be removed. It is also possible that God may some day be discovered; but on the evidence, both seem improbable.

Lastly, Simons defends the common determinist objection that free will is of no value because it implies that decisions are made without a cause. But if I prefer spinach to cabbage, the sense of free exercise of my choice is of value to me. I do not know the cause of my preference, but this ignorance does not destroy the value of free will. I repeat that no sane person acts on the belief that his reasoning plays no part in determining his choice. To reason and worry over a problem demands an effort that we feel free to perform or not. The determinist may assert that this worrying effort is also determined independently of our will. I say that nobody really believes this. If he did, he would always take the easiest path, under the reassuring conviction that this is his determined course.

HENRY MEULEN.

I WAS SORRY to read, last week, that for Mr G. L. Simons "Free Will is Meaningless". I feel that something should be done to rescue him from his deplorable situation. Has scientific or philosophical "determinism" really made him incapable of voluntary action? Has Mr Simons never been in a position where free choice provides the only possible answer to the question to be or not to be? To marry or not to marry? To stay or to quit?

Liberals may sometimes exaggerate the glories of freedom. But even prison governors or dictatorial governments must have some respect for the basic freedom of the individual human will. Communists may have too little liberty, but they are not really slaves or automata any more than English people are.

I imagine that only a few freethinkers will subscribe to the opinion that "Free Will is Meaningless". PETER CROMMELIN.

### Opportunity knocks

IN THIS YEAR we expect to be substantially advancing plans for providing a commensurate income for the truly effective propagation of secular-humanism, in the near future.

Accordingly I ask the editor's permission to invite enquiries as to those plans, once more, through the medium of our FREETHINKER. I have had numerous enquiries since first broadcasting the subject through Karl Hyde's columns, and there is reason to believe there could be a tremendous response to the call for ammunition in this project. I don't anticipate any sort of miracle, but the eventual attainment of a position of financial strength for the Movement is my satisfying aim.

So may I suggest communications to my self at: 67 Broadmead Road, Folkestone, Kent. My thanks in anticipation.

F. H. SNOW.

### Rationalisation of Man

THE CANDID APPRAISAL of man's behaviour compared to that of animals by Kit Mouat (FREETHINKER, December 21, 1968) is deserving of great credit and wide circulation.

About 2,000 years of mythical-fabulous religions have proven, by their own crass falsity, to be self-defeating as ethical guides. But sages in every age, not shrouded in a smog of deceit and dishonesty, have ever pleaded for knowledge of self and nature, self-honesty and humaneness—but many have been ostracised, persecuted, and are restrained today from attempts to rationalise man.

John Dewey had advised, "Have faith in intelligence as the one and indispensable belief necessary for moral and social life".

JOHN H. JONES, United States.

### Which first—religion, sex or morals?

I HOPED all humanists and secularists understood that Religious Instruction in many schools misfires because it is not preceded by a thorough grounding in moral education.

In my article published on March 29th I gave one example of how sex instruction can also misfire, and I endeavoured to spell out in the final paragraph that neither RI nor SI are fit subjects for classroom instruction unless preceded by moral education.

I know from experience that observant four-year-olds can understand the mechanics of reproduction, but although some children are maturing sexually earlier than has been customary in this country for several generations, there are many girls and boys who do not begin to develop their secondary sex characteristics until relatively late. Classes of 40 or 50 are bound to include some of each kind.

For those who have not yet felt any of the emotions or physical sensations which accompany our secondary sexual characteristics, pronouncements about pleasure, desire, excitement, drives, urges, responsibilities and self-control are absurdly incomprehensible, and are regarded as the occasion for a good snigger.

ISOBEL GRAHAME.

### GOD AND LOGIC IN HISTORY (Contd. from page 142)

sage that our odd modern theologians have so taken to heart. In *The Gay Science*, Book V, Nietzsche says:

"The background to our cheerfulness. The greatest recent event—that 'God is dead', that the belief in the Christian God has ceased to be believable—is even now beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe."

And following Nietzsche the thinking opposition to religion came thick and fast. Typical modern critiques of the standard proofs for God's existence are McIntyre's *Difficulties in Christian Belief* and Ninian Smart's *Philosophy and Religious Belief*.

But I feel that the most devastating attack to emerge from modern philosophy against religious belief is the suggestion that religious terminology is meaningless, that it does not satisfy the criteria that meaningful symbology must satisfy. The linguistic attack on religious belief will be the subject of the next article.

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