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NEITHER JUST NOR DIPLOMATIC

ONCE AGAIN the long-haired leader of The Rolling Stones pop group has been arrested for possessing cannabis. It is clear from the number of times that Mick Jagger has been in trouble for this same offence that the efforts of the law will do nothing to deter him from doing something which he enjoys and which clearly harms no one else. It may be said that he has a responsibility to the teenagers, who admire him. Whether this is true or not, it cannot be denied that by repeatedly pouncing on Jagger the police are drawing attention to the fact that he uses cannabis and that without the efforts of the police none of the pop singer's fans would know that he has ever used the drug. Thus the police's action neither deters the 'criminal' nor deters others. Rather the opposite. It is certain that what appears to be victimisation by the police serves only to engender sympathy for Jagger, and that he can now count on support from many people who neither take drugs nor admire his music.

Some time ago Inspector Reg Gale, who is Chairman of the Police Federation, was interviewed on television, together with Caroline Coon, the author of a book which claims, amongst other things, to provide evidence of the fact that the police have in the past planted drugs on suspects. Inspector Gale succeeded admirably in demonstrating just why young people, like Miss Coon, who is the organiser of the 'Underground' organisation 'Release' which helps young people who are in trouble with the police, are dissatisfied with our police force. Britain may have the best police force in the world, but if a senior member of that force can sit in front of a television audience and say "I would like to say that Miss Coon's heart's bigger than her head, and the majority of the people with whom her work brings her into contact are drop-outs and degenerates, and they're individuals who interpret the liberty of the individual as being able to take what they want or to do what they like and use force if necessary, regardless of the rest of society. Now the society I represent, and that's 99.9 per cent of the people in this country, tell us that they don't want this, so at times I think because of the pressure we get from society we are inclined to be a little impatient with this very small minority; and frankly, it's a pity that this minority can't show themselves as queuing enthusiastically at the Labour Exchange looking for work . . ."

At this point the interviewer interrupted this amazingly unenlightened, yet very revealing speech, saying: "Are you really . . . Inspector Gale, are you really the sort of person who's entitled to make a remark like that, that has nothing to do with the discussion we're having?"

Now, the man on the beat in this country is in all probability an excellent type for his job and it is difficult to fault the behaviour of lower ranking policemen. However, it is made abysmally clear both by the continued persecution of Mick Jagger and by Inspector Gale's horrifying remarks on television that the higher echelons are misdirected to a dangerous degree. That there is a fundamental prejudice against long-haired youth is only too clear. What is worse is the apparent complete lack of comprehension of what the more rebellious elements of youth are trying to achieve. To dismiss such admirable examples of endeavour

INSIDE:
**A HEATHEN INTERPRETATION
OF EVENTS IN ULSTER**
by BOB CREW
and
THE CAUSES OF GHETTO RIOTS
by DOUGLAS BRAMWELL

as the underground newspaper *International Times* and the Arts Lab in Drury Lane as the work of .1 per cent of the population, all of whom are degenerates and drop-outs displays abysmal ignorance and intolerance. Worst of all there seems to be no one in the police force who appreciates the basic psychological fact, that the more one tries to understand someone, who at first offends and baffles one, the less offensive that person will become.

HANGING

PERHAPS one of the more enlightened of the observations made by Inspector Gale during the television interview referred to in the previous piece was: ". . . as far as the policeman is concerned his job is to enforce the law. We are doing what society tells us to do . . ." Were this principle to be strictly adhered to, there would be no more grounds for complaints about the police than there are for complaints about the soldier who simply "does his duty".

The Police Federation have recently issued a statement demanding the return of hanging as a deterrent against murderers. Now they cannot have it both ways. On the one hand they want to be exempt from criticism because they do not make the laws, and on the other they publicly demand that the law be changed. Were the law to be changed the police would have no grounds for grumbling were they to be criticised. This is not to deny the individual

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policeman the right to join a pressure group in order to influence our law-makers.

This whole issue of capital punishment has been alive for many centuries longer than any of the other recent social reforms, and it is perhaps superfluous to bring out the arguments against capital punishment yet again. David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, manfully attempting to redress the impact made on the public by the demand of the police federation, has managed to come up with a little-used but nonetheless valid argument: "However distasteful is the mediaeval operation of hanging, it would have much to commend it if it actually deterred murderers. Statisticians have however, shown this is not true, while *psychologists suggest that the act of hanging is a form of institutionalised violence which in the long run—measured perhaps by wars and rioting rather than by organised crime narrowly defined—may prove gravely anti-social*" (My italics).

Quite naturally the police are considering the problem from their own point of view, and of course one sympathises with them. It is surely of more importance though, to look at the question in the long term, as Tribe has done.

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

Belfast Humanist Group: NI War Memorial Building, Waring Street, Belfast: Monday, June 9, 8 p.m.: Briefing of delegates for BHA Annual Conference, and discussion.

Enfield and Barnet Humanist Group: At Norma Haemmerle's, 19 Wakefield Road, N11 (off Warwick Road. Nearest station Bounds Green): Tuesday, June 10, 8 p.m.: "Welfare", Mervyn Probert.

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, June 12, 8 p.m.: Annual General Meeting followed by "Judaism", Maurice Lewin.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, June 8, 11 a.m.: "Politics and Morality", Dr D. B. Halpern.

Thomas Paine Society and Norwich Public Library: Central Library, Bethel Street, Norwich: Until July 5: Exhibition in commemoration of the 175th anniversary of the publication in Great Britain of *The Age of Reason*.

There are those who consider that man would do well to abandon his 'civilisation' and return to nature. However, 'civilisation' has become necessary fundamentally because there are so many people in the world that it is impractical for them all to be self-sufficient. Unfortunately it has progressed arbitrarily and produced many evils. Nevertheless, taking man's attempt to conquer his more anti-social instincts as a major part of the essential process of civilisation, would surely indicate that the abolition of capital punishment is a prerequisite towards the progress of man.

ANOTHER DISTINGUISHED SPONSOR

LAST WEEK'S FREETHINKER carried a report of the setting up of a 'Secular Education Appeal', and listed the appeal's "distinguished sponsors". We are pleased to report that the word "distinguished" can now be used with even more justification. Bertrand Russell has agreed to sponsor the fund.

AT LAST

THE FOLLOWING REPORT of the circumstances surrounding the closure of Billy Graham's newspaper *The Christian* has been received from Eric Willoughby:—

Billy Graham's decision to kill his organisation's British newspaper *The Christian*, can be regarded not only as a triumph for secularism but can also be cited as an unequivocal example of his concern for profit.

Heavy subsidies from America had been made to the paper, and in an announcement in the final issue, the editor euphemistically states that the organisation felt the money could "be used more effectively in other areas of direct evangelism".

Since headlines like 'Hundreds saved at Bristol' have been appearing with some regularity in the publication, the word 'effectively' is only significant in the realm of profit.

First indications of the paper's financial difficulties came during last year when its staff was moved from the grandeur of Bush House, Aldwych, to Camden Town. But the actual closure decision was not revealed to the staff until after what transpired to be the penultimate issue was put to press. In lieu of notice each member of the staff was given three months' salary. If this is Christianity in practice then the publisher of *The Christian* is welcome to it!

It can hardly be said that *The Christian* will be sadly missed by anyone. Those followers of the faith who relied upon it to keep in touch with the current evangelical scene have plenty of other mediums. But we can hope that without this weekly "shot in the arm" their activities may be less enthusiastic.

And it is sometimes the case in the publishing world that the closure of one paper on a particular subject indicates a general apathy and it is to be hoped that *The Christian's* rivals may follow suit.

One certainty is that if Mr Graham thought there was even a slim chance that the circulation of *The Christian*, and therefore its advertising rates, could have been increased, every effort would have been made and the paper would never have closed; Mr Graham is too shrewd a businessman. Only apathy and declining interest in its subject matter can be construed as the paper's reason for

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THE CAUSES OF GHETTO RIOTS

DOUGLAS BRAMWELL

RESULTS OF AN AMERICAN SURVEY

FOLLOWING the serious riots in the negro ghettos of many American cities in the summer of 1967, a group of workers at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan carried out a survey to test the various suggested explanations of the riots. The work was carried out on behalf of the US National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and was conducted in two cities, Detroit and Newark, where major riots took place. The results of the survey show that two of the most popular explanations are incorrect, and confirm a third.

Three common guesses

The various theories put forward to explain ghetto rioting fall into three groups which may be called the 'riffraff' theory, the 'relative deprivation' theory and the 'blocked opportunity' theory.

In the riffraff theory, it is held that the rioters comprise criminals, unassimilated migrants and emotionally disturbed people of the lowest classes. Personal failure, it is held, underlies the troubles.

The relative deprivation theory attributes the riots to the gap between the social and economic status expected by the rioters and the inferior reality in which they find themselves. Comparison with the whites, or even the beginning of improvement for negroes, are said to be generating causes.

The blocked opportunity theory holds that the riots are a consequence of the prolonged exclusion of negroes from American economic and social life. The 'white barrier' generates violent reactions.

The interviews

Negro interviewers carried out the survey and statistical samples were taken in the areas of Detroit and Newark where violence had occurred. Over 400 negroes were interviewed in Detroit and 11 per cent identified themselves as rioters; in Newark over 200, all men, were interviewed and the proportion of rioters was 45 per cent.

Riffraff theory

The hypothesis that rioters are hard core unemployed was disproved by the survey; there was no significant difference in the percentage of unemployed among the rioters and non-rioters. Nor were the rioters less educated; in both Detroit and Newark higher percentages of rioters than non-rioters had attended high school. And rather than being the permanently unemployed, rioters tended to be those on the margin of the job market, often in a job, but never for long. In general, it can be concluded that differences of economic status do not differentiate rioters from non-rioters.

Also disproved was another version of the riffraff theory that rioters are likely to be the recent unassimilated migrants to urban life. It was found, in both cities, that long-term residents rather than newcomers were likely to be among the rioters.

A third version of the riffraff theory is that riots are caused by those whose personalities make them lose control under stress. As it was not possible to measure personality directly, general social behaviour was used as an indirect indication of personality. The survey showed that rioters tended to be more active than non-rioters in organised social groups and among neighbours. The rioters, therefore, conformed rather more to the conventional norm of social behaviour than did the non-rioters.

Relative deprivation theory

One form of this theory is based on the psychological fact that the closer a person comes to a goal, the greater the frustration in not attaining it. According to this view, riots should take place, not when things are at their worst, but when they are improving although not fast enough. In both Newark and Detroit there was no difference in the answers of rioters and non-rioters when asked whether things had got better, worse or not changed over the past few years.

The second variation of this theory is based on the economic and social gap between the negroes and the majority of whites. The survey results show an interesting confirmation of this type of theory in an unexpected direction. While the same proportion of rioters and non-rioters thought that the gap between negroes and whites was increasing, a significantly larger proportion of rioters than non-rioters thought that the gap between the better-off and poorer negroes was increasing. They seemed, therefore, more concerned with their relative progress in relation to other negroes.

Blocked opportunity hypothesis

Unlike the other two, this theory emphasises environmental rather than personal factors as the cause of riots and, unlike the others, is confirmed by the survey.

The theory stresses the exclusion of negroes from society. If the theory is correct it might be expected that rioters would be more sensitive than non-rioters to the discrimination in areas of achievement such as education and employment. They would be expected to reject the traditional idea of negro inferiority. Both these expectations were borne out by the survey.

More rioters than non-rioters felt that racial discrimination, rather than unsuitability, was the reason for certain jobs not being open to them. More rioters also felt that they had been discriminated against at school.

These results could explain the high frequency of riots in the north of the US. Southern negroes tend to blame their failure on poor opportunities rather than on discrimination, and they tend to accept the status quo.

While the survey showed that the rioters anger is not exclusively against the whites, but also against the more affluent negroes, more rioters than non-rioters believed negroes to be superior to whites in several of the qualities in which, traditionally, they have been said to be inferior. In Newark, additional questions showed that a higher proportion of rioters than non-rioters had a high level of pride in their race and colour.

RUSSELL'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

G. L. SIMONS

THIRD OF NINE ARTICLES

A. N. WHITEHEAD once described Bertrand Russell as a Platonic dialogue in himself, and other writers have made similar points. Russell is himself a philosophical movement and in over sixty years of philosophical development he has maintained a number of different and mutually incompatible positions. This can be said of his epistemology, though not of his religious or educational philosophy. His position on religion, education, social values, and even his mathematical philosophy, achieved an early maturation which he did not see fit later to overthrow in its entirety. In these fields the methodology remained unchanged as did, broadly, the beliefs to which it led him; but in theory of knowledge the methodology, consistent after 1900, led to a host of mutually inconsistent notions. Russell himself represents this process as evolutionary, and the fact that a number of philosophical species went extinct on the way is represented by some of his opponents as a weakness. To me it is an enormous strength.

In the *Foundations of Geometry* (1897) he wrote (p. 179) that his viewpoint "can be obtained by a certain limitation and interpretation of Kant's classic arguments". But in *An Outline of Philosophy* he represents Kant (p. 83) as a "mere misfortune". Similarly in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) he maintains a Cartesian dualism which is completely abandoned by the time of *The Analysis of Mind* (1921). One more example of this type—*In Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914) there is a chapter called 'Logic as the Essence of Philosophy', but in *Human Knowledge* (1948) Russell observes that "logic . . . is not part of philosophy". A careless observer may dismiss Russell as frivolous and inconsistent on account of these contradictions, but each successive position has been reached by the application of a common method—and the resulting development is without parallel in the history of philosophy.

In the nineteenth century Russell was a Kantian for a brief period and he also wrote a paper which was, in his own words, "unadulterated Hegel". Then, after the diversion into mathematical philosophy, he returned to the traditional epistemological difficulties in *The Problems of Philosophy*. This represented a careful statement of the common-sense attitude to such things as mind and matter; and matter, for instance, was regarded much as the contemporary physicist regarded it. After this time, partly as a result of his mathematical work and partly because of Wittgenstein, Russell developed a position which he termed Logical Atomism. This philosophy was an attempt to interpret reality according to the logic of *Principia Mathematica*: the ontology was based on the propositional calculus embodied in the mathematical philosophy. Just as logical variables and constants could be related according to definable operators, so the external world comprised "atomic facts" organised into "molecular composites" according to their spatial and temporal relations. The linguistic emphasis in the *Principia* and in Logical Atomism provided the basis for the logical positivism of the thirties and the functional analysis of the fifties and sixties.

But still Russell was not satisfied. Logical Atomism had done little to solve the age-old mind/body problem, and under the influence of William James (in particular an article by James, "Does 'consciousness' exist?" printed in 1904), Russell developed a detailed neutral monism.

According to this theory there was neither mind nor matter in the traditional sense, but neutral entities out of which both could be logically constructed. As late as 1914, Russell maintained (in *Our Knowledge of the External World*) the dualistic belief in consciousness as a relationship between perceiver and perceived. The later abandonment of this position was achieved by a consistent and ruthless application of Occam's Razor. In the first place he removed the artificial distinction between "sense-data" and "sensations", positing only one entity. These, call them "sensations", are virtually the only things that exist in the universe; when they are organised in one way they constitute a mind; when in another, a piece of matter. By "sensations" Russell did not mean atoms or sub-atomic particles, but more patches of light or periods of sound. This, of course, is a familiar notion, but the new step consisted in showing that the sensations were not perceived by agents but were the agents. (Doubtless this sounds vague and confusing—read *The Analysis of Mind* and the essay by Stace in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, both delightfully lucid and readable.)

Simultaneous with Russell's work on neutral monism the philosophers of the Vienna Circle (Carnap, Neurath, Godel, etc.) were creating logical positivism—in which meaning is taken as method of verification. Contrary to some people's belief, Russell was never a logical positivist. In a splendid essay printed in *Logic and Knowledge* he gives arguments against it which seem irrefutable, and he objects again, more briefly, in *Human Knowledge* (pp. 465-467). It is this work which is regarded as the final stage in Russell's philosophical development, and one of its main tasks is the erection of a minimum set of principles whereby a scientific philosophy can be made secure. There are hints of neutral monism in *Human Knowledge* but the emphasis has changed yet again. Here Russell is playing the role of Grand Protector of Science. We are not back with the dualism of *The Problems of Philosophy* but the approach is practical and scientific, and the limitations in empiricism are clearly acknowledged. And this last point is an important one.

For many rationalists, Russell is the chief patron saint. But they are not always aware that Russell himself came to doubt, at the philosophical level, a number of principles essential to the rationalist case. For instance, he came to believe that logic could prove very little, that the claims made in the past for its potency were almost all greatly exaggerated; the more he learnt about logic the more he knew its limitations. He came also to doubt that a pure empiricism was possible (his neutral monism was not pure); he realised that not even a scientific philosophy could rest on assumptions grounded solely in sensory experience. A number of non-sensory assumptions have to be made, if, for instance, the inductive processes of science can even get started. But for over sixty years Russell has been inspired by the methodology underlying the empiricist approach, and he would be the last person to erect a "metaphysics" in the religious sense. But that metaphysics, understood in a particular sense, was necessary he could not deny.

At the end of *Human Knowledge*, Russell writes, in 'The Limits of Empiricism', that "all human knowledge is uncertain, inexact and partial". Other great thinkers have said as much, but few have demonstrated it as clearly as Russell. He looked for certainty, first in religion, then in

mathematics, and finally in science: he found it nowhere. He criticised religion with passion, but he knows the feeling that moves the mystic; he decried philosophy as a pursuit (as, for instance, to Beatrice Webb in 1936) and remains Britain's greatest philosopher; he shows the limita-

tions of empiricism (in detail in his *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*) but remains firmly in the great empiricist tradition. The philosophical evolution of Bertrand Russell is a rare phenomenon; to read the unfolding of his position over the decades is a rare experience.

A HEATHEN INTERPRETATION OF EVENTS IN ULSTER

BOB CREW

A short satirical sketch on the events in Ulster concerning Protestant and Catholic, in which an actor dressed in the manner of a Roman Sentry, gives his interpretation, from the "heathen point of view", of the Rev Paisley's recent jail sentence!

Friends, Ulstermen, Protestants,
Lend me your ears.
I come to bury Paisley,
Not to praise him,
For I am a Roman heathen
And speak with an indifferent tongue.
The evil that good men do
Lives after them
And the prejudice they create
Is never interred with their bones.
And so it is in Ulster.
The perceptive among you
Will see that Paisley was ambitious
For he hath denied many a congregation to Rome;
But if that were his ambition
It was unfortunate for him
For he hath grievously answered it.
And so we are reminded—
As any heathen would tell you—
That even the so-called good men
Are tainted by the common defect
Of making sport of their neighbours
Only to poke fun and laugh at them
And to profit by their discomfort.
If, in Ulster, there is one law for the rich
And another for the very rich,
Then you should ask yourselves
What, other than Catholicism,
Can govern the poor.
But how do you know,
Good Protestants all,
That life here in Ulster,
Or anywhere else on earth,
Is not another world's hell
And that Paisley and the Pope
Are not the luciferian caricatures
Of another world's devils,
Playing their interminable game of chess
With your fears and emotions,
While the unbelievers and agnostics among you
Are another world's cherubims and angels.
And if it is true that imagination is given to man
To compensate for what he is not
While he hath a sense of humour to console for what he is,
Are not both Paisley and the Pope imagining the Gods they
would like to be
And do they not need humour and satire to remind them
of what they really are?
And while Christians hath been thrown to lions
And Protestants and Catholics sent to jail,
Is it not true that the safest mountain paths
Have been trodden by mules and asses
Who set a better example to mankind

*Than Christian Gods and Clerics?
And yet there are few among thee today
Who would join me in the notion
That the curse of mankind
Is not Protestant or Catholic version of original sin
But plain stupidity.
For doth not the scientist
Who asketh what is matter
Receive reply from religious men,
Never mind,
Whilst the rebuke to the religious question
What is God's mind and will,
Is no matter?
So I contend that religion
Is betting your life that God exists
And that Paisley and the Pope
Are thereby arch gamblers
In a reckless game
In which they risk the loss of human happiness
And place their bets with tools of hate and prejudice.
And, if this is so,
What cause withholds you, then,
To mourn Paisley or praise the Pope,
Or any of the world's religious pretenders?
What keeps thee from atheism
While Christians play the game of tyranny and humbug
And throw each other to the lions
With less panache than Caesar did?*

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folding up and we as secularists can feel very satisfied with that. After years of publication, the end has come to perhaps the most influential religious newspaper in the country.

Perhaps more startling is the fact that less than two years ago the proprietor himself visited Britain and besides his verbal gymnastics put in very heavy "plugs" for his newspaper. Scores of copies were sold at Earls Court and the various television centres throughout the country. Yet only a year later lack of funds forced a move of premises and now complete failure. Indications not only of the short-term effects of such "crusades" but of the futility of the organisation as a whole.

In saving himself a loss of revenue, Mr Graham is saving the British public a weekly supply of spurious reading matter with no significance to the present time.

It is to be hoped that former readers of *The Christian* will come to accept this as they gradually realise that they can very easily do without it, and that they are saving themselves 9d into the bargain.

But Mr Graham has not closed up shop in Britain altogether. His outfit's monthly, full colour extravaganza *Decision* is still to be issued here, although this does not resemble its weekly companion in any way.

BEYOND REASON

MICHAEL GRAY

ONE MAJOR DIFFERENCE between Secular Humanism and religion in general is that the former recognises the isolation of man within a hostile universe and seeks to change the circumstances causing his misery and deprivation by direct action, while the latter prefers placating gods or appealing to spirits to intercede on his behalf. Humanism also contrasts with religion in stressing morality as the duty of all for the sake of all and not just as the means of achieving some selfish personal salvation.

Fundamentally, religious morality requires that God's commandments be obeyed simply because those are his wishes. If he demanded the most heinous crimes and savage persecutions then those too would be moral since it is God's arbitrary will which is the yardstick of morality. Many examples of this peculiarly perverted philosophy are to be found in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament where God is commonly represented as calling for the massacre of whole tribes of innocents for some trivial reason. Abraham is praised as the most virtuous of men because he was quite prepared to murder in cold blood his own son Isaac on some passing whim of his God. The Secular Humanist regards these actions as immoral because of their terrible consequences, but the religionist is not concerned with the results of his actions on his fellow-beings, merely with saving his own 'soul' through blind obedience.

This belief that an action is wrong simply because God says so is quite consistent within the context of its own superstition. If moral dictates are not determined by the arbitrary will of God then the alternative is a most unpleasant one for the believer, for if God does not make up the rules then he must be merely passing on the requirements of some Higher Law *to which he himself is subject*. Then we may ask who lays down this Higher Law? For whoever this One who is greater than God (which in itself is a fundamental self-contradiction) turns out to be, the same line of questioning with regard to the formulation of the Moral Law can be applied to him, and so on *ad infinitum*. Eventually it must lead us to *the* God whose whims and fancies dictate the way we must live, or else more reasonably admit the absurdity of the whole idea of morality being determined by gods.

Now the Humanist would ditch all this absurd argument, claiming that his philosophy uses reason not superstition. Reason is the weapon we heretics have always used to fight ignorance and blind faith. We accept that most religionists hold a sincere *belief*, but maintain that our rationalist philosophy is based upon scientific knowledge. But are the views of the Rationalist any more objectively valid than those of the supernaturalist? Just what can reason tell us? Merely that we exist, since we are aware of thoughts and perceptions. "I think therefore I am" (Descartes). I would have to exist even to be able to consider that I did not, therefore that I exist is knowledge. Beyond that I cannot go; reason can tell me nothing else with certainty. Every perception I have *may* be illusion. All my "knowledge" is necessarily subjective; it is the way *I* see things. Whether my perceptions correspond with what exists in the world outside of me (if there is a world outside of me) I can never know for there is no objective criteria against which to judge. I am forever trapped within the closed circle of my own mind. I must therefore adopt the position of scepticism not just in regard to religion, but to everything,

and since what is not knowledge is merely opinion then the views of the Rationalist or Humanist are no more objectively valid than that of the religionist.

Most of us never realise that most of what we think of as knowledge, arrived at by careful reasoning, or demonstrated and proved by experiment, is in the first place based upon assumptions that seem so obvious they have been forgotten. The rationalist philosophy bases itself upon scientific knowledge and the whole of science is built upon one unproved and unprovable assumption—that nature is necessarily uniform, that is that there are certain immutable laws of nature which apply throughout time and space. Without proceeding upon this assumption science cannot proceed at all, for if nature is not uniform then there is no guarantee that an experiment which "proves" one thing today will not "prove" the opposite tomorrow. Even if the experiment be repeated a million times with the same results we can still never know that it will work next time (after all, the past *may* be an illusion). Of course we have to assume that nature is uniform, because our lives would be complete chaos if we did not (just as a determinist has to act as if he believed in free will), and anyway, it works—or appears to. Yet it is necessary that we realise that the conclusions of science are derived to some extent from assumption and can no more give us an absolute guarantee of the way things actually are than can the Catholic Church. Then we might more easily avoid the trap of substituting science or some other body of "knowledge" for the revelation of religion and erecting an absolute morality of our own.

Believers will claim that morality without God cannot exist. What they mean is absolute morality cannot exist, and this we should readily admit, but unfortunately for them neither does it exist *with* God. As has been shown all morality is arbitrary, whether on the part of man or God. All our ethical codes are dependent on subjective experience. If the Humanist bases his morality on seeking to achieve the greater happiness of mankind, without disregard of the individuals comprising it, then I would agree with him that this is a true basis for an ethical code of conduct. My agreement proves nothing other than I share his belief, and I believe (literally) what I like, and refuse to believe what I do not like. Morality becomes therefore a matter of personal taste, like everything else, and can never be "proved" to be correct or otherwise. The question "why?" can always be asked, but never in the final analysis answered. I say I believe that we should all behave morally. Why? Because morality should aim at making people happier. Why? Because it is better for people to be happy than sad. Why? So it goes on until eventually I am forced to admit that the only honest answer I can give is: because I like it that way. Thus because I like the idea of people being happier I find myself in agreement with many who call themselves Humanists, but this does not mean that I think Humanism is the one true faith.

The main criticism I have of Humanists is that many of them, in common with the average Christian, find it easier to say than do. When others not so anxious for dialogue but more concerned with action to change an immoral society, go outside the System to protest then these respectable Humanists seem as anxious to condemn as the rest of the Establishment. An example of such a respectable Humanist is Hector Hawton who, in the March edition of *Humanist* which he edits, helps to spread the usual propa-

ganda aimed at discrediting student militant protesters. Contrasting the "silent, dignified and restrained" behaviour of crowds on the streets of Prague for the funeral of student Jan Palach with the "senseless, violent protest", of English students he goes on to make suitably disapproving remarks about "professional revolutionaries" in favour of "revolution for its own sake". (The editorial is illustrated with a remarkably original cartoon showing two students trying to think up a good cause for the revolution now they have worked it out.) I am sure that Mr Hawton and everybody else who stands to lose if a revolution ever did occur in this country would much rather the students protest peaceably and ineffectively than direct violence against the people who make money out of Vietnam. Perhaps he would even prefer that they direct the violence against themselves as did Jan Palach—then we could all forget about the exploitation and persecution they are protesting about and once again pretend it does not exist. If he is really so ignorant of the motives of revolutionaries that he must swallow whole the myth of "small, fanatical minori-

ties" (Communist-inspired, no doubt?) stirring up trouble then it is about time he attempted to find out the students' side of the argument. In any event I find it much easier to identify with the Humanism of young people who are deeply concerned about the indiscriminate napalming of innocent peasants and the role that British capitalism plays in supporting it than with Hector Hawton's concern for the gates of the LSE. I also find it hard to credit him with sincerity when in one breath he talks of senseless violence while in another (February *Humanist*) he describes the bombing of German civilians as "killing the enemy in a legitimate military operation".

I suppose it all goes to show what I stated earlier—morality is a matter of personal taste. As Humanism becomes first accepted then absorbed by the Establishment, the 'hierarchy' finds itself out of touch with the principles on which its philosophy was founded and no doubt will eventually become as reactionary as any Church in its support of the *status quo*.

FILM REVIEW

LUCY DANSIE

KURONEKO: Cinecenta, Panton Street, London, SW1.

THE SPHERE in which cinema most obviously has the edge over other media, is in its ability to present a spectacle. Thousands of gaily dressed troops can fight a battle and one sees it as though sitting on an adjacent hill. Panoramic views can be displayed in such a way that the audience misses no detail. The cinema can get very close to giving its audience a real experience. One can sit in a motor car moving at speed, or even fight for one's life while sitting on horseback amid a hail of bullets and screaming adversaries.

When the cinema is used to portray anything simple, which uses few characters and inelaborate sets and locations, the medium's value would appear to lie primarily in its ability to present itself to a wider audience than the theatre. However, this would put the cinema in second position after television and clearly this is not the case. As the Japanese film *Kuroneko* amply demonstrates with certain material cinema can produce a more telling drama than could ever be shown on the small screen, or in the theatre. Shot in black and white *Kuroneko* shows relatively little that could not have been portrayed on stage. The film stands up largely on its plot, which without exaggeration can be favourably compared to that of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In terms of human agony caused by dilemmas arising from divided loyalties this is perhaps the most brilliantly worked storyline to have appeared in any form for many years.

And such a plot undoubtedly gains in strength from skilful use of the camera and expert editing. In the theatre it is up to the playwright and producer to draw one's attention from one character to another—from one dramatic realisation to another. However skilful these two may be, they are condemned to failure with a large segment of the audience. In the cinema one's attention is always in the right place.

A drama in which facial expressions play a large part is bound to benefit from cinematic treatment. Too often in the theatre important human feelings are either lost or dissipated by over-acting. *Kuroneko* relies to an enormous extent on individual action, and emotion. As a film it comes off magnificently. To attempt such a drama was brave indeed. That it is undeniably a success is a phenomenal achievement. *Kuroneko* will provide excellent entertainment and stimulation to devotees of epic situation drama, and all who enjoy an intricate plot played with suspense to an unexpected ending.

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LETTERS

The historicity of Jesus

WITH REGARD to Edgar Kingston's chivalrous and stimulating letter (24/5/69), Mr Kingston will appreciate that my main concern, in my article on "Robertson and the Case Against Jesus", was to summarise the arguments advanced by Robertson and his fellow Mythicists—not my own personal views on this fascinating question. Moreover, so far as I am aware, no Mythicist—certainly not Robertson—has ever claimed that every incident as presented in the Gospels necessarily reflects an event in the supposed career of a Semitic sun-god: even those who accept the sun-god thesis make due allowance for the humanisation of the god and for the presence in the Gospels of elements not explicable in terms of the primary myth. Take Robertson's mystery-drama thesis (which I discuss in a forthcoming article): one of the significant things about it, to my mind, is that it does not exclude the Jewish rebel or Zealot theory, to which Mr Kingston alludes.

I am grateful to Mr. Kingston for drawing my attention to the four incidents in the Gospels which he finds apparently incompatible with the sun-god thesis. The "Who touched me?" scene and the preaching in the Nazareth synagogue are full of dramatic possibilities—as Robertson would have pointed out. As regards the former episode, what is surely significant is not the apparent naturalness of the question "Who touched me?" but the fact that the incident is an integral part of one of Christ's *miraculous* healing sessions. It is therefore surprising that Mr Kingston appears to believe that this incident, "if told about any historical person, would be accepted as historical without question"! As regards the latter incident, if the Nazareth scene is historical, it is a telling commentary on the Messiah's limited powers and lack of efficacy, and Christ's rejection by his own people exposed the early Church to the objection that it was difficult for the Church to claim Jesus as the Jewish Messiah when the Jews themselves flatly repudiated him during his ministry in Galilee. Mr Kingston might reply that this, in itself, indicates an historical basis; but that does not follow, and the Nazareth incident, if taken to be myth, is perfectly consistent with Robertson's mystery-drama thesis. In any event, the reference to the brothers and sisters of Jesus seems difficult to square with the doctrine of the Virgin Birth and the supposed perpetual virginity of Mary. Luke, inconsistent with his own narrative, wrongly calls Jesus "Joseph's son"; and Mark's phrase "the son of Mary" indicates the Evangelist's ignorance of Jewish custom.

Mr Kingston apparently believes that the corn-plucking incident reinforces the case for Christ's historicity; yet the Messiah's reply to the Pharisees who upbraid him seems unconvincing for an historical Jesus: Jesus ludicrously compares the action of the disciples (who apparently pluck the corn without Christ's consent) to the conduct of David, who breaks a quite different commandment! Moreover, Matthew erroneously makes Jesus declare that "the priests in the temple profane the sabbath", and with all three

(Continued overleaf)

synoptic Evangelists Christ's concluding remarks about the Son of Man are inconsistent with his preceding argument. It seems to me that Christ's "justification" of the corn-plucking is compatible with the powers of a humanised sun-god. Unfortunately for Mr Kingston, there is no support in the Gospels for his assertion that Jesus plucks the corn himself.

Mr Kingston refers to the questioning of Jesus by the Sadducees: Christ's only encounter with the Sadducees as such (reported in the Gospels) refers to levirate marriage, and their question is designed to ridicule belief in resurrection. This, in itself, suggests a theological rather than a political debate, and, in his supposedly devastating reply, Jesus conspicuously fails to refute the Sadducean denial of resurrection. If Christ was "just another of the numerous Jewish messianic claimants", it remains to be explained how he became "accepted as the founder of what is still the world's greatest religion". Finally, I cordially invite Mr Kingston to inform us as to the antiquity and date of discovery of the Christ-Helas picture, which seems to shed light on the most bedevilled question in religious controversy.

MARTIN PAGE.

[We regret that due to printer's errors (?) Mr Kingston's letter (May 24) did not read as it should. Two words were wrongly added: the word 'not' in the 1st line of the 3rd paragraph, and the word 'they' in the 4th line of the 4th paragraph. We apologise to Mr Kingston for thus spoiling the effect of his letter.]

Paine's first friendly biographer

MR F. L. CORINA raises the question as to whether W. T. Sherwin might have beaten Thomas 'Clio' Rickman by a short head in writing the first friendly biography of Thomas Paine, as I recently said at Lewes. I must admit that the race does seem close in some respects.

Sherwin had some manuscripts sent him by a friend in the USA, and he used these extensively in his fine biography, which appears to have been published on May 1, 1819, as Mr Corina says. I do not know how long he worked on his biography.

With Rickman the actual date in 1819 when his biography was published is less clear, but a great deal more is known about when he actually wrote it. In his introduction, Rickman points out that the book "was in a great state of forwardness" in 1810; the memoirs remained untouched from 1811 to 1819 "and have not received any addition of biographical matter since". Rickman explains the delay in publication as due to family problems; so I think it safe to infer from this account that Rickman's biography was written by 1811.

It is possible that news of the imminent publication of Sherwin's biography—or its actual publication—may have spurred Rickman into publishing his manuscript in 1819, after having been on the shelf so long.

Both books are important: Sherwin's is the more substantial, while Rickman scores through have known Paine well. I am most grateful to Mr Corina for raising the matter in a friendly way, and in future I intend to give more credit to Sherwin than I did at Lewes. My reason for speaking of Rickman there was that Lewes numbers Rickman among its distinguished sons. I am sure that the matter can be put in better historical perspective at the forthcoming *Age of Reason* exhibition at the Central Library in Norwich at the beginning of June.

CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL.

Chairman, Thomas Paine Society.

Effective Birth Control

I AM GLAD to see R. Reader (17.5.69) doesn't consciously want people to starve after all. The fact remains he deplors "economic expansion" because it leads to an increased population; someone should tell him it leads to an increased population simply by cutting down deaths by starvation (and various diseases associated with poverty). Personally, I am in favour of economic expansion and effective birth control, preferably both, but either one alone is better than neither. Both save lives; birth control saves more lives at lower cost, over a longer period.

Seeing that R. Reader wants effective birth control, I thought he'd be pleased to hear of the advances towards it made by the countries of the Far East over the last 15 years. But no, the End is at Hand, mankind is doomed. How cruel of me to try to rob an old man of his Apocalypse!

To be sure I could not assess average Chinese family size from personal observation alone; I have to look at published statistics and other people's reports too (Mr Reader gave a precise figure, "a further 1,400 million in little more than a generation" based on

neither personal observation, other people's observations, nor published statistics). I recommend Jan Myrdal's *Report from a Chinese Village* (now in paperback) which relates how village women organise to systematically bully men who don't want birth control. This is typical of Chinese methods. Short of physical force, it is hard to see what more the Chinese authorities could do to promote birth control than they are doing already.

I don't pretend to know whether Chinese youth finds it "easier to obtain" condoms than British; incidentally what has "youth" got to do with it?

Yes, I do believe that effective birth limitation measures are not only tolerated, but welcomed, by a number of governments, including the Chinese. But then I don't class all politicians as gangsters. Very naive of me, no doubt. As for my prediction that the populations of China and Japan will begin to decline within a generation, it was not supposed to be a "bogy" but a piece of good news.

In recent years, progress towards population control has been very substantial in Far Eastern countries. They are setting an example which we freethinkers should help to publicise, so that the remaining 70 per cent of mankind may learn from it.

CONNAIRE KENSIT.

Saints' Status

INSCRUTABLE ARE the ways of the Holy Sec.

No freethinker would object if His Holiness had demoted Jesus—sorry "Christ"—and consigned him to the limbo of ineffective saviours. Alas—no such luck, he's too valuable a money spinner.

But to demote St George is simply wicked! What about our glorious Knights of the Garter, our predecimal 5s pieces and our Juniors' school books?

Fancy demoting St Christopher, patron saint of ferrymen, motorists, lorry drivers and astronauts; that's heresy of the worst kind! Millions of medallions have been sold to trusting adherents in the two Americas and Europe. Are all these medallions so much junk?

Then to demote St Michael, without first asking the permission of M & S, is in shockingly bad taste.

And lastly, to demote dear old Santa Claus, the patron saint of sailors, prostitutes and shopkeepers, is a crime against humanity as a whole—particularly the children, though family fathers may secretly rejoice.

No more demotions, please—otherwise the whole fabric of the Establishment, the BBC's brainwashing department and the Churches' convocation will fall to pieces—*Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*—thus passeth away the glory of the world!

GEORGE R. GOODMAN.

Marriage ceremonies

I WISH to TELL Elizabeth Collins (21.12.68) that not long ago a young bride in England refused to have the Wedding March played at her wedding. She had been told that 'Here Comes the Bride' from Wagner's Lohengrin had been written for a young girl going to her death. Would that many other brides showed such firmness.

In AD 537 all nobles were ordered to be married by a church ceremony. Then at the Council of Trent (1546-63) in order to counter Luther's reformation, marriage in a church was made compulsory for Roman Catholics. But not till 1753 was it made compulsory in England and later a civil marriage was introduced.

S. W. MACKAY, Queensland.

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