

Freethinker

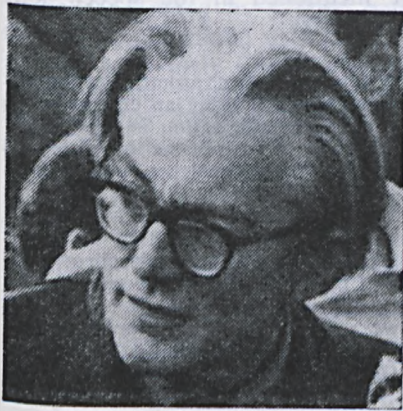
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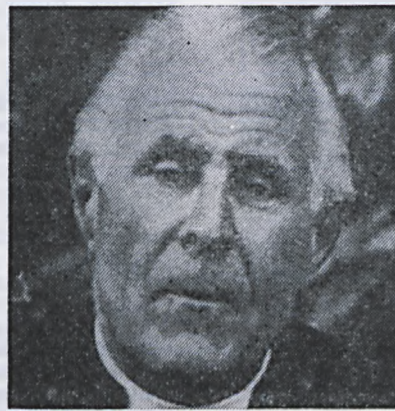
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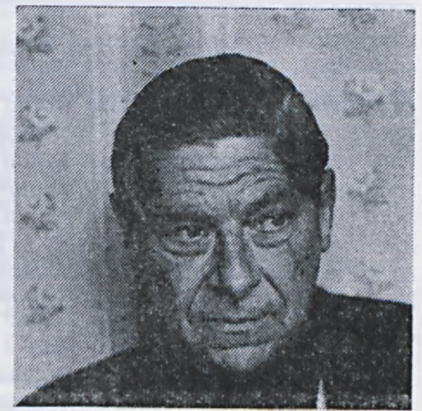
Sixpence Weekly



Michael Foot, MP



Lord Soper



Arthur Koestler

SUPPORT FOR ANTI-CAPITAL PUNISHMENT MEETING

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S public meeting on Capital Punishment, which will have taken place on November 6, seems certain to arouse a large degree of public interest. At the time of going to press the following messages, which will have been read at the meeting, have already been received from prominent people whose strong concern that capital punishment should not be reintroduced is evident from their words printed below:

"I wish you the very best of success for the anti-Capital Punishment meeting, and I am sorry I cannot be present. I think the National Secular Society is doing a fine job in organising this campaign."—MICHAEL FOOT.

"I very much regret that a prior engagement prevents me being with you this evening but I would like to take this opportunity of sending my very best wishes for the success of your meeting. As you will know, I have long been an advocate against capital punishment, and I pray that this will not be reintroduced."—LORD SOPER.

"The gallows is the oldest and most obscene symbol of that tendency in mankind which drives it towards self-destruction. Best wishes for a successful meeting."—ARTHUR KOESTLER

"I am very glad to hear that you are holding an anti-Capital Punishment meeting. It seems to me essential that the public should be made aware of the facts and a meeting of this kind will serve that purpose. This is all the more necessary because it appears that ignorance of the facts is the main reason why a considerable section of public opinion is now in favour of restoring the death penalty. It is clear, I think, to any unbiased person that the period during which the death penalty has been abolished has been too short for any final judgement about its effect on capital crime in this country. I should be very surprised if the result of a proper trial period here would be different from that in other countries where the death penalty has been abolished."—THE EARL OF LISTOWEL.

"I am opposed to the death penalty for a number of reasons, but the one which influences me most is that a civilised State cannot afford to act in a barbarous way. It is said by those who advocate a return to capital punishment for murder that the security of citizens is the State's overriding duty. That is only a half-truth, so far as a civilised State is concerned. Even if it could be demonstrated that capital punishment was a unique deterrent to murder—and the evidence strongly suggests to me that it is not—it would still be quite wrong for the State to kill murderers in cold blood, after the inevitable psychological torture of a prolonged period of suspense. A murderer is a single human being, by definition low in the human scale. The State represents the whole community, and a civilised State must surely represent the community's highest aspirations. How can a civilised State contemplate acting even more cruelly and barbarously than an individual whose mind is deluded or depraved? A civilised State has a duty to protect its citizens to the limit of its capacity as a civilised State. Judicial killing transgresses that limit. Good luck for the meeting on November 6."—JOHN GRIGG.

"My warm support and very best wishes to your important meeting on November 6. I hope it will conclude with an unequivocal resolution."—SIR HUGH CASSON.

"If Parliament fails to reaffirm the abolition of the death penalty by July next year the 1957 Homicide Act with all its widely deplored anomalies will automatically be reinstated. By resorting once again to the irrational and savage

(Continued overleaf)

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expedient of the noose, we would be turning shamefully against the tide of civilised world opinion: among Western European nations only Spain would keep us company. The reintroduction of capital punishment would, I believe, be both retrogressive and morally unjustifiable and I congratulate the National Secular Society in launching this campaign to prevent the defacing of the Statute Book and the lowering of the dignity of our country—I wish them every success.—LORD BYERS.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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.

Humanitas Stamps: Help 5 Humanist charities. Buy stamps from/ or send them to Mrs A. C. Goodman, 51 Percy Road, Romford, RM7 8QX, Essex. British and African speciality. Send for list.

COMING EVENTS

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.

INDOOR

Enfield and Barnet Humanist Group: 82 Westpole Avenue, Cockfosters: Saturday, November 8, 7.30 p.m.: Social and Sale of Used books, good quality magazines and jigsaw puzzles. Entrance charge to cover refreshments, 2s 6d. Proceeds to Agnostics Adoption Society.

Leicester Humanist Society: Tuesday, November 11, 7.30 p.m.: Visit to Stretton Hall where people of sub-normal intelligence are looked after. Refreshments will be provided. Those who can offer, or require, transport, contact Mrs Morley, Leicester 703312.

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, November 9, 6.30 p.m.: "Has Freethought a future?", J. A. Miller.

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, November 13, 8 p.m.: "Abortion—Is the law working?", a discussion between Diane Munday (Secretary of the Abortion Law Reform Association) and G. H. Bancroft-Livingstone, MD (a local consultant gynaecologist).

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, November 9, 11 a.m.: "Psychology of Ethics", H. G. Knight. Admission free. Tuesday, November 11, 7 p.m.: Discussion—"Psychology and Industry", Dr Buzzard (Director, National Institute of Industrial Psychology).

THE QUEEN'S SPEECH

EQUAL PAY for women by 1975, local authorities compelled to institute comprehensive education, and financial safeguards for dependants affected by the recent Divorce Reform Act are three of the chief causes for elation resulting from the Queen's Speech. In a statement to the press David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, applauded these announcements, and then outlined the reforms which were not mentioned in the speech, but which the NSS considers necessary:

"We should liked to have seen a firm promise to abolish capital punishment permanently, and to bring an end to blood sports. We would welcome universal affirmation instead of the oath, the secularisation of adoption, hospitals, the armed forces, broadcasting, prisons and schools. Throughout the country there is overwhelming support for the ill-fated Sunday Entertainments Bill, which the Government should include in its legislative programme. Further liberalisation of the laws relating to homosexuality, the scrapping of outmoded laws on blasphemy and obscenity, better protection of personal privacy, the provision of voluntary euthanasia with appropriate safeguards are other measures whose absence we regret. If the Government is prepared to coerce sluggish local authorities in the matter of comprehensive education, we wish it would take similarly firm action in the yet more pressing issue of providing adequate contraceptive facilities."

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LOSS AND GAIN

PETER CROMMELIN

ON A BRIGHT October day in the year 1956, according to the Christian chronology, a quiet registry office wedding in a small west country town, brought to an end the professional career of one Roman Catholic priest. Although not obviously different from a multitude of similar events, this particular wedding did possess some peculiarities of its own. It was controversial in the sense that it was bound to be condemned by a large body of persons (not all of them absolute idiots) as a mortally sinful act of rebellion against a Divinely Constituted Authority. Even from the purely secular point of view, it might be classified as an act of somewhat dubious wisdom to sacrifice a professional career for the sake of a marriage, or even for the sake of conformity to a purely abstract concept of intellectual honesty. Not everyone is prepared to honour an act of rebellion against the Catholic Church as a legitimate act of free will, or as a courageous assertion of the Rights of Man.

The immediate effect of my marriage was to reduce me to a state of unemployment, from which state I have never really been able to recover. I am not in favour of unemployment. It is a great social evil. It is a cause of human misery and degradation. It is the strongest of all the arguments in favour of a communist type of government. The deliberate creation of fairly massive unemployment for the sake of the economy provides the strongest argument against the capitalistic type of government. Few people would want the State to become the one and only employer of labour. But a good government should always be able and willing to come to the rescue when private enterprise or industry fails to achieve the target of universal employment. It is better to be unemployed than to be employed in something completely anti-social or anti-human such as the manufacture of atom bombs. If however employment can be identified as service to the community, then it is better to be employed than unemployed.

I am one of the fortunate few for whom loss of employment has not led to total personal disaster. It is not possible to live on love alone. But my wife and I are fortunate to be in possession of a comfortable home. We have all that is necessary and far more than is necessary for personal survival. Compared with millions we are fortunate indeed. There are certainly millions who are much better off financially than we are. We certainly have nothing over for "Charity" which perhaps is just as well. But as far as our marriage is concerned there is no evidence to prove that there has ever been a happier union of man and woman. People who marry to please God seldom seem very contented with the sacrament of holy matrimony. People who marry to please themselves have a very good chance of being happy together, whether they are rich or whether they are poor. The relationship between money and happiness has never been worked out scientifically; one doubts if it ever could be. Some money, certainly, is necessary to live in a civilised community. How much is necessary is matter for discussion and Government estimates of what is necessary are very low indeed. My wife and I send in our forecasts to the Pools promoters, with the same regularity that devout persons send up their prayers to heaven and with the same negative results. A big pools win would undoubtedly increase our sense of prosperity, but I doubt if it would create a pattern of behaviour essentially better or more desirable than the one imposed upon us by poverty. It might enable us to do a bit more for the NSS

and the FREETHINKER. In the days of my childhood there was on the wall of our home a religious text that bore the word "God and Not Chance". There would seem to be far more evidence for the existence of Chance than for the existence of God.

Prolonged unemployment has given me plenty of time for the most delightful of all human occupations, the reading of books. My reading has not been entirely unmethodical. I have read to strengthen my mind against any attempt to enslave it once again to ideological doctrines, dogmas, or theories for which there is no pragmatic justification. It would be sad indeed if I had exchanged the errors of Roman Catholicism only to fall into other even more deplorable illusions and delusions. I married to please myself and my wife and no other person. I read books simply and solely to please myself and to strengthen my mind against any too disastrous error of philosophy. I no longer read the "Holy Bible" or the "Holy Mass" or the "Divine Office". But I read books that I think will encourage freedom of thought and stimulate the growth of consciousness and conscience.

My conception of humanist literature includes Shakespeare and Dickens, but does not exclude contemporary studies of world affairs or contemporary speculations concerning the nature of the Universe. Retirement to my study has become as necessary to me, as my wife's passionate devotion to interior decoration or her genius for creating the most wonderful fabrics out of the most primitive kind of loom.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Mr David Tribe for his book *One Hundred Years of Freethought*. It is a mine of information both historical and psychological and greatly helps the reader to understand why some people have chosen to call themselves freethinkers, rationalists, secularists, etc., but have at the same time been somewhat reluctant to profess a too dogmatic or militant atheism. I fear it is not read or studied as much as it ought to be by the general public. Unemployment has been a very good friend to me. It has given me plenty of time to think freely and to read a rich variety of books, newspapers, periodicals and anything that has come my way. I have had a much better life than I could have had if I had been compelled to work full time and overtime in some factory, workshop, office, school, or university. Hostile critics try to cause me pain by calling me lazy, idle, and a good-for-nothing loafer. If they are hard workers I have some sympathy for their feelings.

To have been despised and rejected by all employers of labour is not a thing to boast about. But the enforced leisure has given me plenty of time to explore the world of books, the dialectical materials of which range from pure physics to pure metaphysics, while in between the two extremes lie all the written records of human experience. As I approach the end of life without desire or expectation of anything beyond, my one and only regret is that I have nothing to offer as a permanent contribution to that wonderful but over-stocked garden of English literature, where I have found so many hours in so many years of silent joy. The most interesting character I have met, in and through the world of books (apart from Richard

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WHEN WAS THE CRUCIFIXION?

THE QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY
THOMAS W. HOGAN

THE EXISTENCE or otherwise of Jesus of Nazareth is a storm centre of controversy among humanists. On the face of it this fractious debate is not surprising. In the four Gospels much is recorded which is repugnant to reason. And those who impugn the reliability of such classical writers as Suetonius, Celsus, etc., who mention one *Christus* have included such distinguished figures as W. B. Smith, J. M. Robertson, Arthur Drews, Paul-Louis Couchoud and George Brandes. Did Jesus create the Church, or the Church create Jesus?

Let us, however, for the purpose of this article, assume that there was a man Jesus embedded behind a layer of legend. Is it possible to determine the date of the crucifixion? Are there any clues external to the Gospels which would assist us in such a task? The year 33 AD is frequently quoted, but this, as we shall see, is erroneous.

Crucifixion was apparently of Oriental origin. The ignominious death *par excellence* was reserved by the Romans for thieves, criminals and political offenders. (An echo of the conflict between Jesus and the Roman authorities preserved only in the Slavonic Josephus?) Of the crucifixion no date can be cited with any certainty beyond that it occurred in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius who ruled in Rome 14-37 AD. This is a serious objection to those who hold that Christianity is anchored in history and not in the dim, dark past. Luke, as is well known, took particular pains to gear his accounts with contemporary events. But from his evidence there is no indication which would point to any particular year for the birth or crucifixion of Jesus.

There is, of course, a synochronization by Luke of the birth of Jesus with a census of Quirinius in 6 AD. But this is a palpable chronological blunder. Herod died 4 BC, and Luke endeavours to localise the above census within his reign. Scholars have tried to make a case for Luke intending to refer to an earlier census by Quirinius in 8 BC. But there is no good reason to suppose that such a census would have included Palestine, which was not then under Roman jurisdiction. Luke does, however, record the commencement of the ministry of Jesus as the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius; that is 29 AD. But we have no means of telling how long the ministry lasted; or, from this, in what year the crucifixion occurred. It is often suggested that the fourth Gospel assists in dating the crucifixion when the temple is described as forty-six years in building. But it is now known that the reference was not to Herod's Temple, but to the earlier Temple of Solomon which took forty-six years in building.¹

The Romans, the Greeks, and the Jews all used different calendar systems. While it is possible to reconcile one year of one with one year of another, particular days present a singular problem. That two different traditions exist about the day of the crucifixion is due to a difference in the Roman and Jewish chronologies. With the Jews a day ran from sunset to sunset, but with the Romans it started at midnight, or ran from morning to morning. It is not known which method was employed by the writers of the Gospels.

The date of the birth of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew does not advance our argument any further. Jesus was born sometime in the reign of Herod the Great who ruled from 37 to 4 BC, thus leaving a wide margin of choice. (The Christian era was drawn up in the sixth century by a monk

in Rome Dionysius Exiguus who, in error, dated the death of Herod by a miscalculation of four years). The Synoptic Gospels, of course, state that Jesus was thirty years of age at the commencement of his ministry. But this is contradicted by the fourth Gospel when the Jews say to Jesus: "You are not yet fifty years old" thus implying he was nearly that age. It has been remarked that it is unlikely that the Jews would have accepted a young man as a prophet.

The date of the crucifixion is complicated still further by a statement of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37-95 AD). As is well known, the Synoptic Gospels state that John the Baptist was executed before Jesus. The fourth Gospel, however, ends on the crucifixion, thus implying the Baptist was still alive. It is known from the works of Josephus that he (the Baptist) was executed by Antipas between 34 and 36 AD, probably in the year 35. This falls within the reign of Tiberius; but if Jesus was executed after John it is, of course, a late date.

The date which has the backing of Christian tradition is the year 33 AD. But, again, this is rendered unlikely on the internal evidence of the Gospels. Paul, on his own testimony, was converted in 32 AD at the latest. Seventeen years are spoken of as elapsing since his conversion and his visit to the Apostolic Council in 49 AD. Paul, as is well known, was not acquainted with Jesus in the physical sense, and the crucifixion must have occurred prior to 32 AD on his own telling. This date, as we have seen, contradicts the testimony of Josephus.

The signs and wonders of the crucifixion have also been the object of scientific enquiry. Truly prodigious events are recorded accompanying the crucifixion: dead bodies spilling out of graves and appearing in Jerusalem; the veil of the Temple being rent in two; and a darkness which shrouded the land for three hours. The darkness particularly has engaged the interest of scientists; it is thought that it may be due to solar phenomena. That an eclipse of the sun was visible in Palestine in the reign of Tiberius has been confirmed by the great scientist, Kelper, but this occurred November 24, 29 AD and not in the Spring when all tradition places the crucifixion.

There remains a possibility yet to be considered: a report from Pilate to Tiberius concerning the crucifixion. This is an acrimonious point among scholars. Witness the following:

"To the official world the execution of a carpenter of Nazareth was the most insignificant event of Roman history during these decades; it disappeared completely among the innumerable *supplicia* inflicted by the Roman provincial administration. It would be a most miraculous accident had it been mentioned in any official report".²

To the above, Dr Eisler makes the following cogent reply:

"Such a presentation of the facts . . . is quite misleading. For it was no ordinary carpenter executed for some crime of no relation to the security of the Empire. On the contrary, the execution in question was a political act of the first importance, as were the events leading up to it; for that carpenter had been hailed as the Liberator of Israel, as a saviour-king, and at a time when the capital was filled with pilgrims from all over the known world. Nor is there

any reason to suppose that the Roman Governor was not aware of his own act; the inscription of the cross . . . leaves do doubt whatever as to the political character of the events".³

Both Justin Martyr and Tertullian, Christian Fathers of the third century, assumed that there was a record of the trial of Jesus lodged in the Roman Archives. This would be completely in accordance with the duties of Pilate for the Romans were the most punctilious bureaucrats, and Tiberius the most suspicious of men. Dr Eisler claims further that Jesus was the only Messiah brought to his end by the processes of arrest and trial. Has there in history been any trace of a report is a question which naturally suggests itself.

Eusebius, the writer who published his *History of the Church* in 325 informs us that the *Acta Pilati* was made prescribed reading throughout the Empire under Emperor

Daia in the year 311. Eusebius does not deny that such documents existed, but claims they were forgeries because they do not meet the requirements of Pilate's term of office in the chronology of Josephus. *The Acta Pilati*, in the words of Eusebius, "blackened our Saviour" and also: "at the very start the note of time proves the dishonesty of the forgers".⁴ The point that Eusebius seeks to show is that according to *The Jewish War* of Josephus Pilate did not arrive in Jerusalem until 26 AD whereas the *Acta Pilati* dates the crucifixion in 21 AD, prior to his appointment. One is perplexed why the Romans made the elementary mistake (if indeed it is one) of dating the crucifixion contrary to *The Jewish War* and the narratives of the New Testament.

¹ R. Furneaux, *The Other Side of the Story*.

² Johannes Weiss, *Jesus von Nazareth*.

³ R. Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*.

⁴ Eusebius, *The History of the Church*.

SUBJECTIVISM IN MORALS

JOHN L. BROOM

SUBJECTIVISM is the belief that there are no objective moral standards, that when I say "This action is right", I mean no more than that "This action arouses feelings of approval in me". There are also of course subjectivist theories of aesthetics and metaphysics, but I propose to confine this critique to subjectivism in morals, since it is in that area that most controversy occurs. The following then, are the chief objections to the theory.

1. Subjectivism seems contrary to common-sense. When plain people say that Hitler was a bad man they do not think that they are merely expressing a personal opinion. They do believe that Hitler was characterised by a certain property of badness in precisely the same sense as they believe that a chessboard is characterised by a certain property of squareness. Similarly, most ordinary people would hold that the suffering of a rabbit caught in a trap is an evil thing apart from one's feelings towards it. Yet the subjectivist must maintain that no evil thing occurred until someone came along, witnessed the rabbit's agony, and disapproved of it. In the same way, the perfect crime which was never found out could not be wrong on subjectivist premises because of the absence of all unfavourable attitudes. Admittedly, the fact that a theory leads to apparently odd conclusions and that it would be rejected by most ordinary citizens does not mean that it is necessarily untrue, since majorities have sometimes held beliefs proved to be false. It does place however, I think, the onus of proof on the subjectivists.

2. If moral views are only a matter of taste, we have no more right to attack a man for preferring cruelty to kindness than for his preferring biscuits and cheese to ice-cream. As Colin Wilson puts it, "De Sade was right and there is no good reason why we should condemn him for indulging in day dreams of firing pregnant women out of cannons". (*Beyond the Outsider*, p.28.) Nor, as subjectivists, can we logically try to convert a sadist. Yet, in fact, most upholders of subjectivism are stern moralists, who hold strong views on political and social problems and who write passionate articles to humanist and freethought journals deploring the evil effects of religion and Christianity, and attacking those who disagree with them. All this activity is hopelessly inconsistent with their own theory of moral judgments.

3. It is equally absurd and illogical for subjectivists to point to the presence of evil in the world as an argument against the existence of the Christian God. The existence of evil is obviously not an obstacle to belief in God's goodness if evil is not objectively real. The famous dilemma of St Augustine would run if translated into subjectivist terminology: "Either God cannot abolish the things of which I disapprove or he will not. If he cannot, he is not all-powerful. If he will not, I cannot approve of him". But why should my disapproval be an obstacle to belief in God's existence?

4. If subjectivism is true, it would be nonsense to claim that anyone had ever made a wrong moral judgment. But, in fact, people do sometimes change their views on moral issues; a reasonable man, for example, might be converted by argument from opposing the new Abortion Act to supporting it (or vice-versa). But, according to subjectivism, he was just as right before his conversion as after it, and it would be meaningless for him to say he was previously mistaken. This conclusion though not logically refutable, seems bizarre to say the least.

5. When two sentences have the same meaning, any facts which would prove or disprove the truth of one, should automatically prove or disprove the truth of the other. Any facts proving that Mr Heath is a Conservative would also prove that he is not a Socialist. If the statement "Capital punishment is wrong" means the same as "I disapprove of capital punishment", facts proving the truth of the latter statement (my membership of societies opposed to the death penalty, articles and books written by me against it, etc.) would also prove the truth of the former. But obviously such facts have no relevance at all to the truth of the judgment "Capital punishment is wrong". The two sentences, therefore, are not identical in meaning.

6. In fact, as was demonstrated by the philosopher G. E. Moore, the term "good" is indefinable. Moore pointed out that there are two types of questions, which he called "open" and "closed". An example of the former would be "I know that Jones is a wealthy company director, but is he an atheist?", and of the latter "I know that Jones denies the existence of God, but is he an atheist?" In the

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FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE FOR HUMANISTS IN IRELAND

HENRY ASHE

THIS CONFERENCE held on October 25 and 26 at Hotel Nuremore, Carrickmacross, Eire, was evenly divided between North and South, and in the present situation in our country the theme "People Matter Most" put our deliberations in the proper perspective.

Mr John D. Stewart, well-known in journalistic and broadcasting circles, was forthright about the tragedy of the North. "We have to run our community most inefficiently with two histories", he said, "mutually contradictory, two popular myths; two education systems; two religions antagonistic and destructive to each other; and even two athletic associations". His picture of unrestrained Protestant evangelism even further distorted to embrace rabid anti-Catholicism showed the enormous cost to the North in human misery and deprivation: "We have been ticking over on about one-third of our resources or rather a half, if you count the Labour and Liberal voting sections of the community who have been discriminated against and cast aside—the people never meet—religion has created in our community a deep and almost impassable division—it is not only that Ulster Christians withhold and resist co-operation with the greater part of Ireland, they also withhold it from their closest neighbours".

Mr Stewart's talk was forthright and hard-hitting, ranging through the whole social system—"a tin church up the Donegall Road, one of the many churches which house Belfast's 110 fanatical religious sects, had a notice 'Gospel Meetings every Friday night' and underneath some social critic has written 'Bring your own machine-gun'. In conclusion, Mr Stewart remarked that religion in Ulster is no mere sentimental foible, no silly tradition harmless and forgivable as it may be in England—"we live with it in difficulty and danger. Christianity in Ulster, as the world now knows, is a malignant cancer in the human breast, deep-seated, agonising and ultimately fatal and we Humanists must not shrink from attempting to cauterise it and treat it and cure it by every means within our power".

Mr Kadar Asmal, a lecturer in law at Trinity College, Dublin, was more optimistic in dealing with the South. Borrowing a quotation from Conor Cruise O'Brien he remarked that "the Irish are brooders, while the English are gloaters". Arriving in Dublin in the early 1960's he found a society where, following the first Vatican Council, the Archbishop of Dublin advised his flock "no change". There was a general air of depression, a highly developed censorship system—an extraordinary situation where the English edition of that Irish classic *The Midnight Court* had been banned. He recalled the living sore of mass emigration which removed the most idealistic who would have contributed most to Irish society. Mr Asmal's specialist knowledge of law permitted him to deal effectively with divorce, adoption and religious discrimination in education. On the optimistic side he felt that the interaction of recent events in North and South coupled with development outside Ireland, in France, in Belgium and in Rome, has been reflected in changing attitudes and assumptions in the South where society is slowly but surely becoming more open.

Dealing with Article 44 of the Constitution which recognises the special position of the Roman Catholic church and which is now under question, Mr Asmal pointed out

that it does not give any juridical privileges as the Act of Settlement does in Great Britain, which specifically recognises the special place of the Church of England and lays down that the Monarch must be a communicant. Concluding with the opinion that in the last eighteen months a growing articulate of public opinion, the 'middle ground' has made the Criminal Justice Bill a 'lame duck' he described religion as an exploitative element in society generally used by conservatives for their own reasons and largely to protect their own privileges and emphasised that a secular society will permit the free play of politics and political differences.

After lunch Mrs Antonia Healey, Secretary of the Irish Humanist Association, dealt first with "the quality of our Humanism" on which ultimately depends the success or failure of our whole venture. She felt that it was not enough to become 'knockers' of the Christian faith, we must preserve an open mind. Covering the stated objectives of the IHA she suggested that we must be accepted as reasoning people and not dismissed as extremists. We must enter into discussion and sometimes work with enlightened groups of Christian Humanists and other like associations for the betterment of Irish society. All of them were moving towards a more open society. Secondly, we must educate ourselves and be willing to listen to other points of view. Mr Healey did not neglect 'equal rights for women' and made an important contribution in this field.

The last talk of the day was given by Dr Alan Milne, lecturer in philosophy at Queen's University, Belfast. Dr Milne dealt with 'practicable' objectives in an exploratory discussion. He rejected the idea of a 'blueprint' for Humanism and suggested a list, which we think any decent society should include, with the list always open as our ideas of society develop. He did not see Humanism as another religion without a God nor as a mass movement. We stand for specific ideas which we think would improve the quality of human life, always being willing to learn more, and being willing to revise and change it. We should work with others who share these ideas.

Dealing with Northern Ireland, he suggested our first practical objective would be to endorse the Civil Rights movement and challenge anyone who tries to smear it. Secondly Dr Milne thought that when impartial fact-finding bodies are set up, like the Cameron Commission and the Hunt Report, we should say in advance (provided, of course, that we are satisfied on their impartial nature) that they are likely to be the best approach to a solution of our problems.

Discussion from the floor was brisk and in some cases controversial. Senator Sheehy Skeffington from Dublin, made many useful contributions.

It was finally agreed that Dr Milne and Mr Kadar Asmal would be asked to draw up a broad statement on Civil Rights for submission to the Conference on Sunday.

The following resolutions taken next day were carried unanimously: (a) Proposed by Dr Kevin Healey, seconded by Mrs Margaret Potter:

This Conference is resolved to strive for the achievement of *peace, justice and tolerance* in Ireland, and holds that outmoded attitudes and traditions which interfere with this achievement must be superseded by more valuable ideas and actions.

The first steps to this end are *intergrated education* and *secular laws* based on evolving human values and needs, and not on any abstract authoritarian belief or system.

(b) Proposed by Dr Alan Milne, seconded by Senator Sheehy Skeffington;

This first Annual Conference of Humanists in Ireland

(1) Supports the Cameron Report's findings on the causes of conflict and disorder in Northern Ireland and especially the report's conclusions on the subject of Civil Rights.

(2) Believes that the attainment of Civil Rights and liberties accepted in a democratic society should be effectively secured without reference to race, religion, sex, or political affiliation in the North and in the South.

(3) As an immediate task to work for the repeal of all legislation which impedes the development of a fully democratic society, in particular the Offences Against the State Acts in the Republic and the Special Powers Act in Northern Ireland.

(4) Draws the attention of the Belfast Humanist Group and the Irish Humanist Association to these recommendations.

A welcome address by Mr Michael Lines of the British Humanist Association and an exhortation from Dr Healey to "get up and get on with it" closed a very full-bodied and constructive conference with a final request from all those present to have another Irish conference in 1970.

SUBJECTIVISM IN MORALS

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second case the question is nonsensical, for the answer to it has already been supplied in the first part of the sentence. Now if "good" means "that which is approved of by me", the question "Is that which is approved by me a good thing?" ought to be of the nonsensical or "closed" type. But, in fact, it is plainly a sensible or "open" question. Therefore, "good" and "that which is approved of by me" do not have the same meaning. All other attempts to define "good", for example the famous utilitarian definition "Good is that which produces the greatest possible happiness for the greatest number of people", are exposed to the same fatal flaw. The outcome of Moore's analysis is that "good" like "yellow" or "pleasant" or "better" denotes the simplest kind of quality which cannot be defined in terms of anything else.

Some of the above arguments against subjectivism are more cogent than others, but the overall conclusion seems to me inescapable, that there exist objective standards of right and wrong to which our moral judgments approximate to a greater or less degree. In practice, of course, the existence of such standards is taken for granted whenever people differ over an ethical issue. The man who accuses another of pushing ahead of him in a cinema queue is not merely saying that he disapproves of the other man's conduct. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the queue breaker also to know about. And the queue breaker nearly always tries to make out that what he has done does not really go against the standard, or that if it does, there is some special reason in this particular case why the standard should be broken. As Mr C. S. Lewis puts it, "Quarrelling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do this unless you had some sort of agreement as to what right and wrong are, just as there would be no sense in saying a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football" (*Mere Christianity*, p. 16). Moreover, I strongly suspect that even the most thoroughgoing subjectivist does not, in his heart of hearts, really believe that moral views are only a matter of taste. I am pretty sure, for example, that Mr G. L. Simons would not deliver his passionate

diatribes against Powellism, capitalism and American atrocities in Vietnam in the *FREETHINKER* unless he were convinced, albeit unconsciously, that there is something intrinsically evil in racism, injustice and torture. For he writes with indignation, like a man proclaiming what is good in itself and denouncing what is evil in itself, and not at all like a man recording that he personally likes fish and chips but some people prefer sausage and mash. In short, he writes as though he agreed with Professor H. J. Paton that "It is just as certain that deliberate cruelty is wrong as that two and two make four" (*The Good Will*, p. 371).

My conclusion is that the subjective theory of morals is not only untrue, but that it is ignored in practice even by those who claim they believe in it.

BOOK REVIEWS ROBERT W. MORRELL

Darwin and the Beagle: Alan Moorehead (Hamish Hamilton, 75s).

COMMENTING in his *Autobiography* on the success of *Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin tells us that he attempted to collect all that appeared on the book, "excluding newspaper reviews", but the volume grew so great that he "gave up the attempt in despair". In a way a similar trend of thought might appear in the minds of some individuals when they meet yet another book on Darwin as aspects of his work. The total number of works about Darwin have not, to my knowledge, been counted, however, they must amount to a formidable total. Thus, one might ask oneself, is yet another justified, particularly at such a high price?

Alan Moorehead is not known for his scientific work but he is the successful and highly accomplished author of several interesting non-fictional books. His ability to tell a story in a highly readable manner sets this work apart from many others which manage to get bogged down in a mass of apparently technical jargon which is readily understood by a specialist but leaves most general readers utterly bored. Darwin's own account of the voyage of HMS *Beagle* is not uncommon but many might find it difficult to read in full, a fact noted by at least one publisher who recently brought out a highly condensed version. Moorehead seeks to make the voyage more interesting to modern readers by the simple process of rewriting it. In this he succeeds admirably.

Unfortunately, though *Darwin and the Beagle* will mean that many who might otherwise have not read in any detail an account of the epic voyage will now become acquainted with it, such treatment as given it by Moorehead leaves out of the book some very important parts of it, particularly with regard to geology—the importance of which Darwin himself stressed. Also one finds interwoven into the narrative opinions which Darwin only formulated years after the voyage and which should not have been included in the manner they are. However, such faults will probably be jarring to the specialist rather than the general reader for whom this book appears primarily to cater.

The book is well produced and has a truly magnificent range of illustrations, many in superb full colour. On the other hand the bibliography I found rather unsatisfactory.

Darwin and the Beagle concludes with a chapter on the famous British Association meeting in Oxford at which Huxley gave Bishop Wilberforce a sound drubbing—though this was as much a public condemnation of Professor Richard Owen, Wilberforce's scientific "advisor", as it was of the bishop's attempt to pronounce judgement in a field of knowledge about which he was ignorant. Owen, one of the leading palaeontologists of his day, seems to have been annoyed by the publicity and acclaim Darwin was receiving rather than by any real opposition to the theory of evolution, for he claimed to have advanced the idea before Darwin. Huxley, so Moorehead tells us, had not intended to be present at the meeting but had been persuaded to come by a friend he had met in the street. The friend concerned is not named but by a strange coincidence it was Robert Chambers, the anonymous author of a celebrated—and highly controversial—evolutionary work *The Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (the Centre for Victorian Studies has recently republished this once famous work with a lengthy introduction by Sir Gavin de Beer).

When Darwin had received the invitation to join the *Beagle* as a naturalist his father strongly objected to his accepting. Among

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the reasons was "that it would be a useless undertaking" and "disreputable to (his) character as a clergyman". It is odd now to think that prior to the voyage Darwin had a serious intention to become a clergyman, as he commented himself, "Considering how fireely I have been attacked by the orthodox it seems ludicrous that I once intended to be a clergyman". The intention, as he further notes, died a natural death on his joining the Beagle. Darwin's reputation was made by the voyage. Had he become a clergyman in some quiet country parish it is doubtful if the name Charles Darwin would be as well remembered, if remembered at all, as it is today throughout the world. The voyage of the Beagle far from being the useless undertaking Darwin's father thought it would be, has made a place for itself as firmly in the history of science as the recent voyage to the moon by the Apollo spacecraft. Those who have never read an account of the voyage of the Beagle would be well advised to obtain a copy of Alan Moorehead's rascinating book.

LETTERS

Moral education

DAVID TRIBE suggests that the discussion of moral principles as such should be avoided "in the school at large". On the contrary, in *any* lively, vocal secondary school today such discussion is *unavoidable*.

One pupil complains he has a puncture because some clot has burst a milk bottle on the asphalt and left it there. Maggie is pregnant—should she keep her baby or shouldn't she? (It was too late for an abortion before anyone knew.) Somebody is pinching money from the changing room. The man across the road, who is on night shift, says he gets woken up by the pop group practising over the lunch hour. Bob is up before the courts because his friend shopped him. (Is honesty or loyalty the more important?) What's to do about it all? Why or why not?

It is the best schools—the friendly, participant, democratic ones—that get involved in this way, not the duff ones in which teachers and HM pontificate from on high. Modern adolescents successfully insulate themselves from moral guff—but they are constantly involved in the rights and wrongs of behaviour. And you cannot talk about behaviour without using words. These words are inevitably such words as truth, kindness, consideration, thoughtfulness and so forth. Does David Tribe want a ban on moral phraseology?
JAMES HEMMING.

Indoctrination

THE TROUBLE in Northern Ireland is a tragic warning of the dangers of religious indoctrination. The example is rather extreme and other factors are also involved, such as political, economic and social ones; but the point is that these factors are also largely the result of indoctrination.

Education in the past has been largely based on indoctrination, e.g. with set books and examinations containing traditional questions requiring indoctrinated answers. But, today, indoctrination no longer works well in free educated democracies, as it tends to produce independent competing, and sometimes hostile, groups. Such conflicts are forcing people to examine the whole range of traditional ways of thinking which, today, are undergoing reappraisal, revision, replacement and testing.

Ideally, I suppose, home life should pave the way for the school, while the school should prepare the child for his future life in outside society. The school (its organisation, its teaching, together with the relationships and interactions between its masters and pupils) should help its pupils to develop their own special abilities, their individual ethics and philosophies of life, and prepare them for happy and useful places in society.

The difficulty is that young children must be indoctrinated to obey rules laid down by their parents and teachers in order to prevent harm to themselves and others, and that it becomes necessary to decide what these rules should be. I think that the number of rules should be kept to a minimum and that they should be such that the children, when older, will realise that they were necessary. Probably few people are likely to object to the teaching of the three Rs, though this involves indoctrination (learning by rote, etc.), because of their importance in social communication, while sciences usually have, in their very methods, the means of

correction and modernisation, but when the emotions or faith-producing factors are involved the greatest care must be taken to ensure that children do not become too rigidly indoctrinated. To me, even a course in moral education might be suspect, as liable to constrict individual freedom of thought.

The urgent political need today, in education, is to abolish both RI in national schools and also government subsidies to denominational schools.

Though children might be protected from undue indoctrination, many adults still remain only too easily influenced by those who use faith-producing factors. The only practical way to protect such gullible people is by showing them how to test the truth of theories and ideas, and where to obtain reliable knowledge. This education should be begun at school, but will need to be continued after leaving school. Perhaps we may hope that soon everybody will be connected by telephone to a central computer library, from which the latest authentic knowledge can be immediately obtained.

As conscious human thought becomes more rational, it seems reasonable to suppose that the present ideological confusions and conflicts will be reduced, and that the arts, entertainments, and adult educational and social facilities will be much more fully developed than they are now, so as to satisfy man's instincts and subconscious needs (including his faith-producing factors!).

G. F. WESTCOTT.

Free Speech

How proudly Mr Page celebrates his sterile bourgeois clichés. The Chinese have no right to be in Tibet? Even though Mr Page admits they have overthrown a hideous feudal oppression and given schools and hospitals, and that Tibet is part of China! Poor Mr Page—so if there was ever a British feudal boot on his bourgeois neck he would never accept help from a foreigner! Is Mr Page a racist/chauninist as well as a feeble echo of the capitalist press?
G. L. SIMONS.

LOSS AND GAIN

(Continued from page 355)

Wagner) has been Karl Marx. Karl Marx, atheist, philosopher, passionate lover, devoted husband and father, voracious reader, indomitable student, tragic hero, frustrated communist dictator, undefeated individualist. The earth in all its long natural history has never produced anything more extraordinary, more unique than Karl Marx. No man has been more loved, feared, hated or admired. No man has been more misunderstood. Marx had no desire to be remembered simply as moralist. Yet to him it has been to create a moral passion for social justice that can never die until a much better social order is created than anything so far achieved by Church or State. Should it come about by any chance that the Humanist Revolution does eventually achieve World Government, the loss of personal liberty will be more than compensated by the great gain in social security and final deliverance from the fear of war. The theme of loss and gain runs through the whole pattern of life. What we lose in one way we gain in another. In the end we must lose life to gain deliverance from the burden of life. No man or woman really wants to live for ever. "Ripeness is all."

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