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THE ADOPTION LAWS

THE PRESENT LAWS with regard to adoption are generally acknowledged to be lacking in various ways and a Home Office Departmental Committee has been set up to look into them. There would seem to be two principal problems—the real parents who decide that they want their fostered, as opposed to adopted, children back, and the religious provisions of the adoption procedure. The National Secular Society has made some submissions to the Home Office Departmental Committee, and of the first problem says that the stability of the child must always be put first:

"We think it unsettling to him and unreasonable that a natural parent should be able to claim him back from foster parents years after he was brought to them and after he had come to look on them as his own. Whether as a stop-gap arrangement or over a longer period, most foster parents do a valuable social job which should not be underestimated or unrewarded. There is however a minority who appear to regard it as a business and, working on the assumption that additional mouths get progressively cheaper to feed, undertake to look after more babies than they can adequately accommodate. Parents do not have absolute rights over, or necessarily know what is best for, their children, though it is hard to get some natural parents to admit this. While visits from social workers might therefore in ordinary circumstances be resented, where, as in the case of fostering and adoption, they have already been brought into the picture there is a good case for intensifying or extending the observation and support they can give."

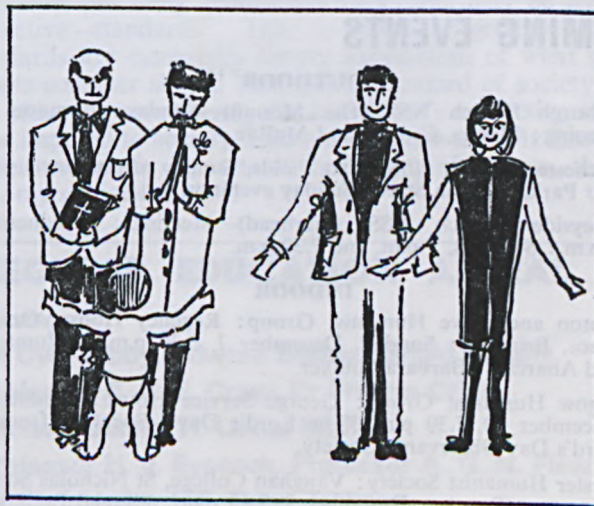
The NSS's document goes on to make an important, but hitherto rarely appreciated, point:

"In searching for an identity, many teenagers are most anxious to know who their natural parents are, while most adoption societies will not reveal this either to them or to their adoptive parents. While understanding the full strength of this teenage obsession, we do not think it involves an absolute natural right. The young person may not necessarily be happier after making the discovery. And he may cause untold misery to the present family of one or other natural parent, who may not have told them anything about him. In extreme cases he could try to blackmail a natural parent as a condition of continued secrecy. On the other hand, it may be quite unreasonable in some circumstances for the adoption society to withhold this information. A suitable compromise would still seem to be for the adoptee to apply to the court which arranged the adoption, which could consider every application on its merits."

The effect of religion in the adoption procedure is well-known. In general terms it can be said that a couple who wish to adopt a child have much more chance of success if they are, or say they are, religious. This is due to the predominance of adoption societies whose articles of association bind them to accepting only religious prospective parents, the number of case-workers with either a personal religious bias or a tendency to suspect the avowedly non-religious of unsuitability for parenthood, and above all the law. The law states that a parent offering a

child for adoption may stipulate the creed in which it is to be brought up. Of this the NSS says:

"It is odd that someone who renounces 'my rights as a parent/guardian' is allowed to retain what some people regard as the most important right, the credal upbringing of the child. Now it is wellknown that throughout the country as a whole there is an imbalance between the number of babies available and those wanting to adopt them, but this varies from denomination to denomination. So that while there is usually a surplus of adopters there may in some cases, e.g. Roman Catholics, be a surplus of babies. Nothing can however be done to level things out, as once a natural parent or guardian has given a baby a religious label it sticks to him for the rest of his life and an adopter of the required persuasion must be found if he is to be adopted at all. This is clearly unjust for the child, who has, of course, no say over the religion that is thus foisted upon him and may in later life repudiate it."



Thus Anglicans join agnostics and atheists in having among their ranks a number of potential parents who can find no children to adopt, while a number of babies, who have been designated Roman Catholic before they can more than howl in protest, languish in children's homes. This situation is not alleviated by the tendency of courts to label children 'Church of England' when there is no parent or guardian available. And as the NSS points out:

(Continued overleaf)

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(Continued from previous page)

"When they ask any parent or guardian who may be present, What is your religious persuasion?—not 'Have you a religious persuasion? . . . What is it?'—they elicit a positive response more frequently than churchgoing or other indexes might suggest."

The answers to this lie in the proliferation of Local Authority adoption agencies, which have no obligation to religion and some of which are at the moment known to be: "Sympathetic to the great number of suitable adopters throughout the country who have no religious beliefs and are honest enough to say so."

ITALY'S DIVORCE BILL

THE MINORITY ruling Christian Democrat party in Italy failed last week in an attempt to throw out the Divorce Bill, which is in its final stages in the Italian Chamber of Deputies. If the Bill becomes law it will introduce divorce into Italy for the first time. The Christian Democrat motion that the Bill should be shelved was defeated by 322 votes to 290. This virtually ensures that the Bill will have gained approval in the Chamber by the time this edition of FREETHINKER is published.

THINKER is published. Signor Rumor, the Prime Minister and leader of the Christian Democrats, has pointed out to the House that their approval of the Bill might "open delicate problems" in the relations between the Church and state.

Though this seems to be a triumph for both progressive opinion and those who wish to secularise Italy, the Christian Democrats still have a strong chance of putting a spoke in their wheels. They hope to obtain parliamentary approval of a measure by which referendums could be set up, and laws, approved by parliament, repealed should the populace decide against them. This attempt to salvage the dignity of the Catholic church should have succeeded or failed, by the time the Divorce Bill is finally approved or rejected.

MISNOMER

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC Bishop of Motherwell has publicly decreed that no Catholic children in his diocese are to watch the BBC's sex education films. To comment on such an attempt to brainwash is perhaps superfluous. But in the circumstances one could say that the name of the diocese is, perhaps, a little inappropriate.

CELIBACY

IN DEFIANCE of the Portuguese Catholic hierarchy 43 priests met to discuss the question of priestly celibacy. The priests rejected a denunciation of their movement by Manuel Cardinal Goncalves Cerejeira, the conservative patriarch of Lisbon, and issued the following unanimous resolution: "We propose to accept with total frankness and honesty those of our brothers in the priesthood who have married or will marry. We ask for them a full integration in the pastoral activity at the same level of priests who decide to remain single".

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton: Sunday, December 7, 5.30 p.m.: "Humanism and Anarchy", Barbara Smoker.

Glasgow Humanist Group: George Service House: Wednesday, December 10, 7.30 p.m. "The Lord's Day", Speakers from the Lord's Day Observance Society.

Leicester Humanist Society: Vaughan College, St Nicholas Square, Leicester: Tuesday, December 9, 7.45 p.m.: "Racial Prejudice", Derek Wright (Lecturer in Psychology at Leicester University).

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, December 7, 6.30 p.m.: "Your Feet", A. Davis, S.R.Ch., F.Inst.Ch., H.Ch.D.

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, December 12, 8 p.m.: "The Homosexual and Society", Anthony Grey (Secretary of the Albany Trust).

Westminster Theatre, Palace Street, London, SW1 (Box Office 01-834 0283): Till December 6—Evenings 7.45 p.m., Matinees Wednesday and Saturday, 2.30 p.m.: Flora Robson, Joan Miller, Joyce Carey in *The Old Ladies* by Rodney Acland. Directed by Peter Cotes.

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 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.

Christmas Cards—peace themes, many-language greetings, bargain parcels, excellent gift selection, generous discounts for sales. 24 samples 12/6 post free. List free. Proceeds to *Peace News* c/o Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London, N1.

APPOINTMENTS VACANT

South Place Ethical Society Committee invites applications from Humanists for a full-time GENERAL SECRETARY with organising ability, able to deal with own correspondence, prepare Minutes, arrange lectures, preside over meetings, etc.

Salary £1,000—£1,300.

Also required: Full-time LETTINGS SECRETARY/HALL MANAGER, responsible for lettings and maintenance of Hall. Committee rooms and adjacent properties. Salary £1,000—1,150.

Applications for both these appointments, including relevant experience, to be addressed to the Chairman, SPES, Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, WC1.

SUBJECTIVISM IN MORALS — A CRITIQUE

IAN N. P. BROOM

MY NAMESAKE'S attack on subjectivism in morals (November 8) should not, I feel, be permitted to pass unanswered. The illogicality, inapplicability and generality of his assumptions tend to invalidate the argument, or, at least diminish its credibility.

Mr John Broom's first criticism of subjectivism in morals is that the theory is contrary to common sense. Hitler, who "was characterised by a certain property of badness", is cited as an example. But to what extent is this phrase the outward manifestation of the public indignation of Hitler and merely representative of the subjective opinions of individuals, which are supported and reinforced by the subjective views of the vast majority of society? Any attempt to differentiate between so-called objective moral standards and common subjective standards is so fraught with difficulties as to be almost impossible. By what principles are 'objective' standards chosen and fixed? Does some magical criteria exist by means of which moral standards may be formulated? My basic objection to the theory of objectivity is that one has to make an assumption that certain standards are instinctive, natural or intuitive. The use of phrases such as "plain people", "ordinary citizens" and "ordinary people" suggests to me that Mr Broom has confused the collective subjective views of society with objectivity.

Any assumption that cruelty is bad is valueless unless it is made by rational arguments and supported by reasonable evidence. Thus any action that satisfies my subjective definition of 'cruelty' is, in my opinion, 'bad'. The consideration of evidence in support of a rational belief converts it into a subjective opinion. If I pose a question such as "What is your opinion of the treatment of animals by the natives of Upper Volta?" you would be unable to give an answer unless you had special knowledge as to whether such treatment was exemplary or not. You could say (as Mr Broom no doubt would), "If the treatment amounts to cruelty, I would disapprove". But, surely, in that case one is merely making and substituting a theoretical, subjective assumption and then formulating a subjective judgment. Furthermore, as suggested above, it is a matter of subjectivity as to what amounts to cruelty. Many people argue that keeping animals in a Zoo or intensive farming methods are cruel, undesirable and unnecessary. Others disagree, but whatever one's view it is a subjective opinion. There is no objective standard of cruelty.

Mr Broom's second criticism is also fallacious. An assumption must be made that moral judgments are (or should be) based on rational and logical grounds, and on this basis one is able to attack any view. If a subjectivist (or anyone else for that matter) is able to substantiate his opinion in accordance with this criteria he is entitled to believe it. The main attack on subjectivists is that they too often hold views that cannot be justified or are not vindicated by the evidence available or by the arguments put forward in support of them. But this is not an attack on subjectivism.

It follows from the foregoing paragraph that any moral opinion that is formed after a review of the evidence on rational grounds is 'right'. Mr Broom's assertion that subjectivity is rigid and insensitive to change is more correctly applicable to objectivity. Subjectivists are aware that change in one's views not only occurs but, in the light of changing circumstances, is desirable. Thus, instead of using the rigid objective standard "This action is right", the subjectivist is inclined to use the flexible expression, "On the evidence available at the present time, this action arouses feelings of approval in me". When a subjectivist changes his opinion he does not say (as an objectivist must) that he was formerly mistaken. He is able to modify his opinion in the light of new evidence or a re-arrangement of the evidence.

In an attempt to support his theory of objectivity, Mr Broom makes an inaccurate interpretation of the motivation of Mr G. L. Simons in delivering passionate diatribes against (*inter alia*) Powellism. Surely the same interpretation is just as applicable to Enoch Powell and others who hold differing views from Mr Simons. For instance, I am sure that Mr Vorster, in common with the rest of the Government of South Africa, is (however misguidedly) convinced that there is something 'good' in the apartheid policy. In fact he is so convinced that he is prepared to continue with that policy in defiance of world opinion and sanctions.

Some of the above criticisms of the argument against subjectivism are obviously not conclusive. Indeed it would be defeating the object of this critique if I suggested otherwise. I agree with Mr Broom that certain common standards exist but deny vehemently that these may be termed 'objective standards'. The so-called 'objective' moral standards are essentially simply expressions of what some people consider should be a moral standard of society. All too often they are merely the individual's subjective moral view imputed to society. I do not consider that Mr Broom's criticisms justify his attack, but then, of course, this is only my subjective view!

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MODERN PSYCHIATRY

WILLIAM WELSH

PSYCHIATRIC BACKGROUND is incomplete without adequate knowledge of nineteenth century ethics and philosophy. The field of knowledge required of a practitioner of psychoanalysis is of course wide. Not only is a recognised medical qualification necessary; a sympathetic and appreciative relationship with others built on the psychiatrist's own balanced personality is a *sine qua non*.

In psychiatric theory, anxiety and the driving force behind it have displaced will, using the latter term in its nineteenth century connotation. But there are as many schools of psychoanalysis as there were schools of philosophy previous to Freud. In his book, *Freud and the Post-Freudians*, J. A. C. Brown notes that prominent post-Freudians like Dr A. C. Fairbairn of Edinburgh have in part restored will to its pristine status. Dr Fairbairn details separate, distinct levels of the ego and the super-ego respectively, ranging these levels in a kind of psychic hierarchy, and insisting that in the case of the ego, will is a dynamic entity in itself.

Similarly, in *The Ways of the Will*, Leslie H. Farber, an eminent American theorist and practitioner, makes out a case for the will as understood by traditional philosophy. But every psychoanalyst is only too well aware of the role of the unconscious in determining human behaviour, the unconscious exerting its influence in areas at one time thought to be the exclusive territory of the ego, then regarded as the organiser and controller of psychic mechanisms, and the source of all intellectual activity.

In the field of ethics, the psychologist may well ignore, in his conscientious desire to help his patient, that even Freudian theory, though it takes into account biological drives and instinctive impulses, is applicable mainly to our Western civilisation. And Freud did inherit areas of knowledge in nineteenth century philosophy, particularly German. What has been pointed out since by anthropologists like Margaret Mead, is that by no means all psychoneurotic conflicts are universal. Some, peculiar to our culture, are veritably unknown to more primitive races.

Similarly, taking a simple analogy, Freud's theory of religion as essentially an escape, a regression to the child's need for a protecting father figure, can't apply literally to a culture, and there are such, in which the female as opposed to the male, is the dominating influence. In such a matriarchy, a mother god, though not necessarily a maternal one, would logically be the object of worship if we are to think along strictly Freudian lines.

Another current criticism of Freud is that he went to extremes in applying the scientific method, the purely objective approach, to a study of mental states essentially dependent to a great extent, and certainly so at the stage of knowledge we have reached, on subjective judgments. In spite of great advances in neurology as applied to psychiatric practice, advances which bring the psychiatrist within the orbit of the specialist in physiology, and incidentally bridge the gulf, albeit partially, between the psychiatric ward and the general hospital, in spite also of careful and thorough research into the effects of narcotics, anti-depressants and inhibitors on the human brain, in spite of modern selective and classified application of electro-convulsive therapy, we are still at a stage when subjective and imaginative approaches to the patient's states of mind are not expendable.

Nearly all psychiatrists agree that Freud's diagnosis of mental mechanisms was revolutionary. They would also agree, partially if not wholly, with his theories on infantile sexuality, even in the first and second years of life. Even the layman can readily see the connection between a contemplation of the faeces in infancy and a compulsion to associate sex with dirt, and, in Western civilisations, with guilt. Only a relatively sophisticated awareness, however, confuses the urinary and excretory functions with those of the genitals. When we come to bowel movement, to the oral, anal and genital development of infantile sexuality and their bearing on personality development in adult life, the layman may well find himself mystified in a region not apparently alien to orthodox Freudians.

A contemporary criticism aimed at the Freudians is that they do not attach sufficient importance to race culture, to environmental influences. What has to be noted is that as a healer, Freud was primarily if not solely preoccupied with his patient's conflict. In helping the patient to resolve it, the great psychoanalyst rightly thought that an awareness on the patient's part of the role played by his or her unconscious was important above all else. On the other hand, the patient must conform to some extent at least to the norms acknowledged by his social milieu if he is to be happy in it. At the same time, an unhealthy exaggerated conformity may well be at the root of his conflict.

Whichever way you look at it, the environmental factors should not be ignored. Psychotherapy has shown, for instance, that in cases of obsessive compulsion neurosis, frequently in intractable and chronic condition amounting to a personality disorder, that a change of environment, a manipulation and rearrangement of environmental factors can have a dramatic effect altogether beneficial, though in cases where an indigenous depression is characteristic of this particular psychoneurosis, environmental changes have a favourable reaction, if the depression is deep, persistent and agonising, only after immediate treatment by modern neurological methods such as ECT, and only if the follow-up indicates that drug treatment is applicable, and this drug treatment is usually necessary. On the other hand, ECT, even the most recent, modified and carefully selective forms, is not a panacea, as was thought by so many when first practised in psychiatric medicine; indeed, in the psychoneurosis mentioned, it can't have any fundamental bearing on the personality disorder though it may well, and often does, lift the deep-seated depression which can be a symptom of the conflict or is intimately wrapped up with the mechanism involved in the process of the conflict itself. And in this disorder, hereditary factors often play an important part.

Fundamentally, however, the psychiatrist philosopher has to come to grips with determinism. A slinging match to establish the relative merits of free will on the one hand and determinism on the other is not the purpose of this study. At the same time, it is well to note that throughout history the question has been debated by philosophers and theologians. An outstanding Latin work by the fourteenth century philosopher, Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, covers the endless debate on the topic. The English poet Chaucer made a not altogether scholarly translation of it into English, and deals with it in a quasi humorous but nevertheless effective manner in his *Pardoner's Tale*, a medieval fabliau dealing with three brothers motivated by

avarice and ending in violence and murder by poisoning. This seems a highly unsuitable context for metaphysical theory, but Chaucer, the most extrovert of all English creative artists, dabbled in occult speculation.

What is important is to draw a strict dividing line between the theological dogma of predestination which ruthlessly divides the elect from the damned, and the determinism which concludes that human will, if it does in fact exist, is influenced profoundly by unconscious motivation, as it is by genetic and hereditary forces. While the names, St Paul, Calvin, and the strict dogmatists of religion are concerned with the theory that a supreme being from the beginning of time selected the fortunate for personal salvation, provided they identified their consciousness with the vicarious sacrifice of the Jewish Messiah (and this act of identification is itself predestined), we must note that no other than Plotinus, of the third century BC, and the founder of Neoplatonism, has a most apposite and a most shrewd comment to make on the function of what we now know as the unconscious, and if we accept the nearly universally held view that the unconscious is important in determining our actions and decisions, we find ourselves on the side of the determinists to a lesser or a greater extent than that prevailing among the pseudo scientists of the human mind. The passage from Plotinus, translated by Buber, is included in a footnote in the book already referred to, *The Ways of the Will*. Making allowances for the possible ambiguity arising from any translation, also for the inadequacy of language as a vehicle for the infinite variety of human thinking, particularly ancient language and idiom, the passage is nevertheless astonishing in its insight:

"For it is very possible that even without being conscious of having something one has it in himself and even in a form more effective than if he knew it. . . . Consciousness seems to obscure the actions it perceives, and only when they occur without it are they purer, more effective, more vital."

It would appear that the ancient writer was of the opinion that instinctive and emotional experiences, unmodified by cerebral activity, are the richest. This line of thought is obviously in line with Rousseau and the poet Wordsworth.

For everyday purposes we rely on the dictates of commonsense. And for that reason, we work on an unproved hypothesis that man can in fact exercise a degree of free choice, though that degree is much less than many moralists would have us believe. Did we not revert to commonsense, there would be no point in entering engagements in a diary, though fortuitous circumstances and a host of other as yet undetermined factors may well invalidate the mental planning. If for this reason alone, it is unrealistic, a word favoured by politicians, to plan decades ahead. The blueprint, whether it pessimistically and suicidally forecasts a Malthusian solution to the population problem through a restoration of balance by nuclear fission, or colonises the outer planets in advance, may well be out of date even in the foreseeable future.

It is plausible to speculate that even the psychiatrist theorist who is so obsessed by his particular school of thinking as to be quite unresponsive to other modes of thought alien to those current in his own field, does in fact accept a modified determinist view at least.

The exploration of space opens up new fields. Though the moon shot is a colossal achievement in man's narrow and limited environment to date, and should be seen in the context of an infinite Universe involving computation in billions and ultimately beyond the scope of the human mind, it is a step towards a new mental horizon. The stress on materialism, inevitable in a pseudo science which now invades territory at one time the exclusive province of the physiologist, may well be underlined by man's conquest of space. Earth bound religions can overnight seem comparatively irrelevant in the perspective of an infinite Universe on which we cavort for a space in time which is utterly insignificant.

Future historians may well conclude that in the field of human thought in the twentieth century, Freudian psychology on the one hand, and the materialist discoveries on the other, take pride of place.

But he would be a bold man who would state categorically that this is any more than a glimmer of light scarcely distinguishable in the infinite depths of the human psyche.

VIOLENCE BREEDS VIOLENCE

DEBORAH DODD

IN JULY 1970 the experimental term of the 'Murder Act' is due to expire; and judging by the National Opinion Polls it seems as though there is a likelihood that the death penalty will be re-enforced. Because the murder rate has risen during the last four years, people have jumped to the immediate conclusion that capital punishment acts as a deterrent.

But if we pause for a moment and review historical facts, we may begin to doubt the validity of this. In the last century capital punishment existed in this country for two hundred different offences, including the defacing of Westminster Bridge, consorting with gipsies, picking pockets and stealing letters. In 1818 a man was hanged for cutting down a tree: soon afterwards a boy of nine years old was hanged for stealing twopence-worth of paints. Sir Samuel Romilly, a member of Parliament at that time, was horrified at the monstrous punishment inflicted for such small crimes, and so he set about reforming the capital punish-

ment laws. In his lifetime he achieved little success. He attempted to pass several bills against capital punishment, including one in favour of its abolition for stealing and shop-lifting. The Lord Chief Justice's answer to this was: 'Were the terror of death removed . . . the shops would be liable to unavoidable losses from depredations, and in many cases, bankruptcy and ruin must become the lot of the honest and laborious tradesman. . . . Repeal this law and see the contrast—no man can trust himself for an hour out of doors without the most alarming apprehensions that, on his return, every vestige of his property will be swept away by the hardened robber'. So the bill was not passed. But Sir Samuel Romilly died only an apparent failure: his ideas on reform had planted a seed which later bore fruit, and between 1823 and 1833 capital punishment was abolished for the majority of small crimes. Since then it has not been noticeable that Marks and Spencer's and Woolworth's have become bankrupt through the hands of shop-lifters; nor that acres of woodland have

been villainously chopped down and taken away. In 1886—at the end of the whole period of reform—the Commissioners on the Criminal Law admitted that 'It has not in effect been found that the repeal of capital punishment with regard to any particular class of offences has been attended with an increase of the offenders'. Surely it is even *less* likely to act as a deterrent to murder, which is usually less premeditated than any other crime.

Proof of this has been found in other countries where capital punishment has been totally abolished. As far back as 1822 Luxembourg abolished hanging; in 1863 Belgium did the same; and since then Austria, Denmark, Western Germany, Finland, Holland, Iceland, Israel and many others have followed suit. So the Royal Commission and the Select Committee decided to examine the situation in these countries, and this is what the Select Committee reported. 'Our prolonged examination of the situation in foreign countries has increasingly confirmed us in the assurance that capital punishment may be abolished in this country without endangering life or property or impairing the security of Society.' The general conclusion to which the Royal Commission came was that 'There is no clear evidence in any of the figures we have examined that the abolition of capital punishment has led to an increase in the homicide rate'.

In view of this evidence—both at home and abroad—that capital punishment does not act as a deterrent, it seems quite clear that the increase in the murder rate during the last few years is *not* due to the abolition of hanging. Exactly what it is due to is hard to ascertain, but perhaps it would pay the Government to investigate the whole matter very thoroughly before it re-introduces capital punishment.

There are also other issues to be examined. That hanging acts as a deterrent is one argument which those in favour of capital punishment put forward, but there are others too. The most prevalent one is 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. But *is* it an eye for an eye? As John Grigg writes in the *Guardian*: 'When the state executes a murderer it is exacting a penalty more terrible than the offence. Most of the victims of murder die suddenly, without the agony of anticipation; yet if justice be done, a murderer must wait to be properly convicted in a court of law, and must then wait for a further period of weeks while his appeal is heard . . . At the very end he is kept alive for what must seem an interminable time while the apparatus for his execution is made ready'. This hardly seems to be an eye for an eye. We know full well what torture a convicted man must endure in the days and weeks before his murder, and yet many of us still support capital punishment. Surely by doing this we are subjugating our moral values to a state that is even lower than that of the murderers: for capital punishment is truly murder in cold blood, whereas, in the majority of cases, the original murder has been committed in the heat of the moment. Those who are so eager to quote the Bible and to cry out 'an eye for an eye' might stop to consider that perhaps the Commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' does not only mean that you should not murder your enemy or your grandmother: but that perhaps it also means that you should not murder a murderer.

Another argument that people bring out in favour of capital punishment is 'He *deserves* to be hanged'. But who are we to pass judgment? What right has any human being to take the life of another for any reason whatsoever? Most particularly in view of the fact that over half convicted murderers are certified either temporarily or permanently

insane, and we have really no idea of the strange forces inside them that compel them to rape, murder and torture. Sir David Henderson, an expert on psychopathy, said that these people 'fail to appreciate reality, they are fickle, changeable, lack persistency of effort and are unable to profit by experience or punishment'. Therefore hanging one psychopath is not going to deter another from committing a murder. *But* psychopathy is not incurable, so by extending our psychiatric research and enlarging our mental hospitals we would perhaps benefit more than by waiting for a psychopath to commit murder and then hanging him.

Inevitably the question will arise: 'But what of the rest? What of those who commit murder and are not certified insane?' However, the majority of these people, like Ruth Ellis, commit murder under a combination of circumstances that are never likely to occur again.

Even if we cannot accept this as a valid argument against capital punishment, maybe we should put a little thought to Sir Samuel Romilly's belief that 'violence breeds violence'; that brutality in punishment only services to induce brutality in crime. Or, as Shaw says in *Caesar and Cleopatra*: 'And so to the end of history, murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honour and peace, until the gods are tired of blood and create a race that can understand'. But are we going to sit back and wait for the 'gods' to create this race, meanwhile allowing murder to breed more murder and violence yet more violence? Or are we ourselves going to create it? Surely it is up to us—each and every one of us—to create a new race, a race which considers and reveres life above all things. For, as John Bright says, 'A deep reverence for human life is worth more than a thousand executions in the prevention of murder; it is in fact the great security of human life. The law of capital punishment, whilst pretending to support this reverence, does in fact tend to destroy it'.

Book Reviews

OSWELL BLAKESTON

Divinitas, John Knowler (Cape, 35s).

A GOOD READ, but not, I think, a good novel. There is splendid promise in the idea of a firm (*Divinitas*) dealing with ecclesiastical investments, promising that old scandals about church funds coming from brothels will be up-dated with such "respectability" as investments in hotels lousy with profit chasing Christians. But the book doesn't make much play with the notion; and in fact it might be the story of any large company at executive level.

We are told the mystery of the mistress of the big boss—a brutal rape in Africa, and the failings of other influential figures in the *Divinitas* set-up which does not make God its business but wants to do business with God. There's the new man who is being tried out, a cold Mr Fysh, the evolutionary answer to machinery; and hints about super-computer-beings on other planets; and the son of an Indian client who goes into trances; and anecdotes about real celebrities. All fascinating in detail, even if the pieces don't always integrate.

So if one reads for passing scenes and notions, there is plenty of entertainment. One may come across a passage about Norman Mailer looking at the Vietnam war as America's search for manhood, a senseless attempt to relieve a feeling of sexual inadequacy, and then saying: "If one were to take the patients in a hospital, give them guns and let them shoot on pedestrians, down from hospital windows, you may be sure you would come across a few miraculous cures". Or one may stumble on an argument about how Christian passivity makes defeat impossible—and victory.

So long as you don't think about a theme book called *Divinitas* which Mr Knowler might have written, you'll find the book he has written is astringent intelligent fun.

BOOK REVIEWS (continued)

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

Reflections on Student Protest: Edited by Salters Sterling (SCM Press, 4s 6d).

THIS 50-PAGE BOOKLET, published by the Student Christian Movement, is a collection of four essays on student protest. Of these four, three are by university lecturers. The aim of the book is ostensibly to help answer the question "What is the Christian responsibility in the crisis of the University?" It is hard to escape the conclusion that this booklet has been produced less with a view to shedding any light on the student protest movement than to make the Christian Church appear as a left-wing institution thoroughly in favour of radical change.

This approach is particularly apparent in the essay entitled *Marxian Alienation or Religious Fallenness?—Towards a Critique of the Revolutionary Left*. As the title suggests, the author is desperate in his attempt to read like a cross between Herbert Marcuse and Marshall McLuhan. But despite this facade, he cannot conceal his true ideological position: "In order to develop both a critique of revolutionary humanism without falling into the trap of conservative Erastianism, and a critique of established institutions without falling into the trap of revolutionary Pelagianism, the Christian Church must learn to regard itself as a community whose total libidinal powers are liberated and engaged by the transcendent Spirit of Christ".

Not surprisingly, perhaps, this attitude leads the author to the conclusion that not only is revolution a jolly good thing, but it is exactly what the Church has been advocating for years: "The Church stands for a principle of non-violent permanent revolution. . . . In other words, the Church fuses the humanitarian concern of Liberalism with the radical, holistic analyses provided by the revolutionary Left and assimilates both into the power of the Love of Christ at work in the world".

The third essay *Notes on a Confrontation* is not much better. The author professes himself to be in general agreement with the radicals, but he reveals just how shallow this agreement is when he criticises revolutionary students for failing to realise the possibility of flexibility in the existing system. It is not necessary, he writes, to overthrow the state in order to change a university department.

It has, however, been shown many times that when universities are opposed to the reforms which their students are demanding, then they will call in all the machinery of the state to crush their protests.

The recent, slight improvements in British universities (taken student representation, etc.) are not evidence to the contrary. Such concessions have been made by the university authorities not out of a spirit of democracy but out of a sense of pragmatic authoritarianism. Paradoxically, minor concessions in the area of student representation (which on governing bodies is never anything near 50 per cent) have strengthened the authoritarian regimes of most universities rather than weakened them.

The decisions of the Senates are the same as before, only now the authorities can maintain the fiction that all decisions are joint decisions. The students, instead of standing apart from the ruthless and insane decision-making, are seen to be implicated in it.

The authorities can buy off any threatened militancy by references to "the proper channels"; ("You asked for student representation, now use it"). They are confident in the knowledge that, as a tactical weapon, student representation is as useless to the students as it is valuable to the authorities.

But gradually all over the country—indeed all over the world—students are waking up to see through the confidence trick which the universities have pulled on them. All the authorities have succeeded in doing is to postpone the inevitable conflict. As Jack Straw, the new President of the National Union of Students, said recently, the universities have bought "not time but a time-bomb".

As a contribution to the student-protest debate, this booklet is worse than useless. It might have been better if the essays had been written by the genuine student radicals, rather than by university lecturers who (perhaps with an eye to joining the ranks of the university tele-pundits) are happy to adopt a radical guise and to sprinkle their essays with the current (and pseudo) revolutionary jargon; just as long as they are not expected to translate their words into action within the walls (be they ivy-clad or red-brick) of their own institutions.

THAT BOUNDER, HAECKEL! NIGEL H. SINNOTT AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER BY SIR FRANCIS DARWIN

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN, especially in the Rationalist press, on the religious opinions of the famous nineteenth century biologists, Darwin, Haeckel, Hooker, Huxley and Wallace. The great battle of Victorian science and theology; secularism and religion, was usually taken with desperate seriousness by most of the participants. An amusing sidelight, however, is shown in an old letter which is preserved in the archives of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.¹

The letter was written by Sir Francis Darwin (1848-1927) [he was not knighted until 1913] to Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker² (1817-1911), the Director of Kew Gardens. It concerns the publication by the German Zoologist, Professor Ernst Heinrich Haeckel (1834-1919), of a note on the religious views of Charles Robert Darwin (b. 1809), author of *The Origin of Species*. Charles Darwin had died on April 19, 1882, and his son's letter carries the characteristic black border, then a fashionable symbol of mourning. Erasures are indicated: [xxx].

Oct 3 '82.

Down³
Beckenham

Dear Sir Joseph,

I don't know whether you have seen a letter of my fathers about religion published by Haeckel—If not [xxx] I enclose a copy which need not be returned—It was published without authority by Haeckel; the so called Baron to whom it was addressed wrote to ask leave to publish it which I refused—There is no moral doubt that H[aeckel] knew of this.

Do you think one ought to make any kind of public [xxx] protest?—the only thing that will coerce these cads of Germans is the Law,⁴ and that I should object to apply—But if such a man as Haeckel sets the example it may well spread.

In its proper place in a book the letter itself would be all right and I think we ought to publish it But this it should be published now in the way it has been done [xxx] makes me furious.

Yours affectly,

F. Darwin.

Sir Joseph Hooker has annotated the back of the letter, probably as the draft of a reply: "Suggested first to write to Haeckel asking his authority for publishing and if he knew of your refusal of the Baron's request".

A (? gelatine-duplicated) copy of the offending Charles Darwin letter also appears in the Kew Archives, and in the fullness of time Sir Francis did in fact publish it, decently clothed by the pages and hard covers of a book.⁵ The "so-called Baron" was named Meügden, but Sir Francis refers to him in print only as "a German student" and a "German youth". Apparently he had written to Darwin for his views, but as the great man was busy, a member of the Darwin family had replied briefly to say that Charles Darwin "considers that the theory of evolution is quite compatible with the belief in a God; but you must remember that different persons have different definitions of what they mean by God". Meügden, not satisfied, wrote to Darwin again, who replied in person. The text of Darwin's reply is reproduced in full from the Kew copy:

From C. Darwin to Baron Meügden

Down
Beckenham, Kent

June 5. '79.

Dear Sir,

I am much engaged, an old man, and out of health, I cannot spare time to answer your questions fully,—nor indeed can they be answered. Science has nothing to do with Christ, except in so far as the habit of scientific research makes a man cautious in admitting evidence. For myself, I do not believe that there ever has been any revelation. As for a future life,

every man must judge for himself between conflicting vague probabilities.

I remain, Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

Charles Darwin.

Sir Francis' letter to Hooker is, I think an interesting example of how very human eminent men can be; not even the Darwins were free of the contemporary concepts of propriety, and it must be admitted that Haeckel at times went to the other extreme. He eschewed the more 'gentlemanly' agnosticism of his fellow biologists, becoming a militant Freethinker of the Bradlaugh type. However, he preferred his own term 'monist' as an improvement on 'atheist' or 'materialist', and never missed a chance at sniping at supernaturalism, even in the most erudite texts.⁶ His famous popular work, *Die Welträtsel*, or *The Riddle of the Universe*, sold three million copies in more than twenty languages, and Haeckel gave the profits to his Museum of Evolution at Jena.⁷ Perhaps Charles Darwin would have forgiven him, after all.

¹ This letter is published by kind permission of the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

² See also Sinnott, N. H., *FREETHINKER*, 19 October, 1968 (p. 332) and 6 September, 1969 (p. 288).

³ Down House, Downe, Kent. See *FREETHINKER*, 2 August, 1969 (p. 242).

⁴ Note capital 'L'!

⁵ Darwin, F., 1887. *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, 1*: 307. London; 1892. *Charles Darwin: His Life . . .* p. 57. London; 1929. [Appendix II] *Autobiography of Charles Darwin* (Thinkers Library Series): p. 143. London.

⁶ E.g. Haeckel's *The Evolution of Man* (translated by Joseph McCabe). London, 1907.

⁷ McCabe, J., 1950. *A Rationalist Encyclopaedia*: p. 275. London.

LETTERS

Local Radio

THE PROPOSAL by the BBC to extend local radio stations will I'm sure be heartily welcomed by the churches, as an added bonus to their existing 'Religious Broadcasting Department'. Clergymen are probably among the very few people used to public speaking who can afford the time, and are already fully paid for that time, to provide items for such local stations. Having broadcast myself three times from the BBC London, I was auditioned in Brighton and accepted. I spent some days preparing to appear in an 'Any Questions' type of programme for which I was paid one guinea, and out of which I had to pay my travelling expenses of some 33 miles to and fro. I then suggested a discussion about RI in schools, spent many hours working on it, and did an item with a Rev Frank Topping (now a very prominent member of Brighton Radio). I was not told when the item was to be broadcast, and although I had asked for the tape to copy, before I got it, it had been destroyed. I was paid nothing. When I sent in a bill for my travelling expense I was told that the Rev Frank Topping had not been paid and had not complained, and something was said about 'good causes'. I replied that Radio Brighton was not priority one on my list of 'good causes', that I already spend many hours a week on unpaid voluntary work, and anyway, Frank Topping was

not losing time or money by 'helping out', while, as a free-lance journalist I was. Anyway, any clergyman would jump at the chance of being able to find yet another pulpit or microphone at his disposal. Radio Brighton were 'not amused'. I was clearly hopelessly anti-clerical. In fact I was on this occasion merely anti-exploitation! Of course this new development of local radio will be a 'god-send' to the clergy who will be able to fill their leisure hours (if not their pockets) with still more anti-Humanist propaganda against which we shall continue to be speechless. I was further irritated by the fact that having arrived on time (hoping to have at least a word with my 'opponent' before the programme began) Frank Topping arrived late. After it was all over, the young teacher (who considers himself an agnostic) took it for granted that I had an hour to spare for further chat. I stayed, but that was another day gone. If some of us *are* anti-clerical it need only be because the clergy have too much time to waste, too many privileges, and vested interests in not thinking about the faith they have so many opportunities to thrust on the public at large, at the expense of tax, licence and ratepayers. KIT MOUAT.

Race

I THINK the most odious part of the racial issue—as evidenced in recent issues of the *FREETHINKER*—is the kind of colour-bar (because it is colour and not necessarily race) that is causing the fascist element to gather round Powell. The kind of colour-bar I mean is that expressed by some of our "Liberals"! Of course, it is put over in the name of humanity. Re-reading some back numbers of the *FREETHINKER*, which I had hurriedly glanced over and laid aside for more leisured perusal, I came across your issue of October 4. The first letter by Claud Watson was an illiterate attack on Communism. The next one was surprising to me—a long letter from F. H. Snow replying to H. Rich on Powell's offer to pay for repatriation of coloured immigrants. F. H. Snow affects to believe that this suggestion by Powell, so far from being anti-Black, therefore racist, therefore fascist is really dictated by Powell's kind heart! F. H. Snow appears to be the only one who doesn't know that Powell dislikes "niggers". Yet it is not just a matter of race. The Irish in Britain who were not born here, like the present writer are not, noticeably, being attacked as immigrants by the Powellites. Just recently Powell, himself, was forced to include the Irish immigrants in his racist propaganda. Of course, the Irish, luckier than the Blacks, have very powerful friends in the world. This makes it all the more cowardly and contemptible, the singling out of the comparatively powerless dark-skinned people. Snow's whitewashing of Powell is not going to cover up the anti-black reaction of a man who is competing for the Mosley role!

CHARLES DORAN.

Aid to Underdeveloped Countries

MR MEULEN is ignorant and naive:—

1. Native Africans were mining ores—gold, iron, copper, etc.—long before the Europeans arrived. See *The African Past*, edited by Davidson, and Chapter Two of *The Race War* by Ronald Segal.

2. How can ores be used to build up home industry if it is shipped out of the country to build US motor cars? Capitalists have been in Africa since the nineteenth century and before. Why is there so little home industry? The answer is simple—because the riches of the underdeveloped world are robbed for the benefit of Western capitalism.

3. The analogy between the private business borrower and the Third World is quite absurd. Poor countries have no freedom of movement to play the business game. India, for instance, is now borrowing simply to pay off the interest on previous loans.

4. Most political turmoil in underdeveloped countries is simply one military clique replacing another, neither of which is a threat to Western business interests. The cases of nationalisation without compensation can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The US government deploys troops and/or CIA agents in over one hundred countries simply to remove the risks of appropriation to which Mr Meulen refers. Vast profits accrue from poor countries simply because labour is cheap, i.e. viciously exploited with high unemployment.

5. Western aid without strings is non-existent. I challenge Mr Meulen to produce some figures. Why has he not already done so? And even if "gifts" were given to help bourgeois cliques to maintain their privilege, how would this benefit the mass of the people? I don't see Britain or the US giving gifts to a place like Cuba which genuinely has the interest of the people at heart! Or would Mr Meulen prefer Batista to Castro?

Mr Meulen's letter is a thinly disguised apologia for white supremacy and the moral righteousness of business activity. Both are myths—Africa has a fine cultural history which colonialists and neo-colonialists have struggled to erase, and business activity is concerned with profits rather than people. G. L. SIMONS.

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