

# Freethinker

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## WHAT NEXT FOR THE ABOLITIONISTS

THE ABOLITION of capital punishment provided the sixties with a fitting epitaph. It was a progressive decade and this final stroke could be held up as proving that the reforms we have seen were not freak occurrences, but that society and public opinion are following a distinct trend away from irrational prejudice and towards an open-minded humanity.

It must not be forgotten however, that public opinion is against the abolition of capital punishment, and in all probability against most of the reforms which have taken place recently. When campaigning for reform therefore, progressives find themselves weighing twin evils—the evil of the matter to be reformed and the evil of bastardising the principles of democracy. When choosing which evil is the lesser it must be remembered that the general public has rarely been known to agitate *against* a particular reform, even before the law is passed. After a reforming law has been passed there has never been grand scale public agitation for its repeal. It must further be remembered that opinion polls obtain views from many people who are apathetic and would not have an opinion at all were it not asked of them. Also bearing in mind that the public often tacitly confesses to having been wrong by enthusing over the new law within a few years of its inception, one can conclude that a progressive is doing society a better service by campaigning for what he believes than by adhering rigidly to the principles of democracy.

By so doing he not only helps to implement the reform in question, but in effect he also pushes society further towards true democracy. For the principles of democracy can never be implemented fully until the population as a whole ceases to be apathetic. Were reformers to wait until they had public opinion behind them *before* pushing legislation through parliament this would be a much less developed, less humane, and indeed less democratic country. By continually agitating, even *against* public 'opinion'. if it can be called such, the reforming element in society awakens people from their apathy. And it will not be until there is no apathy left that we will have a truly participatory democracy.

At present progressives must work not merely for reforms as such, but for reforms which work and are seen to work. The remote possibility of capital punishment being brought back can be killed stone dead if the murder figures, and crime in general, decline. Abolitionists should now therefore devote their energies to improving the penal system so that it falls in line with the principle, established by the abolition of the death penalty for murder, that imprisonment is not intended as punishment but as a corrective measure. The small percentage of murderers whose crimes are premeditated are more likely to be deterred if they have no knowledge of the probable length of their sentence were they to be caught. This has already been recognised by the Home Office and murderers are unable to gamble on getting away with fifteen years, since it could well be a lifetime. The principle has already been estab-

lished that the perpetrators of premeditated murder are liable to spend considerably longer in gaol than those who kill members of their family. The abolitionist's attention should be turned to developing this principle so that it works better and on a larger scale. In the seventies we must make the government, the public and the penal authorities realise that a man must be judged not by what he does, but by why he does it.

## BROADCASTING IN THE 70s

THOUGH IN MOST SPHERES the humanist movement made much progress in the sixties, humanists have been hard put to it to make inroads on the BBC's policy of religious broadcasting. In 1962 the Pilkington Report recommended that "a fair share of time be allotted to the non-religious bodies". In eight years nothing has been done to implement this, despite much letter-writing and a certain amount of confrontation between Lord Hill and eminent humanists. The attitude of the BBC is summed up in the following paragraph from a recent press statement from David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society:

"It is impossible for outsiders to detect whether the Government or the BBC is chiefly responsible for the unparalleled muddle and rumourmongering which have surrounded broadcasting in the past few months. The Corporation is supposed to be entirely independent, yet Mr Stonehouse protects it as if it were a normal branch of the Civil Service. Anyone who has ever had communications with its Secretariat, however, will know it is run by men who are neither civil nor servants. Of increasing irritation is the BBC's—and the Minister's—traditional description of it as 'public service broadcasting'. Recent intrigues have nothing to do with the public or with service."

Tribe concludes: "I hope the public will rally round the Campaign for Better Broadcasting in what is truly its hours of need".

## NAME CHANGE

AS MENTIONED BEFORE in these columns, the Agnostics Adoption Society has recently changed its name and is now the Independent Adoption Society. The new name is clearly an improvement. A benevolent organisation in a particular social field, such as adoption, cannot afford to

(Continued overleaf)

# Freethinker

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be mistakenly considered narrow in its moral outlook. The major object of any adoption society should be adoption rather than the promotion of any particular ideology or philosophical outlook. Many of the other adoption organisations fall down on this in that they place an undue importance on the furtherance of their particular brand of religion, and too little importance on the well-being of the children and adults involved in the adoption process. The Agnostics Adoption Society was set up in 1964 to provide an adoption service "completely independent of all narrow, religious, racial or sectarian considerations". Although the term 'agnostic' implies this, many members of the public would infer that a person or organisation, which empha-

sises their agnosticism, is militantly anti-religious. Such an inference is valid in the case of a campaigning body like the National Secular Society but it is not valid for an organisation whose primary purpose is to provide the best form of adoption service possible.

The Independent Adoption Society puts babies and prospective parents first, and moral considerations second as is revealed in a letter circulated to its members prior to the Special General Meeting at which the name-change was proposed and ratified: "The Agnostics Adoption Society was founded primarily to meet the needs of would-be adopters who had no religious affiliations and who on that account were automatically excluded by the traditional adoption societies, no matter how well suited they might be to fulfil the obligations of adoptive parents. But we do not confine ourselves to agnostic adopters and we help to place babies with certain non-agnostic adopters belonging to minority religious groups for whom there are no appropriate adoption agencies. In this way we have helped Jewish, Hindu, Moslem and other couples. We also place babies with couples of mixed religions and with divorced couples who otherwise experience great difficulty in becoming adoptive parents. It is therefore not so much that we stress the importance of agnosticism but that we do not regard the holding of particular religious beliefs as an essential condition for the acceptance of adoptive parents."

## 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.

Humanist 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.

## 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

Belfast Humanist Group: Greenan's Lodge Hotel, Lisburn Road, Belfast: Friday, January 23, 7.30 p.m.: Annual Dinner—Tickets 30s each must be obtained in advance from Basil Cooper, 46 Cadogan Park, Belfast BT9 6HH.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton: Sunday, January 4, 5.30 p.m.: "The Origin of Life", Professor Sang, Ph.D., F.R.S.E., Research Professor of Genetics at Sussex University.

Cardiff Humanist Group: Glamorgan County Council Staff Club, Westgate Street, Cardiff: Wednesday, January 7, 7.45 p.m.: "A Critical Look at the City Centre Development Plan", Graham King (Planning Officer with Glamorgan County Council).

Chelmsford Humanist Group: Public Library, Chelmsford: Monday, January 5, 7.30 p.m.: A Speaker from the National Council for Civil Liberties.

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, January 8, 8 p.m.: "Hinduism", Speaker from the Luton Bharatiya Association.

Worthing Humanist Group: Morelands Hotel (opposite the pier): Sunday, January 4: New Year's Party.

The review of Brigid Brophy's new book, *In Transit* (December 27) was written by Tony Halliday. We apologise for the omission of his name.

## HUMANIST FORUM

A public debate on

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

between

DAVID TRIBE

President of NSS

Rev. K. N. SENIOR

The City of London School

on

Sunday, 4th January, 1970, at 3 p.m.

in

The Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1

Admission Free — All Welcome

# SUBJECTIVISM IN MORALS

G. L. SIMONS

NOT LONG AGO (FREETHINKER, November 8), Mr John L. Broom criticised moral subjectivism, and raised a number of points that are worth considering. Mr Broom was quite right to cite me as a subjectivist: despite his arguments I still am and I would like to consider his points one by one. The arguments in Mr Broom's article are numbered 1 to 6, and to avoid tedious repetition I will assume that the reader can refer to the original article.

1. That subjectivism is contrary to 'common sense' is irrelevant. If philosophy were simply a matter of counting heads it would be an easy matter. In fact the mass view of many things has been, and is, confused. Clearly Mr Broom would concede this much, but concludes this point with the remark that "the onus of proof" lies with the subjectivist. I do not accept this and I will give my reasons after considering the remaining five points.

2. It does not follow that "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". In the first place Mr Broom forgets that what we consider we have a right to do is in itself a moral position. In the second place "matters of taste" in individuals are only to be attacked on ethical grounds when these affect the lives of other people. If a preference for one type of food meant that certain people were made to suffer then this preference should be attacked. This is not the same as saying that the person should be blamed for having the preference, but it does mean that by reason (which is only important insofar as it impinges on emotion) or exhortation (which is a way of getting at emotion directly) we should try to remove the preference.

3. Mr Broom mistakes the significance of the 'argument from evil' against God's existence. The force of the argument is not grounded in an objectivist view of morality, but on the self-contradictory nature of Christian philosophy. The Christian claims that God wants people to be happy; so do I. My wishes and the imaginary god's are identical. Wishing people to be happy means that I would make them so if I could. God, we are told, could but doesn't. This is self-contradictory—and the logical paradox does not rest on whether evil exists in the world objectively or only in the eye of the beholder.

4. Even within a subjectivist moral philosophy a person can change his moral views. This can happen in a number of ways. In the first place he may discover that he is a receptacle for emotional states that lead to logically incompatible moral positions—in such an event he will designate one (or more) of the moral states as a 'prejudice' and try to rid himself of it. An example may make this clear. Consider apartheid. A person may initially support it in good faith because he believes in equal rights and considers that since negroes are inferior in various ways (which they are not) they must be guided to maturity within a policy of separate development. His view on negro inferiority is a prejudice since it cannot be sustained in logic; when he comes to realise this he will try to make his emotional states consistent by expelling it. A second similar example, with a different logical nature, is where a man believes in racial equality but does not want half-caste children. It is highly likely that this too is silly prejudice, but it is at least a logical possibility that he has an *aesthetic* revulsion to half-caste children much in the way that some men prefer blondes. Clearly the preference could be altered in various ways. When it is the opinion is changed. Whether the moral views that derive from such emotional states can be construed as objective also is irrelevant.

5. Something "being wrong" and "my disapproving of it" are synonymous if, in fact, one is a subjectivist. They are only not synonymous to Mr Broom because he is not a subjectivist. The subjectivist can also entertain the notion of something being wrong to one person but not to another. I readily concede that President Nixon does not believe that his policies on Vietnam are wrong, and I would reiterate that to me such policies are wrong: I have discovered no philosophical arguments which convince me that these policies are wrong irrespective of my reaction to them and the reactions of other people. Clearly, as in aesthetics, I am the judge *for me*.

6. The bit about G. E. Moore is part repetition of point 5. I always thought that *Principia Ethica* could do with a good dose of anthropology. Moore may have been happy that his judgement about what was good satisfied him, but what did he do about completely different moral responses in different times and different cultures? How can everyone recognise the good as a "simple quality" if in fact so many people say it is something different? Who is right? Who is to say?

To me the facts are these: unless an emotional feeling is behind a moral judgement then to say that something is *right* is merely to describe what one has been told by authority, what the mass view happens to be, what the Bible says, etc. One's own morality is what one *feels emotionally* to be right and wrong. Our emotional states are the result of biological and social evolution, and I believe that in principle these states are explicable in terms of body chemistry. Moral views (on every conceivable topic) have varied enormously throughout history and from one culture to another. In some societies men have felt moral qualms at not eating their dead, or at allowing a slightly deformed child to live. If man has entertained every conceivable moral view, how can we affirm our own moral beliefs as scientific facts? They would have to be so affirmed to gain objectivity.

I maintain that man's cultural history shows wide moral diversity and *that this is the basic truth*. If any one moral standard is to be taken out of this mixture and termed 'objective' then it is up to the bold person who tries this to give his reasons. Moore's point was nothing more than the old idea of religious conscience: Moore took away the God bit, tarted up the argument in philosophic language, and then said "we all know what's good—why argue about it?" I know of Moore's reputation in ethical philosophy, but it seemed to me that the best thing he did was to destroy all the old pseudo-objective philosophies on ethics. Remember, Mr Broom, there was a clear sense in which Moore opposed all the *objective* ways of defining the good: it seems to me he was really a clandestine subjectivist.

The quote from Professor Paton ("It is just as certain that deliberate cruelty is wrong as that two and two make four") begs every relevant question. To be "certain" of something is not to "know" it. *Conviction and knowledge are not the same thing*. Knowledge derives from the senses aided by scientific method and philosophic caution; moral commitment derives from one's feelings about people in society. I *know* two and two are four; I *feel* that cruelty is wrong. If the thought of cruelty did not affect my emotions I would not have a moral position on it.

If Mr Broom believes in an objective theory of ethics perhaps he would tell us about it. Until he does I will remain sceptical. Many philosophers have tried to do this, without success, and I suspect—with due respect—that Mr Broom's efforts will be no more fruitful.

# THE MORAL QUOTIENT

E. ROB

'MORAL BADNESS . . . is entirely different from any other badness; and moral goodness is different from other things also good in themselves. To be a poet, or to enjoy poetry, is a fine thing, but it is not at all the same sort of fine thing as being a good man; and the root difference here turns on the special freedom we have to be good or bad in the moral sense.' So said Professor H. D. Lewis in a talk on 'Legal and Moral Responsibility' published in *The Listener* on October 26, 1961. But is there really so much difference between these categories? Can we bring out goodness that isn't in us any more than we can bring out poetry or a facility for higher mathematics if they are not already there? A man with poetic gifts can choose whether or not to exercise and develop them; and so can a man with moral gifts. But nobody can accomplish much without having the requisite gifts. Somerset Maugham has said that we don't write as we would but as we can. The same applies to the way we live our lives. We don't live as we would but as we can.

Earlier in his talk Professor Lewis said: 'We are sorry when people are stupid or inept, but we do not . . . blame them provided they try their best. Few of us understand higher mathematics, but we do not feel guilty on that account'. Morally, the same reasoning applies. A person of below-average intelligence simply does not see the finer distinctions between right and wrong. He sees money on the floor of the bus. 'Some drunken fool has dropped this' he thinks, putting it into his pocket. He may well be right. But it doesn't occur to him that when the bus is crowded, it is impossible to pick up any dropped coins at the time so the money might well be the conductor's. And the possibility should suggest that the money be handed to him. In any case, the conductor is in charge of the bus and if there were any enquiries, they would be directed to him. Anyone with an IQ of 90 can, if he wishes, learn off by heart his multiplication tables and his ABC and acquire various other literary and manual skills. But he cannot, by an act of will, write a great novel or take a first class honours degree in philosophy. Similarly, the moral standard that can be achieved by sheer will-power is very simple and elementary unless one's imaginative and intellectual endowments are considerable. To say 'Be ye therefore perfect' is like telling a mental defective to write a play of the quality of Shakespeare's. As if he could.

Just as we have an intelligence quotient which sets a ceiling to our achievements so we have a moral quotient in which intelligence, imagination, childhood upbringing, character, personality, health, happiness and state of fatigue all play their part. We are not responsible for our inherited attributes, we are not responsible for what was done to us by parents and teachers in our early years; we are not wholly responsible for the choices we made while learning to stand on our own feet during adolescence. Basically, we have to accept ourselves as we are now; we have to come to terms with our own past. But this past, the selves that our parents handed over to us as well as the choices we have since made ourselves, largely determines what is possible—and what it is not possible—for us to do now and in the future—and this applies to the moral sphere no less than to other issues.

Mature adults seldom, if ever, deliberately do what they believe to be wrong. But in ordinary business and social life we act spontaneously much of the time; afterwards we may have time for thought and frequently decide that we

ought to have done differently from what we did. All we are guilty of is, however, an error of judgment. In practice, it is just as distressing to feel oneself a fool as a knave. We need sound judgment and the ability to foresee accurately the consequences of our actions. But these may be factors outside our control. Either something is within our power or it isn't. If it is, there is no reason why we shouldn't do it; if it isn't, there is no reason why we should experience guilt feelings anymore than there is because we have no facility in higher mathematics.

It is largely by our spontaneous behaviour that we are judged and liked or disliked by other people. But by definition our spontaneous behaviour is that part of our actions over which we have least control. What we do or say on the spur of the moment is no doubt conditioned by the whole of our past lives. But can we do anything to improve the quality of our spontaneous actions? We can try to analyse what went wrong and try to see what we ought to have done and what might be done in a similar situation in the future. Dr Eustace Chesser has said that people vary enormously in their capacity to learn from experiences. It depends in part upon our willingness to conduct postmortems. But apart from that, in something in which we have little aptitude we learn slowly and forget quickly. We may be able to influence our future spontaneous behaviour or we may not. The burden of our past selves may be too great. But the rules that apply to learning in general, apply just as much to our general conduct.

When spontaneous behaviour is better than planned behaviour, it should be easier to improve what is premeditated than when it is the other way round. For instance, if a man agrees to take part in a robbery, presumably he takes a decision on this matter beforehand. But if, when a policeman falls through a glass roof and is badly injured, the man, instead of making his own getaway, spontaneously goes to the officer's help, removes the piece of glass from his face and succours him until other help arrives, then his spontaneous actions are better than his premeditated ones. One would imagine it would not be too difficult to bring his planned behaviour more in line with his instinctive actions though a bad environment might hinder this.

Theologians seem to me to overrate our power to choose. Bishop Stephen Bayne speaking in the *Lift up your hearts* series on March 27, 1963, "We become what we choose". How nice if we could. We can, of course, make some choices. We can choose our jobs within the possibilities open to us; whether to accept an offer of marriage or not; whether to take a holiday and where to go; how many chocolate biscuits and sweets to eat, if any; how many cigarettes to smoke, if any; what drink to take, if any. Most of these choices are trivial; those relating to work, marriage, friendship may be important. But even so choices constitute no more of our make-up than the visible top tenth of an iceberg. How far can they affect the submerged nine-tenths of our being? We may sometimes be able to choose what we do but we can't necessarily choose the quality of what we do.

'If . . . I most want to do one thing, but think it my duty to do something else, then . . . I have a choice not determined by character or heredity or environment or anything else,' said Professor Lewis. How burdensome life would become if we were constantly to do things purely from a sense of duty. This would be an excellent way of

engendering a nervous breakdown, it seems to me. Apart from this, if the chooser does what he conceives to be his duty, this will be because that is the course that will give him the most satisfaction. He would rather do something distasteful than experience guilt feelings because he has failed to take the distasteful course. That is to say, his self-respect demands that he act in this way.

But if we act purely from a sense of duty, is this really satisfactory to other people? If we visit someone in hospital as though this were a cross we have to bear, would the sick patient really benefit from our presence? If, from a sense of duty or because our self-respect or vanity demands it, we do something that is a great effort to us, are its results likely to be good? We get overwrought, we embarrass others; because we are not fully in command of ourselves, we do or say the wrong thing. We may realise this the moment we've done it. But it's too late then. Nothing can undo what has once been done. We may have done irreparable harm to someone ill-equipped to bear it, handicapped perhaps or on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Whether good or harm is done or neither the one nor the other, of course usually depends on the other person as well as on ourselves. Is it desirable that the path of virtue should be strewn with victims? It seems to me that what we attempt, must always bear some relation to what we can do pleurably both to ourselves and other people.

The psychologist Jung said of his father: 'He did a great deal of good—far too much—and as a result was usually irritable. Both parents made great efforts to live devout lives, with the result that there were angry scenes between them only too frequently. These difficulties, understandably enough, later shattered my father's faith'. This quotation from *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* serves to illustrate my point.

The results of our actions *do* matter in the formation of a good society. Not only the motives. Hell, after all, is

paved with good intentions. One suspects that well-meaning but stupid people do as much harm in the world as the bad and the mad.

Professor Lewis said that 'moral worth will not turn on the soundness of our judgement, in [obeying our own conscience] or other matters, but on our integrity and firmness'. It seems to me that he undervalues soundness of judgment which is surely important in obtaining good results. If judgment is poor, then moral worth or simple goodness will avail little. And judgment is very variable depending much on health, happiness, state of fatigue, as well as on insight, knowledge and experience. No one can tell us moment by moment what to say or do and what not to say or do—we've just got to use our own common sense.

The prayer book says: 'We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done'. Only too true. But it *is* relevant to consider whether the things left undone could have been done sufficiently well to have been worth doing. And whether we saw beforehand that we ought not to do the things we did do. It is, after all, a good deal easier to be wise after the event than before it.

Among those who write books, the writers of the greatest literature will always be those who are most gifted naturally in this direction. Similarly, I submit that those who achieve the highest standards of absolute goodness in quality of life and the promotion of human happiness and well-being will always be those who have the greatest natural aptitude for this sort of thing. That is to say, wisdom is as much needed to bring about good moral results as genius to bring about good artistic results. 'You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear however much the theologians may preach otherwise. We do as we do because we are as we are.

## WHERE VIOLENCE IS INEVITABLE

THACKERAY WATTS

FROM THE UNITED STATES during the last two months has come much news of the all-but-declared war between the police and the militant black organisation, The Black Panther Party. At the beginning of December two Panthers, Fred Hampton, the Chairman of the Illinois Panthers, and Mark Clark, another leading Panther, were killed in a police raid on a private apartment. Of this incident *Time* (December 12) says: "Pictures indicated that Hampton had been shot in bed; the Panthers claimed that he was asleep, the police that he was firing from the bed. Renault Robinson, president of the Afro-American Patrolmen's League (black policemen), said that, based on evidence at the scene of the shoot-out, his organisation did not believe the official police version of the incident. 'We found no evidence that anyone had fired from inside the apartment', he said. 'The fact that the door wasn't broken down indicated that someone let them in. If a two-way gun battle had been progress, there's no way possible that policemen wouldn't have been shot.'" It is further significant that of the fourteen policemen used in the raid not one was black.

Protests have come from all directions including the enormous Auto Workers Union. The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples, a non-militant moderate body described by *Sunday Times* correspondent, Philip Jacobson, as "certainly no ally of the fiery Panthers", has condemned the shooting of the two men as "a modern-

day lynching" and expressed the fear that the national pattern of action against the militants could spread to embrace the whole black community: "Today the Panthers are the target: tomorrow it may be us". Pressure on the US government has been so great that an inquiry is to be conducted by the Department of Justice.

There can be little doubt that Hampton was, as is suggested by many individuals and organisations, murdered by the police. Even allowing for doubt on this, a single but spectacular incident, there can be no doubt whatever that the white establishment is pursuing a policy intended to stamp out the Panthers once and for all. The day before the Chicago killings, David Hilliard, the Panthers' 'chief of staff' was arrested in San Francisco for making a speech in which he threatened President Nixon's life—a speech described by Philip Jacobson as "little different from the declarations of many white radicals". A few weeks prior to this, Bobby Seale, the National Chairman and co-founder of the Panthers, was sentenced in a Chicago court to four years' imprisonment for contempt of court! Seale's 'contempt' can be justified if one realises that he was denied a court adjournment, which he requested because his attorney was ill, and understandably he refused to accept the attorney provided by the court to defend him. Four years is an unprecedented sentence for such an offence, and furthermore a sentence for contempt of court is imposed by the

judge at the trial where the 'contempt' is committed. So Seale serves four years without trial—a case for Amnesty International one would think.

These examples are only the cream off some very sour milk. Of the attempt to suppress the Panthers Jacobson says (*Sunday Times*, December 14): "The two dead Panthers in Chicago . . . brings the total of party members killed by police to 28 this year alone. With the exception of the fugitive Eldridge Cleaver, every high-ranking Panther is now either dead or behind bars bringing charges from their followers that 'the US government and its State agencies are out to commit systematic genocide'".

Many readers may think my championing of the Panthers and condemnation of the white power-structure over-hasty. The "fugitive Eldridge Cleaver" is probably the most eloquent of all America's black power advocates. A volume of his essays and speeches entitled simply, *Eldridge Cleaver*,<sup>1</sup> has recently been published in Britain and explains a lot. It is edited by Robert Scheer, a radical white journalist who writes a lengthy introduction to the book in which he sketches the background to Cleaver's agitation for black equality.

Cleaver's first book, *Soul on Ice*, was written when he was in prison serving nine years for rape. It was acclaimed throughout the English-speaking world. The *Sunday Times* called it "an outstanding contribution to revolutionary literature", the *New Statesman* "brilliantly intelligent and uncomfortably original" and *The Times* "beautifully written".

Scheer says Cleaver's second book is "not a sequel to *Soul on Ice*, which was written during the leisure of Cleaver's forced confinement. In this book one finds the art of the journalist, and in that sense it is a first book. Comparisons with *Soul on Ice* will inevitably be made by reviewers, but Cleaver was not in a position to work on assembling this book, as he was with the other, and he bears no responsibility for the particular selections, which are almost entirely from *Ramparts* and were drawn together while he was a fugitive unavailable for consultation".

*Ramparts*, the radical magazine, was to a great extent responsible for getting Cleaver out of gaol. They gave him a job and he was released on parole. In this book Cleaver tells how life in gaol awakened him to the waste he had made of his life, and he resolved to use his life to improve the society which has within it a class of people who, like him, are destined from birth to spend most of their lives in gaols. A large proportion of this "criminal" element is made up of black people.

Cleaver left gaol. *Soul on Ice* made him famous. He worked for *Ramparts* and joined The Black Panther Party, quickly becoming their Minister of Information. Two years later he had caused so much havoc in the white Californian ruling circles, headed by Ronald Reagan—not with violence, but with his pen and his mouth—that his parole was revoked for the flimsiest of reasons. Cleaver fled the country.

The book contains factual accounts of Cleaver's and the Panthers' struggles with a sickeningly oppressive white police force, the pawns of the iniquitous Reagan, who can at best be described as an amateur fascist. It also contains polemical essays on the objectives of the Black Panthers and the black radical movement as a whole. Throughout it is written in a most powerful prose. Consider the following account of Cleaver's first encounter with the

Panthers which took place at a meeting of a less militant Black organisation:

"From the tension showing on the faces of the people before me, I thought the cops were invading the meeting, but there was a deep female gleam leaping out of one of the women's eyes that no cop who ever lived could elicit. I recognised that gleam out of the recesses of my soul, even though I had never seen it before in my life: the total admiration of a black woman for a black man. I spun round in my seat and saw the most beautiful sight I had ever seen: four black men wearing black berets, powder blue shirts, black leather jackets, black trousers, shiny black shoes—and each with a gun! In front was Huey P. Newton (now in gaol), with a riot pump shotgun in his right hand, barrel pointed down to the floor. Beside him was Bobby Scale (now in gaol), the handle of of .45 caliber automatic showing from its holster on his right hip, just below the hem of his jacket. A few steps behind Scale was Bobby Hutton (killed by police), the barrel of his shotgun at his feet. Next to him was Sherwin Forte, an M1 carbine with a banana clip cradled in his arms."

When describing the nauseating tactics of the police Cleaver becomes at once angry and a master of narrative. The following is from an account of an occasion when Cleaver and Bobby Hutton were besieged in a cellar:

"The tear gas was not as hard to endure as I had imagined it to be. My lungs were on fire, nose and eyes burning, but after a while I couldn't feel anything. Once Little Bobby told me he was about to pass out. He did, but he came to before long, and the two of us lay there counting the minutes and ducking the bullets that were too numerous to count. One of the shots found my leg and my foot with an impact so painful and heavy that I was sure I no longer had two legs. But it didn't seem to matter because I was also sure that it was a matter of seconds before one of the bullets found a more vital spot. In my mind, I was actually saying goodbye to the world and I was sure that Little Bobby was doing the same thing. Lying there pinned down like that, there was nothing else to do. If there was I couldn't think of it. I said goodbye to my wife, and an image of her dancing for me, as I had watched her do so many times before, floated past my mind's eye, and I reached out to touch her, to kiss her goodbye with my fingers . . ."

"Then they snatched Little Bobby away from me and shoved him forward, telling him to run to the car. It was a sickening sight. Little Bobby, coughing and choking on the night air that was burning his lungs as my own were burning from the tear gas, stumbled forward as best he could, and after he had travelled about ten yards the pigs (police) cut loose on him with their guns, and then they turned to me . . . And a face I will never forget, the face of the captain with the murder blue eyes, loomed up."

"'Where are you wounded?' he asked me."

"I pointed out my wound to him. The Pig of Pigs looked down at my wound, raised his foot and stomped on the wound."

Little Bobby was seventeen years old.

The volume is concluded with nearly fifty pages taken up with an interview Cleaver gave to *Playboy* magazine. If the reader is not convinced of the validity of Cleaver and his colleagues by Cleaver's own essays and speeches, the questions the reader would like to ask of Cleaver are put by the interviewer. Cleaver succeeds in demonstrating the need for what the newspapers describe as black militancy, and in totally justifying the existence of the Black Panthers. This is one reason why it is imperative that the book should be widely read and talked about. Another is that it will open many eyes to the horrors of white America and California in particular. Thirdly, it can help to mobilise badly needed opinion in support of the Black Panthers, who, as has been shown, are now suffering an injustice comparable to that of the Czechs. Newspaper reports and radical magazines can do a lot, but this book should be used to convince any wavering liberal that the Panthers deserve his support.

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Cape, 35s.

# Book Reviews

MERLE TOLFREE

*Religious Education in a Secular Setting*: J. W. D. Smith (SCM Press).

THIS LITTLE book is better written and produced than the majority of Christian pamphlets we have had to consider. Moreover its author, who is a former Principal Lecturer in Religious Education at Jordanhill College of Education, is a well-read person, as his numerous quotations, from many sources show. He concedes several important points to the critics of compulsory religion in schools. For instance, on the subject of those parents (who are fast becoming a legend in themselves) who answered the Newcastle questionnaire in approval of the present arrangements, he questions whether, considering their own lack of belief or practice of religion, their opinion shows any more than "ignorant superstition and superstitious fear" and therefore whether such opinion should be allowed to influence policy. "Their views do not provide justification for evangelistic aims and authoritative methods". What these views show is really nothing more than a natural human concern that the children should be given some sort of moral guidance in a difficult world in which they, the parents, often find themselves at a loss.

As for the children themselves, he quotes Harold Loukes:

"If we look back at the story thus far, we are left with a dismal picture of failure. We try for ten years to teach the 'facts' of the Bible, and we fail. We encourage our pupils to read it for themselves and they refuse. We try to convey, through the biblical narratives, the development of the idea of God, and we fail. We gather our pupils together for a total of 2,000 daily acts of worship, and we leave the vast majority indifferent, hostile, or bitterly resentful. Within the year they will have cut themselves off entirely from Bible, Christian imagery and Christian practice, and will take nothing with them except muddled memories of life in a child-sized church."

The writer agrees that religious language doesn't make sense, even for the youngest.

"Above the clear blue sky  
In heaven's bright abode"—

to children accustomed to moon flights, can only confuse. Religious language has no universal currency today. In an environment of purely secular interests, it has become largely an embarrassment. Even God cannot be said to exist in the sense that sticks and stones exist. Therefore he concludes that a full programme of religious education is no longer possible or even desirable. One might think that the next step advocated would be the removal of compulsory religion from the curriculum. Not so. The rest of the book is concerned with making religious teaching more palatable, until we finish up with something like a new RE syllabus, the aim of which is to deepen our pupils' understanding of the Cross and the empty tomb.

The reasoning which takes us there involves a number of sleight of hand tricks and a good many jumps in the dark. For instance, God, whose death has been announced in the first section, is mysteriously alive again throughout the rest of the book—without explanation. The historicity of Jesus is never put in doubt at any stage, and we have to get over our annoying tendency to want to understand the literal meaning of the Bible.

But the gist of the argument is this. All life has a dimension of mystery. Certainly the word mystery is an emotive term. It is used by some agnostics to cover a certain nostalgia for religion. Nevertheless even people who have rejected all religious dogma (Benson, Wittgenstein, Russell) are conscious, it seems, that the dimension of mystery is central to human life. The fact of death itself awakens man to a recognition of the mystery. This is with us even from our earliest years. Authentic living, according to Heidegger, means acceptance of the mystery, including the mystery of death, and in this context, the responsibility for action. We are not surprised to find that there is a parallel between terms as used by Heidegger and those used by Saint Paul, particularly the concept of "fallenness". The Christian now takes the 'leap of faith'. The humanist shies off and plumps for moral education.

The writer assures us of the therapeutic value of religion, particularly in the case of disturbed adolescents. (Some people consider that religion itself can be a cause of such disturbance.) Jung reckoned to see yearning for religion in his patients' dreams, even though the patients themselves strenuously denied it. And the crux of the problem lies it would seem, in the term 'religious education', which introduces a false dichotomy—for all education

in the definition of this writer is religious. This does not mean traditional religious teaching all the way. In a wholly secular environment this would be useless. But it does mean that the religious dimension of life must be felt and should inspire all education. And so we are taken through the Bible to see how it can be made palatable for the young.

It seems to me that the fact that certain eminent humanists have seen the mystery of life does not in any way justify the teaching of particular religious doctrine. In fact one might say that in giving glib answers it is the religious devotees who destroy the mystery and poetry of life. There is a difference between the religious attitude to the mystery and the rationalist one. Where the believer would worship the mystery, the rationalist tends to try to understand, as far as possible, and where it is no longer possible, to leave the question alone. But to erect certain symbols which are supposed to give a clue and then to more or less command worship in the name of those symbols seems to me to be taking altogether unjustifiable liberties.

As for these symbols themselves—the cross and the grave—are they really the sort of things we want children to spend their lives contemplating—sin, suffering, death and an unproved resurrection? It is because of these ideas that a good many people have thought that religion is not a healthy influence for the young. Mr Smith does not seem to advocate that religion should not be compulsory. He does not face the illiberality of forcing worship on to the whole school population, and while he will admit some useful humanist ideas into his scheme, one wonders if enough research has been done into the possible harmful effects of some of the teaching he advocates. And what is the meaning of the phrase he uses—"Is Being gracious?" in the light of recent disclosures about the conduct of the war in Vietnam on the part of that great Christian country, America? Perhaps being would be more gracious without the war and the fanatical ideas which lead to it.

MICHAEL CREGAN

*The Coming War Between Russia and China*, Harrison E. Salisbury. (Pan Special, 5s).

IN THIS BOOK, Mr Salisbury of *The New York Times*—awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1955 for his reporting from the Soviet Union—attempts a short but comprehensive survey of the most important factor in the politics of the Communist world and of Asia; the Sino-Soviet dispute. The result could be roughly divided into four sections; the causes of the dispute, its effects on the actions of the antagonists, a forecast of what a war between them would be like, and the question whether war can be averted.

It is a mistake, Mr Salisbury thinks, to think that a Communist state can be considered as if it sprang, ready-made, into being at the date of its successful revolution. History is not so easily shaken off. The border fighting, for example, far from being a mysterious aberration, is a direct continuation of a dispute which goes back to 1650 when the first Russian expedition under Khabarov reached the Amur, and eighteen years of conflict ensued. (An amusing note: the first diplomatic communication from the Chinese to Moscow remained untranslated for 56 years; no-one in Moscow could read Chinese!) Three hundred years later the dispute continues, and "Its roots, in many ways, go deeper than those of any Great Power rivalry in the modern era".

The influence of the past is also seen in the Russian attitude to the Chinese *qua* Chinese. In the thirteenth century the hordes of Ghengis Khan swept westwards across Russia and "sat for centuries on the backs of the Russians". Memories of this rule did not disappear with its end, and "Russian terror and Russian hatred of peoples of yellow hue and slant eyes are too deep to be hidden." Yevtushenko, writing in response to 1969 border fighting, needed to give no explanations for his lines:

*You can see in the murky twilight  
The new Mongol warriors with bombs in their quivers.*

On the Chinese side, according to Mr Salisbury, the complaints are more tangible; to them Russia is "the last of the European exploiting countries, the one great European power which has not relinquished its special power in China, which still holds Chinese territory. "In 1949, for example, it set up joint stock companies to exploit China's resources, and retained Port Arthur and Dairen. To a China concerned not only with the construction of a new social order, but with the restoration of a sorely sapped national pride, this was a direct insult.

Add to this the Mao-Stalin friction (Russia's ambassador to Chiang-Kai-Shek was only transferred to Mao the day after the October 1st proclamation); competition for leadership in Asia; vocal Chinese support for national minorities within Russia; and

—probably most serious of all—the mounting pressure of Chinese population upon natural resources, pressure which will render the 1.5 million square kilometers disputed by Peking increasingly desirable; and the picture is far more alarming than the one of comparatively minor border skirmishing exacerbated by mysterious ideological incantations.

If war does come, what sort of war would it be? Mr Salisbury conjectures that Russia would strive for a quick *blitzkrieg* engagement, a “quick strike at the key industrial and port areas of Manchuria, the Peking region, the principle centres of Inner Mongolia, and North China”. This the Chinese would meet with a widespread “people’s war”, fought, in Lin Piao’s phrase, “at 200 metres”. With China’s enormous numerical strength, the result would resemble a  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million square mile Vietnam, with Chinese units conducting guerilla war against the Russian forces—all this beneath a steady rain of radio-active fall-out. All this if Mr Salisbury’s observation “The Sino-Soviet war, if it comes, promises to be the world’s first nuclear war” is correct. Indeed a happy picture.

And one which naturally makes Mr Salisbury’s question, “Is the War Inevitable?” the most urgent of the book. His answer is guarded but not entirely pessimistic.

“The quick answer is: No.

But it must immediately be qualified. If events are permitted to continue on the present pattern war *will* become inevitable. In measurable odds the chances of war between Russia and China have risen year by year in the past decade.”

What, then, could radically affect the dangerous trend towards military conflict between the two Communist giants? And is there anything that the Western Powers can do to avert it? Mr Salisbury thinks there is; firstly the United States, by a deliberate drive towards better relations with China, could come to occupy a position from which it could exercise a moderating influence upon both sides. Such an amelioration of relations, he thinks, although difficult, is not impossible. “To some the possibility of real change in relationship with China seems an insuperable barrier. But, in fact, a creative approach has not been foreclosed.”

Secondly, the economic pressures which could contribute to increased militancy on the Chinese side could be lessened. “This overhanging danger (*of starvation in China*) can be removed unilaterally by the United States or by the United States leadership in the creation of a world food pool on which food deficit nations like China could draw, not as a matter of grant or benevolence or charity but as a *matter of right*.”

None of which leaves me feeling too optimistic. The picture of the US as peacemaker in an internal Communist dispute is to me not over convincing, no matter how much I would like to be proved wrong. As for a food pool, this has long been a necessity, even without any consideration of China; yet little has been done. It does seem that any initiative to radically change the course of events must come from one or other of the protagonists themselves. Unfortunately, in the light of the present belligerent mood of both parties this is a remote possibility.

Perhaps there are some in the West who view the prospect of Sino-Soviet war with a degree of political enthusiasm. Mr Salisbury is not one of them: “the problem of Sino-Soviet war is too complex and dangerous to be dismissed by saying ‘A plague on both their houses’.” Apart from the risk of such a war embroiling all Asia, and eventually the rest of the world, the sheer size of the conflict—beside which Vietnam would seem a minor skirmish—is a horrifying prospect in simple human terms.

To conclude; in his 222 pages Mr Salisbury has set out an admirably clear and comprehensive survey of all aspects of his subject; one which would serve as an excellent introduction for anyone seeking to understand the problems of Sino-Soviet relations.

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## Theatre Review

LUCY DANSIE

### THE THEATRE OF THE DEAF.

THE DEAF are by nature masters of mime. Thus when The Theatre of the Deaf took the stage at the new Cockpit Theatre in mid-December, the audience saw miming at its best. For the first half of the programme, entitled “The Magic of the Theatre”, the ten members of the company appeared in colourful doublets and tights, with the whitened faces and clownish make-up of the old medieval mime troupes. They mimed fables, poems and humorous interpretations of everyday events. For the benefit of those of us who could not understand deaf and dumb language there were two speakers who recounted the stories where this was necessary. And for the miming of the children’s poems—astonishingly perceptive and beautiful poems written by eight to eleven-year-olds—a speaker declaimed the words while a deaf actor mimed to them. To mime to a fundamentally descriptive poem requires much imagination and particularly wide-ranging powers of facial expression. These two qualities abounded amongst the players. Their sadness and their joy communicated itself to the audience to a degree seldom achieved on any stage.

The players further amused us with their versions of two people punting . . . and falling in, people enjoying a trip on an airliner . . . and having to parachute for their lives, and a personification of the rivalry between the United States and Russia.

The second half of the programme was taken up with a short play, *The Pearl*, based on a Steinbeck story. Appearing with conventional make-up this time, the players mimed a protracted fable about the ill fortune of a man who finds a record-sized pearl.

With a small stage and the minimum of scenery the director, Pat Keynsell, showed ingenuity in organising the evening so that the speakers fitted in with the mime as an integral part of the company. The simple set by Guy Chapman was both utilitarian and decorative. The atmosphere generated by the players was uplifting. Thus the evening provided an unusual and supremely enjoyable entertainment. It is much to be hoped that The Theatre of the Deaf will put on this show again. It is worthy of many more than the three performances it has had hitherto.

## LETTERS

### A Pious Atheist?

G. L. SIMONS (November 1) attacks the colonialism of “western capitalism”. He defends the Chinese invasion of Tibet (November 8) which made that country a colony. It appears that what is to be condemned when done by the West becomes laudatory when done by the East!

Mr Simons’ defence of the Chinese action is, ironically, along the same lines as that made by apologists for the imperialism of “western capitalism”: the overthrow of a native “despotism”, the “gift” of schools and hospitals. Gad, Sir, isn’t that what “we” did for India?

Now, I think that the regimes in such countries as Russia and China are more despotic than any produced by bourgeois governments. If I accept Mr Simons’ argument that the Chinese are quite right in invading Tibet in order to get rid of what he considers a despotism, then presumably I can equally justifiably argue in favour of Russia and China being invaded and colonised in order to get rid of their despots.

Many years ago Max Stirner remarked that “our atheists are pious people”. I have often been struck by the truth of this remark when reading the writings of many freethinkers, particularly those haunted by the spook of morality. However, even their piety pales before the kind of effect the religion of Marxist-Communism can have on a professed freethinker such as Mr Simons.

S. E. PARKER.

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