

# Freethinker

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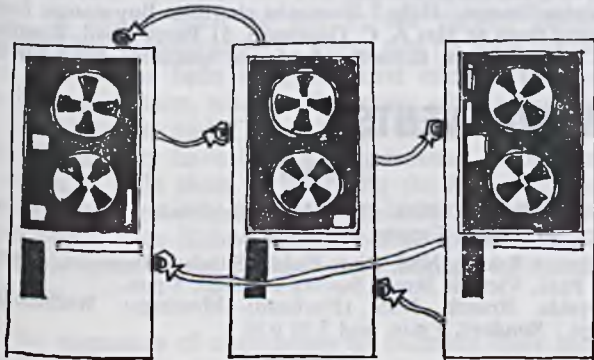
Sixpence Weekly

## THE RIGHT TO BE LEFT ALONE

THOUGH HE WAS FORCED to climb down in his attempt to legislate on the individual's right to privacy, Mr Brian Walden has rendered us all a valuable service by causing the government to set up a committee, headed by the Rt Hon Kenneth Younger, PC, to report on the position. During the debate on Mr Walden's Bill on January 23, it became apparent that virtually all MPs were agreed as to the necessity for safeguards of privacy. Mr Walden had intended that invasion should be a matter for action in the civil courts. Mr Callaghan, the Home Secretary, suggested that invasion of privacy might in some circumstances be regarded as a crime.

The increasing urgency of the need for legislation is illustrated by the following extract from a press release by David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society:

"Business and industry, government and local government, science and technology are all concerned with the most efficient means of planning. For this they demand as much data as can be collected. Very often the general public recognises the right of a particular agency to know certain personal facts and gives the information sought voluntarily, on the assumption that it is regarded as confidential and goes no further. There is, however, a growing tendency to pass this information on, either intentionally or inadvertently, to other agencies or even to private snoopers, sometimes posing as officials, that the subject is most unwilling to brief. With the growth of computerised records, there will be much more information about the individual conveniently recorded in a central pool for anyone resourceful enough to fish in.



Added to this is the growing hazard of information acquired irregularly. Besides old-fashioned methods, there is a whole battery of snooping devices, from the tiny microphone-transmitter (the 'bug') to the large parabolic microphone, from the telephoto lens to the infra-red or laser receiver-transmitter. This is especially used by the industrial spy, attracted by the reputation Britain has long enjoyed for inventiveness, though some of these devices are so cheap and expendable that the 'ordinary' private eye can use them.

Many people are also worried by the readiness of a section of the press to invade privacy in search of a story, especially in those cases which involve private citizens caught up in a personal tragedy that happens to be news."

Mr Walden himself stressed the need for legislation when he spoke the undeniable truth: "The right to be left alone might not be a very exciting freedom, but it is the one British citizens care most about". Set against this, the concept of computers bugging each other in a frenzy to obtain the intimate details of all our lives, as suggested by our cartoonists, is a horror not so far from reality as might be supposed. One earnestly hopes that Younger's committee will report in such a way, and soon enough, to spare us the agonies of such a technological nightmare.

## ABORTION LAW SABOTAGE

ON FEBRUARY 13, Mr Goldman Irvine, the Conservative MP for Rye, is to introduce a Private Member's Bill which will attempt to amend the Abortion Act. At the time of going to press, Mr Irvine's Bill has not been published. However, he has stated that his intention is to insert a clause into the Act which will require that one of the two doctors, who must at present authorise an abortion, be a consultant gynaecologist.

The latest *Digest of Health* statistics show that there were only 555 consultant gynaecologists in England and Wales in 1968. Many of these were only part-time, the full time equivalent being assessed as 436 consultants. Of these some are Roman Catholics or members of other religious groups with conscientious objections to abortion. Others will only perform abortions when the woman's life is in danger, and another category only when there is an extreme risk to the woman's health. It is impossible to estimate how many consultants would be left to work the full provisions of the Abortion Act, but it is clearly a severely inadequate number. Commenting on the results of a provision such as that proposed by Mr Irvine, the Abortion Law Reform Association has produced statistics which show that "more doctors are needed to undertake abortion, not less."

In a report published this month, entitled *The First 18 Months of the Abortion Act*, ALRA says: "fewer doctors mean longer queues. 'He recorded a verdict of misadventure on Mrs Cooper who was first seen in out-patients department on August 29 but had to wait until October 20 for her operation, because 45 other women were waiting for abortions'. (*Daily Telegraph*, November 12, 1969)".

"Fewer doctors also mean later and more dangerous abortions (37 per cent of abortions in the first eight months

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Editor: David Reynolds

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were performed after 13 weeks' pregnancy). Later abortions occupy hospital beds for much longer. Fewer legal abortions mean more pressure on women to turn to criminal abortionists. If this happens, emergency admissions may start to rise again."

Mr Irvine's attempt to sabotage the law would seem to have little point, since by bringing in his "consultant's clause" he will do nothing to alter the nature of the law as such. He will merely cause it to work less efficiently. It would therefore seem likely that Mr Irvine, in common with the Catholic group led by Mr St John Stevas, is motivated by some form of irrational prejudice, and his real concern is in fact to have the Abortion Act repealed. That a Private Member's Bill to that effect would have no chance of success is only too evident, and so Irvine is reduced to this attempt at sabotage. Presumably he and his comrades hope that, were his amendment to get through, the resulting decline in the success which the Abortion Act has enjoyed hitherto, would cause more MPs to consider its repeal a viable proposition and to reconsider their ethics.

Such a hope would seem to be a singularly empty one in the present circumstances. But one can never be certain how a different parliament might react. That the anti-abortion law group is prepared to throw parliamentary principles, and indeed democratic ones, to the wind has already been amply demonstrated by the famous and despicable St John Stevas filibuster. It is thus doubly imperative that Irvine's amendment should fail by the largest margin of votes possible.

## SUNDAY ENTERTAINMENTS

MR JOHN PARKER, the Labour MP for Dagenham, has introduced his Sunday Entertainments Bill into parliament for the third time. In two previous parliamentary sessions the bill has made good progress. It failed in the last session after 60 hours had been spent on it by a standing committee. Mr Douglas Houghton, the Chairman of the liaison committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party, has urged Mr Peart, the Leader of the House, and Mr Mellish, the Government Chief Whip, to make strong recommendations to the cabinet that time should be found for the Bill to complete its course. Mr Houghton pointed out that on two occasions the bill has been passed at second reading.

Mr Parker aims to do away with the anachronistic laws which arbitrarily restrict various activities, in particular sport and theatre, on Sunday afternoons. In the FREETHINKER of December 7, 1968, Mr Parker wrote:

*"In a democracy it is right and reasonable that all adults should be able to hold what views they like, to practice any religion they so desire provided that they do not interfere with another citizen's rights to do likewise. Ever since the 17th century full freedom in the religious field has not existed in this country, for devout Sabbatarians have suc-*

*ceeded in using the law of the land to force their particular views as to how Sunday should be spent, upon the very large number of citizens, who do not agree with those religious views. To compel non-believers in the Sabbatarian way of life to conform to such tenets is a form of Religious Persecution which should be rigorously opposed by all fair-minded citizens. It would even be wrong for a majority to seek to impose their views in this field on a disbelieving minority. It is even more intolerable when a Sabbatarian minority try to enforce their views on a disbelieving majority."*

It is thus much to be hoped that the government will see its way clear to providing enough time and support to enable a bill, which has already been considerably frustrated by parliamentary procedure, to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

## NEWS FROM THE NSS

NOTTINGHAM AND NOTTS Humanist Group is the latest organisation to affiliate to the National Secular Society. The Nottingham Humanists meet regularly, and the current programme is a very good example of how such a group can utilise the services of people from the university and other organisations in the locality. The honorary

*(Continued on back page)*

## 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.

## 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, February 1, 5.30 p.m.: "The Brighton Archways Venture", Leo Jago.

Cardiff Humanist Group: Glamorgan County Council Staff Club, Westgate Street, Cardiff: Wednesday February 4, 7.45 p.m.: "Homelessness", A speaker from Shelter.

Durham University Atheist Society: Dunelm House Ballroom, New Elvet, Durham: Wednesday, February 4, 8.15 p.m.: Forum—"Moral Education", James Hemming, Edwin Cox, and Professor G. Neil Jenkins. All welcome.

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, February 1, 6.30 p.m.: "New Ethical Problems", Dr Graham Sullivan, MB, BS, LRCP.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, February 1, 11 a.m.: "The Human Zoo", Dr John Lewis. Admission free. Tuesday, February 3, 7 p.m.: Discussion (Theme for the month—"Moral Education")—"The Campaign for Moral Education", H. J. Blackham. Admission 2s (including refreshments). Members free.

# THE IMPACT OF HUMANISM

DENIS COBELL

IF THE DECLINE in church attendance is an indication of loss of religious inclination then it would seem that humanism is certainly making an impact. The church still tries to catch the attention of the masses by itself adopting an increasingly secularised approach to worship. A recent issue of *The Bridge*, Southwark Diocesan Review, contained an article describing Holy Communion at an Anglican church in New York, entitled 'It's pop at the spiritual funhouse': "at one point the vicar baptised a baby girl. He laughed when he used the formula about her 'manfully fighting under Christ's banner'. 'A mighty big job, honey', he cracked—and the congregation clapped hands". I don't think one need be a Christian to enjoy the joke, and realise all the mumbo-jumbo talked in church!

On another page of this august publication there is a photograph of the Bishops of Southwark and Woolwich watching three newly ordained clergy bouncing on a trampoline at a conference held in Butlin's Bognor Regis holiday camp. Such frivolities may have a part to play—they may indeed be one way of keeping rheumatism from the knees of praying parsons forced to kneel in cold and dank places—but in an effort to halt the congregation from leaving faster than it already is, such pranks are useless. Secularisation of the church, pop groups singing at the foot of the altar, can only speed the final disappearance of traditional religion; if people yearn for a bit of mysticism they will find it in one of the new sects, such as scientology, but if they prefer passive amusements, they can find them more plentifully and professionally presented by turning the knob of a television set.

The outward forms of religious observance, which had flourished until quite recently, have dwindled markedly. Infant baptism has fallen by 30 per cent in London during the last ten years, and confirmation figures for the Southwark diocese have halved. The last word on such a pitiful state of affairs must be left to the former Bishop of Woolwich: "exhilarating"! There can be little doubt that the church has been its own worst enemy; to translate Dr John Robinson, who hardly knows whether he believes in God or not, and Canon Hugh Montefiore who hints that Christ may have been a homosexual, to positions as shops, is little short of removing the foundation stones in an ancient cathedral. The secularisation process may have begun with Bishop Barnes before the war, but it has certainly gone ahead by leaps and bounds in the decade just past.

The eagerness of churchmen to examine their theology books and as a result demolish much traditional Christian thinking has strengthened the freethinker's case enormously. It is a shame it has taken so long for the clerics to recognise what freethinkers have said for so long: there is no logic in many of the church's past pronouncements. The people have left the steeplehouses in a mood of combined apathy and boredom—it is strange that the church leaders should see fit to alter their beliefs at such a time, in an attempt to follow public opinion rather than formulate it!

But how much of the praise can freethinkers accept in this situation? How far has humanism made an impact?

I think few freethinkers would wish to be congratulated for the current decline in religious belief when this is unaccompanied by a renaissance of humanist values. Pursuit

of the hereafter always has had strong materialistic overtones, and its replacement by the inhuman materialism of the affluent society should come as little surprise. Some people may suggest this is an example of the unchangeability of human nature. This is, of course, rubbish. Human nature does not exist outside its own environment, but until a little thought is applied, there can be no move towards the humanist ideal of the value of life for itself.

It is not sufficient to state a negative case against religion without putting forward the positive alternatives. This is not because religion is some sort of 'prop' to aid people who will fall if it is removed, but recognition of the harm and divisiveness it creates, and which will only be replaced by some other form of mythological authoritarianism if the purposes of humanist ideals are not broadcast. Humanism should encourage thought first, then proceed towards building a world where each man is permitted to fulfil himself.

Humanists must know that religion is only one weapon in the oppressor's armoury, and for this reason alone should be watchful of materialists' attempts to prevent men pursuing good for themselves and co-operating for the welfare of each other. However familiar such expressions of benevolence may appear, humanists and freethinkers must renounce the hypocrisy of the church in belatedly trying to latch on to some of their ideas. There cannot be a free and open society existing alongside an organisation which is top heavy with officials jostling for high places. Humanists may not have made much impact on the churches, but now these are on the way out they must not lose the opportunity to lay the foundation for what Dr Hemming called in his Conway Memorial Lecture, 'The Alternative Society'.

## SECULAR EDUCATION APPEAL

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## PSYCHIATRY IN MODERN SOCIETY

WILLIAM WELSH

NEUROSIS, the curse of a sick society, cannot adequately be treated by a Health Service general practitioner. The average practitioner doesn't have the time to treat neurotics in a surgery cum confessional. If patients are to be helped, exhaustive investigation is necessary and an accurate diagnosis must be arrived at. In most cases this is possible only by referring the patient to a psychiatrist. As a rule, this practice is observed by the vast majority of doctors.

Unless this is done, such patients may well be regarded as a nuisance, taking up time given over for the most part to the treatment of physical disease. Frequently, however, physical ailments may be symptomatic of stress and emotional conflict, as in some cases of peptic ulcer, raised blood pressure, cardio-vascular conditions and even certain forms of arthritis brought on by muscular tension.

If the neurosis is not severe, and in cases where the patient has been treated in a psychiatric ward and is resuming normal life, what Charles Rycroft calls "supportive psychotherapy" may be in order. What does this amount to? In his book, *Anxiety and Neurosis*, Rycroft, consultant at the Tavistock Clinic, describes this kind of therapy as extending the hand of friendship, giving a kind of moral support, with, perhaps, a modicum of advice. This approach is not time consuming and must not be underestimated. To start off with, the patient may well be virtually friendless, and such patients have been described as engaged in the pursuit of the "purchase of friendship".

One may well add that apart from any drug-prescribing which may be thought necessary, such patients should seek solace by confiding in relatives or others who may be disposed to listen. But these may not be available to the patient whose condition may have made him anti-social or whose complainings are such as to repel his immediate acquaintances. In any case, the usual admonitions of well-meaning friends that the patient should rise above himself or use his will power are quite useless. Nevertheless, the kind of psychotherapy which consists of the friendly chat is often undertaken by people in marriage guidance centres and by trained social workers in various welfare organisations.

It is because the treatment of neurosis depends to a large extent on subjective factors, on insight and imaginative sympathy, that the old fashioned bedside manner is still appropriate. In the field of medical practice, this kind of friendly relationship between doctor and patient often enables the latter to "keep going", not an unimportant consideration where family responsibilities are such that the breadwinner must at all costs try to fulfil his everyday tasks and avoid if at all possible, the financial worry attendant on lengthy absence from regular employment, a worry about money which may well underline the distress brought on by anxiety which has attached itself to some other matter. Indeed, sex and money are at the root of a host of neurotic disabilities.

Should the patient be referred to a consultant, he will, if he has some knowledge of modern psychology—and neurotic patients, internally orientated as they often are, frequently dabble in the study of psychoanalysis—readily note the consultant's personal predilections in his methods of psychotherapy, and in this context, we can for the moment leave aside ECT and drugs.

It is a misconception to assume that the neurotic subject is necessarily inadequate intellectually; indeed, he is often

possessed of considerable mental capacity and is suffering from a personality disorder which is quite independent of his cerebral endowment. Fortunately, this is increasingly recognised.

If the psychiatrist is a dyed-in-the-wool Freudian, and it is not suggested that there are many such, now that fresh discoveries have added to the tremendous contribution Freud made to an understanding of the psychic mechanisms the patient may well find that the most intimate details of his sex history are probed. If the patient is over-sexed, if he is at the same time very much inhibited, a mere exploration and consequent understanding by the patient of his state of mind, are not by themselves, as was thought at one time, sufficient to resolve the conflict and effect a partial or complete cure. He must come to grips with reality. And it is at this point that the consultant is in a dilemma, a dilemma which has given rise to the patient's conflict. But there's an important difference here. The consultant is grappling with the problem of resolving his patient's conflict, but at the same time, he may well be unwilling to take upon himself the responsibility of expressly advising his patient in a sphere where the patient's expression of his personality in his own immediate environment may bring on him the moral disapproval of others. Indeed, it comes down to this: a compromise must be sought between the demands of the patient's ego on the one hand, and the right of society on the other to demand courses of conduct most likely to promote the happiness and welfare of the group on the other.

In all this, the consultant may feel himself obliged to assume a quite neutral position. To begin with, there's the practical necessity of not becoming personally and emotionally involved with his patient. But if this worthy objective makes him distant and inaccessible as a human being, the effectiveness of the therapy may well suffer. While psychoanalysis may be regarded by the consultant as a science, he is, after all, treating a patient who may well crave human sympathy as well as an understanding of his difficulties.

The consultant, like his patient, is to a great extent the product of his heredity and his environment. Presumably, his own personal complexes have been partially if not wholly resolved before his undertaking to handle those of his patient, but he is nevertheless subject to certain trends in thinking which may reflect on his handling of a patient's difficulties. If puritanically inclined, he may well point out that sex fantasies, for instance, can give rise to guilt, and for that reason are to be avoided. Such an attitude in no way enables the patient to "live with his guilt" and serves to underline the guilt feelings by the very act of repression, and at the same time to increase the frequency of the sex fantasies. These fantasies are in themselves an outlet for the inhibited patient and may serve as a kind of therapy in themselves. Only when translated into practice can they in some cases be harmful. In the case of psychotics, the technique may be quite different, aimed as it is at the protection of society as a paramount consideration taking precedence over all else.

"Supportive psychotherapy" can effectively be applied to the chronic sufferer who has undergone treatment over the years, who accepts his personality disorder, and whose defence mechanisms against inner conflict may be so deeply entrenched that they are well nigh irreversible. This is the treatment of common sense, not of despair.

A full and complete psychoanalysis can stretch over many years, and is therefore virtually impossible under the existing National Health Service, while what is taken for a "brief" course of psychotherapy may involve the patient in some ten to forty sessions spread over a year. For these reasons, "supportive psychotherapy" is of necessity relevant to many patients as affording the best possible means of enabling the sufferer to resume normal life at the earliest moment possible. Indeed, economic factors may well determine the kind of psychotherapy practised, particularly as the incidence of neurosis increases in our society, and the burden on NHS psychiatrists increases correspondingly.

The advances made in psychiatry are popularly minimised since the theories it advances are applied to the treatment of the immature and the inadequate personality. What is apparent to every thoughtful person is the modern urge to explain, to dissect motive, to find a reason. It is in this context that freethinkers may be deluded into imagining that once we have found, or think we have found, a reason or reasons for the infinitive complexities of the psyche, all conflicts solve themselves. The probing for reasons must of course go on, but when explanations are forthcoming, that's not the end of the story. The organised personality assumes that he has at least a modified free choice in determining his fate, though he is intelligent enough to admit that a neutral, undefined, unemotional entity called reason can in itself solve his or the world's problems.

The urge to seek explanations is characteristic of the contemporary scene. In his provocative and stimulating novel, *Herzog*, Saul Bellow, one of the greatest and certainly one of the most intellectual of modern American novelists, draws attention to the modern obsession in this passage:

"A curious result of the increase of historical consciousness is that people think explanation is a necessity of survival. They have to explain their condition. And if the unexplained life is not worth living, the explained life is unbearable too. 'Synthesize or perish!' Is that the new law?"

## DEVOUT AND DANGEROUS

FAYE AINSCOW

HAVE you ever noticed how newspaper stories which tell about the nice, quiet boy next door who shocked his neighbours by committing brutal murders, often go on to describe him as a regular churchgoer?

There are many variations of this theme. A mother of five goes berserk one day and hacks her family to pieces. Her appalled friends can't believe that she could do this. Not only, they stress, did she appear to be a wonderful wife and mother, but she was a Sunday school teacher as well!

The common aim in these types of stories is to hit the reader with the horrifying fact that no matter what virtues our fellow citizens seem to possess, there is no guarantee that they won't turn out to be vicious killers. To underscore this point all kinds of complimentary adjectives are thrown in to show that the criminal was highly regarded in the community before his crime was discovered. In journalese the result looks more or less like this: "Who could have believed that this kindly, hardworking, deeply religious man would turn out to be a sex maniac?"

While kindly and hardworking are positive attributes it

Modern literature in its almost exclusive concern with the dissection of human motivation, runs parallel with psychoanalytic thinking. The trouble is that when writers are "realistic", they are prone to think that they must also be nasty. Of course the unpleasant and the foul are inherent in human nature, but a persistent emphasis on these elements does not contribute to a true and complete picture of the human scene. Bellow puts it in these words:

"And truth is truth only as it brings down more disgrace and dreariness upon human beings, so that if it shows anything except evil it is illusion, and not truth."

Nearly fifty years ago, D. H. Lawrence in his first edition of *Women in Love*, now available in a Penguin paperback, put these words into the mouth of Birkin, a fictitious character, supposed to have been a self-portrait of Lawrence himself:

"There are myriads of human beings. . . . But they are apples of Sodom, as a matter of fact, Dead Sea Fruit, gall-apples. It isn't true that they have any significance—their insides are full of bitter, corrupt ash."

Strong words which serve as a warning against the disillusion which may, but does not necessarily follow a keen and penetrating insight into what H. G. Wells called "The Secret Places of the Heart" (1922), a lesser known Wells novel built up on a framework of psychoanalysis.

Freethinkers in particular should find psychiatry a fruitful study, appreciating that while its practice is applied to the less stable members of society, the theory is of a novel and revolutionary character. This modern branch of study can be profitably pursued in the confidence that the innermost and apparently inaccessible recesses of the human psyche can be effectively explored and at least partially understood, and that with a view to modifying human behaviour in a way that is beneficial not only to the individual, but also to society at large.

While even the most enlightened student of human nature would admit the limitations of probing and explanation, it is nevertheless true that in the pursuit of knowledge, analysis, particularly self-analysis, has an important part to play.

seems highly questionable whether deeply religious should be treated in the same way. The implication that a pious person is morally superior to an atheist or an agnostic is wholly invalid. One need only look to history for confirmation of this.

The gruesome tortures and executions of the Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch burnings are just drops in the blood bucket of the god-fearing fold. And it isn't just history which is full of religious gore. The 'kill a Commis for Christ' cult is right at the doorstep of the present.

One never reads of rationalists or secularists being portrayed as the freaks of the group they belong to if they commit heinous crimes. Why doesn't the printed page invite us to gape at the horror of it all as is done when the accused turns out to be religious? This omission perpetuates the myth that a much higher standard of moral behaviour should be expected of believers than of non-believers.

This attitude is unfair and unrealistic. There is no factual reason for newspapers to further this view.

## WHEN SHOULD WE DEBATE?

G. L. SIMONS

IT IS ONE of the myths propagated by bourgeois society that *every* topic is debatable. This position is manifested in the popular mind by such clichés as "There are two sides to every question". I suggest that this view is not only superficial but immoral in certain instances. I suggest that sometimes debate does nothing but prolong injustice and mask serious defects within society. First an obvious example that no-one (?) will argue with . . .

Suppose we see a child being viciously beaten in the street, what should our reaction be? Presumably we would intervene or urge the beater to desist. But would we be justified in so doing? Why should a child not be viciously beaten? Because it is made to suffer thereby! How do we know this? Because it screams and writhes about! Then how do we correlate such behaviour with inner subjective feelings? Because we know that within ourselves such a correlation would exist! But in fact we only know it in our own individual cases. From our own experience we tend to assign to other people the feelings we have—but can we be sure we are right in doing this? What in reality we are doing is arguing from a particular—you or me—to mankind in general (the child in question being part of mankind). But argument from particular to general is never usually regarded as reliable, and so the practice is to seek more examples to establish a general law. But by the very nature of our example no further instances can ever be detected: we can never be subjectively aware of anyone else's inner feelings.

There is of course nothing original in any of this. Readers of philosophy will recognise this difficulty as the 'Egocentric Predicament' and my remarks will not surprise them. But what I am trying to do is to bring out a general principle *which seems to me of the utmost importance*, i.e. it is in theory possible to debate *any* question for ever—there is always new evidence to be discovered, new angles from which to view the problem, new witnesses to call, etc. We can always query the authenticity of the evidence, the reliability of the witnesses—and we can embark upon an endless game of patience by pursuing the sort of sterile philosophical problem sketched above. We *can* debate every question for ever, but it is not desirable that we should.

If we find that our pensioners are dying of cold in the winter months because they cannot afford fuel, we do not initially embark upon a discussion as to whether they are *really* suffering or whether, if they are, that such experiences are *good* for them. What we do—or should do—is give them fuel or cash or both. There is a place for debate but it is not here . . .

The examples of the beaten child and the dying pensioner are obvious to everyone, and surely I am not stirring up much controversy here. But what I want to do is to highlight the general principle that can be derived from instances of this type—*that in certain cases (which we have not yet defined in general terms) debate before action is not merely misguided but in some sense immoral*. If this analysis is correct then there are two types of social topics—those (largely of matters of fact) where debate is appropriate, and those (largely questions of moral judgement) where debate is an insult to humanity. A careful application of this idea would cut the ground from under the sterile debate that is so eagerly praised in bourgeois society.

Social injustice is easy to define and easy to recognise—

a society, for instance, in which the rich can spend more on their dogs than the poor can spend on their children is an unjust society (and this is true whether the society happens to be the USSR or the UK). A society that allows some individuals to possess half a dozen large houses which are empty most of the time, and parents to bring up their children in rat-infested slums is an unjust society. If—as the bourgeois apologist insists—we debate endlessly particular remote principles of marginal productivity or the theory of value, if we discuss *ad nauseam* the merits of Marshall as against Keynes, if we talk for ever about social contract theory or Hobbes view of monarchy, we should not be surprised if society does not change its character very rapidly. Mostly such questions are sterile—and such debate is futile. It serves principally as a smoke-screen to delay effective social legislation.

If the above comments on what should be debated and what shouldn't are accepted then the question remains as to how we assign particular topics to each of the two categories. At either end of the scale the answers are easy: it is, for example, a good idea for two Nobel physicists to discuss their different interpretations of Einstein's general theory of relativity; at the other end of the scale it seems to me quite inappropriate that we should discuss whether coloured children should have the same rights as white children. But what about the 'grey area' between the two extremes. How can we be sure whether we should debate a topic or not? I believe that this problem is not as great as it seems, and that to define the principles that should govern our attitudes in this region is quite unnecessary.

What I suggest is that part of political wisdom consists in recognising that many topics that *are* debated in bourgeois society should not be, that to debate them at all is to betray our humanity—for as soon as a controversial topic is debated, both sides assume the respectability that is assumed to characterise every 'honest' opinion in bourgeois society. To debate racialism, i.e. to tolerate its proponents, to debate atrocity, to debate injustice—by doing such things we are not being civilised or progressive, we are not honouring the historic fighters for human rights and equality, we are debasing the currency of human intercourse, we are using our capacities in wretched fashion. If the man mercilessly beats the child we do not debate with someone who approves the action, if we find the old man dying of cold we do not debate with someone who believes in the mortification of the flesh, if we see clear injustice in our midst we do not debate with people who benefit from its preservation—in all these instances it is possible (at a philosophical level or otherwise) *to debate for ever*. But if our humanism is worth anything we must surely recognise that in some instances action is more important than debate.

That we diligently debate *ad nauseam* is one of the rules of bourgeois society. That is why—with most people, 'civilised' conformists—the value-system based on rules rather than important moral principles serves generally to cloud judgement and upset priorities. If Clive Jenkins says on radio "It's a bloody shame that ten per cent of all men earn less than fourteen pounds a week in Britain", then all manner of pious listeners will write in and complain about profane language and bad manners, and never notice the problems of a family man on twelve pounds a week. If

enthusiastic students break half-a-dozen windows in the American embassy to protest at the virtual destruction of an Asian nation, then the righteous public will complain about rowdy youth and demand that we stop student grants.

In each of these instances the sacred Debate-Rules were broken, and because *the rules are more important than the moral principles they are intended to protect*, the conformists are furious. The important things in society are that basic human needs are met, that children have enough food and clothing, adequate housing and medical attention, and education that permits the gentle and progressive unfolding of every person's unique character. *Debate* about social issues is no sacred cow: it must be judged in any context by the extent to which it makes more likely the realisation of the essential features of just society. Debate is not good because it is debate; it is good only if it is socially productive in a progressive way. A general acceptance of this position would give the exchange of ideas a dynamic that it rarely has outside a revolutionary situation.

It is because a correct analysis of the value of debate would greatly accelerate the rate of social change that the 'Establishment propaganda organs' must prevent such an analysis becoming widespread. Debate everything, say the status quo-ists. I say—take a moral stand on what is socially just and regard the basic just principles you arrive at as 'non-negotiable', and then start the *real* debate—how to force society to embody such principles, and embody them soon!

## Book Review

JEROME GREENE

*Dear Bertrand Russell*: Intr. and Ed. Barry Feinberg and Ronald Kasrils (Allen and Unwin, 35s).

SUB-TITLED 'a selection of his correspondence with the general public 1950-1968', this book pinpoints yet another facet of Bertrand Russell's remarkable attitude to his fellow men. His ardent desire to better the lot of humanity is well known, and his efforts in this direction receive the applause which is their due. One would not have imagined however, that a man whose time is continually occupied with the world's problems on a philosophical and political level, would have the time and inclination to treat individuals with the same degree of respect and care which he lavishes on the institutions and theories on which their well-being depends.

Between 1952 and 1968 Russell has exchanged 25,000 letters with the general public. This book contains some three hundred of these exchanges. Divided into five sections: 'Religion', 'Peace and Politics', 'Youth and Old Age', 'Philosophy', and 'Anekdotia', the book demonstrates Russell's wit, sense of humour, all-embracing knowledge and perhaps above all his ability to get to grips with the real point in long-winded missives, in which very often the sender appears to have written with his emotions rather than his brain. Time and again Russell gives a complete answer to a complicated series of questions, in a few brief sentences, but generally manages to remain polite, good humoured and amusing.

The section on 'Religion' will give Freethinkers a particular delight. Russell discusses agnosticism as opposed to atheism, the historicity of Jesus, Islam, Buddhism and the problems of humanists. He advises parents on religious education and baptism. A Mr Simons (whom I discovered is none other than our own G.L.) asks Russell whether there aren't some circumstances in which religious faith should be fostered: "The sincere belief of the old lady that she will meet again her dead husband sustains her in her later years. . . . The child who fears the dark is consoled by the reassurance that Jesus is watching over her. . . . The ill person who apparently survives and grows well through persistent religious faith is another example. . . ." Russell replies, succinct as ever: ". . . 1. If it is thought desirable that certain beliefs should be supported without regard to evidence as to their truth, one is landed with censorship and all its evils. 2. The great majority of false beliefs have understandable social consequences—e.g., Catholics oppose birth control and Anglicans oppose the marriage of

divorced persons. 3. The attitude of seeking comfort through false beliefs is somewhat ignoble. 4. The question of children is more difficult than that of old people because one has to consider their future social activities. On the whole, I do not think it a good plan to comfort children by lies. I think sympathy without lies is better."

The 'Peace and Politics' section is concerned with unilateral nuclear disarmament, the Cuban crisis, Suez, the American colour problem, apartheid in South Africa, world government, demonstrations, and many other topics. 'Youth and Old Age' contains letters from Russell to teenagers and children, and also some to the aged. When he was 85 Russell wrote to a centenarian: "It is comforting and encouraging to learn that after celebrating your hundredth birthday you still have the energy to work for World Peace. As a comparative juvenile, I congratulate you". Russell's concern for his fellowmen is given particular emphasis by his letters to people who write to him with their problems. Of these there are many in this book, and Russell usually ends his replies by asking the writer to write again and tell him how they are getting on. A young man going up to Cambridge, but contemplating suicide due to unrequited love is told that his problem "is like a serious illness—very unpleasant while it lasts but usually not life-long", and is asked "to write to me a little later to tell me how your preparations for Cambridge are going with your tutor".

The 'Philosophy' section is fascinating in that many of the writers ask Russell basic questions such as ". . . what is your position in relation to the question of determinism v. free will?" and ". . . did you know Henri Poincare? What sort of man was he?" 'Anekdotia' is the most light-hearted section and contains Russell's answers to a wide range of unimportant questions such as what is Russell's favourite song; what does he think about when he can't sleep at night; what does he "think of marriage between older, mellow and brilliant men such as yourself, and young, cheerful girls with fairly sound teeth—like me?" The section also contains a number of enquiries from people wishing to know Russell's opinion of well-known writers such as T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, George Gissing, Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner.

It has been said that this book is an excellent bedside book. It is that but many other things as well. It displays Russell on a variety of topics. And on most topics Russell is worth reading wherever you happen to be.

## LETTERS

### Sex education

MR F. H. SNOW allies himself (December 27) with the extraordinary Dr Eickoff, whose views on sex education are currently the laughing-stock of the educational world. Sex education, she claims, is responsible for all kinds of delinquency, theft, drinking, illegitimacy, abortion, and writings on lavatory walls. Presumably we should feel grateful for all those thousands of years before sex education began, when such unfortunate things never happened.

In Bolton during 1968 there was a 90 per cent increase in reported cases of gonorrhoea in the 18-20 age-group. The Preston area, however, showed a decrease. What made the difference? Preston was saturated with information about VD; Bolton was offered the same services, but refused. Mr Snow is in favour of refusers.

The children he disapproves of ("young savages") are the product of a system which for 25 years has given instruction in a certain kind of morality to all school-children. As a remedy, he wants us to give them *more* "moral instruction".

Not only is this attitude blind to the facts, but it is antique in its concept of what morality is. Mr Snow, morality means being obedient, respectable, and polite to adults; and the young are taught to do good "for good's sake" and to be decent "for the sake of decency". Such chuntering hogwash is no longer acceptable to thinking adolescents.

It is clear that for Mr Snow "moral guidance" means making the young behave as he wants them to behave. As long as we continue to attempt to impose our own views on the young willy-nilly, be we Christians or secularists, we are going to produce rebellion and hostility in our pupils. But if we can accept the idea that they are entitled to think for themselves and to work out their own salvation, society may even yet be saved.

I want the young to have freedom to discuss rationally all moral problems without constraint or indoctrination. Mr Snow wants them to have instruction in Victorian etiquette. In the developments of a personal morality in each young individual, he would prefer to see them all indoctrinated through religious instruction. I am not surprised.

MAURICE HILL.

## Futility of Prayer

AFTER READING Nicholas Griffin's article "On what we pray for" (December 27) with a certain amount of interest and pleasure—in spite of its endless repetition of "prayers of petition" and "petitionary prayers", not to mention "X to do Y's" and suchlike—I nevertheless am of the opinion, that if Nicholas wanted to demonstrate the futility of prayer, it could have been done in far less space than a full page and eighteen lines! And with far less complicated arguments and references! I showed how meaningless prayers can be, when I addressed an audience of rabid Methodists, some months ago—in their chapel—by suggesting that it would be more interesting to know how many prayers have not been answered, than to be told how many can be proved to have been answered, to the full satisfaction of the devout supplicant! I also quoted that classic hymn/prayer "Eternal Father strong to save", in which the Omnipotent God is besought to keep a fatherly eye on all those at sea, and asked my tightlipped audience if they would care to estimate how many sailors had drowned since that hymn was first written and sung. Incidentally, I requested my Methodist-strangled audience to join me in the old Chartist hymn—which is in the Methodist Hymnal, strangely enough—"When wilt thou save the People, oh God of mercy—when?" with the added hope that they would think about what they were singing! The Pastor, who was present, looked sheepishly down his nose! Another point made at the same meeting, was a question I put concerning Church Unity, and the Weeks of Prayer which had gone on, countrywide, for at least six years, to my certain knowledge. How many prayers had gone up to the "Throne of Grace" since these Weeks of Prayer were started, and with what results? Incidentally again, a titter came forth from one section, and shocked, under-the-breath exclamations of "blasphemy" from another, when I asked whether God really needed a throne on which to rest his weary posterior!

And how many sincere prayers—including mine, and millions of other war-weary souls—went up to heaven, after the 1914-18 war, that war should be no more? And what answers have humanity had since? I don't think it needs much arguing about, does it, to see what nonsense are prayers and supplications to an omniscient God, who, we are told by parson and priest, knew and knows, from the beginning to the end of time, all that is to happen to each of us. How, then, can our prayers, alter this pre-knowledge in any way?

JOHN SHEPHERD.

## Spanish bull fights

I READ with interest the piece "Animals and the Catholic Church". It prompts me to quote from a letter sent by a Spaniard who is a strong opponent of bullfighting. He comments on the attitude of foreign opponents of the so-called Fiesta Nacional: "I think anti-taurinos are too militant: it plays into the hands of the taurinos and creates belligerency instead of interest and understanding. I do not despair of the efficacy of reason . . ."

On a visit to Spain I was interested in the views of Spaniards on bullfighting. Many have never seen a bullfight, others have seen one and do not want to see another, while a minority are strongly opposed to the show, and work openly against it.

It is regrettable that an appeal from humane Spaniards asking British tourists to keep away from bullfights has been virtually ignored by most British animal welfare organisations—even by anti-bullfight societies!

This appeal is the strongest argument against bullfighting: Spaniards appealing to the "animal-loving" British not to support a show notorious for appalling cruelty to animals.

The lack of British support for the only movement in Spain against bullfighting is surely a triumph for the organised pressure group of British bullring propagandists who are spreading the "gospel" quite openly in the country. The propaganda is aimed at the younger generation.

With the aid of PROs, organised letter-writers, and the backing of the Spanish tourist authorities, members of the British pressure group counteract any criticism that may have an adverse effect on Spain's multi-million pound industry.

The cult of the corrida outside Spain began with a book in English written by an American journalist. The fact that the book was based on information supplied by those in Spain whose job it is to keep the money-making show alive seems to have passed unnoticed.

I have even met British school-children being taken by their teachers to corridas—despite the fact that such public diversions are illegal in their own country.

It is time there was an investigation into the devious means used by the Spanish authorities and their British associates to attract British people to shows which, on account of their hideous cruelty, are outlawed here.

Mrs. M. W. WATKINS.

## Capitalist Exploitation

MR SIMONS is quite correct on Capitalist Exploitation. Communism, Cuba and Mr Simons' shopkeeper are beside the point.

Talk of compensation! How much compensation was paid when they stole the land from the people?

W. GERARD.

## Dictionary definition ?

JOHN BLYTHE (January 10) apparently wants FREETHINKER to 'commit us all' to a 'simple dictionary definition' of the term 'freethinker'. Personally, I hope that compilers of dictionaries are people who move with, and are moved by, the times. That is—people who refuse to submit the present to the past in matters of definition. But then, perhaps this is committing all readers to a definite standpoint on an honestly debatable question.

CHARLES BYASS.

## Obscenity of war

I MUST WRITE and express my admiration for G. L. Simons' article 'Crime upon Crime' (December 13). It should be made into a pamphlet and distributed as widely as possible. This in my opinion is what Humanism is all about, the caring of what happens to people, to show what a brutalising effect war has upon even so-called respectable people.

The system plus apathy produced Hitler. It is now once again producing the atrocities that we read about in Vietnam. Let us in Britain search our hearts and honestly say to ourselves that it could never happen here, and finally let us in the Freethinking and Humanist movement take a lead in demonstrating that we abhor all wars, and the obscenities that go with them.

L. LAZARUS.

## Catholic disappointment

AFTER READING in the FREETHINKER (Jan. 17) that the Vatican owns a firm which manufactures contraceptive pills, I suppose I should not have been surprised to see staring at me in the *Sutton Coldfield News* the headline "Catholic plans to end overcrowding in schools". I must admit I was!

However, any Catholics who snatched up the paper, eyes bulging in eager anticipation were due for a disappointment. For the "plans" just involved extra building to accommodate the rising numbers of Catholic children.

Freethinkers should note that they hope their plans will be aided by an 80 per cent grant from the department of mis-education and biased-science!

MICHAEL HUGHES.

(Continued from page 34)

secretary is Mr J. W. Challand (Rosedon, Lowdham Lane, Woodborough, Nottingham) who has been active in the movement for many years.

The Society has received a legacy of £740 from the estate of the late Mr Fred Sharp of Liverpool.

The NSS is organising a Profile on Broadcasting in the Seventies at Caxton Hall, London, on Thursday, March 5, 7.30 p.m. The speakers will be Stuart Hood, former Controller of BBC Television Programmes. Hugh Jenkins, MP, George Melly, the critic and author, and David Tribe, President of the NSS. Benn W. Levy, the playwright, will be in the chair.

The annual dinner is being held at the Paviour's Arms, Westminster, on Saturday, April 4th.

B.H.S.

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