

Freethinker

Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

VOLUME 90, No. 7

Saturday, February 14, 1970

Sixpence Weekly

BACKGROUND TO THE BACKLASH

It is a fact of life that where there is an attempt at progress, there is a reaction. Marx was by no means the first person to draw attention to this. Gotama Buddha made the point many centuries ago and initiated a religion whose adherents strive to tread "the middle way". Progress is always made in the end, though in social matters the process is often retarded if too forcible a public reaction is provoked.

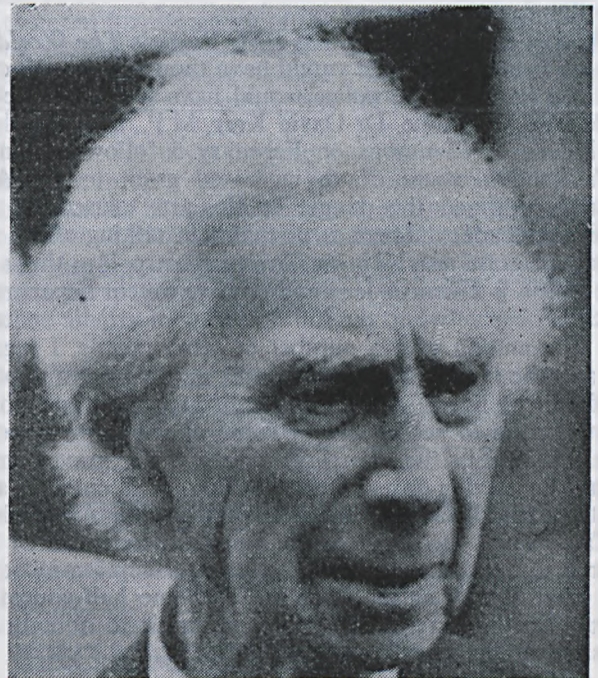
"Permissiveness" was the journalistic cliché of the sixties, and as yet its progress has been smiled at and approved by the general public. A few people support Mary Whitehouse and even fewer Sir Cyril Black. But as yet, the progress of permissiveness has not been fast enough to provoke a reaction from any sizeable proportion of the public. The average Englishman is quite happy to pursue nudes in *The News of the World*, whose arrival has been gently heralded by the bathing belles of the fifties followed by the bikini clad dollies of the sixties. It would seem therefore, that the prophets of "permissiveness" have done little to aggravate the man in the street.

Nevertheless, an official crusade has been launched against the trend towards freedom of expression by a group of public servants, namely the police. In recent weeks a number of small avant garde art galleries and bookshops (as opposed to the real dirty bookshop) have been raided by the police. John Lennon's exhibition of lithographs is prominent among these. The underground press has been harassed, and an inquisition of those who took part in the classified advertisements and resulting correspondence in *IT* is in progress. Tony Smythe, the General Secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties, was questioned by policemen at his home (as opposed to his office). Finally, we have had the raid on the Open Space Theatre, which took place on February 3. Of all the incidents thus far the latter demonstrates best that the police are not so much interested in the corruption of public morals, which is their legal excuse, but rather the avant garde art scene, which is spearheading the road to fuller individual freedom and a diminishing regard for establishment authority.

The raid on The Open Space was made during a showing of Andy Warhol's film *Flesh*. At least twenty policemen confronted an audience of seventy five people who had seen all but the last five minutes of the film. The film was seized and the names and addresses of those in the audience taken. Andy Warhol is an artist and film-maker of considerable international standing. Mr John Trevelyan, the secretary to the British Board of Film Censors, said that the film had not been considered wrong for the type of intellectual club audience which saw it. *The Times* film critic, John Russell Taylor, had reviewed the film some time earlier and written: "Contrary to what you might expect, the final effect is of a nice little film, full of bizarre touches of characterisation which add up to a curiously believable picture of a way of life. Technically it is one of the most accomplished American underground films we have seen. . ." The Open Space Theatre has been open for

17 months and receives an annual grant of £1,500 from the arts council and includes amongst its patrons Lord Birkett, Bernard Delfont, Harold Pinter, Peter Hall and Peter Brook.

THE EARL RUSSELL FRS OM
1872-1970



Inside this issue David Tribe
pays tribute to
Bertrand Russell

Scotland Yard have said they will be sending a report on the matter to the Department of Public Prosecutions. The issue which they will report on will doubtless be whether or not the Open Space was corrupting public morals by showing the film. About half a mile from Scotland Yard near the entrance to Victoria Station is a book-

continued overleaf

Freethinker

Published by G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.

Editor: David Reynolds

The views expressed by the contributors to FREETHINKER are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board.

shop, which sells amongst other items nudist magazines from America which contain completely unretouched photographs of nudist "at play". In recent months London has become riddled with such bookshops, which with their window displays in shopping streets are surely excellent prey for anyone interested in the morals of the public. It requires an involved intellectual wrangle even to establish that anyone has the right to preside over public morals. It is thus highly unjust that the public, having accepted that they are in need of a moral guardian, should find this guardian spending its time harrassing a minute proportion of the population which appreciates the acknowledged artistic entertainments provided by such establishments as the Open Space, rather than protecting young children from concepts as "evil" as leather fetishism and bondage. The situation suggests that the police are in dire need of some sort of supervision.

Michael Foot, M.P., said on BBC Radio's *The World at One* on Friday 4, that he would have thought with the current rise in crime the police would have something better to do with their time. Dr David Kerr, M.P., in a speech in the House of Commons on February 5 following Jennie Lee's announcement of an increased grant to the Arts Council, outlined the danger to the arts caused by the police's attitude: "There is no point in talking about the climate of grant aid, be it for films or theatre, if at the same time action is taken under another government department which is obstructive to the full flowering of artistic endeavour. In common with a number of other people, I regard this act (the raid on the Open Space) as the gravest departure from the liberal climate of recent years and one which seems to me to set in danger some of the more hopeful developments in the arts. I would have the gravest misgivings in having my morals, reading, and cinema, and theatre going dictated by the triumvirate of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland. I take the greatest exception to being told what I may or may not see by some half-educated, bigoted Scotland Yard which is answerable to nobody for decisions of this kind."

That the police are conducting a war on freedom of expression is thus painfully apparent. David Tribe the President of the National Secular Society, has put it: "The police raid on the Open Space Theatre and questioning of members of the audience is the latest in a new puritanical drive against the permissive society."

One may ask: Why are the police conducting this drive? John Calder, publisher and co-founder of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society, furnished the Freethinker with an answer: "Its a campaign by a small un-representative, but very moneyed, group of people, who have influence inside Scotland Yard and possibly inside the Department of Public Prosecutions, and I think its money thats influencing the campaign." Mr Calder also said that:

"The Defence of Literature and the Arts Society is very solidly behind the Open Space. We will do everything we can to stop a prosecution and everything we can to support them should a prosecution take place."

In view of Mr Calder's serious allegation one might further ask: What sort of people can influence Scotland Yard in this way? An opinion on this was given to The Freethinker by Jonathan Hammond, Drama editor of Calder and Boyars and the Director of the North End Troupe, an avant garde play company: "This backlash probably comes from the extreme right wing of the Conservative party. They are trying to turn the clock back to the well-ordered society of pre-war Britain. The extreme right wing is trying to grab back the initiative after years of a kind of watered-down liberalism."

Why should they try to turn the clock back? Mr Hammond replied: "They're projecting their own personal hang-ups and frustrations by seeking to stop other people enjoying themselves and expressing themselves fully."

Last word on the whole nujust and sordid business goes to Richard Neville, editor of *Oz*, broadcaster and author of *Play Power*, a book soon to be published by Jonathan Cape which puts forward the philosophy of the underground in a manner certain to give extreme right-wingers extreme "personal hang-ups and frustrations": "There is no police conspiracy. They raid *Flesh* and *Oz* because they want to enjoy them free of charge which is quite understandable

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

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday February 15, 6.30 p.m.: "The Ulster Question?" C. T. Pertwee.

London Young Humanists: Hotel Eden, 27 Harrington Gardens, London, SW7: Sunday February 15, 7 p.m.: "Autistic Children", Geoffrey Fox. Thursday, February 19, 8 p.m.: Marion Jones will hold a Coffee Evening at Flat 6, 69 Holland Park, London, W11 (nearest Tube—Holland Park).

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, February 15, 11 a.m.: "Humanism in a Changing World", Richard Clements, OBE. Admission free. Tuesday, February 17, 7 p.m. "Moral Development in Childhood and Adolescence", Dr James Hemming. Admission 2s (including refreshments), Members free.

BERTRAND RUSSELL

DAVID TRIBE

*That single elm-tree bright
Against the west—I miss it! is it gone?*

It is often said that someone or other is an institution. Rarely is it true. Yet Bertrand Russell was. For many who, like myself, never met him, he represented more than just another writer we had read or glimpsed from afar at a Trafalgar Square rally. Born in 1872, he came down to us like some great public building erected on the riches of empire and the buoyancy of nineteenth-century liberalism, surviving, scathed but erect, the blasts of two world wars, skilfully modernised to fit the needs of succeeding generations without spoiling the original architect's vision. He was, simply, a Great Victorian to whom the young and the young in heart have continued to respond for almost a century.

There is no need for me to outline his many academic honours and achievements in mathematics, philosophy, literature and political activism. These have featured already in press obituaries and in the splendid series G. L. Simons did for the FREETHINKER last year (May 24 to July 19). Anyone might well be proud to equal Russell's record in but one of the many fields in which he worked. His combination of excellencies must surely be unique, at any rate since the time of Leonardo da Vinci. Despite this there was in him, as in the truly great, a natural, unaffected modesty. And a natural dignity. As an hereditary earl he confounded alike the progressive slogan-mongers who would dismiss all the aristocracy as "parasitic and effete" (though many are), and the respectable establishment who thought it shocking that a peer should sit down on pavements, whatever view they took of the issue he was seeking to publicise. Without histrionically renouncing his title, he was rarely accorded it. It was superfluous. He laid no store by title and was not revered by the world's millions on their account. There are, after all, dozens of earls. There was only one Bertrand Russell.

His association with the National Secular Society goes back over many years. A lecture he gave to the South London branch in 1927 became the text of perhaps his most famous—or notorious—essay, *Why I am Not a Christian*. This was cited against him when his appointment to the City College of New York was rescinded, banned in South Africa, courageously reprinted by the South African Rationalist Association, and is still in constant demand.

In recent years Bertrand Russell has shown a lively and, for a man living in retirement in Merionethshire, active interest in the society's affairs. When Secular Education Month brought our new campaign for honest education to public attention in November 1964, Russell sent a message:

"The attempt to impose religious belief on children should be resisted. Religious doctrine is arbitrary and entirely the province of those who wish to maintain such views as they find adequate to their needs. It is entirely unacceptable, however, that doctrine should be foisted upon the young as a matter of duty in the course of their education. I welcome the campaign against compulsory chapel and religious coercion in our schools."

For our Centenary Year, 1966, there was another characteristically pungent yet balanced Russell message:

"It is good news that the National Secular Society is publishing a centenary brochure, and I am glad to take this oppor-

tunity of congratulating the Society on a hundred years of successful work for liberal causes. Ninety-eight years ago my father was defeated in a Parliamentary election because he advocated birth control. Throughout the disgracefully scurrilous campaign, his opponents alluded to him as Vice-Count Amberley. A Bishop accused him of infanticide, and his usual political friends fought shy of supporting him. Not only in the matter of birth control, but in all questions where sex plays a part, there has been during the last hundred years, and especially during the last fifty, a profound change in which the National Secular Society has taken a valiant part. The Blasphemy Laws, though still on the Statute Book, have become a dead letter. There still remains much to be done to secure a rational ethic, and we may look forward confidently to the continuation of the valuable work of the National Secular Society in this field. I wish all success to the Society."

Messages have continued to come from Russell for important events, the last being in August 1968 when we held a protest meeting against the papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, condemning family planning.

In the same year it became possible, by a change of the NSS constitution, to have him (and nine other eminent people) formally associated with us as one of our Distinguished Members' Panel. Last year we launched a Secular Education Appeal, and he became one of its leading sponsors. Only the necessity to confine his rare public appearances in recent years to political work which he regarded as essential for the safety of the world, prevented him from being on our platform when we were host to the World Union of Freethinkers Congress in 1966 or the guest of honour at one of our annual dinners.

Now he will never appear. But he will live on in our memories, in the reams that have been and will be written about him, in his sensitive, frank, witty volumes of autobiography. Above all, he is certain to survive in the works of scholarship and popularisation he has left so profusely behind. So I return to Matthew Arnold's *Thyrsis*, with which I began:

*Our Tree yet crowns the hill,
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hillside.*

CAXTON HALL, LONDON, S.W.1.
(St James's Park Underground)

Thursday, March 5th, 7.30 p.m.

Profile on

BROADCASTING IN THE SEVENTIES

STUART HOOD

Former Controller, Television Programmes, BBC

HUGH JENKINS, MP

GEORGE MELLY

Television Critic, *The Observer*

DAVID TRIBE

President, National Secular Society

BENN W. LEVY (*Chairman*)

Organised by the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

Telephone: 01-407 2717

FREE WILL AND CHOICE

G. L. SIMONS

MUCH OF the discussion of free will proceeds at a very superficial level, and I cannot help feeling that many people object to determinism without fully understanding the determinist case. Mr L. B. Halstead's review of *Freedom of Choice Affirmed* by Corliss Lamont (FREETHINKER, January 17) seems to me to be a case in point: a number of arguments are advanced here which are clearly invalid and which depend for their apparent plausibility upon a very superficial view of what the determinist is saying.

The central confusion, common to most opponents of determinism, is that between *free will* and *choice*. Many people think that if they have demonstrated the existence of choice they have thereby demonstrated the existence of free will. This is clearly absurd, simply because *choice* obviously exists whereas *free will* remains controversial. It is important therefore to look closely at *choice* to see exactly what it is, and why the determinist does not believe that it entails free will.

We all choose. When we are faced with a moral (or other) dilemma it is necessary to opt for one of two or more alternatives: if we did not select in such a fashion then life would be impossible. Clearly we have to *choose*, many times every day. But it does not follow from these regular choices that free will exists (or indeed that the term 'free will' can even be defined in a meaningful way). In the first place, how can the opponent of determinism know that he is 'free' to choose *either* of two possibilities? In fact he only chooses *one*—the very nature of choice means that by definition he can only choose *one* alternative. In what sense therefore was he 'free' to choose another? It is impossible to return to the original situation and, by way of demonstration, choose differently. Whenever similar circumstances occur again some of the factors are changed, and the total causal situation has different properties.

It may be said that the person "could have chosen differently had he wanted", but the very fact that he chose as he did indicates that he did not want to choose in any other way. His emotional state is one of the factors influencing the resulting choice. Clearly it is true that if *any* of the circumstances had been different there may have been a different choice, but so what! No determinist will argue that a choice will be such-and-such irrespective of the circumstances.

Mr Halstead remarks that perhaps "the strongest case against determinism is proved by the role that contingency has played in events", and the example of the deflection of a bullet from President-elect Roosevelt is cited. If this is the "strongest case" then the anti-determinist position is remarkably weak. For it is obviously true that any contingent example can be accommodated in a determinist view. What the opponent of determinism generally means by contingency is that the causal situation is incredibly complex and that it is quite impossible to predict many social (and other) events with complete confidence—but the determinist never argues that all events can *in practice* be predicted, only that *if* we had enough information they would be predictable, that they are predictable *in principle*.

Mr Halstead *assumes* in his example that the action of the woman in seizing the assassin's arm, that the position of the assassin in the crowd, that the resulting event, could not be predicted *in principle*. But this is clearly absurd. The situation is complex, and many causal lines meet at a point to define this unique historical event—but the idea

that the situation is in some strange way outside the realm of cause and effect I find completely mystifying. *A complex causal situation is still causal in nature.*

Later we are told that increased knowledge may enable a choice to be made. Certainly but *if we knew enough* about the circumstances of the individual we could predict *whether* he would acquire the knowledge, what effect the knowledge would have upon his outlook, and what choices would result in particular situations he found himself in. If we do not accept this interpretation of human behaviour then we are sacrificing the scientific view of man as a part of nature and subject to discoverable natural laws.

In several places Mr Halstead talks blandly about "freedom to choose" and a "free choice". It is easy to talk like this, but how can it ever be shown that the choice that is made is not predictable in principle if all the factors are known. In what sense does the *freedom* exist. The apologist immediately embarks upon a description as to how *choice*, and not *free will*, actually operates, i.e. the person collects the data, assesses it then selects in the absence of external constraint one of the alternatives facing him. But any such description is consistent with a causal explanation of human behaviour. Any aspect can be pressed to find a cause—why does the man collect his data? Why does he judge in the way he does? Why is his personality as it is? Is he decisive? Why? A *total* description of a person's mentality—whether the mentality is interpreted in materialist or non-materialist terms—would allow a prediction to be made as to choice in any conceivable circumstances. Clearly this is not a *practical* possibility, but the practical difficulties are quite irrelevant to the *philosophy* of determinism which seems to me to be watertight.

Does the opponent of determinism actually believe that man is not subject to natural law? Obviously man is in certain instances. If you drop a man from a cliff his body will describe a curve much as will any other similar-weight object. Why should the chemistry of man's brain be somehow immune to the laws that belong to the field of chemistry? Why should the laws that govern the behaviour of sub-atomic particles suddenly not apply inside man's skull? Clearly the brain is complex, responding variously according to external stimuli—but who really believes that these responses are *outside* the natural world? Man is a bunch of chemicals, the most complicated bunch we know but complexity in itself does not overthrow the idea of a cause-and-effect universe. In fact if we do not proceed on the assumption of such a universe then science is a non-starter. Or do the opponents of determinism somehow believe that scientists should not study man?

The task for the free-willists is to show that it is impossible *in principle* to explain why a man chooses as he does in any individual instance, and to show that the laws of nature do not apply when the circumstances get complicated. For if *in principle* we can *explain* a man's choices then determinism is true, simply because no explanation would be adequate unless it described causes and effects—and it is the nature of a cause (empirically viewed) that an effect must proceed from it.

I cannot for the life of me see how the opponents of determinism **can even** get started on their task. We can never say 'no cause exists', only 'we do not at present know what the cause is'—but philosophically these two statements are poles apart. *Choice* exists, but how could we ever show that *in identical circumstances* it could ever be other than what it is?

CAN ABORTION BE RATIONALLY JUSTIFIED

JOHN L. BROOM

I WAS VERY GLAD to see Lord Raglan's sensible remarks regarding abortion in his interview with David Reynolds (FREETHINKER, December 13), since it seems to me that humanists often exhibit much confusion of thought when they speak or write on this important ethical issue.

As Lord Raglan points out, the argument so often used by supporters of legalised abortion that a foetus is in no sense, except the most quixotic, a human being, and that therefore the killing of it is different in kind from the killing of an infant, is invalid. It is true that the study of social anthropology shows that almost all societies (including the Greek and Roman) have regarded, and do regard, feticide as a lesser crime than infanticide. Indeed, some societies (for example the Samoans and the Mitchell Islanders) do not, to this day, regard feticide as a crime at all. Even St Augustine of Hippo wrote, "The body was created before the soul. The embryo, before it is endued with a soul, is 'informatus', and its destruction is to be punished only with a fine". Augustine believed the embryo acquired a soul thirty days after conception, though now, of course, the Catholic Church teaches that the soul enters the body at the moment of conception. In spite of the anthropological evidence, however, I think it must be acknowledged that there is no recognisable difference between a foetus one second before it has emerged from the womb and one second after. If it is wrong to kill the latter (and surely very few humanists would seriously advocate the legalisation of infanticide), it is also wrong to kill the former. And this obviously applies all the way back down the line of development to conception, as there is no point at which (in spite of St Augustine) we can logically say "This thing has now become a human being".

It is no answer to this objection to claim that an infant can live independently of its mother whereas a foetus at the stage at which it is safe to perform an abortion, cannot. This is a purely arbitrary criterion, depending for its validity solely on the human method of reproduction. Moreover, as Lord Raglan says, a newly-born child can no more live

independently of its mother than can a foetus, unless it is fed and tended.

However, I disagree with Lord Raglan that it is a "totally irrational thing" to support abortion in certain circumstances. There is in my opinion one valid rational argument in favour of abortion, and this consists in the demonstration that the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" is not universally applicable. As Lord Raglan observes, this is not denied even by the Catholic Church, which teaches that the slaughter of one's fellowmen is permissible in a just war. It is true that the Church maintains that the aggressor in a just war has, by his aggression, forfeited his right to live and therefore, unlike the helpless foetus, he deserves to be killed. This judgment might have had some force in the days when individual adult armies were pitted against each other in open combat on the field of battle, but in modern war, the sufferers are all too often innocent women and children who can by no stretch of the imagination be called aggressors who have "forfeited the right to live". In any case, the Catholic church has undermined her own stand against abortion by acknowledging that a commandment may occasionally be broken. No ethical principle is absolute in the sense that it never admits of exceptions. If I encountered a maniac armed with an axe pursuing a young girl, and he asked me which way she had gone, I would, I hope, have no hesitation in breaking the commandment never to bear false witness, by sending him in the wrong direction. Abstract ethical rules are useful general guides to conduct, but they must never be adhered to slavishly if the consequences of such blind obedience would be evil. In the case of abortion, it is the contention of those who support it, that in certain circumstances the consequences of not destroying the foetus would be evil. There is, of course, a wide divergence of opinion about what those circumstances should be, and I have myself grave reservations concerning two of the clauses in the 1967 Act. Nevertheless, I hope I have shown that abortion is not wrong in principle and that it can be defended by at least one rational argument.

SQUARES AND AMOEBIDS

LAURA CAMPBELL

I HAVE long wondered what is the opposite of 'A Square'? I think 'Amoeboid' might suit: an amoeba being a primitive creature which progresses by means of adapting its shape.

Adaptability in the human species demands intelligence, but not to the exclusion of those primitive instincts which form part of 'native intelligence'.

To my mind the division between the generations represented by the contemporary emphasis on 'teenagers' and students is partly natural and partly created artificially by commercial interests and by the squares and bureaucrats who prefer to take cover under: "They only think like that because they are young". This is rubbish. The true division is not between those in the first two decades of life and those in the other six or seven decades, but between the blinkered and unblinkered, the rigid and the expanding, the squares and the amoeboids.

The significance of student protests is not simply students: but the ability to express protest. They have

shown up how little opportunity the *individual* has to express his or her opinions, even in a democracy, especially when that democracy is rapidly descending into a bureaucracy, in which bureautechnics count for more and more while the human values, about which individual *people* are mainly concerned, take subsidiary place. Students are some of the few people able to express themselves in a group (and—what is becoming increasingly important—a non-political group).

But this should not be so. If students express their opinions about society, then why don't the university and other teachers vocalise their opinions? There used to be a University vote for Oxcomb graduates; but this was discarded as an unjustifiable privilege. Should it perhaps rather have been widened? If it had been, the system would doubtless by now have become too complicated. The problem is not the lack of opinion: but the lack of machinery for collecting it.

(Continued overleaf)

And if academics express themselves, then why not industry? Why indeed? The Trades Unions are the biggest organisations of all; but they have failed society by being too exclusively concerned with their own private interests.

There have been plenty of young squares (bound by their own four walls) amongst student protesters. But the best and broadest of the pronouncements have been a lesson to others in the unselfishness of their motives and genuine concern for the society of our country and our world. Yet one must also bear in mind that 'charity begins at home' may be condemned as self-centred, but is actually one of the harder dicta to live up to: it can be easier to feel compassion for those with whom one is not in such close contact. The challenge must be taken up by *all* groups and strata throughout our society. Otherwise we deserve

what we get! And the opinions of women are needed just as much as those of men: the opinions of women in the home as much as of women in jobs. Of all opinions the former are probably those least accessible.

At the same time, categorising may denigrate. First prize to a student interviewed on television some time ago who said: "I object to being labelled as 'a student': I am a human being, a member of society". As such he was expressing himself: and as such should each one of us, through whatever channels are open to us. But how do we come by the channels? Are the computers in the hands of the wrong people? And how should the majority interests and minority interests be balanced? For the answer to that one is not necessarily the obvious one, perhaps.

GOD AND FREE WILL

NICHOLAS GRIFFIN

IT IS NOT intuitively obvious what is meant by 'free will'. But having free will (or being free) on a certain occasion would be (roughly) having the ability to choose between at least two different courses of action. As, for example, I may be said to have the choice now of raising either my left hand or my right. It also seems to be the case that if a person is going to be said to be free in a certain situation then his action in that situation will be essentially unpredictable (unless, of course, he tells us how he is going to act). If someone could predict with infallible (or almost infallible) accuracy which hand I will raise next there would be good grounds for saying that my actions, in this particular situation, are determined. Of course, it does not follow from the fact that they cannot make such predictions that I possess free will for they might simply be using the wrong predictive theory. Thus predictability implies determinism, but unpredictability does not imply free will.

It is sometimes erroneously thought that the omnipotence of God means that every event in the universe is determined by Him. But this is not necessarily the case. We might distinguish between two possible types of omnipotence. The first is that God can be omnipotent if He is able, if He wishes, to perform any action. The second is that every action performed in and every event occurring in the universe is caused by God, and that, also, God could substitute any of these events by any other, if He wished. We might ironically call these weak omnipotence and strong omnipotence, respectively. Clearly only strong omnipotence, by its very nature, rules out free will. Even though it may appear to me that in certain cases I have free will and even though the choice I make is unpredictable, it will still be the case that a strongly omnipotent God is causing whatever action I perform.

Weak omnipotence does not banish free will in such a grand manner. A weakly omnipotent God will still have it in His power to prevent me raising either of my hands, or to determine which hand I do raise, but He may decide to abstain from intervening in this case and let me raise whichever I wish to. If God does decide ever to do anything, it will, of course, limit the area in which free will is possible, in the same way as a physical law limits it. The difference between a weakly and a strongly omnipotent God is the difference between a permissive and a perpetually active one.

This does not mean that the existence of a weakly omnipotent God will not have important consequences for

free will. It can hardly be held that God can make a mistake. Thus any prediction God might make about our actions will always be right and on the grounds we mentioned earlier this will give good grounds for assuming that our actions are determined. Although I think that this assumption is a reasonable one—and indeed is largely what is meant by claiming that the movements of material objects are controlled by physical laws—we may, for the sake of argument, abandon it to see if that helps the religious person who also believes in free will.

Suppose that today I utter the sentence 'Man will land on Mars in 1985'. Now this will turn out to be either true or false, although nobody *knows* when I utter it which it will be (although some may have good grounds for *believing* it to be one or the other). God, on the other hand, must know. To deny that He knows this will impose limits upon His knowledge, omnipotence and omniscience. But if the truth or falsity of my utterance is determined there will be no chance for free will to change it. If God (or, for that matter, a clairvoyant) 'sees' men landing on Mars in 1985 then no act of volition can prevent it. If, by some exercise of free will, we can prevent men from landing on Mars in 1985 then it will not have been the future that God has seen but a delusion. Any method of genuinely foreseeing the future will be incompatible with free will, for if the future turns out to be other than how it was foreseen then it would not be the future that was foreseen, but a delusion. It is difficult to imagine that God, of all people, could be deluded.

It seems impossible that a person who believes in an omnipotent God can also believe in free will, without self-contradiction. In order to maintain free will the religious believer will have to place limits on God's omnipotence, not merely by exchanging strong omnipotence for weak, but by denying that God can have knowledge of the future. I think that this will prove too high a price to pay.

VISION AND REALISM

Annual Report of the
NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Free copies from

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, SE1

Book Review

JEROME GREENE

Incident on Hill 192: Daniel Lang. (Secker and Warburg, Pan Books, 4s).

THOUGH WRITTEN in American journalese and somewhat overpriced, this book is important in that it has the words: "The unbelievable yet true story of an atrocity by American soldiers in Vietnam. A horrifying account of rape, murder and reluctant retribution", on its front cover and will therefore be bought by many who hitherto have not appreciated the extent to which the Vietnam war has abused and degraded humanity. The My Lai massacre will have fulfilled this function to a certain degree, but here we have a fuller, more personal account of an atrocity, which is in some ways perhaps more nauseating than My Lai.

Daniel Lang, an American journalist, wrote the book as a factual account of an interview in which an ex-soldier, Sven Eriksson, tells how he was horrified by the action of his four comrades on a patrol when they kidnapped, raped and murdered a young Vietnamese girl, how Eriksson reported them, how they were brought to trial, convicted and sentenced.

For those to whom such incidents come as no surprise, the real interest of the book lies in its description of the American method of dealing with the culprits. Both Eriksson's Platoon Lieutenant and his Company Captain tried to persuade him to keep quiet, and he further found the majority of his platoon were hostile to his having spoken up.

Their attitude unnerved Eriksson so much that at a new posting further from enemy activity, he took elaborate pains to ensure that he found the right person to confront with his revelation. He found a chaplain and at last something was done. The four men were arrested and after detailed investigations, including two visits to the scene of the rape and murder by an armada of military policemen guided by Eriksson, brought to face charges. At the trial in a tin shack, defence counsel endeavoured to expose Eriksson as everything from a coward to a homosexual. The four men were given separate trials and varying sentences, all of which were shortened on their return to the US. One had his sentence quashed due to a legal anomaly. The other three will be free within a comparatively short period of time.

Though the book tells its story straightforwardly, it reveals very little of the pressures on the men involved, their daily lives in Vietnam, or their civilian mentalities. Thus, it leaves the reader with little material from which to assess how large a part their participation in the war caused the men to act as they did. This again makes it hard for the reader to judge whether the men's sentences were reasonable, too long or too short. Had Lang been able to interview each man involved and researched deeper into the incident, this book could have constituted a most penetrating study of the effect war has on the 'civilised' mentality, and could have gone a long way towards enlightening many as to the real cause of the My Lai massacre. As it is, the book is a fair account of what happened, but it scarcely begins to tell us why.

Film Review

LUCY DANSIE

ADALEN 31: Academy One, Oxford Street, London, W1.

AN INTENSELY MOVING film telling the true story of the incident in 1931 at Adalen in Sweden when troops fired on a column of striking dockyard workers, as they marched in protest against the management's bringing in professional strike-breakers. Three men and a girl died and many more were wounded. The director, Bo Widerberg, rings once and for all the death knell of the documentary feature film. By centring the story around the family of one of the strikers, he manages to put over the real strength of the horrifying truth that all involved were victims of circumstances, and it is very hard to find a culprit. The strikers were trying to remedy a totally unjust situation. The strike-breakers had understandably grasped the rare opportunity to earn money. The owners were accustomed to being owners and found it hard to appreciate the socialist principle which was being flaunted at them. The military were called in because the strikers rioted. The officer who ordered his men to fire predictably received his orders from above, from men miles away who presumably expected the threat of gunfire to halt what they considered to be a march likely to end in violence. The marchers went on marching despite the threat. No one told

the magnate at Adalen that the soldiers might fire. Otherwise he would have prevented it. And . . . Who was to blame? Anyone? Or perhaps the system?

The irony that an order was on its way to have the strike-breakers withdrawn only underlines the humbling waste of humanity. But then was it a waste? Are we not now enabled by the magic of cinema to watch, think and gain in inspiration and awareness. The four dead deserved to have a film made about them. And perhaps if all who deserved such treatment received it, the world and certainly cinemas would be better places.

It may appear odd to add here that Widerberg utilises very successfully a strongly sexual theme to support his twin theses: that men die yet all continues as before, and until we have equality men will continue to die needlessly. The central character is a good-looking youth, the son of a striker who is on amorous terms with the daughter of the local magnate. Their differing social statuses don't affect them. The girl being pressed into an abortion on the day four people died, and the youth's mother's refusal to make love to her husband because they can't afford it are just two examples of the damning contrasts with which the film is illuminated. Humour is used to effect, hilarity being reached in a series of scenes where a youth endeavours to hypnotise a girl and then undress her.

More cannot be said without revealing which of the alarmingly innocent characters is to die, which would ruin the thread of suspense, which, though incidental, adds to this superb film.

LETTERS

Subjectivism in Morals

WHILE NOT WISHING to prolong unduly the discussion of "subjectivism in morals", I would like to comment briefly on Mr G. L. Simons' interesting reply (Jan. 3) to my original article.

Mr Simons states that . . . "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". Mr Simons is here assuming that it is wrong that "other people" should be made to suffer. But if this is only an "emotional feeling" on his part, on what grounds does he attack those who have a different emotional feeling? Emotions, unlike rational judgements, can be neither true nor false. They just *are*. A man is entitled to say "I do not like tripe and onions". But he is not entitled to add, "And therefore I will try to stop everyone from eating tripe and onions". Similarly as a subjectivist Mr Simons is entitled to say "I do not like to see people being made to suffer". But he is not entitled to add, "And therefore I will try to stop anyone who makes people suffer".

Later in his article Mr Simons affirms that "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". If this is so, Mr Simons' passionate onslaughts in the FREETHINKER against capitalism, racialism, American atrocities in Vietnam and so on, are explicable in terms of his body chemistry. Why then should we pay any attention to them since in no conceivable sense can Mr Simons' body chemistry be described as true?

Finally, Mr Simons' statement that "moral views . . . have varied enormously throughout history and from one culture to another", is very misleading. While there has admittedly been wide divergence in *particular* moral judgements (and Mr Simons gives examples of two of these), there has been almost universal agreement about the principles and values which these judgements imply. I know of no society, ancient or modern, in which cruelty, treachery, falsehood or injustice were not accounted vices and their opposites virtues.

In my opinion, the assumption that objective moral standards exist is, logically necessary in order that we may make moral judgements. Mr Simons believes that the ideology of communism is better than that of capitalism. But if "good" and "better" are terms deriving their sole meaning from the ideology of each class, ideologies themselves cannot be better or worse than one another. Unless the measuring rod is independent of the things measured, we can do no measuring.

JOHN L. BROOM.

Red China

CONNAIRE KENSIT'S letter (January 24) contains a veritable plethora of naive, fatuous and dogmatic assertions. Mr Kensit says of Communist China today: "All public discussion assumes . . . Nobody, either in a newspaper or in a school essay, is allowed to refer, etc. . . . All Chinese news media constantly plug the idea, etc. . . . This slant is *always* given, etc." I challenge Mr Kensit to present irrefutable evidence for the validity of these sweeping statements regarding the position in China in 1970. But if these assertions are valid they hardly describe a state of affairs that humanists can applaud: humanists cherish human individuality and freethought, whereas Mr Kensit's own choice of language indicates a constant endeavour by the Chinese Communist élite to ensure that the Chinese people conform to the prejudices of that élite. In any event, Mr Kensit's remarks here are contradicted later in his letter when he maintains that the Cultural Revolution "has involved a massive increase in freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, public discussions of controversial issues".

At the same time he conspicuously fails to point out: (1) that such "a massive increase in freedom" since 1966 is, in itself, a telling condemnation of the preceding seventeen years of Communist rule in China; and (2) that the Cultural Revolution has involved considerable bloodshed and suppression of those considered Mao's opponents and critics, because of their divergent ideological beliefs—a development to be deplored by freethinkers and humanists, not eulogised by a crude propagandist like Mr Kensit, who apparently claims to be a humanist. Foisting his personal opinion upon us as historical fact, Mr Kensit calls the Cultural Revolution "the biggest national effort to increase 'awareness' in world history"—yet he does not bother to offer a coherent definition of "awareness", and he fails to indicate the real reasons for the Cultural Revolution. Nor does he point out that totalitarian régimes have rarely failed to claim unique world-shaking significance for the revolution that brought them to power or consolidated their position. Mr Kensit claims the Cultural Revolution has involved "attacks on the polices of one's superiors". But how far, Mr Kensit, has Chairman Mao encouraged criticism of his policies? In claiming "loyalty to the nation and the social system" as a fundamental characteristic of democracy, Mr Kensit offers a highly personal definition and seems to lack sufficient "awareness" to distinguish between democracy and nationalism.

Mr Kensit perpetuates the distinction supposedly made by the Chinese Communists between "the Americans" and "the American Imperialists". Yet this distinction is academic and artificial in the extreme: Mr Kensit himself tells us that "all public discussion of possible war with the United States assumes that *the Americans will attack*". "The American Imperialists" would not be in power if they were not supported, either implicitly or explicitly, by the American people. In the last analysis, "the American Imperialists" in Vietnam are the thousands of American soldiers themselves. Mr Kensit alludes to nuclear war between China and America; yet nuclear bombs on America would hardly distinguish between "the Americans" and "the American Imperialists". "The Chinese are publicly threatened with bombing and invasion by the two strongest nuclear powers on earth". In that case perhaps Mr Kensit can tell us the last time President Nixon publicly threatened Communist China with invasion and nuclear bombardment by America. To Mao Tse-tung must go the "credit" for having declared that even if 300 million Chinese should perish in a nuclear war, there would still be more than that number left to enjoy the triumph of Communism and participate in "a bright future for mankind". Has China, like America, signed the nuclear test-ban treaty?

Mr Kensit tells us that the Chinese Communists give "a hero's welcome to Americans who migrate (flee?) to China to escape their own régime: these are described as representing the American people". But how representative are they, Mr Kensit? In any event, there are almost certainly far more Chinese in America than cowardly American "heroes" domiciled in China. If true, the Chinese Americans may be claimed, on the basis of Communist logic, as representative of the Chinese people! MARTIN PAGE.

I READ (January 22), over my morning egg, that a Chinese woman has been hauled over the coals for defacing a portrait of Chairman Mao, (*Absit omen*), a cockroach having devoured the bread paste with which she attached The Portrait to the wall.

So much for the woman. But what of the cockroach? I am sure that I speak for comrades everywhere, and nowhere, when I express the deepest horror and highest indignation at the monstrous act of this social-fascist hexaped.

Undoubtedly the jackbooted hand of the CIA-Ogpu was behind this, for how else could the cockroach have escaped the quick vengeance of the People's Justice? The recruitment of individuals from the animal world to act as imperialist agents is well known to us. I know personally of a very large and hairy house spider who freely admits that he has been employed by British Intelligence since 1966 to climb up the bath pipes of the Chinese Legation and there to wreak all kinds of mischief. Furthermore the mouse in my attic wears jackboots.

But the people are united! And let any earwig or ant who sets himself up against us beware!

COMRADE CREGAN.

Communist thinker?

I SHOULD like to join Claud Watson (January 24) in hoping that the FREETHINKER is not becoming a Communist-thinker. It seems to concern itself more and more with ultra left-wing policy and permissiveness.

Why can't we have more articles dealing with Christian origins instead of so many of G. L. Simons' diatribes? People are *still* ill-informed about the total lack of fact behind priestly pretences and to my mind the spreading of such knowledge should take precedence over any politics.

A. HIGGITT.

Aid to Undeveloped Countries

MR MEULEN'S faith in the value of Western aid to poor countries is very touching. I would however draw his attention to figures printed in *The Economist* (17/1/70), p. 47. Here three graphs show the aid situation as it actually exists.

One graph reveals that most of the aid from the West goes to Latin America and the Carribean. The first graph—beautifully entitled 'Poorer Nations in Hock'—gives staggering figures for the *capital repayments and payment of interest as per cent of new borrowing*. For Africa (1965-1967) the figure was 73 per cent, and for Latin America the figure was 87 per cent: if the present rate of borrowing continues it is estimated that by 1977 the figures will be 121 per cent for Africa, 130 per cent for Latin America and 134 per cent for East Asia.

For those readers not good at sums (Mr Meulen?) I would point out that this means that most of the countries receiving Western aid will in a few years be borrowing simply to pay back a portion of capital repayments and payments of interests, i.e. in the bulk of the poor countries there will be a regular large flow of capital (net) to the rich countries. I suggest that this is criminal exploitation—or has *The Economist* suddenly become a communist organ, Mr Meulen?

G. L. SIMONS.

Vietnam

MANY OF YOUR readers will feel too strongly about the Vietnam war to allow Claud Watson (January 24) to write untruths about it.

It is blatantly untrue to say that this is the struggle between "communist tyranny" and the free world.

It is an unwholesome lie to say that the North Vietnamese started it by invading the South.

The blood of the innocent victims of French, British and American aggression must not be dishonoured by people who speak without knowledge.

Let Claud Watson follow the history of oppression and suppression in Vietnam and the conclusion, already reached by America herself, will not elude him. America knows she has no moral right in Vietnam and her people feel unclean and sullied in that knowledge.

KENNETH J. EAD.

FREETHINKER subscriptions

and orders for literature . . . The Freethinker Bookshop
01-407 0029

Editorial matter . . . The Editor, The Freethinker
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 01-407 1251

POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 months: £2 1s 6d 6 months: £1 1s 3 months: 10s 6d

USA AND CANADA

12 months: \$5.25 6 months: \$2.75 3 months: \$1.40

The FREETHINKER can be ordered through any newsagent.