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EVERY DAY A HOLY DAY

A FREETHINKER may be said to be one who believes that men's minds should not only be free of religion but free of as much prejudice and inhibition as possible. Individual freedom should only be limited if it is likely to restrict the freedom of others. Thus, freethinkers must always weigh the benefit to individuals which will be obtained on acquiring a freedom, against the effect this new freedom will have on society in general. While freethinkers maintain that religion restricts freedom of thought, they tend to be opposed to any coercion in matters of conscience. That is to say they have no desire to restrict belief in an authoritarian manner. However, as David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, points out in the following statement to the press, there is a tendency among progressives to advocate freedom for individuals, particularly in the religious sphere, without giving enough attention to the needs of society as a whole:

"In the Financial Times for 25 February, 1970 there is this report: 'A complaint that ten Kashmiri workers were dismissed by a Birmingham foundry for attending a Muslim feast day prayer meeting during worktime has been referred to the Race Relations Board. The men were away for about four hours from a grinding shop at the Aluminium Diecastings factory.'

Without personal knowledge I do not wish to comment on the rights or wrongs of this particular issue. It may be that, like some transport authorities which have refused to allow Sikhs to wear turbans, the firm in question has been needlessly bureaucratic and unco-operative. It is possible that permission for absence was given and the matter was then used as an excuse for dismissal. But, on the face of it, referring this dispute to the Race Relations Board seems a most misguided procedure.

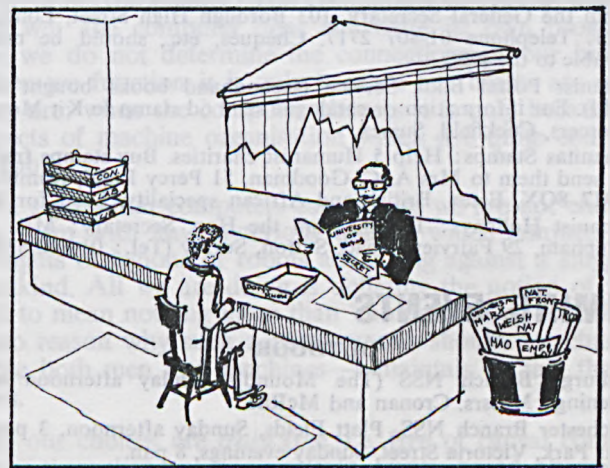
One of the causes of Powellism (though not the only, or even the main) is a reaction against the neurotic sensitivity of many 'liberals' to questions of religion and race. Just as the mildest criticism of Israel is denounced as anti-Semitism, so anything less than adulatory of the religious and social customs of immigrants or the activities of black power organisations is condemned as racial prejudice.

It is time that some objectivity entered consideration of the problems of employment in a multi-religious society, especially in assembly-line operations that depend on team work. Religious observances could cause intolerable disruption to production, or bring it to a halt altogether. For devout Christians Sunday is a holy day; for Jews, Saturday; for Muslims, Friday. There is hardly a day of the year which some sect or other does not celebrate as the day of birth, dedication, enlightenment, death or resurrection of some god or other. Should devotees be entirely free to walk off whenever they feel like it for some ritual, ceremony, holy procession or invocation? Is there to be no limit to the patience of employers?

If people wish to pray instead of doing their work, let them look to the god they pray to to employ them and pay their wages; whether their prayers go up to Jehovah, Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, Allah, the Buddha, the Bab, or a banyan tree."

OPEN THE DOSSIERS

THE FUSS amongst students and university authorities over the possible existence of files, which contain records of student's political beliefs and activities, raises the fundamental moral issue as to whether any individual or body has the right to hold dossiers on other individuals, the contents of which, and sometimes the existence of which, is unknown to the person concerned. Such practices are one example of the way in which a state can invade an individual's privacy, and one hopes will be considered by the committee, headed by the Rt. Hon. Kenneth Younger, which was recently set up by the government to report on the matter of privacy. The only justification for the state or an institution like a university maintaining confidential dossiers is in circumstances where they feel that the good of society is threatened by an individual. Criminals and political agitators are therefore the only categories of people on whom there is cause for a dossier being kept.



Is it absolutely necessary however, for such dossiers to be secret? Could they not perhaps be made available to their subjects? In the case of a criminal, the principle that the police operate on, of waiting until he has committed a crime before pouncing and prosecuting, might be im-

(Continued overleaf)

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proved upon by a principle which let the criminal know they had their eye on him, and which thereby might deter him from committing his crime. The argument against this is, of course, that a criminal who knew exactly what the police knew, would be able to gauge far more precisely his chances of being caught. But is this necessarily a bad thing? A criminal who knows that the police are suspicious of him, will be deterred from committing a crime which he would have committed were he in ignorance; while a criminal who knows that the police are not on to him, will only commit a crime which he would have committed anyway. It will obviously be many years before such a system could work in practice. However, the time may be ripe for some slight opening up of police files.

The same argument can apply to political agitators of the 'spy' variety. But revolutionaries fall into a different category. There is already a strong tendency for the activities of revolutionaries to be well-publicised in advance. We are all quite prepared, for instance, for civil war on the cricket pitches next summer. The process seems to be the reverse of that applied by the upholders of law and order. Instead of waiting for the South Africans to be invited by the MCC and then taking action, the anti-apartheid demonstrators gave full warning of what they intended to do

should the South Africans come. This can be set against the policy of the police, who having been tipped off that a man is going to rob a bank, give him no warning that they know and that they will act if he goes through with it. This is an interesting reflection on the relative tactics of the forces of darkness and enlightenment and indicates the desirability of a less furtive approach by the establishment.

If the government and university authorities were again to make dossiers available to the individuals concerned, no harm would be done, save that the people who agitate for the sake of it, rather than for an ideal, would perhaps be warned off which would represent no great loss to any political movement, nor indeed to the country as a whole.

The idea of keeping files merely on individual's beliefs rather than actions, has no moral excuse. It is a denial of the individual's right to think as he likes, and can only harm the development of a healthy society. It is thus heartening that many university authorities have asserted that such files do not exist. Particularly to be applauded are those like the University of Kent, who have allowed the students to verify this fact by seeing for themselves. It is a little strange that the majority are not prepared to back up words with action, though this reluctance can probably be put down to a fear of losing authority, rather than a desire to hide anything.

The prime cause of worry among students has been the fear that information might be passed on to would-be employers or perhaps the government. Any passing on of information must be condemned and it is to be hoped that the government committee will recommend laws to prevent this in all spheres. If they can go further and recommend the gradual opening up of confidential dossiers, they will hasten the day when society can tolerate a wider gamut of activity and opinion, and have no need to keep tabs on itself.

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.

Humanist Holidays: Details from the Hon. Secretary: Mrs. M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey (Tel.: 01-642 8796).

COMING EVENTS

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. Cronan and McRae.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

INDOOR

Belfast Humanist Group: NI War Memorial Building, Waring Street, Belfast: Monday, March 9, 8 p.m.: "The Mathematics of Corn Flakes and the One Armed Bandits", W. Hawthorne (Lecturer in Mathematics, Strandmillis).

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, March

8, 6.30 p.m.: "The Case Against Vivisection", R. D. Marriott (Anti-Vivisection Society).

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, March 12, 8 p.m.: "Is there a Supernatural?", D. N. Clark-Lowes, MD (Investigator, Society for Psychical Research).

Nottingham and Notts Humanist Group: Adult Education Centre, 14 Shakespeare Street: Friday, March 13, 7.30 p.m.: "Race Relations and the Law", A Speaker from the East Midlands Conciliation Committee of the Race Relations Board.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, March 8, 11 a.m.: "Some Problems of Law, Crime and Punishment", F. H. Amphlett Micklewright; Admission free. Tuesday, March 10, 7 p.m.: Discussion—"Biology and Ethics", Dr Peter Lewis, Admission 2s (including refreshments), Members free.

New Paintings by Oswell Blakeston. BH Corner Gallery, 34 Cathedral Place (opposite St Paul's Cathedral), London EC4. March 5th until March 18th. Monday to Friday, 10.30 a.m.—6 p.m. Saturday, 10.30 a.m.—1 p.m.

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DO COMPUTERS HAVE FREE WILL?

G. L. SIMONS

The last in a series of three articles on computers.

MANY PEOPLE think they know what they mean by free will. The terms are often used to describe 'voluntary' action, and can have consequence in methods of education and penal philosophy. However, what people *generally* mean by free will is choice, and the two things are by no means the same.

A choice can be *caused*, i.e. it can spring out of circumstances which make it what it is. The cause/effect relationship, though contingent, has a powerful content of inevitability: when we are being rational we always believe that like circumstances (causes) give rise to other like circumstances (effects)—only if one state of affairs had been different could the related consequences have been other than what they were. This means that to say that a choice is *caused* is to say that it must be what it is, the earlier circumstances being what they were. And the corollary is that if we once admit that choices are caused we give our hostage to the determinists.

Choices in fact *are* caused. Any other view cannot be maintained by scientifically-minded people. Choices are events in a naturalistic world, and their antecedents are responsible for bringing them into being. To give reasons as to why we choose as we do (or chose as we did) is to give reasons, to describe *causes*: this is not to say that our descriptions are always accurate. We may think that such and such is the cause of our behaviour where in fact the reason is something entirely different. We may act in altruistic fashion through frustrated sexual impulse rather than through a responsible awareness of our social duties. Causes there be, but we are not always right in saying what they are.

An explanation of why we choose as we do in given circumstances can proceed in a number of different ways, at a number of different levels. We can talk in ready terms about the causal effects of education (some freethinkers are happy to relate that a Roman Catholic upbringing appears to make a person more likely to become a delinquent), the causal effects of abuse or ridicule, the effects of an upset stomach, a hard day in the office, or in terms of erudite psychoanalytic theory or physics. The effective causes of human choice can be described in a variety of languages. And of course what is a cause to one man need not be to another. Where one man is abused and commits murder in consequence another may exercise self-restraint and merely render the offender unconscious—but clearly in such cases the question is only removed one step further back since the 'exercising of restraint' can also be discussed in the same terms, i.e. what *caused* the man to show restraint?

Thus human choice, as characterised by decision after reflection, can be examined scientifically, as can any other event in the world—and by a scientific examination what we necessarily mean is looking for causes. To what extent can the modern electronic computer exhibit choice as we find it in human beings?

In any sophisticated computer program there are 'jump' orders that provide the computer with its *decision* facility. The program of the computer is, as we saw in the first article, merely a set of instructions telling the computer what to do. But what we want the computer to do depends upon various factors that are constantly changing. If for instance a computer is controlling a chemical process we

may want action to be taken if a concentrate is found to be too dilute half way through the process (with no action taken if the concentrate is satisfactory). The computer must therefore be able to inspect the mixture, by electronic means, and take action according to the result. Thus the computer has to 'decide'.

A 'jump' order in a computer program is a means of telling the computer to ignore a number of subsequent orders if certain conditions apply. Such an order may read—"Jump to instruction 7952 if the contents of store location are less than 198", which means that the computer must decide what to do when it gets to the 'jump'. Exactly how the computer will decide at any jump is not known to the computer operator, or even to the programmer. All they know is that the computer will have to make the decision when it reaches the jump order in the program. *How* it decides depends entirely upon the prevailing conditions inside the computer, these conditions being caused by (for instance) the chemical process being governed.

Thus the computer, in any detailed application, has facilities for making choices. When a choice has to be made a certain amount of 'cerebral' activity goes on, i.e. the computer inspects the salient parameters and possibly makes calculations, and then the decision is arrived at. The decision depends upon the programming of the computer, the incoming data, and the internal organisation of the central processor. This is exactly analogous to human choice depending upon incoming data, the way the brain functions, and the internal state of the organism. If you feed in certain data the computer will choose one way; feed in different data and the machine will choose differently.

Many people will resent the idea of computers being thought to have free will in the same sense that human beings have it, but their confusion arises from not seeing the essential point, that by 'free will' most people mean choice and nothing more. And clearly the possibility of choices being caused must be taken seriously by anyone who values rationality. The computer can choose and so can we: the computer does not write its own program, but we do not determine the connections in our brains. When we function it is only because our brains are what they are; when the computer chooses it is only because of aspects of machine organisation which are quite comprehensible.

In saying that computers can choose we are not endowing them with any myterious quality which conjures up thoughts of legions of robots advancing against a sluggish mankind. All we are doing is deflating the notion of free will to mean nothing more than 'caused choice', and there is no reason why such a phenomenon should not characterise both men and machines—I maintain in fact that it does.

If our choices are *truly* free, i.e. free of causal connections, then they are a singularly empty breed of events. For it is characteristic of people that they wish to believe in the values of right education, i.e. they hope that sound education will influence a person's choices in later life—he will choose to reject superstition and embrace truth, for example. But this is a purely causal concept. And how

(Continued on page 79)

CALCULATED TO DEPRAVE & CORRUPT

FANNY COCKERELL

SCENE: A courtroom. *Mr. Justice Simpleton* presides.

CLERK OF THE COURT: The Court is in Session. Case of Crown versus Charlotte and Byers, accused of publishing an obscene article, to wit one book, *The Last Entry to Brewer Street*, which said book is calculated to deprave and corrupt those who read it. Counsel: For the Prosecution: Mr Porge. For the Defence: Mr George. Next Witness: Amelia Muggins. Take the Stand.

Amelia Muggins takes the stand.

CLERK: Raise your right hand and swear.

Amelia Muggins is sworn in.

PORGE: Miss Muggins. You have seen this book?

MUGGINS: Oh yes, sir.

PORGE: What do you think of it?

MUGGINS: Terrible. Quite terrible. Disgusting. Shocking. I mean to say . . .

JUDGE: We get your point.

MUGGINS: But I mean to say. Languid like that, I ask you. I don't know how anyone can bring themselves to read it. I don't really.

GEORGE: Have you read it?

MUGGINS: What me? Certainly not. What, read a filthy book like that? What d'you take me for?

GEORGE: How do you know it's a filthy book if you haven't read it?

MUGGINS: Oh everybody knows that, don't they? I mean even the postman said . . .

JUDGE: What the postman said isn't evidence.

MUGGINS: Fancy that. Not the postman?

GEORGE: Your honour I object to this witness.

JUDGE: Objection sustained.

PORGE: As you say, M'lord. [*Exit Muggins.*] Next witness. Mr. Juggins.

JUDGE: Has he read the book?

PORGE: Er er er . . . I I I . . .

JUDGE: Because if he hasn't . . .

PORGE: It's very hard to find people who have read it, my lord. You just heard . . .

JUDGE: Nonsense. I've read it.

GEORGE: And has it depraved and corrupted you, my lord?

PORGE: Your honour, I object.

JUDGE: Objection overruled. It's a very pertinent question. After all if it had (*sniggers*). But the point is I cannot be called as a witness.

GEORGE: (*hopefully*) You're sure you can't?

JUDGE: No. I can't come before myself. In any case it would prove nothing. The point is that this book is liable to corrupt and deprave ordinary people. I am an extraordinary person.

PORGE: Certainly your honour. Here is Mr Juggins.

Enter Juggins.

JUDGE: Have you read this book Mr Juggins?

JUGGINS: Certainly, M'lord.

JUDGE: Take the stand. *Juggins does so.*

PORGE: How did you like this book?

JUGGINS: I didn't. I found it obscene, disgusting, filthy. It uses words no gentleman would use and describes things no decent person would do. It made me quite sick.

PORGE: Thank you (*grins*). Your witness.

GEORGE: You would describe yourself as an average citizen, Mr Juggins?

JUGGINS: Yes sir.

GEORGE: Do you usually read books like this?

JUGGINS: Certainly not.

GEORGE: Why did you read it?

JUGGINS: Mr Porge asked me to. He promised if I did he would—

PORGE: Objection. What I said is not evidence.

JUDGE: Objection sustained.

GEORGE: I see. So you read this filthy book because . . . well never mind why. And did it deprave and corrupt you?

JUGGINS: Did it what? What are you insinuating?

GEORGE: Deprave you. Corrupt you. Make you want to do the things it describes in this book.

JUGGINS: Certainly not. I think they were horrible.

GEORGE: You don't think it would make anyone want to do them?

JUGGINS: (*indignantly*) No I don't. I think it would put anyone off. Not anyone decent. Not if they wasn't depraved and corrupted before they started reading it.

JUDGE: In that case you could hardly say the book had done it, could you?

JUGGINS: (*out of his depth*) N-no my lord.

JUDGE: You may go.

PORGE: M'lord you're making it very difficult for me. The sort of people who read this book aren't likely to come forward as witnesses against it.

JUDGE: True, very true.

GEORGE: What about the Jury, m'lord. They've had to read it.

JUDGE: Very good. Call the foreman of the jury.

CLERK: Call Jim Top.

TOP: Here I am, sir. (*He is sworn in.*)

PORGE: You have read this book?

TOP: Oh yes.

PORGE: How did you like it?

TOP: Very much, thank you.

PORGE: Perhaps you did not hear my question. I will repeat it.

TOP: I heard. I said very much.

PORGE: You would not call it a dirty, disgusting, filthy . . .

GEORGE: Your honour I object.

JUDGE: Objection sustained. Disregard that question. You have not heard the question.

TOP: But I have heard it.

JUDGE: Put it out of your mind.

TOP: Well that's not the way my mind works your honour. I can't put something out of my mind because I'm told to. It's just been put in.

JUDGE: Well, go on.

PORGE: What did you think about the book?

TOP: I found it very interesting.

PORGE: Why?

TOP: Well it opened a new world to me as you might say. I didn't know things like that existed.

PORGE: And you enjoyed reading about them?

TOP: Oh yes, very much (*grins*). Very spicy. Very unusual.

PORGE: Really. Really.

JUDGE: This is most interesting. Most interesting.

PORGE: And do you think it might make people who read this book want to do some of the things described in it?

TOP: Oh I do. Yes, indeed I do.

PORGE: (*delighted*) In other words you think it might corrupt and deprave them?

TOP: Well, yes I suppose I do.

GEORGE: Objection. He is putting words in the witness's mouth.

JUDGE: Objection overruled. Go on this is most interesting.

PORGE: Thank you, m'lud. Now Mr Top, would you say you were depraved and corrupted as a result of reading this book?

TOP: Yes, I think I should. Yes definitely. Definitely.

PORGE: You admit it?

TOP: Oh yes.

JUDGE: And the other members of the jury?

TOP: All of them. Without a doubt.

JUDGE: You think it is a satisfactory state to be in?

TOP: It's a very enjoyable one.

PORGE: (*to George*) Your witness. (*George shakes his head.*) M'lud, my case rests. (*Retires, grinning with delight. George looks crestfallen.*)

JUDGE: Thank you. You will now return to the jury box and consider your verdict.

TOP: We have considered it.

JUDGE: What do you mean? You hadn't heard the evidence.

TOP: Oh they knew what I was going to say. We pronounce for defendants.

JUDGE: Wait for me to sum up. And go and consult with your colleagues.

TOP: As you say M'lord. (*Goes back to jury box, whispers to someone off stage.*)

JUDGE: There are three points. First, is this book one which is liable to corrupt and deprave the reader? Two: are the defendants guilty of publishing an obscene article? Three: should the book be suppressed? Have you considered your verdict?

TOP: Yes, M'lud.

JUDGE: How say you. On count one . . .

TOP: Not guilty M'lud.

PORGE: But you just said—we all heard you—someone's been getting at this jury.

JUDGE: Do you find the defendants guilty?

TOP: Oh no, M'lud.

JUDGE: Should the book be suppressed?

TOP: Certainly not. We want to go on reading it. We want all our friends to read it.

Pandemonium in court.

PORGE: I don't understand. What's happened?

JUDGE: Let me explain. It is quite simple. The jury, on their own admission, and because you insisted that they read this book, have become depraved and corrupted. You can't expect a corrupt and depraved jury to give an honest verdict. As simple as that.

PORGE: Then I demand a re-trial.

GEORGE: My learned friend is wasting his time. The same thing would only happen again.

PORGE: (*desperately*) You can't be sure. You can't be sure. Perhaps they wouldn't be depraved and corrupted at all. No no, it's quite likely they wouldn't be . . .

GEORGE: Then, you would lose your case. (*Tucks his papers under his arm.*)

JUDGE: Case dismissed. (*Everyone leaves the court. The Judge waits a moment, then picks up the book.*)

I must read this again.

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THE FUTURE OF MAN

L. BEVERLY HALSTEAD

HAVING REACHED the present where do we go from here?

There are still some people who consider that a nuclear war might write the final chapter of our history on this planet. I don't see how you can be sure of polishing off every single person—so I am inclined to think that a nuclear war will be a bit of a useless exercise. It would undoubtedly thin out humanity to a considerable extent but it wouldn't take very long for what Desmond Morris has called the sexiest primate to get going again.

How about the population explosion? We are always warned of the dire consequences of unlimited propagation of the species. Of course current trends cannot continue indefinitely—wars, starvation and pandemics are likely to be quite good controls in the short term. For the longer term—in the context of geological time I would expect some control to come into play. In essence advances in medicine have lowered the death rate and agricultural science hasn't caught up to cope with the extra mouths. And finally education, which is perhaps the key, trails the field. In time I think one can predict with confidence that these three aspects of human activity, now out of phase, will eventually be in phase.

So what do I think will determine man's future? His nature. Just that. This has survived from his australopithecine past with no change that I can see. Man is fundamentally a group hunting predator—and many of man's basic traits, as well as social trends, can be best understood in this light.

One of the most striking features of man is the apparent difference between the way people act as individuals and the way they act when in a crowd. This is frequently remarked upon in the popular press. For example Grigg (*Guardian*) wrote "when people go to a football match they seem to lose their identity and to become part of a sinister elemental force. And when that force is compounded with chauvinism the result is peculiarly menacing—not unlike the Nuremburg rallies". Mass hysteria, lynch mobs, race riots. The almost infinite catalogue of mass murder and genocide is witness to this trait. This same phenomenon when acted out on a different stage gives us an almost equal catalogue of noble acts of man—the heroism and self-sacrifice which any disaster can call forth.

Sargent has described the mechanisms of engendering mass hysteria whether in evangelical meetings or political rallies. The techniques of brain-washing employed by the early Methodists and in modern times by the Communists. These methods can be used for good or ill—but in either case it is in the sincere belief that it is for the good of the people concerned. Herein lies its inherent danger.

As this behavioural trait runs through all human communities it must mean that this pattern is a fundamental one to our species. This being so it must have had a straight forward biological advantage to our forebears. Here we return to our group hunting predators. For a society of animals that as individuals are puny, survival let alone success is only possible if they act in concert. For particular activities such as hunting, defence or attack, the needs of the individual must be subordinated to those of the community as a whole. Without this built-in behavioural pattern no such societies could hope to be viable. This group activity is directed against the enemies—either real or imagined of the group. There will prob-

ably always be a need for this trait to find expression—it's channelling and control is something we haven't yet learnt to cope with. We can, therefore, look forward to a jolly future of wars.

It is all very well to have group activity but this does not arise of its own accord. There has to be a leader, a rabble rouser, a prophet. In all higher social animals there is a natural hierarchy. All men are demonstrably not created equal. There is a peck order. A human society is a class society. In non-human societies animals find their proper level in the community. The stratifications of human societies are more rigid and in consequence the greater part of human potential may be wasted. It is probably a forlorn hope to ever expect genuine equality of opportunity to appertain. There is a natural drive on the part of parents to ensure that their gains are passed on to their offspring. Thus there will always be a tendency for a class system to become ultimately more rather than less rigid. The trends we observe today are not the breaking down of class society but merely its restructuring.

Perhaps the most significant trait is the vertical division of society. This is between a male and a female ethos. It doesn't need me to point out that there is a marked physical dimorphism between the sexes, nor perhaps that their behavioural patterns also differ.

In general terms women favour security and stability, men prefer adventure and change. In Britain this is borne out even in politics where men in the main vote for the radical parties, women for the conservative. From these two basic attitudes all the rest flows.

Again these differences seem to have been a common feature throughout our history—the women sitting at home, the men off to seek adventure, generally in wars. This pattern would also seem to be a consequence of our group hunting past. The main hunting would be carried out by the males of the group who would be distinct individuals, with different gifts, although when required these differences would be sunk for the sake of the common endeavour. The females would stay back in the camp to bear and bring up their offspring. Their prime need would be for security and stability.

The incompatibility of the requirements of the two sexes makes their mutual relationships interesting for it is a conflict that in the nature of things can never be resolved. Indeed, looking back over the history of the vertebrates it is a microcosm of a basic conflict that is revealed over and over again. The more closely an animal conforms to its environment, the more successful it appears to be. For a time. The more perfect the fit to the environment the more certain is extinction. Time after time it is the un-specialised forms that remain highly variable and adaptable that survive. The main tendency is to join the current rat-race, to follow the herd, yet it is on those that opt out, the apparent failures, that the future frequently seems to depend.

In the advanced societies of the world today—in America, Europe and the Soviet Union, we find that the one factor they have in common is the increasing tendency for people to conform more and more rigidly to the social standards of society. The unorthodox is tolerated less and less. People do not like to be different, life is more comfortable if the accepted norms are adhered to.

(Continued on next page)

Professor Ralph Nursall in discussing what mankind would be like in a mere thousand years from now wrote "he will be socially well oriented and will probably not readily suffer nonconformity. His problems and pleasures will all be artificial and he will look back on us with pity, as we look ahead to him with dismay".

This daunting prospect is the logical result of the extrapolation of current trends into the future. There is little doubt that once the unorthodox is no longer tolerated then society loses its vitality. Unless a society can maintain variety it will go the way of Nursall's prediction. On present showing the advanced societies of today are heading strongly in this direction.

But we have seen this all before. Successful communities get ever more successful and ever more specialised, become 'socially well orientated'. And then they are taken by surprise—primitive communities suddenly sweep the board. History seems to stress the identical lesson of the fossil record—the most advanced communities do not give rise to still further advanced ones—they become complacent instead. Affluence saps their evolutionary vitality. What Professor Terence Miller calls the "corruption of comfort". Once dissent is obliterated, society has signed its death warrant. It will destroy itself of its own accord—without any help from outside.

Looking at the world scene for a palaeontologist's point of view it seems that the great powers of today will be replaced by others with more vitality. I would expect the civilisation of the future to arise from Africa—here if anywhere is a region of vitality and variety.

Due to a printer's error the third and fourth paragraphs of L. Beverly Halstead's 'The Origin of Man', published last week, were printed in reverse order. We apologise for this mistake.

Book Review

TONY HALLIDAY

Doves for the Seventies: Poems for those who care. Edited and introduced by Peter Robins (Corgi Books, 5s).

THIS BOOK was launched recently with a national advertising campaign including a programme of readings by contributors at the Royal Festival Hall. It is obviously aimed at a much larger market than most contemporary verse and it is committed to a theme: 'the struggle now/tomorrow/always for peaceful living' and to a style: 'In general the poems are lyrical. They sing.' An anthology with such objectives will recommend itself to those aware of how pitifully few people read verse nowadays and of how arid much of the verse produced for them is. It is therefore sad to have to confess that this selection is bad, especially as its badness seems to have something to do with the too indiscriminate application by the editor of his own high principles. First, there is Mr Robins' attitude towards the larger audience for whom this book is published. He obviously dislikes the wilful esotericism of many modern versifiers, but the patronising tone he assumes in his own introduction (e.g. 'I've placed the poems in four groups. Movements if you like. Seasons if you're not musical') merely gives the same intellectual snobbery a different and, it seems to me, a more revolting aspect.

True there are some good poems—among the best are 'Not Marching Away to be Killed' by Jean Overton Fuller and D. J. Enright's 'The Sensitive Philanthropist'—but such is the standard of most of the residue that I am tempted to suspect that they got here by accident. No-one could deny that most of these poems will be understood by however dimwitted a reader, but not many will give enjoyment, except to those with a warped sense of humour. Perhaps with the excision of the good pieces the selection could be renamed 'Stuffed Owls of the Sixties'. Even amusement though will give way to embarrassment at some of the material included: work so inept that to have exposed it in book form at all seems almost cruel. (Perhaps this was the reaction that Mr Robins was anticipating when he feared that the 'over-genteel' would be 'scared into the loo'). Nor are these lyrics helped by the intrusion of the theme in the form of frequent and fatuous references to Vietnam, Biafra and racial divisions. A sprinkling of platitudes on currently fashionable subjects is no more likely to ennoble poetry now than it did when Eliza Cook sang the bless-

ings of temperance 100 years ago. Indeed the individuality of a good poet is rather expressed in the undercutting or at least questioning of received attitudes. Thus, two of Stevie Smith's brief and grisly lyrics, 'The Photograph' and 'But Murderous' are in these surroundings as conspicuous for originality of viewpoint as they are for technical superiority. Other good poems to be found amongst the hundred-odd contributions include ones by George Barker, Robert Conrad, David Tribe and Bruton Connors (whose 'Briefing for Tropic War' is particularly enjoyable) in addition to those mentioned above. For the sake of these alone, especially as most of them appear here for the first time, at any rate in book form, *Doves for the Seventies* is worth wading through. I only hope that the large young audience at whom the book is directed have the stamina to do so, and (being more optimistic about their capacities than Mr Robins is) I hope they also have the discrimination to recognise the good stuff when they find it.

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could it be otherwise? If choices were not related *causally* to the context in which they came to be made what use would they be? Just imagine choices springing into being randomly, without our having any control over them (if we *have* control over them then the control exists in a causal framework and determinism is true).

If by free will we mean choice then men, computers and animals have it. If we mean something more esoteric and mysterious then clearly there are not grounds for saying that computers have it—and there are no grounds for saying that men or animals have it either.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY COMING EVENTS

EASTBOURNE : EASTER

(in association with the Humanist Teachers' Association and Eastbourne Humanist Group)

Saturday, March 28th, 1.30 p.m.

Distribution of leaflets to delegates attending the annual conference of the National Union of Teachers, Congress Theatre.

Sunday, March 29th, 3 p.m.

CENTRAL LIBRARY, GROVE ROAD

Public Meeting

RELIGION IN THE SCHOOL

Speakers:

EDWARD BLISHEN

WILLIAM HAMLING, MP

DAVID TRIBE

Offers of assistance (including cars) during Easter weekend will be appreciated.

THE PAVIOURS ARMS, PAGE STREET,
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LETTERS

Nationalisation of the Church of England

WE HAVE just received the latest issue of the FREETHINKER (December 13, 1969), and were quite appalled at some of the remarks contained in the National Secular Society's latest idea of nationalising the Church of England. By and large we think that the FREETHINKER is quite a progressive journal, but sometimes, unfortunately, your journal errs by allowing 'wishy-washy' thinking to creep in between the lines.

For example, we object, as rationalists, to conceding some rights to the clergy if it were possible for the Church of England to be nationalised. Let me quote part of the report: "... but the following broad outline might be considered. All church premises and lands (except recent voluntary gifts and bequests) should be nationalised for the public benefit. . . . For a modest rental the nationalised buildings might be made available to the Church of England at the time of existing Sunday services. Free-will offerings would in some areas support a full-time clergyman. In others the church could be spiritually renewed by his becoming a worker priest, retained at public expense for suitable educational or social work while officiating on Sundays . . ."

Mr Editor, the foregoing is absolute nonsense and typical of humanist thinking. If all freethinkers are concerned about the effects of organised religion, then they must also be concerned at the way the establishment functions and controls its people. The idea of nationalising the Church of England is all right up to a point, but it would not solve the problem if priests of the church were to remain in the position in order to inculcate a mythical god in children's minds while being paid either by the state or by the religious community. It is a great mistake for people to think (including Humanists) that Christianity is dying fast and that it won't be too long before we reach that utopia called "Free Secular Society". That is similar to some atheists who say and think that if the majority of people on this earth were atheists, then man's problems would be solved. Would they? We doubt that. Between the two so-called extremes—the atheists and the practising religious people—the so-called agnostics, the non-church attenders who, though occupied with their 'affluence', still believe that a supernatural could exist somewhere.

We think that many freethinkers need to take a course in clear thinking—something that is lacking in our world—in order to understand that society's problems are not solved by merely compromising with the establishment. Mr Wilson and his so-called 'socialist' government would no more think of lending support to the idea of nationalising the Church of England than he would of denouncing American war crimes in Vietnam, and I dare say he would have as much respect for the National Secular Society as a practising Jew would have for a pork-chop in a synagogue!

For the sake of readers of the FREETHINKER and members of the National Secular Society, I wish to quote what Chapman Cohen, long time editor of the FREETHINKER and one of the world's greatest freethinkers, said on page 44 of his book, *Primitive Survival in Modern Thought*: "So I say that the work of the true reformer is not to rationalise religion, but to end it. I say that his real task is not even to attempt to prove that he is fundamentally at one with his religious neighbour, but to show that he is in complete and fundamental disagreement with him. I do not think that it is a good policy or a wise policy for the Freethinker to work for a time when Christians and Freethinkers may settle down comfortably together. I believe that his real task should be to work for a time when there are no Christians to settle down with. Our work is not to make religion rational, but to make it impossible".

The National Secular Society ought instead to urge the government to make the churches pay taxes and rates. That would be one way of trying to chip the establishment, even if it takes 50 years to achieve it. When the masses of the people are so confused by the mass media, the churches, Wilson's labour government and big business all benefit from its effects. If it were possible to achieve a mass enlightenment of the people, Christianity, the mass media, corrupt governments, and big business would gradually disappear and in its place we could have a society based on rational thought and action, on humane co-operation and respectability for each and every individual. It seems that we all fail to comprehend that, when a social system, such as ours, faces crises, it immediately desires and effects compromises among the radical groups in order to maintain the status quo. It is as simple as that.

RON MARKE, *Hon. Secretary*.

Rationalist Association of NSW, Sydney, Australia.

Art and pornography

IT APPEARS to me that the writer of the front page article "Back-ground to the Backlash" (February 14) is suffering from 'liberal blindness'.

While he rushes to the defence of the *avant garde* art scene (and rightly so) it appears that he is blindly opposed to the 'pornographic' bookshop.

Arthur Moyses (*Freedom*, February 14) covered this particular subject very well; Moyses writes: "... we must protest against any infringement of our own and other's freedoms and seek, according to the extent of our moral or physical courage, to defend the 'rights' of these people to communicate whatever they so desire, but one wishes that these people would not claim a right for themselves that they would deny to others. If they wish to communicate freely with other like-minded people then they can only do so if the Soho smut shop has the same freedom. Deny that shop and its customers the right of free communication and you deny yourself that same privilege. It is a mistake that so many of our cultural liberals fall victim to . . .".

What is good for the goose, is good for the gander.

KEITH FELTON.

Vietnam

I CONFESS to being puzzled by Kenneth Ead's reaction to my letter about Vietnam.

I have followed the "history of oppression and suppression" in Vietnam right from the start of hostilities with the deepest distress. The attempt by the communists to seize power followed the pattern we have become familiar with elsewhere (Czechoslovakia for example) and must sicken all lovers of democratic freedom (which I am sure must include Kenneth Ead?).

If the North did not start the war by invading the South, then presumably it was the South who started it by invading the North? So the newspapers I was reading and the BBC got it the wrong way round. Likewise we are asked to believe the Korean war started by the South Koreans invading North Korea one presumes. How gullible can one get!

Why on earth should the Vietnamese, or anybody else, be forced to accept a Communist government if they don't want it? Why should they not be allowed free elections such as is enjoyed by Western nations?

Communists can only get into power by a combination of force, fraud and terror, and that is what they are trying to accomplish in Vietnam, as they do everywhere else!

CLAUD WATSON.

Rationality of Abortion

I SHOULD like to comment on John L. Broom's article "Can abortion be rationally justified" (February 14).

Without wishing to discuss the merits of this issue, I think that the author's logic is faulty in several respects. The argument that it is wrong to kill a child, therefore wrong to kill a new-born and therefore wrong to kill a foetus, whether just before birth or at any time previously, is reminiscent of the ancient paradoxes concerning the impossibility of motion, of which the story of Achilles and the tortoise, which the former can never overtake, is perhaps the best-known example.

The author argues thus: There is no recognisable difference between a foetus one second before it has emerged and one second after, but the correct answer to the paradox becomes clear when one asks: *Why* is infanticide unacceptable in our society?

Clearly the answer is that a relation exists between the new-born infant and another human being, as it already exists between that human being and the nearly born foetus. It is that emotional bond, which is usually non-existent at the time of conception—the latter being in practice unknown—and which will imperceptibly form a gestation progresses, which is the rational basis for our instinctual attitudes to feticide and infanticide. E. ROSENSTIEL.

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