

# Freethinker

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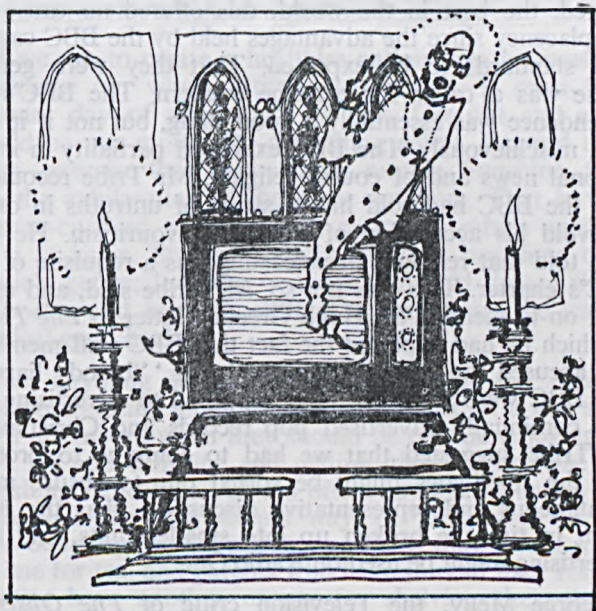
## 'BROADCASTING IN THE SEVENTIES'

THE MEETING organised by the National Secular Society on 'Broadcasting in the Seventies' took place in Caxton Hall on March 5, while snow and its attendant afflictions filled the air outside. This perhaps accounted for the hall being only about half full, but despite this the efforts of the NSS's tireless general secretary, William McIroy, who organised the meeting were well-rewarded. The current bitter controversy over the BBC's new policy, as outlined in their statement, *Broadcasting in the Seventies*, brought a number of experts on broadcasting to the meeting, in addition to the panel of speakers.

The meeting was chaired by Benn Levy, the playwright, who in a brief speech at the beginning asked despairingly, apropos of the demise of the Third programme: "How can a democracy be effected by the cherishing of a minority". He went on to quote Lenin: "When I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun", and pointed out how regrettable it was that Harold Wilson faced with the same situation had reached for Lord Hill. The first speaker, Hugh Jenkins, MP, was then introduced as a stalwart in the cause of broadcasting and "one of the few MPs who feels strongly about the arts".

Mr Jenkins spoke long and lucidly. Extolling the past virtues of the BBC and giving the opinion that it has done more for the arts than the Arts Council he said: "In terms of providing possibilities for creative artists to become known, the BBC's record is beyond question. This more than anything is now threatened". He went on to explain in detail how he thought the present sorry situation had arisen. It slowly became clear to the audience that the present position had been reached because of a peculiar, and in many ways arbitrary, collection of circumstances and personalities, not least among which was the succession of Postmaster Generals, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, Edward Short and John Stonehouse. This combined with the BBC's determination, and resulting almost unscrupulous efforts, to avoid greater governmental control had resulted in a *volte face* in the government's broadcasting policy. Mr Jenkins asked the audience to compare a government white paper presented by the then Postmaster General, Edward Short, in 1966 with the policy outlined in *Broadcasting in the Seventies*. The latter, Mr Jenkins said, "denies the white paper at every point". Short stated that it was the duty of government to prescribe broadcasting policies. In *Broadcasting in the Seventies* the BBC had told the government what they intended to do. There had been a "complete abdication of responsibility by the government". Short suggested that local radio should be financed by local resources and not from licence fees. *Broadcasting in the Seventies* claimed that local radio was an integral part of the BBC system. Dealing with the McKinsey report, Mr Jenkins explained that it had been kept secret, and its recommendations included in the BBC's policy statement without any reference to the government. "The nature of our broadcasting system is no longer determined by our government but by a firm of American management consultants . . . I am ashamed. No one could vote against the government on this, because the procedure was staged so that by voting against the government one supported the opposition's support of com-

mercial radio". The answer, Mr Jenkins thought, lay in the short term with the BBC staff. Such moves as their letter to *The Times*, and further harassment from within were all that could be done. In the long term he hoped that a Royal Commission would be set up to enquire into the communications media as a whole. To further this he hoped there would be a large scale meeting at the House of Commons, attended by entertainers as well as administrators. Such a meeting would help to influence the government.



Hugh Jenkins was followed by Stuart Hood, who has worked for both commercial television and the BBC, for the latter as Controller of Television Programmes. He began by stating that there was an economic crisis throughout broadcasting. Some commercial companies were losing money, for which they blamed the government levy. These companies used television as a means of making money to put into other ventures totally unconnected with broadcasting. There is thus a squeeze on production, The BBC's crisis was caused by the levelling off of its hitherto rising revenue from licence money, at the same time as its expenses were going up and it was taking on extra

(Continued overleaf)

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responsibilities. Politicians were reluctant to raise the licence fee. The BBC was unwilling to accept grants in aid because it was liable to lose its independence, and few people were attracted to a policy of accepting advertising. Mr Hood described the BBC as a "factory". Middle management men had crept in and formed a "soggy mass" between producers and decision-making at the top level. The BBC had become too big and it had thus to foster industrial democracy. Mr Hood hoped that a fresh start would be made when the BBC's charter ran out in 1976, and this meant tackling the problem now. He suggested the BBC and the ITA were not the only solution. A move had to be made towards pluralism.

David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, began by alluding to the fact that there were enough sacred cows in Broadcasting House to keep United Dairies going. He said that though British broadcasting was considered, the best in the world, this offered no cause for complacency since the advantages held by the BBC caused high standards to be expected. That they were getting worse was a cause for extreme concern. The BBC's independence was essentially a good thing, but not if it was used mischievously. The BBC exercised partiality in international news and of course religion. Mr Tribe recounted how the BBC had told him a string of untruths in order to avoid his accusation of religious favouritism. He had been told that religious broadcasting was a requisite of the BBC's charter. This was not so, Mr Tribe said, and aptly went on to mention Sir Hugh Greene's letter to *The Times* in which he had deplored the fact that BBC staff members had accused the administration of being "bloody liars". The BBC were supposed to be opposed to advertising yet they continually advertised pop records and Christianity. Mr Tribe suggested that we had to continue to protest, that the libel laws might be sorted out to ensure more spontaneous and representative discussion, that the BBC might in time be broken up into smaller units, and that advertising might be used on Radio One.

George Melly, the Television critic of *The Observer* and broadcaster, began by saying that his support of the Campaign for Better Broadcasting made him feel like someone fighting their way out of a bag of custard. The BBC administrators were not monsters, merely people who couldn't appreciate the problem. Charles Curran was not "an ogre, more like a hole in the air". Radio was a boil which was absorbing all the pus of broadcasting. It was looked on as moving wallpaper whose function was to rationalise financial difficulties. Radio Three might be a William Morris print, while Radio One was the type of wallpaper suitable for plaster ducks. The BBC policy-makers were forgetting that there were listeners. Everything was being rationalised so that programmes were identical lengths, "prepacked and sellophane wrapped". Lord Hill, Mr Melly emphasised, "must go". Hill's con-

tempt for "high-brows" and his belief that they were to be baited was a major source of trouble. "High-brows are no longer a set of people who are interested in Ming China or lesser known prints of Degas". There was a large set of young people, whom Hill ignores, who are interested in serious pop and pop poetry. Hill fobs them off with Tony Blackburn and Jimmy Young. "Broadcasting it has been decided is to be pap and rubbish". This trend was entering into television, Mr Melly thought. All opposition must be directed at the Madame Tussaud like figure of Lord Hill. He must go, and if he went then "his ventriloquist's dummy, Charles Curran" would go too.

The discussion which followed resolved itself into a set of speeches, some of them extremely forceful. Roger Snowden, the well known broadcaster, spoke at length and with derision of the BBC. He criticised the lack of ethics and decency, "the cutting down of every standard to the level of cheap commercialism". He exposed as hypocrisy the BBC's anti-advertising policy. He condemned the producer's budgets as "abysmal" and Radio One with all its offices and studios as doing the job worse than a boat in the North Sea. He finished by speaking of the BBC as a "sick organisation, and if the government doesn't do something about it, it will be a threat to democracy". In the name of Equity, the actors' union, he called for an immediate, full-scale government enquiry, and added as a footnote that even "the BBC's studios don't work. One spends half the day getting them into working order".

## 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

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, March 15, 6.30 p.m.: "Are the Progressives Reactionary?", Thomas Hosc.

London Young Humanists: Eden Hotel, Harrington Gardens, London, SW7: Sunday, March 15, 7 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

North Staffordshire Humanist Group: Cartwright House, Broad Street, Hanley (near Cinebowl): Friday, March 20, 7.45 p.m.: "The Open Society", Roy Beardmore.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, March 15, 11 a.m.: "Common Sense", H. J. Blackham, BA. Admission free. Tuesday, March 17, 7 p.m.: Discussion—"Euthanasia and Ethics", Dr S. Crown. Admission 2s (including refreshments), Members free.

Sutton Humanist Group: Friends House, Worcester Gardens (near station), Sutton: Thursday, March 19, 7.30 p.m.: "Censorship", John Montgomerie. (Coffee beforehand.) Saturday, April 25, 11 a.m.: Book sale. Details from Mrs Mephram—telephone 01-642 8796.

# THE WET BLANKET EFFECT OF RELIGION

CLAUD WATSON

IT IS IRONICAL that with the advance of medical knowledge we are gradually eliminating the infectious diseases, but many constitutional diseases appear to be on the increase. Our civilisation is a highly artificial one, and we tend to live in a most unnatural way. With the onset of an industrial society over the last 150 years we tend to crowd together in large cities, and most of our workers earn their living in factories and offices. The old peasant economy in which the bulk of the population lived in the country close to the land is fast disappearing. Even farming has become highly mechanised and is completely changing in an era of mass production.

Much of the disease which now afflicts us can be directly attributed to our unnatural way of life. By and large we are subjected to severe stress, both physical and mental, in our daily work, and to a large extent denied a healthy normal outlet for our energies in our spare time. To this unhealthy combination can be attributed most of the unrest now seen to an increasing degree in our industrial workers and our students for example. But medically it is well known that stress can wreak havoc with a poorly conditioned body; especially as middle age approaches.

A typical example of this is the alarming increase in coronary disease, the mortality of which is causing real concern to the medical professions of all Western nations. It would appear from what we know of our Victorian ancestors that although their lives tended to be short, sharp and horrid, this could seldom be blamed on the state of their coronary arteries; and to the Victorian physician coronary disease, so common now, was a comparative rarity.

One undoubted factor in this sad story of our flabby hearts is the decreasing amount of exercise we now indulge in. The average citizen probably takes less than one tenth of the amount of exercise that his Victorian predecessor indulged in one hundred years ago. In our mechanised society we spend much of our time on wheels and far too little on our legs. The change in the nation's habits since the advent of the motor car is quite revolutionary in this respect, and medically speaking it is a change for the worse.

All the marvels of medical science with its fantastic organ transplants and wonder drugs are not going to make a healthy citizen out of an unhealthy one if the cause of his trouble is fundamentally an unhealthy way of life. What then can we do?

First of all we must encourage everybody to use their leisure to their best advantage. This means they should get into the habit of doing something *active* as much as possible. It is so fatally easy (often literally so) to sink into a sort of lethargic passivity in one's leisure moments. So easy to sit back, put one's feet up, and become a spectator of life's scenery rather than to gird up one's loins, go out and be a *doer*.

And here of course we come bang up against the traditional English Sunday and its conventional passivity. The atmosphere of peace and tranquillity, of sitting back and doing nothing in particular. Nothing could be more harmful to one's coronary arteries, or for that matter to one's whole body. We are not designed by nature to lead a cabbage-like existence. We are by intention over millions of years of painful evolution active, aggressive searching animals. We are only supposed to rest when we are tired,

eat when we are hungry, and in between go out in search of food.

Should Sunday be a day of rest or of activity? One glance at those pasty faces and flabby bodies on any Monday morning in a suburban bus queue will give us the answer to that one!

In a supposedly secular society it is quite fantastic that religion still has such a hold over what we do on a Sunday. Bodies like the Lord's Day Observance Society survive like medieval knights in armour. Comical though they appear, they have, astonishingly, got the law on their side. When a well-known prince plays polo on Sunday they can, with impunity, openly reprove him. Another prince is not even permitted to take part in theatricals on a Sunday. Before the war it was commonplace for golf clubs to be closed on Sunday. And this would be the most convenient day of the week for members to play on.

The story of the creation of the world in Genesis is so absurd from a scientific point of view that it is difficult to believe that anyone still takes it seriously. The ancient Jewish scribe who recorded the quaint story presumably assumed, quite logically, that each phase of the moon lasted seven days because the world was created in seven days. He would have been astounded to realise it was the other way round. How he would have explained the origin of the month and the year we are not informed. No doubt he would have thought up some equally quaint fable—duly recorded for the benefit of a gullible posterity.

If we are to create a healthier nation then we must try to change our whole attitude to Sunday. It must be a national day of *action*, not of rest. Get out and about should be our motto. Do something active. Expand those lungs—exercise that flabby heart muscle. Sunshine, fresh air—the exhilaration of the great outdoors. That is what an over-civilised, over-coddled, nation of softies needs to get it fit again. Sitting in stuffy churches breathing other people's germs; listening to those same old dreary rituals (so boring and mentally stifling!): that is not the way to physical good health.

Can anything be more depressing than the sight of children traipsing along to Sunday schools on a fine summer's afternoon, when they should be outside enjoying the fresh air and sunshine and getting vigorous exercise and refreshing recreation. All too often, as most of us are well aware, it is the lazy parents' ways of "disposing" of tire-some offspring for the afternoon. When they return it will be time for tea, and parents who have shirked their responsibilities have another excuse for shelving their proper duties and neglecting their children's true welfare. Thus is the hypocrisy of religion compounded with the felony of neglect hiding under hollow pretence. Parliament must be prodded into taking more action over Sunday freedoms. The stifling effect of religion is still strong. It still has that wet-blanket effect which stifles initiative and effort to make Sunday a day of recreation. Even in this secular age people still have a peculiar sort of guilt-complex over what is permissible on the "Lord's Day". It is not "quite nice" to be too active on Sunday. It is not quite respectable. The old die-hard Sabbath tradition is still there just beneath the surface. And it is by no means confined to puritan areas where the nonconformist conscience holds sway.

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# THE GRAND DESIGNER

A. J. LOWRY

ATHEISTS will no doubt be interested to hear that, on the authority of the *Teach Yourself Encyclopedia of General Knowledge* (no less!) all who subscribe to such a philosophy as theirs must be deemed unreasonable for not accepting the argument from design. Were such opinionated twaddle, masquerading in the ill-fitting garb of fact, to constitute the rantings of one isolated man, we might rightly question his worth to serious consideration; but the continued appeal of this peculiar argument, both amongst the general public and the intellectual defenders of the faith, must supplement by weight of numbers the slight logical gravity of such a polemic, tipping the scales of public interest in favour of the necessity of a refutation and reply.

The teleological argument (as the argument from design is more properly called) attempts to prove the existence of God from the wonders and beneficence of nature. Surely, the proofs runs, the enormous complexity of nature, which is so finely attuned to the needs and lives of the creatures of this planet, proves the existence of a supreme architect and co-ordinator of infinite power and intelligence—it testifies, in short, to what a Christian would mean by the use of the word 'God'.

The first and most obvious of the mistakes of this argument lies in postulating an infinitely powerful being to explain the existence of a universe whose infinity of dimensions, and hence of complexity, cannot be proved. For in this post-Einsteinian universe, it is at least as likely as it is not, that there exists a curvature in space, and that the cosmos, though incalculably large, may nevertheless prove to be finite. Similarly, by Gamow's theories, the primeval Ylem was infinite neither in density nor volume, so that the matter comprising the meta-galactic system, though far from insignificant, would be finite rather than the reverse. Though the universe may prove to be infinite in extent, such notions remain speculations, and since it is not easy even to see how we might prove such a characteristic were it true, the supposition of an infinite premise to explain the existence of what may prove to be finite mass, remains one of the gravest and most irresponsible errors in the whole history of human thought.

If the Christians could prove the existence of an intelligence very powerful, though not, perhaps, omnipotent, it is certainly true to say that they would have proved a lot. But the evidence for such a power diminishes as the scrutiny of nature's benevolence increases, for if the regularity of the seasons, sunshine and rain, and the abundance of nature proves the benevolence and magnificence of God, what do the phenomena of earthquakes, volcanoes, famines, epidemics, locusts, rheumatics and tape-worms prove? They surely prove that God's power is trivial if he cannot prevent such occurrences, or not benevolent if he connives at their continuance, whilst having the power to prevent their effects.

Many, however, have attempted to employ Genesis 3 : 17 as a defence of the theistic position, claiming that the multitudinous shortcomings of the natural world are a consequence of God's curse at the time of the Fall; an argument saying very little for the justice or righteousness of the Almighty, in that distemper, swine-fever and foot and mouth disease should have added misery and death to the unenviable and transitory existence of the beasts, because of the recalcitrance of the human species. Christians may claim, of course, that their God is inscrutable, and

beyond the moral judgement of man, but only at the price of relinquishing all authority for asserting his benevolence, since that which is inscrutable cannot be known, and that which cannot be known cannot be known to be good.

This argument from the Fall, like the argument that the evils of the world are really for the best, stimulating man's bravery and compassion, robs the teleological argument (which it was intended to support) of whatever little experimental justification it may once have had. For it tells us only that in nature we find pleasant and unpleasant factors, a fact of which anyone possessed of his wits was already aware, and since, however benevolent or otherwise the natural world was found to be, the same arguments could always be employed, there cannot exist in theory any way in which the truth of the theist's assertions could be tested. In short then, it is clear that this assertion of God's existence, accounts, by this argument, for not one fact, good or bad, which could not equally well be explained by assuming that the universe was not governed by any intelligent being at all.

The argument of the suitability of climatic conditions for the existence of animal life stems from a mis-understanding of probability theory, and of the causal chain of life. It is not that we have the correct climate for our animal life, it is that we have the correct animal life (through the process of the survival of the fittest, etc.) for the climate in which we and they find ourselves. It might be maintained that if God and natural selection produce the same effects, there is no reason for maintaining the latter rather than the former explanation of the world. However, if the climate was created by God for the benefit of the animals (including man), then that climate might reasonably be expected to suit their needs and appetites to perfection. On the other hand, if animal life has slowly evolved, making the best of a rather poor job, we would expect to find a considerable discrepancy obtaining between the ideal climate for any species, and the climate in which that species is forced to live. The two hypotheses predict different results, and by appealing to the facts we may easily determine which of them is correct. The fact that every year literally millions of migratory birds and insects are killed by adverse weather conditions, whilst cold and heat, drought and flood, decimate the animal kingdom and necessitate the continual over-production of offspring to ensure survival, clearly reveals the inadequacy of the God hypothesis to explain the evidence at hand.

But Christians, particularly if they are possessed of some scientific knowledge, are not beaten yet. Granted that the arguments so far considered are conspicuously inconclusive in proving God's existence, does not the existence of life itself contradict the law of increasing entropy which a God-less universe would predict, and thus necessitate the postulation of a divinity to explain how this process has been overcome? Since, if left to themselves the order between objects diminishes, whilst the advent of life represents the complete reversal of this trend, the existence of life must surely testify to the intervention of an extra-cosmic intelligence, which might, with a fair degree of justification, be identified with the Christian God.

To this a number of objections can immediately be raised. Either the law of entropy may be universally applied, or it may not, and since the former postulation results in the conclusion that God himself is becoming increasingly disordered—an intolerable thought—we must

conclude that there are exceptions when this principle does not work. In which case, it must surely be obvious to all that to explain life as circumventing entropy by some natural means requires a considerably smaller assumption than to postulate the existence of a whole world (heaven) outside its application, together with an unknown means by which its citizens may interfere with the operations of the natural world.

Despite its initial appeal, however, the concept of diminishing order, when more fully understood, gives little or no support to the believer's claim. The fusion of free hydrogen atoms into the molecule  $H_2$  forms one of the most common atomic reactions in the universe we observe. If a reaction such as this be considered contrary to the universal law of entropy then it is clear that the law is not universal at all, and the advent of life presents no particular problem in defying a principle whose application would appear to be the exception rather than the rule. On the other hand, however, if the creation of molecules is in accord with our understanding of entropy, there would appear no good reason to believe that any new principle came into operation as we considered substances of increasing complexity, and the formation of such molecules as DNA would invoke no philosophical considerations not discussed, and overcome, in the creation of  $H_2$ .

Eventually Christians are reduced to bad arguments from analogy. Like the editor of the Teach Yourself Encyclopedia, in his reply to my letter of complaint, they argue that since no intelligent child would believe anyone who told him that a fruit orchard had grown without anyone having planted it, so no intelligent person would believe the atheist who told him that the universe had come into being 'just by chance'. Ignoring the quizzical 'chance', atheism's belief in which appears to constitute an article of every Christian's faith, the point must be made that the only means whereby the child could verify his opinion would be to point to wild groves of trees, wherein the order could be shown to be significantly less, or to directly observe the planting of similar fruit orchards by farmers and their friends. To convince enquirers of the existence of God, therefore, the champions of such an argument as this would have to show either a portion of the primeval chaos which the Almighty had not yet taken in hand, or produce evidence of present divine creation that all might see and believe. The failure of believers to satisfy either of these criteria renders their argument null and void, and represents a fine example of the specious conclusions which may be reached by false reasoning based upon analogies whose relationship to the issue in point is both tortuous and obscure.

Finally, full allowance must be made for the unfair advantage which the teleological argument must, by the very nature of things, enjoy. It is clear that a certain amount of benevolence and order must exist in nature in any place where life, especially of the complexity of human life, is to be able to develop. Thus, whatever conditions obtain in the universe as a whole, it is logically necessary that intelligent life must find itself in a tolerable climate, and hence be attracted to the teleological argument, whether it is true or not. Mercurians and Plutonians do not sit in their respective inclemencies, cursing whatever God may have placed them in such a wilderness, since the conditions on these planets are so atrocious that life has never been able to progress to the point where it could pass intelligent comments upon them. Nor must it be forgotten that man, having in the past existed in regions most likely to promote his own survival, doubtless gained

a view of the universe in which its benevolent aspects were considerably exaggerated. It is only in the past few centuries that we have come to understand the fact that the vast preponderance of the worlds in the solar system, and probably elsewhere, are barren, lifeless, inert, and show not the slightest trace of intelligent design.

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## NEWS FROM THE NSS

THE National Secular Society, Humanist Teachers' Association and Eastbourne Humanist Association will join forces for a weekend of activity at Eastbourne during Easter when 1800 teachers will be in the town at the annual conference of the National Union of Teachers. They will be promoting the campaign against religious indoctrination in school, and a leaflet distribution, pamphlet sale and public meeting will be held.

On Saturday, March 28th, 1.30 p.m., there will be a leaflet distribution outside the Congress Theatre where the conference takes place, and a sale of pamphlets at the end of the afternoon session. On Sunday, March 29, 3 p.m., there will be a public meeting at which the speakers will be Edward Blishen (author of *Roaring Boys*), William Hamling, MP, and David Tribe; David Purdon, chairman of Eastbourne Humanist Group will preside.

Readers in Sussex are urged to support these events. Car parties are being arranged from London and elsewhere, and if you require transport—or can offer lifts in your car—contact us at once. If you can help in any way please get in touch with the NSS or Miss D. Pyper (Hon. Secretary, Eastbourne Humanist Group), 9 Peartree Lane, Little Common, Bexhill (telephone Cooden 2518).

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The NSS annual dinner has always provided an opportunity to meet co-workers and friends in a pleasant, informal atmosphere, and the 1970 dinner should prove well up to the standard of former years. The guest of honour will be the well-known botanist J. S. L. Gilmour, who is a former Assistant Director of Kew and Wisley and now Director of the University Botanic Gardens, Cambridge. He helped to found the Cambridge Humanists, and is a Director of the Rationalist Press Association. The other speakers will be Nigel Sinnott (chairman of London Young Humanists and NSS Executive Committee member), Fanny Cockerell (editor of *Plan*), Richard Clements (Appointed Lecturer at South Place Ethical Society) and David Tribe, who will be in the chair.

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Mr William Burgess who died recently, aged 85, had been a member of the NSS for many years. There was a secular committal ceremony at Honor Oak Crematorium, London.

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The Society has received a legacy from the estate of the late Mrs Annie Louise Bazin (London). Mr Alexander Addison (Aberdeen) also remembered the NSS when making his Will.

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David Tribe, President of the NSS, recently broadcast in two programmes for schools, *Living Without God*. Marghanita Laski and the Dean of Guildford also took part.

B.H.S.

## LIFE FROM A TEST TUBE

ERIC WILLOUGHBY

THE STARTING of a human life in a test tube is a scientific achievement as great as any this century. The splitting of the atom was another. Both are fraught with difficulties in their practical use, involving social and moral problems.

Thanks to the atom we have power stations which are relatively cheap to run, devoid of clusters of smoking chimneys, coal stockpiles, slag heaps and the belching out of soot particles which spread for miles around. It has also given us atomic weapons, and plunged the world into the fear of a nuclear holocaust.

On the face of it, similarly conflicting arguments can be advanced by proponents and opponents of laboratory procreation.

For one thing, it is ironic that the announcement should have come during European Conservation Year, when we are supposed to be thinking about environmental problems, most of which stem directly from over-population. In the face of over-crowding and too many people with too little food, it would appear that an additional way of having babies is the last thing the world needs.

We are, it seems, at a period in history when contraception and fertility are being given equal attention by the scientists.

What then, are the benefits of this discovery which make the undesirable possibilities tolerable?

The most obvious one is that women who have hitherto been unable to conceive now have a better chance of doing so. And the end product is by no means the only consideration. Impotence and incapability often leave deep-seated psychological wounds. And although the new technique is not likely to effect any cures for these disabilities at least it may turn a woman into a mother by the only means possible and must, therefore, relieve many feelings of inferiority, guilt and frustration.

From no official sources has it been suggested that the test tube technique will be other than a last-resort method for women unable to bear children.

One point which is worrying people at present is what the resultant child is to be told when the inevitable question as to his origin is asked. The worry results largely from ignorance, as does most worry generally. The technique involves the reimplantation in the womb of an egg originally taken from the woman. Between the two operations the egg is brought into contact with sperm from the woman's chosen male partner. This is an over-simplification of course, but is basically the principle involved.

The only artificial element involved is therefore, the method of bringing the two organisms together. This should present little difficulty of explanation and should, perhaps, be approached by an explanation of the usual method of reproduction, and introduced as an addendum after an explanation that the usual method is not always possible with some people. It should be stressed that the female and the male are both still involved in the normal way. Schools should include the subject in their sex education syllabus.

A far more sinister aspect, and one which does seem to be gaining ground among thinking people is that when perfected and regularly used, the test tube method presents every opportunity of experiment with selective breeding.

Shortly after the announcement that the method is being tried with a woman, it was stated by the consultant in charge of the case, Mr Patrick Steptoe, that it would be possible to determine the sex of the child while in the tube.

Predictably, fierce words of opposition have come from religious bodies, although the Catholic church seems to have remained strangely quiet—so far anyway; these things take time. (It always seems strange to me that although the Roman church vehemently opposes birth-control it doesn't bat an eyelid at the doctors who practise death-control, which is surely as equally unnatural.)

However, we must now await the passage of time in the hope that no untoward aspects of conception outside the womb will become apparent. When the technique is perfected, it is to be hoped that it will be freely available to those who can derive most benefit from it; at the least it should not be denied them because of pathetic wailings from ecclesiastical circles.

### 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

DAVID PURDON, *Chairman*

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

THE PAVIOURS ARMS, PAGE STREET,  
LONDON, SW1

**Saturday, April 4th, 6 p.m. for 6.30 p.m.**

#### 64th ANNUAL DINNER

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## Book Review

DAMIEN DOWNING

*Murder vs. Murder: The British legal system and the A.6 murder case.* Jean Justice. (7/6, available from the Freethinker Bookshop, plus 6d postage.)

THIS CURIOUS little book is ill-named; the large part of it consists of the author's account of how he tried to prove the innocence of James Hanratty and the guilt of another person. Peter Alphon—who was in fact the first suspect of the police, subsequently eliminated from their list. Poorly written in a rather subjective style by someone who is clearly very involved in the story he tells, it nonetheless manages to raise the questions it sets out to answer. Sufficiently to interest John Lennon in its publication anyway.

The story so far; on August 22, 1961, at 9.30 p.m. Michael Gregsten and Valerie Storie were sitting in their car just off a side-road near Slough when they were accosted by a man, who produced a gun and made them drive around for five hours until he shot Gregsten, killing him, and shot Valerie Storie several times in the back and legs, leaving her for dead. It was the positive identification of Hanratty by Storie that was the backbone of the prosecution case in the trial. Hanratty was found guilty, his appeal failed, and he was hung on April 4, 1962. Throughout he professed his innocence, and did not even mention the murder in his confession on the eve of execution, as any good Christian would.

From accounts of the trial, it is clear that apart from several minor circumstantial details, such as Hanratty's having disposed of the jacket to a suit, which Superintendent Acott implied as meaning that it had been bloodstained (Hanratty said it had been torn in a house-breaking job so he threw it away) and despite the production of more than seventy witnesses for the prosecution, who helped to turn it into the longest trial in English legal history, it was the evidence of Valerie Storie, dubious evidence, that convicted Hanratty.

The only thing that could prove the innocence of Hanratty is a sound alibi for him, or proof that the murder was committed by someone else. As Hanratty changed his alibi and failed to produce a complete, coherent one—for which his father blames his solicitor—it is improbable that any further investigation would achieve anything in this direction. But what the inquiry that the author of this book, together with John Lennon, is calling for could possibly achieve is to establish the guilt of another person—something that this book claims to do but fails.

Two-thirds of *Murder vs. Murder* is concerned with the story of Justice's attempt, through a friendship with Peter Alphon that turned into a highly-charged relationship, to prove his guilt. In fact he managed to elicit a written confession and several obtuse verbal admissions of guilt, but since Alphon was an ostensibly schizoid character (not to mention his Fascist tendencies and his belief in his messianic mission) the sincerity of these must be questionable, and their legal validity zero. Consequently the bearing of that part of the book on the A.6 case is small, although it is fairly exciting in itself—good material for a novel.

The subject on which the book does have a bearing is the actions of the police in the matter. Integrity in the members of the constabulary is something that we are at last coming to regard as being less than dogma; up till now we have always considered policemen and doctors as having a perfecting charisma such as is attributed to Catholic priests. Even so it has taken the lead of the "underground", who have ample reason to feel paranoid about the "fuzz" to start us questioning the sacrament of police-hood.

On October 11, nearly two months after the crime, Valerie Storie, at an identification parade, took 20 minutes to identify the man who shot her. When she "had decided on Hanratty, Supt. Acott gripped her arm and said 'Well done'. It may be that, infected by his enthusiasm, she felt more confident about her identification".

Operating on this new and exciting basis of the less than infallibility of the law's long arm, it is far from unreasonable to suggest that a man under such pressure as must be put to bear on a member of the Murder Squad working flat out to achieve an arrest, the only result regarded as a success, could easily paint the most convenient set of answers with the colour of truth. One does not need to adopt the extreme view of Joe Orton—in the words of the police officer in his play, *Loot*: "Anything you say will be taken down, twisted around, altered and used in evidence against you"—to see how a false identification could be encouraged out of a witness.

The second case of the police being naughty is more blatant if not more serious; a year after the murder, when Justice had been involved with Alphon for seven months, he received a phone-call

from Scotland Yard—"Listen to me, Justice. If you don't promise to drop the A.6 business, it will be the loony bin for you and no mistake." After such events as the raid on the Open Space Theatre, we find it a lot less difficult to believe such things; but they didn't start with the Open Space, they have been going on since civilisation started to call itself such.

A book then, more interesting in its implications and connections than its content. Don't rush out and buy it because it's exciting—it isn't—but do if you are interested in the Hanratty case, or are thinking of trying to defend an innocent man yourself.

## THE WET BLANKET EFFECT OF RELIGION

(Continued from page 83)

The great majority of scientists, and that must include the medical profession who are basically scientists, must by the very nature of their training be agnostic at heart. But as they must retain an aura of respectability they dare not speak out openly about the absurdity of our attitude to Sunday observance. It would seem that the Humanists must take the lead here. But dare one predict that if they do they will earn the gratitude of all those concerned with the nation's health and welfare?

## Theatre

LUCY DANSIE

*The Battle of Shrivings* by Peter Shaffer (Lyric Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W1).

THIS IS an exceptional play in that it both entertains and enlightens, a rare combination, and fulfils both functions to an even rarer degree. It is a play which cannot but be of intense interest to those who label themselves humanist, rationalist or the like. Shaffer poses many questions, the most important of which might be said to be, 'Can man live by reason alone?' His answer is open to varying interpretation, but all are varying shades of 'no'. The question is posed at the centre of the plot which is built on an argument between Gideon and Mark. Gideon is the personification of the rational, pacifist side of Bertrand Russell taken to an extreme—an elderly philosopher who sits down in protest in Parliament Square. Unlike Russell he is a vegetarian, tectotaller, celibate, and more important he regards his pacifism as absolute. Mark is a poet, once Gideon's most prized pupil, who finds in middle age after the death of his wife that he can no longer sustain atheism and the rational ethic. His emotionalism is again taken to extremes, as is exemplified by his portable shrine to his dead wife, a box adorned with flowers containing a coloured replica of her head inside of which are her ashes.

He comes to Gideon's house, Shrivings, ostensibly to see his son, who is staying there as a virtual member of the family, but really in the hope that Gideon can restore his faith in reason. He issues Gideon with a challenge at the end of the first act, Friday night, that by Sunday midnight Gideon will throw him out of the house.

The remaining two acts take us to Sunday midnight. That the play is a massive contrivance is so evident that it offers no scope for condemnation. The central characters are larger than life, as is the situation they put themselves in. There can be no time limit on the testing of a philosophy, while equally the provocative activity engaged in by Mark, is something which would not enter into a normal situation, since Mark's behaviour is contrived even within the play.

The central outcome of the challenge is material more to the sustentation of the audience's interest than to the substance of the play and as such need not be revealed here. Suffice it to say that both men's outlooks are radically altered. Shaffer shows that a complete faith in reason as exemplified in absolute pacifism, or in its synonym universal love, is humbug. Gideon in demonstrating publicly his pacifism and advocating the efficacy of reason in all things, paradoxically unwittingly sets himself up as a God, who transcends his wife to the point of denying her individuality and is worshipped by such as his young American secretary. At the

(Continued overleaf)

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same time we see that a deterministic emotionalism is correspondingly hollow. Such a philosophy is shown to be not only unworthy of an intelligent being but devastating in its effect both on its recipients and its practitioner. Mark had killed his wife and outlawed his son from the family circle. Shaffer binds this up with religion, Gideon being an atheist while Mark is veering towards the Catholic church, the implication being that neither position is tenable. Though Shaffer demolishes these extremely sacred cows and insists that an honest man must admit to the fickleness of his nature, as manifested in a blend of reason and emotion, he does not advocate any definable middle road. He implies that each must work out his own salvation, that we are isolated.

This and much more is put across, and if the impression thus far is that Shaffer has created a mimed sermon, let me not only remind the reader that suspense is sustained as in the best thrillers, but point out that there are many comic episodes. The comedy comes chiefly from the fiery Mark, played brilliantly by Patrick Magee. With an Irish-central European accent he spits out lines like: "The sixth century . . . before Kant". John Gielgud and Wendy Hiller are predictably good as Gideon and his wife, Enid. Dorothy Lyman as Gideon's American secretary and Martin Shaw as Mark's son, David, are again excellently cast. This is a play of immense meaning, which should not be missed by anyone whose mind is open.

## LETTERS

### Celtic nationalism

Dáibhi Reynolds, Uas.,  
An tEagarthóir,  
An Saorintinneach,  
103 Borough High Street,  
London, SE1.

An Luan, 2 Márta 1970.

A dhuine uasail,

Mr Berresford Ellis' letter of February 28 is one of the most extraordinary diatribes (to use his own term) that I have read for some time. With friends such as this the Celtic language movement needs no enemies.

Firstly I should like to refute his charge that the FREETHINKER is an organ of "English imperialism"; if Mr Ellis had done a little more reading on the Freethought movement he would know that it stood consistently for home rule for India and Ireland; and on a personal note, only a few weeks ago the Saxon beast who edits FREETHINKER deigned to publish an article of mine on Adam Dubh Ua Tuathail—Gaelic quotations and all!

If Mr Berresford Ellis' conception of reality is correct it will not be long now before the downtrodden English storm the Tower of London, overthrow the historic foreign tyranny of the Devereuxes, Lloyd Georges, Disraelis, Mac Donalds, Powells and O'Callaghans, and create a glorious "socialist" republic speaking un sullied ninth century Anglo-Saxon. That is if they are not in turn decimated by Norse/Latin-speaking fanatics trying to resurrect the Viking/Roman empire! I eagerly await the formation of the Isle of Dogs Freestate, proclaimed, no doubt, in matchless rhyming slang (—I beg your pardon, Classical Cockney)!

Mr Ellis has completely missed the point about South Africa; nobody disputes the oppression of the Xhosa and Bantu, but the fact remains that the ruling clique, the Afrikaner nationalists, help to maintain their privileges by appealing to a "ghetto" mentality based on the myth of the downtrodden Voortrekkers and the "sacred" Afrikaans language. Afrikaans students have been known to be discouraged from taking scholarships in the USA for fear of Anglo-Saxon (i.e. liberal) "contamination".

One of the shameful deeds of British rule in the late Middle Ages was the denial of public office to Welsh and Irish speakers. I very much fear that in Mr Ellis' 'Celtica' the same bigotry would be practised in reverse. I know of one case where a good English-speaking physicist found difficulty in furthering his education because "his Irish was not good enough". An attempt to (re-)enforce a Celtic language upon a population at large will only reduce it to the level that Latin reached in England until recent years. Now that Latin is no longer being demanded as an essential subject for University entrance, students are turning to the Classics with a renewed enthusiasm.

Nobody denies that an oppressed community has the right to self-determination; the Irish and the Slavs are a good case in

point. But humanity, owing to the enormous growth of communications and science, has outgrown nation-states. For the happiness and peace of humanity we desperately need an effective world government on a pluralist, not a uniform basis. A common language would greatly facilitate this, and English is an obvious first choice, especially as it is an excellent medium also for transmitting scientific information. This does not mean that the Celtic languages have to be exterminated: the rich variety of saga, song and poetry to be found especially in Welsh and Gaelic will continue to appeal and give emotional satisfaction to the artistic needs of Man which I do not see disappearing with world government. And why, Mr Ellis, should not a Japanese share the beauties of Welsh poetry as well? Languages should be used and shaped for Man, and not he as their slave.

In conclusion I had better confess that I am a "horrifying melting pot" mongrel of English, Irish, Scots and Welsh descent. I am a keen student of the Irish language and an active member of *Conradh na Gaeilge (Londain)*, though I have written purely in a personal capacity.

Is mise,

le meas mór,

NIALL AODH SIONOID.

(Nigel H. Sinnott)

### Free Will and Choice

THE FREETHINKER of February 14 contains two articles on free will, one by Mr G. L. Simons and one by myself. Mr Simons argues that free will has nothing to do with choice. I suggest that it does. Perhaps I could try to analyse our differences.

I only introduced "free will" in terms of choice because I didn't know how else to do it. Mr Simons gets around the difficulties of the term by hinting that it mightn't have a meaningful definition. This is one way of reducing your opponents' position to nonsense, but it seems a bit glib to me. On the other hand, if Mr Simons could define "free will" without recourse to choice I would be very happy.

As it is, I am prepared to argue a determinist position even if the two were identical. It does not seem so obvious to me as it does to Mr Simons that choice exists and I think that Mr Simons gives excellent reasons for assuming that it doesn't. Surely we would want to say, if someone acted as he had to act, or couldn't have acted differently, that he had no choice, not that he had a choice, chose and then couldn't have chosen otherwise.

The difficulties which face free will are fairly considerable, even on the interpretation I gave. My view is that to say I have free will is to say (e.g.) that I have the ability to choose between raising my left hand or raising my right. Now the concept of an ability is, itself, difficult because how do we know that I have an ability unless I exercise it? Normally, of course, we say that if I raise my hand I have the ability to raise it. But what would having an ability to choose amount to? No conceivable action would prove my ability to choose. At best the doctrine of free will will be completely without empirical foundation.

NICHOLAS GRIFFIN.

### Terminology

MY WAY OF LIFE is *secular* because I am *atheist* about all the images of Gods so far projected by religious institutions. I am *agnostic* about the initial cause of the Universe and the motivation of existence. I am *rational* enough to accept the teasing probability that members of our species may never know these mysteries.

ISOBEL GRAHAME.

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