

# Freethinker

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## A SELL OUT BY THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

THE Social Morality Council is a body made up of Christians, Jews and Humanists. The Humanists on its executive committee are H. J. Blackham, Director of the British Humanist Association from 1963 to 1968, Dr Peter Draper, Chairman of the BHA, Michael Lines, General Secretary of the BHA, and Dr James Hemming, Chairman of the BHA's Education Committee. Last week the council's Working Party on Moral and Religious Education in County Schools, a body again made up of Christians, Jews and Humanists, published its report. The Humanist members of the Working Party were Mr Blackham and Dr Hemming. Distribution of the report is being undertaken by the BHA. Of this report Maurice Hill, Secretary of the Humanist Teachers' Association, has said: "The report contains some very acceptable suggestions particularly in the section on moral education. Also they do state that compulsory worship is indefensible, but instead they want two things: worship by different sects, which is of course very divisive even though voluntary, and they still want to have assemblies from which there will be no opting out. This is very worrying because one is not certain what will happen there. One can only suspect.

"They want to change RI to RE, but as far as I can see this means it will be more or less the same as it is now and its direction will remain in the hands of the RI departments. And they also say that since this is moral education no one can opt out. Those things are a total disaster. I don't see how we can possibly support it."

Prior to publication of the report the BHA press officer issued a press release, headlined "Humanists Give Report of Social Morality Council Working Party on Moral and Religious Education Wholehearted Welcome". That the BHA thus presumes to speak for "humanists" appears to be a not insubstantial deviation from democratic, or indeed from what I for one take to be humanist, practice. Particularly so, since at the time the statement was issued only a minute handful of humanist opinion had even seen the report, and a substantial proportion of that handful had had direct connection with its preparation anyway.

The executive officers of the National Secular Society had not seen the report, and whether he had seen it or not, it is clear that the opinion of the Secretary of the Humanist Teachers' Association is paid little heed when announcements are made as to what Humanists feel about educational matters. This is not the first time that the BHA have supported a document as though it were the policy of Humanists on religious education, only to find that large sections of Humanist opinion would not accept it. This happened in 1964 when a statement entitled *Religious and Moral Education, Some Proposals for County Schools*, by a group of Christians and Humanists, created a great deal of controversy and was rejected by The Humanist Teachers' Association.

To argue as to the definition of a Humanist is not my purpose here, nor do I have any desire to create undue animosity between Humanists, since a movement requires solidarity in order to further its aims. Nevertheless, when those aims themselves come in question, one is bound to attempt to explain what is going on. The BHA's participation in, and support of, a document which in effect does little except give the religious further licence to monkey with the minds of British children, at a time when more and more people are coming to recognise the intrinsic harm, not to say impracticability, of religious education,

constitutes nothing less than a denial of what a large number of Humanists believe and are working towards.

The BHA press release alluded to above indicates that the BHA's executive realise this. It says of the report: "We welcome it wholeheartedly. The report contains very little with which the BHA disagrees. Nevertheless, in order to place in perspective the differences in emphasis between Humanist and the non-Humanist participants in the Working Party, we should like in particular to add the following points of clarification". There follow three points of clarification, one of which is too general to have any importance whatever, the other two of which are both quite asinine, namely: "That the right to opt out" of the newly proposed acts of worship and of religious education until the compulsory "new open style" RE begins to operate "should attach to the child rather than to the parents"; and that the acts of worship should be held "outside normal school hours (e.g. at lunchtime or after school)". Consider an eight-year-old telling a teacher, who is bolting his lunch-time sandwich while mugging up his sermon, that he has decided he isn't religious.

Is there any reason why parents should not opt their children into religion by sending them to the proper place, church, Sunday school or their equivalents, and thus leave the teachers to get on with the job of teaching, including the inculcation of morals, which the BHA do at least concede has little to do with religion.

For some reason the BHA is bending over backwards to conciliate the religious and is selling British school-children, teachers and in my opinion Humanists up a most obscure and ill-defined river. In the circumstances the following press release from David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, gives a surprisingly lucid interpretation of the proposals which are wholeheartedly, but with reservations, supported by the BHA:

*"The statement on moral and religious education from a working party of Christians, Jews and Humanists is an interesting document. Views on this highly controversial subject vary not only from ideology to ideology but from individual to individual. Any report which gains a number of signatures must therefore be a little vague and imprecise.*



# Freethinker

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Editor: David Reynolds

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and it is the more pleasant to notice some admirable observations here, especially under 'Moral education'.

The following points should however be made. The statement 'that an assembly for worship need not be held for all children every day, and that Christian worship as a daily act imposed on the whole school is no longer justifiable' may suggest that it would be all right to hold this event less frequently; and the possibility of 'general assemblies on religious themes conducted by members of different religious groups' is mooted. 'Special group assemblies or acts of worship for different religious groups' are also suggested. A third suggestion is an assembly as 'a corporate celebration of common values'. All these suggestions are more or less questionable. Any religious assembly or assemblies are divisive and of highly doubtful educational value. Various religious rituals can, if desired, be shown on films taken in their natural setting, and small groups can, if they want to, meet outside school hours. I have no personal objection to assemblies for making general announcements, but any ceremony like the American Saluting of the Flag or a public school Founder's Day celebration could be objectionable in many ways.

The report wants to 'encourage sympathetic understanding of a religious approach to life', foster 'respect for religious beliefs and ways of life' and recognition of 'the nature and claims of religion'. While it is important to recognise that there are many views different from our own and that respect is due to those who hold them, it is no part of day school life to admire beliefs which many people regard as superstitious, decadent or fanciful. The sophisticated approach to problems of comparative religion and religious psychology mentioned in the report 'may seem to apply only to the higher than average pupil'. What is more likely to be urged, despite a statement to the contrary, is that such attitudes are too difficult for the primary school, where religious education should not appear as a distinct subject.

The document recognises that those parents who favour RE mostly have moral aspirations in mind. But moral practice can be even more difficult than those moral theories to which attention is given. Apart from psychopathic cases, who clearly have to be curbed, and young children, whose understanding of the world has to be supplemented and regulated, there are clear dangers in stating that 'the morally immature . . . must be encouraged to adopt certain attitudes by those of greater experience'. This could readily become a priestly function. In his Foreword the Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster stresses the need 'to find common ground from which to face the vast moral issues of our time: world poverty, international peace, race relations, control of environment'. Ways to achieve this are rather more difficult than he seems to believe. Apartheid is a form of race relations, which is given moral and religious sanctions by its practitioners. Many non-Catholics believe that the Vatican's attitude to contraception is an important cause of world poverty and that its involvement in 'Biafra', Vietnam and other places has been

a threat to international peace. Above all, we must not suggest to society at large that the schools have, or will soon have, a magic formula to solve the moral problems of humanity, which will relieve parents and governments of their responsibilities for the environmental life of the individual, that is much more important than any moral precepts."

## SECULAR EDUCATION APPEAL

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All donations will be acknowledged

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, SE1

## 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 Mepham, 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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton: Sunday, April 5, 5.30 p.m.: "Nationalism and the Needs of our Time", Richard Clements, OBE.

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, April 9, 8 p.m.: "Adoption", D. Mackay (Hon. Secretary of the Independent Adoption Society).

Merseyside Humanist Group: Ethel Wormald College, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool 3: Friday, April 10, 7.30 p.m.: "Race Relations", Pauline Crabbe (Conciliation Officer, Race Relations Board and member of Granada Television Seven Days panel).

New Medical Society: Chelsea Town Hall, King's Road, London, SW3: Monday, April 6, 8 p.m.: "The Right to Die", David Tribe.

Nottingham and Notts Humanist Group: Adult Education Centre, 14 Shakespeare Street; Friday, April 10, 7 p.m.: "The Work of the Family First Trust", Mrs R. I. Johns (Chairman, Family First Trust).

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, April 5, 11 a.m.: "Psychologists at War", Dr John Lewis. Admission free. 3 p.m.: Bertrand Russell Memorial Meeting—Chairman, Lord Sorensen; Speakers: H. J. Blackham, Peter Cadogan, Dr John Lewis. Admission free. Tuesday, April 7, 7 p.m.: Discussion—"Nationalism or Internationalism?", Peggy Duff. Admission 2s (including refreshments), members free.

The address of Roger Collinson, the organiser of the Bring Back Children's Radio Campaign, which was referred to in last week's leader, is 231 Carlton Avenue, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex.



## ON THE DOLE

ARTHUR FRANCIS

HAVING CANCELLED my order for one packet of crisps for enjoyment on Saturday night, my economy is now set at the Department of Employment and Productivity. I now produce nothing, but understand my unemployment will bring some benefit to a healthy budget. It makes me sick.

If I may speak so common—there is nothing wrong with the labour exchange. But it has its moments when there is nothing to exchange. The modern building greets you with hope. A leaflet that urges one to take a long trip to Australia swells the mind into comfort and joy. True the down-under only wants the skilled and the healthy. Our taxpayer has paid well for this. The swagman hugs his waltzing matilda with glee.

I must be British fair. There are also opportunities offered in the Royal Air Force. The Department of Employment and Productivity flies high to attract the employables.

The receptionist smiles you into the public place of workship. She asks what you want. One million different adjectives not fit for *Private Eye* are kept in their place. You make your request. Another part of the hall is offered to receive your lazy buttocks. The waiting begins.

Off with the optics: out with the dirty handkerchief. The glasses are rubbed with solemn effect. How else can you pretend that you have a brain that little bit higher than the normal commoner? Eyelids close as if a mighty problem is being solved. In reality you itch on a certain part of the leg but dare not scratch in front of the lady.

I am just that little bit different. I have been asked to attend as the organisation has a job to offer. Visions of thirty pounds per week—no, hang it, in view of the dockers, forty pounds each Thursday, loom under that mighty cranium. Of course, you'll be in charge of others. Can't expect Bank of England blessings for sweet fanny—sorry—for no responsibility. There will be a new car on top of the income. Good way of avoiding tax; perhaps perks like grub vouchers. And a return to my Saturday-night crunch.

The tune of 'Land of Hope and Glory' blows silently through my lips. My Red Flag is hauled to the ground. If society wants me to do an outstanding job—fair enough. That two pounds one and sixpence in my Giro must increase. Hang it all, I'll transfer to one of the Big Five . . . or is it four . . . or is it three now?

My ears tease me a little. From the private screens at the counter I can here every word. Good job that the royal gentleman has not called and is to join the Senior Service.

An elder worker is seeking crumbs at the DEP's table. (Note my modern phrase—Wigan Pier has sunk). He has an offer. Six shillings per hour but week-end working can raise earnings. The seeker-of-fortune refuses with manly pride. We did not beat Hitler for nothing: I mean, six shillings per hour. Another opportunity is given by the lady as she scans the local press. Fourteen pounds to sixteen pound fifteen. I have seen the advert too. The range was from labourers to tractor drivers. The man is after a labourer's job.

He agrees to seek his fortune on that path. I gulp some expectoration that should have smashed on to the floor.

My gentlemanly feelings rule the day as I quickly scratch the ungentlemanly part.

Two clients enter the Hall of Labour. They appear through my glasses as if the last time they worked was in the snow clearance of 1947. My dreadful thoughts are confirmed. There is no work for them. And with a confident smile their four boots smash out into the open air.

I still wait the golden opportunity if you'll excuse the pun, Hughie. My heart beats to the tune at the top of the forty-five. I pull up my socks—not too hard or the toe will go through the hole. My blue tie is put etonwise. (My new word—please note.) Yes, blue. For jobs it's a blue tie: for angry places and situations a red one. The social tie of maroon flavour is being fed to the moths. Having yet two elder brothers to see off the black one is safe and sound. The last thought helps my heart reach normality.

There is much work behind that counter. I laugh to my wicked self. It must mean that there is not much work my side of the counter. Yes, I'll really have to save that one behind the new desk. Got to be human in charge you know.

My serious-type daily comes into play. I scan adverts that have no connection with my purse or wishes. Yet truth must come out. It is yesterday's paper that happened to be resting in the park waste paper bin. It read on not knowing that I have my distance glasses on and can but see the frames of the large adverts. I blame a bad printing machine for my mistake.

I do wish my saviour would hurry—I want to inspect the local toilet at convenient quarters. My legs cross themselves to ease the discomfort. Perhaps before the century is out they'll have a place for Gentlemen Only at such governmental buildings. Progress knows no bounds.

I hear the angel calling my name. My sweetest smile shakes my pretty face. With legs of confidence I trip over the mat as I enter the private stool.

Many papers are rustled as I sit facing the lady-like officer. Perhaps each paper is a job? Why my heart must think so too and races like the Concorde, I do not ask? The great future is at hand and the wife shall have that coat paid for on the club. Two pounds is not much.

You see I am a rehabilitation problem. It sometimes means that if an employer is found who will accept you the trick is played and all is well. A fact that such cases want more selectivity and not less has missed the official mind. The last job had been amid radium. Two months and a doctor via a legal examination decided I should not ever have been there. Excuse me getting serious. I can only speak from my experience.

However, the job was offered. Seven shillings and one halfpenny per hour. (I thought halfpennies were finished?) This would be three-halfpennies less than the radium post and sixpence an hour less than the job before. I stood on my back-side and said 'No'. I would wait for the promised new rehabilitation treatment.

We signed forms. I would meet her every Friday at two-thirty. The High Street winds blew my heat down a little. My memory forgot itself. A bus was caught. I should have saved the fare.

Man does not live on bread alone: sometimes he wants a packet of crisps.



## PLAY POWER

IAN MABLY

A review of *Play Power* by Richard Neville (Jonathan Cape, 38s).

*Play Power* is a breathlessly delivered collection of facts, events and ideas surrounding today's vocal youth. With the exception of the chapter on the Underground Press, this energy infects the reader and carries him on a turbulent course through the holy trinity of drugs, sex and revolution to, dare one admit it, an almost philosophical conclusion. Lurid yellow phalli leer out of the cover, vicarious suggestions abound—'Girl Rapes Pack in Play-ground'—and there is even a game for acid-heads included with the book, but, lest the timid are dismayed, they are reassured by the confident statement that "Play Power is . . . important for those who consider themselves part of the movement, essential for those outside it". Unfortunately, *Play Power* is neither an important nor an essential book, nor is it even a relevant catalogue of events and it cannot be if it is to remain consistent with its own principles. Throughout, Neville is projecting the philosophy of fun in life and politics by inviting us to laugh at the grotesque antics of those who take themselves seriously, seemingly unconscious of the paradox that this creates. If nothing can be taken seriously then the philosophy itself cannot be taken seriously, unless one is prepared to violate its initial premise. The life that Neville sets out is thus necessarily meaningless and can only be lived by those who are sufficiently disillusioned with all other alternatives to make them all equally worthless.

The belief that life as set out by society is meaningless and inadequate is a distinctly different concept and it is this that has provided the impetus behind many social revolutions. The beats, the hippies and the drop-outs have all begun on this assumption, and the yippies, the term given to the current genre of revolutionary activists, are no exception. This attitude has existed for centuries, but what distinguishes this new movement is its size. With so many searching for new life-styles the possibility of finding viable alternatives is enormously increased and no longer will *Steppenwolf* have to feel his isolation. The central chapters of *Play Power* on marijuana, love-making and Asian adventures are concerned with some of these attempts at a new life-style, but sadly the conclusions are rather depressing. This is not unexpected considering the enormity of the challenge but at least the raw materials are there. Much of the responsibility for this wasted effort must fall on society, since an essential prerequisite for mental evolution is an open mind, and society does its best to stifle this. These experiments cannot be carried out in the traditionally sacrosanct havens such as the laboratories, churches and even parliaments since to be valid they have to be felt and lived. This drives them out into society, conflict ensues and then they are driven underground. This inevitably increases the chance of failure; LSD, a drug which has been shown to be extremely valuable by Aldous Huxley amongst others, has to be used in an uncontrolled environment which occasionally leads to widely publicised hysteria, but more frequently and more dangerously its potential is simply not realised. Similar difficulties arise over experiments in personal relationships, since marriage, so frequently exposed nowadays as purely a social expedient, still dominates the tax and legal systems. It is more than an anomaly when a child born outside a certificate is declared illegitimate.

It is in the conflict with established society that the

yippies differ from their predecessors both in their aims and their tactics. Previously political arguments have consisted in opposing one ideology with another with the ensuing ritualistic displays of polemics, barricades and marches where blood was spilt but where social life was not essentially altered. The annual CND marches became accepted as society's laxative and revolution was castrated by being institutionalised. This is clearly an inadequate approach for the current conflict as it is not only the power structure that is at stake, but also the total life-style. By integrating their own attitudes into politics the yippies have developed a very novel and forceful approach particularly because of its appeal to the mass media. To the yippies sex is accepted and nakedness is no sin, but to a police officer the feeling of being unzipped must be very disturbing. The Dutch provos introduced communal bicycles, the Chicago riots created Pigasus, the first presidential candidate with a curly tail, and so on. In themselves none of these incidents are very alarming, rather amusing in their absurdity, but the contrast between them and the reaction of the state is extremely heavy.

A recent example of this all involving process in action has been the Chicago Conspiracy trial which incidentally, resulted from yippie activity. In one fell swoop the accused managed to undermine the time hallowed methods of the courts, to throw doubt on the summary law of contempt and to gain mammoth free publicity as well as sympathy.

Apart from their political efficiency there is much more to be learnt from the yippies. To them it is actions rather than theories that matter as it is only through practice that a theory can be verified (it is a pity so few Christians appreciate this as it would give them at least a certain amount of credibility). They show us that living need not be the narrow and repetitive exercise that we frequently tacitly accept it to be. By exposing to ridicule the inconsistencies and absurdities within the system they manage to stimulate fresh and original thoughts helping to keep alert those minds that have not already sunk into premature senility.

It is these provocative qualities that give the yippie movement its value but unfortunately Neville allows very little of this to seep through. He describes numerous 'happenings' which illustrate the techniques but he never releases the rigid constraint imposed by his basic principle of play power. The result is entertaining but detached since by distilling all the emotion Neville loses the factor that gives the movement meaning. To the actors there is much more at stake than a laugh from the audience. Their lives are intimately involved in the play itself, and if they are to survive it must also. If this compassion is absent and the movement soulless, as Neville suggests, then they have nothing to give us and the exercise is as futile and sterile as so many of its predecessors.

By taking a cynical approach Neville protects himself from attack but he also loses the sympathy of the potentially wide audience his book could reach. This is unfortunate since *Play Power* has a great deal to offer due to its being the first comprehensive and concise history of a potentially stimulating and energetic new breed of revolutionaries. I only hope that those who read it will not take *Play Power* as being representative of either the yippies or of Neville himself.



# WORLD GOVERNMENT OR STARVE

I. S. LOW

WE NEED World Government: first to stop the shooting; secondly to tidy up the economic muddle.

The world is economically one. No nation today can get the food it needs, the clothes and other necessities by itself alone—not even the USA and Russia.

Why do balance of payments crises happen? Simply because the world's divided into different nations with different currencies. Naturally if you buy a car from a German it's no use paying him in pounds. He wants marks which he can spend in his own country. So nations have to go to excessive efforts to sell as much as they can to other countries—while all the other countries are doing the same. Result—to get the food, etc., we need we've got to produce more than we need; This involves unnecessary strain; and waste of raw materials.

Look at it this way. Utopia needs X units of food and commodities generally to give her people health and comfort. But Utopia cannot produce them by herself. She must buy some from Megalomania. To get Megalomanian currency she must sell cars, television sets, refrigerators to the Megalomanians. But Megalomania already has enough of these! So Utopia must produce at least 2X units so that her prices go down or make her cars, etc., more fascinating. All this costs more than the X units mentioned in the second sentence of this paragraph. And in real life Utopia will also have to export goods to Ruritania, Kleptomania, Neurasthenia!—who will also have to export to each other.

And! Suppose Utopia does outsell Megalomania. She produces so many cars that the price falls and Kleptomaniacs, Neurasthenians and even some Megalomanians buy them rather than Megalomanian cars. The Megalomanians will be out of work! They won't be able to buy what they need. They may go to war against Utopia! So under National Sovereignty you are in a dilemma: either starve yourself or make someone else starve and raise a potential enemy.

This some crazy idea of mine? Listen to what Victor Gordon says in his book *Export—or Die?* (Zenith): "If Britain sells an extra £500 million abroad she will be healthily in the black but she can only do that by increasing her share of world markets at other countries' expense. One more international order for the UK means one less for, say Japan" . . . "Britain is pursuing an essentially selfish policy . . . we are saying in effect ' . . . I'm not all right, Jack' ".

You may say "Ah! But if all countries were Communist this wouldn't happen. The governments would arrange exchanges of goods in such a way as to benefit everybody. Balance of Payments wouldn't come into it". Ha, ha! If National Sovereignty continued you'd still have economic upsets. Soviet Megalomania will have interests opposed to Soviet Kleptomania. She will want to exchange as few tons of steel for as many bushels of wheat as possible. And if Soviet Megalomania has some advantage against Soviet Kleptomania (say a bigger army) she will force the latter to agree to this inequitable settlement. As a matter of fact Russia's economic dealings with the "People's Democracies" of Eastern Europe have been on this pattern. The Yugoslavs, after their famous clash with Stalin, complained that his government treated them in the same way as an old-fashioned capitalist state treated a colony: Yugoslavia had to supply Russia with raw materials and act as a market for Russia's products. In 1965 Kosygin and

Brezhnev forced Eastern Germany to sign a trade pact by which East Germany had to supply manufactured goods to Russia at low prices and buy raw materials and food from Russia at high ones.

Victor Gordon pinpoints more inequalities: "The world's goods are distributed in a horribly unfair way . . . the Republic of Chad is twice as big as France but not nearly as rich". "Another popular idea is that countries do what they are best equipped to do, that is grow food, mine minerals, provide services, process raw materials into manufactures, and that a fairly equitable balance emerges. Clearly it does not. Countries with a great food potential like the USA and France are far more industrialised than places like Afghanistan and Libya" . . . "The manufacturer gains far more from the value he adds in his factory than the prime producer who sells him the raw materials . . . the situation is like the story of the woman who complained that a ten guinea hat consisted only of a feather and a piece of felt. There is far more gain in the ten guinea hats of advanced technology than in the feathers of the primary producing countries . . . in the long term the rich countries are getting richer faster than the poorer countries (which may not improve the chances of world peace)."

Margaret Jay in *How Rich Can We Get?* (Zenith) says of the Asian countries: "They will have to expand their economies at a far faster rate than any European plan—but not to get rich, just to avoid starvation. By comparison, Britain's output will need to grow by only 9 per cent over the same period (about 1966 to 1975) to keep our present living standard at the same level".

Because of Nationalism the wealth of the west can't really help the people of the east. There is no World Plan to make western technology combine with Asian and African manpower to benefit both. There cannot be unless there is World Government.

Nationalism is a killer. It kills with guns; it kills also by starvation. It is doing things to the atmosphere that may make us all have to carry gas-masks permanently ten years from now. And it makes us spend a crippling proportion of our wealth on weapons of war. Nationalism must go. There must be World Government.

THE PAVIOURS ARMS, PAGE STREET,  
LONDON, SW1

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

## 64th ANNUAL DINNER

J. S. L. GILMOUR (*Guest of Honour*)

RICHARD CLEMENTS

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DAVID TRIBE (*Chairman*)

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QUOTE: ". . . the after-lunch talk was given by Mr Derek Wigram, a school headmaster, retired but now serving the Lord in an advisory capacity". (*Crusade*, the journal of the Evangelical Alliance).



# RANDOMNESS, DETERMINISM AND BIOLOGY

L. BEVERLY HALSTEAD

ARGUMENTS OVER FREE WILL or freedom of choice and determinism exercises the mind of philosophers. Furthermore, they produce heated exchanges in the columns of the FREETHINKER. A good example is G. L. Simons' article 'Free Will and Choice' (FREETHINKER, February 14) attacking my review of Corliss Lamont's book (FREETHINKER, January 17). Simons' polemic left me with the impression that Halstead did not really know what he is talking about and probably gave many readers a similar impression, it was evident that a reply was called for. Now when the different statements of Halstead and Simons are analysed further it becomes apparent that they are virtually saying the same thing. So what is all the fuss about? Is it after all a 'pseudo-problem'? I do not think so.

Rather than being an example of two people arguing at cross purposes, the discussions strikingly illustrate the different ways in which physicists and biologists view the world. Simons is probably a physicist and Halstead a biologist—an obvious inference from their respective articles in the FREETHINKER.

First let us take the attitude of physicists. In principle it is possible to reduce the functioning of living organisms to chemical reactions, movements of atoms, activity of electrons. This is true but our experience tells us that life is more than this. Similarly every phenomenon no matter how complex is causal in nature and ultimately can be reduced to the fundamental property of matter/energy. Working up from this state Simons contends that with all the information available all events are predictable *in principle*. At the same time he acknowledges that this is not a practical possibility. The approach of Corliss Lamont's disciple Halstead is that the parameters involved in attempting a deterministic case are so vast that for all practical purposes freedom of choice exists. Corliss Lamont ends his book as follows 'And we are justified in taking the existence of this most basic of all freedoms as at least a *working principle* for the ongoing career of man'. Perhaps it now appears that we have conceded Simons' case. He accepts that determinism is impracticable and we that freedom of choice is practicable. Perhaps it is all semantics.

Evolution is generally accepted as resulting from the natural selection of random changes in a population. Order evolves out of chaos. According to the Simons' thesis ultimately there can be no such thing as randomness. But let us follow this particular example in depth. In the nuclei of all cells are contained chromosomes on which are situated the genes. These latter are made up of Deoxyribose nucleic acid (DNA) and the sequence of nucleotides spells out a programme of protein synthesis. A sequence of three nucleotides codes for an aminoacid—that is a building block of protein. The sequence of aminoacids in a protein chain gives that protein its special properties. A wrong nucleotide (remembering there are only four different kinds to choose from anyhow) on a particular locus of the DNA molecule can lead to a different aminoacid being coded for and a possible change in the sequence (primary structure) of the protein which may affect the configuration of the final protein chain (tertiary structure). Such mutations can lead to defects in the basic chemistry of the body; occasionally they may improve a sequence of reactions. As the DNA molecule replicates itself, there is always the possibility of a wrong nucleotide slotting into a particular locus. There is little evidence of pattern—some mutations have no

effect on the tertiary structure of the resultant protein. Biologists speak of such changes as being random.

To continue the story of the gene. All normal cells in the body possess pairs of chromosomes; the germ cells, the sperms and eggs, only one of each pair. The formation of the germ cells is rather complex. In what is termed the first meiotic division the pairs of chromosomes (each pair has a maternal and paternal strand) get themselves interweaved and exchange fragments so that when the cell concerned divides the resultant pairs of chromosomes in the two daughter cells consist of recombinations of the original genetic material. During the second meiotic division the daughter cells with their pairs of chromosomes divide so that only one of each pair is present in the next generation of cells. These are the germ cells proper. Hence one cell produces four germ cells each of which has a different genetic make-up. Since the recombination of genes during the first meiotic division is not identical with every cell, although they all start off with the same sets of genes, and since millions upon millions are produced all the time, the degree of shuffling of genes is astronomical. This system occurs in both sexes.

In ourselves millions of sperms are ejaculated into the female and if the mucus allows adequate swimming eventually one sperm will unite with one ovum. A new chromosomal combination will then result. Hence the genetic uniqueness of the individual. All the cells of the new body will have one maternal and one paternal chromosome in each pair.

The degree of recombination of genetic material and which particular sperm out of all the millions which actually finds home is again designated random. If genes for single characteristics are considered it is possible to demonstrate that all possible combinations are effected. It becomes possible to predict *statistically* the results of crossing particular strains. It is never possible to determine what will happen in any individual case—rather like tossing coins.

It does seem to me that unless the English language is altered out of all recognition the factors described above must be termed random. These are the variables before the organism emerges into the world to be moulded by the factors of the environment.

Selection working on such variety leads to the dominance of some strains at the expense of others. In fact order arises out of randomness.

This, in the final analysis, is the crux of the matter. The physicist analyses down to fundamental processes and particles, the biologist in contrast is not merely concerned with the discovery of the workings of the building blocks of life. One of the lessons of biology is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is in the realm of the life sciences that changes in quality can be most readily appreciated. An organ is more than a conglomeration of cells, a body more than the sum of its organs. Human society more than just a heap of individuals.

If the history of life on this planet is traced, it is patently obvious that there is a qualitative difference between thinking man and our ape-like ancestors, to say nothing of our fish-like ancestors of 500 million years ago. It is

(Continued middle of next page)



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## Book Review

BARBARA SMOKER

*Shaw the Villager and Human Being: A Biographical Symposium.* Narrated and edited by Allan Chappelow, with a foreword by Dame Sybil Thorndike (Chas. Skilton, 1961; 42s).

THERE ARE dozens of biographies of GBS, by men of letters, of the theatre, of politics; but this book has no pretensions to any scholarly assessment of the great writer—he is seen here through the eyes of some sixty ordinary people, most of them his fellow-villagers of Ayot St Lawrence, who knew him simply as a neighbour or a customer or an employer. Few of them seem to have read anything he wrote, or even have much idea of the extent of his world fame. To them he was “a very nice gentleman” or “an amiable old humbug”.

Some of the contributors are themselves now dead, for the book is not a new one: it was published almost a decade ago, but I have been asked to review it at this late date because its sequel, *Shaw—“The Chucker-Out”*, appeared a few months ago and was recently reviewed here. And as the earlier book is still in print, it should not be left out. Indeed, the two together make a fine double-volume set—not least in terms of visual and tactile qualities. The perfect match of colour of the paper, the cover, and the dust-jacket is quite remarkable in view of the fact that the volumes had different publishers, the later one having the Allen & Unwin imprint.

The volume under review is even more liberally illustrated with

photographs and facsimiles than its sequel, and there are some fascinating photographic comparisons, printed side by side (as in the pre-war *Lilliput*)—for instance, Shaw aged 20 is placed beside GBS aged 94; both looking straight at the camera with penetrating gaze, the head at an identical angle, the same eyebrow lowered, the same straight determined mouth; but with seventy-four years of living and working and wisdom separating them, seventy-four years of ageing and wrinkling, of hair turned white, less hair on forehead and more on chin. The old-age photograph was taken by Allan Chappelow, author of the book, who, then a very young man, managed to get Shaw to let him take a batch of photographs which proved to be the last ever taken of him. The photographs are superb, and are superbly reproduced in this book. As Warwick says in Shaw's *Saint Joan*, “Nowadays, instead of looking at books, people read them”; this one is for looking at as well as reading.

## RANDOMNESS, DETERMINISM AND BIOLOGY

(Continued from previous page)

significant that we can communicate abstract thoughts in the columns of this paper.

Asimov in his *Foundation Trilogy* introduces the concept of “Psychohistory” by means of which the future can be predicted but even here the unpredictability of the individual had to be taken into account. This is it. A rational approach to human behaviour is not merely looking at the specimen through a microscope. Although everything can be analysed into its component parts, evolution demonstrates over and over again that new advanced states of organisation arise out of preceding and less advanced states. The origin of life is a case in point, and so is the origin of human consciousness.

So we come back to the points made previously by Lamont and Halstead, for all practical purposes man behaves as if he had free will. It is my contention that this is significant philosophically.

## LETTERS

## Man's Past and Future

L. BEVERLY HALSTEAD finishes his article “The Origin of Man” (February 28) with the statement: “The subsequent history of man is well documented and need not be repeated again”. If such documentation is as reliable as the assumptions made in the article, no wonder the veracity of what is reported to have occurred comparatively recently is so violently disputed. Mr Halstead obviously supports Darwin's theory of evolution but, as has since been demonstrated, there are many loopholes in it and the explanations are not all as scientifically satisfactory as they might be. How for instance does the *desirability* for possessing different traits, whether physical, instinctive or mental, cause such traits to evolve, since, whatever the species primarily happened to be, it could neither contemplate nor conceive the advantages such changes could bring about? It is all very well saying as Mr Halstead does, “So you increase your size . . .”, etc., but how does the necessity to grow larger eventually bring about the *fait accompli* of actually being larger? How is it that the potentiality to change was absent from the countless forms of life which existed at various times in the history of the earth, yet failed to cope with a changing environment and have since become extinct?

A fundamental function of science is not to be dogmatic without sufficient knowledge and I am afraid that in this field, as in many others, science has a long way to go before a definite conclusion can be acceptable.

H. RICH.

## Is Abortion Rational?

THE fallacy in Mr E. Rosentiel's argument (March 7) is that the “emotional bond” he talks about between the mother and her baby surely begins to form the moment the woman knows she is pregnant. If, therefore, it is wrong to kill a newly-born child because of this “emotional bond”, it must be equally wrong to kill a foetus for the same reason.

JOHN L. BROOM.



I WOULD like to comment on L. Beverly Halstead's article (March 7) about the vertical division of society and as to why behavioural patterns differ.

In my opinion, one of the reasons is that these patterns are more often forced on women as children than men, and men are expected to behave as 'men' signifying being mature and adult, whereas women are expected to be helpless, passive and incapable. Most women as they grow up are 'conned' by society into never thinking for themselves or indeed having to. (The idea of being 'handed over' from father to safe husband comes to mind.)

Has it been substantiated whether the vast majority of women do vote 'Conservative' and say that from these two basic attitudes 'all the rest flows'? After all it was the Labour party that allowed the private members' and other bills on Abortion, Family Law Reform, repeal of the Death Penalty, and at last the Equal Pay to become law.

Although the first woman MP to actually *take her seat* was a Tory, there are far more women MPs under the Labour government than ever before.

Despite Dr Beverly Halstead's observations on behavioural patterns in western culture I would like to draw his attention to the fact that division of labour between the sexes varies considerably in other parts of the world.

MARGARET PEARCE.

### Racial discrimination

THE RACE RELATIONS BOARD feature, in the 1.45 p.m. 'News', today (March 16) on BBC1, showed a dark-skinned young man scanning a works notice-board, advertising vacancies. Catching sight of an additional notice, reading: "No coloureds", viewers saw the dusky seeker of employment turn disconsolately away.

I felt sorry at the spectacle. Discrimination such as that illustrated is disgraceful. During my wage-earning days, I worked with a fair number of coloured 'hands', and found none unworthy of one's company. Some, indeed, I found cordial and conversational. Nor were the whites who constituted the great majority of those employed, hard upon these chaps in any way. One saw none of the racist prejudice so played upon by some writers.

I have no reason to think that the situation is much different today towards coloureds at work with whites. This letting in of great numbers of immigrants has altered the position somewhat, where is imperils the chance of employment of 'home grown' of definitely prior right to be given the means of wage-earning. Still, I would have no discrimination against clean, respectable coloured applicants for work, where the circumstances are equal, and my sympathies are strong with such as that televised coloured man, whatever may be my view of Enoch Powell.

F. H. SNOW.

### Celtic nationalism

WELL, nobody can say that the Celts are not getting their "fair whack" in the FREETHINKER these days: an editorial on Ulster by Dáibhí Mac Raghnaill (David Reynolds); a précis of Wolfe Tone's 1798 Irish rebellion by Liam Mac Giolla Rua (Bill McIlroy); and a letter by Seumas Mac a' Ghobhainn (Jim Smith or James Mac-Gowan)—all in one issue!

I cannot help feeling a certain sympathy for Seumas Mac a' Ghobhainn's views on the atrocious treatment of "primitive tribes" by "imperialists", especially that meted out to the Australasian aboriginals, the Congolese and the American Indians (ever since I was in short trousers I was incensed at the way Hollywood labelled the Red Indians!). However, at that point Mac a' Ghobhainn and I part company.

Firstly I would beg to point out that the Scots were in the forefront of the building of the "British Empire" which he despises (with some justification), and that Scots settlers were among the first to "colonise" Ireland during the Plantation periods. I would remind him that at the battle of Rourke's drift in the Zulu wars, the Zulus were beaten by a company of Welsh infantry, singing, sadly to relate, "Men of Harlech"!

Secondly it is virtually meaningless to talk of "the Celtic peoples . . . who share this island with the Anglo-Saxon heren-volk" as if there are two clearly defined "races" present. There has been so much intermarriage between Saxon, Celt, Norman, Viking, and Huguenot that these terms are almost meaningless outside a linguistic and cultural context. And have we not forgotten the pre-Celtic Iberians who settled in these islands c. 2500

BCE, and of whom A. L. Morton has written (*A People's History of England*. London [Left Book Club], 1938): ". . . They [the Megalithic Iberians] have left their mark upon the face of the land more clearly than either Celt, Roman or Saxon. Further, their stock is one of the main contributors to the present population of the British Isles, especially in Ireland, Wales and the West of England"?

One of the most succinct and balanced "thumbnail sketches" of the Irish problem I have read in a long time is "The most distressful country" by Mac Giolla Rua (FREETHINKER, March 21). As the author has shown, the "problem" is also in this case heavy overlain by the religious troubles of Ireland, which were not so important in the history of Scotland, Wales, Man and Cornwall (it should not be forgotten that, in a sense, "England" was acquired by Scotland—or to be more honest, the Scottish monarchy—on the death of Elizabeth I!). There is, in the language field, one curious, and to readers of this journal, highly ironic exception; I quote from the introduction of Vinay, J. P., and Thomas, W. O., *The Basis and Essentials of Welsh*. (London, [1948] 1958): ". . . By a curious twist of fate, *The Bible*, which was translated into Welsh by the act of 1563 so that *Welsh may disappear the quicker from this island* became the Welsh book par excellence, and in its final form (1620) saved the life of the language it was meant to eradicate." (Original authors' italics.)

We cannot raise the dead nor undo the misdeeds of the past. But if the "soul has fled" from Tara's harp, there are other harps to be fashioned and strung whose music, if unsoftened by hatred, may reach to the ends of the earth!

NIALL AODH SIONOID.  
(Nigel H. Sinnott)

### Degrees of omnipotence

MR CREGAN (March 21) makes two criticisms of my article 'God and Free Will': one of them was fully justified, but the other I believe to be mistaken.

He is quite right to criticise my penultimate sentence: 'In order to maintain free will, the religious believer will have to place limits on God's omnipotence, *not merely by exchanging strong omnipotence for weak*, but by denying that God can have knowledge of the future'. The phrase italicised is a frightful howler and very far from what I meant! Clearly weak omnipotence is nonetheless omnipotence. As Mr Cregan points out 'weak omnipotence' merely 'says something about the exercise' of God's power. What I meant was that the religious believer cannot maintain free will 'merely by exchanging strong omnipotence for weak'. I hastily acknowledge that it would be very difficult to construe my sentence in the way I intended it to be construed.

Mr Cregan's second point is that I am wrong in holding that a denial of divine foreknowledge is also a denial of divine omnipotence. On this I am prepared to argue. If God is omnipotent he can do anything, in particular he can predict the future, and he can predict correctly. To deny that he can predict correctly means that there is at least one thing he can't do; and that, surely, limits his omnipotence. More accurately, since 'omnipotence' is an 'all-or-nothing' word, if God can't predict the future he is not omnipotent at all. In short, I treat divine omniscience as a special case of divine omnipotence.

The argument in Flew's *God and Philosophy* (pp. 43-48) to which Mr Cregan refers will only work if the notion of God as Creator involves that of God's (strong) omnipotence. Perhaps this is the way 'Creator' is used in religious discourse, but I doubt whether it needs to be used in this way.

NICHOLAS GRIFFIN.

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