

# Freethinker

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Q

AT THE BACK of every thinking person's mind is the knowledge that the existence of the human race is in 1970 gravely threatened. We all know that there are three major factors, nuclear warfare, pollution and the population explosion, which quickly or slowly may bring about the end of human kind. We all know that it is easily within man's power to overcome these threats. We all know that the reason he hasn't is because different nations do not agree. And again we all know that the problems caused by disagreement can only be overcome by world unity and world government. We know this, and we know it is the most important thing we know. And yet it is at the back of our minds. Why?

Because to an individual the problem seems insuperable. It seems he can do nothing. He just hopes vaguely that the politicians will muddle through and sort out something: that in the end they will disarm after wasting untold human resources; that pollution will slowly be eradicated, after not too many lives have been shortened and babies born deformed; and that the population explosion will sort itself out, perhaps with the help of a few wars or famines, after only a relatively small proportion have died of malnutrition and overcrowding. We hope all this, push the problem to the back of our minds and turn our attention to religious education or London's third airport. This, because we feel helpless when faced by the problem, which will render communism, capitalism, religion, humanism, let alone the motorway box, utterly meaningless if it is not tackled successfully.

Thus we, the people of this country, are interested overtly in lesser matters than the world government which is needed to give the human race a chance of survival, and therefore our politicians, hoping for our votes, are interested in lesser matters as well. We, and the peoples of all nations, have it in our power to make world government and human survival the crucial political issue the world over. Such in essence is the message of Q.

"Q is an international movement of ordinary people. Its sole object is to make sure the human race survives. Nothing else matters today. Q has no connection with any political party. It has no officials and no committee. There's no subscription."

Q does have a manifesto and a growing number of sympathisers in many countries. Their practical aim is to win more sympathisers, so that politicians will have to take notice. Support is gained by distribution of the manifesto, public speaking, advertising and with the snowballing "international grapevine" of Q's supporters.

The manifesto is very well produced and makes one realise not only the imperative necessity for Q's plan to work, but the extreme simplicity and feasibility of the whole venture.

Only sixteen pages long, it begins by outlining the horrors that face us, the need for world government and the redundancy of the United Nations. It then discusses national sovereignty and points out that it is "merely a cloak for something much deeper—the individual's emotional craving for security", but it can no longer fulfil that function.

No frontier or ocean can stop an ICBM. Suddenly, after centuries of deep emotional significance, frontiers have become meaningless. If anything, they are now a liability. They divide us from other people without protecting us from them. They arouse suspicion in people outside, but provide no security to those inside.

It is only to be expected that such a total change in our circumstances should take some time to sink in. We who are alive today are a very unlucky generation; we have to make a far greater mental and emotional re-adjustment than any other generation in the whole of history. What makes our situation doubly cruel is that if we fail to re-adjust, there probably won't be any more history. If we fail, we shall be destroyed by war or pollution in the near future. On the other hand, if we succeed, mankind may well emerge, in the near future, into a prospect bright with hope.



Under the sub-heading 'Only if people get together' the manifesto continues:

Lester Pearson, the former prime minister of Canada, once said: 'I can only see world government coming if people get together and force their governments to get together'. The only way we can hope to do this is by creating an international, non-party, mass movement of ordinary people—a movement determined, not to seize power, but to compel those already in power to unite us before it is too late.

(Continued overleaf)



# Freethinker

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

If a state gives up its sovereignty, or shares it with some other countries, its ministers will inevitably lose some of their power. So, human nature being what it is, some political leaders are likely to be more reluctant than the rest of us to 'get together'. There will obviously be opposition, too, from militarists and the manufacturers of armaments.

But on our side will be most scientists, artists, creative thinkers and those statesmen who see national boundaries as a hindrance to their life's work. We should also be able to count on the common sense of ordinary people the world over who just want to stay alive.

The manifesto goes on to discuss the movements which already exist in this country to further world government, UNA, BAWG and CND. It then suggests a way in which world government might be implemented. The plan is both interesting and plausible, but is only secondary to the primary object of gaining public, and thence political, support for the very idea of world government. After a section devoted to answering the more obvious objections that might be made to the scheme—loss of national identity, domination of the world parliament by one group and other important points—the manifesto explains how the vital support can be won:

... we need to get the idea so widely spread and so firmly fixed in people's minds that it comes out all the time. In opinion polls, for example. At present, when a pollster goes round asking people what they think is the most important thing the government ought to be doing, he gets all kinds of answers, most of them about money. But suppose an H-bomb exploded accidentally in a populated area, or a germ canister leaked in transit across a continent. Then people would come up with a different sort of answer because they would have a very different sense of priorities. Our job, then, is to get things so clear to everyone that, even without some disastrous accident, they will quite naturally come up with the only intelligent answer: 'Why, they should get the world united, of course. Then we wouldn't live in fear any longer. Besides, think of the money we'd save. Think of all the things we could do with it.' Once we begin to reach the stage where ordinary people all over the place accept this idea as perfectly natural and obvious, then the mass media will take it up; it will begin to appear in the press and on TV and radio. This will speed the message across frontiers which may otherwise be difficult to penetrate. At home, MPs tramping round their constituencies will catch the new note, and party leaders will begin to sit up and take notice. Finally, they will have to act.

Clearly this represents what many people, particularly young people, think is badly needed, a 'new approach to politics':

There are two ways in which Q represents a new approach to politics. First, it shifts the emphasis from the traditional party 'platform', or mixed bag of policies, to a single crucial issue which has nothing to do with party politics at all. Some people will be troubled by this, because what Q is doing is to insist that a single issue must override party loyalties that have often persisted through generations. The justification for this is that there has never been an issue of such appalling magnitude before, and possibly there never will be again. . . .

The second point . . . is that it calls for initiative on the part of the ordinary voter. In traditional politics the politician stands up and talks, while the voter sits back and listens. But today our situation is far too grave for this passive kind of politics. Somehow, we *must* get our own sense of urgency across to the politicians; we must make them realise that their 'platform' no

longer meets our needs, because our situation calls for a totally different order of priorities. To make sure that this message gets across is going to require some active 'participation' on the part of the voter. It won't require anything dramatic or demonstrative. What matters is that it should be clear and definite.

Q undoubtedly has great potential. It has already gone a long way since it was born on some stencilled sheets in September last year. Q invites contact from individuals. Its address is 65 Artesian Road, London, W2. Copies of the manifesto can be obtained at 2/- for 1, 5/- for 4, 10/- for 8, or £1 for 16 (cheques and postal orders to be made payable to Q publications), though an addendum to my copy states: "If you're broke and want some free copies, just let me know and you'll get them by return. The object of the operation is survival, not profits. What matters is to get it around."

## OBITUARY

MISS DOROTHY ANNE TARRY who has died at the age of 49 had been a member of the National Secular Society for many years. She was a shy and retiring person with a small circle of friends to whom she was deeply attached. Miss Tarry was deeply affected by her mother's death seven years ago, and her health had been poor for a long time. Our deepest sympathy is extended to her sister, Mrs M. G. Orme.

A secular committal ceremony was conducted by Mr Jim Challand at Derby Crematorium on April 24.

## 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 Moulton, 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. Mephams, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey (Tel.: 01-642 8796).

## COMING EVENTS

### OUTDOOR

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

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

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

### INDOOR

Belfast Humanist Group: NI War Memorial Building, Waring Street, Belfast: Monday, May 11, 8 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

Jerry Van Duren—An exhibition of sculpture: Woodstock Gallery, Woodstock Street, London, W1 (near Bond Street Underground): Until May 16.

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, May 14, 8 p.m.: "Prisoners of Conscience", a speaker from Amnesty International.

London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London, WC2: Thursday, May 14, 5 p.m.: The Eighth Auguste Comte Memorial Lecture—Professor S. J. Gould, "The Rational Society".



## EDISON THE FREETHINKER

BARRY HOBSON

ALTHOUGH Thomas Alva Edison is well known as the pioneer of the electric light, gramophone, moving pictures, etc., it is not so well known that he was a freethinker. When aged only twelve he read Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, and he said many years later: "I can still remember the flash of enlightenment that shone from its pages".

In 1910 a prolonged controversy was provoked by Edison when he candidly professed himself to be a freethinker in religious matters. During an interview he was asked: "What does God mean to you?". He replied: "A personal God means absolutely nothing to me". He said he was an enemy of superstition, deplored the fact that most people were "incurably religious", and pointed out that billions of prayers had not stopped natural catastrophes and wars.

As a result of his outspokenness, Edison's mail was soon swollen with angry letters whose authors begged him "not to take from them their God". In the face of attack he held his ground, saying: "The criticisms that have been hurled at me have not worried me. A man cannot control his beliefs. . . . I try to say exactly what I honestly believe to be the truth. . . . I have never seen the slightest scientific proof of the religious theories of heaven and hell, of a future life, or of a personal God. Proof! Proof! That is what I have always been after. I do not know the soul, I

know the mind . . . I do not believe in the God of the theologians; but that there is a Supreme Intelligence, I do not doubt."

He spoke in praise of Thomas Paine and honoured him for writing, "The world is my country, to do good is my religion".

When a minister inquired as to the value of lightning rods as protection for his church spire, Edison replied, "By all means, as Providence is apt to be absent-minded".

In a letter to his wife he remarked on the fact that President McKinley in his Thanksgiving speech of 1898, had thanked God for victory over Spain. Edison wrote: "But the same God gave us yellow fever, and to be consistent McKinley ought to have thanked him for that also. Thus we see terrible contradictions everywhere about the mystery of life."

One day, without warning her husband, Mrs Edison invited six Methodist ministers to Sunday dinner. Edison might have managed peaceably with one, but six was too much. A heated argument about the Bible was provoked by Edison, and in the end, to Mrs Edison's embarrassment, he threw up his hands, exclaimed, "I'm not going to listen to any more of this nonsense!" and stalked out of the room.

## FREEWILL AND EXPERIENCE

MICHAEL CREGAN

FROM TIME TO TIME articles appear in the FREETHINKER in which the notion of freewill is besieged by considerations ranging from Freud to computers. What is noteworthy about these attacks, and the replies they evoke, is the absence of any consideration of the *sine qua non* of an apology for freewill, that is our *direct experience of our own freedom*.

It is certain that whatever green fields of psychology or logic may be entered while discussing this subject, anyone rejecting determinism does not do so as the end result of a purely intellectual exercise. Rather, this rejection arises from his own day-to-day experience and consciousness. His position is not so much embraced as forced upon him.

It may well seem a little *passé* in days of scientific sophistication to make a fuss about individual experience, but nevertheless, the problem still exists, and the determinist must meet it. What could he say about it?

Presumably he could deny that this experience is at all widespread, and that it is only Mr Cregan and the odd handful of weird types found defending freewill in FREETHINKER who have these peculiar sensations. I wouldn't have any statistical evidence to wave around, but I am perfectly confident this theory is unfounded. The vast majority of people would surely not say that their experience had convinced them they were, and had always been, just another machine, albeit a very complex one.

Perhaps then, this whole experience, this sense of autonomy, is groundless, a confidence trick of the mind—in short an *illusion*?

Well, if so, it can surely, like any other illusion, succumb to an explanation (and therapy?) and be accounted for in purely mechanical terms. Such an explanation is sorely needed; for if I am labouring under some type of delusion, I certainly have a lot of fellow-sufferers. (Freud

considered religion to be a universal neurosis; even if that is true, it's got nothing on *this* one.) But where *is* the explanation? Candidates seem remarkably scarce. If you are going to assert something so remarkable as that a fundamental human experience is an illusion, you must surely account for that illusion.

This insistence upon experience may also be important when considering arguments of determinists in detail. Take, for example, Mr G. L. Simons complaint<sup>1</sup> that freewill is meaningless.<sup>2</sup> Human actions are either caused or uncaused: if they are *caused*, they are just like any other natural event (e.g. a match flaring when struck), which the freewill advocate denies: if they are *uncaused*, then they are random, haphazard, totally fortuitous characteristics that the advocate does *not* wish upon human actions. Therefore, what prospects freewill? None.

To this one could reply that there are certain phenomena—to wit, some human actions—which are neither uncaused nor caused; and when it is demanded how these actions escape the fundamental dichotomy, to reply: "Quite honestly, I don't know. All I do know is that I cannot dismiss all my activities as solely the result of ongoing natural processes, nor as a mass of completely arbitrary 'happenings': *for both of these descriptions deny my experience and offend my self-awareness*. And in this I am not alone."

The individual's experience of freedom, it seems to me, must not be allowed to slip from sight in the "freewill debate", and certainly should figure large in the brief of the non-determinist.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, FREETHINKER for 30-11-68, and 12-4-69.

<sup>2</sup> Not that we *don't* have it, in the way that we don't have hooves, but that we *can't* have it, in the way that we can't have candy-striped minds. Some of the replies indicated that the full force of Mr Simons' "fork" had not sunk in.



## VIRGINITY CULT

WILLIAM WELSH

ROMAN CATHOLIC doctrine paradoxically insists on chastity for its priests and nuns and on fecundity for lay men and women.

It was in his capacity as infallible lawgiver of the church that in 1950, Pope Pius XII promulgated the myopic dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This second Ascension Day myth was imposed by the Pope on the faithful in spite of the absence of scriptural authority. Apologists were disingenuous enough to point out to the incredulous that this event took place after the era covered by the synoptic gospels.

But that's not all; the Virgin not only ascended into the heavens; she was born sinless, that is, without original sin. Hence the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, propounded in a "bull" of Pius IX in 1854. "O Mary, conceived without sin" is an invocation constantly on the lips of believers.

While Protestants wash their hands of these beliefs, they nevertheless pay at least lip service to the presumably sinless birth, whatever that may mean, of the child, Jesus, "the fruit of thy womb, Jesus" being the issue of the mystical union of the Virgin with the Holy Ghost.

With this theological data we can examine and interpret the theories advanced by the authoritative apostolic church concerning virginity as desirable in itself for those in its various orders.

On the face of it, priestly celibacy frees the clergy from worldly ties which might detract from their exclusive dedication to duty. What is being increasingly appreciated by many priests is that celibacy at the same time creates a yawning gulf between the virgin priest, and the large family unit, prohibited by the Encyclical of Pope Paul VI from relaxing in its adherence to the no-birth-control tradition.

Medieval clerics could get away with incontinence. Their "natural" sons were termed "nephews". The poet Robert Browning presents a vivid picture of the worldly prelate during the Renaissance period in *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*.

One doesn't have to be a psychologist to find eroticism in RC virgin worship. By its very nature, it is enervating and woman orientated; hence the lace embroidered surplices over crimson vestments, the swinging censers exhaling the all-pervading aroma of burnt leaves, the symbolic candles, the occult celebration of the Mass, the haunting Gregorian chants. Few situations can be more sensuous or more voluptuous.

Both doctrine and mystique are illumined by passages in a symposium, *Born Catholics*<sup>1</sup> to which Antonia White contributed. Referring to the Virgin dogmas she wrote:

It is significant that within the last hundred years the Church proclaimed two dogmas which must have seemed strangely irrelevant to the outside world . . . the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. There are even Catholics to whom the latter seemed not, of course, irrelevant, but perhaps ill-timed, a possible stumbling-block to the union of Christendom.

And referring to the impact of modern psychology on the religiously minded she goes on:

There is a definite tendency to exalt the universal great Mother figure into something which could almost be called the embodiment of the feminine aspect of God or even the matrix of the Divine Substance.

The exaltation of Woman is reflected in many literary artists. Indeed, the feminine strain in RC thinking may well account for the special attraction that church holds for many writers and artists, who, repelled by the gaunt, stark simplicity of Protestantism, by the bleakness of non-conformist worship in particular, turn for solace and a sublimation of primal instinct in a cult that is notably feminine, widely divergent from the acrimony, debate, fanaticism, bigotry and Puritanism frequently associated with forms of worship and ways of thinking grounded on interpretations of scripture that are all too often muddled and contradictory.

In short, here we have an example in religious practice of dethroning reason and implying that man's attitudes are determined to a great extent by atavistic motivation.

In its worship of Woman in the person of the Virgin, Roman Catholicism at one and the same time reveres chastity and fecundity. The latter aspect of woman's function has been stressed by the particular bias of Freudian thinking, and reinforced by Margaret Mead's studies in anthropology. These studies tend to glorify the cave-woman of primitive tribes, intent on guarding her male partner from the lures of rival women, and altogether engrossed in the tasks of child rearing. But Margaret Mead discovered that in a primitive tribe, the Tchambuli, Woman was dominant and her male partner dependent, not the "happy housewife" image of the women's magazines of today, and certainly not the image of Woman in the RC cult of Mary.

The dominant female is vividly portrayed in the characterisation of Hermione in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*:<sup>2</sup>

It filled him with almost insane fury, this calm assumption of the Magna Mater, that all was hers, because she had borne it. Man was hers because she had borne him. A Mater Dolorosa, she had borne him, a Magna Mater, she now claimed him again, soul and body, sex, meaning, and all. He had a horror of the Magna Mater, she was detestable.

It's interesting to note that whereas the feminist movement at its outset claimed among its adherents many women strongly endowed with the "masculine protest", today's career woman not only rears a family but also demands equal rights as well as equal pay with men. In fact, woman's role changes with the evolution of society, and followers of Betty Friedan<sup>3</sup> would maintain that the roles of men and women respectively are not so sex-linked as has been traditionally thought in our society.

But even in our now very complex society, old ideas persist. And in no sphere as much as in that of sex and the role of women.

Church morality clutches to the idea, however modified and however brought up-to-date, that sexual pleasure must be equated with the satisfaction of what is known as one of the "lower instincts". Except, of course, when blessed by marriage lines, and then for the purpose of procreation, the only justification for sex fulfilment according to RC doctrine.

And in priestly celibacy we have a crowning example of unnatural and unhealthy repression. Nietzsche, himself unmarried, puts it scathingly thus:<sup>4</sup> "The saint in whom God takes pleasure is the ideal castrate".

Nietzsche also quotes from the *Law-Book of Manu*



whose contents he attributes to "old greybeards and saints": "All the openings of the body above the navel are pure, all below impure".

The conflict in a highly sexed priest between his natural inclinations and his ecclesiastical commitments is movingly portrayed in a novel by Emile Zola, first published in English under the title, *The Abbé Mouret's Sin*,<sup>5</sup> and now available as a paperback entitled *The Sinful Priest*.

The Reverend Mouret tries to escape his insistent desire for the child of nature, Albine, in his deep psychic involvement with ritual worship of the Madonna, a worship which for him proves an unsatisfactory sublimation of an erotic impulse so deep rooted as to give way to direct biological fulfilment, this experience in turn giving rise to a state of remorse which only underlines the conflict within and constitutes a deep-seated neurosis.

The powerful erotic desire aroused in the priest, struggling with his worship of a symbol representing lily-white virginity and fruitful procreation at one and the same time is evoked in the following:

Where could he ever have found so desirable a mistress? What earthly caress could be compared with this breath of Mary in which he moved? What wretched union, what dirty-fouled physical satisfaction could ever outweigh that eternal flower of desire for ever swelling yet never breaking into bloom?

In a fierce intensity of desire to rid himself of fleshly lust, he invokes the help of the Virgin:

Oh Mary, Vessel Elect, castrate what is man away from me, make of me a eunuch among men, so I may be without fear awarded the treasure of your virginity!

But motherhood as well as virginity is to be revered:

This Virgin instilled sovereign respect. She was the Mother of God. She had the breadth of body of fecundity, the august features, the powerful arms of the Divine Spouse who carried Jesus in her womb.

A contemporary of Freud, Zola not only incorporates the new psychology in his novels; he also follows the realistic trends in fiction, a fashion in writing which had led to Flaubert's prosecution over the publication of *Madame Bovary*, a study in adultery. In the same "genre" is *Une Page d'Amour*<sup>6</sup> in which Hélène, overcome by a deep passion for a married man, seeks solace in the Virgin cult:

Hymns soared aloft, overflowing with spiritual emotion; fresh-cut flowers filled the close air beneath the vaulted roof with their heavy scent. The atmosphere was full of the primitive intoxication of spring, the worship of woman exalted into a cult, and Hélène became rapturously absorbed in the mystery of love and purity as she gazed at Mary, the Virgin Mother, crowned with white roses.

Both Zola and D. H. Lawrence were opposed to sexual promiscuity. One imagines that they would have had serious misgivings about a "permissive" society. Lawrence was known to oppose the commercialisation of sex in pornography. But both paved the way for a greater understanding of the human conflict in which the individual finds in the expression of his natural desires the enmity of a disapproving bourgeois environment.

The present unrest among priests who kick against the Vatican's insistence on celibacy is an ironical commentary on a form of worship which exalts a woman, highlighting the paradox of her unsullied purity allied with her procreative function as the Great Mother. The amorous priest tries to remain sexless in the act of worshipping the Madonna statue, itself a symbol calculated to arouse those desires he must keep in check.

<sup>1</sup> *Born Catholics*, Thomas More Books.

<sup>2</sup> *Women in Love*, D. H. Lawrence. Penguin Books.

<sup>3</sup> *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan. Penguin Books.

<sup>4</sup> *Nietzsche*. Penguin Classics.

<sup>5</sup> *The Sinful Priest*, Emile Zola. Arrow Books.

<sup>6</sup> *A Love Affair*, Emile Zola. Arrow Books.

## THE CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, 1965-69

CONNAIRE KENSIT

A LETTER from Martin Page (FREETHINKER, February 14) challenged me to "indicate the real reasons for the Cultural Revolution". That is a tall order, but I can at least indicate what happened. As for moral judgments, readers must make up their own minds. Personally I agree with Mao Tse-tung's public position on all important controversial issues, but I don't expect everyone else to do so at once. Liberals, for example, disapprove of some aspects of Mao's thought, just as Mao disapproves of liberals (see *Combat Liberalism*, Selected Wks., Vol II). In particular liberals dislike Communist methods of using the mass media to educate the public in Party policy. I hope the debate on the inadequacies of liberalism, carried on by G. L. Simons, Martin Page and others, will continue in this paper; as for this article, suffice it to say that in China all political factions agree in rejecting liberalism.

In 1964, when I came to China, there was obvious danger of the Communist Party becoming the instrument of a new privileged class, as seems to have occurred elsewhere. In Communist theory a socialist state is supposed to be a dictatorship of the proletariat, exercised through the Party. (*Dictatorship* here does not have its usual meaning of "autocracy".) Logically this means the proletariat must have the power to control or replace the Party if necessary—just as the land-owning aristocracy replaced the Emperor after his attempts at reform in 1898. But until 1966

Communists neglected this point—the Party was relied on to act for the proletariat without supervision. This was in accord with traditional Confucian thought, which teaches that good government can only come through educating the ruler in benevolence, certainly not by restraints of any kind on his absolute authority. To get rid of attitudes rotted in 21 centuries of Confucian culture needed not merely a political revolution, but a cultural revolution.

It began in October 1965 with Yao Wen-yuan's article in a Shanghai paper about a play by Wu Han, a Vice-Mayor of Peking. The play is set about the year 1600. Its hero, the statesman Hai Rui, is unjustly dismissed by his Emperor. Yao Wen-yuan's article pointed out what everyone knew but none had dared print—this play was a satire on the Lushan conference (1959) where Peng Teh-huai, then Minister of Defence, was sacked. At this meeting of the leadership there had been three main tendencies: right opportunists (as they were later called) led by Peng Teh-huai, pro-China revisionists (notably Liu Shao-chi, Peng Chen, Teng Hsiao-ping) and anti-revisionists (notably Mao, Lin Piao, Chou En-lai). The right opportunists would have made China a Soviet satellite; the pro-China revisionists firmly opposed that, but supported Soviet-style internal policies.

(Continued on page 151)



## DO RELIGIOUS BELIEVERS MEAN WHAT THEY SAY?

D. GOLDSTICK

THE HUMANIST critique of dogmatic religion has often included the philosophical charge that all these dogmas are, not false, but meaningless. Indeed, the ordinary believer, in affirming his credo, did mean to assert something. However, according to this common line of criticism, he did not succeed. His words, in fact, actually meant nothing at all. Nor could they ever be rephrased in more correct language so as to express his meaning, for, according to this particular philosophical line of attack, he really did not mean anything whatever. Despite the fact that he really did mean to.

The extreme implausibility of this conception of unintentional meaninglessness would appear to favour a re-examination of something like the old-fashioned atheist attempt to convict religious doctrines of simply being false. And yet, there definitely are some hard cases. Whatever can the *Christian Science Journal* of May 1962 have meant in writing the following?

"Matter is a mental misapprehension of the nature of substance, which has been believed, accepted, and feared for much longer than natural science has existed. Really, natural science is a highly organised study of what Christian Science classifies as the beliefs called matter. It searches for the truth concerning these beliefs . . ."

Can the author(s) of these lines seriously have meant to tell us that the science of chemistry, for example, is really a highly organised study of certain erroneous human beliefs? Why then, we want to ask, does scientific chemical research normally proceed by means of laboratory methods rather than by means of public-opinion-polling, for instance? The claim advanced, straight-forwardly interpreted, is so altogether preposterous that we naturally feel most uncomfortable if we are required to take it at face value. In such a situation, inadvertent meaninglessness may well appear to recommend itself as a somewhat milder diagnosis than outright lunacy.

However, we may be overlooking other possibilities, specifically three other lines of explanation that are jointly more promising, it can be argued, than might at once appear obvious. First of all, there is always the possibility of insincerity, which need not be complete to be present in one degree or another. Secondly, which may help to conceal from a person much of his own insincerity, there surely can exist a considerable measure of hidden vagueness in what he is trying to express. Being vaguer than we should like to be is only too common an experience for us all and raises no theoretical difficulties like those posed by the hypothesis of absolute meaninglessness. Thirdly, there is the possibility that a religious pronouncement like the one quoted can always be rendered relatively innocuous by interpreting it in some more or less non-literal way.

The non-literal interpretation of traditional religious formulas has always been the course favoured by "liberal theology", and it has always had the drawback that what it gains in innocuousness it loses in the religious capacity to inspire. A "demythologised" god cannot save, and the non-literal mode of interpretation, taken all the way, can never explain the fervent allegiance which religions actually have historically inspired, though it may reveal how certain disillusioned ecclesiastics can attempt to save today both their professional way of life and their personal conscience. The more ordinary believer naturally rebels at most "liberal" attempts to water down the literal meaning of the faith which he holds dear.

And so all in all, it would seem, statements like those quoted from the *Christian Science Journal* will still remain much too preposterous to take seriously if they cannot be interpreted so non-literally as to become totally uninteresting platitudes (e.g. "Chemists have beliefs about matter which contain some error"). To explain why such doctrinal statements as the ones quoted actually could be of any interest to the *Christian Science Journal* or its readers, a good deal of literalism in interpretation must be jealously held on to by humanists who seek a rational understanding of the religious mentality; indeed, we must take care to be nearly as jealous in our insistence on literalism as some of the most obnoxious of "conservative" theologians are.

All the same, though, does it not seem that in conjunction with unconscious vagueness non-literalism could possibly be taken a very great deal farther than it could go on its own? As long as the believer remained unconsciously vague about how literally his pronouncements could be taken and how literally they could not be taken, it might prove psychologically possible to some extent to combine the (intellectual) advantages of unassailability with the (religious) advantages of boldness.

The present suggestion is simply that these two factors, unconscious vagueness and non-literalism, can together help to explain why believers say the strange things that they do. But clearly they cannot play a part in explaining anything except upon the hypothesis that they are employed by believers to some extent deliberately. And yet, if their employment were to be entirely conscious and deliberate, the believers would all have become complete hypocrites, and there would no longer be any real believers. This, of course, itself contradicts the empirical facts rather obviously. The important concept here will be that of degrees of insincerity, degrees of cleavage between professed belief and actual belief, and degrees of the awareness of such cleavage. Naturally, unconscious vagueness always can, in its turn, help to conceal from an individual the extent of his own insincerity. A degree of insincerity of this sort is in practice compatible with a very high degree of personal earnestness.

Indeed, one main avenue for the exercise of this earnestness is right in the very struggle to attain religious belief, or the semblance of it. A religious belief is very commonly considered to involve some real "difficulties", and even to endow those successfully attaining it with some merit, not to say salvation. In the circumstances, can it really be any cause for surprise if serious-minded people are often in favour of, and therefore profess, even to themselves, more doctrines than in fact they fully believe? Frequently such a practice is not only tolerated but even expected on the part of church adherents. This gets carried rather to an extreme in the Christian Science Church, which appears to hold that truly full belief in the unreality of matter, pain, and evil is compatible with nothing less than absolute perfection and complete disappearance as an individual. At any rate, the present argument is that all religious belief, insofar as it is not totally unserious and unreflective, is likely to contain some degree or other of downright insincerity.

Now, surely the common experience of everyday life in civilised society, with which we all are familiar, should put the practical possibility of degrees of insincerity beyond

(Continued overleaf)



dispute. We are all the time, even to ourselves—let alone to others—making believe that we believe all sorts of things. As is well known, this phenomenon tends strongly towards the fuller, more conscious end of the scale in the case of professionals—from the perennially cheerful “bed-side manner” of the good physician to the less justifiable pious evasion, and even pious fraud, of the well-meaning cleric.

“One who claims to be the moral leader of mankind should not tell lies”, said ex-priest Charles Davis of Pope Paul. But, if the present account is right, then Mr Davis quite misunderstood the complexities of the real situation. Not that understanding them better would have been compatible with morally excusing the Pope either—let alone with continuing in honest adherence to his Catholic Church. The account presented here was *predicated* upon the supposition that the untenability of religious belief is something which can in fact be soundly established independently. If this account is correct, it would seem to follow that in reality the religious frame of mind can only be truly understood by unbelievers.

## THE CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, 1965-69

(Continued from page 149)

Yao Wen-yuan's article broke customary standards of Party discipline. The Peking Party Committee are said to have complained bitterly about their Vice-Mayor being attacked in public without their consent. As everyone knew, *Hai rui* could never have been published and performed (in 1962) unless Wu Han had had higher-level backing in the Party—sufficient to convince editors it would be unwise to let any mention of the obvious satirical intentions appear in print.

Since 1962, when Liu Shao-chi had been dominant, the anti-revisionists had done much to consolidate their position. So Yao Wen-yuan got away with his “breach of discipline”. For several months Peking leaders tried to stifle open discussion of the satirical nature of the play; as a compromise Wu Han published a self-criticism admitting that his work promoted “the inheritance of traditional ethical values”—which was not the point. The compromise was refused: the cat stayed out of the bag. The nett effect of this episode, as I believe was intended from the start, was to establish the respectability of attacks from below on persons in authority. Of course the critics must argue that the authority he is attacking is less loyal to Socialism and to Chairman Mao than he ought to be. It is rather like the European Reformation, when everyone was Christian but you could criticise the bishop for being less Christian than you.

In March 1966 there was an exhibition of relics “to celebrate the 95th anniversary of the Paris Commune”. Not really controversial—but the intensive press coverage promoted by the anti-revisionists got people thinking of the Paris Commune, rather than the Russian Revolution, as the prototype for a workers' state. The principle of elected officials being subject to recall was stressed.

On June 1 *People's Daily* praised the activities of a student protest group in Peking University (which had been active for eighteen months, despite repression by the Party authorities), and the students' demands were complied with. This was an official signal that independent political activity (i.e. independent of the Party machinery) need not

be subversive and could pay. Thence forth competing independent political groups sprung up all over the place, first among students (so-called Red Guard groups), later among the population at large.

This development horrified many people. For two months (June, July) the Party machine tried to control the student groups by sending Party work teams into the colleges to “guide” the students—Teng Hsiao-ping, as General Secretary, was in a position to organise this. In August Mao called a Central Committee meeting which put a stop to this “guidance”.

Democracy then became rampant. There were demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, occupations of offices, sit-downs, debates, some strikes. “Look how much democracy we've got”, one Shanghai worker told me, “Things like this would never be allowed in the USSR”. The chief form of “free speech” was notices stuck on walls—some with parochial complaints, others commenting on national issues and theoretical questions, many just giving news. A common slogan was, “Tearing down other people's notices is a counter-revolutionary act!” There were numerous little newspapers produced by different factions, sold by enthusiasts on street corners. Often these contained exaggerated reports of violence on the part of an opposing faction—these papers were the main source for reports in the Western press. They were more revealing, more sensational, and far less reliable than the Party press.

Many of the issues at stake are familiar in this country. Educational selection was a big one: for the same reasons as in Britain, upper class children found it easier to get secondary and higher education. Some of my well-off Chinese colleagues worried about getting their children into a *good* secondary school (about one child in four gets *any* secondary education). Yes, there are upper classes in China—short of massacre, you can't abolish them overnight; they stand out by their speech, manners, and cultural traits. There were successful demands for abolishing high-class boarding schools for top cadres' children. Then there were the political files on students and employees. After complaints by students the Central Committee ordered (September 1966) that all such files be shown to the people described in them, then destroyed. Of course many administrators destroyed files secretly, then denied they'd ever kept any. In Nanking (April 1967) I saw a leaflet stuck on a café wall showing photos of half-burnt “confidential records” which some students had snatched from the bonfire.

The fight against the authoritarian traditions in Chinese culture was the most spectacular aspect of the cultural revolution. Other noteworthy struggles were those against conspicuous consumption and against the promotion of élite minority culture. There was a powerful non-official campaign against the obscurantism of the Roman Catholic church.

The whole movement was aimed at getting everyone—that includes the uneducated masses—to examine the social and ethical implications of all aspects of their cultural conditioning, then to deliberately bring about new cultural traditions that would help make China the sort of society they want to live in. Now in our country people are subject to cultural conditioning which (despite some explicit official policies) encourages racism, religion, filthy sexual taboos and other evils. Humanists work to change these things: promoting cultural change is our business. The more advantage we take of the experience of others in the same field, the more effective we will be.



## LETTERS

## Vietnam

So MR WATSON gives us the American case on Vietnam! What a miserable performance! Not one shred of evidence to support his original assertion of North Vietnamese aggression! Not a single fact to justify the cruel onslaught with napalm, foetus-deforming defoliants, etc., on a simple peasant nation. Instead he talks of Napoleon and Pearl Harbour!

How recklessly Mr Watson throws law out of the window when it conflicts with the whims of Pentagon generals. How happy he is that the Americans have demonstrably violated the Charter of the United Nations, the SEATO Agreement, and the Geneva Accords. (Does Mr Watson really want to compare the UN Charter and the Geneva Accords with the Nazi laws on Jews?) Of course because of "sheer ignorance" the Vietnamese "behave foolishly" and are not entitled to have general elections. Instead the fate of their country must be decided by vicious military personnel from 6,000 miles away. What a sublime view of democracy Mr Watson has!

If Mr Watson considers me a communist because I oppose US aggression then presumably such famous Americans as Senator Fullbright (see *The Arrogance of Power*), Professor Chomsky (see *The New Mandarins*), and journalists I. F. Stone and Walter Lippman are also communists. They will be surprised to learn it!

Yes, Mr Watson, I'll "take up the cudgels again", not because of any imaginary "communist friends" but in the name of common humanity. In your next priceless contribution let's hear you justify your claim (implicit) that Vietnam is two countries. And try to do it by talking about Vietnam itself, not Czechoslovakia or Cromwell, even if you have to do some hard work first to find out what it's all about!

G. L. SIMONS.

"IF THE NORTH did not start the war by invading the South, then presumably it was the South who started it by invading the North?" asks Claud Watson (Letters, March 7).

In fact neither is true. The original war began in 1946 when the French invaded Vietnam, which then had a single Communist-led government. In this war the Vietnamese government lost half its national territory: by the Geneva Agreement (1954) it withdrew its forces from the large area of southern Vietnam it still held, in exchange for French withdrawal from occupied areas of the north. It was thus reduced to being the government of North Vietnam.

The present war started in 1959 with armed resistance by south Vietnamese against the Saigon regime. Lacking air capability North Vietnam simply had no physical access to the places where the fighting occurred—this was obvious to all who followed events through the capitalist press, if they also consulted maps. US propaganda claimed the revolt was directed from Hanoi, but was not so daft as to claim it was an invasion. Only in 1964 did the NLF ("Vietcong") control sufficient territory to set up supply routes—constantly bombed footpaths—with the north. North Vietnam did not take part in actual fighting until the US and "South Vietnamese" air forces began to bomb it in 1965.

According to NLF ("Vietcong") sources, many early NLF leaders had been Communist civilian administrators in southern Vietnam during the war with France, who took to the woods to avoid extermination by Ngo Dinh Diem's police. Certainly they were loyal to Ho Chi Minh, but they did not need to "invade" since they were there all the time.

Why should the Vietnamese not be allowed free elections? The 1954 agreement said free elections were to be held in 1956, but when the time came the Saigon regime did not allow it. One can draw one's own conclusions as to why—D. W. Eisenhower, then President of the US, said in his memoirs it was because Ho Chi Minh would have got 80 per cent of the votes.

Kenneth Ead is right: the story that "North Vietnam invaded the South" is a lie. Furthermore the lie was put about for the first time when the war was six years old. Readers can check this by looking through files of pro-American newspapers; there is no need for anything extreme like seeing what the Vietnamese side has to say.

CONNAIRE KENSIT.

THOSE OF US who are concerned with Human Rights will have read with extreme disquiet Christopher Brunel's letter of April 18 in the FREETHINKER, giving authentic information about American atrocities in Vietnam. This surely is the New Barbarism perpetrated by an all-powerful, modern Christian nation, ostensibly civilised, against a small, weak and poor country.

It is a sad comment upon the much-vaunted boast of the Churches that Christianity brought the blessings of civilisation to

the world! If the brutality in Vietnam is proof of it the implication will not be lost upon the newly developing nations.

Of course the real object of this adventure in SE Asia is the expansion of American Imperialism and a possible extension of Catholic power. However, the USA is very sensitive to world public opinion, so that the more vigorous the protests the better, especially to MPs as after all our own government is virtually an accessory in this unfortunate business; though to be really effective any action of disapproval needs to hurt the pockets of Big Business and the armaments firms who, after all, are the real beneficiaries in any war.

How far America has fallen from the ideals of Thomas Paine and certain of the founding fathers is one of the world's tragedies.

ELIZABETH COLLINS.

CLAUD WATSON, in his article: 'Vietnam and Mr G. L. Simons' says: "I suspect that I am a bit older than he is, and can remember events of the pre-war decade with unpleasant vividness".

So can I, Mr Watson, and I wish to make certain observations on your article denigrating the views of Mr Simons. You stated, in that article, that we all sat back helplessly and watched the ghastly farce (preceding World War Two) run its gruesome course. We paid bitterly for it when 1939 arrived. True, we paid bitterly for it, but not through negligence or weakness on the part of Neville Chamberlain. According to Hitler's translator, recently heard on the BBC programme, Chamberlain opposed Ribbentrop's heated words with heated words, and somewhat shook Hitler. He fought with verbal skill to gain time for preparation for the bloody struggle he thought probable if he failed to come to terms with Germany's leader. He gained twelve invaluable months, without which respite our unpreparedness for a major war would have made a swift victory for Hitler almost certain. That twelve months saved us, in the long eventuality. Neville Chamberlain was every bit as much Britain's hero as Churchill, despite the calumnies it was thought politic not to refute.

Mr Watson went on to ask: "Was there ever a Communist regime which rose to power except on a basis of terror, fraud and force? And once having got in power has a Communist regime ever been dislodged by legal means?"

I will answer those questions by others of parallel significance. "Was there ever a capitalistic regime which did not come to power except on a basis of terror, fraud and force?" I ask. "And once having got in power, has a capitalistic, regal, feudal, or whatever power is communism's diametric opposite, been dislodged by legal means?" Anti-communist history is many centuries older than that of communism, and reeks of the cruellest oppressions. When communism becomes ten years older than at present, we shall be entitled to make a comparison of records.

Mr Watson rightly termed the efforts of Hungary and Czechoslovakia to liberate themselves from Communist rule as feeble. The insurrectionists in both countries being in very small minorities, and the generality of both peoples being, like their governments, communistic in policy and in spirit, and the revolts were easily crushed. The feeble efforts of both minorities were ruthlessly suppressed, says Mr Watson. We do not like ruthlessness and goodness knows the histories of European civilisations tell pretty stories of ruthlessness.

I am old enough, Mr Watson may be interested in learning, to remember Pearl Harbour, whether G. L. Simons is or not. The Japanese committed virtual suicide by crippling the US fleet stationed there, and bringing America into the war against them. I hold no brief for the Japanese. Nor do I hold a brief for the extremely provocative policy of 'containment' incited by Winston Churchill's inflammatory post-war speeches against Russia and her allied states. I heartily endorse Mr Simons' views of American policy in Vietnam. And I do not call myself a communist.

Back to Neville Chamberlain and his 'silly bit of paper', in Mr Watson's terminology. "I felt ashamed to be British!" he exclaimed through the medium of his article. Possibly he didn't see or hear the BBC broadcast to which I have referred. Possibly Mr Watson merely echoes the anti-Neville tirades of unthinking patriots who jump on the band-wagon and are loud in denunciation of unflamboyant workers for the country and goodwill to other nations.

Finally, democracy is serving us rather ill at present, with wild-cat strikes, and permissiveness in many wrong directions. The average Briton, avers Mr Watson, continues to detest dictatorships, but a very good many Britons do disservice to Britain and democracy in ways Mr Watson should know without being informed. I will conclude by endorsing our editor's footnote to Mr Watson's article: 'It should be noted that Mr Watson's description of Mr Simons as a communist is purely his own opinion'—or rather, I will conclude by saying to Claud Watson: "Put out the olive branch, man, not for Christ's sake, but for the sake of world brotherhood and peace".

F. H. SNOW.