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WAS JESUS A MUSHROOM?

MR JOHN ALLEGRO'S now famous, or infamous depending on your viewpoint, book, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, which caused considerable controversy when a few months ago extracts from it were published in *The Sunday Mirror*, has now been published in its entirety. In the book Mr Allegro, an ex-Methodist priest and eminent philologist whose books on the Dead Sea Scrolls have received high acclaim and who is now a lecturer in Old Testament and Intertestamental Studies at Manchester University; puts forward a theory that Christianity was a hoax and that the Old Testament could be the key to a secret drug cult, the adherents of which derived hallucinatory experiences from the hallucinogenic mushroom, fly-agaric, and whose rites were strongly sexually oriented their priests dressing up as penises.

The FREETHINKER has been unable to obtain a review copy of the book from the publishers, Hodder and Stoughton, and thus until it can no detailed analysis of Mr Allegro's arguments can be made in our columns. However, Mr Allegro's record as a philologist in the field of Christian origins, the fact that he is by no means the first scholar to dismiss Christianity as a hoax and the fact that given such a hoax a bizarre explanation of the Old Testament becomes more credible, permit one to express surprise at the hysteria which the book has promulgated in some clerical circles.

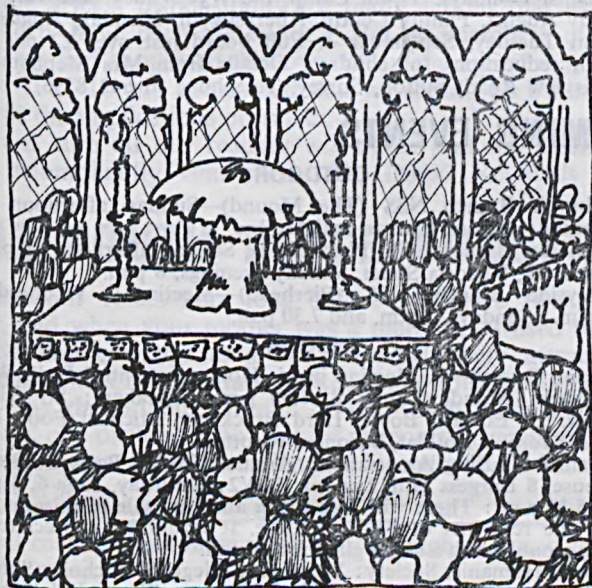
the extreme difficulty and loneliness of their work, or because of some connection between codes and paranoia, or because, beyond the complicated forest of specific facts about words, an open plateau of general truths and amazing laws must seem to beckon, going wild appears to be an occupational hazard for comparative philologists." One had to turn to another page to find the explanatory information that Mr Levi is a Jesuit.

The holocaust unleashed was too much for Mr Edward England, the religious books editor at Hodder and Stoughton. On Monday, publication day, he issued a somewhat remarkable statement. He said that he regretted the actions of the small group of clergy which had gained the book so much publicity, adding that the idea "might well have been thought up by a skilled publicity man to get the book maximum exposure in the press and on radio this weekend. Their action may double the sale."

Why should a publisher regret the sales of one of his books being doubled? Though he said that the book should not be banned since it would not shake the faith of an intelligent Christian, later on in his statement he said, "... I believe this book will prove unnecessarily offensive to many people and it should not be on our list". He further announced that Hodder and Stoughton would publish a reply to Mr Allegro's book in the summer written by the Rev John King. Disregarding Mr England's lack of feeling for unintelligent Christians, one is nonetheless bound to wonder about the effects of a publishing policy which censors works of scholarship because they are liable to offend someone.

The Sunday Times, fair as always, published in the same issue as Mr Levi's apocalyptic diatribe, an interview with the heretic Allegro: "The church can stand persecution.

(Continued overleaf)



The book was officially published on Monday, May 18. During the previous weekend a group of clergy and laity acquired themselves and the book a good deal of publicity by threatening to get the book banned by the Director of Public Prosecutions and Mr Allegro prosecuted for blasphemy. More than one Sunday newspaper published vicious reviews by religiophiles, the heavenly chorus being led perhaps by Peter Levi in *The Sunday Times* where he wrote of Mr Allegro: "The wildness of the wild philologist is a curious feature of the academic world. The first philologist I ever met, when I was an undergraduate, warned me about it; he said they all lived on a cliff edge, and every five years or so one fell over, whether this is because of

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 new General Secretary for the NSS

Freethinker

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Whether it can stand ribald laughter remains to be seen. The first thing my critics will do is denigrate me. They'll find all the dirt they can and heap it on as they did in 1956...

"The funny thing is that these people will let you say anything about Jesus as long as you say he was real. This joker in Cambridge who has just been made a bishop can say blithely that Jesus was a homosexual. You can take Jesus apart, psychoanalyse him, anything, and get away with it—so long as you allow him to have existed."

ST JOHN-STEVAS HITS NEW LOW

MR NORMAN ST JOHN-STEVAS, the Conservative MP for Chelmsford, is well known to freethinkers as parliament's leading proponent of religion and leading opponent of social legislation which contravenes the laws of the God with whom Mr St John-Stevas is lumbered, and with whom Mr St John-Stevas strives his utmost to lumber us all. Hitherto his activities in this direction have consisted largely of a number of underhand attempts at preventing popular laws being passed, by stretching parliamentary procedure to its limits. Last week the virtuoso filibusterer joined parliament's leading clown, Sir Gerald Nabarro, in the ranks of those who have spread severe alarm amongst the public without supplying that public with any evidence for the cause of their alarm.

Nabarro frightened car owners. St John-Stevas turned his attentions to the more vulnerable large number of women who have undergone abortion operations, and indeed to all women who may at some time in the future have to undergo such an operation.

St John-Stevas issued a statement that he had evidence proving that an abortion clinic had sold living foetuses to a doctor for research purposes, and went on to describe in horrifying detail what the doctor did with them. He named no names.

The Times published on May 21 a letter from Mr Donald Longmore, consultant physiologist and research surgeon at The National Heart Hospital, which began: "As the clinical physiologist referred to in a statement issued by Mr Norman St John-Stevas, MP, under the heading 'Aborted live foetuses sold for medical research', may I avail myself of your columns to set out the facts?"

"At no time have I sought, purchased or obtained live foetuses for any purpose whatever, I have not, nor have I ever intended, to keep live foetuses 'in suspended animation on heart-lung machines until they reach full term . . . and then slaughter them'. Such a concept would be unlawful, totally abhorrent and scientifically impossible."

The letter goes on to disclose how Mr Longmore has received dead foetal material which is vital to his research into heart disease among, otherwise healthy, young people. He states that "foetal material has been used in medical research for over a quarter of a century".

Mr St John-Stevas' statement evoked feelings of horror among all those who read it. When considered rationally those feelings stemmed from two things: that according to Stevas live foetuses were being used, and that money was paid for them. If Mr Longmore is to be believed neither of these emotive factors embody any truth.

In order that his face should be saved Mr St John-Stevas clearly had to reply to Mr Longmore. In *The Times* of May 22 he did not deny that Mr Longmore was the doctor concerned. He merely wrote with questionable syntax: "I read with interest the letter from Mr Donald Longmore in *The Times* today, whose name has never been mentioned by me nor has that of any other doctor.

"I clearly cannot comment on its contents since the whole matter is still being investigated by the Department of Health."

We have grown used to the unscrupulous behaviour of Mr St John-Stevas. It would seem unfortunately that his tactics have reached a new low.

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. Youth Camp, the Wyc Valley, late July and early August. Family Centre, Aberystwyth, Monday, August 17 until Tuesday, September 1. Full board just over £2 per day with reductions for children. Details from Mrs Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 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

Bertrand Russell—A Meeting in his Honour: Central Hall, Westminster: Monday, June 8, 7.30 p.m.: Speakers: Sir Alfred Ayer, Sir Edward Boyle, Lord Brockway, Michael Foot, Professor Joseph Rotblat, Baroness Wootton.

Humanist Housing Association: Annual Garden Party at Burnet House, 8 Burgess Hill, London, NW2: Saturday, June 6, 3 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.: There will be a Bring and Buy sale to raise money for the residents of Burnet House. It would be appreciated if you would bring a small gift for the stall.

Leicester Humanist Society: Vaughan College, St Nicholas Square, Leicester: Wednesday, June 3, 7.45 p.m.: "Race Relations in the USA", Dr Robert B. Grafton.

Portsmouth Humanist Society: 99, Victoria Road South, Southsea: Sunday, May 31, 8 p.m.: "Moral Education versus Religious Instruction"—A review of the state of play.

Rationalist Press Association Annual Dinner: The House of Commons, Westminster: Saturday, June 6, 7 p.m.: Speakers include Professor Antony Flew, Professor H. Gwynne Jones and Dr David Kerr, MP. Tickets at £2 each from RPA, 88 Islington High Street, London, N1.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, May 31, 11 a.m.: "Our Humanist Religion", P. Buttinger, B.Sc. Admission free. 3 p.m.: Humanist Forum—"The Law and Order Backlash", Sir Ian MacTaggart, Bt., and Garry Walker. Admission free (Tea 2s).

Worthing Humanist Group: Morelands Hotel (opposite the pier): Sunday, May 31, 5.30 p.m.: Tea party and Annual General Meeting.

CONTINUITY IN DIVERSITY

TWO OF the most difficult jobs in the world are the editorship of the FREETHINKER and the secretaryship of the NSS. Apart from the usual professional requirements both call for wide knowledge and understanding of the freethought-humanist movement, loyalty to its secular traditions, tact and common sense. Whenever a change is required in one or other of these positions those of us with responsibilities for filling them successfully undergo great anxiety. When both have to be filled together the anxiety is doubled.

Such an occasion has now arisen, though the story is, fortunately, less dramatic than this prelude suggests. To blurt out the whole scenario at once and save readers and members from their own anxiety, David Reynolds is resigning, Bill McLroy is moving into his place, and Martin Page is moving into his.

When Mr Reynolds was appointed some two years ago he warned us that he would be unlikely to stay more than three years. Recently he applied for a place to read social anthropology at the London School of Economics, expecting it would be next calendar year before one became available. Instead he has been offered a place in the coming academic year and has decided to take it. Though the FREETHINKER board is very sorry to lose him we understand his position and feel he has made the right professional choice.

I can now reveal, for those who may not hitherto have known, that he is not a "mature student" belatedly discovering a vocation. When he was appointed he was the youngest editor the paper has ever had, so young indeed, that as the law then stood he was still a minor. So, in addition to their usual responsibilities, the directors had to assume a legal responsibility for many actions that would ordinarily have been the editor's. But, as members of the NSS, we had supported the lowering of the age of majority from 21 to 18 and considered that we should be willing to accept the implications ourselves.

I am sure all our readers will agree that our decision was triumphantly vindicated; that David Reynolds has

brought a wide vision and maturity of judgement to his editorials that have given us great satisfaction and not a moment's anxiety; and that if he is typical of his generation parliament can feel gratified by the results of the change it has since made. In joining the ranks of LSE students he will, it is true, be long-haired; but he will be neither scruffy nor irresponsible and generic comment by the media on the group he represents can be given the attention it deserves.

Little need be said about his successor in the editorial chair. Members of the NSS are well aware of Bill McLroy's devoted and indefatigable service as general secretary for over six years—years which have seen a great expansion and consolidation of the society's work, all owing a very great deal to him. These qualities will be especially valuable in his promotion of the FREETHINKER's sales and influence in the very difficult years that lie ahead for small-circulation weeklies. Readers who are not NSS members will recall his felicitous and penetrating reviews and reports that have appeared, regularly though not in great abundance, throughout the years.

Martin Page may be, as yet, lesser-known personally to NSS members outside London, though he is known to us here as a loyal, conscientious and specially talented EC member. Readers will be familiar with his writings, especially his monumental work on J. M. Robertson, while some will also know him as associate to Barbara Smoker in editing the ever-stimulating *Ethical Record*. Some measure of his dedication will be appreciated from the knowledge that he is making a considerable financial sacrifice in coming to us from a responsible post in local government.

I am sure that all readers of the FREETHINKER and members and friends of the NSS will join with me in wishing every success to these three loyal workers in their future careers, and will help them in every way possible.

DAVID TRIBE,

President of the NSS and Chairman of Secular Society Ltd. and G. W. Foote and Co.

BERNARD LEVIN

THE SOUTH PLACE CONCERTS

YEARS AND YEARS AGO, long before you were born, my dear, and when your mother was a mere girl, I used to go on Sunday evenings to a not overwhelmingly attractive building, the Conway Hall, in Red Lion Square, Holborn.

It was the principal venue of the South Place Ethical Society, one of those 19th century rationalist organisations; over the stage was the challenging legend: 'To thine own self be true'.

I did not, I confess, go there for the ethics, which were in any case not in evidence on Sunday nights, I used to go for the music.

For every Sunday, there was chamber music, as there had been every Sunday since 1887, when the South Place Concerts (so called after the hall in which they started, which was the South Place Institute in Finsbury) were launched to provide the opportunity of listening to good music for those who could not afford to pay more than a nominal sum.

When I went, entrance cost a shilling, and a programme twopence. That was nearly a quarter of a century ago, but the charge is only four shillings a concert now, and if you buy a season ticket for the whole series (three months at a time) it works out at only two bob, and that includes a seat reserved up to ten minutes before the concert starts.

For the other day, I discovered to my astonishment and

delight, while talking to the wife of one of the Amadeus Quartet after one of their Mozart series at the Queen Elizabeth Hall (where my ticket cost 17s and the programme half a crown), that the South Place Concerts are still going on every Sunday, rain or shine: and I had thought they had stopped years ago.

Last year the 2,000th concert took place; they published a little book to mark the occasion. This year's programme, as far as I can see, is as varied and enterprising as ever.

Between now and April you can hear Haydn, Bartok, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, Shostakovitch, Schumann, Elgar; quartets, trios, singers, violinists.

Nor are the performers unknowns, launching themselves on the musical world; they are all established and distinguished individuals or ensembles. (In three successive weeks of quartets they had the Albernì, the Allegrì and the Gabrieli.)

Apart from the Proms, and even there the minimum entry fee is now 5s, I cannot think of any better musical value to be had in London.

Of course, London offers more good music on any evening than any other city in the world; but among the offerings, the South Place Concerts at Conway Hall hold an honoured position. I wish them well for their next 2,000.

Reprinted from the *Daily Mail*, March 1970.

DETERMINISTIC LAW, INDEPENDENT RANDOMNESS AND FREE-WILL

IAN GORDON WILSON

THERE HAS BEEN an interesting exchange of articles in the FREETHINKER about Corliss Lamont's book and the concepts of free-will and determinism. The book although entertaining, reveals a lamentable absence of clear thought about the basic issues involved. In order to avoid arguing at cross purposes, a few definitions would not come amiss.

Deterministic Law is the agency that makes the constituents of the physical world behave in a way that is directly determined by (viz. intrinsically predictable by) their existing interrelations with the other constituents of the physical world.

Free-will is the potential of a conscious thing (whether spirit, animal or machine) to consciously influence its own actions independently of other agencies.

Independent randomness is the potential of things in the physical world to behave independently of deterministic law or unpredictably, without the direct intervention of free-will.

The question whether these three phenomena are 'active agencies' or merely 'descriptions of the way in which things happen' is probably a semantic one. The agencies as defined above are ideal concepts that may or may not exist, whether they do or not can only be decided by examining evidence. The three agencies, although they are all direct influences on the physical world, are independent of one another. The ultimate nature and origins of the agencies, assuming they exist at all, are unknown at present, and perhaps intrinsically unfathomable by scientific method. In other words, along with the origins of the physical world, the nature of consciousness and God, they are possibly from the human viewpoint ultimate mysteries. The agencies can act concurrently and independently which means that they are not mutually exclusive and also that the scope of each is limited. Both Corliss Lamont and Halstead emphasise this point and it seems a very reasonable one. This means that no matter how psychologically determined human behaviour is, the existence of one single act of volition in one man's lifetime, no matter how trivial its nature, would establish the existence of free-will as an ultimate cosmic agency. Similarly one single departure from strict deterministic law by a subatomic particle would establish the existence of independent randomness for good and all.

It may be objected that there are other ways of defining randomness and free-will. For example there is another familiar concept of randomness which could be called determined randomness.

Determined randomness is the potential for things in the physical world to behave in an irregular manner as a result of deterministic law acting on a given situation.

This certainly exists, and the Second Law of Thermodynamics tells us that it is a process going on all the time so that the disorder of the physical world is continually on the increase. It is not in any sense a mysterious agency however, and its effects can be shown to be the inevitable result of deterministic laws, as in for example the diffusive intermixing of two different gases to produce a homogeneous mixture.

Unlike randomness there are no two ways of looking at

free-will. If it exists at all it cannot be a product of deterministic law, otherwise it would not be free, or of random happenings because these have nothing to do with conscious will. The nearest we can get to an alternative definition is that Free-will is a concept of whose existence a conscious being has a strong intuition, but which has no correspondence with reality. This merely says that free-will does not exist in the real world.

With these ideas in mind let us have a look at what Halstead says 'the parameters involved in attempting a deterministic case . . . [to explain the functioning of life and all the other complex phenomena in the universe] . . . are so vast, that for all practical purposes freedom of choice exists'. For the practical purposes of navigation it is possible to assume that the earth is the centre of the universe and that the sun, stars and planets are all equally distant. For the practical purpose of predicting eclipses Ptolemy's solar system based on cyclic and epicyclic motion is adequate. For practical engineering Newton's Laws suffice, and for practical story telling the moon can be made of green cheese. In philosophy and pure science unfortunately the practical purpose is to find out what reality is. It may be, and frequently is, impossible to discover the truth in practice. It may even be intrinsically impossible to ascertain the truth by observation, as in the position and velocity of an electron at a given instant. However, just because some things are beyond the scope of scientific enquiry is no reason to suppose that their reality is non-existent. The real nature of the Laws of the Universe are independent of our approximations to them, or of our possible inability to ever fathom them. To suggest that complicated deterministic interplays are in any ultimate sense independently random, because we have not the time or the inclination to unravel them is a first magnitude *non sequitur*.

The next step Halstead takes is even more fascinating and in it he merely echoes one of the main themes of Corliss Lamont's book. A major part of this book gives examples of random events, viz. contingencies or chance happenings, and then having "proved" the existence of contingency as 'a cosmic ultimate that is the opposite or correlative of determinism', assumes that this is in some way a telling argument for the existence of free-will. As G. L. Simons has pointed out in the FREETHINKER (February 14, 1970) to imagine that Lamont has proved the case for contingency as a cosmic ultimate independent of determinism is utter nonsense. Lamont himself gives a nice definition of chance as 'the casual intersection of two or more mutually independent and previously unrelated causal series'. In this, as he freely admits, deterministic law governs each causal series up to the moment of intersection, and also the way they interact at and after intersection. He attributes to the intersection itself, however, some property of indeterminateness. This is not very logical. The future fact of intersection followed the action of deterministic law on the given previous situations as surely as the arrow intersected the apple after leaving William Tell's bow. Each 'given situation' could be followed back to the original situation at the origin of the universe. This initial situation held the seeds of future contingencies, but all these chance happenings are the result of deterministic law acting on the given initial situation. This latter may be an

ultimate cosmic mystery independent of deterministic law, but it is hard to see how it has anything to do with independent randomness or free-will.

Suppose, nevertheless, that Lamont has proved the case for contingency as a cosmic ultimate, in what way does the existence of free-will follow from this? It would have been interesting to see him present a reasoned case to show that free-will was a logical by-product of randomness and consciousness, or even that it was equatable with the phenomenon of self-aware independent randomness. He does not do this, but in any case if free-will is just a form of randomness or contingency or a by-product thereof, it cannot be 'will'. It is an illusion that does not exist. ('Will', like 'consciousness', is a concept that probably defies definition in terms that do not presuppose experience of its nature.) Anyway, Corliss Lamont does not get tangled up in this sort of an argument, he just seems to imply without being unnecessarily explicit that since free-will and 'contingency as a cosmic ultimate' are both independent of determinism, the existence of free-will follows on from a demonstration of the existence of contingency. In a dog-ridden world this would be rather like trying to prove the existence of elephants by demonstrating the existence of cats, since obviously neither concept correspond with that of dogs!

In his conclusions Lamont gives ten points that he considers are the most telling arguments for the *objective* existence of free-will. The first, fifth, eight, ninth and tenth

points all amount to the same thing: we have a strong intuition of possessing free-will, and that this is a prerequisite for having concepts of ethics, morality, good and evil. This incidentally is a completely *subjective* argument. It is a very good one, and perhaps the only real one he gives. His other points beg the question by assuming that contingency and potentiality are cosmic ultimates when no evidence is given that could not be explained in terms of the determinist theory. In any case the existence of independent contingency or randomness, viz potentiality as an agency undirected by conscious will, is an irrelevancy to the existence of free-will itself.

In conclusion, the existence of free-will and independent randomness is not (as far as I know) proven, at least Halstead and Corliss Lamont contribute little to this end. The existence of deterministic law and determined randomness, even if only as limited cosmic agents, are beyond question, as shown by the success of science. There is no convincing evidence as yet in support of independent randomness, and it is likely that the concept only arose in order to explain the ubiquitous randomness of statistical science that now seems well on the way to being explained on entirely deterministic lines. Probably the only admissible argument in favour of free-will is the existence of our intuition of it. It is possible therefore that human assertions about it will always be in the nature of statements of belief, beyond the bounds of proof or disproof in this life. I am a rather doubting believer.

MRS BISHOP, UNBELIEF AND RAILWAY TRAINS

S. E. PARKER

RECENTLY I STAYED for a few days in Swanage, Dorset. While there I bought a copy of the Bournemouth *Evening Echo* dated Saturday, May 9, and found a most edifying quartet of letters from Christian theologians in the "Readers Write" section.

It appears that a rationalist named Mrs Bishop had had the effrontery to write a letter in which she said that "there is no heaven or hell and no after life". This confession of unbelief unleashed the righteous wrath of local Christendom and the letters I read were clearly the product of its intellectual élite.

The first was from a brave Christian signing himself "Saggitarius". He dismisses Mrs Bishop as being "dogmatic" and chides her for her view that some of "the myths and legends of the Middle East" were superstitious. This, writes "Saggitarius", "probably indicates the adoption of opinions at second hand from (not only) atheist (but also) leftist literature". (What would our bold Christian make of Messrs. Meulen and Watson?)

The second epistle comes from a voice of the church in the shape of Wynford G. Whittaker (Rev.). This gentleman assures us that Mrs Bishop "will have a surprise when she does wake up in the spirit world after death and finds she is alive". (Yea, verily, just like Mr Whittaker's surmise when he wakes up and finds himself dead . . .)

Letter the third is signed "An Optimist". Here we have a truly scientific mind which claims that "extra-sensory perception" proves there is life after death, as do "the thousands of books" that have been written "to suggest that other planes of life exist, and that death is not the end". (Telepathy proves immortality. Proximity equates veracity. Let us pass on.)

Finally, "Acquarius" clinches this startling display of argument and erudition with a letter that certainly shook the foundations of my own belief (though whether with logic or laughter I have not as yet decided . . .). The letter begins: "My heart is full of pity for Mrs Bishop and her resentment towards God. Reading between the lines (a most difficult feat!) I think she is saying to herself 'God is a myth because he is doing nothing for me in my difficulties'".

After three more paragraphs of pity and exhortation of the 'lift up your hearts' variety, "Aquarius" tells us of the "difficulties Mrs Bishop is experiencing. This revelatory conclusion uncovers the source of scepticism, atheism and rationalism in such a striking manner as to cause any sinning backslider to seriously think again. Because of its importance I quote it in full:

"I do not blame her, because I believe that the property in which she lives is shaken day and night by trains which thunder within yards of it—enough to ruin the peace of anyone's mind and make them cynical."

Well now, what do you think of that?

I have no way of knowing whether this quartet of Christian pundits will read this little piece about them. Even if they did, I don't think they would appreciate it, for, you see, like Mrs Bishop, I happen to live in a property shaken day and night by railway trains—in this case, running in and out of Paddington Station. Which fact accounts, no doubt, for what I have written . . .

(Footnote.—Oh my Satan! I have just remembered that the offices of the FREETHINKER are located close to London Bridge Station. Perhaps it is British Railways who are responsible for all this unbelief . . .)

THE NCCL: GUARDIAN OF LIBERTY

MARTIN PAGE

THE AGM of the National Council for Civil Liberties took place in London, April 25-26. The NSS was represented by David Tribe (on the NCCL Executive Committee), Govind Deodhekar (NSS Treasurer) and Martin Page. Those who attend the NCCL's Annual General Meetings cannot fail to be impressed by the efficient management and almost uniformly high standard of debating that characterise these gatherings. This year was certainly no exception in this respect, and tribute should be paid to the wise and good-humoured chairmanship of Martin Ennals, who might be criticised, however, for not perhaps being sufficiently alive to the evident desire to speak of some in the audience who could not easily reach the microphone.

The Annual Report for 1969-70 (which is eminently worth reading: obtainable from the NCCL at 2s 6d) was introduced and accepted. The AGM then went through the motions (in at least one sense!). The subjects covered included: privacy, censorship, police powers, legal aid, academic freedom, democracy in schools, the perennial big debate on the "closed shop", equal pay, equality of marital status, homosexuals, drugs, contraceptives, citizens' rights, Northern Ireland, and the Common Market. It would, of course, be impossible here to discuss all the motions in detail, and so my comments on them are necessarily brief and selective.

The AGM deplored the Home Secretary's decision to exclude arbitrary invasions of privacy by officials from the terms of reference of the Younger Committee. Unanimous support was expressed for the Report of the Arts Council's Working Group on Obscenity Laws, with regret that "much of the public discussion and official reaction to the Report has been confined to the fruitless and irrelevant examination of the misleading expression 'permissive society' as a poor substitute for the serious consideration of the important legal and civil liberties issues at stake". Emphasis was once again placed on "the urgent need for a system of independent review of complaints against police officers"—a proposal that accords with Hewart's dictum (in the British empirical tradition), "justice must not only be done; it must also be seen to be done", and that is really in the interests of the police themselves, though many of them do not see it that way.

Won over by the eloquence of the earnest "whizz-kids" from the Oxford Council for Civil Liberties, the AGM called upon the NCCL "to look into the possibility of a scheme by which compensation, at the very least in respect of lost earnings, might be paid to accused persons held in prison on remand who are subsequently found Not Guilty". Framed no doubt in view of proposed Tory legislation and the recent storm over "secret dossiers" at Universities, another successful motion urged the NCCL:

"to campaign for restrictions on the collection of personal data in higher education, in order to exclude irrelevant information, such as political opinions, and to prevent disclosure without the consent of the individual concerned, and thus protect the privacy of students and staff; and:

to oppose changes in the law of trespass which would make the peaceful occupation of university or college premises a criminal offence, recognising that punitive or repressive measures will do little to restore conditions under which students, staff and college authorities can work together effectively."

The British Humanist Association successfully moved a motion calling upon the Government to amend the 1944 Education Act, so that neither the act of worship nor religious instruction is required by law, and to encourage schools to abandon acts of worship "unless on a voluntary

basis, out of school hours" and to deal with religion "in an educational, open fashion, in those lessons where it is relevant". Also passed were the NSS motions that "in the definition of criminality, homosexual behaviour should be subject only to the same constraints as heterosexual behaviour", and that:

"This AGM believes that the possession of drugs intended for one's personal use should be considered an aesthetic or a medical question and not a criminal one. It calls on H.M. Government at the same time to take every step to educate schoolchildren in the dangers of drugs of habituation and addiction and to eradicate the illicit traffic in these drugs."

An emergency motion moved by Mr Deodhekar, on behalf of the NSS, and repudiating "paki-bashing", was carried. On the other hand, the NSS motion that "it is the right of all people, whatever their age, sex, or marital status, to have free access to contraceptive advice and materials" was remitted in view of a tie-vote.

The successful emergency motions included one whereby "this AGM wishes to associate itself with recent appeals to the Cricket Council to cancel the South African Cricket tour in view of its likely effect on race relations and civil liberties in the UK"; and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom persuaded the AGM to urge the Government to confine troops and police in Northern Ireland to methods of riot control known to be less noxious than CS gas, at least until the results of the full enquiry into the health hazards of CS gas are published.

Lord Foot gave the keynote speech on "Civil Liberties in the 'Seventies'". He stressed the need for clarity and careful definition regarding civil liberties, and he presented a persuasive rather than a convincing case against a Bill of Rights: he thought there was a danger of excluding some "rights" for all time. The Labour MPs Alistair MacDonald (Chislehurst) and Frank Judd (Portsmouth West) opened the discussion on Lord Foot's speech. Mr MacDonald understandably expressed misgivings about the aptness of Lord Foot's key phrase "the liberty of the subject", but, like Frank Judd, who followed him, he failed to subject to critical scrutiny the noble lord's arguments against a Bill of Rights. Rather surprisingly, although the discussion ranged from consideration of the last remaining priest-kings to consideration of the erosion of parliamentary power by the corporations, no one came forward to put the case for a Bill of Rights. This was a rather disappointing and even discourteous reaction to a stimulating and witty speech in the Foot tradition.

At one point, Lord Foot quoted Macaulay as attributing the success of Cromwell's Army to its dedication and sense of purpose. Taking our cue from Lord Foot, we recall that it was indeed Thomas Rainborough of the revolutionary Cromwellian period who declared: "The poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he". For such a principle the National Council for Civil Liberties has fought valiantly for more than a quarter of a century. It may be a limitation of its activities that the Council sometimes seems to concentrate on the legal superstructure at the expense of the economic base of society, that it sometimes seems to countenance the equality derided by Anatole France when he wrote in *Le Lys Rouge*: "The law in its majestic equality forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, to steal bread". A society in which economic power is increasingly diffused and democratised is surely the one in which civil liberties become most meaningful. Civic rights are surely hollow

if they do not presuppose or include the right of each individual to creative self-fulfilment; as Marx said: "In a democracy, the starting-point is man. Man is not made for the law, but the law is made for man". Or as another Jewish Messiah declared: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath".

Whatever criticisms may be levelled at the NCCL, it remains an invaluable organisation for the defence of existing rights and for the securing of no less vital rights. No doubt the NCCL, like the State in Marxist ideology, would wither away in the truly free society of the dreamer's imagination. Its very existence is symptomatic of, and made possible by, a relatively free society. It is a guardian of liberty.

Book Review

R. W. MORRELL

The Dinosaurs by W. E. Swinton. Illustrated. 331 pp. (George Allen and Unwin, 75s).

WHEN it first appeared some thirty-six years ago this book gave rise to considerable interest both within and outside palaeontological circles. It was in reality a pioneering work in a field about which much was known, but the information was scattered around in numerous publications of a largely specialised nature. Its principle achievement was to assemble much of this information into a comprehensive and well written account of these reptiles. It was recognised almost immediately as the definitive work on dinosaurs. Subsequently our knowledge of the dinosaurs, a name coined by Richard Owen (1804-1892), the anatomist and vertebrate palaeontologist who crossed swords with T. H. Huxley and was humiliated in the battle, has increased so considerably as to rob the book of its definitive status. Aware of this the author, Professor W. E. Swinton has now completely re-written the book to take into account the many interesting discoveries made and theories advanced over the past thirty-six years.

Although it is clearly the hope of both author and publisher that the new edition (in effect a totally new book) will regain its definitive status, this appears unlikely in view of there being several similar works available, particularly by the distinguished American palaeontologist, E. H. Colbert. Swinton's book is a work of profound scholarship by one of the world's outstanding experts on dinosaurs. It presents material concerning both the fossilised remains of the creatures and the history of their discovery which has either been overlooked by other workers or is difficult to obtain by virtue of having appeared in journals taken only by specialist libraries. Professor Swinton stresses the importance of a good research library being available and not a few of his readers will have experienced the sense of frustration brought on by the difficulties in trying to obtain a copy of an obscure but important paper.

This book is not without its defects and perhaps the most easily noted is the apparent uncertainty on the part of the author as to who he is writing for. The technical data included will give it an importance to those engaged in dinosaur studies or students receiving palaeontological training. Both groups will find the bibliography of original papers of great value, but at the same time might well wonder why no works of the great pioneer student of dinosaurs, E. D. Cope, are mentioned although four of those of his great rival, O. C. Marsh are. There are other works of a more popular nature omitted, in particular Colbert's *The Age of Reptiles*, and this leads again to the point about uncertainty made above. While the specialist and student are catered for, the author in his introduction clearly had in mind the interested but uninformed reader. He draws attention to popular interest in dinosaurs but adds that this is often coupled with "serious misconceptions". This suggests that Professor Swinton hopes to clear up these "misconceptions", but unfortunately he has a tendency to abruptly make use of terms known to palaeontologists but which are for the most part vague or meaningless to the lay reader. This can only produce even greater "misconceptions". Had the author included a chart displaying the relevant section of the geological column it would have clarified some of his points considerably. On the question of lack of clarity even specialists might find that references are given to certain works, as that of Martin Schmidt on page 35, but no indication is given in the bibliography as to where it was published.

No book is without its faults and what few *The Dinosaurs* has cannot be said to lessen the importance of the book. It is of value

to specialist and non-specialist alike, as also to those interested in the history of the earth sciences. It can be read right through—and the author has the ability to make even the most technical of descriptions go with a zing—or used for reference. In respect to the latter it will be found that the habit of the author in giving in many instances the present location of the fossil material about which he writes should ensure for it a use value most of its rivals lack. Readers wishing to see dinosaur remains for themselves will find the last chapter of particular value as it not only discusses the role amateurs had (and have) in the discovery, excavation and description of dinosaurs, but gives a check list of museums having collections on shows; nor does Professor Swinton forget to mention the restored (inaccurate) models of dinosaurs to be seen in the crystal Palace grounds at Sydenham, South London.

There are still many unsolved problems concerning the dinosaurs, understandable in a group of creatures which dominated the world for approximately 140 million years, but perhaps that which has intrigued most people concerns the reasons for their extinction. This hotly debated problem has for many years been the happy hunting ground for religious obscurantists. Their favourite theory, catastrophism, is dismissed firmly and in few words by the author, who demonstrates without difficulty, or recourse to technicalities, the scientific untenability of this still widely held theory. Professor Swinton is too cautious to accept without reservation any one theory to account for dinosaur extinction and consequently while displaying his preference leaves the matter open, though it would be true to say that it is no longer the complete mystery some people still think it is.

The Dinosaurs is well illustrated with plates originally, with one exception, published in the *Illustrated London News*. These while effective would have been more so on larger pages. The series of maps published as an appendix and showing the location of dinosaur discoveries in Britain would have looked more impressive if they had been brought together in a folding map which showed the country as a whole. Although it might have posed problems, had the map also included the sites at which dinosaur traces such as tracks only have been found it would have given it value apart from the book. Professor Swinton has produced an important contribution to general dinosaur studies which is essential reading for all who require up-to-date information and ideas on the present state of research.

PUBLIC FORUM

SHOULD THE STATE SUPPORT CHURCH SCHOOLS?

BRIGID BROPHY

THE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM
(Dr Ian Ramsey)

ARCHBISHOP ROBERTS, SJ

DAVID TRIBE

(President, National Secular Society)

Chairman: MAX WILKINSON

(Editor, *The Teacher*)

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LETTERS

J. M. Robertson

AS MR ROBERT F. TURNEY'S remarks about John M. Robertson (March 28) constitute a wholly unwarranted and somewhat obtuse critique of the latter's works who, truly, was one of the most brilliant and scholarly Freethinkers to grace our fold, I believe, in the interests of historical accuracy and objectivity, a few remarks may be pertinent.

That Joseph McCabe was a valuable asset to Freethought is well known and also readily admitted. That he showed a definite tendency to denigrate JMR on various occasions is likewise well known, but, alas, to comparatively few in our movement. *Tempus fugit*. The rift between the RPA and McCabe to which Mr Turney refers took place many years ago and the "confidential" report issued by the RPA to its members on March 12, 1928, is now, alas, an item found only in the archives of those who collect Freethought memorabilia. McCabe, at that time, was charged with not admitting certain contractual responsibilities and JMR was present at the occasion. Years later, McCabe in writing what he captioned *Eighty Years a Rebel* (sub-captioned an autobiographical work) had the brazen effrontery to state that Robertson received \$75 for attending that meeting and making an "attack" on him.

That Mr Turney doesn't like Robertson's literary style is his privilege, of course, but a style rich in scholarly precision and keenly logical, cannot, alas, be admired by everyone. That Mr Turney's psychologizing leads him to consider Robertson "a bore almost without limit", may evince evidence of his intellectual limitations.

Now, McCabe also showed an evident dislike and perhaps jealousy for the scholarly achievements Robertson made in his researches in the Jesus myth theory and his criticism often, unfortunately, showed more of the nature of a washerwoman's standards than those of one who had written so many valuable Freethought works as he had done.

If I may indulge in a certain degree of what some may term conceit, I should like to state that I gave McCabe his comeuppance in *The Truth Seeker* (Historicus: Jan. 1944—Sep. 1944—May 1945). So, let us, at least, keep the record accurate so far as historical matters go and not divert attention by displaying personal likes or dislikes anent literary style, personality, etc.

JACK BENJAMIN, Member RPA.

Jesus: A Homosexual?

WITH REGARD TO the sex life of Jesus (April 18), his homosexuality is plainly revealed in St John 13:23 and 25.

In the days of Jesus men sat at meals tailor fashion. The person who was leaning on his breast could only have been a child. (Experiment with an adult and see!) Six centuries later Muhamed ordered a different posture at meals; one that he considered more respectful to the liver. In ancient times homosexuality was not considered reprehensible: "Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel. Judge, O ye Gods, how dearly Caesar loved him".

In the nineteenth century the Qajar Shahs of Iran had male as well as female seraglios. A Kurdish youth was given the title Aziz-us-Sultan (The King's Darling!). When he became too old to delight his Majesty, he was given the task of recruiting young, comely boys. He accompanied Nasr-ud-Din Shah on his visit to Europe. Did Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, the Princess of Wales and all the royal family who shook the Kurd's hand, know the meaning of his title, or his functions? We can only surmise. Certainly it is that the ancient and modern world were in confrontation.

W. E. HUXLEY.

Q

WHILE I AM wholeheartedly at one with the underlying attitudes that prompted the formation of Q, as described in your editorial of May 9, and agree that the threats to man's survival presented by pollution, population explosion, and modern methods of warfare, dwarf every other political issue, I cannot support Q's aim of world government as a panacea. The logic of this—that since every regional government has always been more or less corrupted by power, we must set up a far more powerful government over the whole globe in the hope that it will remain incorrupt—seems to me very similar to the logic of religious believers who say that since there is no justice in this life there must be another life where everything will be put right!

What we need are far smaller, not far larger, units of decision-making, each unit being represented in the United Nations. Why shouldn't Wales and Scotland determine their own affairs and have seats at the UN? They have larger populations than many

countries already accepted as separate nations. For that matter, England could well be divided into three or four regions determined by regional interest. As for countries like the USA and USSR having monolithic governments and no more representation on the United Nations (leaving aside the right of veto) than Lesotho and Luxembourg, this is surely an absurd situation, and could be remedied by the power of the Pentagon and the Kremlin being dispersed among their constituent states, which, when given autonomy (but not before), should be accepted as separate members of the UN. (The absurdity is compounded, of course, by exclusion of 700 million Chinese from any representation at all.)

If a *coup d'etat* is a perennial fear in many countries and, as in Greece, can be so disastrous, how much worse would be the possibility of a *coup de terre*! There would be nowhere for refugees to go; no one to grant them political asylum. And since the world government would presumably control all the stockpiles of modern weaponry everywhere, any areas of the world that failed to toe the line could simply be threatened with annihilation. Or, if a particular racial group got into power, their solution to the population explosion might simply be genocide on an unprecedented scale. So much for the Q panacea of world government!

BARBARA SMOKER.

Celtic Colonisation

MR HALSTEAD successfully pricks the balloon of Celtic nationalism. His achievement would have been even more remarkable if the balloon were other than his own construction.

All of us on these islands are much of a genetic muchness. What that amounts to is that Celtic Nationalism is a cultural and not a racialist conception.

Mr Halstead claims that there are more differences among the English-speaking peoples of the world than he would care to enumerate. To the extent that they have such a penchant for assimilating any poor devils within reach that is hardly surprising. Even in the present mass media epoch the process requires a certain measure of time. Those of us who are fortunate enough to be welcomed to the bosom of this happy breed would be churlish not to recognise the altruism in this desire to stamp their own cultural pattern on the rest of us. If we were just a little more cynical it might be classified as a variation on a genocidal theme. We have just reached the centenary of the legislation that brought general education to this country. In England it was an enlightened measure; in Wales, which had a far higher literacy rate (I am not quite clear about whether or not it is possible to classify anyone as being literate in a language other than English?) it was a steamroller designed to bring about the uniformity Mr Halstead professes to deplore.

My impression is that Mr Halstead has been so busy blinking at what he takes to be the shortcomings of Berresford Ellis as a historian and biologist that he has become more than a little blinded by his own archaeological science. Having guided our steps with such expertise through the archaeological complexities of La Tène, Hallstatt and Iron Age A, he ought now to apply his typewriter to straight fiction. What about a thirtieth century archaeologist's account of the successive invasion waves which gave rise to the Canal, Railway and Tarmacadam cultures of our own benighted age?

PADRAIG O. CONCHUIR.

IT SEEMS the Celtic Nationalists—Berresford Ellis and R. Mulholland—are angry about "imperialism".

The answer is—Nationalism causes Imperialism.

If the world's divided into nations each nation has to be as powerful as possible to prevent other nations pushing it about. Having an empire is one method of getting power.

Further—some nations will always be more powerful than others. They will use their power to set up empires. These empires may be in the form of a more or less direct rule—as in the case of the old British Empire and the Austro-Hungarian empire—or in the form of spheres of influence, trading areas or alliances, as in the case of the present day American and Russian empires.

So if the Celtic Nationalists don't like imperialism they should stop being Nationalists and support World Government.

I. S. LOW.

Edison the Freethinker

THE ARTICLE by Barry Hobson "Edison the freethinker" (May 9) is very interesting and I feel sure gives information that is unknown to many people. However I think that in publishing material of this sort reference should be given to the source of the statements and quotations. This would make them much more valuable if one wanted to bring them up in a discussion.

STANLEY WATKINS.