

Freethinker

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VD OR NOT VD?

ON MAY 22 Richard Branson, the editor of *Student* was fined £8 at Marylebone Magistrates Court for contravening the Indecent Advertisements Act of 1889. As was reported in the *FREETHINKER* of May 16, Branson had caused leaflets to be distributed which offered help to young people. It was the use of the words 'venereal disease' which caused the leaflets to be ruled 'indecent advertisements'. The magistrate cannot be blamed for his reading of a law which is clearly antiquated and absurd. His ruling does however, place a number of organisations in a quandary. The Family Planning Association, The Health Education Council and the large number of local authorities who place notices in public lavatories advising people of the whereabouts of VD clinics will have to risk prosecution or alter their policies.

A Private Member's Bill introduced by Lady Birk which sought to amend the 1889 Act had passed through all its stages in the House of Lords, before the election and the dissolution of parliament were announced. Now it will obviously be some time before any amendment to the 1889 Act will become law. And meanwhile sufferers from venereal disease will continue to suffer. Unless the Bill is introduced by the next government itself, it will have to undergo the usual parliamentary rigmarole and strictly budgeted time which retards all Private Member's Bills. Venereal disease is very much on the increase and is one of the most fiercely contagious afflictions of modern society. For the sake of the country's health it is therefore imperative that the next government ensures a swift amendment of this unhealthy Act.

Meanwhile David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, who with three other members of the NSS Executive committee faces the possibility of prosecution under the Act for distributing the leaflets which earned Branson his criminal record, has written to the Home Secretary, Mr Callaghan, asking for a quick decision on his case.

Mr Tribe's letter informs the Home Secretary of the situation, explaining how on May 8 he was the speaker at a meeting organised by the NSS in Lincoln's Inn Fields. His speech, he writes, "drew attention to the problems of young people in London", and made the point that: "Often the problem was how to locate sympathetic, confidential and free medical or social help in a Welfare State that may be, or may be thought to be, hostile, officious and discriminatory in dealing with particular problems and particular age ranges".

He goes on to tell how he informed his listeners of Branson's "Student Advisory Centre, which offers free help, through appropriately qualified personnel who have agreed to act as referees, in matters relating to abortion, adoption, contraception, drugs, educational problems, homosexuality, lesbianism, marriage, pregnancy testing, psychiatric help and venereal disease". The Home Secretary is then informed how: "Leaflets prepared by this centre were then distributed by Mr William McLroy, the society's General Secretary and soon to become editor of the *FREETHINKER*, Mr Martin Page, an executive member soon to become General Secretary, Mr Nigel Sinnott, another executive member, and myself."

Tribe continues: "Three police officers, who behaved very courteously throughout, informed my colleagues that they had committed an offence under the Indecent Advertisements Act 1889 and the Venereal Disease Act 1917, and me that I had committed two offences under the same statutes. I understand that the matter was reported to your department. From research I discover that my colleagues face a maximum sentence of two and a quarter years with hard labour and I one of four and a half years, also with hard labour. As we are all quite unrepentant and propose to continue to help young people to get medical advice and treatment, we cannot expect the courts to show the leniency usually reserved for penitents.



"Naturally, as both individuals and officers of a national society, we are anxious to plan our lives accordingly and would be grateful if you could tell us when these cases will be heard and from what date the sentences are likely to commence. I understand there is usually remission for good conduct but it may be that this is a discretionary power which is withheld from the most heinous offenders. We

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Freethinker

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Editor: David Reynolds

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should therefore be grateful if you could also inform us whether the offence of helping people with medical and social problems comes into the category of exceptional depravity."

As yet Mr Tribe has heard nothing from the Home Secretary beyond an acknowledgement of receipt of his letter. If Tribe, McIlroy and the others should get away with it, one is bound to ask why charges were pressed in Branson's case (one explanation was supplied in the report in May 16's FREETHINKER), and also whether the Student Advisory Centre and the other responsible bodies mentioned above can continue their activities without fear of reprisals. My local public lavatory still carries a notice about VD clinics. The only amendment to it has been made by a gentleman named Kilroy. The shocking words "venereal disease" are still there! Mr Callaghan must surely let all concerned know where they stand, and clear up this anomaly as soon as possible.

A FRIEND IN NEED

THE HUMANIST MOVEMENT derives much of its attraction from its campaigns both for the reduction of the influence of the religious on the rest of us and for enlightened social reform based on reason. It is sometimes forgotten that a part of the movement's strength lies in its ties with, and support of other organisations working towards different, but compatible ends—organisations as varied as the League against Cruel Sports, The Euthanasia Society and the National Council for Civil Liberties.

The Independent Adoption Society, until recently the Agnostics Adoption Society, is a body with whose work humanists cannot but have particular sympathy. It exists primarily to cater for people with no specific religious beliefs and who on this account encounter difficulty in finding children whom they can adopt. Over the few years since its foundation the society, and its necessarily scant number of officials have provoked the admiration of all with whom it has come in contact. It is doing a unique job very well.

Recently it sent a disquieting letter to all its adopters, members and supporters. It began "We make no bones about the fact that this is a begging letter. What we beg you to do first is read it through to the end, by which time you'll understand why we have written to you as we have. We don't like doing it, but it has to be done.

"The plain truth is we are going broke.

"It isn't just that we are short of money—we always have been, but we've managed. Now, though, the financial position is so critical that if we don't get a lot more money very quickly, the Society will cease to exist in about three months. For good."

Were the Society to cease to exist, it would be a disaster not only for innumerable prospective parents and children, but also for the humanist movement, for the Society is one of the best examples of humanism in practice that exists in this country.

Above anything else the Society needs covenants, which will ensure it an annual income and of course have the added advantage of allowing it to claim tax allowances, thus making the amount received something over two-thirds in excess of that donated. Straightforward donations are of course also very much needed.

Copies of the letter and covenant forms can be obtained from the Society. Its address is Red Cross House, 160 Peckham Rye, London, SE22 (telephone 01-693 4155).

Humanists will find it hard to uncover a better cause.

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 Wye 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

Belfast Humanist Group: NI War Memorial Building, Waring Street, Belfast: Monday, June 8, 8 p.m.: Briefing of delegates for BHA Annual Conference and discussion.
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 Burnett 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 Burnett House. It would be appreciated if you would bring a small gift for the stall.
London Young Humanists: Conway hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, June 7, 7 p.m.: "Art Therapy and Psychiatry", Edward Adamson.
Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, June 11, 7.30 p.m.: Annual General Meeting followed by "The Unmarried Mother", A talk by a representative from the Society for the Unmarried Mother and her Child.
Nottingham and Notts Humanist Group: Adult Education Centre, 14 Shakespeare Street: Friday, June 12, 7.30 p.m.: "People in Groups", A. W. Gottschalk, BA.
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, June 7, 11 a.m.: "Do Drugs Open the Door of Perception?", Dr John Lewis. Admission free.

THE SMC AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

DAVID TRIBE

IT IS BY NO MEANS certain that "we freethinkers . . . are all on the 'abolitionist' side", for many seem anxious to remove compulsory RI to replace it with compulsory RE, or RE-ME, and merely to make compulsory worship more polyglot. Whether or not these proposals would, on balance, reduce the element of brainwashing (if they did it would most likely come about by raising the element of confusion) is a moot point, but they are by no means as innocent as they sound. Quite apart from ideological considerations, compulsory "participation" in "strange" or "foreign" customs does not necessarily increase tolerance and social integration, while segregation of the school community along religious lines would largely highlight segregation along racial lines and be a notable disservice to race relations. All that would be achieved would be a certain downgrading of Jesus Christ, and Christian fundamentalists are naturally up in arms. All the more reason, therefore, for humanist "fundamentalists", if that is what some of us are, to step up the secular campaign, for the new proposals give us little joy as "sectarians" and small comfort as educationists. If we oppose the Social Morality Council Working Party's Report it is from conviction and a long historical memory and not from pique at not being represented. The NSS did not expect to participate as it is not a member of the parent SMC. I cannot recall that we were ever invited to join; but I make no complaint as I think it quite likely we should have declined with thanks. A body which grew out of the pro-censorship Public Morality Council does not arouse universal enthusiasm.

One of the reasons for this lack of humanist "solidarity" is the fact that some humanists seem to have had experience only of sixth formers, among most of whom brainwashing does of course break down, and not of the great bulk of the school population. The generally liberal Pilkington Report made it quite clear that the main purpose of primary school religion is the inculcation of belief. Even if that hope is not realised, some humanists under-estimate the effect on unconscious attitudes that can be engendered in the process. I am convinced that one of the main reasons why we have so much difficulty in achieving law reform, broadcasting equality and the removal of civic, taxation and rating privileges enjoyed by the churches is that, while having no real religious beliefs or affiliations themselves, a great number of people are successfully sold the idea, usually at the primary school, that religion is "a good thing", the most valuable part of our cultural heritage and an essential part of our social fabric. A "sympathetic understanding of a religious approach to life" is as good a way as any of defining this attitude.

But the main disagreement arises from a "a genuine difference of view and of policy", especially in the attitude to religion itself, and this to some extent mirrors the historical roles of the NSS and of the Ethical Union, which was always as much an extension of Nonconformism as of scepticism, and sometimes more. It may very well be that James Hemming has set out the three viable choices: old-style RI, RE-ME, and legislated secularity. If that is so I should unhesitatingly plump for secularity, which is not necessarily to be equated with "the pressure of the academic rat-race". Neither does it mean the "total abolition . . . of religious discussion" in sixth form liberal studies, though it certainly means "the total abolition of worship".

That part of the SMC Report which has received universal praise from humanists (and wide-ranging condemnation

from the churches and the ARE, not to mention NATORK) appears under the heading "Moral education" (paras. 7-13) and deals with the autonomy of morality. But while this section should be studied by every school, LEA and college of education, it cannot be legislated for or syllabised. I have already given my reservations about syllabised ME and don't have space to repeat them. But I should like to deal briefly with syllabised RE of the liberal sort.

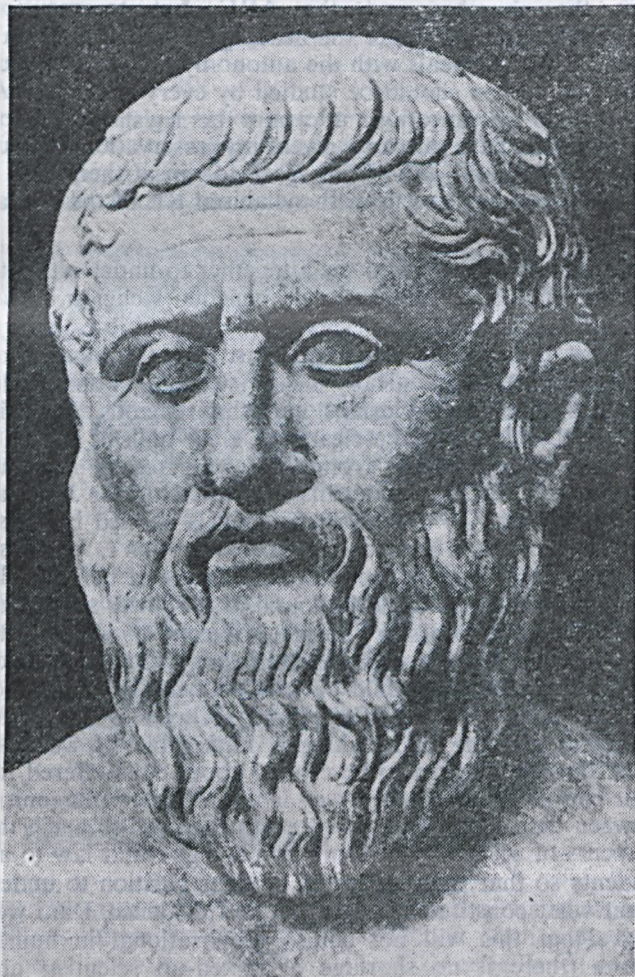
Its protagonists seem to me altogether to under-estimate its difficulties and exaggerate its benefits. Religion as an academic discipline is a very complex subject, and a specialist taste. Much more specialist than the number of RI "specialists" (technically below strength) would indicate. As their own journals and the religious press in general abundantly make clear, the great bulk of students who major in it (apart from those who regard it as an easy option) do so as a means of witnessing for Jesus at public expense. On the whole, religion is studied by those who believe it and ignored by those who don't. It is also a highly sensitive area, especially the nature of belief itself. How many teachers could be found in the lower secondary school with the necessary insight, objectivity and tact to deal with it without creating confusion, ill-will, psychological damage to the child or tensions between the school and the home? While at the primary school level I persist in saying that the undertaking is impossible. If we wish to encourage children to be critical about cults offered for their consumption, the best way is not to foster antagonism between the science and RE departments, but to teach the elements of science—including psychology—and law to all students so that they will be in a better position to understand what constitutes motivation and evidence. I am well aware that this will not banish the irrational in human nature (there is no shortage of mixed-up scientists and lawyers) but it is likely in the long run to be more effective as a prophylaxis against superstition than to try to teach religion itself by the "open approach".

"Openness" is something of a contentious word and I hope in the next few months to make it more so; but what might pass muster in most academic circles in 1970 as an "objective" approach to religion? No doubt I shall be accused of dogmatism, absurdity, autocracy, narrow-mindedness and anti-educationalism, but here is my viewpoint. In ultimate questions there is no scientific explanation of why there is something rather than nothing and why that something should have the evolutionary potentiality of developing self-aware living organisms. It is not absolutely certain to me that there is anything outside my own consciousness; nor, if there is no physical brain to account for it, is there any explanation of the origin of this consciousness. But granted that the existence of matter-energy with certain properties has an overriding plausibility, there is no difficulty in explaining the biological role (even though the details may be obscure) of life and death, coupled with a desire for immortality; of antisocial activity, coupled with a desire for law and co-operation; of materialist values, coupled with artistic creation; of morality, often in the past coupled with supposed supernatural sanctions. Like Freud I believe that religion is an obsessional neurosis, and like Marx I believe that it is the opium of the people (in both his original sense and its vulgarised form), intimately connected in its nature and

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THE REPUBLIC AND THE CROSS

MARTIN PAGE



Plato.

AT AT TIME when Greece has perverted her democratic tradition to become a Fascist State dedicated to defending "the free world" as a member of NATO, it is ironically appropriate that Oxford University Press should reissue F. M. Cornford's translation of Plato's *Republic* (366 pp., 7s 6d)—the first totalitarian utopia of Western Europe.

Plato to some extent adumbrated the concepts of non-logical behaviour and the circulation of élites, which were developed by Vilfredo Pareto in the early years of our century. Plato's acute observations on dreams and the neurosis of the "despotic" man were striking prefigurations of Freudian theory. His ideal society clearly divided into three classes—artisans and labourers; soldiers; and guardians at the top—was a kind of feudal system centuries before the Middle Ages. In certain respects the *Republic* foreshadowed Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*. Plato's guardians may be compared with the Jesuits of Paraguay, Nietzsche's Supermen, and the Nazi and Communist party élites.

His work contained insights of enduring topicality. Thus he declared: "revolution always starts from the outbreak of internal dissension in the ruling class" (p. 268)—a principle that may yet spell the downfall of the present junta in Greece. Of leadership he said (pp. 291-3):

"The people always put forward a single champion of their interests, whom they nurse to greatness. Here, plainly enough,

is the root from which despotism invariably springs. . . . In the early days he has a smile and a greeting for everyone he meets; disclaims any absolute power; makes large promises to his friends and to the public. . . . But as soon as he has disembarassed himself of his exiled enemies by coming to terms with some and destroying others, he begins stirring up one war after another, in order that the people may feel their need of a leader."

Plato's myth of the "noble lie" (p. 106), by which rulers and ruled alike would accept the predetermined inferiority of the ruled, was, in a sense, inverted by Marx when he declared that the proletariat would liberate both themselves and the bourgeoisie from the capitalist system. Plato's three-tier, essentially static society rather presupposed that a person was best suited to stick to one particular job and that people naturally slotted into one of his three categories. Paradoxically, he envisaged communism flourishing among the élite of a quasi-fascist state. As part of their "education", the children of the guardians were to watch real war—rather as the present sons of American senators and arms manufacturers can see the Vietnam tragedy unfold on television. Plato excluded all dramatic poets and certain kinds of musicians from his utopia—rather as the present Greek régime banned the music and restricted the freedom of Mikis Theodorakis. Yet it was largely due to the Renaissance humanists that Plato's work became widely known and appreciated in the western world. Renaissance Platonism may be said to have begun with the Greek Georgios Gemistos Plethon, whose paganism was justly believed to be subversive of the Christian creed; and the Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino tried to fuse Platonism and Christianity, thereby challenging Thomas Aquinas's combination of Aristotelianism and Christianity.

Plato's advice that the guardians should frame convenient myths and fictions to inspire the young has been used by successive governments to indoctrinate children with various nationalist, racialist and religious creeds: in modern Britain, the myths engendered by British imperialism were superseded by the myths engendered by the 1944 Education Act. Certainly the success of politicians seems to depend largely on their ability to foster myth. Plato, who despised the "barbarians", was virtually the only thinker of ancient Greece in whom the idea of national unity of all Hellenes was clearly apparent; and in his ideal state, heavy and degrading work would be done by foreigners, as in Britain today, where the very name of the "permissive" society indicates the residual power of the guardians of the paternalistic society, against which "permissiveness" is a reaction.

In his *Republic*, Plato virtually disregarded organised religion and worship; yet the close criticism to which he subjected popular notions of the gods did not indicate denial of the gods as such. He objected to the scandalous tales concerning the gods because they were unedifying, not because they were untrue. He insisted that the gods love the just man, of whom he said: "Our just man will be thrown into prison, scourged and racked, will have his eyes burnt out, and, after every kind of torment, be impaled" (pp. 46-47: Spens, in his translation, has "crucified" for "impaled"). Like passages in Isaiah (50; 53), Psalm 22 and the Passion narrative, Plato's remarks have been derived from some myth of the Suffering Saviour: Cornford's comments on this would have been welcome, especially as his annotations are generally illuminating.

Regrettably, Cornford ascribes to Thrasymachus a verbal definition of "justice" (338c: p. 18) which has no basis in the original Greek and which, in any event, is repudiated in his introduction (p. xvi).

In language of singular beauty and charm, Plato taught the most refined theism before Christ. A fundamental difference between Plato and the Christian moralists who framed the Gospels was that they believed the end of the world was nigh and the "kingdom" at hand, so that an egotistic zeal for repentance and virtue was desperately important, whereas Plato serenely conceived of society organised according to the dictates of "justice". Unlike Christ, Plato grappled with the problem of the State and gave an analysis in depth of art, education, marriage, private property and war—subjects of no less vital concern to modern technological man than to the pre-Christian philosopher. Some two thousands years before any Christian, Plato vindicated the equal rights of the sexes—at least so far as the guardians were concerned. At a time when so much of Europe stagnated in a "dark age" of Christian faith and ignorance, Plato's ideas were known to the Arabs who nurtured such a fine civilisation in Spain: his concept of love, for instance, was mirrored in *The Dove's Neck-Ring* (c. 1022 AD) by Ibn Hazm of Andalusia. Platonic love emerged as a social cult in fifteenth century Florence and became identified with courtly love—only to degenerate into the preciosity ridiculed by Molière.

To turn from the pagan Greeks to the early Christian Fathers is to turn from sublime creations of the human imagination and noble speculations of the human reason to shameless fraud and the grossest superstition. It is to turn from the simple beauty of the human body, architecture of wondrous symmetry and art of imperishable glory, to the mortification of the flesh and the nailed figures of a morbid and tortured creed. For all its perpetuation of primitive myth, religion in ancient Greece was incomparably superior, morally and mentally, to the degenerate faith of later Christians, with their grovelling worship of dead men's bones and their journeys to Arabia to kiss Job's dunghill. To compare Plato or Aristotle with Origen and Clement of Alexandria—who were, in many ways, the most cultured of the Christian Fathers—is to become vividly conscious of the intellectual decadence that accompanies the growth of imperialism. In St John's Gospel, the concept of Jesus as the Logos probably reflected the influence of Platonism. At the same time, the New Testament pointed to differences between Jews and Greeks that may be said to illustrate the dichotomy between religious and scientific attitudes to life: "the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. 1 : 22-23).

At a time when the New English Bible and John Allegro's Mushroom Theory have focussed attention once again on early Christian history, Oxford University Press has, appropriately enough, reissued Henry Bettenson's *The Early Christian Fathers* (310 pp., 15s), subtitled "A selection from the writings of the Fathers from St Clement of Rome to St Athanasius"—that is, from the period immediately after the New Testament to the age of Constantine (c. 274-337 AD), who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Aply translated and annotated, with an introduction that, like the curate's egg, is good in parts, this valuable selection reminds us how little the early Christian Fathers knew of the life's work of the supposedly historical founder of their religion.



Mikis Theodorakis.

Mr Bettenson refers to the "theological crudities" of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which, though completely silent concerning Jesus, was extremely popular with second-century Christians; yet, regrettably, he gives no extract from *Hermas*, or—for that matter—from Polycarp's surviving Epistle. By plainly implying that Peter never reached Rome, Clement of Rome's *First Epistle to the Corinthians* impugned the claim that Peter founded the Roman Catholic Church. Mr Bettenson quotes the relevant passage (pp. 38-9), though he does not note its significance any more than he discusses Tischendorf's conclusion that Clement's Epistle furnished no proof of the contemporaneous existence of the Four Gospels. Clement mentioned—or was made to mention—Paul's *Epistles to the Corinthians*; yet, in his long passage in praise of love, Clement did not once quote from Paul's famous chapter on the very same topic to the same Christian community.

Disregarding the arguments of Davidson, Volkmar, Bauer, Scholten and Hilgenfeld, Mr Bettenson asserts that Ignatius was "taken to Rome": the improbability that Ignatius made the journey from Antioch to Rome casts grave doubts on the supposed authenticity of any of the Epistles that bear his name, for these letters create the impression that they were composed on that journey. In any event, the Todeswunsch of Ignatius thirsting for martyrdom provides a classic case of the psychosis of religious hysteria and fanaticism. When he was asked for evidence to support his faith in Christ, Ignatius invoked

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THE REPUBLIC AND THE CROSS

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only the Old Testament prophecies (p. 48); and he declared that the birth and death of Jesus were unknown to Satan, the prince of the world (p. 41). Like Paul's Epistles, those ascribed to Clement of Rome and Ignatius revealed bitter strife and schism within the churches—the abiding note of Christian history. Baptism and the eucharist were barely mentioned by Clement and Ignatius, who seemed no less ignorant of Christ's miraculous career and most of his teachings.

In his next section, Mr Bettenson quotes from the *Didache*, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. The *Didache*—perhaps the earliest extant manual of Christian practice—was silent concerning Jesus. Justin Martyr deliberately placed Christ's miraculous deeds on a par with those of pagan gods; and his dialogue with Trypho indicated that the historicity of Jesus was denied by Jews. The Four Gospels were first mentioned about 190 AD—some 150 years after Christ's alleged crucifixion—by Irenaeus, who wrote of Jesus that “at last, He came on to death itself” and that he ascended to heaven *before* his crucifixion, which apparently took place when he was “more than fifty years old”!

Mr Bettenson does not quote the passages where Tertullian implied that Jesus Christ was a sun-god and com-

mended Christ's perverse incitation to castration “for the kingdom of heaven's sake” (Matt. 19 : 12). Mr Bettenson candidly admits that “in his work on the Bible Origen shows little of critical acumen, even for his age”. He calls Origen “a great teacher”, but he does not add that this “great teacher” regarded the sun, moon and stars as living and rational beings, and castrated himself “for the kingdom of heaven's sake” (sixteen centuries after Origen, a Christian sect in Russia still practised castration in obedience to Christ's command). Whereas the victorious Christians attempted to dispose of Celsus (Origen's too incisive pagan opponent) by burning his works, Mr Bettenson disposes of him by not even noting his existence.

Our editor quotes from *De Lapsis*, but avoids the passage from the same work where Cyprian said of Christian bishops in North Africa: “They were greedy for money, seized estates by fraud, and made great profit by usury”. Thus, virtually from the start of organised Christianity, God and Mammon walked hand in hand. Cyprian was heretical or stubborn enough to reject the notion of the supreme authority of the Pope at Rome—yet Cyprian's attitude might be revived in our own time in view of the deep divisions within the Roman Catholic Church. Perhaps no more insane quarrel over absurd dogma ever convulsed society than the sectarian strife of Arians and Athanasians: and that reflection, prompted by Mr Bettenson's survey, provides a suitable opportunity to bid farewell to him, the Cross—and the Republic.

“GO TO THE ANT”

BARRY HOBSON

THE BIBLE says, go to the ant and observe its ways, and ask the beasts and they shall teach us; but what do they teach us? The Army ant teaches us the profession of war. Millions of these ants have been observed marching, sometimes in lines a quarter of a mile in length. They eat anything in their path and especially like the taste of flesh, which they only eat while it is hot and pulsating on the victim. The Ashanti tribe of Africa used these ants to dispose of enemies. Their bite is like tiny white hot firebrands.

The world's largest ant is to be found along the Amazon. The females of this species are over an inch long, and they are the rulers, warriors and huntresses of their kingdom. The males are puny in comparison and are sometimes carried in the huge jaws of their ‘sisters’ in time of danger.

The ant world is like assembly line reproduction—they are automatons. Each ant has its role to play. Some workers exist solely for one chief duty; to tear flesh from living prey. Some are defenders and military strategists.

Ants can be used to justify slavery. There was a case recently of a man who after ‘going to the ant’ got the idea of making a slave out of another man. The ant is a fierce creature. Its normal reaction to an insect weaker than itself is to kill it and eat it.

The ant-lion of Jamaica has large pincers with which it scoops a hole in the sand; it then lies hidden till an unwary insect falls into the hole. As it tries to climb out, the ant-lion throws sand at it making the victim fall to the bottom. Long before man came on the scene, insects were killing their victims in many devious ways, some of which we have copied. Long before Sweeny Todd, spiders used trap doors to kill their victims. The bolas spider lasso's its victim, and several insect and animal species use C and B warfare.

What of insect-eating plants? The Venus flytrap is a miniature bear trap. Hapless insects are lured by its brilliant purple red colour and its perfume. How many men have been lured by ‘Venus’ dressed this way? In nature the female of the species is often deadlier than the male.

Whole articles could be written on the bizarre aspects of nature. Even the names of some of these creatures tells us something about them. The surgeon fish carries a pair of knives; the glass catfish has a transparent body; firefish have white hot needles; the Red Finger sponge looks like a hand dipped in blood; Viper fish have fangs; the angler fish has a rod to attract its prey, etc., etc.

Nature is an endless pageant of disguise and masquerade, of death and deceit, of kill or be killed. Every minute of every day, millions of big and small predators are killing—so that life may continue. Usually death comes too swiftly to be painful.

As Huxley said: “The animal world is on about the same level as a gladiator show. The strongest, the swiftest and the most cunning live to fight another day”.

FREETHINKER FUND

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Book Review

KEVIN PAGE

Political Elites, by Dr Geraint Parry (Allen & Unwin, 169 pp., 18s).

IN HIS excellent, though brief survey of political elites, Dr Parry, a bright young don from Manchester, provides a critical review of the relevant literature (especially that of recent origin), rather than an original approach to the subject. Appropriately enough, he begins with the two great classical elite theorists, Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, who were, in fact, as much concerned to refute Karl Marx as to explore an ethically neutral political science. Later elitists, such as James Burnham and C. Wright Mills, attempted to synthesise elements of Marx with elements from elitists originally antagonistic to Marx. To the elite theorist, economic factors are important; but he would insist that by political means an elite can control, accommodate or even counteract economic forces. Marxism and elitism are complementary, in that just as Marx's work was basically a response to the industrial society of his day, so elitism is a response to more recent political developments.

Whereas the classical elitists examined the existence and nature of a single, cohesive elite which dominates the affairs of society, later theorists have been concerned with a *number* of ruling elites. According to Meisel's famous, though not entirely satisfactory, definition, elites embody the 3 Cs—"group consciousness, coherence and conspiracy". Mosca, Pareto and Mills distinguished between two strata within the elite: the upper and lower, with the second providing a pool for recruitment to the first and justifying the decisions of the leaders to the rest of society. The elitist standpoint is, however, complicated by the fact that those who take decisions in society do not necessarily comprise all those who wield influence. Moreover, in "weaker" (i.e. less precise) versions of elite theory which incorporate the plurality of interest groups, the 3 Cs are almost abandoned, and the ruling elite becomes virtually synonymous with the category of top people.

Michels contended that even the socialist parties of Europe, devoted to the negation of elite control, nevertheless conform to the "iron law of oligarchy". For Mills, the elite comprised those who hold the leading positions in the strategic hierarchies; for Pareto, the elite was a class of persons with the highest indices of ability in each branch of activity. But Pareto himself abandoned this precise definition for simply a ruling group who, regardless of ability, occupy the leading positions. For him, the great majority of men's actions are non-logical (i.e. not rational), in the sense of not appearing either to the actor or to an impartial observer to be both consciously undertaken to reach an attainable end and appropriate to that end.

Burnham prophetically asserted in *The Managerial Revolution* (1942) that the capitalist system (as Marx understood it) was in decline and would be replaced by a society controlled economically and politically by a managerial elite. He recognised the fact—as some latter-day Marxists have not—that the formal "owners" of some productive forces, i.e. the capitalists, had become increasingly divorced from the actual operations of productions, while the productive process itself had passed into the hands of a managerial class. Nevertheless, power for both Burnham and the Marxists is cumulative: viz. control of production gives rise to political power, social prestige and wealth.

The elite theorists see the mass as "atomised", with a psychological desire for leaders to assume responsibility on their behalf. Through control of the mass-media, the elite can diffuse the values and principles which legitimise its position. Cataclysmic change occurs only if the ruling class is closed to recruitment from below and lacks the flexibility to accommodate new social forces. Dr Parry quite rightly underlines the very real difficulties—practical and otherwise—of testing the cohesiveness of a particular elite. There is, for instance, Floyd Hunter's "reputational" approach (i.e. selecting leaders on the basis of their social standing) on the one hand, and, on the other, Robert Dahl's "decision-making" approach (i.e. selecting those individuals who are deemed to have made the most significant political decisions in society). As decision-making is a complex process, it is often difficult to isolate the "decision-makers" as elitists try to do. Elitists wrongly assume in many cases that elites can wield influence with equal effectiveness in all areas of public decision-making.

Can a highly complex technological civilisation (such as ours) function without elites? If not, what should be the role and scope of elites and pressure-groups in a democratic industrial society? It is a merit of Dr Parry's work that he is clearly aware of these problematical questions; and because they are problematical, it is

not necessarily a demerit that he does not offer unequivocal answers of his own to these questions. According to "democratic elitists" like Schumpeter, the power of the elite is limited by the need to win the votes of the electorate, but at the same time it is the leaders who formulate policies and who are technically free between elections (Harold Wilson, please note!). For Sartori, voting should be restricted to the better educated so as to select the best leaders. The "radical democrats" want to see greater and broader-based participation in decision-making in political, economic and other spheres, e.g. in the form of "workers' councils" (Bottomore) or a widening of the "corporate constituency" (Bachrach). They also desire an educational system to develop everyone's talents so as to facilitate his participation in creative activity.

The bibliography is really comprehensive for an introductory work of this kind. The publishers may be criticised for selling this slim paperback at the princely sum of 18s, but it still makes worthwhile reading in a highly relevant and challenging discipline.

THE SMC AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Continued from page 179)

its history with tribalism, chauvinism, imperialism, racialism, intolerance, censorship and anti-science, and that these aspects (however moderated by modernism or secularisation) outweigh its contribution to art, literature and music. I imagine that some humanists make a contrary assessment and would really like to help the churches to keep religion going, so long as it doesn't interfere too much with their own lives. As the late Mr Hutton Hynd told the World Congress of Faith on one occasion, if ever there were to be a real confrontation between religion and unbelief he would be on the side of the churches. It may be that such humanists really fear "the academic rat-race" or "cost efficiency accounting" or communism or the breakdown of law and order or permissiveness or hedonism or the revival of magic or any one of the numerous bogies Christian evangelists threaten us with as the alternative to Christianity.

To speak "realistically" I cannot in the foreseeable future see Parliament allowing, let alone obliging, the schools to teach what most academics know to be the real nature of religious beliefs and the utter lack of credentials for every religious claim, ancient or modern, Christian or non-Christian, insofar as "religious" is distinct from moral or aesthetic. It may be, for reasons I have given earlier, that the schools should be circumspect in this matter, not intruding on the inwardness and privacy of the individual, recognising that we all to some extent hold phantasies about ourselves, about our partners (without which most of us might commit suicide and most marriages might break down). It is one thing to preach atheism through the media; it is quite another to undermine the beliefs of other people's children in the special atmosphere of the classroom. That being said, it is monstrous to expect the schools to perpetuate organised superstition, whether gross or refined. If we need phantasies we can create our own. Confident predictions are from time to time made that Christianity will disappear in so many years. They seem to me optimistic in the light of its financial assets and the longevity these tend to confer, regardless of convictions which are certainly under pressure. But I for one should like to see it disappear and recognise no obligation to keep it going, tagged on to ecumenical moralisings. That, in short, is what this argument is all about and it is good that all humanists should recognise, however belatedly, where the divide lies.

LETTERS

The Social Morality Council Report

BARBARA SMOKER (May 16) states that I demand "of the Humanist movement a similar rigid dogmatism and preclusion of compromise". As a freethinker and agnostic I certainly have no wish to encourage dogmatism, but I do think that truth is too important to be compromised. We should all be free to seek our own truth unhindered by indoctrination, but not be free to impose our ideologies upon others.

My letter was written in alarmed reaction to the editorial comments in the FREETHINKER. I bought a copy of the original Report as soon as possible. The report itself confirmed my fears, by the "wholehearted welcome" given to it by the BHA, that it claimed that the Humanist movement as a whole advocated giving education in religion, as distinct from other kinds of basic ideology, a privileged and protected position in national schools. I have written a letter to the editor of *Humanist* criticising the Report on a number of specific grounds. If this is published, it should make my objections clearer. G. F. WESTCOTT.

DISCUSSING Humanist policy with members of the BHA is becoming like discussing the existence of God with Christians. On May 2 I raised some points of real difficulty in the SMC Report, but very few of these have been mentioned, let alone answered, in five critical letters printed on May 16.

Instead, the critics have adopted the familiar Christian tactic of quoting things that I and others *might* have said (but did not), and attacking those.

For example, James Hemming quotes the view: "We will not deal with this area (things mystical) in school at all", and calls it 'obscurantist'. So it would be, if we had ever said it.

Isobel Grahame suggests that we are demanding "statutory requirements imposing total abolition of worship or of religious discussion". None of us has said this; but her fantasy gives her the opportunity of calling us "dogmatic, absurd, autocratic, narrow-minded and anti-educational".

Marjorie Mepham implies that we want to "refuse to allow children to learn something about the nature and claims of religion", and on the strength of this invention she hints that we are "rigid and limited", and she slips in the phrase "empty ranting opposition" as an implied description of our views. You will find no such language in my reply.

Harold Blackham accuses me of "a narrow refusal to afford full significance to beliefs held by others" because I oppose the teaching as fact of the Christian story of the Virgin Birth; but readers will make up their own mind.

Mr Blackham gives us a "justification for RE in the county schools" (which he incidentally seems to refer to as "religious communities"). What he here suggests is more or less what I also suggest as a short course forming part of Social Studies in Secondary Schools, and shared by teachers of any persuasion. But Mr Blackham is supporting it as a central activity of all schools, under the auspices of, and largely taught by, committed Christians. Which of these is more likely to produce that "openness" everyone says they want?

We must see our plans in practical terms. What is to happen in the schools? While Mr Blackham is insisting that there is no connection between RE and Moral Education—"The equation ME=RE is rejected from the beginning and throughout" (Committee Report, March 10)—James Hemming is saying that it is Utopian to suppose that they can be divorced, and that RE/ME is the very thing we should be aiming at. Were Humanist members of the SMC Working Party quite clear what it was they were unanimously supporting?

The crux is this: Christians, by adopting some of our modern educational theory and methods, are aiming to retain their privileged position and to continue to evangelise in schools. Some Humanists are helping them to do it. Those of us who want the privilege removed, fair shares for all, and real openness in the classroom, are abused as "dogmatic". Who is on which side? MAURICE HILL.

MARJORIE MEPHAM (May 16) quotes James Hemming as having no objection to 'periodic assemblies' with a religious 'flavour'—"so long as everyone knows what is going on and no claims to absolute truth are put forward". The proviso surely excludes any form of *religious* worship—be it compulsory or optional.

I further note that Isobel Grahame (May 16) writes of "the inevitability of gradualness". How does it bear on the "intellectual regression" of which she also writes? CHARLES BYASS.

Bertrand Russell's Last Words

I CAN'T IMAGINE what possessed you to print Bertrand Russell's last diatribe against Israel (April 11) unless it is that you have shown a consistent partiality for the Arab case (articles, book reviews). I would have thought that a tribute to a great man should play down his questionable assessments especially if, as in this case, it is so horribly wrong. It is a message to an 'International Conference of Parliamentarians' held during February in Cairo. Where? Yes, Cairo! Where a rubber-stamp parliament votes yes to a dictator, Cairo, where Nazi war criminals are still given employment and refuge. Where *Mein Kampf* is published and propagated, where happy liaison is made with the parliament-absent Rapist of Czechoslovakia and where aggressive action is initiated for the destruction of the only parliamentary democracy in the middle east.

Consider tiny Israel: outnumbered 25 to 1, surrounded on all sides by enemies with more arms than they can use, enemies aided by Russia, China, France, even Britain, yes, even the United States whose policy of benevolent indifference to Israel gives strength to her enemies. This Israel, utterly alone, again like David, victorious against Goliath, but a Goliath which always rises again, tiny Israel, in the position in which Czechoslovakia and Biafra were once placed, is branded by Bertrand Russell—and not only by him—as an expansionist aggressor. Is it not grotesque?

And the refugees—for which Russell also blames Israel—kept in camps for twenty years by those who fought supposedly on their behalf? Is there not a contradiction here? Imagine Israel collecting her half-million refugees from Arab persecution, placing them in camps and saying 'Here you stay for 25 years. We give you no rights. The United Nations can be induced to support you. We will keep you in penury in order to elicit pity (and to raise your frustrated sons as terrorists against the Arab neighbours) and get the world to condemn the Arabs for kicking you out and for making it inevitable that you live in this manner.' Again, how grotesque! All over the world, where wars cause dislocations, refugees are absorbed by the parent population—except among the Arabs. And instead of attacking such heartless behaviour, Russell, and not only he, attacks Israel instead. It is not only immoral, it is also a puzzlement, and needs some explanation.

J. ROSS,
Johannesburg, South Africa.

Solid Mankind?

IN MY LETTER concerning Professor Eysenck (No. 21, p. 168) the words of my manuscript "*Solidary* Mankind" became "*solid* mankind" by a printers error which is not obvious.

Solid is a term used in physics, dealing with inanimate objects. Mankind, considered as a living whole, can never be "solid", as much as insecure people may wish it. Always being in a process of historical development *solidarity* is essential for mankind's survival.

Hitler's belief that his Third Reich was so solid that it would last a thousand years was an illusion. This is most likely also true for still surviving dictatorial regimes. PAUL ROM.

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