

Freethinker

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THERE'S A FIGHT AHEAD

LAST WEEK I wrote that the general election was a topic which could not be fruitfully discussed from a freethought viewpoint. Subsequent events have led me to reverse this opinion. Whatever one's view of the relative merits of the Conservative and Labour policies in the fields of economics and foreign policy, humanists must surely agree that in the domestic sector the election of a Conservative government is a serious set-back, and it is in the domestic sector that we, as humanists, are involved.

Perhaps our prime concerns for law reform in 1970 lie in the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act, the Sunday Entertainments Laws, the Blasphemy Laws, the laws regarding affirmation, and for the majority of humanists, at least, the laws which though not directly connected with religion are those which are consistently opposed by the religious, both inside and outside parliament, on irrational grounds: such laws as those regarding censorship, family planning and blood sports. Also one is bound to wonder whether some of the humane laws passed with the help of humanists in the face of religious opposition, during the last six years will not now be placed in jeopardy. Under this heading comes legislation regarding such things as divorce, homosexuality and abortion.



This all adds up to a rather gloomy immediate future for active humanists. However, although our immediate chances of obtaining progress have been lessened, the degree of our activity must be increased, not only because reform will be harder to promote but also because those reforms we have won may be put to the test again. The new government thus poses a challenge to humanists and thus our activities *must* be stepped up and sustained, rather than allowed to fall away because of the apparent futility of the task.

When we consider that Mr Heath's majority is small, and that, although he has assured us that he will not extend the Conservative whip to the Rev Ian Paisley and his supporters who somehow have made their way to Westminster, Mr Powell who is inside the governing party with a very substantial number of supporters made clear during his election campaign that he had great sympathy with the so-called "man of God". It is by no means impossible that before long Mr Heath will be cowering not only to Powell but to Paisley in an attempt to maintain the solidarity of his party. Should such a situation, where the prime minister will be lending an ear to policies of both racial and religious intolerance, occur, it will be the duty of humanists as much as anyone else to do all they can to reduce the influence over the nation's affairs of men whose reason is subservient to their irrational hatreds and fears.

In such circumstances our task will be made more difficult by the absence from parliament of men who have done a great deal inside that institution to aid humanism and social progress. Eric Lubbock, the former Chairman of the Parliamentary Civil Liberties Group, Ben Whittaker and John Ryan are just three of those who gave particular attention to the views of humanists. The surprisingly large majority against Jennie Lee, the former Minister for the Arts, is perhaps some indication of the electorate's and therefore the new government's attitude towards the progress in the arts, for which Miss Lee was responsible and with which of course humanists are inextricably linked. Lastly Peter Jackson, the former secretary of the Humanist Parliamentary Group and perhaps the most individual member of the late Parliamentary Labour Party, has lost his minute majority at High Peak. It is interesting to note here that the swing against Jackson was considerably lower than the average for the country, despite an all out attack by Roman Catholic priests in his constituency, one of whom wrote a vitriolic article about humanists in his church bulletin which finished up: "Mr P. Jackson, who has been nominated as Labour candidate in the general election, is known to be a Humanist and has admitted it. All Catholics and all members of other Churches should be ready to sacrifice party preferences and should use their vote to uphold the Christian faith and the Christian civilisation in this country".

Clearly it is up to us humanists to start now to ensure that more men who are prepared to 'admit' to their humanism are returned to the next parliament.

Freethinker

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

NEWS

THE coming changeover of editorship of this paper, reported by David Tribe in the May 30 issue, is to take place at the end of July. William McIlroy, at present the General Secretary of the National Secular Society will edit the first issue in August. Martin Page, at present a member of the NSS Executive, will take on the General Secretaryship from August 1. * * * *

Last week I reported on the Bertrand Russell Memorial meeting which took place at the Central Hall, Westminster, on June 8. On sale at that meeting was a programme of the proceedings, which is however, in essence more of a memento than a programme. It is a 32-page booklet printed on glossy paper of roughly foolscap size. It contains an authoritative chronological biography of Russell, taken from the now out-of-print catalogue of the Bertrand Russell archives and edited by Barry Feinberg. It also contains 12 pages of 'The Selected Writings of Bertrand Russell', photographs and a complete list of his books, which Christopher Macy, the Rational Press Association's publicity officer, tells me is the only fully comprehensive list available since it includes books published only in America and books published by publishers other than Allen and Unwin, Russell's regular publishers for over seventy years. In addition the booklet contains notes on both the speakers at the Memorial Meeting and the organisations which promoted the event.

The whole constitutes a worthy memento to the great humanist, Bertrand Russell. Copies are available from the RPA, 88 Islington High Street, London, N1, at a price of 9/- post free. * * * *

Eastbourne and Bournemouth Humanist Groups are two new additions to the Humanist Groups which are affiliated to the National Secular Society.

THE EXISTENCE OF AN ENTITY

D. L. HUMPHRIES

WHEN WE SAY that 'something' in the world 'exists' we usually mean that some group of intellectual or material characteristics definable as separate from others in the environment is cognizable within our natural world of sense-perception.

Hence, to say that 'God exists' means that he must be empirically knowable either by his actual presence in this mundane realm or inferable from his acts as they affect the natural order.

But God must be definable as some recognisable entity, and the Acts of God must be more than just a figure of speech used by insurance companies.

That 'I know that I exist' is a circular argument, since I assume that the evidence of sense-perception is not 'an illusion'. Since both the terms 'existence' and 'illusion' and

even *words themselves* are all products of an empirical sense-perceptive naturalistic frame of reference, we would seem to be trapped within this axiomatic environment.

But even within this confined realm how does one define 'a human being', for example, as distinct from other human beings? Accepting the findings of science, we may reduce 'a human being' to the physical-chemical level and say that 'a human being' is a self-perpetuating chemical formula. It is the integrated quality of the chemical processes which make a person an entity separate from other entities, and as long as such processes are self-perpetuating then the 'human' remains in a state of 'being'. Once a person 'dies' his state of being and separateness ceases, since although chemical processes may continue (bacterial action or crematorial combustion) such processes are no longer of an integrated type concerned with the self-perpetuation of their particular collective whole.

Generally, a 'human being' defined in this metabolic materialistic way functions by the ingestion of food, water, and oxygen; the production of heat, energy, and body tissues; and the expulsion of carbon dioxide, water and urea.

In the case of alcoholics and other drug addicts, however, other ingredients (of an ultimately deleterious nature) have been added to the basic formula, and can result in becoming *essential* to the total functioning of the organism—a 'craving' develops. Continuing unchecked, such 'body-dictating-to-mind' harmful process can cause the death of the whole entity.

This *factual* account may not necessarily be *evaluative*, and it is at this point that the 'human' aspect of the 'human being' must be considered. For some persons may prefer a short and pleasant life (of drinking and smoking) to a longer and more abstemious one. Freedom of choice in this regard should still be open to all citizens.

A materialistic picture of human entities would seem to debar the 'existence' of 'souls' and an 'after-life'—unless some sort of definition capable of empirical test for these can be produced.

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

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, June 28, 11 a.m.: "Was Marx a Humanist?", Dr Ralph Miliband. Admission free. 3 p.m.: Humanist Forum—"In Defence of Skinheads", Nigel Wright (a teacher), David Webb (a skinhead) and others. Admission free.

"THIS FREEDOM"

A. A. H. DOUGLAS

There has recently been much discussion in these columns as to the existence or non-existence of "freewill". It seems to me that many of the arguments used on both sides betray thinking which is confused, and that such confusion arises from a lack of clear understanding of what is the real point at issue. This again arises from a failure to analyse and appreciate the flexibility of the word "freewill".

Some of your contributors have used the word "freewill" as I have so far written it, namely as one word. This is the beginning of confusion. The argument takes the shape of "Is there such a thing as freewill or not? Yes or no?" The answer are wrong because the question itself is wrong or at least vague and meaningless until it has been defined more clearly. There is great latitude in the meaning of the word "free", but the word "freewill" is generally used in a much narrower sense.

To get away from this confusion let us think in terms not of "freewill" but of "free will". Let us consider the meaning of "will" and the meaning of "free". The argument then becomes, not "Is there such a thing as freewill or not?", but "To what extent is the will free?"

Let us first take the word "will". Nobody will deny that everyone whose mind is active has a will. We make decisions and act upon them. This does not apply only to decisions or choices requiring careful weighing of alternatives. It applies to everything we ever do, trivial as well as important. If I move any part of my body, if I open my mouth to speak, if I do anything whatever except in sleep, my will has been at work. Instead of moving or speaking I could have been totally inactive or kept my mouth shut. A choice was made even if that choice took only a fraction of a second and appeared automatic. I may later regret that I did or said this or that because the outcome was not to my liking. But I cannot plead that I acted against my will. *At the time* my will was as work and caused me to act as I did. My brain, that extraordinary complex of emotional and cerebral nerve cells, reacted in a certain way to external circumstances. But the way it reacted depended on the original nature of that brain and the habits (patterns of nerve reaction) which it had acquired.

The original nature of the brain in each individual is determined by its genetic inheritance and also to some extent by the physical attributes of the body to which it is attached, since the nerves extend throughout the body, and brain and body are inextricably linked. These two factors create the basic tendency of the individual's character.

The habits or patterns of reaction which I referred to earlier are those which are impressed upon the brain, especially during its formative years, by family influence, training and education, by contact with the outside world of people and ideas, and by the civilisation which surrounds it. These influences add their patterns to the genetic inheritance to complete the character of the individual.

I have said that all action whatsoever is preceded by will. This is true of the whole world of life and not only of human beings. Every action or behaviour of animals, birds, insects, and so on down to the simplest living cell, even the reaching of a plant towards the light, is determined by will, namely by the reaction of its nerve cells to external circumstances. (In the lower forms of life the genetic inheritance is paramount since they lack the cerebral power of our brains; but experiments on animals and birds have shown that patterns of reaction can be imprinted on their nervous systems.)

In short, will is not a peculiarity of man but is universal in all living matter. It is one of the factors which distinguish all life from non-life.

Now let us give some thought to the word "free". The word is very flexible in its meaning. There are all sorts and degrees of freedom. We may say that we live in a free society. But the limits of our freedom are set by the law or by moral codes. The law, or a moral code, can be likened to a circle. We are free to move within that circle but not outside it. We may call ourselves free but we are only partially free.

Similarly, a horse grazing in a field is entirely free within that field, but the boundaries of that field set a limit to its freedom.

These are cases where the human being or the horse can know or see the limits to its freedom. But throughout the living world there are other limits to freedom of which the individual is quite ignorant. All living creatures might be thought to be "free" to act in whatever way is within their physical powers. But in fact this is not so. A pigeon cannot build its nest in a bush nor a lark on the house-top. A hare or a wild goose cannot court or mate except in its specific way. A spider, though it has freedom of movement, cannot build a web except in a recognised pattern. A bee cannot opt out of the rules or conventions of the hive. And so on *ad infinitum* throughout the whole world of life. All creatures have to behave in a way which is peculiar to their species. This is because, all unknown to them, their genetic inheritance and sometimes the patterns imprinted in them by their parents or herd or flock set limits to their freedom and determine their behaviour.

So it is with human beings, whose brain systems have inherited characteristics from lower orders of life from which they have evolved through hundreds of millions of years. The individual who feels that he is making a decision of free will may be quite unaware that his act or decision is influenced by his genetic inheritance and by the characteristics of his brain which have been imprinted on it by influences which I have mentioned earlier.

To sum up then, a man's will is free within the circle of limits imposed upon his brain by his genetic inheritance and by his early environment and experience. He may be quite unaware of these limits (though sometimes they can be seen by the insight of others), just as the lower forms of life are unaware of their own limits, which can be seen by us. But the limits are there for all that, and a man's will, which is his reaction to every situation which arises, is not free to break through the confining influence of these limits.

As Browning said: "So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!"

MEMORIAL EDITION

**WHY I AM NOT
A CHRISTIAN**

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Preface DAVID TRIBE

Introduction Professor ANTONY FLEW

PRICE 3/- (plus 6d postage)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

AMANITA IN EXCELSIS?¹

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

A review of *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross; a study of the nature and origins of Christianity within the fertility cults of the ancient Near East*, by John M. Allegro. (London, 1970. Hodder and Stoughton, 63s.) A copy of this book for review purposes was kindly donated by an anonymous reader.

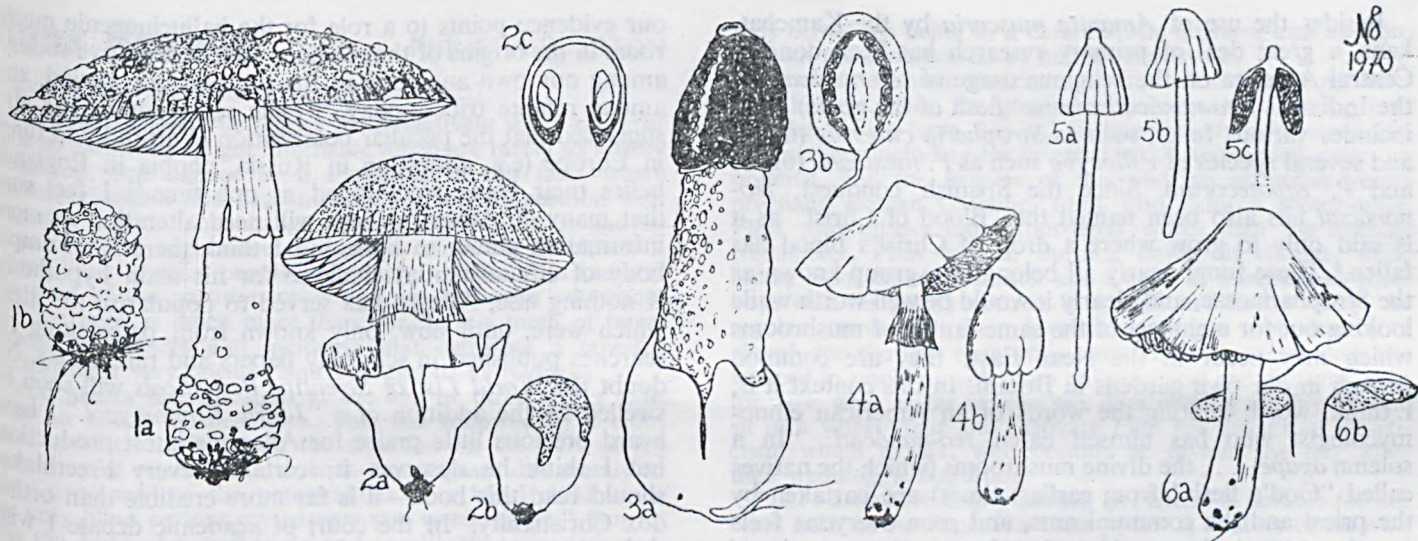
THE AUTHOR of this book is already well known to the general public for his work (and outspoken opinions) on the Dead Sea scrolls and their bearing upon the historicity of the New Testament and the origins of Christianity. Now John Allegro has put the philological cat among the theological pigeons in this new book in which he suggests not merely that the Jesus of Christian mythology was not an historical character, but that the New Testament was a hoax in its literal form; an elaborate code for transmitting the secrets of an "underground" drug cult in a guise in which it was hoped they would appear superficially respectable to non-initiates, as such cults were exposed to ruthless persecution. "Christianity", according to Allegro, had been going for centuries before the supposed birth of Christ, but eventually the cryptic writings of this mystery cult fell into the hands of a respectable "establishment" who drove the drug-eating "heretics" into the desert. Thereafter, symbolic meals of bread and wine replaced the ritual consumption of the "flesh" and "blood" of the drug-god; the real meaning of the New Testament was suppressed in favour of a literal interpretation of the Greek text, and the "new" Christianity took on the form in which we know it today. Further more, the drug-god of the "true Christians" (i.e. the heretics) was none other than a mushroom known as fly agaric, or *Amanita muscaria*, which, as ethnologists have been aware for some time, was used as an intoxicant by the Kamchatkans² and probably by the ancient Vikings.

Allegro has based his hypothesis primarily upon his philological researches which extend to Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Aramaic, Semitic, Ugaritic, Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Syriac, and, most important of all, Sumerian, a language which was only rediscovered a century ago, and which he believes forms a linguistic "bridge" (a sort of philological "missing link") between the Semitic group of languages (which includes Aramaic, in which it was claimed the New Testament was first written) on the one hand, and on the other the Indo-European group (including Greek, in which the earliest extant Christian texts appear). Armed with this detailed knowledge of Sumerian root words, and extrapolating where necessary to fill in the blanks, Allegro claims to make sense of many of the peculiar glosses and seemingly false translations "from the Aramaic" in the Greek text of the New Testament, together with some from the Hebrew of the Old, such as the famous "Mene, mene, tekel uparsin" which appeared on the wall at Belshazzar's feast (Daniel 5). Indeed, from the hypothetical Sumerian combination IA-U-ShU-A(ShUSH) meaning "semen which . . . heals", the author traces a common relationship between names such as Jesus, Joshua, Jason, "Saviour"; and from IA-U-NU-ShUSH "semen, seed that saves", the names Dionysus and Nosios (an epithet of Zeus) [p. 35]. By detailed examination of names and phrases in the New Testament stories Allegro has built up an elaborate case to show that Christian origins lie firmly within the general pattern of fertility cults that held sway in the ancient Near East. Central to all these cults was the consumption of a sacred, hallucinogenic mushroom which was also a phallic symbol. Our author believes that this same mushroom drug was common to Christianity, the Essenes, and Zealots, and was the real *hashish* (Hashish) of the legendary Assassins [p. 188 ff.]; perhaps even the Soma of Indian mythology

A frequently occurring Sumerian phrase in Allegro's root words is BALAG, "mushroom cap" or "glans penis", from which is derived, for instance, "*phalanx*", "Asparagus" (a diuretic), and the "Bacchantes". Apart from the examples given by Allegro it is interesting to find that in Scottish Gaelic, which is a very old language by European standards, one of the expressions for "mushroom" is no less than *ballag bhuaichair!* [Oddly enough, its literal equivalent, *blaosc bhualtraigh*, does not appear to occur as a fungus-name in modern Irish.] *Ballag*, which appears to be the almost unaltered Sumerian BALAG, is the Gaelic for skull, cranium, or egg-shell; and *bhuaichair* comes from *buachar*, "cattle dung". In Gaelic the letters "c" and "g" are often interchangeable, and bearing this in mind, we are left, after removing the prefix *bu-*, "cow", with *ac(g)har* "dung", which closely approximates to the Sumerian term Allegro gives for it, AGARGARA, from which he derives *Agaricon* and *Agaricus* [p. 269]. One can even speculate a little further: the Scottish-Gaelic *buaghair* "shepherd" [or more correctly, "cowherd"] differs from *buachar* by only one letter in the genitive, giving the hypothetical *ballag bhuaighair*, which could be translated as "the Mind [brain] of the Shepherd" . . . or could it, really, in the absence of external evidence?

I have introduced this piece of Celtic kite-flying because soon after the publication of Allegro's book a letter appeared in *The Times* of 26 May, 1970, signed by Professor Driver *et al.* which claimed that the book was not based on scholarly evidence and was "an essay in fantasy rather than philology". The authors of this curt epistle did not deign to give any reasons for these statements, and in my opinion they are grossly unfair. Unlike my "*ballag bhuaighair*" speculation, Allegro's reasoning is amenable to checking: as well as extant Sumerian root words Allegro has, by means of extrapolation and his knowledge of the syllabary, produced a large number of root combinations [indicated by a star in the text] which are not known from the surviving Sumerian literature. However, if the theory is correct, these hypothetical combinations should have occurred, and there is a fair chance that some may have been recorded on clay tablets, and a search can therefore be organised as and when more material is found by the archaeologists. In other words, Allegro's book does produce data that can be tested, and therefore, be it right or wrong, it is a proper work of scholarship. I would venture to suggest, in fact, that either Allegro is "on the ball" (anybody remember Darwin and Bishop Wilberforce?), or that *The Sacred Mushroom* is the most sophisticated academic hoax since the Piltdown forgery!

The real headache for anyone who would espouse the "Sacred Mushroom" theory is the mycological evidence, especially as Allegro insists that only one species, *Amanita muscaria*, is involved. To begin with, the dust cover and end-pages of the book are decorated with what purports to be a snake twining round a branched *Amanita muscaria*. This motif is clearly derived from the famous fresco of the Tree of Good and Evil in Plaincourault Church (Indre, France) [which is illustrated as a rather poor colour photograph facing p. 74];³ unfortunately, however, the motif has become the mirror-image of the original fresco. For some considerable time mycologists regarded this fresco as a stylised representation of *A. muscaria*; however, as an addendum to Ramsbottom's description of this fresco is appended a statement casting considerable doubt on this interpretation,⁴ (which Allegro has read). "There are



Sacred and toxic fungi (not to scale): 1. *Amanita muscaria* (a) mature mushroom; (b) young stage. 2. *Amanita caesarea* (a) full-grown fruiting body; (b) young stage; (c) section through "egg" stage. 3. *Phallus impudicus* (a) mature stinkhorn; (b) section of "witch's egg". 4. (a & b) *Stropharia cubensis*. 5. *Psilocybe mexicana* (a & b); (c) section of mushroom. 6. *Inocybe patouillardii* (a) mature mushroom; (b) vertical section.

times," as Freud said, "when a cigar is . . . just a cigar."⁵ Allegro does not help his case by including on page 92 an illustration claiming to be a diagrammatic section of an *Amanita* "egg" stage; the primordium has been drawn upside-down, and then the gills hatched in as though the drawing were still the right side up! Doubtless Allegro would claim (rightly) that mycologists have "sinned" far more greatly in misusing classical fungus names!

Another stumbling-block (to use one of the author's "key-words") is that *Amanita muscaria* does not appear either from published records or herbarium material to occur either in the Tigris-Euphrates delta (Sumer) or even in the Palestine area. The fly agaric is typically a mushroom of temperate forests where it normally occurs in a symbiotic mycorrhizal relationship with birch or two-needled pines. I would have thought that the "rich . . . alluvial plains" [Allegro p. 8] of ancient Sumer were outside the natural range of such a species. On the other hand, Palestine is a borderline case, and it is reasonable to suppose that *A. muscaria* should at least grow there up in the hills. It is certainly known from the Mediterranean coast of North Africa. Also, of course, it is feasible that the mushroom could have been imported in ancient times in dried form from the forests of the north. The problem is even further confused by the fact that the flora of the Near East has been subjected to considerable degradation as a result of the activities of the self-proclaimed "highest form of life" and his goats! Therefore we may never know with any degree of certainty which fungi did and did not occur there in ancient times.

According to Allegro the essential characteristics of the Sacred Mushroom were a bun-shaped cap, a basal [bag-shaped] volva, a red top, and spots. *Amanita muscaria* fits the part very well, except that although the possession of a "saccate" volva is a feature of the genus *Amanita* generally, *A. muscaria* is disobliging enough to belong to a small group where the volva is indistinct, being reduced for the most part to rings of scales around the swollen stem-base (fig. 1). Moreover, the author also tries to equate the red fly-agaric with the Golden Fleece of Greek legend [p. 118], and excuses the colour anomaly by saying "By 'golden' in this context we have to think of the red gold most common in the ancient world, rather than the purer, yellow metal of modern jewellery." Special pleading by any other name. . .!

Allegro seems to be unaware of the fact that if you cut through the red cuticle of the cap of a fly-agaric a bright yellow zone is found between the "skin" and the white "flesh" underneath. But in any case, there is another fungus which "fits the bill" of the Golden Fleece theory even better, namely *Amanita caesarea*, that great delicacy of the Roman patricians,⁶ which still occurs in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean area generally. *A. caesarea* does not have a white-spotted cap, which in this case is plain red, but it does have a bright yellow stem and gills, and, most significantly, a large, white bag-shaped volva (fig. 2)!

The fact is that as yet no one species of fungus completely fulfills the description of the Sacred Mushroom that Allegro claims to have unearthed from his philological researches; not even the fly-agaric, despite the fact that its use in Europe and northern Asia is well attested. If the general theory is true, I think we have to conclude that more than one species is implicated here. Is it not possible that two classes of mushroom were involved, one type being the small, toxic mushrooms that were actually consumed by the devotees of the cult; the other type being large, bright-coloured fungi such as *Amanita muscaria* and *A. caesarea*, which became the "mascots" of the cult because of their phallic and other symbolism? May we not have a case of "double bluff" here—a "hoax" within a "hoax" in fact? I think it is worth mentioning that a well known denizen of citrus groves in Israel is the stinkhorn *Phallus impudicus* (or the related *P. imperialis*) (fig. 3) which also has a large volva and an "egg" stage which was reportedly used as an aphrodisiac in Czechoslovakia—this was because of its supposed sympathetic "magical" properties, and not because of any real drug that it contained. Other stinkhorns, such as *Dictyophora indusiata* and *D. quadricolor* are, or were, held in semi-divine awe by the indigenous inhabitants of New Guinea!

This still leaves us, of course, with the problem of which were the fungi actually consumed during the ancient mystery-rites—the "mushrooms of divine inebriation"? In view of the fact that the Near East has been very little explored by mycologists, and because of all the other difficulties involved in this case, I think one can only offer a few imaginative suggestions until a great deal more work is done in the area in question by the archeologist, botanist, and mycologist.

Besides the use of *Amanita muscaria* by the Kamchatkans, a great deal of primary research has been done in Central America on the religious usage of *teo-nanácatl* by the Indians.⁷ *Teo-nanácatl* means "flesh of the god(s)" and includes various fungi, such as *Stropharia cubensis* (fig. 4) and several species of *Psilocybe* such as *P. mexicana* (fig. 5) and *P. zapotecorum*. Since the Spanish conquest, *teo-nanácatl* has also been named the "Blood of Christ" as it is said only to grow where a drop of Christ's blood has fallen.⁸ These fungi nearly all belong to a group known as the Strophariaceae, and clearly it would be well worth while looking out for members of the same family of mushrooms which may occur in the Near East; they are common enough in our own gardens in Britain. In this context it is, I think, worth quoting the words of an American ethnomycologist who has himself eaten *teo-nanácatl*: "In a solemn *agape* . . . , the divine mushrooms (which the natives called "God's flesh" from earliest times) are partaken by the priest and the communicants, and soon everyone feels translated to another world, to far places and remote times, and even to other planes of existence, into the presence of God himself. In this Supper there is no need for the faithful to accept Transubstantiation as an act of faith: the element carries its own conviction."⁹ There is even a report of *Dictyophora indusiata* being chewed up as a psychological adjunct to the pharmacological effects of *teo-nanácatl*!

Outside the Amanitaceae and Strophariaceae, toxic species have been reported in various genera of fungi, such as *Clitocybe*, *Rhodophyllus* (*Entoloma*), *Hebeloma*, *Inocybe*, and *Panaeolus*. The abortifacient properties of ergot (*Cordyceps*) have been known for many centuries, and there is even a hallucinogenic puffball.¹⁰

From the above list I would like to mention one in particular, *Inocybe*. Several species of this genus are known to contain alkaloids related to the secondary poison (muscarine) of *Amanita muscaria*, and *I. patouillardii*, which occurs under beech in Europe, is reported to have caused fatalities in man. Besides being toxic, some of these mushrooms also have distinctive odours: sometimes the smell is a strong "fruity" one which persists for some time in dried material; in other cases the odour is of a more "rank" type, like that of wet earth or waterglass, and is described, significantly, in the literature as "spermatic". Not only this, but some species stain [spot!] reddish-brown with age and on bruising—a symbolic "menstruation", in fact! Here we have a group of mushrooms which include several of Allegro's requirements for the divine inebriant: "spots" (but in this case red on white or ochre, as opposed to white on red); marked sexual symbolism of a hermaphrodite type, and in some cases a sensuous, fruity smell to which another of Allegro's key-words, "fascinating" might be applied [see p. 76 ff.]. I think species of *Inocybe* are a clear favourite in the "Sacred Mushroom stakes", for although there is no distinct basal volva in *Inocybe*, I think that the volva was a feature essentially of the representational mushroom, and that the "volva" of the real intoxicant species may have been the mouth of the devotee as he consumed it! Notwithstanding, the intoxicant itself might still have been a flowering plant (or possibly a truffle, puffball or sclerotium); time alone may tell.

In conclusion, I think that *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* is a most valuable book, particularly to students of the mythicist theory of Jesus. For a long time we have noted a marked similarity between the mythologies of Christianity, the Baalim cults, and the Essenes; now Allegro has postulated a common denominator. Speaking of his own researches, W. G. Wasson has written: "We believe

our evidence points to a role for the hallucinogenic mushroom in the origins of the religious idea in primitive society, among our own ancestors in the protohistoric period, and among remote tribes today."¹¹ The same author has also suggested that the peculiar polarisation of attitudes to fungi in Europe (e.g. adoration in Russia, phobia in England) belies their being worshipped at one time.¹² I feel sure that many of Allegro's ideas will need alteration as more information comes to light, but I think there is an ample body of circumstantial evidence for his main hypothesis. If nothing else, Allegro has served to popularise the ideas which were, until now, only known from painstaking researches published in scholarly papers and rare books. No doubt the *World List of Scientific Periodicals* will soon be swelled by the addition of a "*Journ. Ethnomycol.*" I have heard precious little praise for Allegro's latest production, but I think he deserves it; certainly every Freethinker should read this book—it is far more credible than orthodox Christianity! In the court of academic debate I wish the author and his theory "a good deliverance"!

Yes, Mr Editor, I agree with the book's conclusions.¹³

¹ Note for exhausted philologists: this is a pun on "Hosanna in excelsis" and the mushroom, *Amanita excelsa*.

² see Ramsbottom, J. 1959. *Mushrooms and toadstools*. London: p. 44 ff.

³ There is a better monochrome photograph of this fresco in Ramsbottom, l.c.: pl. Ib.

⁴ Ramsbottom, l.c.: p. 48.

⁵ Apocryphal?

⁶ *Amanita caesarea* was the *Boletus* of the ancient Romans, but not the *Boletus* of modern mycology which is the Roman *Suillus*.

⁷ e.g. Heim, R., Wasson, R. G., et al. 1958. "Les champignons hallucinogènes du Mexique." *Arch. Mus. Hist. nat. Paris sér. 7*, vol. 6.

⁸ Wasson, V. P. & Wasson, R. G. 1957. *Mushrooms, Russia and history*. New York, vol. 2: p. 242.

⁹ Wasson, R. G. 1959a. *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 February.

¹⁰ Heim, R., & Wasson, R. G. 1955-6. "Les hycoperdons narcotiques des Mixtèques." *Arch. Mus. Hist. nat. Paris sér. 7*, vol. 9: pp. 196-199.

¹¹ Wasson, R. G. 1959a, l.c.

¹² Wasson, R. G. 1959b. "The hallucinogenic mushrooms of Mexico." *Trans. N.Y. Acad. Sci. ser. 2*, vol. 21: 235.

¹³ "Was Jesus a mushroom?" Editorial, *FREETHINKER*, 30 May, 1970.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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Book Review

PHILIPPA PRESTON

Face to Face, Ved Mehta (Penguin Books, 7s).

THIS BOOK enables the reader in a relatively short space of time to gain deep insight into fields which are rarely so vividly described. One cannot be a bystander in this land where colour, splendour and pageantry appear in juxtaposition with tragedy, division and change. One is drawn into it and so acquires novel experience of patterns of living which are a closed book to most people—blindness, childhood in India at the time of the partition crisis and an American education. But the book is much more than this. It is a mesh of interwoven experiences and incidents that complete a tapestry portraying a very talented and courageous individual.

Ved Mehta lost his sight at the age of three and a half, after an attack of meningitis. This was followed by a complete inability to deal with the situation on the part of his vast array of relatives and friends—an impasse due mainly to the "ignorance" of the potentialities of a blind child, since the only blind persons my parents saw were beggars". But he was the child of a well-to-do and excellently trained doctor, and it is the fusion of the child's will to be educated and the father's determination for this to be carried out that enabled their desires to be fulfilled. The problems of a blind child's education and adaptation to surroundings are portrayed without any call for pity but merely with great honesty that can only draw great respect from the reader. The problems are shown in the words of one of his teachers in a social adjustment class in America: "To be blind is an uphill struggle. You've got to sell yourself to every seeing man. You've got to show him that you can do things that he thinks you can't possibly do." Because, as he goes on to say, if you do anything "in the world of seeing, . . . They'll call you poor wretches, feel sorry for you, and they will commit the worst sin of all by excusing it because you're blind."

To mention only the sections relating to the author's blindness would be to miss half of the essence of this book. It gives a very good picture of the economic and ideological problems in India that reached their head at the time of the partition. It shows at a personal level the relationship between many of the Muslims and Hindus, expressed here by Ved Mehta's sister, a Hindu by birth: "The Muslims have become ours, and I dare say that an Indian Muslim bears little resemblance to the Muslims of other countries. He has an Indian character which marks him as our brother and part of our culture."

There are many beautiful descriptive passages which include the marriage ceremony of the author's sister, and the author's music lessons which show the intricacies of Indian classical music that are imparted by the guru to his most devoted disciple, "never written but entrusted to the safety of the memory alone". In strict comparison is the period the author spent on the American campus where he became disillusioned with the educational system. "It seemed to me that the theory of education in which I had been reared at college asked me to stock the storehouse of my mind with so many tins of facts. . . . It appeared to ignore sharpening the tools of the mind for a rigorous methodology, for critical thinking, for expression and communication with style."

This is only a small part of the wealth of this book. A book which offers so much and is perhaps the best tribute in both style and content to Ved Mehta, who completed it at the age of 22.

puts across his belief in a deterministic universe and the consequent meaninglessness of human endeavour.

However dynamic the character the same futility pervades their actions. Flint, the greatest embarrassment a bishop ever had, whom we learn has led an impressively adulterous life, his partners including his crippled wife's unmarried sister, an organist, and the heroine of this play an attractive young pregnant Roman Catholic, Flint who rides a motor-cycle, Flint who utilises more four-letter words than the average freethinker, Flint who in burning down his church—while hiding from the choir master and a band of mischievous choir boys with his young mistress in a cupboard in the vestry, the regular venue for their love-making—does not destroy a church for the first time—this remarkable character does not succeed in resolving any more philosophical conundrums, than his wife, who, as far we can see, does nothing all day beyond sit in a wheel chair and castigate Flint for his sexual athleticism, which to her, who became an invalid the day after their wedding, is disgusting.

Flint's attractive empty-headed girl-friend is notable for her blind faith in the Pope. His sister-in-law is another of his own kind, a seemingly 'nice old lady' who unexpectedly comes out with remarks that would shock many fifty years her junior. A policeman, who has to investigate Flint's alleged arson, is a beautiful and somehow sympathetic portrayal of a man who is not that different from the average criminal. Flint's bishop, the bishop's assistant, and Flint's curate are all excellent caricatures at the same time as being intensely real.

Mercer's dialogue is brilliantly arresting throughout. The play is successful on two levels, as a piece of dramatic philosophy and as an anti-clerical farce, indeed I doubt whether the West End has ever provided a platform for a naughtier, more vulgar or more likeable clergyman.

LETTERS

Democracy and Vietnam

PETER CADOGAN takes issue with me over the subject of democratic evolution. Perhaps I should have said democracy *should* progress by evolution; even if at times this process is tempered by episodes of violence.

I certainly agree with him that many a democracy has been started by the violent overthrow of a tyranny in the past. But once having got started it should then evolve democratically.

The tragedy which history reveals to us so often is that one tyranny is merely replaced by another, often a worse one; as happened in the French revolution and the Russian one.

I would be the first to admit that the French and Russian revolutions differed in many important respects. But they had in common that they used terror and murder as a political weapon; and thousands of innocent persons were ruthlessly butchered by the thugs who seized power.

Possibly Robespierre was not the infamous butcher we used to believe; he certainly could not be compared to Stalin in this respect. But he was still a horror and largely responsible for the ghastly Terror—to which he himself fell a victim (poetic justice indeed!) and had his hated rival Danton murdered.

Why on earth does Peter Cadogan think this "country is on the bottom and still sinking"? I have never seen it look so prosperous and its people so happy!

I gather from David Petrie that he and I do not see eye to eye. But why should people stop "tearing me to pieces"? I am enjoying every moment of it—so please don't stop now! Hitler and Co. did their best some years ago and I emerged a bit battered but still unbowed. I am delighted to know you all want to understand me. Its mutual. I hope this includes the communists as well?

How free is the press? Well, how free is FREETHINKER for example? Is it controlled by big business—if so it's news to me.

I certainly do not want to kill a Commie for Christ (what a revolting idea!). I have no desire to kill anybody at all. But on the other hand if a Vietcong rebel points a loaded Chinese rifle at me I *might* be tempted to fight back if only to save my own skin.

Theatre Review

LUCIE DANSIE

Flint by David Mercer (Criterion Theatre, Piccadilly Circus, London, W1).

THIS PLAY could be either the freethinker's wildest dream or his most lurid nightmare. It tells of an elderly parson, who has been an agnostic ever since his ordination. The play is an exceptionally irreverent farce in that it moves from one bout of Flint's outrageous behaviour to another, but it also shows that a clergyman could be human in the humanist sense of the word. More fundamentally, the playwright, David Mercer,

Nobody as far as I am aware ever asked us to kill a Nazi for Christ. They did not need to. Such American vulgarity may not endear them to anybody; but it does not necessarily mean they are not entitled to defend themselves and other nations against Communist aggression.

If, as David Petrie assures us (I wonder how he knows—did he have a Gallup poll?) most people laughed about this matter then they have a strange sense of humour. Communist tyranny is a grim subject and millions of its wretched victims find little to laugh about I can assure him.

Do go on "tearing me to pieces" though—I just love it all!

CLAUD WATSON.

CONCLUDING his reply to Mr Claud Watson, Mr David Petrie writes (June 13): "Most people were not indignant about you or your letter—most people didn't write at all—they laughed at you." One wonders how Mr Petrie arrived at this interesting piece of information. Presumably his only method would have been to send a questionnaire to every FREETHINKER subscriber demanding, "Were you indignant about, or did you laugh at, Mr Claud Watson and his letter?", and then collate the results. He must have missed me out.

Let me assure Mr Watson that some of us do not regard such inane comments as a substitute for argument, and are prepared to consider our opponent's views seriously and courteously, however much we may disagree with them.

JOHN L. BROOM.

Nationalism and World Government

MESSRS. Rich and Low use some dubious arguments in their replies to Barbara Smoker.

H. Rich depends on pious wishes and equally pious promises. World government, he says, cannot be compared "with government as we know it today". Indeed, then with *what* can we compare it? It is only possible to speak of government as we have known, and do know, it: "the organised negation of the individual" as Paul Herr once put it.

And government as we have known, and do know it, is an institution whose violence and atrocities make those committed on the basis of "private enterprise" look piddling and ineffectual. If world government, then, partakes of the same nature as other governments (and I cannot see how it could be otherwise and be a government . . .) we can expect more of the same and on a larger scale.

I. S. Low thinks that world government would get rid of the "gang of militarists" at present in power in Greece. How? If the militarists refused to go, then the world government would have to send armed forces to deal with them. In other words, go to war, but, of course, they would not call it this—it would probably be called a "police action". A distinction without a difference to those who got killed!

His remarks about Hitler "seizing power" are ironic in view of the fact that Hitler got into government by means of a democratic election. Presumably a large section of the German population wanted him to "seize power", and ensured he could do it by legal means!

It is quite true that, at the moment, the governments of the USA, the USSR and Britain are not blowing up parts of their respective countries. But each of them has done so in the past during so-called "civil wars" and would not hesitate to do so again if the need arose. And the same would go for world government if it was faced with armed revolt.

Both Mr Rich and Mr Low scorn Miss Smoker's suggestion that smaller administrative units would lessen the risk of war, and Mr Rich shudders at the thought that this might eventuate in "every man for himself".

I am not afraid of the logic of this. Only large States can command the capital needed to construct a nuclear war apparatus, so the smaller the State the less likelihood there is of nuclear or large-scale warfare. It follows that if each man and each woman became his or her own "state" then their power to destroy would be limited to their power as individuals. In other words, if the "sovereignty of the individual" replaced the sovereignty of government violent conflict might well still go on, but the organised violence of war would be impossible.

No doubt, in view of the propensity of the vast majority to want to be governed, this is a utopian thought, but, then, equally utopian are those who shut their eyes to the rivers of blood shed by the forces of government and imagine that if they can make one group of political gangsters bosses of the world the other gangsters will become as meek as lambs.

And please don't give me the gush about constitutions and laws—Hitler never repealed the Weimar Constitution and a fat lot of good *its* guarantees were . . .

S. E. PARKER.

WE TAKE our health for granted unless it commences to become impaired. The same applies to a nation, by which I understand a collective entity with a common ethos. During the middle ages in Europe one's national identity could largely be taken for granted. If the ruler happened to be of an alien ethos this was not of so much consequence. Linguistic "frontiers" shifted very little in the course of a century. As far as the subordinate nations were concerned this was far from ideal thought quite tolerable. It is a millenium since the Cornish kingdom was smashed. Nevertheless the policy of turning the Cornish people into second-rate Englishry has been systematically applied only since Tudor times. Prior to that it is evident from the surviving miracle plays that community life in mediaeval Cornwall was far stronger than that of contemporary England.

The advent of printing and the movement towards General Education should have been unqualified benefits. Instead of this they were frequently used as instruments for assimilating the subject nations into the ethos of the dominant nation. At the turn of the century, for example, the national language in Wales was spoken by approximately half the people in Wales. Now this proportion has dropped to little over a quarter. Modern nationalism is largely a reaction against externally engendered national decay of this nature. It is hardly surprising that deliberate destruction of a culture with all the psychological harm that this induces gives rise to bitter resentment. Quoting from a father figure of the culture that has been imposed upon me:

You thought me how to beg and now methinks.

You teach how a beggar should be answered.

Mr Low attempts to foist an entirely unnecessary choice upon us of either nationalism or internationalism. Nations, as distinct from artificial states and empires are in no way irreconcilable with internationalism. On the contrary, they would serve as the natural infrastructure to a viable world government. In fact, the international character of internationalism has already been demonstrated by your Esperantist correspondent Basil Edgcombe. My assumption is that Mr Low wrote his letter before the publication of Mr Edgcombe's letter. If not he is clearly an English chauvinist cloaking cultural imperialism with a spurious internationalism. His integrity as an apostle of internationalism will be more apparent when he begins to learn Esperanto. If he is in fact a "Worldist" rather than an internationalist perhaps his time would be better spent learning Chinese.

PAWL ENESYGOW.

Edison, Ingersoll and Eva Ingersoll Wakefield

A propos of Barry Hobson's article on "Edison the Freethinker" (May 9), Edison was a great admirer of America's greatest Freethinker, Robert G. Ingersoll. He wrote: "I think that Ingersoll had all the attributes of a perfect man, and in my opinion no finer personality ever existed. Judging from the past, I cannot help thinking that the intention of the Supreme Intelligence that rules the world is to ultimately make such a type of man universal."

I am sorry to report to you that my wife, Eva Ingersoll Wakefield, grand-daughter of Ingersoll, died on April 1, 1970. She was the last remaining descendant of Ingersoll. She was the author and editor of the best book on Ingersoll, *The Letters of Robert G. Ingersoll*, with a biographical introduction, published in New York in 1951, and also published in an abridged edition as *The Life and Letters of Robert G. Ingersoll* in London in 1952.

SHERMAN D. WAKEFIELD, New York.