

The FREETHINKER

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DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CATHOLIC DOCTORS

"I am a Catholic, aged 33 and a medical practitioner with five years postgraduate training in obstetrics and gynaecology and a member of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. Recently I have applied for Registrar appointments at three university teaching hospitals and have been unsuccessful. At each interview I have been asked my views on the Abortion Law and have stated my conscientious objection to abortion on demand. At my last appearance before an appointments board I was directly asked if my conscientious objection was due to religious conviction. After the interview was over I was recalled by a member of the Committee, himself a Catholic, and told that although I was the most senior and well qualified of the group shortlisted . . . I was not given the job as I was a Catholic. It was considered that to give me the job would be doing me a long term disservice, and I was directly told that 'there is now no place for a Catholic obstetrician and gynaecologist in the United Kingdom'. As I have recently done part of my training in Canada I was advised to 'cut my losses and get out of England as soon as I could, or, if not, change my speciality'. Recent advice from consultants in a teaching hospital not far from the House of Commons was in the same vein."

The above quotation is taken from a letter written by a doctor to an MP and published as an appendix to submissions on the operation of the Abortion Act from a representative Catholic Committee under the chairmanship of the Right Rev. Patrick J. Casey, Bishop of Brentwood.

Considering the fact that these submissions come from a group of people who "are against abortion in principle" but who "have tried not to let this opposition influence them in considering the working of the Act", the product is a remarkably moderate and reasoned document. It will even be an embarrassment to the anti-abortion hard-liners: even before the submissions were officially announced, the *Catholic Herald* (28 January) was voicing "grave fears" that the findings would "prove to be half-hearted and unrepresentative". The histrionics we have been hearing about people leaving the nursing profession wholesale over the Abortion Act look pretty silly set against: "Catholic nurses appear to have no real complaint . . . There is no significant evidence of nurse recruitment suffering as a result . . . of the Act. This is somewhat surprising, particularly since an important source of nurse-recruitment is Ireland". Though the Committee does mention occasional problems with non-Catholic nurses opposed to abortion, and "localised and infrequent" resignations.

Because this is a researched and moderate document, humanists may well take seriously the allegations it does contain of discrimination against Catholics in gynaecology and obstetrics, especially as we are ourselves familiar with job discrimination against atheists and agnostics in the teaching field. If a man has declared a conscientious objection to performing abortions, that should be enough. It seems quite improper to delve further into whether his

motives are religious or no. On the other hand, in a hospital where there is an abortion service already provided, a working proportion must necessarily be kept between those who can, and cannot, carry out these particular duties. To use a crude analogy that will doubtless delight the devotees of LIFE and SPUC, it is no use staffing an abattoir entirely with vegetarians. In general, ideological tests for jobs are thoroughly objectionable, and the onus of justification must lie very firmly with those who employ them. One answer, perhaps, to the problem would be, as the Catholic committee suggests, to separate abortions from ordinary hospital gynaecological work. This might also provide a more efficient and speedy abortion service.

Other findings and recommendations of Bishop Casey's committee include: Catholic doctors have received unsolicited advertisements from abortion clinics (a few hefty fines should fix that). A few viable fetuses have been encountered (the Committee suggests limiting abortions to the first twelve weeks of pregnancy: obviously the earlier the better, and this would be possible if the "machinery" for admissions is worked properly. However, there will always be emergencies and exceptions). The need for counselling services for those with unwanted pregnancies (agreed). Lack of after-care, especially after private abortions (agreed). High fees and expenses, leading to exploitation (agreed) and "*undue encouragement of abortion*" [! ?—our italics]. The Committee also complains about the Act being interpreted in many cases as providing Abortion "on demand", and recommends that abortions should require the sanction of a GP and an NHS consultant gynaecologist. Here the vast majority of freethinkers will disagree: most of us would prefer to "make an honest woman" out of the present Act and amend the law specifically to permit abortion on request for those who really want it.

WHAT IS FREE-THOUGHT?

DENIS COBELL

By introducing this subject interrogatively, let me say at the outset what I do *not* think free-thought is. Mr Tribe has written in a book *100 Years of Freethought* quite admirably of the causes supported by "Freethinkers", and their progress in the past century, which I think might more correctly be called liberalising and reforming influences. However, the definition of free-thought according to Webster's Dictionary is "unbelief, scepticism"; so Mr Tribe is right to use the word insofar as it is established semantically. But it is only fair to say that this does not always imply freedom of thought, and may even mean freedom from thought!

The very idea of free-thought presupposes that man is capable of being free to think as he chooses. There are many who would contest this on scientific or philosophical grounds, and yet others who would aver that the influences which at present prevent free-thought are so old and entrenched that it is doubtful if man, by his very nature, can overcome them. It was, after all, Einstein who said we are what our ductless glands make us—and that leaves little individual choice! From each particular point of view there are a variety of interpretations forthcoming; some more reasonable than others. Certainly the majority of Englishmen are inclined to believe that free-thought and its accompanying free speech are attainable, and possibly enshrined in our unwritten constitution.

It is hard to hope, though one must try, that free-thinkers stand much chance against all their many and varied opponents. Free-thinkers stand for a largely untried way; this means that they are idealists, and ready-made targets for ridicule. Whether they can succeed in their opposition to rigidity depends on their success in dismantling most of the organisations of communication and opinion moulding. Anyone who has ever protested against anything in contemporary society, surely knows just how difficult this will be.

Common Roots

The free-thinking ideal—that choice for each human being in the action he chooses to make actually exists—has common roots with protestant Christianity. This is the belief that man can choose, or not, as the case may be, to be damned for his sins. This fundamentalist doctrine ignores, as it finds difficult to swallow, the text that "many are called, but few are chosen", which is of course very much a part of the determinist theory. Which goes to show what readers of this journal probably know already, that you can prove any axiom by careful selection of a passage of scripture and keeping it out of context if necessary!

The opponents of free-thought abound. Those who claim on the grounds of Hobbes' philosophical analysis that the course of events is inevitable and unalterable are just as much of a nuisance as believers in the importance of adopting rigid thought lines. Those who accept the determinist theory of life would deny the existence of free will altogether. This is a tenable philosophical proposition, and as such may not easily be controverted by the unphilosophical. Nevertheless the common man, in his day to day affairs feels that he possesses something called "free will", however much it may be thwarted by those

who surround him. The extension of the determinist argument leads to belief in prophetic dreams and clairvoyance, all of which is an illogical field and ground for preying on the gullible.

To add to the determinist argument there are always those cases of "overnight conversion" which illustrate how little a human being changes inside, despite his outward decisions. Douglas Hyde, author of the well known *I Believed* changed from a communist worshipping Marxist dogma to a Roman Catholic with similar rigid views. Both these set of doctrines hold millions of followers in harsh adherence to their cold orthodoxy of exclusive right. A protestant finds humanistic secularism much more to his taste; both are born of individual thought and encourage discussion as the road to clarification. On the other hand a militant atheist is as dogmatic as any Roman Catholic, and at times makes himself look equally ridiculous. As a critic of this attitude, the anarchist Malatesta wisely wrote in 1924: "To the will to believe, which cannot be other than the desire to invalidate one's own reason, I oppose the will to know, which leaves the immense field of research and discovery open to us".

The Only Real Free-Thinker

Being an optimist I refuse to accept the determinist proposition: but having allowed that man has freedom to choose, how much chance has he to exercise this freedom, once he has been exposed to all the forces of influence that operate on him right from the cradle? Possibly the only real "free-thinker" is the baby in its cradle! Certainly once a child has reached school age his chances for freedom to think unfettered by others' half-baked notions are grim, if we are to believe what John Holt wrote in *The Underachieving School*: "Almost every child, on the first day he sets a foot in a school building, is smarter, more curious, less afraid of what he doesn't know, better at finding and figuring things out, more confident, resourceful, persistent, and independent, than he will ever again be in his schooling or, unless he is very unusual or lucky, for the rest of his life".

The work of Herbert Marcuse is also a very useful guide to the study of how intricate and wily are the articles of repression in the modern state surrounded by the affluent society. Freedom of thought and speech are assumed to be always present, but on examination one finds these are always subordinate to material requirements imposed on people. Unfortunately Marcuse goes to the opposite extreme in calling for an active suppression of all the speech and thought at the moment exercised by the political Right. He excuses himself by asserting that the Right alienates men from one another. He considers this alienation proceeds through the insidious materialistic propaganda that is continuously pumped out under the guise of promoting the good life of affluence. One could condemn both the Labour and Tory party as equal evils under this definition, by virtue of the consensus they perpetrate. When one considers the obstacles and restrictions placed upon free-thought, it is hardly surprising there is so little of it about! Most of the communication media are

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WAGNER NIGHTS

PETER CROMMELIN

Despite the fact that I am completely non-musical I have come to the enjoyment of musical experience through nights at the Opera, and especially through the works of Wagner. In the field of music as in every other field of human activity, secular humanism has defeated theological "humanism" not so much by anti-religious polemics as by making the doctrines of religion unnecessary to the work of the philosopher, the scientist or the creative artist. The best music is no longer confined to the church or the monastery. It can be heard all the world over in the completely secular atmosphere of the concert hall or the opera house. I have been driven to the enjoyment of classical music by the appalling noises that pass for music in our contemporary world. We must have either bad music or good music. We cannot live in a world of silence. But I can see no intrinsic reason why the music of the future should not be as good or even better than the music of the past.

A recent performance at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, under the musical direction of Edward Downes, of Wagner's four operas, the Ring cycle, left a completely full house obviously well satisfied that they had seen and heard something of extraordinary significance and outstanding value. Many hours of first class orchestral and vocal performance brought to life some of the characters from ancient mythology and revealed them as potentates still extremely active and busy in the government of the world today.

Opera is not just a spoken drama with a musical accompaniment. In any great or true opera the course of the drama is made clear in the words which are themselves a part of the musical structure. But the human emotions aroused by the course of the drama are not in any way spoken or sung but are expressed in the very sound of the music itself which expresses far more than words can express. And so it is in Wagner's great music drama of the Ring. The four separate works form together one coherent system of musical sounds and one coherent system of dramatic events. For some persons the final result of all this complex effort seems to carry the mind beyond either music or drama to some kind of philosophic vision of things as they really are.

Pre-Christian

I want to suggest that Wagner's masterpiece can be claimed and classified as a product of purely secular humanism in the mind of the composer. It has never been suggested that Wagner derived inspiration for the work from anything other than materials provided by a purely pagan mythology. The work is certainly non-Christian but is not exactly or precisely anti-Christian. In some strange and mysterious way it seems to be pre-Christian. One could easily indulge the fancy that it was composed thousands of years ago, perhaps by Orpheus himself, who could not possibly have foreseen the vain attempts of the Christian religion to cause a deviation in the natural course and flow of cosmic evolution. It is precisely those vain attempts that give a peculiar poignancy to the nineteenth century Wagnerian musical melodrama. For the Ring is lurid melodrama from beginning to end. The dramatic action begins with the female seduction of a male and the vain attempts

of the rejected male to secure physical satisfaction by means of rape. All that follows proceeds from this initial failure of a sub-human male to achieve any physical satisfaction from being a male. Having failed to achieve anything by rape, he turns his attention to robbery. He is not the inventor of gold, but becomes the inventor of making "Money" out of gold. With the Financial Power so obtained he plans to govern the world to his own advantage but is thwarted in his ambition by the superior intelligence of Wotan's minister of defence (Loge) who persuades the god that the growing power of gold threatens the divine government.

It is quite impossible in a brief article to give even an outline of the complicated plot of the Ring melodrama. It is sufficient here to say that from the moral point of view all the characters in the drama are equally bad. They are all equally traitors to any rational concept of the good life. When in the end they all perish in the fire or in the flood the audience must feel that this is the very best end that could be devised. But all through, the musical stream of sound reveals the human potential that is present even in the worst characters and even in the most tragic situation. I have no doubt that for many years to come *Der Ring des Nibelungen* will provide employment for a multitude of musicians, a multitude of theatrical producers and satisfaction for an ever growing multitude of the musical public who will only accept the best. I shall know that humanism has conquered the world, when the opera house or the concert hall become a familiar objects as the cathedral or church.

WHAT IS FREE-THOUGHT ?

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if sometimes unconsciously, directed towards unification of thought, or as it should more properly be known, the thwarting of thought.

But I disagree with atheists assigning to themselves the title "freethinker". The name is misleading in this context today as atheists are often as dogmatic in their assertions against God as any believer in the supernatural. If we want to think freely, and surely this entails being logical, then we must admit with Max Horkheimer, "Let it be said in answer to those who serve religion with philosophy that the necessity to make a religion out of the absence of religion is a factual, not a logical, necessity. There is no logically compelling reason for setting up any other absolute in the place of the fallen absolute, other gods in the place of the fallen gods or denial in the place of reverence. People might even be able to forget the absence of religion today, but they are too weak to do so". (Quoted from *The Misery of Christianity* by Joachim Kahl —reviewed in *The Freethinker* recently by Margaret Knight.)

A monopoly of free-thought is not the prerogative of any particular group. Dogmatism can never help people to think freely; thinking freely is to be truly democratic, even to the point of political, philosophical and religious anarchy!

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

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Freethinker is obtainable at the following addresses. London: Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Calodonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1; Freethinker Bookshop, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. Glasgow: Clyde Books, 292 High Street. Manchester: Grass Roots Bookshop, 271 Upper Brook Street, 13. Brighton: Unicorn Bookshop, 50 Gloucester Road, (near Brighton Station).

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High St., 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 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 01-642 8796.

EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone: Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Sunday, 13 February, 6.30 p.m.: Mrs S. Cybulnyk, "The Writer and Society".

London Young Humanists. Sunday, 13 February, 6 p.m.: visit to Academy Cinema, Oxford Street (meet in queue). Tuesday, 15 February, 8 p.m.: coffee and pancakes c/o David Hickman, Basement Flat, 25 Kensington Park Gardens, London, W11.

National Secular Society, The Clarence, Whitehall, London SW1. Friday, 18 February, 8 p.m.: speakers from Howard League and from Radical Alternatives to Prison, "Imprisonment".

Portsmouth Humanist Society, 12 Poyning's Place, St Nicholas Street, Old Portsmouth. Wednesday, 16 February, 8 p.m.: discussion with Peggy Curtis, "Death and Dying".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 13 February, 11 a.m.: Richard Hauser, "The Faith of the Non-Believer"; 2.30 p.m.: Very Rev. Dr. John Robinson, "The Difference Between a Christian and a Humanist Today". Tuesday, 15 February, 7 p.m.: David Tribe, "Ethics and Philosophy".

Sutton Humanist Group, Trinity Hall, Hill Road, Sutton. Saturday, 19 February, 10.15 a.m.—1 p.m.: book sale.

Welwyn Garden City Humanist Group, Backhouse Room, Hand-side Lane, Welwyn. Thursday, 17 February, 8 p.m.: Fr. John Coventry, SJ, "Is the Faith of a Jesuit relevant in the 1970s?"

NEWS

"I know that no man is a good advocate for a great principle unless he himself be worthy of the principle he advocates . . . I have no fear. If I am not fit for my constituents, they shall dismiss me, but you never shall. The grave alone shall make me yield."

—Charles Bradlaugh, at the Bar of the House of Commons, 7 February 1882.

DERRY DEATHS INQUIRY

The Government's decision to appoint a Tribunal of Inquiry under Lord Widgery into the shooting of 13 civilians in Londonderry on 30 January is an obvious and essential measure. It is to be hoped that the suggestions of Mr Wilson and Mr Thorpe, that two additional assessors be appointed, will be incorporated into the tribunal's structure. The inquiry will, apparently, have powers to hear evidence in private, for the protection of witnesses; but it would be far better if all evidence was given publicly and witnesses, in turn, were given very thorough police protection. Safe conducts should also be given to possible IRA witnesses, even though Bogsiders have said they will boycott the tribunal. Strange how there was no clamour for an inquiry when young off-duty soldiers were shot in the back. Kipling had words for that!

REPORT ON AFRICANS IN RHODESIA

The Minority Rights Group (whose field of concern also includes disadvantaged majorities) has just published a report of special importance on the topical issue of Rhodesia. Entitled *The Africans' Predicament in Rhodesia*, it deals with the whole position of Africans in Rhodesia today, and with their probable status in the light of the proposed settlement between the Smith régime and the British Government.

The report has been written by Mr Jack Grant, a Rhodesian citizen living in Salisbury who was Treasurer of the Christian Council of Rhodesia from 1964 to 1969. Additional material has been contributed by other Rhodesians of all races.

The report describes the position of Rhodesian Africans as regards land, education, employment and income. It discounts the Chiefs' claims to act as modern leaders of African opinion, and it then analyses the proposed settlement in the light of the Five Principles; how it is likely to affect the position of Africans; and what the likely reaction of the African majority will be. Appendices set out a summary of the White Paper proposals; an assessment of how far African nationalist opinion is representative of the population; an analysis of the proposed Declaration of Rights; and a summary of the problems involved in public opinion-testing.

The Africans' Predicament in Rhodesia is obtainable (price 30p, postage included—38p overseas) from the Minority Rights Group, Benjamin Franklin House, 36 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NG.

THE DEVILS

In view of the advertisement given to the Ken Russell film, *The Devils*, by the Catholic Bishop of Dunkeld (see "News and Notes" last week), the editor of this paper has been to see it. It is certainly not recommended bed-time viewing

AND NOTES

for elderly Catholic clergymen, Mothers Superior, or for those who cling to fond belief in a lost gilt-and-plaster age of immaculate morals. For sado-masochists the film is a "must". The rest of us can make up our own minds, unless, of course, we live in Dundee.

RESIGNATIONS OVER MORAL EDUCATION

Two prominent academics have recently resigned from the board of the Farmington Trust, established six years ago at Oxford to sponsor research into moral education without particular reference to religious belief. They are Professor R. M. Hare and Mr A. D. C. Peterson, both of Oxford University.

The Director of the Trust is quoted as saying: "They feel there is a definite place for moral secular education. We feel that moral education and religious education are virtually identical".

For some time not a few of us have had the nasty, unkind feeling that the moral "education" bandwagon was a somewhat untrustworthy . . . er . . . bedfellow. From now on there will be a sword under our pillows!

"MONEY, MONEY, MONEY"

The Very Rev. Richard Wingfield Digby, Dean of Peterborough, has been obliged by his local council to close the highly lucrative car park which he has been running in front of Peterborough Cathedral—without proper planning permission.

Councillor Philip Healy is quoted as saying: "The trouble with the church authorities is that they are too mercenary. All they think about is money, money, money. One would think that they would preserve our heritage instead of going out of their way to destroy it."

RIGHT TO ATTACK RELIGION

The *Times Educational Supplement* reports that a United States appeal court ruling has prevented the administration of state-supported universities on Staten Island from carrying out threats they had made to suppress attacks against religion in student newspapers.

AN UNSEEMLY FRACAS

Humanist House, headquarters of the Assembly of Bloomsbury Heretics, was well filled last Tuesday for a public meeting to launch the special February edition of the Assembly's journal, the *Harbinger of Rational Heresy*, dealing with Ireland.

The chair was taken by His Beatitude the High Moderator of the ABH, who wasted no time in introducing the principal speaker for the occasion; Mr Robin Billiard-Bessemer, editor of the *Harbinger*, dashing and debonair in powder-blue suit, apple-green waistcoat, and orchid buttonhole.

To begin with, the meeting ran smoothly and without interruption save for intermittent growls in a Co. Down

accent from a little man who sat at the back of the room wearing purple socks and an orange cummerbund. Mr Billiard-Bessemer began by drawing the audience's attention to the display of exhibits that had been arranged for the occasion: an old boot, allegedly used by Mr Cathal Goulding in the manufacture of nail-bombs; a real half-brick from Sniper's Corner, Bogside, Derry; mangled copies of *An Phoblacht* ("The Republic") and *The United Irishman* from the Falls Road, and a charred item of ladies' green underwear, abandoned by retreating members of (Official) Cumann na mBan.

Mr Bessemer went on to describe how, during his fact-finding mission in Ireland, he had accompanied a patrol of the Ulster Defence Regiment as a war correspondent. They succeeded in arresting a tomcat that was attempting to fill in a crater in an unapproved road, and also in disabling an IRA (Provisional) Tiger tank by throwing a bottle of Connamara *poitin* at it. The crew, captured in-sensible, are now held in the dreaded Ballysally Internment camp on Skerries Island, Co. Antrim.

Unknown to the speaker, the audience included Mr Feargus Ua Flaithbheartaigh, the Fenian firebrand of Finsbury Park, and Commandant of Celtic Power (an underground movement said to be responsible for outrages against tin mines in Cornwall and against lobster pots in Brittany). Incensed, Mr Ua Flaithbheartaigh (motto: "Light up an embassy") strode up to the table, slammed his blackthorn stick down under Mr Billiard-Bessemer's nose and called him a "cringing camp-follower of Saxon imperialism!"

The chairman, Mr Roger Montmorency, tried his best to pour oil on to troubled waters, but in vain. The scent of Catholicism had wafted to the nose of the Editor of *The Episcopophagist* who thus far had been sitting taciturnly in the second row. Seizing the sledgehammer that he always carries as a walking stick, the Hon. Peregrine Burke uttered an ear-splitting shriek of "No Popery!", and proceeded to bear down upon the horrified Ua Flaithbheartaigh. By some miracle of Providence, it so happened that Constable Lyttle of the West Bloomsbury Constabulary was passing by the window with his small daughter, *en route* to the sweet shop, and with the appearance of this 25-stone guardian of the peace the entire company shrank back against the wall. Mr Burke, still brandishing his hammer, was carried out bodily, held by one hand above Constable Lyttle's head. Miss Lyttle, at 5½ the youngest Judo black-belt in London, escorted Mr Ua Flaithbheartaigh, holding him in a deft half-Nelson. The following day both Burke and Ua Flaithbheartaigh were bound over for three months by West Bloomsbury Magistrates' Court.

Altogether the meeting was a rather unseemly and undignified affair, but it was not without success. The illicit liquor trade has never been the same since, and I gather that the special Ireland number of the *Harbinger* is selling like hot cakes down the Shankill, and outside the GPO in Dublin.

Is there a linguist in the house? The Freethinker Office receives a number of foreign language journals from time to time, and we would be grateful if people fluent in, for instance Italian and Polish, could have a look through some of the journals we receive in order to see if there is anything of interest to British readers in them. Offers to do short translations from French, German, Russian and Italian would be appreciated.

BOOKS

WHO AM I? A BOOK OF WORLD RELIGIONS.

By Martin Ballard. Hutchinson (Educational). 85p.

This book gives an account of some of the major religions of our time, covering Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The author gives a clear picture of the main tenets of these religions and his account of the emergence of religion, as a sophisticated form of attempts by magic to control and propitiate the powerful forces of nature, provides a useful introduction to the subject.

As a Christian he has, as one might expect, given more space to Christianity than to any other religion. One can detect a tendency also to assess the other religions in terms of Christianity, to be somewhat more critical of them than of Christianity. This has led him to be more aware of the defects in the other religions than in his own. For example, he is critical of the fatalistic tendency of Moslems to regard suffering and disasters as the product of the Will of Allah, resulting in a lack of incentive in them to change the circumstances from which suffering springs. But of course exactly the same thing can be said of any religion which postulates an omnipotent deity for whom human destiny forms part of a grand design. Suffering and disasters are expressive for many Christians, of God's inscrutable purpose—"Acts of God" as they are sometimes called.

A survey of this kind is bound to highlight certain features which distinguish one religion from others. One that emerges very clearly is the greater dependence of Christianity on miraculous events and claims to divinity for its founder, than any of the other religions. Islam, for example, with something like 300 million adherents, seems quite content with a founder who makes no claim to divine origin and who is credited with few, if any, miracles during his lifetime. In contrast, many Christians appear to believe that if one abstracts the miracle of resurrection or the claims for divinity made for Jesus, their religion is emptied of meaning. This seems to be extremely frail basis upon which to build a view of reality, religious or otherwise. Mr Ballard falls back on a distinction between historical and religious truths. The former are accepted by the head; the latter by the heart. Thus the New Testament writings, he claims, make it clear that "Jesus was God as well as man". This he gives as an example of a religious truth. Unfortunately for his argument, it is not perceived as a religious truth by many other Christians who find different interpretations for the obscure passages in the New Testament usually quoted. The resurrection narratives, says Mr Ballard, fall short (very far short in my view) of proof but "a believer is challenged to acknowledge the resurrection with his heart, and not with his head".

In contrast, the Asiatic religions seem less concerned with speculations about the nature of God or the divinity of their founders and much more concerned with problems of self-development, of the mastery of desires and their replacement by forms of inner contemplation. Thus according to Buddhism all life consists of suffering which in turn is caused by desire. The cure of suffering is therefore the elimination of desire, to be achieved by following "The Noble Eightfold Path". The doctrine of reincarnation, which most Eastern religions hold in some form or other, has a certain quality of universal justice about it. The wicked will be punished in a less agreeable life later on. Its major defect is the absence of any supporting evidence. Like the doctrine of resurrection in Christian belief it can

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only operate on the highly suspect plane of religious truth. The Moslems, on the other hand, are promised a more attractive and joyful destiny, as true believers. They will recline on soft couches under shady trees with fruit hanging in clusters over them. They will be served with silver dishes by boys graced with eternal youth. As for the unfortunate unbelievers, they will go straight to hell where the sparks from the flames are as big as towers and bright as yellow camels.

A further distinction that marks Christianity from other religions is the bitterness with which doctrinal differences have been fought over. Christians have tortured and burned Christians over subtle differences of interpretation. Thus the quarrel over whether Jesus and God were of the same substance or similar substance, a difference expressed in Greek by one letter, caused unspeakable horrors of persecution.

A short section of the book is given to a consideration of the critics of religion, especially the Marxist and Freudian criticisms. It seems to me that Mr Ballard has not taken the trouble to find out what these critics really had to say. It simply is not true that Marx considered that man "was an economic animal, whose overriding aim was to improve his material wealth, if necessary at the expense of others", that Marx refused to give weight to any motive other than the economic one. This is a standard distortion of Marxism. Nor is it correct to say that Freud did not want to see religion abolished but "felt that it was an essential prop to human life". On the contrary, he wrote that the consolations of religion deserve no trust. In his New Introductory Lectures, he wrote: "The ethical commands, to which religion seeks to lend its weight, require some other foundation instead, for human society cannot do without them, and it is dangerous to link up obedience to them with religious belief".

Mr Ballard is right in saying that religion is one way man seeks to answer questions about his place in the universe. But, as his book illustrates, religions seek to answer such questions by offering conflicting systems of dogma and discouraging the free, questing spirit of enquiry.

REUBEN OSBORN

ON TWITCHING

In reviewing *The Emerging Ethic* I frankly confessed that reactions to much of the book must be a matter of temperament. What I deny is that my "emotional response" was more "irrational" than anyone else's or that it inhibited my careful reading of the text.

First, let me apologise to Avril Fox if readers thought that "all you need is love" was a quotation from her book. By using it a few lines below mention of the Beatles I thought it would have been recognised as the title of one of their most famous songs, but perhaps I miscalculated. Naturally Mrs Fox's book was far too sophisticated to employ slogans like this or to invoke Flower Power, Beautiful People, Love Children and other curiosities of the Swinging Sixties. They were, however, very fashionable at the time I suspect the first draft of the text was prepared and her work is in the tradition of religious writings which rely on love to solve most of the world's problems.

Quotations are certainly given in *The Emerging Ethic* from trendy names like Wilfred Trotter, who warrants being traced back to source, but I persist in thinking that they are outnumbered by the trendy ones, especially in those cases where they have a parlous relevance to the text. But trendy names are just one—and a minor—index of a general trendiness of mood and argumentation, hostility to "duty", exaggerated appeal to "spontaneity", unwarranted tributes to the power of the "human mind" and all

REVIEWS

the rest of the euphoria that history will associate with Kennedy's New Frontier, Johnson's Great Society and Wilson's Technological Revolution. Remember? Not even the language quite escapes this infection. On page 4 there is an 18-line paragraph which contains four "new" and two "fresh", with another "new" on the next line. No detergent commercial could outclass such neophilia. Perhaps I can claim some support for my opinion from Mrs Fox herself. In answering Brigid Brophy (29 January) she admits, "I am not so hopeful as I was when I wrote *The Emerging Ethic* that we can re-educate man in the time left to us before we pollute this planet to extinction". Dare I risk stretching a beautiful friendship to breaking-point by suggesting that she has now graduated from one trendiness to another?

I did not state that the author "might make money with the book". On a modestly priced limited edition clearly she won't. But I think her material is both good enough and bad enough to be expanded into a successful paperback, and I wish her well. Greatly inferior writers have prospered mightily. When I spoke of a "lucrative cult" I was of course referring to a possible organisation. After all, if one thinks one has a good idea for a new religion, the only thing is—like Auguste Comte, Mary Baker Eddy or the Apostle Paul—to found it oneself.

As a reviewer I had a duty to spell out my criticisms as well as my praises. I have no such duty with *Individual Morality*, thought I must respond to James Hemming's invitation (22 January), with humble apologies for having pained him.

Many of my objections to that work (which contains, of course, a great deal with which I agree) are similar to those directed against *The Emerging Ethic*, which, though published more than two years later, was probably written about the same time and in the same climate of trendy progressivism. As far as style is concerned I am afraid I am more critical of Dr Hemming than of Mrs Fox, especially in what I select as the "offending" chapter, "Yes, to life": "We have it—life. What are we going to do with it? There is only one possible answer. *Live it—fully, profoundly, with all our sense aware and awake; as though looking our last 'on all things lovely every hour'. We should take our prize to our hearts and do it justice. . . . Yes, to our bodies and the physical enjoyment of life: our eyes, our ears, the feel of comforting touch, good food and drink, the evocative quality of scents, the movement of our limbs, the touch of wind and rain, the comfort of a hot bath, the snug warmth of bed, the ecstasy of sense in consumption, sleep, the weary muscle of the long climb, the headache of effort pressed beyond energy. . . .*" After eight pages of that I could only echo the secularist parody of "All Things Bright and Beautiful": "All Things Vile and Horrible".

Now, literary taste, like emotional response, is a very personal thing. Dr Hemming may not like my style. Plenty of people don't. And it may well be my fault that I am less optimistic about human nature than he. One of the many reasons why I am steadily disengaging from active work in the humanist movement is that I do not feel able to exude the easy confidence, derived from the Dogma of Original Virtue, expected of its leadership. But there are, I suggest, some more questionable propositions in the above quote. For one thing, is it the sort of message you would send to a blind spastic in Bangladesh? Dr Hemming may reply that, on the contrary, it was directed at public schoolboys in Britain, and, he will add, the unfortunate are included in "yes, to suffering: to transcend suffering without being overwhelmed with self-pity is to achieve depth and understanding". Maybe; but how many do? And haven't we heard all this in the Beatitudes and C. S. Lewis? There is also a tribute to Julian Huxley's "Trans-humanism" from *New Bottles for New Wine*: "Most human beings develop not more than a small fraction of their potential mental and spiritual efficiency". Setting aside the question of just what "spiritual efficiency" may be, one may well ask what is the evidence for this statement? For it seems in its context to be saying more than that most of the world's population could achieve more if they were not undernourished, uneducated and diseased. And achieve more what?—more hydrogen bombs?

Such things are, however, the achievement of "old men". As Dr Hemming's letter and his book make clear, he is writing to the young. Certainly he is telling them what they want to hear: "Young people around the world, regardless of creed, philosophy, or colour, show they have an idealism in common. The gap between the generations in any nation is often greater than the gap between young people in different nations. The young are getting together in spite of their elders. The community of mankind is now noticeably nearer than it was 30 years ago". Is citing "30

years ago"—the outbreak of the Second World War—entirely ingenuous? What about 100 years ago? And what solid basis is there for this juvenilophilia? For years I have been assiduously listening to my students in discussion, fingering through the underground press for blueprints of the "alternative society" and studying those hippie communes which have tried to put their ideas, such as they are, into practice. Most of them have already ended more disastrously than the nineteenth-century Owenite communities. And that is saying a very great deal. At least I agree with Avril Fox that there is an important role for maturity in human affairs. I am tired of apologising for being no longer a teeny bopper! James Hemming is undeterred. "The mood of mankind is towards resolving conflict by discussion, whatever bloody battles are now in progress and are still to be". But what is the point of a mood for discussion if bloody battles continue? It seems to me that the mood of mankind is, as it has always been, to get one's own way. In the words of Clausewitz, "War is an extension of diplomacy, but only by other means". Dr Hemming has a way out. "We in the west have to recreate our philosophy on what is shared of belief and feeling within our own society and within the world—a passionate, life-affirming humanism . . . the secular principles of personal, social, national, and world fulfilment. In spite of all the hazards still around us, we are on the threshold of a new freedom, and a clearer purpose, fashioned to the nature of man . . . We have in us creativity enough to solve any problems so long as we latch on to the life-affirming values . . . The morality comes from the principles that such living involves." What is the evidence for any of these assertions?

Let me hasten to add that I do not believe we should all say "No, to life" and that I consider the will to survive of what is, after all, a social species is the best hope for mankind. But the way in which this is to be realised is, in my view, a good deal more complicated than *Individual Morality* suggests and we should not deceive ourselves. Nor can we lay all the blame on "Long-faced Christianity" for not hitherto achieving our "potential". The conflict between optimism and pessimism (or euphoria

DAVID TRIBE

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
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 Reception 6 p.m.; Dinner 6.30 p.m.
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 (Guest of Honour)
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WINTER ORCHARD

Framed in a winter orchard:
 Branches of apple trees gauntly
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 Blind to the season of bees
 Humming the pink-white blossom,
 And pickers of sun-ripened fruit.
 A vermilion-breasted bullfinch
 Flashing white on the wing
 Busily pecks at the buds:
 Fragments flake the cold grass.

CHARLES BYASS

LETTERS

Abolish Church Schools

The British Humanist Association is campaigning to desegregate our schools by turning church schools into county schools. We are writing a pamphlet on church schools which will contain first hand evidence of conditions in these schools.

To arouse public opinion on this subject we need information from parents, pupils and teachers on religious indoctrination in church schools, disregard of parents' and children's rights, problems in single school areas, or simply general information on the number of church schools in particular areas, copies of school brochures, etc.

Will anyone who can help please write to:

PATRICIA KNIGHT,
BHA Abolish Church Schools Project Group,
37, Crofters Mead, Courtwood Lane,
Croydon CRO 9HS.

Jews in the USSR

In considering Russia and the Jews the following points should be taken into account:

1. Nationality and religion are here inextricably tied up. The Orthodox Jewish God has made them his "chosen people"—a religious sanction for aggressive racialism if ever there was one. Side-effects: The Jewish attitude of "superiority" towards the Arabs; the Israeli government's claim to the allegiance of Jews everywhere.

2. Zionism, reflecting a "God-given" ideology, has always been anti-Socialist and anti-Soviet (except for a small dissident minority).

3. There are enough Jews round the world to turn every Soviet prosecution of a Jewish criminal into an "anti-Semitic" act; to denounce the *general* Soviet regulations on emigration as "anti-Semitic" when they apply to Jews; and to cry anti-Semitism when the Soviet State treats the Jewish religion no more favourably than any other. Why, for example, unless we accept *apartheid*, should dead Jews be buried in separate cemeteries? Hardly nice in a country which is trying to wipe out all vestiges of national discrimination!

4. The Soviet state is "staunch", as you say, in its anti-Zionism, and in its opposition to Israeli aggression. Just as it is "staunch" in opposing American imperialism and the aggression in Vietnam. It is also "staunch" in opposing anti-Semitism.

5. Why on earth should it be "reptilian" to prevent emigration to an aggressor state? Was Britain "reptilian" in the last war when it did not allow free emigration to Germany? Is it totally unreasonable of the Soviet Government to regard as treasonable a citizen's proclaimed prior allegiance to a foreign state (especially an aggressor)?

6. As a result of the world hullabaloo, the USSR is now letting more Jews "go". As a result of this, the world press is already reporting that some of them want to go back "home" to the USSR. Maybe some sanity on the subject will emerge from this.

PAT SLOAN.

The Editor comments:

In answer to paragraph 5 above, (i) the Soviet Union is not at war with Israel; (ii) if Pat Sloan or myself declared a wish to emigrate to Australia, Israel, Germany or Mongolia we would not be regarded as "traitors" by the British Government (assuming that we had not been engaged on military security work).

When I wrote "The Sport of Czars" I was aware that some Jews who had left the USSR were reported as wishing to return. But the point is that they should have the choice of leaving, even if they then repent at leisure.

Reply to Peter Cadogan

Peter Cadogan (*Freethinker*, 29 January) asks whether anyone doubts the validity of his reply to my review of G. K. Young's pamphlet *What are Europeans?* Well, here is one, for a start. I rather like Mr Cadogan's exposition and critique of the "whole European process of the objectification of phenomena" (Oh the jargon!); but I was reviewing, not Mr Cadogan's letter, but Mr Young's pamphlet. I was not convinced by Mr Young on first acquaintance, and remain unconvinced by Mr Cadogan's defence. Incidentally, why can't Mr Young be responsible for his own polemics?

I disagree flatly that Mr Young "ably" argues what Mr Cadogan concedes to be "obvious", namely the case for diversity

whatever that is supposed to mean. Nor am I impressed by Mr Young's portentous warning that the western "monolithic" concept of man will somehow destroy the species. If I had to give a five-minute talk on threats to the human race, then the European capacity to objectify phenomena would come rather low on the list. I do not think either Biafra or Bangladesh are good examples of the evil effects of western culture imposed regardless on an unwilling and unresponsive people; for you could just as well argue that fights for national independence and political autonomy in the "third world" owe their inspiration to western values. Of course Mr Cadogan is right to criticise the assumption that western ideas and institutions are automatically suitable for other peoples and cultures, but having now gained their independence it is up to the new nations to work out their own futures. A great many of them accept their original European-imposed boundaries, and observe, in varying degrees, the conventions of western-style parliamentary rule.

Mr Cadogan finds Mr Young's thesis not just important, but "incredibly important". Incredible, yes; but important, never.
PHILIP HINCHLIFF.

Ethics, Evolution and Man

I am glad that J. Stewart Ross has made specific criticisms of my "Evolutionary Ethics" article. Verbal "muddles" can sometimes be cleared up by dialogue. I did not define "evolution" and "ethics" because I thought their meanings would be sufficiently understood by readers to arouse their interest in the subject. Where is one to draw the line in a short article? Should I have defined "objective" and "science" also?

I certainly do not equate evolution with progress. Indeed, I have cited the fate of the dinosaurs and other species to refute this error. However, I think that there is ample evidence to show that the human species has evolved in a way that may be reasonably described as having a direction; though I can see no evidence of a final destination, unless possibly it is extinction. When mentioning the possibility of men controlling their own evolution, I had in mind, for example, "genetic engineering".

If the human species is to survive, I certainly do think that man's ability to reason is most important, but he has also other important qualities, such as his tendency to consider (love) others, his curiosity and his abilities to learn from experience and to change.

I agree that man is a most complex animal. I recently stated: "Man is not merely a rather unreliable thinker and doer, requiring supervision and help—he is much more: a self-conscious sentient being. He has experiences, perceptions, thoughts, emotions, instincts, etc., which give rise to motives, impulses and actions to enrich his existence, and, if he is fortunate, to make his life worth living".

Much of my fortunately long life has been spent in trying to understand human experience. I realise that my abilities are very limited and that there is much I do not understand. However, I hope to live and learn for several more years. Meanwhile, I will try to think and write as freely, considerately and reasonably as I can.

G. F. WESTCOTT.

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