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THE DANGERS OF RELIGIOUS SECTARIANISM

—N.S.S. ANNUAL REPORT

"The growing casualty list, damage to property and social upheaval that has taken place in Northern Ireland, made even more people despair of that area of the United Kingdom," says the Annual Report of the National Secular Society for 1971-72. "The rôle of Christian teachings and institutions in creating the present situation is played down or even completely denied by religious apologists and largely under-rated by people outside the Province. Both parts of Ireland are clergy-ridden, with religious indoctrination starting in the cradle and being reinforced in the classroom. Church leaders strenuously oppose any suggestion of desegregated schools, and actively encourage their flocks to associate only 'with their own kind.' Centuries of religious indoctrination have resulted in the total supremacy of intolerance, superstition and xenophobia. This is a fact which days of prayer and other ecumenical diversions have not been able to obscure."

The validity of secularist warnings

The Report, published last Monday, continues: "Unfortunately, it has taken a tragedy like events in Northern Ireland to make many people realise the validity of secularist warnings on the dangers of sectarian education. But whilst the Roman Catholic bishops of England and Wales were proclaiming their full support for the continued existence of Church schools, there was evidence that a growing number of Catholic parents are dissatisfied both with segregated education and with standards in Catholic schools."

The Annual Report speaks of "other encouraging signs of opposition to the statutory position of Christianity in the nation's schools;" but warns that while the campaign against religious indoctrination (initiated by the N.S.S. in 1964) has made some progress, nevertheless, "much will depend on the effectiveness of our future activities if the religious clauses of the new Education Act are to be radically different from those in the 1944 Act."

A year of unrest

Looking back at the past year, the Report describes it as "a period of escalating violence and unrest in many countries, and in parts of the United Kingdom." On the subject of Vietnam, it points out that the United States "cannot prop up indefinitely the corrupt and reactionary régime of President Thieu in South Vietnam . . . During the last decade Vietnam has been devastated, and countless numbers have been maimed and killed. A generation of young Americans who left their homeland in planes blessed by chaplains, and for whom the prayers of millions have wafted heavenward, have returned as corpses or drug addicts."

Mentioning the war which gave rise to the independence of Bangladesh, the Report says: "Yahya Khan, the former President of West Pakistan, announced that God was on

the side of his militarist régime, but his army suffered a humiliating defeat . . . Pakistan was born out of religious fanaticism, and the atrocities which took place during the war were on a scale which is inevitable when religion is a major factor in a national or international dispute."

The Report observes: "The Rock of Ages is crumbling at the edges, but Secularists must not forget that the foundations are firmly cemented with assets like land, property, works of art, oil wells and tax exemption." These enable the Catholic Church ("traditional and continuing bulwark of reaction and obscurantism") and others to exert political influence and employ adequate staff and advisors.

The need for persistence

The N.S.S. applauds the passing of the Sunday Cinema Act and the Sunday Theatres Bill, and welcomes the "great advances . . . in the campaign for sex education and to make contraception freely available to the married and unmarried." Thus, "we can look back with some satisfaction on our last twelve months. But we must never be tempted to relax our efforts both to defend the gains and to further promote freethought and secularism."

The Annual Report closes with a characteristic and colourful flourish: "The National Secular Society will continue to pursue its own independent rôle, and to work for the achievement of those goals which inspired its founders. One of the lessons we learn from the history of the movement is that although there are periodic upsurges of interest in secularist and humanist ideas, the work of organisations like the N.S.S. is, for the most part, plodding and unexciting. Persistence, moderation and tolerance are unfashionable concepts at the present time. But they will keep the N.S.S. and radicalism on an even keel long after the trendy Leftists, disgruntled Rightists, line-shooters and shooting stars have departed on their sloganeering way."

THE FREETHINKER

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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 Caledonian 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 Street, London, SE1 1NL. Telephone: 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the N.S.S.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL.

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.

Rationalist Press Association. Conference on "Rationalism and Humanism in the New Europe," Churchill College, Cambridge, 11-13 August. British and Continental speakers. Coach from and back to London. Details from R.P.A., 88 Islington High Street, London N1 8EW (Telephone: 01-226 7251). Bookings close 28 July.

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.

Havering Humanist Society, Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane. Tuesday, 18 July, 7.45 p.m.: Mrs. Dilys Cossey on the work of the Birth Control Campaign.

Humanist Housing Association, Rose Bush Court, 35-41 Parkhill Road, London NW3. Saturday, 15 July, 3 p.m.: formal opening of Rose Bush Court extension, followed by Annual Garden Party.

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday, 16 July, 7.30 p.m.: Alison Truffitt, Peter Newall and Simon Steyne, "Alternatives in Education" (discussion).

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 16 July, 11 a.m.: Professor G. A. Wells, "Did Jesus Exist?"

B.H.A. CONFERENCE

The 1972 Annual Conference of the British Humanist Association* will be held at Scraftoft College, Leicester, from 21 to 23 July. The theme will be "People First" (also the title of the B.H.A.'s recent manifesto), concentrating particularly on the issues of population and community action. Speakers will include Dr. Malcolm Potts of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (and a former chairman of the Cambridge Humanist Group), and George Clark of the Golbourne Neighbourhood (community) Centre. In addition there will be discussions on "world order," "religious humanism" and the structure of the B.H.A. The British Humanist Association's A.G.M. will be held during the conference on Sunday, 23 July.

* Inquiries and applications for booking forms should be addressed to the General Secretary, B.H.A., 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG.

SOUTH AFRICA'S "CHRISTIAN HERITAGE"

The Cape Regional Director of the South African Christian Institute, the Rev. Theo Kotze, is quoted by the *Observer* (2 July) as saying that "it is becoming increasingly dangerous to be a Christian in this country." Somewhat of an exaggeration, one would have thought, considering that apartheid was very much the brain-child of the Dutch Reformed Church—and still is. It has always been much more dangerous to be an atheist in South Africa, and atheists and agnostics are not considered desirable immigrants.

However, we must concede that the Rev. Theo Kotze's statement is not wholly incorrect. Margaret Biggs of the Hull University Catholic Chaplaincy, in a letter to *The Guardian* (14 June), wittily pointed out that the South African Government's recent ban on gatherings of more than eleven people "wisely precludes any possibility of Christ holding the Last Supper anywhere in its country."

THE OLD, OLD CLICHÉ

"... An Aberdeen parson lately declared, 'Materialism is dead. Mr. Cohen must bring his science up to date. He is fifty years behind his time.' We are dismayed, but take a little heart on reflecting that we have heard the same thing, about others as well as ourselves, very many times. And we really ought to have something better than the word of an Aberdeen parson to settle the matter definitely."

—Chapman Cohen in *The Freethinker*, 16 July 1922.

WOMEN DRIVERS

The unbelievable obstacles being put in the way of Mrs. Doreen Barnett's ambition to become a bus driver are a graphic illustration of the fact that male chauvinism is by no means merely a paranoid phantasy of the lunatic fringe of women's lib.

Frankly we would rather be the passenger of the most witless "dumb blonde" than of the sort of moronic male charioteer who supposes that the possession of an automobile carries with it the privilege of *Droit de Seigneur*, and who develops a "suicide pilot" syndrome at the merest suggestion of his being overtaken on the road by a woman!

S AND NOTES

CATHOLIC CHARITIES PROTEST

Employees of the city of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) have been receiving at work a fund-raising brochure from the 1972 Catholic Charities Appeal together with a form authorising their employer to withhold Catholic charities contributions from their salaries. The withholding authorisation forms were imprinted with the individual employees' names and payroll numbers.

Since many employees felt that they were being pressured into contributing to a sectarian fund drive so as to remain in good standing at work, a formal protest on the matter is being made by Howard Stevenson (Philadelphia area director for Americans United for the Separation of Church and State) to Mayor Frank L. Rizzo. Whether the mayor will take much notice is open to conjecture: the magazine *Church & State* carried a photograph last March of Mayor Rizzo kneeling and kissing the ring of Cardinal John Krol, newly appointed head of the United States Catholic hierarchy.

SMALLER CATHOLIC FAMILIES IN U.S.A.

Quest News Service reports that the size of American Catholic families is dropping radically, as shown by a recent American fertility survey. Charles Westoff, one of the Princeton demographers responsible for the National Fertility Survey, commented: "The implication is that despite church strictures against birth control, Catholic women are increasingly using unapproved forms of contraception. We are now developing data that confirm this; that show Catholics are becoming more and more like other parents in their use of the Pill and other contraceptive devices."

In 1970 Catholic woman between 20 and 24 reported that they wanted 20 per cent fewer children than the same group wanted in 1965, and the birthrate figure for the group fell from 3.45 to 2.75.

LEAN YEAR FOR THE LORD

It has been a lean and dismal old year for the Lord and His Day. In Britain the Sunday Theatres Bill has received an unopposed third reading, and in Italy the abominable Continental Sunday has claimed yet another victim with the repeal of a Mussolini-era law restricting work on newspapers on Sundays.

It is small wonder, therefore, that the latest number of the ineptly named *Joy and Light*, which carries the 141st annual report of the Lord's Day Observance Society, appeals now not so much to the Sabbatarian "crusader zeal" as to "backs to the wall!" Even Scotland, once the inner bastion of the dreary "British Sunday" has "lost herself out in the barren wastes of commercialism, tourism, materialism, and—in the spiritual realm—liberalism."

Joy and Light, laments dimly over the new Sunday legislation and "the National Secular Society . . . gloating over this new blow at the Lord's Day." Once we heard of the Lord of Hosts, but now "it certainly appears that there are few prepared to oppose the desecration of the Lord's Day by this Bill."

Out-maneuvred and outdated, but not lacking in cash and two U.K. offices, the L.D.O.S. can still summon the

strength to rattle its rusty sword at Sunday freedom: "One thing we can learn from the enemy," says *Joy and Light*,

The N.S.S., in their statement adds: "We hope that Mr. Jenkins' bill will encourage others to press for the abolition of obsolete Sunday regulations . . ." *Shall we learn the lesson?*

Let us arouse ourselves—churches, Christian M.P.s and Christian people everywhere—to be prepared for the next onslaught, which will most certainly come.

Alas, too late, too late! Already the secularist hordes are massing for the kill on the south end of London Bridge, and in Edinburgh a long file of agnostic gallow-glasses, led by Fiona MacDrumnadrochit ("The Scourge of the Sabbath") is slinking along the Waters of Leith for the final assault on Kingsburgh Road! The end is nigh!

"AT LAST"

Ninety years ago *The Freethinker* rolled off the presses bearing its "battle ensign" above the masthead: "PROSECUTED FOR BLASPHEMY." The Editor had finally goaded his enemies into giving battle!

"We are in for it at last . . . The bigots looked glum, and asked despairingly if no one would try to suppress that dreadful *Freethinker*. They prayed for help, but the Lord sent no legion of angels. Yet there are always certain persons ready to rush in where angels fear to tread, and at length Sir Henry Tyler came forward to do the deed . . . [He] has tried in vain to put down the Science Classes conducted by Dr. Aveling, Mrs. Besant and the Misses Bradlaugh; and he will be just as successful in his attempt to annihilate the *Freethinker* . . . You cannot frighten men who know no fear. If one goes to gaol, another will take his place, as soldiers step up to fill the breaches caused by the enemy's shot. Let the bigots do their worst . . ."

"This prosecution has been long impending. It was talked over in the Tea-room of the House of Commons, where the plot was laid and hatched. Mr. Bradlaugh's enemies are engaged in it, and they hope, in striking the *Freethinker*, to strike him too . . . But this is certain, that our age will be tried as well as the editor, publisher and printer of the *Freethinker* . . ."

"If Freethought is attacked it must be defended, and the charge of blasphemy must be retorted on those who try to suppress liberty in the name of God . . . And before I leave the court, for whatever destination, I will make the ears of bigotry tingle, and shame the hypocrites who profess and disbelieve."

—G. W. Foote in *The Freethinker*, 16 July 1882.

FREETHINKER FUND

Because *The Freethinker* is printed as cheaply as possible, and published with a ridiculously low profit margin (in order to reach the widest possible public), we do appeal to those readers of modest means and above to remember to give a little extra to the Freethinker Fund from time to time. One of the reasons that this paper is still going strong and is as inexpensive as it is because of the generosity of past generations of readers. Will you help keep the ink flowing?

Our thanks to those who kindly contributed to the Freethinker Fund last month: anonymous, £1; H. A. Alexander, 35p; P. Barbour, £2.45; I. Barr, £1; J. L. Broom, £1; J. Buchanan, 45; Charles Byass, £1; A. S. Careiro, 14p; J. Corder, 14p; W. Craigie, 19p; J. L. Ford, 45p; E. Gomm, £2; Professor Halstead, £3.28; J. G. Hillhouse (in memory of W. Ingram), £2; H. Holgate, 50p; R. T. Lawley, £3.28; R. C. Mason, £2; C. S. Niles, £1.45; Bruce M. Siegan, £1.75; M. D. Silas, £1; Pat Sloan, 45p; Miss E. G. Vaughan, 45p. Total for June: £26.33.

ACCIDENT OF BIRTH

PETER CROMMELIN

It was more than fifty years before I recovered fully from the accident of birth that made me a Roman Catholic and subjected me from early infancy to total bombardment of religious indoctrination.

Both my parents were absolutely convinced of the truth and the supreme importance of the Christian faith as taught with infallible authority by the one true Catholic Church. My father had the educational advantage of being a "doctor of science," but unlike the majority of his kind he was quite obsessed by his private conviction that there is a Supernatural World beyond the reach of any mere physical science. My scientific rather co-operated completely with my non-scientific mother in persuading their children that there is no essential conflict between Natural Science and Supernatural Religion. Thus I acquired in childhood the notion of Faith as a "gift of God" enabling me to believe without doubt the most incredible of religious doctrines. I became an eager young defender of the Faith, and when the time came for me to choose a career, it was perfectly easy to persuade me that I could not choose anything better than to become a priest. This required a highly specialised vocational training in which everything seemed to go according to plan, and whatever may have been going on in my subconscious, there was no external sign of the atheistical agnostic waiting for release. In due course I was made a priest by the hands of a bishop. That I think was the real beginning of the process by which I lost my Faith and ceased to be a member of any Christian community.

Theology worse than pornography

My faith did not disappear suddenly. It was like a very slow awakening from a very long dream. The trouble was that I could not rouse myself sufficiently to make the necessary distinction between the dream state and the real state. I know from my own personal history why Dr. Karl Marx classified religion as a form of opium, something that must seem unintelligible to anyone who thinks of religion simply in terms of a B.B.C. Epilogue or "Thought for the Day." But without doubt, religion can become the most delusive form of self-deception. Theology has done far more damage to the human mind than all the pornography that has ever been published. Religion has always claimed to be a divine and supernatural revelation, an inaccessible source of knowledge open only to the members of some privileged religious community. The individual who belongs to such a community comes to share the common illusion that he or she knows things that cannot be known to those "outside."

In the course of time I became awake to the fact that if my entire life was to be dominated by religious dogmas, I would prefer to make my own in preference to accepting passively those provided for me by a community to which I belonged simply and solely by an accident of birth. I am absolutely convinced that had I not been born and bred inside the Roman Catholic Church, I would never have become converted to that institution in later years by any of the so-called "motives of credibility." The same principle applies to all other forms of Christian community. So, in ceasing to be a Roman Catholic, I ceased also to be

a Christian. I fully accept the fact that scientific scholarship has reduced the credibility of the Gospel story almost to vanishing point. It is perfectly possible that the Gospel contains no single historical fact. The Gospel could be a completely fictitious account of events that never really happened. It is not merely possible but really beyond dispute that no secular historian would accept the Gospel as we possess it, as a well authenticated record of real events. From the modern point of view, there is a totally impossible gap between the events described and the first actual recording of them.

From the moment that I abandoned every imaginable form of orthodox or conventional Christianity, I have moved more and more in the direction of a purely secular humanism. It would not be true to say that I have become an atheist. When people describe any fairly decent and compassionate example of human behaviour as being "basically Christian" then I am indeed tempted to call myself an atheist. I regard Christianity as a false religion and Jesus Christ as a false god, and I can see no point in attributing human goodness to a false religion or a false god. None the less, I am not strictly speaking as an atheist. The fact that Jesus Christ is not God does not lead logically to the conclusion that there is no God. The word God indicates for me all that Man is not and can never hope or want to become. God is intrinsically the unknown and unknowable essence of creation without which there could be no such thing as evolution. The Universe must have a creator, even though the creator and creation may be one and indivisible. There is not and never can be any revelation of the creator except that which nature provides.

Atheism and reason

Militant atheism is a very good war against very false gods. It is in strict and literal obedience to the first commandment of the Decalogue that mankind should avoid the worship of "strange gods." All the gods that receive the homage of mankind are very strange indeed. Humanism however, has a more comprehensive purpose than mere atheism. The former indicates a way of escape from any one religious community that does not lead to any other by any logical necessity. We do not want people to move from Catholic to Protestant or vice versa. We do not want people to move erratically from faith to faith. We want people to move from faith to reason, and from reason to the full enjoyment of a rational life in so far as that can be enjoyed here on earth, or here in England in 1972. There is certainly no legal obligation for any individual to maintain a life-long allegiance to any religious community that was entered only by an accident of birth.

I would be less than human if I did not feel some human sympathy and compassion for those who believe what I myself have believed, but cannot as I have done, liberate themselves from the burden of faith. And faith can be a terrible burden for those who feel they must bear it. It imposes something much more terrifying than the existence of an almighty and eternal God. If I have left the Christian community it is because, more than for any other reason, I have come to reject their doctrine of personal immortality. I know that I shall not live for ever, either in this or in any other world.

HUMAN EVOLUTION VERIFIED

GONZALO QUIOGUE

For more than a century well-meaning religious people have demanded proof for evolution, although they themselves admit that God cannot be proven: "You have just got to have faith that there is a God," but, "How ugly and shameful it is to think that we are descended from apes! And how nice it is to cherish the thought that a God created us!" They justify their belief for the comfort of their egos.

Lamarck, Darwin, and successive scientists built up a body of evidence that man is related to all vertebrates, mammals, primates and apes. These facts are now elementary biology, but we must beware of fault-finding fundamentalists who now and then tell us that there is a weakness here and a weakness there in the chain of evolutionary evidence. We realise of course the vested interest or disguised motive of the churches when they fight evolution. They want to perpetuate the Adam and Eve myth and the creation story which are still among the pillars of fundamentalist religion.

Evidence from Comparative Anatomy

The construction of man's body is almost like that of the ape. Every human bone has a corresponding bone in the ape, and the long bones of the arms of man and ape are difficult to distinguish. Man and ape have the same stereoscopic and colour vision. Both cannot move their ears. The muzzle of both is replaced by a face. Both have a weak sense of smell. Both females have menstrual cycles; and both have no breeding season—they mate at any time of the year. Both females usually give birth to a single offspring. The mothers of both show a passionate and loving care for their young, and usually the male of both has dominance over the female and the young. In the words of Theodosius Dobzhansky, "The differences between man and ape are quantitative and not qualitative, as are the differences between one ape species and another." This implies that man is simply a species of ape, although intelligent and moral.¹

Evidence from Embryology

Baer's law states that, "the younger the embryos of different animals are, the more they resemble one another, while they become more and more distinct as they grow older." The development of the foetus in the female body is, in a sense, a repetition of the evolutionary development of the group (phylogeny). The gill arches which are formed in human foetuses and in the embryos of other land-

dwelling vertebrates, are also present in the embryos of fishes, but in the latter they become the supports of functioning gills. The human foetus at a certain stage has a tail formed like those of mammalian embryos which have tails as adults. This suggests that our remote ancestors had tails.

Evidence from Vestiges

All the muscles in man are represented by corresponding muscles in the anthropoid ape. One muscle (*peroneus tertius*) of the human foot was found in 18 per cent of the gorilla specimens studied; but it is absent in some humans. Other muscles like man's external ears and the vermiform appendix are devoid of function. The appendix corresponds to a large part of the intestine of some herbivorous mammals and was more developed in man's ancestors.

Evidence from Genetics and Physiology

The body's physiological functions, in resembling those of other animals, suggests also a common ancestry as does the similarities of body structures. Ape and man both digest food, respire, excrete waste matter and reproduce in much the same way.

The mechanism of reproduction and transmission of heredity are the same in all animals and plants. Chromosomes and genes occur in all living things and even in microorganisms. All animals (that reproduce sexually) show chromosome pairings and meiosis. An analysis of the heredity of pea plants or fruit flies can tell us much about human and ape heredity, for the mechanism of heredity, discovered by the monk, Gregor Mendel, is universal among living things.

These facts suggest that life arose only once from non-living elements and that all organisms are derived from this single event. Man and modern apes probably began to evolve from primitive ape-like creatures in Africa or Asia some 25 million years ago.²

NOTES

¹ See Dobzhansky's *Mankind Evolving*: p. 173, and *The Naked Ape*, by Desmond Morris.

² For further reading I suggest the following books: *Understanding Evolution* by Herbert H. Ross, *Modern Science and the Nature of Life* by William S. Beck, *Mankind in the Making* by William Howells, *Man and the Vertebrates* by A. S. Romer, and *The Evolution of Life* by E. C. Olson (I listed a number of other titles in my "Human Evolution: Some Facts," *Freethinker*, 17 June 1972).

REVIEWS

BOOKS

THE RADICAL TRADITION IN EDUCATION IN BRITAIN. A compilation of writings by William Godwin, Thomas Paine, Robert Owen, Richard Carlile, Robert Dale Owen, William Thompson, William Lovett, and William Morris. Edited by Brian Simon. Lawrence and Wishart, £1.

Brian Simon is Professor of Education at the University of Leicester. Two of his previous books, *Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870* and *Education and the*

Labour Movement, 1870-1920 have become standard works, and manage to be what most works on education are conspicuously not, exciting and urgent reading for all those at all interested in the subject.

The present collection of papers covers the period from 1793 to 1840, one of intense production in this field, with a final chapter from William Morris, who revives the earlier tradition with his sketch of the ideal factory, as a centre for education, as well as work and recreation.

One tradition in this book, which could very well be revived, is the style in which the articles are written. Vigorous and pungent, with a clarity that makes contemporary efforts seem often confused and pallid, it is matched by the uncompromising nature of the thought and argu-

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ment. These men, several of whom were writing in prison, knew the strength and subtlety of the enemy they were facing, and were not easily seduced. They analysed and planned indefatigably for a future that was to remain hypothetical for most of them.

Universal education, for which they fought, did not come about until 1870. The schools that existed in their time were only for the better-off, as a rule, and purveyed a strictly classical and academic education hardly suited to the industrial revolution. What gave impetus to the new thinking was the change in the old social relationships, owing to developments in industry and science which changed men's view of the universe. This led to wide inquiry about the purpose, scope and aims of education, in a much wider context than the question of schools alone, though that was part of it.

Godwin begins with an analysis of how characters are formed. He attributes this firstly to the impact of external circumstances, the totality of social and political influences. He rejects completely the idea of innate principles and instincts, as obscurantist and tending to limit investigation. The character is not born ready-made, nor is it formed irrevocably during the first five years of childhood, whatever the Jesuits might say. It is subject to constant change and development throughout life, so there is no need to give up hope. The second factor concerned is that of the human intelligence. The human mind is to be considered an intelligent agent acting and reacting upon the environment, and it is through such reasoned action that we make progress.

William Thompson, who was an Irish landowner much concerned with problems of poverty among the peasants, takes this analysis further by showing how social institutions have actually influenced men. Domestic, religious and political institutions, instead of diffusing knowledge, as they might be expected to do, have often prevented its diffusion, and have kept men (and particularly women) in a state of slavery. The development of society leads to a division of labour; knowledge and its purveyors become separated from labour and hostile to it. This is neither right nor useful. Education must be given to all, and established attitudes must be changed, for the benefit of the whole of society.

The education given, however, must have practical relevance, and must be based on truth. Truth is the criterion for moral education, with freedom of inquiry and the right to doubt. Education should add to people's happiness, not detract from it, so children should not be coerced. Rewards as well as punishments are immoral, as they lead to attitudes of contempt or fear. Physical exercises, recreation, music and imaginative work should all play a part. But even all this is not enough; a more equitable social system is necessary if men are not to have a slavish outlook, and there must be an end to the "pernicious economical dogma of low wages." This is morality in practice.

Thomas Paine, in an excerpt from *The Age of Reason*, stressing the demand for a scientific education, shows that the chief obstacle to the development of science has been Christianity. The age of ignorance, he says, commenced with the Christian religion. So far from the Church being the guardian of learning, it was the Church that stifled it. It was the Church that introduced the time-wasting study of dead languages, because it was afraid that a rational system would make its pretensions ridiculous. But the study of astronomy has had that effect in any case. "Are we to suppose that every world in the boundless creation

had an Eve, an apple, a serpent and a redeemer? . . . He would have nothing else to do than to travel from world to world in an endless succession of death, with scarcely a momentary interval of life."

Writing as a deist, Paine would free education from erroneous and superstitious beliefs, and base it upon evidence. He is followed by Richard Carlile, writing from Dorchester Gaol, in which he had been put for publishing Paine's *Age of Reason* and Palmer's *Principles of Nature*. In his splendid *Address to Men of Science*, he makes a strong appeal to them to speak out. They were of sufficient strength to kill superstition if they chose to. He attacks Newton, who, he says, could not really have believed in Christianity, but lacked the courage to break away from it. He derides those famous mathematicians who reckon to believe that three is one and one is three. Newton was courting popularity by succumbing to the despotisms of the day. For religion, and religious attitudes, have been in the service of despotisms, and with a more rational education system we stand a chance of getting a more rational social system. He attacks obscurantist teaching and religious practices in schools. They stultify the intellect, as they are intended to do. The subjects that need to be taught are Chemistry, Natural History, Geography, Astronomy, and Mechanics.

William Lovett, writing from Warwick Gaol, produces a remarkable pamphlet on Chartism and a *Plan for the Education and Improvement of the People, Politically and Socially*. He calls for a universal franchise, freedom of opinion, the right of assembly and free distribution of knowledge. He wants secular moral education, free from the desire to mould children to a certain pattern, or for a certain place in society. He gives in great detail his plans for the regulation of schools and methods of instruction. And, to prove that it was not all just theory, we get from Robert Owen and his son an account of the school they organised at New Lanark. Owen insists on the unity of theory and practice, and his son on the need for happiness as a basis. School, in the opinion of these daring reformers, should actually be a joyous place, with plenty of music and dancing. And why, in heaven's name, not?

Some, it is true, of these early ideas on education have become a little out-dated. Drilling in straight rows has given way to freer forms of activity, and art teaching has been revolutionised even during the last twenty years. On the other hand we have still not caught up with many of the radical ideas of these sturdy and individual pioneers. We cannot claim to have a rational system while religious worship and teaching remain. We still allow children to be beaten, and pay little attention to their personal happiness or their right to question authority. In spite of comprehensive schools, we still have a system which retains a privileged sector. We have universal education and universal franchise, but there are many injustices and inequalities left in society. Throughout the world extremes are greater than ever. Christian nations still drop bombs, and men are still imprisoned for asserting the brotherhood of man. Have we used our education to further the interests and happiness of men as a whole, or has the very education system itself been manipulated to serve the ends of an inequitable society? We need to be on the alert, and to know what is happening to us.

Meanwhile we can be grateful for the brave statements made by these radical thinkers, so long ago, and for the efforts they made to disentangle these problems. Our thanks are also due to Brian Simon for editing them.

MERLE TOLFREE

THE NEW RELIGIONS by Jacob Needleman.
Allen Lane The Penguin Press, £2.75.

In eighteenth-century maps of *Gulliver's Travels*, Brobdingnag is sited where Los Angeles now stands. It seems a very suitable location. As Dr. Needleman puts it in this excellent book, everything in California tends to be larger than life: "The variety of psychological flora and fauna here is amazing. Cults and sects grow like weeds. 'Gurus' abound."

And what Gurus! Dr. Needleman introduces the awestruck reader to such notabilities as Meher Baba, self-confessed "Highest of the High . . . God personified," and the Maharishi (of Beatles and Rolling Stones fame) whom he describes irreverently as "a 'classic' guru, delivered by Central Casting . . . a holy man surrounded by money, matinée idols, public relations men, private planes and air-conditioned meditation halls."

But, though Dr. Needleman's touch is commendably light, he has written a perfectly serious book, serious without being solemn. The phenomenon he deals with is real enough, even if "new religion" seems a misnomer for one of his chapters, that dealing with Krishnamurti, whose teaching is as "modern" as Annie Besant and W. B. Yeats.

And I do not think Dr. Needleman pays enough attention to intellectual fashion, to the way in which some of these so-called "new religions" flourished in the 'twenties, were then superseded by Marxism in the 'thirties, by Existentialism in the 'forties and 'fifties, and now once again it is the turn of the Wise Men from the East. In particular, now, from Tibet, as Dr. Needleman brings out in one of his most important chapters. As Marx conquers China, so Tibetan refugees are conquering the West—or, at least, thousands of mostly young Westerners, in San Francisco and elsewhere. Dr. Needleman plots the graph, as it were, of what has been called "the spiritual explosion," dealing as a philosopher with such things as Subud, Yoga and Transcendental Meditation. If it all makes one feel a bit like Gulliver, in Laputa as well as in Brobdingnag, that no doubt is good for the soul.

R. C. CHURCHILL

running in Liverpool. Is the "situation" the machinations of the wicked English who "persecuted" him, or the imposture whereby gullible Irish youths are made the tools of "patriots" who are at best unstable, and at worst vicious; men who are really happy only when they reduce the whole community to the chaos of their own personal lives? For on any objective grounds, however Ireland may have been exploited by England in the past, in modern times the English connection is greatly to be preferred to the murder, maiming, gun-law and kangaroo courts of the I.R.A. If Brendan were to have stated this clearly and starkly his message would indeed have been a humanist one. But in *The Hostage* his satire on I.R.A. chauvinism is, like Miss Murphy's letter, mixed with I.R.A. romanticism. At the end, when the hostage is shot, it is just an "accident" and the audience is cosily reassured when he immediately pops up and starts singing "The Bells of Hell."

In *My Brother Brendan* Dominic refers sketchily to "Joan Littlewood's version of Brendan's English translation." This is amplified in Ted E. Boyle's *Brendan Behan* (1969), using material from Sean McCann's collection, *The World of Brendan Behan* (1965): "Behan's second play *An Giall* was commissioned by the Irish language organisation Gael Linn and was produced in Dublin's Damer Hall in June, 1958 . . . On October 14, 1958, the first English-language production of *The Hostage* opened in Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, London. The production was a near thing, for the Theatre Workshop was having financial difficulties, and Brendan Behan was not. As the money rolled in, Behan became increasingly dilatory; and he finished the translation of *The Hostage* only because Gerry Raffles, manager of the Workshop, virtually forced him to complete the project" (pp. 86-87). It may be that Brendan pretended to have written an original play, as his life was a continuous "con"—another humanist trait, I suppose.

For all I know, *An Giall* may qualify Behan as the successor to Sygne or O'Casey, as admirers would have us believe; *The Hostage* certainly does not. If the original version is truly a humanist play I should have said: "Brendan's warm humanity, compassion and Irish lyricism were, in Joan Littlewood's noisy production, dissipated in a babble of gags and stage tricks." Would this be more acceptable to Miss Murphy? DAVID TRIBE.

Euthanasia and Happiness

J. Stewart Ross (letters, 1 July) has now set out clearly and logically the differences between us. (Incidentally, he shares his unbelief in "a Victorian phenomenon called progress" with another Victorian phenomenon called Malcolm Muggeridge.) I agree that if abolition is allowed, the pressures for reform may be diminished; if euthanasia were allowed, I should suggest that there would be no comparable diminution of pressure on doctors to find cures for terminal illnesses—they would still try just as hard to find cures.

Mr. Ross produces further arguments: that "death" cannot further either human dignity or happiness, and that all today's social reform is geared towards making life worth living. This latter statement is true, but we make life worth living not (or only incidentally) by causing happiness, but by reducing unhappiness. It is this principle which animates both social reform, and the campaign to legalise voluntary euthanasia—since this is the one case where it is quite impossible to create happiness (until we can actually cure such terminal illnesses).

As to human dignity, which is the dignified death: one where the patient dies in agony, begging the doctor to put him out of his misery, but the doctor refuses; or the other, where the doctor does not refuse, and the patient dies peacefully? Voluntary euthanasia is in fact a form of assisted suicide. If Mr. Ross regards suicide as always undignified (which I do not), then euthanasia would still seem to be the lesser of two evils. NICHOLAS REED.

Hitler's Military Leadership

In answer to Mr. S. Birkin (letters, 1 July) I would point out that in my letter of 17 June I did not praise Hitler's military leadership and genius (no-one was a genius in World War II!).

What I did say was that Hitler was not the military duffer his critics have supposed him to have been. Mr. Birkin says that Hitler ignored Raeder's advice to invade Britain—why not? At that time Britain was isolated, Europe occupied and the Afrika Korps in the desert undefeated. In my opinion Hitler (and, of course, the German High Command) knew that to be certain of victory a powerful future foe had to be destroyed. The Germans adopted the tactic of *Blitzkrieg* which had been successful elsewhere—and why not in Russia?

As Mr. Birkin says, Hitler aimed to get the war on the Eastern Front over by September; and how dangerously near he came to succeeding! J. H. MORTEN.

LETTERS

Brendan Behan's Patriotism

I am surprised and disappointed that Theatre Workshop should "object strongly" (letters, 24 June) to what was, after all, a favourable review of *The Hostage*, in which I as good as said that it was "marvellously funny and relevant." Am I also to proclaim, despite all the evidence, that Brendan Behan was both a genius and a humanist, endorse a clearly inaccurate programme note, and lavish praise on I.R.A. gunmen?

About the only virtue that Behan possessed was an honest contempt for the Holy Ireland of popular mythology and for the Hampstead intellectuals who lionised him. Like Theatre Workshop itself he owed his reputation not to the priest-ridden people of the Republic, the London Irish of Kilburn and Camden Town or the working classes of Stratford East, but to the English affluent intelligentsia whose capacity for romanticism is unlimited. Though it suited him to pose as an Irish patriot (of the sort that would do anything for Ireland except live in it) and he was given a hero's funeral in Dublin with full Catholic and I.R.A. honours, his real views were set out in Dominic Behan's lively and gossipy *My Brother Brendan* (1965); "Ireland is a figment of the Anglo-Saxon imagination, her vices extolled as virtues and her glorious memory perpetuated by Boss Croker and Tammany Hall. Ireland is a lie."

What precisely does Carol Murphy mean when she refers to "the roots of the situation that kept him in prison for eight years"? Three of those years—the *Borstal Boy* period—were for jelly-

Rational Organisation of the World Economy

Peter Cadogan (letters, 1 July) is a good one to talk about *non sequiturs*! He says the Tudors overthrew feudalism in England, and Oliver Cromwell set up a standing army and in Russia, China and the U.S.A. the army is the state, and therefore World Government would be the ultimate disaster!

His "analysis" is a load of muddled mysticism! A little empiricism would be a good mental discipline and corrective for him.

What is the real "sin" of national sovereignty? Answer: if the world is divided up into nations, each nation has to be as strong as possible to prevent others pushing it about. And it has to secure the food, raw materials and economic resources it needs. This involves brainwashing its citizens to make them believe other nations are always wrong. So national sovereignty causes a tendency to war.

Under world government there would be no need to oppose other nations as we would all be the same nation. An intelligent share-out of economic resources and a rational organisation of the world economy would be possible.

"We need city-regional republics," says Mr. Cadogan. How lovely! Every time you travelled from London to Birmingham, or from Newcastle to Carlisle, or from Edinburgh to Glasgow, you'd have to carry a passport! Then certain city states would conquer others and we would be back to where we are now.

"Ah!" replies Mr. Cadogan, "But modern technology has rendered war an anachronism." It had done that in 1914 yet a war happened. But if we had Mr. Cadogan's idea of city-states modern technology would not stop war—because nobody would be able to afford modern technology! (And nobody would be able to afford a high standard of living either.) And if, as Peter Cadogan suggests, his system is to be put in force in Europe now, it would mean Europe would be conquered by the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.

Finally, Mr. Cadogan says that Derek Senior in his minority report to the Maud commission "does not draw these [i.e. Peter Cadogan's] conclusions." No wonder! I. S. Low.

World Government versus World Dictatorship

I can well understand Peter Cadogan's misgivings about the idea of world government. We all dislike governments of various kinds and the thought that there might one day be only one for all of us (and therefore nowhere to escape to if it turns nasty) is a disturbing one.

However, a world government will not necessarily turn into dictatorship if people keep their heads. (After all, in the last analysis, the only thing that prevents a British government from turning itself into a dictatorship is the fact that people keep their heads.) It is rather the present situation which will inevitably lead to a world dictatorship within a generation or two at the most—unless, of course, either World War III or an ecological catastrophe gets in first. If we manage to avoid these misfortunes, the arms race will go on uninterrupted, for there will be no authority capable of putting an end to it or of protecting any nation which is so misguided as to disarm.

The arms race, however, will not go on indefinitely. Sooner or later it will be won. This will happen in one of two ways. Either for economic or for technological reasons, first one, and then another, of the super-powers will be forced to drop out. It may happen through bankruptcy, as the rate of expenditure soars even higher. In the last two years, for example, world expenditure on arms increased by forty per cent, which is far more than the increase in gross world product. Not even the richest or most dedicated nation can stand such a pace for very long; the one that lasts longest will rule the world. Alternatively, one of the super-powers may discover what they are all frantically researching for: an unbeatable weapon (or defence) which can be developed and deployed before the others know about it. All that is then needed is a Berlin- or Cuba-type confrontation, a warning over the hot line of the consequences of opposition, and "Bob's your Uncle:" the herrenvolk have arrived.

When that happens—as it one day will—then we shall have a world dictatorship from which there will indeed be no escape and from which there can be no let-up. Even with the best will in the world (and which super-power can be credited with that?) the winning nation would have no option but to rule by terror and by torture, because it will be numerically far too weak to maintain its grip in any other way. They can never afford to relax for a moment. For if any region is left without surveillance, it might produce a new unbeatable weapon of its own. That is a risk the tyrants cannot afford to take.

The fact is that, in a world which has shrunk to the size of global village, we are going to have a world government soon anyway. The only question is whether we are going to act ourselves to establish a sensible form of elected world parliament which we can choose, control and, when necessary, kick out; or whether we prefer to sit around and wait until a government over which we have no control at all is imposed on us—for ever.

TONY MILLS.

Pornography: the Problem of Definition

Mr. Broom (letters, 1 July) says that I offer no definition of pornography, and believes that I am confusing the pornographic with the erotic. The implication is that, since definitions are difficult, there can be no satisfactory definition for the purposes of legal, or critical, discrimination. This is very largely the basis of much "progressive" opinion.

It is, indeed, very difficult to discriminate, and the work of Ken Russell is a case in point. In *The Music Lovers*, I am told, there is a scene in which a girl, sitting over a grating in a hospital yard, is brought to orgasm in her mother's presence by hideous deranged patients below. I believe that no overall creative purpose could possibly justify such an "acting out" of deranged primitive phantasies, any more than a "high moral purpose" of "exposing the Church" can justify zoom close-ups of men being burnt alive, nuns having their vaginas syringed, and the breaking of a priest on a frame. A very clever and subtle intellectual justification now offers to vindicate the indulgence in watching cruelty; this seems to me to be parallel to the justifications offered in the cruel old past for indulgence in collective acts of sadism and bestiality.

There is a very serious difficulty, discussed by George Steiner, over works of evident intellectual power, which are violent and pornographic. They are, in fact, morally worse than cheap and crude pornography, and we need to face up to this problem. There may be no doubt that Kubrick is a splendid film director. But a psychoanalyst contact tells me he thought the last film was a malicious and militant assault on human values, while a friend of his—a most liberal person—thought it should be "completely banned." There is certainly here a schism in our minds at large, which people must face up to.

I have not closed my mind to the possibility that I may be mistaken, as Mr. Broom suggests. On the contrary, I am trying to get liberal-progressive and "free-thinking" people to think. At the moment reviewers and journalists trot out a number of limited bromides: "there can be no definition;" "pornography has been shown to be harmless by the Danish experiment;" "there is no evidence that violence or sex on the screen is imitated" (a statement that is totally untrue—yet no journal will publish an article I am circulating drawing attention to such evidence). To help to change the climate, I am publishing soon a collection of essays by reputable thinkers called *The Case Against Pornography*. In this a number of people offer definitions. Roughly speaking, the gist of the definitions seems to be that while eroticism leads towards a deeper imaginative involvement with another person, as the object of one's love, pornography tends to deny the validity of "the other." It reduces people to things, and sex to a mechanical activity, negating the personality of "the other," and substituting for true bodily sensuality a mental excitement of rage and vengeful feelings. At the extremes, a film shot which shows a man's hand being placed on a girl's, in a situation in which we knew them both as people, and identified with them, could be immensely erotic. It could, through imaginative excitement, turn us towards our partners with renewed excitement, leading towards that shared ecstasy that belongs to meaningful love. By contrast, a film shot of a woman having sexual intercourse with a pig would be pornographic, because it debases both the act of sex, and the human person. Its effect would be to thrust a distaste between ourselves and our partners, and dehumanisation. There is surely no difficulty here?

The contributors to my book often suggest that the actual portrayal of sexual acts on the screen or stage is inevitably pornographic, because the audience is at once taken into the realm of participating voyeurism. This is destructive of the imagination, because it is an invasion of the subtle realm of creative perception, in which alone true erotic love can develop.

All this should prove food for freethinkers; and to me it belongs to a fundamental debate about the nature of man, and the value of culture. When culture becomes overwhelmed by nihilism and negation, I believe our attention to this destructive development is urgently called for, without blind resistance to any debate at all.

DAVID HOLBROOK.