

# The FREETHINKER

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## DECLINE IN BELIEF IN GOD

### —RESULTS OF BBC POLL

A poll conducted for the B.B.C. religious programme *Anno Domini* revealed on 13 October that only 29 per cent of the population of this country believes in a personal god. In 1963 a similar survey showed that 38 per cent believed in such a god. The 1974 poll went on to show that 42 per cent now go to church and another 11 per cent go less than once a year. There has been a marked increase in unbelief among young people. The churches correspondent of the *Guardian* described the survey as "almost an indictment of Britain's main denominations". Miss Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, commented that despite being clearly now a minority religion "Christianity still retains all its historical privileges". The results of this poll raise once again the question of the rightful place of religion in society and the effects of its hanging on to the means of indoctrination in the residual beliefs of the population.

#### Distribution within society

Besides the 29 per cent that believed in a personal god, 35 per cent said they believed in a spirit or life force (compared with 33 per cent in 1965). Only 6 per cent said they believed in no god or life force (9 per cent in 1963). There was a significant drop in those who believed in life after death—39 per cent as against 53 per cent in 1963. 35 per cent believed in no life after death (22 per cent in 1963). On both occasions about a quarter said they did not know.

The survey also showed up how religious belief is distributed within society. As is well known, women were shown to be more religious than men. More than half the women were willing to call themselves "very" or "fairly" religious, while the figure for men was just over a third. While only 15 per cent of women would describe themselves as "not at all religious" or were non-committal, 30 per cent of men were so-minded. More women than men (47 per cent against 29 per cent) also believed in life after death. Belief in life after death seems also to be related to socio-economic class with 45 per cent in classes AB and C1 believing, as against only 35 per cent in classes D and E.

One significant fact to emerge from the poll is the growth of unbelief among the young. A solid proportion of those aged sixteen to thirty-four expressed disinterest in religion. Indeed, one half of the non-believers were in this age group, and of those 40 per cent believed in no life after death (as compared with 35 per cent of the total sample). These findings belie the claims often made by religionists that there is a religious revival among the young. Again, although there appears to have been no growth in the total outright unbelief, there has been a significant decline in belief in a personal god, and an increase in those believing in some vague life force, but this lends no support to the extravagant claims that have been made by evangelists of late.

In fact, the survey seems to show that the majority of the population have had enough of organized religion, have had enough of their personal god and all his works. As the *Times* correspondent put it, "The national soul appears to have made a unilateral declaration of independence from

the churches". No less than 42 per cent of the respondents said they never went to church, while another 11 per cent went not more than once a year. Only 14 per cent went once a week. Now, the 1963 poll did not investigate church attendance. However, the *World Christian Handbook 1968* estimated regular church attendance at about 20 per cent. This decline can be seen from statistics put out by the Church of England, which claims some 60 per cent of the population of England to have been baptized into its ranks. Baptism into the Church of England is now accorded to less than half of all babies (511 per thousand in 1966, 466 in 1970). More significantly the number of confirmations in the Church of England has dropped from 156,583 in 1964 to 106,216 in 1972—and this despite the fact that nearly three-quarters of candidates for confirmation are under sixteen.

#### Religion largely irrelevant

It is clear, then, that whatever the population's lack of an atheistic outlook, the churches do not offer a practicable alternative. When it comes down to it, attendance at church and belief in a personal god are felt to be largely irrelevant. Disregard for the church in practical matters is clear from such things as the widespread use of contraceptives among Roman Catholics or the fact that in Glasgow where 30 per cent of the population is Catholic no less than 25 per cent of the patients referred for abortions are nominally Catholics. Cardinal Heenan clearly knew what he was talking about when he referred to Britain as a post-Christian country. Returning to the B.B.C. poll, it is interesting that when asked to whom they would turn when facing problems, only 10 per cent said they would seek a religious counsellor.

Now, it is worth posing the question, why it is that the beliefs of the population in this country are seemingly so out of step with their secular life-styles. Surely we have not become a nation of John Robinsons, having talked ourselves out of all the fundamental beliefs of Christianity while retaining a hollow religious pattern of thought and an empty religious turn of phrase? Rather the answer must be sought in the social and linguistic framework in which

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# NEWS

similar to the one under consideration in a society where religion occupies a very different position. It was stated in the *Church Times* recently by members of a British Council of Churches working party on religious conditions in Eastern Europe that they believed that there religious belief and church attendance were more widespread than in this country. However, one suspects that in Eastern Europe the answers to a pollster (authority figure eliciting what is believed to be socially expected response) would give a result heavily biased towards atheism. Freethinkers must find encouragement in the fact that the B.B.C. poll indicates an increasingly secularized way of life, but steel themselves for the task of urging that this be reflected in material life and institutions as well as in personal life styles, and hope that common sense will eventually draw the nation's beliefs into line with its way of life.

religion operates in this country.

On the one hand religion is so entrenched in the institutions of our society, that its effect is bound to be far greater on the population at large than the number of its active adherents would suggest to be likely. For eleven years all the nation's children are indoctrinated with religion compulsorily by law. For most of them their education is then curtailed before they are given the means to criticize what has been foisted on them, as it deserves. Now it so happens that the indoctrination is so blatant that it fails in its object of producing practising christians. But some of it rubs off and we are left with a population that has ingested sufficient religious pap to sustain a residual superstition. This is the enormous price that is paid for the scandal of religious instruction in school. This is backed up by the systematic propaganda put out by the broadcasting media, and by the populist opportunism of the press that lends credence to every charlatan and crank.

### Language of religion

This situation has had a profound effect on the language of religion. The word "religion" is so engrained as a good thing, that there is a strong force acting against its being discarded by an individual, even when he has decided personally to have nothing to do with religion, insofar as he has rejected its fundamental beliefs and has abandoned its institutions. And what is true of the word "religion" is even more so in the case of the word "christian". For so long "christian" has been synonymous with "good", and "christianity" with "morality", that one can find someone saying, "Oh yes, I'm a christian though, *of course*, I'm not religious", without any inkling of contradiction. This is the phenomenon that leads people to say they are in favour of religious education, when all they are asking for is for their kids to be given some notion of right and wrong. Again, when people reply in the affirmative to the question of whether they believe in a life force, one wonders whether they would reply so readily, if they were encouraged to examine the metaphysical implications of such a statement. Is it not possible that when they say they believe in a life force, all they are really saying is that they believe in the force of life, in life itself?

It is interesting to speculate as to the results of a poll

### ELECTION DIARY

It is repeatedly urged that this is a christian country and that so-called christian values have a particular place in our society (see the article "The Christian Conscience of Mr. Cordle" elsewhere in this issue). In one constituency the electors were given a chance to put a specifically christian candidate into parliament. In the Bassetlaw constituency (the area around Worksop) a politics and economics lecturer stood as a Christian Party candidate. His manifesto called for a theocracy in which only God is sovereign and all power is delegated thence. The idea of political salvation was dismissed and Jesus Christ put forward as the only answer. This would seem to be a prescription to await the second coming, and this was borne out by his proposition "that the State should not control economic life, education, the media, church life and people's normal activities". However, with typical christian sleight of hand he proceeded to call for an immediate freeze on prices, incomes and profits, and the setting up of a system of wages and prices courts. In the case of companies he proposed that shareholders, employees and consumers (how?) should have equal election rights to the boards of public companies and that every firm should have a legally constituted consumers' association. As an economics lecturer one would have thought he might have considered the implications for his proposals as there are over 15,000 public companies and nearly 600,000 private companies in Great Britain. The electors of Bassetlaw gave their view on both his religious stand and his political and economic judgement with a meagre 408 votes.

Elsewhere the electorate did not have the opportunity to demonstrate its indifference to religious issues. However, various religious pressure groups sought to discover which candidates shared their pre-occupations. With its usual disregard for the English language, the Order of Christian Unity mounted an election crusade against "cruelty laws", whatever they may be. Describing themselves as "moral moderates" (which if it means anything must surely mean being only half-hearted when it comes to morality) the O.C.U. sent a questionnaire to some 2,000 candidates. Some candidates, however, objected to the loaded, not to say offensive, nature of the questions: euthanasia

# AND NOTES

was described as "a merciless means of getting rid of the crippled and elderly"; divorce as "increasing broken homes, emotionally deprived children and innocent partners victimised".

The Nationwide Festival of Light also sought to establish the key election questions. They saw economic problems as secondary to their narrowly defined "moral" issues of impure television, contraception, abortion, euthanasia, legalized brothels, pornography. It would seem, however, that they are particularly active against sex education. They believe that what they call "education for marriage and parenthood" should be along traditional Judaeo-Christian lines, and that sex education should not be given in schools by organizations associated with the sale of contraceptives for profit. Presumably they are referring to the Family Planning Association, since firms such as the London Rubber Company have consistently declined to support organizations active in sex education. They also propose that it should be illegal to produce sex education material for children which shows things which would be criminal if done in public. One assumes their aim is to make sex education impossible, or do they propose that sex education material should show only copulating dogs—duly licensed and wearing leads?

The Salvation Army published its own manifesto in the *War Cry*. At the end of the manifesto you learnt that all the items in it were based on a string of biblical texts. Most of these were incomprehensible and seemed to have little to do with anything, let alone the social and political questions discussed in the manifesto. However, the one against racial and sexual discrimination was supported by Gal. 3: 26-8:

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Now leaving aside the question of the majority of the population who are certainly not "one in Christ Jesus", why did they select that policy and that text? Surely it was contemporary humanitarian considerations and not biblical or religious criteria that led them to do this, and not, say, pursue a policy of sexual discrimination based on 1 Cor. 11: 3, 7-9:

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is the husband . . . A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.)

The report of the Sexual Law Reform Society, which was featured in last month's *Freethinker*, was the subject of political concern for Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, the so-called National Viewers and Listeners Association incarnate (I will not say "made flesh"). She obtained assurances from all three main party leaders that the report would not become party policy, but only Mr. Heath stated his clear intention "to protect standards within our society". Mr. Wilson pertinently remarked that "Reports which have appeared in certain newspapers do not do full justice to it". Mrs. Whitehouse also expressed concern that

Lord Beaumont, Liberal Party chairman, was a member of the working party that worked on the report.

One of the most remarkable things of the election campaign was the emergence of the National Front as the fourth largest party in terms of numbers of candidates. Their aim, it seems, was to qualify for party political broadcasts and thereby get across to many more people than they ever could by public meetings or door-step contacts. The policy seems to have been a success as it appears they were delighted by the postal response they had. They have also been successful in their policy of appearing respectable by putting on immaculately ordered meetings and demonstrations, thereby characterizing their opponents as enemies of free speech. However, it is worth reminding ourselves that both their leaders, Tyndall and Webster, have been to prison for their fascist activities. There is no telling to what extent they have modified their former views and to what extent their present position is determined by opportunism. In any case, their policies of "Stop immigration, start repatriation", "House British people before immigrants", "Stop industrial disruption", "Get tough with criminals" all smack of a vicious authoritarianism. One fears that it is a point of view that will be increasingly attractive to a frustrated and insecure populace.

## UNBAPTIZED BABIES SPARED HELL

The Church of England recently decided that babies that die unbaptized do not go to hell. The report stated that the church had taught parents that they must take babies to be baptized as soon as possible. The report continued that much stress was laid on this and parents were made to feel guilty if this was not done. "There was real fear that the unbaptized baby would go to hell". The report admitted that this view was still prevalent today.

Miss Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, commented on the report during a lecture at the inaugural meeting of the Cambridge Humanist Society: "This doctrine, on which the Church laid great stress until recent years, caused untold anguish to the parents of babies who died without the sacrament. It is all very well in these less credulous times for the churches to wash their hands of the more obnoxious doctrines of the past, but nothing can absolve Christendom of all the human misery it caused over the centuries.

"To believe in an almighty being who allows all the suffering there is in the world (whether or not he also penalizes unbaptized babies after death) is sad; but to worship such a being is immoral."

## PUBLIC MEETING

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1  
FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER, 7.45 pm

EDWARD BLISHEN     G. N. DEODHEKAR  
PATRICIA KNIGHT     MARGARET McILROY

## CHURCH SCHOOL AND GHETTO SCHOOL

Chairman: BARBARA SMOKER  
Organized by the National Secular Society

# THE CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE OF MR. CORDLE

WILLIAM McILROY

British General Elections produce a rich assortment of fringe candidates ready to make most of the opportunity to trot out their hobby-horses. The chief qualification of these political aspirants—with rare exceptions—is the willingness to forfeit £150 in respect of lost deposits. Most of them are unknown outside the constituency and even there are forgotten soon after election day. And increasingly it is not the candidates but the pressure groups and individuals trying to influence the major contestants who bring light relief to the proceedings.

One such pesterer during the recent election campaign was the Marchioness of Lothian, a devout lady who presides over that esteemed body known as the Order of Christian Unity, members of which were described by the *Church Times* as “moral moderates” drawn mainly from the professions. Lady Lothian and her moderately moral supporters are greatly perturbed by legislation for social reforms that has been enacted recently and by the possibility that the nation’s classrooms may not always have to be used as part-time churches and chapels to meet the legal requirements of the Education Act. That and other fears were expressed by Lady Lothian who wrote to candidates proclaiming: “We urge all Christian citizens to use their vote at this election as a ‘cross for Christianity’.” But alas; as those noble sentiments were being penned by Lady Lothian, a real “cross for Christianity” was being prepared in the form of a Harris Poll survey which revealed yet another sharp decline in believers in the Christian deity.

## Minority church

Parliamentary candidates who read the correspondence columns of the *Daily Telegraph* on 8 October may have noticed an appeal “to all involved in this election to remember that they are seeking office in a Christian country”. This emanated from Mr. John Cordle, Conservative candidate (and now Member of Parliament) for Bournemouth East. If Mr. Cordle had relaxed from the rigours of electioneering (no great risk for a Conservative in Bournemouth) he may have found time to read a speech made by Canon John Taylor, Bishop Designate of Winchester, whose diocese will include Mr. Cordle’s constituency. Canon Taylor told the Church Missionary Society: “God is no longer ‘in the strong city’. Christendom has come to an end. Everywhere we are a minority church. We have to learn what it means to be a minority church”. This declaration was supported by a *Church of England Newspaper* editorial which stated with chilling candour: “Canon Taylor’s words . . . are not just rhetoric, intended, like a political speech, to jerk his listeners into awareness. They are true”. It is unlikely that such pronouncements, even from Anglican sources, would have convinced Mr. Cordle that Britain is not a Christian country in either a legal or social sense. He is made of sterner stuff than to allow himself to be confused by realities.

The president of the National Secular Society wrote immediately to the *Daily Telegraph*, pointing out that “Members of Parliament are elected to represent the wishes of their constituents, not to carry out the ideological dictates of a minority Church.” However, neither this letter nor those of several other leading Humanists who also wrote were published; the only letter to appear was in support of John Cordle.

Mr. Cordle is a staunch protagonist of that evangelical

myth known as the Christian conscience of the nation. One of his memorable triumphs for righteousness occurred in 1963 when, with true Christian charity, he put the boot into John Profumo, a fellow-Conservative and a former Minister, whose banishment from public life was one of the more unlovely manifestations in the 1960s of sanctimonious humbug, envy and priggishness.

## Affront to the Christian conscience

Mr. Profumo had rendered conscientious service to his party and the country, but he had also gone to bed on several occasions with an attractive young lady (behaviour hitherto unknown in politicians) and he lied to his colleagues in the House of Commons (where absolute truthfulness is observed at all times and in all circumstances). During the furore that followed, Mr. Profumo was bludgeoned by both the Right honourable gentlemen of his own party and the Left honourable gentlemen on the Opposition benches. His career in politics was ruined and the private anguish of the ex-War Minister and his family must have been almost insupportable. But such considerations did not deter Mr. Cordle, champion of the nation’s Christian conscience, from doing his Christian duty.

The opportunity came when Profumo, having been a Secretary of State, had to return his Seals of office to the Queen. It was announced that, in accordance with the customary practice, the Seals would be returned by Mr. Profumo personally. Up spake the gallant Mr. Cordle in tones reminiscent of Pecksniff and Pooter: “I was appalled to hear that our beloved Queen should be so wrongly advised as to give an audience on Tuesday next to the former Minister of the Crown, who has proved himself so untrustworthy and at last made public admission of his guilt. It seems to me surely an affront to the Christian conscience of the nation at a time when standards in public life need to be maintained at the highest level. I am absolutely staggered”. Some newspapers, having picked the carcass clean, fell on this extra tit-bit and in order to prevent the Queen becoming involved in the controversy, Mr. Profumo, with a dignity and sensitivity that somehow eludes the Cordles of this world, asked to be excused the traditional audience and the Seals were sent by messenger.

## Wisdom and compassion

The Queen is head of the Church of England, but any ideas she held about the Christian conscience of the nation were tempered by wisdom and compassion seldom found in Christians of John Cordle’s ilk. She wrote to Mr. Profumo thanking him for his work as a Minister in her Governments and expressing sorrow that his public career had ended in such unhappy circumstances.

Mr. Cordle was safely returned to Westminster on 10 October, so the Order of Christian Unity, Festival of Light, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and the National Viewers’ and Listeners’ Association can be assured that there is a stout defender of the Christian conscience of the nation in the House of Commons. And Mr. Cordle can rely on the support of at least one of his colleagues. When it was announced that the Reverend Ian Paisley had been returned again by the moderate majority in North Antrim, a large crowd of electors sang fervently, *Praise God From Whom all Blessings Flow*.

Poor old God!

# TO EXIST: RIGHT OR DUTY?

GEOFFREY WEBSTER

It is remarkable (and characteristically human) how frequently we use phrases without reflecting upon what they really and essentially mean, particularly when we are discussing, with suitable and much-advertised seriousness, topics like "Freedom", "Rights", "Democracy", to name but three. Nowhere is this more immediately obvious than in our employment of the phrase "right to exist". However we may differ on economic, political, sexual, philosophical matters (the list could extend to the sun), we all bow our intellects (the humanistic equivalent of genuflection) when this phrase "right to exist" is uttered. In an age when sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists have demonstrated, beyond a shadow of a reasonable doubt, how man is determined by social and cultural environment (thus dealing a death blow to any form of "innate ideas" theory), we still regard the "right" to exist (and its assumed corollary, "reverence for life") as the foundation of civilization, something which civilization presupposes, without which it is inconceivable.

## Tyranny, not right

In this century, we have witnessed the liquidation of millions of innocent folk in the ghastly death-camps of Hitlerian Germany—thus, it is sometimes difficult for us to think clearly, systematically and objectively about the "right" of men to exist, since we choose to think that any questioning of this fundamental principle will lead to infanticide in the case of the physically and mentally crippled, compulsory (as distinguished from voluntary) euthanasia for the aged. However, bearing all this in mind, I shall try, in the remainder of this article, to show, coolly and undramatically, that there is no such objective reality as a "right" to exist, how this concept can be a form of tyranny in the case of suffering individuals who are compelled to go on living by an unsympathetic society, and how, basically, this idea is an intellectual and moral "hang-over" from religion—in which we are obliged to accept life (irrespective of the conditions under which it is presently available) as the gift of God.

When the average man uses this phrase ("the right to exist"), it is to be understood that what he means is this, "I want to go on living, I have no objection to others occupying the planet with me, as long as we are all decent, law-abiding folk." Thus (and I defy anyone to disprove the contention), it can be shown that a desire for life precedes a "right" to life, that the universal assumption of an objective entitlement to exist until the time of death is merely a way of making more philosophically respectable, man's desire (not necessarily instinctive) to eat, sleep, mate—be. Therefore, this impressive phrase is simply and solely a result of a particular form of animal life possessing intellect (man) deciding, albeit almost automatically, that he has no desire to terminate his existence, but leaves that to "Mother" (!) Nature. Of course, it is rarely asked by the ordinary person whether existence is really desirable or "necessary", but that is a little mischievous, trying thus to introduce into the mind of Joe Smith "artificial" doubts about life.

Let us look at this from a slightly different angle. If man has a "right" to exist, who confers this right? Dismissing the laughable answer "God", we can only reply "Well, uh, man himself, I suppose." So, the desire to exist has a limited validity, since it is only the product of a limited, fallible being, who is prejudiced in his own existential favour precisely because he exists. Similarly (a point con-

veniently overlooked by all religious and most humanistic thinkers), a "right" to exist is practically indistinguishable from a duty, obligation or requirement if it is not balanced by the alternative—an incontestable right not to exist, which has no more to be qualified by circumstances than does the hypothetical right to exist. For example, ignoring the case where a physically and psychologically healthy, care-free person terminates their life through lack of inclination to continue, let us consider cases such as children born handicapped, physically and mentally. Suppose (just suppose) some of these people, in later life, curse the day they were born, what will be society's response? Certainly, society respected their "right" to continue their burdensome little lives, but it will dismiss as neurotic and unjustified their lamentation about enduring in a crippled body or clouded mind. So much for the "right" to exist being *chosen!*

Also, what are we to make of the case of elderly folk, "imprisoned" (experientially speaking) in deteriorating, unresponsive bodies, perhaps kept technically alive in some geriatric ward, where an expressed desire for death would probably be described as "senile ramblings"—what finer and more sickening example could one have of the right to existence becoming an iron compulsion, from which the only release (often after years of long, tearful and tormented waiting) is the merciful oblivion of democratic death, by which all beings are equally entitled to the right to . . . cease? Let me emphasize the above-mentioned point: if we are required to exist by others, there can be no "right" to existence, much less reverence for life; a right can either be exercised or not, as (to take a simple example) with our right to make occasionally an anonymous mark on a piece of paper—voting. Now, if we voters were forced, at gunpoint, to register a vote, this would not be "exercising a democratic right". By analogy, there can be no such thing as a right to exist until it be acknowledged, without moralizing and the predictable, sanctimonious hysteria of the religious, that we have an equal right not to exist. Otherwise, talk on our freedom to exist just becomes hypocrisy and nothing else.

## Fear of the universe

On religion and this attitude of gratitude towards Nature for her unsolicited presentation of the priceless gift of respiration and consciousness of ourselves and the world (life), it does not need to be established (since it is self-evident) that all religion is based on fear of the universe (quite understandable, when you see the universe!), a desire for companionship other than that of fellow-men, a feeling that the world and all therein has been "under-written" (and thus guaranteed, validated) by intelligent supernatural forces, escapism—to mention but a few "causes" of religion. Now, since religion states categorically that we do not exist apart from the will of God, and since the will of God, being inscrutable, is obviously (!) benevolent and paternal, it follows from this that life possesses an inestimable intrinsic value (almost independently of those who must endure it, according to religious thought), and we must not only transmit this wonderful gift to our children—propagate the species—but must also experience within ourselves reverence for the Great Power (God to the Theist, Nature to the Pantheist) that has brought us forth from nothingness—where, if we are a little fond of baiting the orthodox, we could say we would have been more happy to remain. However, it is clear from what religious

people say that we should not be so churlishly ungrateful as to suggest that, if life is negative or miserable, we just courteously return it to our Creator. On the contrary (on your knees, serfs!) we must reverence the indefinable "essence" of life (produced in God's celestial scintillating factory), which is incomparably more important and spiritually valuable than you and I, its mere "vessels".

### Unbalanced mind

But we have liberated ourselves from credulity and superstition, say the massed secularists of the country. Have you? If so, why is it that suicide is still regarded as the result of an unbalanced mind, why is it (assuming the country is not populated by actual sadists and gloaters over human misery) that there is still no legislation providing for voluntary euthanasia in this country? How ironic that a country where healthy dogs, cats, Tommy the Hamster, can be "put to sleep" unquestioningly makes no provision whatsoever for man, who is supposed to be superior to (thus, presumably more susceptible to suffering than!) our animal kin. Compulsory euthanasia for those who enjoy their little lives, not even the hope of voluntary euthanasia for the human aged, incurably ill and the like. If (*per impossibile*) there were anything in the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation, I would recommend that my readers endeavour to gain rebirth as a domestic pet in this country: you will thus be entitled to more compassion than if you are a mere human being.

I am not by any means suggesting that we do not "reverence" life or question anyone's "right" to existence. What I am saying is that reverence for life must not degenerate into an impersonal concern for "Life" as an abstraction. We must feel compassion and concern for individual beings, human and animal, not puppets animated

by some mysterious "Vital Principle". Similarly, if a person wishes to exist and suffer on the planet until Death taps him or her on the shoulder, well and good. But let us bear in mind that we have our origin choicelessly, in what is only a momentary genital exhilaration of our progenitors, and that, consequently, since our "necessary" existence began in a virtually fortuitous event, there can be no question of it being "necessary" to anyone besides ourselves, it being our personal decision whether we elect to join our ancestors in Non-Being. Thus, if society is to progress in the short time remaining to it on this ravaged planet, it must become concerned to recognize this simple point: if we choose to assume men are entitled to live (which rests on nothing objectively demonstrable), they are also entitled to question existential conditions and, if they think fit, discontinue that which began without their consent anyway. I do not see why treating each person we see as an individual rather than "a member of the human race" should be in any way destructive of that compassion and fellow feeling which alone deserves our respect as an absolute, morally speaking. The time has come for humanity to cease from cringing before the universe, feeling that abject submission (whether in the name of "religion" or "progress") is incumbent upon it.

Let me close by mentioning a remarkable custom of the ancient Thracians, who appear to have recognized something about the nature of life our sophisticated and superficial age does not. When a child was born to them, they lamented, understanding that the only right that being would have would be the right to suffer (perhaps they practised infanticide). However, when a person departed this life (it is reasonable to assume they did not disapprove of suicide), there was feasting and jubilation. Someone had attained release from the pain of life.

## FREUD, SELF CENSORSHIP AND NUDES JEAN STRAKER

The last words of the first essay in Sigmund Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* are as follows:

Besides the simple forgetting of proper names there is another forgetting which is motivated by repression.

This observation concludes a self-analysis of an example of his own forgetfulness which Freud had previously used in 1918 in an earlier short essay on the *Psychic Mechanism of Forgetfulness*.

### Vivid realism

In re-remembering his own loss of memory, and taking it as a starting point for further discussion, he says: —

I vainly strove to recall the name of the master who made the imposing frescos of the Last Judgment in the dome of Orvieto. Instead of the lost name, *Signorelli*, two other names of artists — *Botticelli* and *Boltraffio* — obtruded themselves, names which my judgment immediately and definitely rejected as being incorrect.

The occasion was a conversation with a stranger in a carriage during a journey from Ragusa, in Dalmatia, to a station in Herzegovina; he had asked his travelling companion if he had been to Orvieto and had seen there the famous frescos of . . . ? And the name of the artist had escaped his memory.

The fresco cycle in Orvieto Cathedral, which had been started by Fra Angelico in 1447, and which Signorelli was

commissioned to complete in 1499, is described by Peter and Linda Murray, in their Dictionary of Art and Artists, as follows: —

The frescos depict with vivid realism the End of the World, the Coming and Fall of Antichrist, and the Last Judgment. Signorelli's gifts as a draftsman are fully revealed in the sharp foreshortenings of the figures, their strained poses, the illusionistic perspective, the hardness of outline, and the imaginative power with which, for example, he peoples Hell, not with pathetically grotesque creatures half-beast, half-fantasy, but with vigorous muscular devils, passionately engaged in fiendish cruelties and entirely human in form, though with the hideous colour of rotting flesh. His use of the nude figure for dramatic ends, his interest in classical antiquity, and his terribilita presage, and influenced, Michelangelo.

Luca Signorelli had been born about 400 years before Freud, at a time when the sack of Constantinople was bringing to an end the dominion of the Eastern Empire; it was an age in which humanism was giving to the minds of men, and to some only for a short time, a right to perceive not only the secular authority of pre-Christian thought but also the first-hand observation of personal discovery; this was a time of rebirth and newlook, and from the visual art of this time, which Freud had seen for himself, and remembered, there was projected into the visual experience of the crusading Viennese Jew a freedom to explore the emotions in terms of human postural nudity, and which was, in itself, the focus of three

forces, the classical ideal, the formal reality and the ethos of the times.

It was a vision from a time when there was no dichotomy between art and science, no separation or antagonism between what you feel and what you say, no censorship on man's right to observe, enquire, sense and communicate without limit.

It is the particular quality and value of the artist in society to absorb and restate in the context of his time and place the totality of his experience in terms of personal originality; it is for this reason that the artist in any society which is heavily authoritarian becomes either in service or an outcast, and when in service will betray either by formula repetition, or by subtle perversion, such conflict as he may have with the ethos of his masters.

In remembering the Orvieto *Last Judgment* Freud would certainly have known that within a few years Michelangelo would feel the strain of the Reformation in the shrouding of human impression and expression.

The remnant of that Catholicism in the Ostmark that was to persist until the outbreak of the 1914 war had maintained a cultural ethos that gave to Viennese art the unreal quality of a state baroque amalgam of renaissance, gothic and byzantine influences, framed by court and bureaucratic nonchange, and tempered only by a degree of eighteenth century liberalism that gave to the young Jew his right to education; in such an environment an unorthodox freethinking scientist might feel a sense of strain in the containment of his thoughts, the frustrations of his feelings and the barriers to his visual curiosity imposed by an authority whose power was more pretence than real, whose ethos was evanescent.

### Separation of science and literature

In his monograph on *Freud and the Crisis in our Culture* delivered to the New York Psychoanalytical Institute in 1935, Lionel Trilling said:—

By the middle of the nineteenth century the separation between science and literature had become complete, and an antagonism develops between them, and while it is indeed true that Freud based his scientific interest on the humanities, he is, above all else, a scientist. He was reared in the ethos of the nineteenth century physical sciences, which was as rigorous and jealous as a professional ethos can possibly be, and he found in that ethos the heroism which he always looked for in men, in groups and in himself. He did not set out with the intention of becoming himself a humanist or of finding support for his scientific ideas in whatever authority humanism might have. And if, when we have examined his achievement, we cannot pronounce him as one of the very greatest humanistic minds, we cannot yet say of him that he was in the least a literary mind.

The dichotomy which isolated the affective and cognitive disciples from each other would have appeared to a Jew in nineteenth-century Vienna as but another aspect of the overall régime-protecting policy which had fragmented the wholeness of human society into isolated non-communicating elements. If the ethos of nineteenth century science infused the young Freud with a sense of strain that he found absent in the fifteenth century humanism that he perceived in the Orvieto frescos, a feeling which ran parallel in his mind with stories of Turkish sexual licence, it may well be that it was this same sense of strain that he was to feel again in the ethos of the thirties, when deterministic authority re-emerged in the shape of Hitler, and made then of the scientific Jew and would-be humanist, a pragmatist and an outsider.

As he took to his heels and to America he would have remembered Mark Twain's horror in 1898 when he des-

cribed the deputies in the Viennese parliament as:—

princes, counts, barons, priests, mechanics, labourers, lawyers, physicians, professors, merchants, bankers, shopkeepers — all religious men, earnest, sincere, devoted — and they hate the Jews.

He would also have remembered Cardinal Bellarmine's retort to Galileo that the scientist's facts had pragmatic value, but that did not mean that they were truths: and above all he would have remembered what Signorelli said to him through those Orvieto frescos, that the universal human truths were in the natural responses of the body to its emotions, and that the fiendish cruelties of the devil are expressed in human action; he would have sensed that just as with the Reformation humanism was suppressed, so again, would art and science and truth be in service.

### Motive for forgetfulness

He had shown in the self-analysis of his own forgetfulness not only a pre-occupation with the formal values of words, which he substitutes for a confessed unease at revealing the picture values of the words, but also within those formal values, the very motive for the forgetfulness. He plays with the word-name *Signorelli*, rejects the '*Signor*' part, which he equates with the German '*Herr*' (English '*Sir*'), and transfers the '*elli*' part to *Botticelli*. He does this subconsciously because he says that it would have been embarrassing to relate to a comparative stranger an anecdote to the effect that the Turks valued sexual pleasures above all else, in which occurred the words: "For you know, *Sir*, (*Herr*) if that ceases, life no longer has any charms."

The visual memory of the Orvieto frescos with their humanistic nudity, the quick association in the mind with Turkish sexuality, the immediate sense that perhaps his travelling companion would find in his anecdotes another example of a Jewish attempt to undermine Christian morals and the authority of the Ostmark — could this have been the substance of the self-censor that kicked *Signorelli* into limbo, and produced in place a face-saving non-controversial *Botticelli* to smoothe the passage?

### Environmental censorship

If the environmental censorship of an authoritarian culture imposes on each subject a fear of saying the wrong things and saying things in the wrong way, it may by this means condition the artist, graphic, literary or audio, as well as the scientist and the layman to censor himself, lest he inadvertently respond in a way that his masters, or his conditioned equals, would disapprove of. Such self-censorship appears to be so effective where there is strong authority that the motivation for the repression of thought becomes lost in the depths of the unconscious; and where authority is not quite so strong, it is not quite so effective as to censor completely the etch of memory.

In his essay on determinism Freud says:—

I believe that a large portion of the mythological conception of the world which reaches far into the most modern religions is nothing but a psychology projected into the outer world. The dim perception (the endo-physic perception, as it were) of psychic factors and relations of the unconscious was taken as a modern model in the construction of a transcendental reality, which is destined to be changed again by science into psychology of the unconscious.

One must thus wonder to what extent the forms of the nudes in the mythological visions of the master of Orvieto so fixed themselves in the mind of Freud as to make a flash of fifteenth century humanism illuminate and fire the whole challenge of twentieth century psychoanalysis.

# THE WAR IN HEAVEN

R. J. CONDON

Th' infernal Serpent; he it was whose guile,  
 Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived  
 The mother of mankind, what time his pride  
 Had cast him out from heav'n, with all his host  
 Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring  
 To set himself in glory above his peers,  
 He trusted to have equalled the Most High,  
 If he opposed; and with ambitious aim  
 Against the throne and monarchy of God  
 Raised impious war in heav'n and battle proud  
 With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power  
 Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky  
 With hideous ruin and combustion down  
 To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
 In adamant chains and penal fire  
 Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to arms.

Thus John Milton, in his great Puritan epic *Paradise Lost*, introduces the subject of the War in Heaven. So much of the poem—the greater part of six of its twelve books—is occupied with the theme that it is somewhat surprising to find so little material about it in the Bible. Apart from a few stray references, all we have in the New Testament is Revelation 12:7-9:

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Satan's rebellion against God has a solitary and equally brief mention in the Old Testament. Isaiah 14:12-15 reads:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou has said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

The legend of the War in Heaven was widely diffused in the ancient world. According to Hindu mythology, a legion of evil spirits called Rakshasas fought desperate battles with Indra and his spirits of light, and would have taken Paradise by storm had not Brahma intervened.

A similar story was related by the Persians. As S. Baring-Gould tells it:

Ahriman, the devil, was not created evil by the eternal one, but he became evil by revolting against his will. The revolt resulted in a 'war in heaven'. In this war the Iveds (good angels) fought against the Divs (rebellious ones) headed by Ahriman, and flung the conquered into Douzakh or hell.  
*(Legends of the Patriarchs)*

R. J. CONDON

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(foreword by Barbara Smoker)

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Among the Greeks the tradition took the form of the struggle of the Titans against Jupiter, when Titan and all his rebellious host were cast out of heaven and imprisoned in the dark abyss of Tartarus. The ancient Mexicans also had a tale of war in heaven, with the downfall of the rebel angels.

A Babylonian version of the legend has been deciphered by H. Fox Talbot from a cuneiform tablet in the British Museum. The opening lines are illegible, but they probably refer to a heavenly festival of praise at which certain dissidents were present. The legible portion starts with the Divine Being announcing the commencement of a psalm, whereupon:

With a loud cry of contempt they broke up his holy song spoiling, confusing, confounding his hymn of praise. The god of the bright crown with a wish to summon his adherents sounded a trumpet blast which would wake the dead, which to those rebel angels prohibited return, he stopped their service, and sent them to the gods who were his enemies. In their room he created mankind.

Though not mentioned, a struggle may be inferred, for a few lines further on we read of "the malice of those gods who deserted their allegiance to raise a rebellion".

### Bible silent

It will be noted that mankind are here said to have been created to take the place of the ungrateful angels. As to this the Bible is silent, but the belief was held by the medieval Church, although it never became an authorized doctrine. It also finds a place in Book 7 of *Paradise Lost*, where God says of Satan:

But lest his heart exalt him in the harm  
 Already done, to have dispeopled heav'n  
 My damage fondly deemed, I can repair  
 That detriment, if such it be to lose  
 Self-lost, and in a moment will create  
 Another world, out of one man a race  
 Of men innumerable, there to dwell  
 Not here, till by degrees of merit raised  
 They open to themselves at length the way  
 Up hither . . .

Egyptian mythology preserves both the original uncorrupted account of the War in Heaven and its elucidation in terms of natural phenomena. The great battle was fought between Horus as Har-Makhu, the sun-god of the eastern and western horizons, and the devil Set as the Apap-dragon of darkness and winter, who at sunrise at the vernal equinox was hurled down from the eastern horizon with all his angels or fiends called the Sebau. At the equinox days and nights are of equal length, the forces of light and darkness are balanced, and the sun-god is at the point of gaining the mastery over his enemy. The equinox, as a natural balance, was symbolized by the Makhu, the Balance or scales of justice erected on the horizon for the trial of the defeated host of evil. Some of the details may be gathered from the Book of the Dead. Chapter 17 has: ". . . concerning the night of the battle, these words refer to the inroad of the children of impotent revolt into the eastern part of heaven, whereupon there arose a battle in heaven and in all the earth." A little later there is a reference to "the two arms of the Balance on the night of reckoning destruction."

In chapter 18 we read of "the night of the battle . . . the night of the shackling of the Sebau fiends . . . the shackling of the Sebau fiends signifieth the destruction of the fiends of Set . . .". The destruction of the Sebau, as



an incident in an annual cycle of astronomical events, could not have been permanent. Six months later night and day would have again been equally balanced, but the advantage would have been with the god of darkness. This is the eternal struggle between summer and winter, whose fortunes change at the equinoxes.

As Har-Makhu, Horus is Lord of the Double Horizon, the Equinox and the Balance, for Makhu signifies all of these. The Hebrew equivalent of Har is El, while Makhu is very close to the Hebrew Mikha, Mikha-el, or Michael in Greek and English, is said to mean Like the Lord, but it could as well be rendered Lord of the Like—the Equal or Balance. Here, it is suggested, is the origin of the archangel Michael, who represents Har Makhu as the commander of God's army in the Christian version of the War in Heaven. Michael holding the scales of judgement is a common scene in medieval church mural paintings. In Christian art he binds Satan with chains, and he raises the sword of victory over the dragon, on whom he treads. St. George of England is but a form of Michael or Horus. Revelation 20:1-3 has an angel, Michael or one of his aides, binding Satan, shutting him up and putting a seal upon him. The imagery is again Egyptian, for it is Horus who fetters Set, "and thereby is Set put in into his place of restraint" (Book of the Dead, chapters 86 and 108). In his Christian guise Har-Makhu is still Lord of one equinox, for Michaelmas, the Feast of St. Michael on 29 September, is one of the "quarter days", a sufficient indication of its equinoctial significance.

In both Testaments the annual triumph of the sun-god at the vernal equinox is projected forward as eschatology,

or prophecy of the Last Things, for by analogy the astronomical battle resulting in a temporary restoration of world order must have its counterpart in a final war to usher in God's Day of Judgement. The prophetic books of the Old Testament see the adversaries of God in this "war to end wars" as the heathen oppressors of Israel constituting the army of the Prince of Darkness. God himself is to come with his heavenly legions and fight on behalf of his chosen people. To the Essenes of Dead Sea Scrolls fame the war was so imminent that they drew up a detailed plan of campaign, "The War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness", in which it was taken for granted that men and angels would be fighting side by side.

Revelation 16:14-16 foretells "the battle of that great day of God Almighty" when all the rulers of the earth will be gathered "together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon". The Revised Version has Har-Magedon, which is close enough to Har-Makhu to indicate a probable derivation. It has been suggested that Har-Magedon refers to the Palestinian hill-fort of Megiddo. This could well have had its name from the heavenly battlefield of Makhu, for Megiddo overlooks the great plain of Esdraelon, a natural arena in which many wars were fought with Egyptian and other invaders.

Har-Makhu and Set fought the war of Har-Magedon in the Egyptian mythology and continue it as Michael and Satan in the Christian. Whether viewed as a future human conflict or as an annually recurring astronomical event, the final battle can come only where Revelation places it, at the end of the world.

## HUMANIST POLICY ON R.E.: A REPLY HARRY STOPES-ROE

Freethought should be fair thought and realistic. Imputing bad motives to those who disagree is not helpful—and nor is quoting works published eight years ago, in a field which moves as fast as has R.E. over the last decade. Neither Pat Knight nor Michael Lloyd-Jones (August *Freethinker*) has responded adequately to the present opportunity and challenge.

I want in this reply to focus particularly on realism. Various factors conspire to make a radical change in the law a real possibility. Success requires three things: that we make the right proposals for the new law; that we understand how all those people think who are likely to be influential, and what moves them; that we present our point of view effectively to these people. As to the change of law, we could aim for an amending Act that does one of three things:

- (1) To outlaw all religious education in state schools.
- (2) To control anything that may be done in this area, requiring it to be educationally valid.
- (3) To repeal the present law on the matter, and do no more.

The third is the weakest. It implies no radical change in the present situation, and leaves R.E. teachers in unrestricted control. Naturally there is much support for this possibility among R.E. teachers; it is difficult to see why Pat Knight prefers it. The first alternative is clearly quite impracticable. It seems to me that we must adopt the second, and take great care that our conceptions have a strictly educational basis.

This leads us to the need to understand what has been and is going on. Certainly we must bear in mind that the proponents of religion, who also seek to face the Humanist position and to be educational, have very deep personal

problems. In my short article in the July *Freethinker* I tried to indicate a few of the basic academic points, however. I am discussing the matter at somewhat greater length in forthcoming issues of the *New Humanist*. It seems to me that the fundamental requirement is that work in schools shall be fair and balanced over all the answers to so-called "ultimate questions", including the "answer" that the questions were wrongly put in the first place. How can the R.E. people have the face to say "no" to this? How can we be so egocentric as to ask for anything other than fair treatment?

If we ignore the case that can be made for some treatment (at a suitable stage in the pupil's development) of fundamental questions about the nature of man, his place in the universe and his relation to other men, we will (quite rightly) be written off as narrow bigots. We must be positive, not negative. Certainly I reject the idea that there should be a special slot for religion, and that teachers should be required to have a special sympathy for religion. But "fair and balanced" must be our aim. It is eccentric of Michael Lloyd-Jones to call this "unilateral disarmament". If teachers are required to have sympathy and insight, then it must be bestowed equally upon the secular view, as well as on the religious. Incidentally, I think there is much more support than Pat Knight realizes for the abolition of the Act of Worship. We stand a good chance of getting rid of that. As I said, we must be sensitive to the movements of opinion with which we are interacting.

Finally, we must win support. Dialogue within the National Council for Religious Education is by no means a solution, but it is one particular opportunity for us to influence influential people. There are many others, and we must take them all. I agree with Pat Knight that the

Social Morality Council document of four and a half years ago did not take us very far; but it has a very real historical significance. Things have moved since then. We are today in a very much better position. One help is the clearly articulated concept of a "stance for living", which has already proved its worth in Birmingham. (If anyone can suggest a better term to express the conception, that would be a great help.) The contrast between religious education and education in stances for living is precise and clear, and brings out just the points required: the range of discussion is stances for living (religious and secular together) not religions—and the whole must be treated fairly. If we can get these points established in an amending Act, then we will have a basis for transforming the scene in the schools. We will achieve this, however, only by the adequacy of our own understanding, and the effectiveness with which we use every opportunity to present it. Our power will depend more on the clarity and justice of our position than on our numerical strength.

# REVIEWS

## BOOKS

**IN DEFENCE OF ECONOMIC GROWTH** by Wilfred Beckerman. Cape, £3.95.

It's only quite recently that people in this country have stopped feeling so guilty about Britain's economic growth. Years at the bottom of the growth league table, and years of denunciation by assorted politicians of our sloth, indolence and torpor, have made us almost welcome the thunderings of environmentalists that economic growth was actually a Bad Thing, and would perforce have to stop for all manner of social, ecological and physical reasons. Let the Germans and Japanese poison and pollute themselves into an early grave: we in Britain might be lazy and inefficient, but we would at least survive.

Now along comes Professor Beckerman to shatter this cosy retreat into decline in a book positively crackling with vigour and wit. His book is a celebration of reason and moderation and will therefore have a smaller audience than it deserves in this intolerant age. Read it if, like me, you feel a simple pleasure from seeing popular myths demolished, Right and Left; and read it if you want a forceful demonstration of the power of economic analysis, uncontaminated by ideology, to make sense of an important issue of our times: the extent to which economic growth is either necessary or desirable in the so-called age of affluence and (impending?) age of shortages. And, finally, read it if you feel, as I do, some sympathy with the doomsters; you will be treated to one of the sanest and most level-headed (if sometimes slightly impatient) discussions of the pollution problem I have yet seen.

The peculiar contribution made by the economist to public debate is, I suppose, the concept of opportunity cost: this piece of jargon simply means that you can't have more of one thing without giving up some of another, and put like that amounts to nothing more than the apparently trivial proposition that a rational choice of policy in a situation of uncertainty depends on some assessment of relative costs and benefits (but try telling that to an ardent

environmentalist who would have us revert to the medieval three-field system to secure our survival). So to choose economic growth implies some surrender of present consumption to put aside resources for investment; not to spend now implies being able to spend more in the future; and to switch resources into environment-protecting measures now means giving up some current consumption (or perhaps some investment in machinery and plant which would increase output and hence consumption in the future). Every choice, therefore, has a cost. The interesting question is thus how to decide what sort of cost must be paid to improve the environment, and discussion of various tax and subsidy policies to achieve this objective takes a big chunk of the book. Behind this lies an assumption which may appear large: that there is an optimum amount of pollution at which the benefit to be gained by reducing pollution by a given amount would just equal the social costs of doing so—that is, the cost to society in foregone production of the resources allocated to the environment. Now an extreme environmentalist, accustomed to posing the problem in stark colours—"survival or else"—will not take kindly to a calm analysis of the marginal changes in the pattern of output required to reduce pollution to acceptable levels. But it is hard not to be impressed with Beckerman's admirably numerate discussion of this issue, and harder still not to come to terms with the undoubted success of a good many pollution policies to date. Nor should one forget the great absorptive capacity of the environment: man's pollutants are pretty small beer compared with the immense cleansing forces of nature.

But what of the evils of modern urban society, such as too many cars on the roads, too much noise, stress, strain and the rest: are not these by-products of growth? Not so, insists Beckerman: they are evidence of what the jargon calls resource misallocation, not to be confused with economic growth itself. Motorists do not, for instance, pay the full social costs of their decision to opt for private rather than public transport, and therefore a misallocation of resources takes place: too many cars and not enough buses, trains and tubes. All this, however, is not "caused" by growth: it is rather the consequence of the misuse of the fruits of growth. Economic growth itself is neutral: neither good nor bad. What matters is the use made of growth: for whom and of what are the right questions to ask.

Another hatchet job which Beckerman performs with obvious relish is that on the silly idea that growth is some sort of nasty capitalist trick to persuade us to buy a lot of useless goods we don't want. This depends on a highly dubious distinction between natural or innate wants on the one hand and manufactured wants on the other: there is no difference for most goods. And on the question of raw materials and other resources drying up, Beckerman satirically observes that the world has managed to survive very well so far without any supplies at all of Beckermanium, a commodity that his great-grandfather failed to discover in the nineteenth century; the point is, of course, that as commodities such as oil eventually dry up, their price tends to increase, which makes prospecting for new supplies or developing substitutes more and more attractive. Beckerman, perhaps overstating his case, doesn't anticipate any serious problem over raw materials for maybe several million years: by which time, he thinks, we may have thought of something.

One note in this cascade of polemics I found sour. Beckerman actively dislikes the middle class. He reckons that much of the anti-growth crusade springs from the fear of the middle classes that their hard-earned privileges and status will be swept away by mass affluence. Think, for

example, of those rather snobbish residents of Cornwall who don't want tourists from the north and midlands to drive their cars all over the county and turn the whole place (as they see it) into a vast tourist trap. Beckerman approves of Anthony Crosland's warning that those enjoying an above average income should be chary of warning others of the dangers of increased wealth. A good point: one tends to forget that for many people the problem of the environment is not so much polluted rivers or vulgarized countryside: it is one of bad schools, inadequate housing, and noisy factories, all of which need growth to do away with them. Yet at a time when traditional middle-class virtues of thrift, hard work, respect for people and property are all under attack, Professor Beckerman's rather shrill denigration of the middle class sticks out like a sore thumb from an otherwise beautifully considered and sensible book. Otherwise, strongly recommended.

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

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**THE TRIAL OF RUTH ELLIS** by Jonathan Goodman and Patrick Pringle. David and Charles, £3.50.

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Jonathan Goodman, who wrote so splendidly *The Killing of Julia Wallace* and expertly edited a book on the Moors Case, *The Trial of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley*, has now collaborated with Patrick Pringle to introduce and edit one of the most sensational murder cases since the last war, *The Trial of Ruth Ellis*. Mrs. Ellis it will be recalled was the last woman to be hanged in England and for this fact alone her "fame" in legal history is assured.

There were all too many baffling features to the case at the time, 1955, and although the work of Goodman and Pringle is instructive, informed and absorbing in its detailed Introduction to the Trial itself, there must surely be another book about the woman in the case when so many of the characters in the netherworld she inhabited—"odd people" they were called by counsel at the trial—are no longer alive or still vulnerable. For all the facts to be disclosed, as they will in time, would appear to be as engaging as any of those juicy pieces of journalism with which the readers of the pop press of its day were "fed" as their staple diet for so many weeks both before and after the trial itself. Both authors are admirable "investigators", to coin that bit of journalese certain Sunday papers are constantly using when referring to their own staff journalists on the track of a "story" that has to be made into a mystery (which it rarely is) in order to make it hotter and thus more palatable reading for those who get their kicks out of the aberrations of others. Not that Ruth had many aberrations. Or, if she did have them, they were kept decently under cover. The same cannot be said of her "friends", many of whom turned out to be her enemies. It is about the latter that the Introduction is most concerned and it is made clear that the most remarkable facts about the case cannot, at this juncture, be made clearer. But the "homework" performed by the editors, extensive and intensive at the same time, has unearthed fully authenticated documents and facts. A bare recital of the main events in the tale that led to the arrest, trial, verdict, controversy surrounding the case and judgement, and finally the execution, will serve to remind us what it was all about.

On Easter Sunday 1955, Mrs. Ruth Ellis shot to death her lover, a racing car driver named David Blakely, outside a Hampstead public house, The Magdala. There was no question about the shooting nor who fired the gun and

despite the unsparing efforts of her legal advisers to secure a reprieve Ruth was executed on the morning of 13 July. The relationship between the lovers had been sordid and stormy and it is dealt with in depth. Copious appendices set out the arguments that raged at the time, for and against the execution, while several of the illustrations including letters written by Ruth, and the post mortem report after the hanging, appear for the first time. At least one major novel, *My Mother Was Hanged*, was inspired by the case, and a compelling novel (and film) *Yield to the Night*, was said to be based upon the Ruth Ellis story. It has been dealt with by some of the leading criminologists in the land; Edgar Lustgarten was one of those who regretted the hanging of Mrs. Ellis, principally because it opened the door to the abolitionist lobby and did, perhaps, more to remove the death penalty than any crime of murder in our time. There were others who felt differently. Raymond Chandler, a case in point, was both fascinated and repelled by what he regarded as a glaring miscarriage of justice. And yet the woman herself made no attempt to fight for her life, throughout the short trial which ended by lunchtime on the second day.

Ruth, the daughter of a Belgian mother and a Manxman father, came to London from Rhyl in North Wales as a young girl, and after a succession of jobs as a photographer's model, dance band singer, waitress in a West End cafe and finally "hostess" and manageress at a tiny drinking club in Knightsbridge (where she was to meet Blakely and the witness, Cussen, with both of whom she lived intermittently in the months immediately preceding the shooting) made world headlines. How much bigger those headlines would have been had the general public been in possession of the full facts, it is not difficult to imagine. If there are still those who believe, because of conflicting evidence, that Wallace—of the Liverpool murder case, about which Mr. Goodman has also written—was guilty (despite the evidence gathered over the last half century that proves the contrary), then Ruth Ellis was guilty also. But the disquieting features of her case, now backed by cast iron evidence, emerge. The drugs, the drink, the hard life and efforts to support her baby (son of a French Canadian father in the army who returned quickly to Montreal, leaving Ruth with a small bouquet of flowers to mark the occasion of the new arrival and wiping his hands of the whole affaire); the tattiness of it all is revealed now for the first time. A score of years ago, because of the difficulties in conducting a defence for a client who wanted to die, the trial itself had become a non-event. There were many rumours and much whispering both at home and abroad, but despite her bill matter "Beautiful Ruth Ellis: the last woman to be hanged" some facts established in this now celebrated trial were never published and rarely shouted out loud. Coincidences as well. For now we know for the first time that the dead man's father had little over twenty-one years previously, in 1934, been charged with the murder of his mistress—an ex-waitress, whom he had made pregnant. He was acquitted. Ruth, who had also been at various times a waitress, was made pregnant by the same man's son at the end of 1953, only a short time after they had started living together. She was to say at her trial that she got out of the mess at her own expense. And twelve months later she suffered a miscarriage, and a fortnight after that shot her lover who had deserted her. She was unlucky was Ruth. Unlucky with Blakely, the playboy. Unlucky with Mr. Neilson from Canada, who was deeply religious and kissed the girl goodbye in haste, in order to get back to his deeply religious wife. Ruth's mother was also a devout Roman Catholic, and when she heard that her daughter's lover had a wife, she hurried him out of

the country with more thought for Mother Church than for Daughter Ruth. Like that other unfortunate who perished on the gallows, Edith Thompson, Ruth Ellis was twenty-eight, and like Edith she had a younger lover; one who was to be described later by the novelist, F. Tennyson Jesse, as "a lamentable specimen of humanity". But neither this description nor frantic appeals to the then Home Secretary, backed by public meetings (I attended one myself at the Central Hall, Westminster, and recall on the platform Michael Foot, Christopher Hollis, Gilbert Harding, Montgomery Hyde and the late Beverley Baxter; the atmosphere was electric) saved the day. A few months later Ruth's crime was to be known as "diminished responsibility", for example in cases of *crime passionel*. Last days and nights before execution were spent reading the Bible (a fact well publicized), seeing her lawyers and refusing to appeal, all in the belief that she was going to see Blakely again and deserved to die. But not even this cherished conviction and the graphic description of the religious "laying out" of the corpse after execution and post mortem, when the brother was compelled to identify the body—a macabre scene with candles, crucifixes and the rest, if ever there was one—could prevent Truth leaking out finally, and here we have it: the text of a statement made by Ruth to her solicitors, less than twenty-four hours before she was hanged, in which she revealed that a man, whom she named, had given her the gun, driven her out for firing practice, plied her with Pernod, and finally taken her to the place where she was to kill Blakely. Had this fact, above all others, been made public at that late hour, it seems highly unlikely that she could have been hanged. But there were other facts that could have displaced the scores of rumours abounding; evidence that was never followed up sufficiently by the authorities during the precious hours before Ruth died, although her solicitors Mishcon and Simmons never ceased trying. But "Hanging criminals is the favourite sport of the English", wrote de Muralt in 1694; and in 1955:

Shortly before 9 a.m. on 13 July, the headmaster of a school in Middlesex saw four of his boys standing still on the playground. One held a watch.

"Only four more minutes", the child said; "One . . . two . . . three . . . four—she's had it boys!" "Not only was Ruth Ellis hanged today", wrote another teacher, whose school was near Holloway Gaol, "but hundreds of children were a little corrupted".

Poor Ruth Ellis had indeed had it. And so had the British public—for the time being. But the end of that story, as well as Ruth's, has still to be written.

PETER COTES.

## THEATRE

**THE GREAT CAPER** by Ken Campbell. The Royal Court Theatre.

"Disfunction" is the first word of this play and, from the point where Eugene Grimley is struck by some inexplicable trauma into a trance on an underground platform, nothing functions as you would expect in this crazy romp.

In the course of a labyrinthine plot, which travels from bedsitterland to a sun-soaked cafe in Tel Aviv and ends for baffling reasons in Lapland, Ken Campbell cocks a

snook at as many a trendy cult or fashion as he can. The dottiest of religious cults and sci-fi fantasies surround the characters hovering with a significance or galactic pattern which never becomes quite clear. Does Eugene possess the sperm which will produce a new Messiah? Will the quest for the Perfect Woman be assisted by the bottle of perfume which falls from the trousers of the Perfectly Costumed Man? Will the message which Jeremy Bathurst, Hare Krishna devotee from the North of England via India, provide the missing link? When the ideal Woman—Diana, of course—appears, why does she quickly dematerialize and then re-appear as a were-wolf in a lunatic asylum run by nuns in Lapland? Are the craziest of us tuned into the best vibrations or people from the future lost in a time warp? Is God a psychiatrist using earth as a gigantic experimental laboratory?

Don't expect to find all the answers if you go to this play but simply a trip through endless puzzles and mystifications. Warren Mitchell, as Ion Alexis Will, gave an energetic performance (I particularly enjoyed seeing him prancing around the stage displaying his baboon's arse and genitals) and Richard O'Callaghan, as the bemused Grimley, gave a delightful performance of bewildered enjoyment. The play has considerable verbal energy, which for my money began to flag about two-thirds of the way through, though some of the visual effects towards the end were very impressive. But humour which needs to rely too often on ferrets and farts begins to suggest a paucity of invention.

The main weakness, I felt, was the fear of slipping into anything serious: any serious hint at a valid point required an immediate intellectual double-take. For instance, Stu Lyons's speech about our all living in high-rise polluted battery-rearing blocks (spoken with some feeling by Ken Campbell himself) seemed to have passion behind it, but was distanced by being seen as the ravings of a paranoid pamphleteer. The recurring ice-skates perhaps suggested the precariousness with which we skate over reality, but that is a fairly trite point. The main thesis I take to be a kind of celebration of lunacy, a eulogy to the clowns of the universe; but if we are all crazy the play demonstrates that some are much crazier than others.

JIM HERRICK

**SUMMERFOLK** by Maxim Gorky. The Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre.

**THE FREEWAY** by Peter Nichols. The National Theatre Company at the Old Vic Theatre.

Gorky's *Summerfolk* written in 1904 would seem in many ways to be like the work of his contemporary, Chekhov. Gorky was a far more socially committed writer, angrier, more concerned with content, less with style.

The summerfolk of the play's title are a cross section of the intelligentsia, who having left behind childhood poverty spend their summers in hired villas writing, putting on plays, indulging in love affairs and petty jealousies. The play has an idle insouciant beginning, but gathers momentum as the characters become more and more disenchanted with each other, with themselves, with their way of life. As the play draws to its explosive conclusion, these dilettanti realize how empty their lives are, and how, by their effete-ness, they have betrayed the poor.

In this production by David Jones, the team work of the cast is superb, and individual performances are memorable. Estelle Kohler plays a young woman, Varvara, who

## LETTERS

## Religion and existence

I read, with considerable interest and basic sympathy, Mr. Stubb's letter in the September *Freethinker*. May I be permitted a brief but, I trust, relevant, reply?

I find that the statement "In other words, Life and Living are the real religion" a somewhat misleading, not to say irresponsible one. The vast majority of animal species are instinctively determined, which means that their behaviour is somewhat impersonal and automatic. If this predisposition to react in certain ways is to be sanctified (descriptively) as "religious", this is merely a deification of instinct, not a logical definition of what (if anything) constitutes "religion".

Man has "picked a quarrel" with a purely mechanical approach to life—admitting we are subordinate to the universe, susceptible to so many sorts of suffering, we do yet possess a little more freedom, in choice of existential response, than the average animal. But, instead of attributing the birth of "human" religion to this desire for "... the Intangible aspect of Life", may I suggest to Mr. Stubbs, admitting I may be totally mistaken, that all religion has one source only—fear? Primitive men experienced that the material world was a remorseless, frequently "capricious" place, in which they seemed so vulnerable, so fundamentally powerless. Consequently, this state of affairs led to the first tentative attempts at a "religious" response to the world—an attempt to rationalize their ontological anxiety, an attempt (understandable yet utterly pathetic) to demonstrate that the world was governed by, grounded in, "values" that were objectively real. So, the formulation of creeds—a God, who is Absolute Reason, Love and so on, he is the Cause of it all, the director of everything, he (if no-one else) knows all the answers we puny mortals desperately and persistently ask about life.

As to the idea of "... there is no going back", it should be borne in mind by the more "spiritually"-minded humanists that the human race is under no *obligation* to continue on this planet, and that, in the event of the discontinuance of the race (through whatever cause), we don't know whether life would recommence again or not. As to this idea of our species having to "... be got quickly to the point where it was implicitly going"—if this means a return to "the religion of the blood", for want of a more expressive phrase, may I suggest that we demolish every factory, office, shop and building on this planet, abandon language, thought, politics, dress, and then find just how exhilarating and fulfilling this purely natural and "religious" mode of life is?

And does it not, perhaps, occur to Mr. Stubbs that mankind may be the saviour of this planet in a manner that has never occurred to him—namely, human consciousness being more objectively aware of the miserable nature of life than animals, it is through a planetary resolve that we could achieve the consummation of the evolutionary process—the total discontinuance of mankind and all other life (or, if you prefer it, just mankind), thus liberating life from the anguish of existence? Incredible as this idea may sound, it was, in point of fact, enthusiastically advocated by the German thinker, Eduard Von Hartmann, as early as the sixth decade of the nineteenth century, in his work *Philosophy of the Unconscious*. As life is basically alogical, suffering predominates—as evolution leads to an increasing development of rational mentality, the final task of global rationality will be consciously to abolish existence, preferring the painlessness of oblivion to the stress, folly and sorrow of existence. This may sound absurd, but could this be the aim of the "religious impulse" in man, perhaps, Mr. Stubbs? The desire for union with the "Infinite Nothingness"? True immortality as eternal nullity?

GEOFFREY WEBSTER.

## HERETIC CARDS

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feels imprisoned by the shallow, idle people around her. She tries to maintain a severe exterior and to guide others with her strength, but the rancour and pain at last come to the surface—a totally believable and very moving performance.

Mike Gwilym plays Varvara's brother, Vlass, with a sort of consumptive vitality. Vlass plays the fool, but this is clearly an attempt to mask and contain the force of his own feelings. He declares his love for Maria, a rather austere woman doctor, old enough to be his mother. Maria is beautifully played by Margaret Tyzack—ruthless honesty and a desire for tenderness battling within her.

There is a striking, and typically controlled, performance from Ian Richardson as Shalimov, a writer with whom Varvara had once been infatuated. Shalimov has now lost contact with the people for whom he is writing, has abandoned his ideals. There is a deadness behind Richardson's eyes, a glassy aloofness about his dandified appearance and toneless voice. His life is fuelled by loneliness.

Another writer out of touch with reality is Kaleria, brusquely played with wild-eyed astringency by Susan Fleetwood. Kaleria directs her spinster's frustration into the writing of embarrassingly turgid poetry. Miss Fleetwood fuses comedy and pathos in her interpretation. Sebastian Shaw is lovable and refreshing as an unselfconscious eccentric. This very fine production should not be missed.

*The Freeway* is the weakest play I have seen by the author of *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* and *The National Health*. It is still very diverting, and shrewdly observed. It is set in the future, possible fifteen years on, when England has become a great car park and the carless are classed with the disabled and geriatric. The action, or rather inaction, of the play takes place on the approach road to The Freeway, which has reduced today's motorways to the status of country lanes. The traffic is at a standstill as a result of the activities of a group of latter-day Luddites.

We meet the occupants of three vehicles, who are forced to share three days of immobile hardship. They would not normally have met socially. An ebullient peer and his tweedy mother, a car worker promoted to foreman, whose most prized possession is his Motorhome, and the family of the manager of a Junkerama. Nichols presents different lifestyles, different attitudes to adversity—but with the common factor that nobody seems aware of the absurdity of the situation. There is some harmless political debate, harmless jokes and amicable characterization.

The situation is resolved by the marooned drivers being instructed by loudspeakers to abandon their vehicles and start the long trek home: "Operation Dunkirk" is set in motion. The Minister for Movement, reminiscent of a 1960's skit of a Tory politician, visits the scene in the course of one of his walkabouts and arranges that the peer and his mother leave with dignity. They ascend, *deus ex machina*, to an awaiting helicopter, smiling and waving beautifully to the detritus beneath.

This ludicrous situation is the very embodiment of our affluent democracy, in which the right to own a car is all. People like these caricatures in Nichols's play really do exist, and culture is in many ways as plastic and soulless as the synthetic pleasures of these people. There is an element of menace in the play, but it is quickly suppressed. Death has lost its sting, and the character who has remained in touch with nature does not have much contact with us, although he has the last word.

This is an amusing play rich in "quotable quotes", but it lacks bite in this first production by Jonathan Miller. Paul Rogers and Graham Crowden acquit themselves well as the car worker and the peer.

VERA LUSTIG

## R.I. or a scientific ethic

When R.I. in schools is finally abolished and the conflicting moralities of the numerous religious sects, based largely on tradition, indoctrination and human suggestibility, are no longer effective, it will eventually be necessary to create a new ethics based on the testable theories of science.

Already, on the scant evidence known to me, I am beginning to wonder if all that exists is mutually involved in a process of continuous evolution (? creation) in order to survive, and that Man may have an important part to play in this process.

Regardless of whether there is any truth in this highly speculative theory, the scientific study of evolution is of great importance and already one point seems to me to be well authenticated, namely that if the higher, more complicated species, are to survive, their members must contain among them individuals with a wide variety of different abilities, so that there are always some able to adapt themselves to any important change in the environment of the species.

Therefore I think that one of the aims of a scientific ethics would be to encourage human variations (except those which were obviously harmful).

On the physical side I would expect that a scientific ethic would provide better protection against the misuse of human suggestibility and gullibility.

Human suggestibility is, of course, only one of the many factors that determine exactly what any particular individual believes, how strongly he believes, whether he changes his beliefs, and consequently how he behaves and what his ethics are. As the doctrine of "freedom of worship" works today, it seems unlikely that present ideological conflicts can be rapidly reduced, since every religion is allowed complete autonomy and is free to develop its own dogmas, to indoctrinate children and to use almost any methods it wishes to induce people to believe its dogmas and to continue to adhere to them. In our country some traditional religious sectarian schools are now almost completely subsidized out of public funds. Here, it seems to me, is a matter in which more control (censorship?) might well benefit human beings.

Children need some external control of their ideas and behaviour, but they should certainly not, in my view, be indoctrinated with the basic ideology of any particular religious sect, political party or other organized group. They should rather be taught how to guard themselves against the misuse of their natural credulity and be helped to obtain self-control and to develop gradually the basic ideology best suited to their own particular natures and circumstances.

Reason is perhaps the most recent and the most valuable of Man's achievements. It is largely dependent on the art of language and its highest expression is, I think, in scientific method. But the quality and quantity of reasoning ability varies greatly in different individuals and, as a means of controlling his thinking and behaviour, is generally greatly overpowered by other earlier control mechanisms. Man has reflexes, senses, instincts, emotions, intuitions and other methods. These, I think, should all be exercised, regulated and satisfied without excessive conflict if an individual is to be as happy, healthy and valuable a member of society as possible. It is here that the various arts have their essential integrative function. The actual practice of art is, perhaps, the most effective means for producing a balanced individual, when the individual has the necessary ability, but observation of art is also needed, and observation alone can be very effective. I would include recreation among the arts.

G. F. WESTCOTT.

## Symbolism and semantic blunder

R. Stubbs (September, letters) poses the question why Man should be the only form of life that practises religion.

The simple answer is that Man is unique in having developed language and culture—religion, being an element of culture, has nothing to do with animals "doing their own thing". Other creatures—lacking an educational imperative and a complex symbolism—do not inherit and perpetuate the accumulated errors of the past. Nor do they, in consequence, concern themselves with "occultic legends of lost continents, interplanetary miscegenation, psychic powers and so on" (Antony Milne, September letters).

Other creatures are without religion because not having reached the heights of Man's achievement they could not possibly accompany him in his fall. In other words, the symbolic arts have first to be acquired before they can be corrupted.

"... 'pass it on', and what a parody comes out at the end" (Margaret Knight quoting Phyllis Graham, September reviews).

BRIAN KHAN.

## Freethoughts on the paranormal

After reading Barbara Smoker's August Book Review of *Uri Geller* I decided to wait a while, and note the reaction (if any) of the readers before writing my first letter to you.

I am disappointed that Mr. Antony A. Milne's letter was the only one printed, and I am in agreement with him that the humanist movement is in danger of becoming enslaved by intolerance and dogma, especially when dealing with the paranormal and other phenomena.

If humanists are really going to be accepted as genuine freethinkers we must be more ready to examine all phenomena, be it the claims of Mr. Uri Geller, or the existence of UFOs, with the open mind that many leading scientists are doing today and not be afraid to admit that our approach to these subjects may have been wrong in the past.

It would seem to me that there is ample evidence that some people do possess powers that are not fully understood by us and to dismiss their claims without proper investigation is not only unfair but short sighted, as open-minded investigators are realizing; and whose findings could uncover a greater understanding of man and the world in which he lives. Once the occult is stripped of its supernatural trappings.

J. A. SUNTER.

*Barbara Smoker comments:* To strip the occult of its supernatural trappings would surely be like stripping sugar of its sweetness. I see no more reason to retain an "open mind" as to Uri Geller's "powers" than those of any other conjurer—especially as I happen to know that Uri used to subscribe to an American magicians' journal, and I also have a shrewd idea how two of his tricks are done. On the other hand, I would welcome an open-minded investigation by Mr. Sunter into the objective existence of a colony of invisible fairies who, I am convinced, have recently taken up residence on my window-sill.

B. S.

## Occultic powers dismissed

With reference to Antony A. Milne's letter (September), as I find it impossible to believe that any individual possesses occultic powers, I unashamedly dismiss out of hand any evidence to the contrary; I simply believe that all those who make such claims are either frauds or self-deluded. I am, however, in favour of the evidence being presented in order that it can be scientifically investigated and reported on. If I am wrong, and it could be shown that certain individuals may, in fact, possess powers that could fairly be described as occultic and magical (and not just put down to latent human powers as yet undiscovered by most of us), then as a humanist should I feel not somewhat disturbed? Surely it would imply the beginning of a further step in evolution and the creation of a new master race that would treat us humans in the same way that we ourselves treat the lower species—and possibly with a same lack of reverence for life as such, that many of us still show them?

H. A. GURNEY.

## Opinion and fact

It seems that Walter Connolly (letter, September) does accept a subjective/objective difference between an "opinion" and a "fact". It is surely a purely subjective matter whether an "opinion" is an "honest" one. I would agree that in the selection of facts there is a subjective side—but that does not mean the selection is necessarily "dishonest" or the facts selected are "lies". (Incidentally, the assertions in Mr. Connolly's letter seem to me to lack factual "specificity"—"unconscious victims of the Press . . . indeed!) I would suggest that a fact can be offered as being "true in itself" without it being a "lie". The point is, surely, that even in the "relating" of facts, the assertion of each fact is, nevertheless, the assertion of a fact as a "fact in itself".

Honestly, I wonder whether Mr. Connolly is not arguing for the denial of free speech to anyone who holds a political, ideological or any other sort of opinion.

CHARLES BYASS.

## President Ford on America's atheists

Toward the close of an address on 12 August of this year before a joint session of both houses of Congress President Ford declared that he would be President of all the people of the United States of America, including atheists. He then added the qualifying phrase "if there really are any atheists after what we have all been through".

Well, I am an atheist, and I have been an atheist throughout my sixty-four years as an adult. And neither Watergate nor any other tragic happening in this country has ever shaken my conviction that no God of any kind exists. Indeed, Mr. Ford's phrase as quoted above is a *nonsequitur* that makes no sense.

His phrase as to this nation's atheists is, in truth, an irresponsible belittlement of the many distinguished scientists, philosophers, and other eminent persons, living or dead, after whose names must be written the word atheist. In fact, the phrase, though it was

apparently uttered by him with some degree of good humor, clearly indicates Mr. Ford is of the opinion, an opinion demonstrably false, that God-believers in general are superior to the generality of atheists in intellect or in learning, or in both.

The use of that phrase places Mr. Ford in the same category as those pious persons, some of them prominent and influential, who will not admit the sufficiently obvious fact that such great natural evils as death-dealing earthquakes, storms, and floods, carnivorous animals, and bodily maladies that kill with protracted agony, combine powerfully to support the atheistic postulate that there is no being or power to which the name God could appropriately be applied.

In conclusion, I take the liberty of suggesting that Mr. Ford acquaints himself with the basic arguments for atheism. An excellent "starter" for this purpose would be Robert G. Ingersoll's eloquently logical and factual public lectures titled "The Gods" and "What Is Religion?", each of which is forthrightly atheistic. The first of these may be read in volume one, the second in volume four, in the Dresden edition of Ingersoll's published works, the second one having been delivered by him only six months before he died.

ROBERT H. SCOTT.  
(U.S.A.)

### Scottish Fascism?

Mr. Mulholland makes another attempt (letters, September) in his devious endeavours to discredit and suppress freedom of discussion. His only specific point concerning me relates to the French Communist, Louis Althusser.

As I have shown in my August letter, Althusser must be held fully responsible for the text of the Glossary to his book, which he went through and corrected "line by line" and down to "matters of detail", and to which he expressly, and without qualification, refers his readers on his very first page.

Whether we take the Glossary into account or not, or refer to Althusser's "announcement" or to his "words", it remains an incontrovertible fact, repeatedly asserted by Althusser himself, that this professional Communist Party philosopher holds that "one can and must speak openly of *Marx's theoretical anti-humanism*". (For *Marx*, page 229).

My April letter has succeeded in drawing attention to this accurate piece of information and to what is doubtless a highly relevant topic for freethinkers and humanists. But what Mr. Mulholland is evidently seeking to achieve is the suppression of my writings, and this leads him to make sweeping generalizations which he does not even try to substantiate and which are just utterly worthless slanders.

JUDEX.

### Begrudged right

Mr. Mullholland has now grudgingly admitted my right to express my views; but he's still trying to prevent Judex enjoying the same right—by suggesting Judex's writings won't bring in money. There's nothing sinister in Judex using 230 words to answer one of Mr. Mullholland's arguments. Judex's reply about Althusser is reasonable—on the evidence supplied by Judex (and not contradicted by Mr. Mullholland) Althusser must have approved the words in question and perhaps wrote them himself, since he made interpolations. Mr. Mullholland's (September) comment on this point is simply a repetition of his original argument which Judex had answered (and Mr. Mullholland says he's against repetition!)

Mr. Mullholland says he's not interested in world issues like Marxism and World Government because they don't affect his country (so he thinks) and then boasts he's a great cosmopolitan. (For his information I know lots of Scots). With true Nationalist head-in-sandulence he says we might be ready for World Government in the twenty-first century. We need it now. If it wasn't for the Nationalist outlook held by people like Mr. Mullholland we could have it now too. And it's time that "nations are necessary for internationalism" quibble was nailed. First, we need world government, not internationalism. Second, each new independent nation brings another lot of generals, diplomats and so on with vested interests against World Government and increases the tensions caused by national sovereignty. Thirdly, by Mr. Mullholland's argument, every region and town and village should have national independence: is he going to give the Scottish Highlands, The Orkneys and Shetlands, Galloway, Skye, and the rest national independence?

The second paragraph of Mr. Connolly's September letter is a beautiful piece of muddled meaninglessness. He says "If an honest opinion" is not a lie who is to declare it "honest"? Evidently he thinks only lies are honest—is that why he's a Marxist? He and other Marxists keep on about lies and say "Free speech should not be equated with the right to lie and cheat". Who do

they say is lying and when? On the only occasion I can remember when there was evidence that someone was lying in *The Freethinker* the Someone was a Marxist.

"Why should the Left help the Dominant Right?" demands (in effect) Mr. Connolly. In 1848 and thereabouts the capitalists might equally well have accused Karl Marx of helping the Dominant Right—the Landed Aristocracy and Absolute Monarchy.

I. S. Low.

### No continuity

Judex in his letter (September) in condemning the Stalinist regime in the 1930s and 1950s says that this proves a continuity from 1917. I don't think this is so: after all, both Lenin and Trotsky were extremely worried as long ago as 1918 about the bureaucracy creeping into the Communist Party. Lenin, in particular, had no illusions about Stalin, because he warned the C.P. about him in the famous suppressed statement. After his death the Left Opposition in the Russian Communist Party, led by Trotsky, fought against Stalinist irregularities for years until Trotsky's expulsion from Russia. The terror started in real earnest after the purge trials of the 1930s when the dominant group in the R.C.P. led by Stalin were able to eliminate their Leninist opponents.

J. H. MORTEN.

### Marxist religion

Mr. Ross (Letters, August) is quite right in pointing out that Mr. Sloan's belief in Marxism is a religious one.

The difference between a scientific accepted theory and a religious dogmatism is not simply a subjective one of truth or error but is determined by the fact that a scientific theory no matter how widely held permits of dissent.

As Mr. Sloan points out, the roundness of the earth is generally accepted in scientific circles but scientists do not find it necessary to execute flat-earthers let alone to imprison those who dare to suggest that the earth might be slightly flattened at the poles.

Can Mr. Sloan tell us of any part of the Russian Empire where freethinkers may openly question the basic dogmas of the Marxist religion?

G. DALTON.

### Vaccination greater damage

In reply to Miss Smoker, I wish to point out that vaccination is never "the lesser of two evils".

For example, the most flagrant example is vaccination against smallpox. Dr. Creighton who studied cowpox (which Jenner asserted was smallpox of the cow), smallpox and vaccination first hand, stated. "The real affinity of cowpox is not to the smallpox but to the greatpox. The vaccinal roseola is not only very like the syphilitic roseola, but it means the same sort of thing. The vaccinal ulcer of everyday practice is, to all intents and purposes, a chancre".

His verdict was, "The antivaccinists are those who have found some motive for scrutinizing the evidence, generally the very human motive of vaccinal injuries or fatalities in their own families or in those of their neighbours. Whatever their motive, they have scrutinized the evidence to some purpose; they have mastered nearly the whole case; they have knocked the bottom out of a grotesque superstition".

What are the facts? In 1870-2 with about 90 per cent of the population "protected" by vaccination or a previous attack of smallpox there were 44,000 deaths. Over 14,000 children were under five years old. In Prussia, in 1871-2 after 35 years of compulsory vaccination there were 124,978 smallpox deaths. During the Gloucester epidemic of 1895-6 there were 1,979 cases, 1,211 of them had been vaccinated. Of the latter, 29 were malignant and they all died, 223 were confluent smallpox and 99 died, a total of 252 of the worst cases and 99 deaths, giving a case mortality rate of 39.3 per cent. Prior to the quack Jenner, the case mortality rate was 15 to 18 per cent. The first case of smallpox was in a vaccinated person and from May to September 1895 not a single unvaccinated person caught the disease. It spread entirely among the vaccinated. At last it reached the insanitary schools and the first person to be attacked in them was a young vaccinated teacher.

During that epidemic over 9,000 unvaccinated children passed through it unscathed. Out of the 1,979 cases about 1,750 occurred in the insanitary half of Gloucester. The moral is obvious. Good sanitation, not vaccination, eliminates smallpox. Inoculation of diseased matter is fundamentally wrong. The great scientist, A. R. Wallace, said it was "because it did not recognise that a condition of health is the one and only protection we require against all kinds of disease, and that to put any product of disease whatever into the blood of a really healthy person is to create a danger far greater than the disease itself".

SIDNEY NEWTON.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL (telephone: 01-272 1266). Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the N.S.S.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Company, 698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

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.

Humanist Counselling Service, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG; telephone 01-937 2341 (for confidential advice on your personal problems—whatever they are).

London Secular Group (outdoor meetings). *Thursdays*, 12.30—2 p.m. at Tower Hill; *Sundays*, 3—7 p.m. at Marble Arch. (*The Freethinker* and other literature on sale.)

The Pagan Carols Restored. These are the original folk-songs before indoctrination. 50p. Norman Isles, 381 Marine Road, Morecambe, Lancs.

## EVENTS

Amnesty International, Collegiate Theatre, 25 Gordon Street, London WC1. Sunday 17 November, 2.30 p.m.: "Torture, Politics, and Prisoners of Conscience"—a theatrical documentary/poetry concert/exhibition. Tickets £1 (students 40p) from Amnesty, 55 Theobalds Road, London WC1, or London University Student Union, Malet Street, London WC1.

Brentwood Humanist Society, Old House Arts Centre, Shenfield Road, Brentwood. Thursday 14 November, 8 p.m.: PETER CADOGAN, "Free Speech in a Democracy". Thursday 28 November, 8 p.m.: CHARLES WILSHAW, "Voluntary Euthanasia".

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Imperial Centre Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday 3 November, 5.30 p.m.: MADELEIN SIMMS, "Abortion Law". Saturday 16 November: Annual Dinner (details from Hon. Secretary, 142 Western Road, Hurstpierpoint, Sussex).

Croydon Humanist Society, Study Room, Central Library, Katharine Street, Croydon. Wednesday 20 November, 8 p.m.: ANTHONY CHAPMAN, "Charity Laws—A Need for Change".

Eastbourne Humanist Group, Committee Room, Central Library, Grove Road, Eastbourne. Tuesday 12 November, 7.30 p.m.: Major M. GOULDEN, "The Work of the Marriage Guidance Council".

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday 3 November, 7.30 p.m.: Elder LESTER, "The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints". Sunday 17 November, 7.30 p.m.: GEOFFREY HOLLIDAY, "The Modern Catholic Church".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tuesday 5 November, 7.30 p.m.: 56th Conway Memorial Lecture, Professor ERNEST GELLNER, "Options of Belief" (admission 10p). *Sunday Meetings*, 11 a.m.: 3 November, HECTOR HAWTON, "The Religious Humanism of A. N. Whitehead"; 10 November, RICHARD CLEMENTS, "Charles Lamb, Essayist and Agnostic"; 17 November, HAROLD BLACKHAM, "Can Morals Be Taught?"; 24 November, Sir HERMANN BONDI, "Humanism and the Scientist". *Sunday Forums*, 3 p.m.: 10 November, COLIN HINES, "Population Explosion?"; 24 November, "The Normal Neurotic". *Tuesday Discussions*, 7 p.m. (admission 10p): 12 November, SATISH KUMAR, "The Green Revolution?" (joint meeting with the London School of Non-Violence); 19 November, HUGH SHARMAN, "Why We Must Develop North Sea Oil"; 26 November, ROBERT WALLER, "Man and Nature".

West Glamorgan Humanist Group, Friends' Meeting House Annexe, Page Street, Swansea. Friday 29 November, 7.30 p.m.: HARRY STOPES-ROE, "Religious Education".

Worthing Humanist Group, Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing. Sunday 24 November, 5.30 p.m.: RASHEED AZAM, "The Fundamentals of Islamic Faith".

## PUBLICATIONS

TITLE	AUTHOR	Price	Post
The Jesus Hoax (Hard cover)	Phyllis Graham	£3.95	22½p
(Breakaway edition)		£2.25	22½p
The Dead Sea Scrolls	John Allegro	55p	9p
Comparative Religion	A. C. Bouquet	55p	11p
The Longford Threat to Freedom	Brigid Brophy	10p	3½p
Did Jesus Christ Exist?	Chapman Cohen	5p	3½p
Materialism Restated	Chapman Cohen	50p	13p
Thomas Paine	Chapman Cohen	15p	3½p
Morality Without God	Chapman Cohen	5p	3½p
Our Pagan Christmas	R. J. Condon	20p	4p
Ten Non Commandments	Ronald Fletcher	12½p	3½p
The Bible Handbook	G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball	65p	11p
Bertrand Russell: A Life	H. Gottchalk	25p	9p
The Nun Who Lived Again	Phyllis Graham	5p	3½p
The Humanist Revolution	Chapman Cohen	50p	11p
Controversy	Hector Hawton	60p	11p
The Little Red Schoolbook	Soren Hanson	30p	7p
Rome or Reason	R. G. Ingersoll	10p	5p
Humanist Anthology	Margaret Knight	60p	9p
Christianity: The Debit Account	Margaret Knight	3p	3½p
The Case Against Church Schools	Patricia Knight	20p	3½p
The Secular Responsibility	Marghanita Laski	10p	3½p
The Vatican Billions	Auro Manhattan	£3.00	17p
An Introduction to Secular Humanism	Kit Mouat	45p	3½p
What Humanism is About	Kit Mouat	52½p	15p
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Life, Death and Immortality	P. B. Shelley	10p	3½p
Abortion Counselling	M. Simms	50p	5p
The Freethinker 1972	Edited by Nigel Sinnott	£2.50	30p
Bound Volume			
Humanism (Ward Lock Educational)	Barbara Smoker	40p	5p
A Chronology of British Secularism	G. H. Taylor	10p	3½p
Broadcasting Brainwashing Conditioning	David Tribe	25p	3½p
Nucleoethics: Ethics in Modern Society (paperback)	David Tribe	90p	13p
Questions of Censorship	David Tribe	£4.75	23p
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