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## EDUCATION AND THE GREAT RELIGION DEBATE

A great educational debate is supposed to be raging over the land. A small educational debate has taken place in the House of Lords. The Minister of Education, Shirley Williams, is making regular sweeping pronouncements on the subject. Lord Longford has put a question in the House of Lords. And not surprisingly religion has got caught up in it all. Now perhaps the best way in which religion and education should be linked is by a clear agreement that the twain shall not meet; recent discussions indicate that this is by no means the case at present.

A "core curriculum" is the phrase of the day. It has even been suggested by Dr Rhodes Boyson that religion should be the Fourth R. Dr Boyson's statements on education have become more frequent and more ludicrous as the years separate his career as a schoolmaster and as a politician increase. But he is not alone in seeing the time as ripe for widening the demand for the place of religion in schools.

### Christian Teachers Urged to Fight

Sir Frederick Catherwood, whose qualification to speak on the subject is apparently his position as Chairman of the Overseas Trade Board, told the Association of Christian Teachers that "Since we have a society which is nominally Christian, we should fight to retain it", and urged Christian teachers to fight to win the battle for the public mind. He spoke of the harm which the secularisation of education had caused, leading to juvenile crime and the blackboard jungle.

It should not be forgotten however that religion in education, is not always all good; Shirley Williams, herself a Catholic, (like her counterpart in the Shadow Cabinet, St John Stevas) has criticised standards in Catholic schools. Speaking to the Herefordshire Catholic Teachers' Association she said,

speaking as a Catholic not as Secretary of State for Education, that Catholic schools did not always equip their pupils for the outside world, which was largely secular.

Another critical comment on religion in schools was recently made: "Religion also has a great deal to answer for. It has to answer for much of the situation in Belfast and Northern Ireland at this time—the segregation of Protestants and Catholics in schools and the teaching from youth of this difference between them. It is not only a situation which exists in Belfast, Northern Ireland; it also exists in Glasgow and Liverpool and other cities."

### Lords Debate

These words were spoken by Lord Fenner Brockway in a debate in the House of Lords on 16 February 1977. The debate was initiated by Lord Longford, who had asked a question as to what steps were being taken to ensure an adequate supply of qualified teachers of religion.

The National Secular Society wrote to members of the House of Lords before the debate. In the letter Barbara Smoker, President of the Society, wrote:

"We hope you will be in the Chamber . . . to say something on the secularist side when Lord Longford asks HMG what steps are being taken to provide a supply of qualified teachers for Religious Education.

"It is true, no doubt, that many teachers now taking RE are not themselves believers, let alone theologians—but that is due to the statutory compulsion on all state schools to provide RE lessons, though the majority of the population no longer subscribe to the traditional beliefs or see any relevance in them to life today.

"Lord Longford's argument from recent increases in juvenile crime is utterly false, since most of the

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young people who take to crime have in fact received RE throughout their school life. Moreover, it is a statistical fact that Christian families, particularly Catholic families, disproportionately fill our prisons.

"At a time when serious education cut-backs are being made on all sides for economic reasons, it seems monstrous to suggest that the most controversial and divisive subject in the whole curriculum should be selected for exemption from the general stringency, and even for extra resources to be allocated to it."

### Declining Religious Education

The debate was well attended and lasted from 8 pm to midnight, which is a measure of the interest in the subject. Much evidence was seen to show that there are many who would like to see the place of religion in education increased, but encouragingly this was also frequently shown to be due to the fact that it is so palpably in decline. The very concern over the numerical deficiency of qualified RE teachers is an indication of its meagre priority in some schools and of the small number of students wishing to make it their speciality.

Lord Soper admitted that "there are a great many people who no longer find any sense of peremptory importance in Christian matters" and emphasised that religious teaching was the concern of the churches more than the schools. His contention that religion is caught rather than taught will be seen by Freethinkers as good reason for reducing the chance of infection in schools by keeping the virus out altogether.

Lord Ritchie Calder described himself as a Humanist and emphasised that we cannot claim this is a Christian country. He stated: "I would say categorically that we do not need—and I am speaking out of turn because I do not think that the British Humanist Association would say this as categorically as I should—or should have something called 'religious education' as a prescribed subject."

### No Change to 1944 Act

In his reply for the government Lord Donaldson noted in passing that the custom of a collective act of worship was very meagrely attended in the House of Lords. He stressed that the Government had no intention of modifying the relevant section of the 1944 Education Act. A much fuller debate is to take place in the House of Lords next May.

It must be clear to all those engaged in the educational debate today that some people are actively attempting a re-emphasis of religion in schools and to include religion in a "core curriculum". The time is now right for those opposed to the privileged legal position given to religion in schools to express their opposition with clarity and force.

## WORLDWIDE

### CANADA

On December 11, 1976, Quebec's new government announced its decision to halt all further prosecution of Dr Henry Morgentaler, who has been tried and acquitted three times in the past three years for performing illegal abortions. While hailing this decision, civic groups supporting Dr Morgentaler said that the fight was still on to liberalise the abortion laws. Dr Morgentaler, a past President of the Humanist Association of Canada, has endured innumerable legal battles, imprisonment and persecution in his heroic struggle to establish women's right to obtain an abortion in Canada.

### ISRAEL

Abortion has been legalised by the Israeli Knesset (Parliament). The Bill only permits abortion for unmarried mothers, victims of rape, women over 40, and cases where there is a serious danger of a child being born handicapped or where social conditions would make another child an additional burden. It has been strongly opposed by religious parties and hundreds of women protesters wailed and prayed outside the Knesset, while the Bill was being passed (January 31, 1977).

Liberalisation of abortion laws is now a worldwide trend. At the beginning of 1971, 38 per cent of the world's population lived in countries where abortion was liberally available. By early 1976, the figure had increased to 64 per cent, nearly two thirds of the world.

### UNITED STATES

After the US election Dr Matthew Spetter, an International Humanist and Ethical Union representative to UN in New York, has written on *God and Politics in America at Election Time*:

"Election time was very much a time of what Winston Churchill called 'a time of the God bit'. A recent poll found that 34 per cent of adult Americans considered themselves 'born-again Christians' . . . The religious impulse now prevalent in the US is obviously used for political purposes. Politicians as well as evangelists want to bring America back to God 'before it is too late'. 'Secular humanism' recently was the target of legislation in the House of Representatives. Tolerance is not on the increase . . .

"It is no accident that as the election came closer, candidates pronounced themselves increasingly more frequently in religious terms. Barely a presidential address was terminated without the phrase, 'God bless you'—as if a minister of the Gospel was speaking rather than a politician from Michigan. This mixture of godliness and politics, of course, heady medicine. There is a threat in democracies when moral leadership becomes confused with piety . . ."

# The Secret Service and Religious Cults

ALASTAIR SEGERDAL

Much has been written about the causes and motivations for what has become an international phenomenon—the proliferation of religious movements, cults and sects. The twentieth-century road to Truth is not without hazards. Cultists have been condemned by the established churches, exposed by the media, investigated by the authorities, brainwashed, kidnapped and deprogrammed. The author of this article asks what lies behind the formation of these groups, and advances new and disturbing possibilities.

Are some cults deliberately set up by intelligence agencies of one country to manipulate and mould the social and cultural values of another? Is the end result political rather than religious? A look at recent events in Washington, DC, offers material on which governments, committees and devil-dodgers by the dozen could have a field day. It happens to involve that "cult of the year", the World Unification Church, founded and run by South Korean millionaire, Sun Myung Moon.

The fall of South Vietnam, the complete Communist take-over in Cambodia, and the final withdrawal of United States strategic forces in Thailand, have left South Korea, an isolated non-Communist dictatorship on the South-East Asia mainland, vulnerable to the Reds. It is obviously to American advantage to support this country, yet South Korean fears of a gradual and total US disengagement must always be uppermost in the minds of its politicians, not least of its leader, President Park. Such a daunting prospect has no doubt prompted South Korean politicians and businessmen to take out the added insurance of gaining Congressional support for their Government. But recent Washington disclosures of alleged bribery of US Congressmen with cash and other gifts have soured such possibilities.

During the late 1960s, the CIA reported on a meeting in the Blue House, the South Korean Presidential palace. This meeting was attended by President Park, Korean intelligence officials, leading South Korean businessman Tongson Park, and Sun Myung Moon's chief aide, Park Bo Hi. Since that time, a story has emerged of efforts by South Koreans to bribe US Congressmen in order to "create a favourable legislative climate" in Washington for South Korea. Park Bo Hi, a close associate of Sun Myung Moon, has been said to be a member of the Korean intelligence service. At the present time, federal officials are busy investigating the scandal. There have been admissions of bribery such as that of Governor Edwards of Louisiana, who admitted in October that his wife was given ten thousand dol-

lars in cash five years ago by a South Korean businessman. It is alleged that Tongson Park is one of the key men at the centre of the scandal. He is said to have told friends of how he handed out cash, jewellery, holidays and other gifts to Congressmen, 20 of whom are now under investigation.

Latest information suggests that the South Korean intelligence agency was promoting the huge Unification Church demonstrations at pro-Nixon rallies in 1974 on Capitol Hill, and which opposed the impeachment of the then American President. Sun Moon's aide and translator, Park Bo Hi, is believed to have been asked by the Korean intelligence to arrange for those big demonstrations. The US commitment to defend South Korea was at a danger point in April 1970 when Americans withdrew some twenty thousand troops from South Korea. President Park, fearing the worst at a time of high resentment about Vietnam in the States, started to produce constitutional changes in South Korea that gave him almost unlimited powers and the gradual removal of democracy as we know it. South Korea has since expanded in trade, commerce and general living standards, but its method of governing are still frowned upon by most Americans, including Jimmy Carter.

## Influence of the Moonies

Would the Unification Church and its rallies, recruitment and monies exist if an intelligence agency, in this case the South Korean one, did not exist? Certainly the Moonies have influenced thousands, perhaps millions of people in the West, and if we include the fiscal as well as the "spiritual" influencing of men at the top of government, it could significantly affect the survival of the regime in South Korea.

The influence of religious cults should never be under-estimated and dismissed as simply nutty crazes that some kids go through. They can effect the maturing process in a way that is of deep and of lasting influence for many a university graduate. None are more aware of this than the policy-makers and administrators of the intelligence community be it CIA, MI6 or Korean CIA. For this reason one should equally never underestimate the power and skill of such agencies in trying, at least in part, to manipulate and mould both the social and political values of their friends and enemies. Recent expulsion orders on UK-based writers Mark Hosenball and ex-CIA man Philip Agee, prove that the game is a deadly serious one, often appearing to be above the law.

A close inspection of aspects of a new religious

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# Albany Trust Awaits Whitehouse Reply

ANTONY GREY

Last November Mary Whitehouse directed her smear tactics at yet another target. The work of the Albany Trust with sexual minorities was alleged by her to be a misuse of public funds. Antony Grey, director of the Albany Trust, denounced this "vicious and irresponsible public attack" at a meeting of Gaycon, an organisation of homosexual Conservatives. (Reported "The Freethinker", December 1976). Here Antony Grey describes how the Albany Trust has asked for a withdrawal of these allegations.

Mrs Mary Whitehouse has failed to answer a demand by the Albany Trust that she should withdraw allegations about the Trust which she made in a speech on 24 November last year. A letter from the Trust's Chairman, Harold Haywood, OBE, was sent to Mrs Whitehouse by recorded delivery on 17 December 1976. Mr Haywood's letter read:

Dear Mrs Whitehouse,

As Chairman of the Trustees of the Albany Trust, I am writing to you on behalf of myself and my colleagues.

The Trustees have considered the terms of the address which you gave, in your capacity as Honorary General Secretary of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, to a meeting of Christian Lunch and Dinner Clubs at the Central Hall, Westminster, on 24 November 1976.

It is evident that you have been materially misinformed about the Albany Trust and its activities. As a result you have, it is to be hoped inadvertently, misled the audience who heard your address on 24 November and all those very many more who have read or heard reports of what you said.

To enumerate the inaccuracies in your speech:

Firstly, you stated erroneously that the Albany Trust is "the homosexual lobby front runner". The Trust is in fact a Registered Charity whose objects are to promote psychological health through research, education and appropriate social action. While in its early years the Trust concentrated upon the provision of counselling and other assistance for homosexuals in need of it, since at least 1970 our work has lain in the broader field of psychosexual health and education, with especial concern for members of sexual minorities. We do not have close links with any specifically homophile organisation. We receive public funds from the Voluntary Services Unit of the Home Office and from the Department of Education and Science, in addition to private subscriptions and donations.

Secondly, not one of us is conscious of any influence emanating from "left" elements in the Government or elsewhere—as distinct from the middle or the right—to gain or to maintain Government support for the Trust; and we consider that your remark: "And I mean the left hand" carries implications which are wholly unwarranted, so far as we are aware. In fact, we have throughout our existence received both moral and material support from members of all the three main political parties.

Thirdly, you said that the Trust "now has its own youth officers to counsel what it describes as 'the gay teenager'." In fact, the Trust employs one Youth Officer, funded by the Department of Education and Science and supervised by a steering group which includes a representative of that Department. His functions are to create a greater awareness of the situation and needs of members of sexual minorities in sex education and youth work training programmes generally. It is no part of his task to counsel teenagers—nor indeed to work directly with them to any great extent. He is primarily concerned with adult education programmes.

Fourthly, you claimed that "some of these youth counsellors—who work through schools and through youth clubs—are otherwise engaged in giving what is euphemistically termed 'psycho-sexual advice' through the columns of various pornographic magazines." The Trust employs or uses no "youth counsellors"; neither its Field Officer nor its Youth Officer "work through the schools" nor "through youth clubs"; nor are either of them or anyone else employed or engaged by the Trust to give "psycho-sexual advice" through the columns of any magazines—pornographic or other.

Fifthly, you alleged that "the support given by this Organisation" (meaning the Trust) "to paedophile groups" meant that (presumably as taxpayers) "we are all subsidising and supporting, at least indirectly, a cause which seeks to normalise sexual attraction and activity between adult males and little girls." The Albany Trust does not "give support" (financial or otherwise) to "paedophile groups"; nor does it promote or encourage any person or group in seeking to "normalise"—whatever that may mean—sexual attraction and activity between adult males and little girls: or, for that matter, sexual attraction and activity between adult males or adult females and little boys.

Your address, so far as it concerned the Albany Trust, is most seriously inaccurate and damaging, as well as being personally false and libellous of each of the Trustees individually and as a body.

We accordingly feel bound, for the protection and furtherance of our Charitable objects, to call

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# A Lesson From South Africa

BARRY DUKE

William Benyon's Abortion (Amendment) Bill will have been debated by the time of publication. How retrogressive a step this amendment would be has been widely publicised. Here Barry Duke makes a cogent comparison with the situation in South Africa.

A lesser-known by-product of the repressive system in South Africa is the terrifyingly high incidence of death caused by septicaemia or haemorrhaging following illegally procured or self-induced abortions. No doubt there are a great many other countries which have an equally high or even higher instance of fatalities resulting from clandestinely performed abortions, but I choose to use South Africa as an example in attacking William Benyon's private member's Bill because five years as a court reporter in Johannesburg convinced me that the irrational attitude to abortion in that country resulted directly in the deaths of hundreds of women each year, and an immeasurable degree of human suffering.

Abortion in South Africa is strictly illegal, and penalties for the "crime" are tremendously high. Yet despite heavy fines and long prison sentences, abortions continue to be carried out every day in sordid back rooms under horrifying conditions. When I was first assigned to the court beat, which included monitoring the inquest records for the Johannesburg district, I was amazed at the high number of deaths attributed each week to "septicaemia—the result of an abortion procured by person or persons unknown". Either that, or death came after messy, self-performed operations with knitting needles or other sharp instruments.

So common, in fact, were such deaths that journalists never bothered to report on them—unless the victim was white and relatively well-known. The only other time the question of abortion received a public airing was through the occasional trial of an abortionist. The arrests of these people in relation to the number of deaths caused annually through inexpert back alley operations were few indeed and this is surely an indication that the police were unable to handle the burden placed on them by the law governing abortion.

Because the firmly-committed Christian authorities in South Africa would not even entertain the thought of, let alone embark on, abortion reform, the only conclusion one could reach was that they felt the death and the misery and the indignity suffered each year because of the repressive law was far more desirable than shelving their irrational religious objections towards abortion.

Followed to its logical conclusion, this strong

"moral" stand simply proclaims that it is better to allow both a woman and her foetus to die in the most sordid possible circumstances than open the way to a system that would allow a person the freedom to terminate an unwanted pregnancy under clinically acceptable conditions.

What has this Dark Age stance by a most illiberal regime got to do with liberated, enlightened Britain? Simply this: Britain took a major step forward on the road to improving the quality of life in this country when the existing abortion Act was introduced in 1967. It is this progress the anti-abortionists (who strangely enough count among their ranks many pro-hanging protagonists) would dearly like to reverse. To them the present Act represents freedom of choice—and freedom of choice runs contrary to popular Christian sentiment.

South Africa is in the unusually powerful position of being able to teach the rest of the world how to avoid tackling a great many things, whether it be abortion, race relations or censorship. The least we can do is heed those lessons.

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● **Stop Press.** Mr William Benyon's Abortion (Amendment) Bill was given a second reading by 170 votes to 132 on 25 February 1977. It will be seen as a significant victory for the anti-abortion lobby. The chamber was crowded, the debate was heated and feeling ran high. Mrs Renee Short was among those who spoke strongly of the dangers that the Bill would decrease the effectiveness of NHS abortion service and infringe civil liberties. The measure will now go to a standing committee for detailed consideration.

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Secularists will recognise with respect the firm stand which the General Synod of the Church of England has taken on human rights. It is a tragic irony that within the same week the Archbishop of Luwum in Uganda, who had apparently stood so firmly for the human rights of sections of the Ugandan population, died in a "car accident", while being transported for interrogation. This account seems almost certainly a fabrication to cover up yet another political murder instigated by General Amin. The world's condemnation of this cruel, ruthless, lunatic dictator cannot be over-stated. It can only be noted with regret that a crazed, confused element of the Muslim faith seems an aspect of Amin's maniac personality. Should the UK Government, so pedantic in refusing entry to a harmless if tasteless film-maker such as Thorsen, or so secretive in its reasons for attempting to deport the American journalists Agee and Hosenball, be allowing President Amin to attend the jubilee celebrations?

# The Origins of Hedonism

GEOFFREY WEBSTER

Most secularists base their ethical outlook on Hedonism, which is the individual's search for happiness, providing this search does not interfere with the happiness of others. Here, the writer considers two ancient Greek philosophers who could justifiably claim to be the founding fathers of Hedonism, and considers their relevance to secularist thought.

Two remarkable Greek thinkers, notable for their hedonistic outlook, were Aristippus and Epicurus. They were both vigorous individualists and have both been denounced as representative of the "decadence" of Greek thought, dubious concept though that may be. The earlier of the two was Aristippus, founder of the Cyrenaics, who lived from 435 to 365 BC. Born in Cyrene, North Africa, the son of a wealthy merchant, he apparently devoted himself to wandering about in search of pleasure and philosophy. Abundant funds guaranteed the ready availability of the first, whilst his search for the wisdom born of philosophical discussion led him to become a disciple of Socrates. There was some difference of opinion between the two as to what exactly constituted happiness, Socrates identifying it with virtue and knowledge, Aristippus identifying it with momentary pleasures (though he recognized the pleasure to be derived from intellectual activity). In his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon records an argument between the two in which Aristippus reveals himself as a gifted and merciless debater. He scandalised many by becoming the first disciple of Socrates to accept payment for giving instruction in philosophy.

He spent the remainder of his life travelling from place to place, even numbering himself amongst the courtiers of Dionysus, the Tyrant of Syracuse, for some time. When questioned about how he reconciled the pursuit of wisdom with attendance upon a brutal and licentious ruler, he replied, curtly and characteristically: "I went to Socrates for wisdom, Dionysus for money." When he was once criticised for bankrupting himself over his famous mistress, Lais of Corinth, he replied: "I take—I am not taken."

Although he evidently was something of a voluptuary, he always emphasised the importance of moderation. Certainly he would have argued the most desirable experience in life was pleasure, the most undesirable pain. We know the world exists because of its pleasurable or painful effect upon us; at the same time, we cannot make valid inferences about the nature of independent reality from the nature of its effect upon us. Aristippus also asserted that we are only sure of what constitutes pleasure for us, not for others. Consensus of opinion is no

guarantee of identity of experience. Philosophy, if it is to be either productive or honest, must start with the most immediate reality experienced by each and every one of us ourselves.

He distinguished three possible psychological states for a man: violent change, gentle change, no change. The first was undesirable since it might be preceded, accompanied or followed by pain. The third state, equanimity, was not a pleasurable state (this was to be a bone of contention between later Cyrenaics and the Epicureans, who claimed that the absence of pain was itself the supreme pleasure). Thus, a wise man (that is, a self-interested man) would avoid the two extreme experiences of agitation by violent desires and boredom due to stagnation, and would regulate his life on the principle of "gentle change". Unquestionably, bodily pleasures—belly and genital—were the most intense pleasures, but a wise man is never possessed by his desires, impulses and urges, he is their master. Aristippus further said that one should not endure suffering in order to experience happiness in the future, since such pleasure remains problematic. He would expect the pleasure to be gained from an experience to be balanced by the pain that may attend it, or the "hedonic calculus", as it was called. A man should value his ability to occasionally forego pleasure, if chasing after a particular pleasure might appreciably diminish his actual amount of freedom at any given time.

## Pleasure and the Individual

Above all, for Aristippus we cannot generalise about what pleasure is. Let each person decide for themselves what they find agreeable and disagreeable. The emphasis upon the primacy of personal experience made a welcome change from the icy platitudes of earlier Greek philosophers, and marked the beginning of a new period of Greek thought, in which the systems of the Hellenistic period (Cyrenaics, Epicureans, Cynics, Sceptics, Stoics) were to concentrate upon the individual and the burning question "How can the individual be happy?" Although he has often been described as nothing but a silver-tongued libertine, Aristippus lived to nearly 80, which showed that pleasure had not exactly disagreed with him throughout his life.

Aristippus died almost a quarter of a century before the world began to hear of a young Macedonian named Alexander. Epicurus was a product of the world that began with Alexander, a world in which the Greek way of life spread to the borders of India and heavily influenced the "barbarians" in Italy known as "Romans". At the same time, the system of Epicurus exercised a tremendous influence for five or six centuries after his death, his

followers regarding him as the wisest, most cheerful and compassionate man who ever lived.

Epicurus of Samos (341-270 BC) was a philosopher by the time he was 30. He spent the last three decades of his life in a property he had purchased on the road to Athens, and there he lived and taught, surrounded by a community which offered the visitor a warm welcome and bread, cheese and water for the body. For Epicurus, traditional abstract philosophical speculations were a waste of time. He took from Democritus the atomic theory, slightly modifying it to allow the falling atoms distributed in infinite space the ability to swerve, collide, and thus form worlds. He was ready to answer the criticism that this "ability to swerve" in the atoms contradicted determinism: on the contrary, the fact that the behaviour of atoms may be unpredictable does not mean they are not causally determined. (This is reminiscent of the "uncertainty principle" in modern physics, which is said to apply to certain sub-atomic particles—the fact that their behaviour is statistically unpredictable does not mean that they are not causally determined either.) He acknowledged the existence of the gods, which were, however, responsible for neither the existence nor the government of the universe, but were simply ethereal, purely contemplative beings inhabiting the space between worlds, neither beneficent nor maleficent, simply indifferent to sublunary happenings. Thus, Epicurus virtually emasculated the gods by regarding them as powerless to interfere in the affairs of men. He also denied the immortality of the soul, believing death meant the obliteration of consciousness. To fear death is irrational, since how can one fear that which is not?

### Pleasure and Serenity

For him, pleasures were either "kinetic" or "static". The kinetic pleasures were those which required the expenditure of excessive amounts of energy, pleasures of very limited duration. Static pleasures were preferable and were those states in which the body and mind are free from pain and disturbance, so that we enjoy a state of "ataraxia", unruffledness of mind. Differing from Aristippus, he was reasonably sure that what is pleasurable for us may be so for others also. Like the Cynics, he believed that happiness came from the elimination of superfluous desires. We should avoid what is natural but unnecessary, we should also avoid what is unnatural and unnecessary, and stick simply to what is natural and necessary. Unlike Aristippus, he counselled abstention from sexual relations, and actually demanded that his followers refrain from marriage and parenthood. He was not opposed to sexual activity on moral grounds, his opposition was based on the recognition that sex agitates body and mind and only offers momentary satisfaction. Serenity is the goal, and anything which opposes

serenity is itself to be opposed. Living simply, having likeminded friends, enjoying inexpensive vegetarian fare were the ways to attain pleasure for Epicurus. Since the Cyrenaics ceased to exist as an independent school in the third century BC, it is more than likely that they "converted", en masse, to Epicureanism.

Whilst the followers of religion offer us deontological ethics, in other words ethics based on the notion of "duty", secularism follows the hedonistic outlook. Whilst Christian apologists drone on about the incalculable debt we owe Christianity, the free-thinker can look back to sages like Aristippus and Epicurus, who recommended the life based on happiness and cheerfulness. Now that we are awakening from the long cultural nightmare of Christianity, let us recognise the contributions made to ethical theory by these two distinguished hedonists.

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### *Albany Trust Awaits Reply*

upon you to withdraw publicly each of the false statements I have listed above, and to join with us in seeking to obtain as wide a circulation for your retraction as you achieved for the original publication of your remarks.

Please let me hear from you in very early response to this letter with your confirmation that you will co-operate, as a matter of urgency, to put the record straight.

Yours sincerely,  
HAROLD HAYWOOD,  
Chairman

As no response had been received by 19 January, the Trust telephoned Mrs Whitehouse to enquire whether the letter had reached her. She refused to say, and suggested that the Trust should consult the Post Office. Mr Haywood therefore wrote again to Mrs Whitehouse:

Dear Mrs Whitehouse,

I understand from my secretary that you may not have received the letter which I sent to you by recorded delivery on 17 December.

I accordingly enclose a copy of that letter, and shall be much obliged for the courtesy of your reply. I am sure you will appreciate that this matter is regarded by the Trustees as important and urgent.

Yours sincerely,  
HAROLD HAYWOOD,  
Chairman

At the time of going to press in late February, this usually loquacious lady has steadfastly maintained her uncharacteristic silence.

## SOME SAINTS DAY

St Valentine, honoured each February as the patron saint of romance (and the sale of printed cards), is out: but Lupercal, the Roman festival of February 15, associated with fertility rituals, is not likely to be in. Parallel with the countrywide decline in the number of church attenders, those honoured in the roll of sainthood are to be diminished.

The General Synod of Churches has received plans from a Liturgical Commission to tidy up the number of Saints' days. In the proposals to cut the number of minor Church of England festivals from 250 to about 80, some of the harp-holders in the sky are bound to be demoted. A more realistic and relevant pattern is hoped to be established. Good-bye St George—hello St Harold? Farewell St Nicholas—welcome St Harrods?

## TELEVISION OBSERVED BY RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Television must watch it. It is being carefully observed, not only by the vast majority of the population with great frequency and inattention, but also by a newly formed organisation. The Bristol Family Life Association (BFLA) has been described as an organisation to "promulgate and uphold the Christian standards of family life and public morality". The Association has been concerned to survey the amount of blasphemy, violence and extra-marital sexual activity on television. In "1984", by George Orwell, Big Brother surveyed the population from a screen in every room, now the would-be guardians of our behaviour are surveying the screen itself.

In a week shortly after Christmas the BFLA monitored all channels in detail. Many acts of violence were noted. Everyone must be concerned with acts of violence in society, though the direct relationship between violence on the screen and in society is as yet unproven and controversial. Concern with the quality of personal relationships is also universal, but whether the context is marital or not seems of marginal importance. The report tells us that in the week's survey there were, between 6 and 9 pm, 96 references to extra-marital sex on ITV, 63 on BBC2 and 59 on BBC1. Apart from the misapprehension that youngsters switch off television at 9 pm, the grave mistake of the survey is to assume that such a numerical account is likely to tell you anything more than how inquisitively prudent were the surveyors.

The fact that blasphemies and swear words featured on 237 occasions during the week's programmes suggests simply that they reflect the speech patterns of the everyday world. (Has anyone worked out the statistical percentage of such words to the

# NEWS

total number of words spoken?) Blasphemy on radio and television has also been condemned by the General Synod of the Church of England, which has objected to the "grave offence" caused by broadcasting authorities allowing the "repeated dishonouring of the Lord's name." It was complained that standards were slipping and that characters in popular programmes came out with such shockers as "Oh Christ" and "God blast it". Would a more widespread acceptance of Anglo-Saxon expletives be preferable? The continual biased religious slant of broadcasting must annoy many Freethinker readers, but unlike the language of the pop group The Sex Pistols this has not, as far as is known, caused anyone to kick their set to pieces.

## SEX, THE LAW AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Contrary to what some religionists hope, sexual morality is increasingly being seen as a matter for the individual and not for the law. In several cases recently, youths involved in unlawful sexual intercourse with girls under age were acquitted. Judge Edward Clarke, QC, at the Old Bailey commented on one such case: "My view is that this is immorality more than criminality, and I am not here to deal with immorality but with crime."

Mrs Whitehouse, self-made morals campaigner, has commented on these recent cases that the age of consent is being lowered not by Parliamentary decision but by the law going by default. This, she has pontificated, is another demonstration of how uncivilised is a permissive society.

However, her mewing with discontent over this question must have been amply compensated by her purring with pleasure at Jens Thorsen being refused entry into the country. The Danish filmmaker, who plans to make a film on the sex life of Jesus Christ, is provocative, publicity-seeking and perhaps unlikely to produce a great work of art. But if his film were ever to be completed those who disliked it could show their displeasure by not going and he would probably then lose money. It is predictable rather than disturbing that Mrs Whitehouse should express delight in the decision to refuse him entry. What is distinctly more disturbing is that we apparently have in Merlyn Rees a Home Secretary who is much more prepared to listen to the authoritarian prudes pressing for greater public control, than was his predecessor, Roy Jenkins.

A further call for changes in laws relating to



# S AND NOTES

morals is more alarming and yet more absurd. The Nationwide Festival of Light has asked that the age of consent for homosexual practices be raised from 21 to 24. They have submitted a report on the age of consent to the Policy Advisory Committee on Sexual Offences and to the Criminal Law Revision Committee at the Home Office. The NFOL have called for an enquiry into "the whole question of the spread of homosexual practices and its propagation in this country." Why one might ask, raise the age to only 24, why not 44 or the age of impotence—94? Fortunately, most people will see the suggestion as ludicrous, and appreciate that the real need is to lower the age of consent for homosexual acts to give equality with heterosexual behaviour. So ludicrous is this suggestion of the NFOL that one is tempted to consider it only the grotesque groan of a dying creature, but the Thorsen case and the Whitehouse comments on age of consent suggest that it is necessary to be vigilant so that any backlash be kept back.

## THE POLICE AS VICAR'S MESSENGER BOYS?

The feud between a vicar and his organist must be a matter for private concern, though the press could not resist amusing its readers with accounts of piano competing with organ at different speeds. It is more a matter for public concern that dismissal notes from the Vicar of St Mary's Church, Andover, to his organist and seven choristers was delivered by two policemen. Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, has asked the Home Secretary about the case and the text of her letter was issued as a press release. The letter read:

"Members of the National Secular Society will, I am sure, not be alone in their astonishment and indignation at the news that when the Rev Peter Chandler, vicar of St Mary's Church, Andover, issued notices of dismissal to his organist and seven choristers these notices were delivered by two policemen.

We should like to know whether these two policemen were (a) acting in their official capacity, (b) wearing uniform and (c) actually on duty.

If the answer to any of these points is affirmative, then we protest most vigorously at this misuse of police authority and public expenditure in a private dispute within a particular sect of a particular religious persuasion."

A reply from the Home Office to the NSS claimed

no knowledge of the incident. In view of the widespread publicity, this indicates a lack of information which is, to say the least, most surprising.

## ANNUAL DINNER

The guest of honour at this year's National Secular Society annual dinner is to be Lord Houghton. The NSS annual dinner has for many years been one of the Humanist movement's main social functions. Lord Houghton is widely known for his public service inside and outside of Westminster. In recent years he has been an indefatigable defender of the 1967 Abortion Act in the House of Lords. The toast to Lord Houghton will be proposed by Lena Jeger, who is Member of Parliament for Camden, Holborn and St Pancras North. She has been a colleague of Lord Houghton for many years. Mrs Jeger has been a keen worker for social reforms and has a fine record as a constituency MP.

The toast to the NSS will be proposed by Peter Fryer. He is a well known journalist and writer, whose books include *Mrs Grundy: Studies in English Prudery* and *The Birth Controllers*. The response on behalf of the NSS will come from Denis Cobell, who has been active in the movement for several years. He is secretary of the Lewisham Humanist Group and recently became a member of the NSS Executive Committee. The chair will as usual be taken by the President of the NSS, Barbara Smoker.

The dinner will be held on 2 April at the Pavours Arms, Page Street, Westminster, SW1. Tickets, £3.50 each, are obtainable from the NSS, 702 Holloway Road, London N19. (Vegetarians—advance notice to the NSS is essential.)

## Freethinker Fund

Once again there has been an encouraging response to the appeal for donations to meet the annual deficit. We thank those readers who contributed to the Fund during the period 22 January until 21 February.

Anonymous, £1.25; M. Ali, £2.25; A. Ashton, 75p; Mrs M. Chisman, £5; A. Dennis, £6.10; H. W. Day, £2.25; J. W. Eadon, £3.25; A. Ellisdon, £3; J. A. Farrand, £1.25; Mrs D. Follett, 50p; Mrs P. A. Forrest, 75p; Mrs G. K. Grubiak, £3.25; W. Holland, £1.25; E. J. Hughes, £1; Miss C. Jeffrey, £1.; F. W. Jones, £1.25; G. A. Kirk, 75p; Doris Martin, 98p; Mrs W. A. Mawson, £5; L. M. Moore, 25p; I. Mordant, 25p; T. Mullins, 50p; A. Row, £1; E. Royle, 75p; R. Sandilands, £2.25; F. M. Skinner, £1; D. J. Smith, 50p; G. B. Stowell, £5.25; Professor Taylor, £3.25; J. Vallance, £3.25; E. Westman, £1; G. N. Wright, 50p; I. Young, £1.25. Total £61.88.

**ENQUIRY CONCERNING POLITICAL JUSTICE** by William Godwin, ed. Isaac Kramnick. Pelican Classic, £2.25.

Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals*, to give it its full title, was published in 1793 and written between 1791 and 1792. It was inspired both by the French Revolution and by older mentors of Godwin, in particular Thomas Holcroft and Thomas Paine, who was in England during the same period writing Parts I and II of *Rights of Man*. Late in 1792 Paine was elected to the French Convention and left for Paris just before his trial in London on a charge of seditious libel. Godwin in publishing his own book took exactly the same risk; but the massiveness of his work and its philosophical content put it beyond the reach of proletariat and lower middle class readers, who avidly read *Rights of Man*, in cheap editions, right through to the time of the Chartists: in spite of the fact that its publishers and sellers suffered grimly in terms of imprisonment and deportation.

Godwin's 3-guinea book was not considered dangerous enough by the Government to suppress. It won him instant fame, but an adulation that faded and turned to desecration as the French Revolution supposedly jettisoned its early ideals and the British Government, anticipated by writers like Burke, launched propaganda which was later fortified, in the English public mind, by the rising and threatening star of Napoleon.

Godwin amended his book eventually in two further editions, and Professor Kramnick mistakenly, I think, has chosen to present the third, published in 1798 when Godwin's backsliding was already becoming apparent. He had always been what might be termed a non-combatant defender of liberty, and although his philosophical stance and rejection of religion remained, he now became even more timidly convinced that "the interests of the human species require a gradual, but uninterrupted change." Politics were still "a proper vehicle for a liberal morality", founded on the doctrines of human perfectibility already proclaimed by David Hartley and Dr Joseph Priestley. Crime would cease entirely once there was equality of money and possessions; and Godwin, the one-time minister of religion turned agnostic, yet retaining all his puritanical scruples in spite of his criticism of marriage (as his later admirer and son-in-law Shelley found to his cost), took directly from Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* the idea that man, in his final moral democratic state, would totally relinquish the manufacture of all luxuries and "trinkets", and dress himself like twentieth century Maoists in the same uniform-like clothes.

## FREETHINKER

Kramnick does not remark on this particular echo of More, nor did Godwin acknowledge it; and it is difficult to substantiate the Editor's claim that Godwin's book "was the first great trumpet against the 'brute engine'—government." Paine and others had already preached anarchy as an ideal, and Godwin was no more unwavering in his advocacy of it, as completely practical politics, than his predecessors. In spite of the obvious sincerity of his tenets, it is difficult to disentangle his finer passages from the jungle of philosophy that spreads its sometimes impenetrable and repetitive branches over 795 pages. Its cult of reason has better survived than its liberal principles, diluted in the light of events and natural character from the first glow of revolutionary idealism that still suffused the 1793 edition, in spite of caution: even one of Godwin's most telling original attacks, on the transportation of political prisoners and their treatment, is much reduced.

The excisions and additions at times make for inconsistency, and in spite of its high philosophical tone and prolixity, *Political Justice* nowhere reveals the flash of imagery and conciseness and practicality of argument that have preserved *Rights of Man* as the far more widely read and politically influential classic.

It was still worth republication, being long out of print like Paine's *Common Sense*, recently re-issued by the same paperback firm. Both men's works are a part of our radical heritage, and the Age of Enlightenment that first set the steps of modern man in the direction of religious scepticism.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

**ABORTION IN DEMAND** by Victoria Greenwood and Jock Young. Pluto Press.

*Abortion must be the key to a new world for women, not a bulwark for things as they are, economically nor biologically. Abortion should not be either a perquisite of the legal wife only, nor merely a last remedy against illegitimacy. It should be available for any woman, without insolent inquisitions, nor ruinous financial charges, nor tangles of red tape. For our bodies are our own.—F. W. Stella Browne, 1935.*

I totally agree with this quotation and am astonished that it should have been written in 1935. I felt a grim satisfaction at the phrase "without insolent inquisitions". Insolence is what females have

# REVIEWS

to suffer from about the age of 13. Up till then we are sometimes seen as people likely to have enquiring minds, like Alice in Wonderland. After about 13 the insolence of the salesmen of deodorants and such confuse our advances to sexual hopes and fears. The insolence of priests and professional counsellors shadow our adult sexual pleasures. Doctors, welfare workers and maternity ward personnel insolently treat our motherhood as though it robbed us of judgment and brains. It goes on right through the menopause. Only in old age is the equality of the sexes reached and that because in old age both sexes are treated with equal insolence.

So a book with such a text should be a refreshing treatment of abortion as a technique to be used on the sole decision of the women concerned, neither urged on them nor withheld. But what a let down this book is! It rightly rejects the insolence of those playing God by deciding which women "deserve" abortions and which not. But it undoes its good championing of women's right to hold their own reasons (which surely they should not even be obliged to articulate) by wanting the demand for abortion to be a weapon in the revolutionary struggle of the Left! This just about equals the insolence of the Pope.

After several chapters making excellent case against reformist nosey-parkers such as the MPs James White and Leo Abse, who support what they call socially necessary abortions but want to withhold them from trivial and frivolous women, with bureaucrats deciding who is trivial and frivolous, the authors disclose that their real aim is that the abortion demand should be "put forward from a socialist perspective. Restrictions on NHS facilities for abortion, for instance, can be related to the general opposition to private medicine and to cuts within the private sector."

They caution that it is necessary to oppose any legislation which contains within it notions of compulsory counselling, as there is, for instance, in Swedish legislation. I do agree. Women who know what they want only need to be told how and where to get it, so that they can be off and away on more interesting occupations, trivial and frivolous or not. However, in a lifetime connection with the birth control movement in many countries I have never encountered any counsellors who intruded the population explosion into advice to individual abortion seekers, as the authors imply is the risk. It is particularly unlikely in Sweden. But having rebuked Sweden for intrusive counselling the authors then say there must be "interposed be-

tween the state and the individual counsellors whose sympathies lie with the women's movement. For an important counselling role exists at each stage in the process of having an abortion. First the real alternatives . . . should be discussed: housing facilities, social security support, job opportunities . . . day nurseries . . . pressures from parents or the father of the child . . . a candid assessment of the concrete support if the woman were to have the child." Good grief! It would take all day. And on the same page Greenwood and Young have been denouncing paternalistic counsellors!

Poor women; when our problems come up there are always other fish to fry, if not priestly or commercial, then revolutionary. Imagine going to get a wanted abortion and having your ear chewed off with Marxist rhetoric *and* having to discuss your private relationship with your parents and sexual partner. This is abortion on demand?

These revolutionary Left authors are no more prepared to let women off having to give "reasons" than are the bourgeois legislators they airily brush with the unwarranted words "racist and fascist". Take their statement: "Abortion is a right of the individual and the provision of facilities a duty of the state *in so far as the necessity for abortion is often a product of precisely the social order which the state safeguards.*" The phrase which I have emphasised is just a lump of revolutionary rhetoric. The necessity for abortion is simply that the woman wants it. Were it an indication that the social order was in a mess what are we to think of the social order in Communist countries, where abortion rates are higher, much higher, than in capitalist ones, as the book's own tables show?

With the *professed* aim of the authors—that women have the right to utilise medical techniques, abortion or contraception, so that they can, if they wish, enjoy sex without child production—I agree. But I am indignant at their real aim of using women's discontent for the revolutionary reconstruction of society. Don't trust them, sisters! Be revolutionaries yourselves if you are convinced, but don't mix that up with human rights.

The book is dishonest about the treatment women can expect in Communist countries, unless they are as eternally vigilant as they have to be in capitalist ones. The authors mention Rumania only once, and then airily as a "pragmatic government" which withdrew abortion facilities in 1966. They do not describe nor discuss the tremendous hardship for women and long prison terms for helpful doctors resulting from this tyrannical, pro-natalist decision. Nor is any mention made of the quite harsh population policies of China, where the birth rate is being deliberately and successfully lowered by enforced late marriage, puritan sex attitudes, rationing and public bullying of those who have a baby out of turn.

"Women's freedom, the conditions needed to bring

up children, and the separation of procreation from sexuality matter to everybody", says the book, and then all is spoilt by the next sentence: "They are the real arguments against the population controllers." Are not those aims real of themselves?

Population control should not, of course, be intruded into the private sex lives of individual women, any more than should pro- or anti-revolutionary aims. But nevertheless it is a genuine and sensible concern. The earth *is* finite, as the rulers of China recognise. Let us hope that we in the free world can move towards the equilibrium of population and resources and space more humanely than the Chinese, and with more intellectual honesty than the authors of this book. It is in the Communist world, Chinese or Russian style, that the birth rates are tumbling down. They are far more skilful manipulators of women than we "bourgeois reformers".

BARBARA CADBURY

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**BORN AGAIN** by Charles W. Colson. Hodder & Stoughton, £4.95.

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To hear Charles Colson tell it, the Watergate burglary and cover-up were the inevitable consequences of Richard Nixon's aggressive approach to affairs of State and his overweening pride in the office of President of the United States. Mr Colson, Special Consul to the President and White House "hatchet man", has written this account of his contribution to Nixon's administration and his own conversion to the faith once the scandal had been exposed and "all the President's men" began to fall before the US Senate Investigating Committee. As Colson repeatedly points out, he was not directly involved in Watergate. He was indicted and received a one-to-three year prison sentence for his part in the conspiracy to discredit Daniel Ellsberg, the former aide responsible for leaking the Pentagon Papers on Vietnam to the *New York Times*.

Colson's crime was analogous to Nixon's: he was aware of the break-in of the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist, but was immediately to blame. Nevertheless, he speaks of Ellsberg as a subversive against US security, and seems to have accepted the task of exposing him with the alacrity of the House Committee on Un-American Activities 20 years earlier. This was typical of the loyalty which Nixon inspired and Colson himself personified. He is perhaps most widely known for having boasted that he would "run over his own grandmother" to get the President re-elected.

*Born Again* reveals other striking similarities between the two men. Both were the products of humble, middle-class families, and both display curious feelings of inferiority towards members of the Eastern Establishment. Colson's own *hubris* led him to refuse a fully-paid place at Harvard University. When applying to a Washington child adoption

agency following a divorce and remarriage, he admitted to the interviewer that he had never done anything wrong in his life. The tone of the entire book makes Colson appear as self-righteous and penitent as the most dedicated catch-penny journalist. He was raised, he claims, according to the Protestant gospel of work. The sentimentality with which he describes his relationship with his parents recalls Nixon's tearful remembrance of his Quaker mother on his final day of office.

There is indeed something grotesque about such mawkishness. An ex-Marine, Colson is able to replace conventional morality with devotion to duty in order to justify any political intrigue. He duly defends Nixon's own contention that Watergate resulted from a breach of faith against the President by the Congress and the liberal Press.

This type of inverted logic informs Colson's religious transformation. He begins his memoir on a note of pious foreboding. Election night, 1972, finds him alone in a corner, subdued amidst the celebration of the biggest presidential landslide in American history. Something is definitely wrong, he confides to a concerned wife and son. He confesses having mixed emotions about serving Nixon through a second term. Not the President himself, but his lieutenants, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Mitchell are the cause of his misgivings. They in turn suspect Colson of being not quite "one of the boys".

That is very nearly the extent of Colson's inside exposé. His prose is rife with intimation of evil misdoings, though little is ever uncovered and, in the end, what the reader confronts is Colson on Colson, the brilliant example of patriotic loyalty and sincere Christian benevolence.

In fairness, Colson is admittedly abject, devoting more than half the book to details of his acceptance of Christ through the ministrations of fellow Christians. Yet his attempt to liken the prison at Maxwell Air Force base to Gethse where he converts the most hardened criminals into a small band of disciples is about as genuinely heroic as a mock assault by an army cadet battalion.

Colson expresses bitterness about Press reaction toward his conversion. If they did not quite believe him, he says, at least he managed to provide them with one of the few moments of light relief throughout the whole Watergate crisis. One is left with a similar feeling about this book.

JAMES MACDONALD

## TELEVISION

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**THE WARRIOR'S RETURN** by Beryl Bainbridge. BBC2.

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A series entitled "The Velvet Glove" on BBC2 is dealing with six women who combined toughness and attractiveness. It has included Marie Stopes-Roe, Elizabeth Fry, Edith Cavell and the play here

reviewed concerned Mrs Annie Besant. All of them were women of unusual strength of character; all of them made their mark on history. The series has been uneven, making ponderous rather than captivating television at times. The play about Elizabeth Fry was distinctly leaden, despite an unpredictably effective piece of casting with Vivien Merchant as an attractively steely Elizabeth Fry. In the play depicting Marie Stopes-Roe, despite a plethora of flashbacks, an interesting portrait of a pioneer of birth control was given, as seen from the cantankerous perspective of her latter days.

Annie Besant (1847-1933), once Vice-President of the National Secular Society, had a life of great length and variety. It is no mean feat to encompass in one play the many lives of Annie Besant: atheist and campaigner, champion of the poor, theosophist and spiritualist, traveller, lover of India and active fighter for Indian independence. The play attempted to do this by moving swiftly through her life and separating the stages in her development by titles, photographs and newsreels. Headings such as "1873 Unholy Wedlock", "1887 Annie Militant" and "1892 Annie Visible and Invisible" anchored the historical moments upon which the play focused. A strong sense of the swift revolving process of time was given as we moved from a facsimile of the title page of John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* to a photograph of George Bernard Shaw, to glimpses of the Jazz Age. Each section was also separated with a weird circular diagram, probably representing astral planes and a whirling wheel dissolving into the next scene. I am not entirely sure if such visual effects were totally successful, but they did help to shape the play.

Other attempts at special visual effects were made. For instance, a phrase of Annie's which was often used concerned her desire to open new doors; and in the light of this a number of shots (especially the opening one in which her brutal clerical husband Frank Besant swung open the door and sneered "Writing again") were given added visual point. There were moments, however, when one felt the visual gimmicks had more to do with a limited budget than with artistic effect—energetic hectoring of crowds on an empty screen, with taped crowd noises off, has been a hallmark of the series.

It was disappointing that only a rather brief mention was made of the "Fruits of Philosophy" trial, the centenary of which is being commemorated by the National Secular Society this year. Many of the significant events of her life were seen from a tangent. Her interest in socialism and the match girls strike was shown with a chat with a girl whose objections to striking were quickly overcome by Mrs Besant's earnest strictures on fighting for two meals a day. Annie's interest in the poor, the underdog was a consistent theme of her life—whether they were people deprived of information about contraception, Indians denied in-

dependence, or women refused higher education.

Another consistent theme was seen to be her vulnerable fascination with enthusiastic men of ideas. The man to whom she was closest in her life was Charles Bradlaugh and contrary to the gossip of the period their relationship was entirely chaste. A wistful scene when the two of them, towards the end of Bradlaugh's life, gently referred to what might have been "If we had been free" was a deeply felt moment in the play. Her fascination with Edward Aveling, later to be the ruin of Eleanor Marx, led her towards Fabianism and when she felt scorned by him she was deeply disappointed. The emotional depression, the swings from enormous enthusiasm to heartfelt despair, perhaps came closest to explaining her extraordinary life. Once caught up in Theosophy, C. W. Leadbeater was to be the man to whom she remained constantly loyal. This was not an easy task, since his proclivity for young boys caused several scandals. (One such scandal was portrayed with wry humour: to C. W. Leadbeater's indignation at the publicity given to the scandal Annie Besant cried out "It is not vegetarianism and sea bathing that interest the English newspapers.") The crucial influence over the second part of her life was Madame Blavatsky, who introduced her to Theosophy (and her gender was in doubt, it was suggested later in the play).

There was some fine acting in the play. Lila Kaye, as Madame Blavatsky, gave a delightful cameo sketch of someone taking enormous delight in her own eccentricity, in lighting a cigarette with great gusto, in presenting an unusual blend of mischievousness and mysticism. Denholm Elliott as C. W. Leadbeater bore an uncanny resemblance to photographs of him. Robert Hardy gave an excellent picture of Bradlaugh, getting very much inside this fiery but subtle character. As Annie Besant herself, Rosemary Leach gave the most remarkable performance of the play, rich in its variety of moods and particularly effective in moving from eager, energetic youth to strange but fiery old age. Annie Besant was a woman too large, too silly, too brave, too bizarre, too energetic, too curious . . . to be encompassed by one performance, one play, one movement.

The play had its weaknesses. One could question the balance of incidents, and the overall perspective, and I wonder whether those unfamiliar with the incidents would have found the play entirely clear throughout. Beryl Bainbridge, whose script this was, has written novels of great psychological subtlety and with a very exact feel for period. In "The Warrior's Return" she has written a play that was fascinating and the best to date in the series; but for me it remained tantalisingly unsatisfactory as a whole, just as Mrs Besant's life remains tantalisingly inexplicable in its entirety.

JIM HERRICK

# LETTERS

I'm sorry David Tribe ("The Freethinker", February) is disappointed that my "Beardsley and his World", a book in a biographical series, is biographical and not something else, but I'm grateful for his kindness to my earlier book on Beardsley, which was not biographical.

I can't agree that what he calls my "topographical detective work" could have been "taken for granted". If you are publishing for the first time facts that were previously unknown, it seems only fair to state the evidence. Then, if you've misconstrued it, someone else can have a go.

David Tribe himself asserts something that was certainly unknown until now. Mabel Beardsley, he writes, "probably had an affair with Heather Firbank". Surely Mr Tribe owes it to history to publish the detective work that has led him to this remarkable probability. Otherwise I shall always suspect that his evidence consists of his misreading of my previous book on Beardsley, where I say: "I can find no evidence they so much as met; but if poetic justice exists, surely Mabel Beardsley had a love affair with Heather Firbank."

BRIGID BROPHY

I write concerning the poem "The Love That Dares to Speak its Name" by James Kirkup. In the account of the erotic relationship between the dead body of Jesus Christ and the Centurion a more apt and honest description in choice of title would have been "The Lust that Dares to Speak its Name". Nevertheless the freedom to publish must not be denied.

DORIS MARTIN

Having recently been lent a copy of "The Freethinker" I was surprised how very superficial were the thoughts expressed therein. Of course one would not judge all so-called Freethinkers from one copy of the magazine but, if I may, I should like to comment on one of the articles in the January number.

Mr George Jaeger wrote about his reasons for leaving the ministry into which he had been ordained and for finally abandoning Christianity altogether.

Obviously Mr Jaeger was very honest and sincere, but it somewhat astonished me that he had apparently given little thought to the question of suffering until it hit him personally. He must have known about the horrors of wars that had taken place all through the ages before the particular one in which he actually served when he saw them with his own eyes. Equally he must surely have been aware that thousands of mongol, and mentally and physically handicapped, children are born every year with all the consequent suffering for themselves and their parents. And yet only when the tragedy hit his own sister does he appear to have given the matter any serious thought.

I do not blame Mr Jaeger for not having found any way of reconciling a good God with the misery and evil in the world seeing that I have never yet heard an orthodox clergyman who has anything helpful to say on the subject, other than that it is a mystery to be accepted with faith. This is not the place to express my own views on this matter, but it does seem extraordinary that any man should enter the church and serve as a priest for eleven years without having come to terms with this problem, seeing that a major part of his work must be to try to help and

comfort the suffering and the bereaved. However, one must congratulate him on having at last got out of a false position and hope that his "freethinking" will help him in time to find deeper understanding.

L. W. A. FINDLAY

## *Secret Service and Cults*

movement often reveals a series of motives for its existence and appeal that bears little relation to what we call "religion" or "religious belief". It is too easy to dismiss them as money-making schemes and leave it at that. The potential effect they might have on society is far more important than the funds they raise. In a world of cause and effect, cults do not just "happen". They are started by a person or group. Money and politics may only be a side-show to the major long-term aim, which is changing and manipulating minds. That is one of the most vital end-products of any effective intelligence agency.

## THE FREETHINKER

VOLUME 95 (1975)

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"Humanism can be described as the conscience of the community, since it concerns itself among other things with establishing a sensible moral code for society," explains someone connected with a meeting on Sunday.

The meeting in Kenilworth, at 3 pm is preliminary to the formation of a local Humanist group which will cover in addition Coventry, Leamington and South Warwickshire. Anyone desiring information about the group is asked to contact Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, Warwickshire.

● Extract from "Kenilworth Weekly News", 4 February 1977.

CHARLES WILSHAW

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 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

## Coming Events

THE PAVIOURS ARMS, PAGE STREET,  
WESTMINSTER, LONDON SW1

SATURDAY, 2 APRIL, 6 PM FOR 6.30 PM

### ANNUAL DINNER

LORD HOUGHTON (Guest of Honour)  
LENA JEGER, MP; PETER FRYER;  
DENIS COBELL; BARBARA SMOKER

Tickets: £3.50 each, from NSS

(Vegetarians catered for)

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE  
HOLBORN, LONDON WC1

WEDNESDAY, 13 APRIL, 7.45 PM

### PUBLIC MEETING

to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the prosecution of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant for publishing a pamphlet on birth control ("The Fruits of Philosophy")

EDWARD ROYLE, historian and author of "Victorian Infidels"

ALASTAIR SERVICE, Chairman of the Family Planning Association

DAVID YALLOP, author of the television play based on the trial

CONWAY HALL, LONDON

FRIDAY, 27 MAY, 7.45 PM

### PUBLIC MEETING

REPEAL THE BLASPHEMY LAWS

BRIAN SEDGMOOR, MP; NICOLAS WALTER; BARBARA SMOKER

## THE FREETHINKER

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## EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Imperial Hotel. First Avenue, Hove. Sunday, 3 April, 5.30 pm. D. Stark Murray: "Can we Separate Ethics and Politics in Health?"

Belfast Humanist Group. Meetings on the second Thursday of the month, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade Castlereagh. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co Antrim, telephone Whiteabbey 66752.

Humanist Holidays. Easter at Southsea and Summer Holiday at Ross-on-Wye (small hotel and camping site). No single rooms at either centre. Details: Mrs M. Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone (01) 642 8796.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 31 March, 7.45 pm. Bob Smith (speaker) and film on the League Against Cruel Sports.

London Young Humanists. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8. 7.30 pm. Admission (non-members) 30p. Sunday, 20 March. Discussion: "Changing Society". Sunday, 3 April. Speaker: David Pedley of Friends of the Earth on "Environment".

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

Merseyside Humanist Group. Lecture Room, 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Meeting held on the third Wednesday of the month, 7.45 pm.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. 43 Pages' Lane, London N10. Thursday, 17 March, 8 pm. Jeff Crawford: "Race in Perspective".

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 20 March, 11 am. H. J. Blackham: "Fifty Years a Humanist".

The archdiocesan authorities in Liverpool have warned that the Catholic population is declining dramatically. There has been a 50 per cent drop in baptisms in the last ten years. This means that the Catholic population will be predominantly elderly in the future. A Pastoral Plan has indicated that this must mean a large-scale contraction of schools and churches.