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"RELIGION IS A POSITIVE EVIL" SAYS SIR HERMANN BONDI

"Religion is a positive evil and should be seen and exposed as that," said Sir Hermann Bondi in an after-dinner speech at the Annual Dinner of the Brighton and Hove Humanist Group on 18 November. Professor Sang, Professor of Genetics at Sussex University and President of the Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, introduced Sir Hermann Bondi, famous for his work in mathematical physics and prominent in public life, having worked at the Ministry of Defence and now Chief Scientist at the Department of Energy.

Sir Hermann Bondi pointed out the curious way in which people have slipped straight from one kind of organised religion to another kind of organised superstition. He gave the example of horoscopes which were to be found regularly in 80 per cent of newspapers. Editors included such material because they felt on balance that it was an advantage rather than a disadvantage to include horoscopes; and on balance the readers prefer to read such material rather than not.

He suggested that one of the reasons people fell for this sort of thing was that they wanted some kind of insurance policy. Another reason was that people found that now and then things did coincide with the predictions and from a lack of understanding of statistics supposed this meant that horoscopes were true. They said to themselves: "This happened to me—isn't it extraordinary" without asking themselves what was the probability that something extraordinary might happen to them any day. An understanding of probability was important in statistics and an understanding of statistics was of great value in adopting a rational approach to matters such as astrology.

There are weaknesses in our education when people lack the basic knowledge to look at things rationally, said Sir Hermann Bondi. It was of great importance for democracy that education gave

people these skills.

Turning to look at the present concern with energy conservation and creation, he said that he had been an early enthusiast for energy conservation. He said that humanists were rightly concerned with the whole world and with the poor quality of life in the Third World. But he doubted whether humanists always expressed their concern at the right time. "Our civilisation is energy hungry" he emphasised. But some humanists opposed the development of nuclear power and other potential energy resources. This opposition was misguided since if we failed to develop adequate energy resources the Third World would pay the bill. "At the end of the day it is the weakest economically who will suffer."

Another question which exercised humanists was considered by Sir Hermann Bondi. Many humanists felt, although they held no religious beliefs themselves, that we can comfortably live with religion: they think "if others have their religion—so be it". He strongly disagreed with this view.

"Religion is a positive evil and should be seen and exposed as that". It was extremely difficult to overcome the division between rich and poor. To actually create divisions between people was positively wicked, and "religion acts as a source and justification for people to be hostile and wicked to each other".

Christianity Has Failed

Sir Hermann Bondi quoted G. K. Chesterton: "It isn't that Christianity has been tried and found wanting, but that it has never been tried at all". This was rubbish, said Hermann Bondi, for Christianity has been tried and has failed. He listed some of the crimes of war and persecution for which Christianity had been responsible, and spoke of how Christianity had "drenched Europe in blood during

(Continued on back page)

Moonies at the Albert Hall

Thousands made their way to the Albert Hall on the evening of 7 November. They all held free "personal" invitations to the New Hope Crusade, at which there would be a Declaration of Divine Principles. The guests were also expecting to enjoy the delights of brass bands, dancers and singing—all colourfully illustrated in the glossy programme. An entertaining evening, a devout evening, an evening of promise: for many it was an evening of deep disappointment.

The invitations had been handed out gratis in the streets of London and to groups throughout the country. According to reports hundreds of people were turned away at the door, once the Albert Hall was full of those first-come for the "unique evening of music and inspiration." And of the five and a half thousand who were crammed inside many found a very different evening from what they had expected, for many were fundamentalist Christians expecting a Christian Crusade, as well they might from a quick glance through the programme, which gives the impression of a thoroughly Christian occasion; they surprisingly found themselves attending a Unification Church rally.

The Unification Church is led by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, who has recently left this country after withdrawing his last appeal against the decision not to renew the two-week visa he was originally granted. Mr Moon, a multi-millionaire based in the USA, is the inspiration of the Moonies and has been accused of brainwashing in the United States.

The main performers in the Albert Hall were Dennis F. Orme and his wife Doris B. Orme (with her "unique, dramatic, mezzo-soprano voice"). Mr Orme is an English Moonie proselytizer and his declaration, printed in the programme in the form of a call to the nation, concludes with the words: "We need a rebirth of religious understanding that we may all dwell in a more beautiful country and world."

It is typical of the Unification Church that its public statements are so vague as to be easily confused with "born-again" Christianity—or even general idealism calling for unity between world religions and world peace. (The Rev Sun Myung Moon is alleged to have made a fortune from the sale of guns.) His book the *Divine Principle* puts forward a theory that Adam was God's first chosen, that Jesus was God's second chosen, but since man's physical and spiritual perfection had not yet been achieved a third chosen would come as a Messiah. The Unification Church writings leave it unclear who the third Messiah will be, but he will come from the East around 2,000 years after Christ and Rev Moon, who has had direct visions from Jesus,

seems a good candidate.

The Unification Church have been criticised above all for the methods, apparently similar to indoctrination, by which converts are kept involved in the organisation. Parents have become extremely anxious about young people who have joined the sect and broken completely with their families. The Moonies are now claiming 1,300 members in Britain in 40 centres.

According to Alistair Segerdal, a freelance journalist who spoke to members inside and outside the Albert Hall, people were bitterly upset and disappointed both because they had come long distances assured of a seat and then been turned away and because some who had got in found it far from the Christian jamboree they had anticipated.

At the time of going to press news comes of a mass-suicide of members of a bizarre American sect, the Peoples' Temple, with a colony in Guyana (further comment in a future issue on this tragic event.) Who can deny that the development of sects and cults, to which people establish an unthinking, hysterical allegiance, does not pose grave threats?



On the Outside Looking In:
Turned Away from the New Hope Crusade

(Photo from Alistair Segerdal)

Mentmore Towers, a large stately home in Buckinghamshire, has been sold for £250,000 to followers of the Maharishi, to be used as an international centre for teaching of Transcendental Meditation.

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of "The Times"

MIKE PARKER

Earlier in the year a "Times" leader commented upon a recommendation to abolish fox-hunting. Here Mike Parker shows how many secularist issues were raised by the arguments of an establishment paper, now, with the threat of permanent suspension, apparently in pursuit of its own extinction.

The announcement in June that the Home Policy Committee of the Labour Party had recommended that the Labour manifesto for the next election should contain a commitment to abolish fox-hunting, hare-coursing, beagling and stag-hunting produced a predictable outcry from the field sports ranks, and cries of "infringement of liberty" from those who apparently believe that "freedom" should be enjoyed only by human beings—and only certain sections of that particular race. The attitude of the bloodsports lobby was characterised by a leader in *The Times* which raised a number of issues which are of concern to all freethinkers.

It was the editor of *The Times*, the ubiquitous William Rees-Mogg, who recently published a very slim and highly-priced volume of pretentious theosophising called *An Humbler Heaven*. It was a book notable mainly, as are most expressions of the unlearned Christian view, for its naivety—such naivety as to be a worrying characteristic of a man who controls one of Europe's most influential newspapers. It also made me far more aware than I had ever been before of the underlying unbalanced nature of the conservative Christian establishment.

One of the most cogent examples recently of the unbalanced and hypocritical Christian mind attempting to justify the unjustifiable was the leader "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of foxes" printed in *The Times* on June 14 in response to the call from the Home Policy Committee of the Labour Party for the abolition of fox-hunting, hare-coursing, beagling and stag-hunting. If this piece was not itself the work of Mr Rees-Mogg, it was certainly written under his aegis.

It would be only fair to deal first with the only point raised by *The Times* that has any validity. "It is not really possible," claimed the leader, "to make a distinction between these particular field sports, which all involve hunting with dogs, and other sports which depend on shooting or on catching fish with a hook," and it has a point. Here it could quite fairly be argued that it is the Labour Party which is exhibiting double standards with a rather cynical attempt to win votes by the abolition of blood sports largely the province of the land-owning

gentry while leaving untouched a "blood" sport indulged in by millions of its supporters.

For *The Times* to suggest, though, that it would be wrong to prevent one cruelty if we cannot prevent them all is absurd. We must, of course, prevent what cruelty we can prevent *now*, and work towards the abolition of other cruelties when public awareness makes it possible.

This deliberate half-blindness threaded its way throughout the leader, and was most obvious when the writer failed to make a distinction between the slaughter of animals for pleasure and their slaughter for food—which, however distasteful, is still unfortunately necessary to sustain a large proportion of the population (until we can wean ourselves from it).

Not satisfied with this amazing lack of perception, the leader attempts to argue that it is *actually illogical*, and *somehow morally wrong*, to try to prevent the unnecessary slaughter of animals for pleasure if their (currently) necessary slaughter cannot be prevented at the same time. It is unable to comprehend that progress is usually achieved in stages.

Animal Slaughter A Liberty?

Worse follows. The right to slaughter animals for pleasure is described as a "liberty". "To impose the conscience of one part of the community on what other people regard as a central part of their lives is an infringement of liberty."

On what issue could that not have been used as an argument for *laissez-faire*. It was once the "liberty" of a slaver to deprive negroes of *their* liberty, transport them 5,000 miles and sell them to plantation owners. It was once a central part of mine-owners' lives to send seven-year-old children down pits. It is, however, still not a "liberty" to be able to choose for ourselves without interference what we wish to read, see or hear, and in many cases do—usually causing no damage to life, animal or human.

Of course, depriving an animal of its life for a mere whim is considered far less damaging to human morality than offending the offensive Mrs Whitehouse. The arrogance of this attitude towards the creatures with whom we share our planet has been exposed before in *The Freethinker*, not least by Bridg Brophy.

Continuing with its line of argument, however, *The Times* went on to say: "Laws are for necessity, not to assert the universality of the particular opinions of particular groups." This is so facile as to be unworthy of a debate in first-year political science.

Laws, of course, are *not* a necessity—reasonable

standards of human behaviour are a necessity. Laws ARE an assertion of the universality of the particular opinions of particular groups—whether it is those who believe that theft should be punished (as opposed to those who steal), those who believe that pornography should be illegal (as opposed to those who produce or use it), those who believe that homosexual behaviour is ungodly and criminal (as opposed to those who are, quite naturally, homosexual) or those who support the existence of our expensive fox-hunting monarchy (as opposed to those who would see Britain a republic). And so on, *ad infinitum*.

Blood Sports

The Times should have extended its argument even further. Why does it not campaign for the return of bear-baiting and cock-fighting — which were once, and might become again the central part of some people's lives. (Surely if the slaughter of animals for pleasure is the central part of any life, that life is not worth the flesh which hangs on it.) Perhaps *The Times* considers it wrong for a blood sport to be staged primarily for spectators rather than participants. Perhaps the quality of persons involved might not be high enough. Perhaps it is too busy lending its support to those who would see the return of the most popular blood sports of all—hanging and birching.

Further, it goes on to state (and with what authority?) that abolition “will not be accepted as just by those most affected (who? the foxes?) and will therefore be widely disobeyed”. This conjures up visions of midnight fox-hunts disguised as point-to-points, and suggests the revolutionary possibility of the back-bone of our nation — the pillars of the country house and the House of Lords—defying the law in a way pioneered by the heroic Clay Cross councillors, and is a thought amusing if it did not embody such sickening hypocrisy. *The Times* also suggests (with approval, it seems) that the country-based police would ignore such defiance of the law. What it is actually stating is this: the law is inviolate so long as only we choose to violate it.

Then, and of particular interest to secularists: “A law which seemed to represent the vexatious imposition of a largely agnostic conscience would only tend to bring the principle of obedience into further question.”

This can be interpreted as saying (a) that non-Christians can now consider themselves officially in possession of a stronger moral conscience than Christians, though this of course makes them a danger to law and order because that moral conscience would encourage them to sponsor laws which the Christian establishment would then consider it necessary to defy (in other words, we are still scapegoats for establishment guilt), and (b) that defiance of the law by lower orders is wrong and must be punished

but that we must not pass laws likely to be defied by the establishment since, obviously, this would further undermine the principle of obedience of the law. Catch 22.

The leader ends with the crass, patronising and insulting statement that the British “will not be dragooned into being saints by those whose sanctity remains a legitimate matter for debate”. It is notable mainly for the fact that it appears to admit that our fox-hunting gentry are not, after all, saints. After an article full of such bigoted, hysterical, class-arrogant hypocrisy, that little bit of honesty did not become its writer.

I have left until last, however, the leader's most depressing and disgusting feature.

“A progressive conscience which enthusiastically approves the abortion of infants by the million while being concerned to prohibit the killing of a few foxes is dangerously sentimental and dangerously unbalanced. Given the choice between the lives of unborn babies and of foxes our grandparents would have voted for the babies; we may now be asked to vote for the foxes.”

This gem, which attempts to equate the murder of animals for pleasure with the subject of abortion, with all its complexity, can only be viewed with distress, astonishment and rage by all rational people, particularly those women who have been through the traumas of abortion. It is stupid, insensitive, and, I believe, plainly dishonest.

Shallowness of Thought

The subject of abortion has been dealt with comprehensively in the pages of *The Freethinker* in the past, and I see no point in dealing specifically with the issues raised by the above paragraph. It surely needs to be stated, however, that the fact a newspaper as prestigious and influential as *The Times*, one with a reputation for integrity, should have printed in its leader column a passage which demonstrated so clearly its shallowness of thought, ignorance of real issues, and lack of humanity and moral understanding is a matter for deepest regret.

Unfortunately, further suspicions must be cast on the integrity of *The Times* by the responses to the leader published in its letter columns. In the four editions following that of June 14, 17 letters were printed, all but six wholeheartedly supporting *The Times'* line, including a brace of Lords and the secretary of the rather nasty National Association of Veal Producers.

I find it difficult to believe that *The Times* did not receive any letters refuting at length its easily refutable arguments. Could it be that it had made up its mind so firmly on the subject that any argument was superfluous? Or perhaps it was merely embarrassed by its own leader—and critical reaction would have embarrassed it further.

Presumably we shall never know.

Optimism or Pessimism?

GEOFFREY WEBSTER

Philosophic debate about an optimistic or pessimistic approach to life is almost as longstanding as philosophic argument. The ideas of thinkers who have adopted one or other position, from Greco-Roman stoics to modern existentialists, are described by Geoffrey Webster. Not himself an optimist, Mr Webster thinks that atheism is neutral as far as these contrasting outlooks are concerned.

Of the many controversies which have raged down through the centuries in philosophy—monism versus pluralism, realism versus idealism, egoism versus altruism—one of the most vigorous has been that between optimism and pessimism. Now it is a mistake to consider that religion is invariably pessimistic and atheism invariably optimistic. Teilhard De Chardin, arguably the most distinguished Christian thinker since Thomas Aquinas, offered to the world a form of evolutionary optimism (albeit of the most insufferable kind) in which the misery experienced by all the preceding species on this planet can be retrospectively justified because it led to the appearance of Man. On the other hand, some of the ancient atheistic outlooks in Indian philosophy are radically pessimistic, constantly deploring the incarceration of the innocent, vulnerable "soul" in the "sarcophagus" of the brute body. We can see, therefore, that it is necessary to abandon preconceived ideas when it comes to examining the rival outlooks of optimism and pessimism.

Optimism, broadly speaking, is the theory that happiness, goodness and reason predominate in the world at the present time, and will be increasingly in evidence as mankind develops morally and intellectually. Thus, Leibnitz's idea of "pre-established harmony", or Hegel's seductive, enormously influential idea of the "world-process" as the self-revelation and self-realization of a dynamic, purposive "Absolute Spirit". Optimism is also much in evidence in many forms of Chinese thought, where the universe is regarded as a vast system of intricate, harmonious inter-relationships. This tendency is exemplified in the "Hua-Yen" (Flower-Garland") school of Chinese Buddhism, which offers to us the theory of the four levels of cosmic reality. These are: 1. The level of individual phenomena; 2. The level of cosmic principles; 3. The level at which the preceding two interpenetrate; 4. The level at which every individual thing is interpenetrated by every other individual thing. In this outlook, suffering is declared to be illusory and the self is seen as merely a wave on the limitless ocean of the "Cosmic Consciousness." Thus, everything is based on, and totally expressive of, an absolute harmony and

oneness.

In the West, we are (understandably) more familiar with the Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian outlooks. The Greco-Roman outlook (generally speaking) tends to combine moderate pessimism with stoicism. Although the ancient philosophers admitted that life could sometimes be problematic and melancholy, they did not conclude that this state of affairs was inevitable; on the contrary, much of the suffering we encounter in life could be avoided through the cultivation of wisdom and imperturbability. Indeed, a School like the Cyrenaics denied that life was a miserable affair, dedicating themselves enthusiastically to relishing each moment as it passed. Thus, the classical philosophy, whilst often yearning for peace and deliverance from suffering, could not be described as unrelievedly pessimistic.

Christianity's Sombre Outlook

The Judaeo-Christian outlook differs from classical philosophy in being both theistic and obsessed with the idea of personal immortality. The cosmos is seen as the creation of an unlimitedly rational, benevolent deity, the existence of suffering being blamed on the sinfulness of the mythical first man, Adam. Whilst modern Christians try and sweep the embarrassing doctrine of Original Sin under the carpet, saying that pain is simply an "inevitable by-product of evolution", primitive Christianity said that suffering and death were of catastrophic origin—strictly speaking, they were completely unnatural, which is why Jesus was so kindly incarnated in order to liberate us from them. From the start, Christianity (heavily influenced by Gnosticism) was a very sombre outlook, regarding life as a vale of tears, from which one is only released at the time of death, to be immediately transferred to paradise. However, Christianity experienced considerable difficulty in trying to harmonize the two mutually exclusive tendencies of theistic optimism and life-denying, ascetic pessimism. By medieval times, the world had been (philosophically) surrendered to Master Cloven Hoof, and there seemed very little practical difference between heretics who maintained that the world was the work of a malevolent god and non-heretics who maintained that the creator was good but had virtually abandoned the world to the Prince of Darkness!

As European society began to liberate itself from the stultifying influence of religion and began to rely upon observation and experiment rather than faith and ignorance, there was a rebirth of confidence in the human spirit, culminating in the Victorian belief in the perfectibility of man and endless progress. Yet—paradoxically—at the very time when nineteenth century European man was smugly optimistic in his outlook, there were individuals like Schopenhauer

and Darwin who challenged the complacency and anthropolatry surrounding them. Schopenhauer did it by seeing all living beings as merely the objectifications of a blind, remorseless "will". Life was the perpetual conflict of all against all, saturated with suffering; man was basically an irrational, vicious being; one should therefore try to deny the ego and its insatiable desires, living austere, celibate, practising contemplation and compassion. Darwin showed how all beings had evolved from a common, unicellular ancestor, so that God was pensioned off and existence was seen as governed by blind urges and predatory egoism.

The Instinct for Happiness

A little later, along came Freud, who maintained that men were determined by powerful instinctual drives such as sex and aggression, so that civilization is only a valiant attempt to contain these drives, rather than their transcendence. The conscious mind, Freud concluded, was a frail little boat on the heaving surface of the unconscious, constantly threatened by the mountainous waves of the instinctual urges. Pleasure, happiness? For Freud, pleasurable feelings are just a result of eliminated tension, so that pleasure is essentially negative rather than positive. (This doctrine is obviously influenced by Schopenhauer, who also said that happiness was only the satisfaction of a desire, nothing more.)

Two other nineteenth-century thinkers deserve a brief mention. Eduard Von Hartmann attempted to reconcile the optimism of Hegel and the pessimism of Schopenhauer by seeing evolution as a fierce contest between Unconscious Will and Unconscious Reason. Eventually, Reason breaks through to the level of reflection (in Man), thus allowing the consummation of the evolutionary process to take place—its voluntary annulment in and through a philosophically enlightened humanity. Nietzsche could perhaps best be described as an "heroic" optimist: maintaining that the amount of pain a man can take "determines his position in the hierarchy", he advocated "Dionysian" life-affirmation. The "Superman", sublimating his "will-to-power" (for Nietzsche, the fundamental drive in all living things), constantly overcomes his own mental and physical limitations, until he is prepared to accept the idea of the "Eternal Recurrence" of his life (the ultimate form of life-affirmation). Nietzsche certainly recognized that existence was often hard and unhappy; someone who suffered from agonizing stomach cramps, eye-strain and blinding, lengthy attacks of migraine would hardly be likely to say life was just a bowl of cherries! Nevertheless, he asserted that the existence of suffering did not automatically invalidate life (as against Schopenhauer, who said it did, taking the view that suffering was a punishment for the sin of existence).

In the twentieth century, the Existentialists have

continued the pessimistic tradition. Men like Heidegger and Sartre have described life as basically meaningless and absurd, seeing "authentic" existence as one which is strong enough to freely acknowledge the intrinsic emptiness and vanity of the human adventure. We also have the work of a novelist and dramatist like Samuel Beckett, who evidently regards existence as a disease for which the only cure is death.

One can easily dismiss this difference of opinion about the value of life by saying "We cannot generalize about the worth of existence. Whilst we are conditioned by so many unalterable factors (subjective and objective), this doesn't mean that life is intrinsically one thing or another, inasmuch as each life is different from all others" (The idea of the cosmic singularity of each person). Perhaps we may venture the opinion that each man is certainly a limited, vulnerable living entity, but that this finitude and vulnerability co-exists (in the individual) with qualities like courage, compassion and adaptability. The acid test lies in comparing people's reactions to existence—if a man holds death to be a greater misfortune than birth, he is an optimist, if the opposite, a pessimist. If someone, confronted by a newborn child, experiences a feeling of joy and reverence, he is an optimist, if pity a pessimist. (A genuine pessimist, needless to say, would be completely opposed to procreation). Perhaps—in the final analysis—one's choice of optimism or pessimism is determined as much by one's temperament as by the actual circumstances of life. So, an atheist can be of a cheerful, resilient nature, seeing life as something to be grateful for, or he may regard existence as a gloomy, unprofitable business, agreeing with E. M. Cioran that "By capitulating to life, this world has betrayed Nothingness." Of course, a consistent pessimist would feel it a point of honour to commit suicide—the argument of someone like Camus, who maintains that committing suicide means one has surrendered to the "absurdity" of life rather than holding out against it, is a very weak one. If existence is intrinsically painful, why not hasten to the tranquillity and invulnerability of the grave? How many "pessimists" actually died at an advanced age? (Dear Christians: if we have no right to take life, surely we also have no right to give it? If suicide is wrong, so is parenthood.)

Atheism, per se, is unconcerned with optimism and pessimism, since it is merely a denial of the objective existence of a Creator. Even if the existence of god could be conclusively demonstrated, it would not follow that creation was thereby justified, nor would it follow that god was omnipotent or benevolent. If the world is inexplicable without god, it is inexcusable with him! The optimist says: "Where there's life, there's hope." The pessimist says: "Where there's hope, there's suffering." That—in a nutshell—is the difference between them.

JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

We are fools for Christ's sake. 1 Corinthians 4-10

Charles Oxley, that distinguished educationist, publisher and servant of the Lord, recently made his particular contribution to the Christian campaign for the retention of blasphemy law. He compiled and published a manifesto signed by 180 "men and women of distinction, learning and experience", declaring their support for this particular form of censorship. Readers are assured that "many of those who have signed believe that the law might be extended to cover other religions".

The front page of the document is headed by quotations from Exodus 20—7: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain"; and Colossians 3—8: "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth". With commendable tact the author omits Leviticus 24—16: "And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death".

Mr Oxley takes the opportunity to denounce opponents of blasphemy law and other forms of protection and privilege afforded to Christianity. Schoolmasterish admonitions are hurled at Nicolas Walter, the National Secular Society and those who "are determined to destroy existing society with its Christian institutions and characteristics".

It can be safely assumed that a devout, bible-believing Christian like Charles Oxley invoked God's blessing on his efforts to confound the blasphemers. With a little help from The One Above, the whole exercise turned out to be an Almighty cock-up.

For a start, Mr Oxley's list of "men and women of distinction, learning and experience" is rather unimpressive. It includes a substantial number of worthy nonentities like Masood Archad (student, Pakistani nationality), Colonel F. Lane Fox, Royal Horse Guards (retired), Laurence E. Porter, schoolmaster (retired), W. Leslie Pratt, Geoffrey W. Robson, London District Postmaster (retired), John Rolston, Yorkshire farmer and Ralph Turton, lawyer (retired).

Some of the signatories are distinguished in curious ways. K. P. Frampton, for example, assisted the Children of God sect to establish itself in Britain (and lived to regret it); Bishop Vernon Nicholls has resolutely defended the Isle of Man's use of birching as a form of punishment; Lord Macleod and

Lord Halsbury made speeches during the House of Lords debate on blasphemy last February that created more merriment than enlightenment.

One of the main reasons for publishing such a manifesto is, of course, to publicise and promote the views of its sponsors. Here, too, Mr Oxley's endeavours came to naught. It was scarcely mentioned, even in the religious press. (Beg pardon: it made the front page of the *Catholic Herald*, but the compositor made such a hash of it that poor Mr Oxley must have fervently wished that he had not sent the precious word to Charterhouse Street.)

The Lord loveth a cheerful giver, but his servant must have felt decidedly glum when he had to foot the bill for printing, distributing and launching his masterpiece at a press conference in London. For there had been practically no return on his investment.

Then came the hardest blow of all, in the form of a letter from the legal representatives of Denis Lemon, Editor of *Gay News* and a defendant in the Old Bailey blasphemy trial. Alas! In his enthusiasm to smite the unbelievers Charles Oxley went too far and made a serious accusation against Denis Lemon. The matter is now with the lawyers.

The servant of the Lord appears to be up a gum tree.

* * *

When Uri Geller, the personable and talented young showman from Israel, made his debut on British television five years ago the gulls were ecstatic about his "paranormal" gifts. Fleet Street and the provincial newspapers, daily purveyors of irrational rubbish in their astrology columns, devoted a colossal amount of space to his exploits, although the only aspect of the "Geller effect" that interested them was his effect on circulation figures.

Those who expressed doubts or reservations about the tricks of Uri Geller's trade were dismissed as materialist bigots. In fairness to Geller, however, it should be pointed out that his naive devotees made far more extravagant claims regarding his abilities than he did.

Professor John Taylor of King's College, London, who appeared with Geller on the famous television programme, said at the time he felt that the whole framework with which he viewed the world had suddenly been destroyed. The mathematics professor imparted a scientific blessing on the spoon-bender from Jerusalem which made a considerable impact on the British public.

Last month Professor Taylor published a paper which shows that he has changed his mind about the "Geller effect". It did not require paranormal abilities to foresee that the news of Professor Taylor's return to rationality would not make the headlines. And it is unlikely that he will see the inside of many television studios in future.

APARTHEID SUPPORT

"Despite publicity given to opposition by various churches to apartheid in South Africa, the majority of white Christians in that country wholeheartedly support the repressive measures used by the Nationalist regime to maintain white supremacy," said Barry Duke, at a meeting of Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Mr Duke is an expatriate South African journalist and an Executive Committee member of the National Secular Society.

Mr Duke said: "The majority of white Christians in South Africa have found strong theological justification for maintaining divisions between the races, and the churches which serve 60 per cent of South Africa's white population have actively promoted apartheid as God's will. These churches have strong affiliations with the pro-Nazi Broederbond organisation, and from their ranks, and the ranks of the Broederbond, are drawn almost the entire Nationalist cabinet.

"To my knowledge, none of the Afrikaans churches has seriously challenged the Government, nor uttered a single word of condemnation against institutionalised violence and murder perpetrated by the Nationalist regime against their opponents, black or white. In fact, if one analyses the general crime statistics in South Africa, it becomes clear that the greatest amount of violence against black people is inflicted by the strongly Christian Afrikaans sections of the population.

"It is this section of the population who formulated the infamous no-sex-across-the-colour-bar laws, and ironically it is this section of the population who persistently get caught breaking the law. Afrikaans clergymen and policemen are traditionally the worst offenders. They spend half their lives braying about the bible and fulminating about liberalism and communism; and the other half beating blacks or devising ways of humiliating them.

"In short, they are unprincipled Christian thugs with aggravated god complexes."

Barry Duke was also highly critical of the English churches in South Africa which, he said, were doing nothing constructive to oppose the tyranny of apartheid. Instead, they were helping to entrench the system by trying to reconcile the blacks to their unhappy lot in life.

"The churches have merely adopted a token stand against the excesses of apartheid, but not against apartheid itself. They will not accept that it is pointless just criticising the Nationalist regime for its panoply of degrading laws, for detention without trial, for the systematic killing of detainees, and for widespread torture in prisons and police stations. These are merely the symptoms of a foul disease.

"True to their past record, when they begged for the better treatment of slaves rather than the abolition of slavery, the churches in South Africa are

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quite content to bring into play the age-old Christian confidence trick of reconciling the oppressed to their unhappy lot.

"But the simple truth is that the meek in South Africa, or anywhere else for that matter, aren't going to inherit a damn thing. Let's be honest—the churches need the poor and downtrodden to preach at. They need to exhort slaves to obey their masters, and it would be unthinkable for them to campaign seriously for a major social change.

"The churches in South Africa are microcosms of white South African society as a whole. There are church leaders who are thought of as staunch opponents of apartheid and who have fallen foul of the regime. But the sad reality is that people like Bishop Trevor Huddleston, Father Cosmos Desmond and Beyers Naude of the banned Christian Institute, were voices crying in the wilderness—very rarely supported by their white laity and barely tolerated by their fellow clerics in South Africa.

"In regard to apartheid itself, the Nationalists, because of world opinion, now try to disguise this nasty, bible-based ideology behind such phrases as 'separate development' and 'plural democracy'.

"It is like trying to pass off a deadly nightshade as a daffodil."

USA—DEMOCRACY OR THEOCRACY?

A group of American Atheists led by Madalyn O'Hair are challenging the use of the phrase "In God We Trust" on paper currency and coinage. They point out that Thomas Jefferson, who openly proclaimed himself a materialist, has "In God We Trust" inscribed on both the two-dollar bill and the nickel coin that bear his likeness. They ask "Would 'In God We Trust' stamped on the Biblical 'Thirty Pieces of Silver' have stopped Judas from accepting them?"

The case of *O'Hair vs Blumenthal* (Blumenthal is director of the mint) has now reached the appeal stage after fourteen months of litigation, during which "ignorant (i.e. lacking knowledge) and stupid (i.e. lacking sense) judges" ruled that the phrase "In God We Trust" is a patriotic expression which has nothing to do with religion. American Atheists argue that the First and Fourteenth Amendment of the American Constitution protect atheists in their right to be free from religion. There is a legal argument about the meaning of the Amendments and Atheists are fighting for an inter-

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pretation which reflects the phrase of Jefferson "a wall of separation between church and state".

It has been argued that the phrase has a secular purpose in its use on currency, but American Atheists point out that this is the equivalent of saying that "If the motto were stamped on toilet seats in government buildings, this would be a proper and secular purpose for such a religious phrase".

Madalyn O'Hair is renowned for her fiery atheism, for her legal struggles to keep religion separate from the state, and for her public debates with religious men. In arguing against the use of the slogan she wrote: "The constant day to day passage of money with this offensive slogan through the hands of atheists is repugnant to them. It is equivalent to a Christian being daily required to handle government currency on which the slogan would appear 'There is NO God in Which You Can Trust'. The outcry would echo throughout the world."

BELIEFS OF YOUTH

During the four years from 1974 to 1978, between eight and ten more young people in every hundred have rejected what the churches stand for. This is one of the findings of the *National Survey on Religious Attitudes of Young People* which was sponsored by a number of Christian organisations to provide facts to evaluate the church's work among young people. Parts of the sample were readers of the Christian evangelical magazine *Buzz* (a highly untypical group), but the survey was linked with other research projects to gain representative samples from fourth- and sixth-form school pupils.

Comparisons with a previous survey show that the number who consider church services boring have increased from 42 to 49 per cent, and those who believe God helps people have been reduced from 62 to 52 per cent. In 1974 only 13 per cent dismissed the bible as "out of date", while 22 per cent do so now.

Not many of the youngsters definitely do not believe in God—only 18 per cent of the boys and 6 per cent of the girls. On the other hand far less than the majority have a definite belief in God, with 20 per cent of the boys and 35 per cent of the girls being positive about this question. Predictably with belief in God the various "don't know" categories are the most numerous.

Those alarmed at the rise of cults such as the Unification Church or Hare Krishna groups will observe that only about one per cent seem interested in such groups, while 33 per cent are interested in

Christianity. There is a much greater fascination for supernatural and unproven matters like UFOs, astrology, re-incarnation and ghosts. Horoscopes are believed by 63 per cent of the girls and 28 per cent of the boys and ghosts/spirits are believed in by 47 per cent of girls (35 per cent boys). Boys incline to more practical speculation with 60 per cent believing in UFO's and 65 per cent believing in life on other planets.

The youngsters showed a fairly conservative approach to moral issues. Sex before marriage is seen as definitely right by only 57 per cent of boys and 15 per cent of girls. Abortion is thought acceptable for anyone who wants it by 38 per cent of the boys and 24 per cent of the girls, only if there is a possibility that the child will be born abnormal by 33 per cent boys and 43 per cent girls, and never by 16 per cent of boys and 21 per cent of girls. Teenagers were less tolerant of homosexuality with 58 per cent of the boys and 38 per cent of the girls thinking it was definitely wrong.

The most hopeful sign in the survey was the indication that 58 per cent of the young people questioned felt that their views on moral issues related to their own consciences or learning through experience, rather than external authorities such as school or religious preachers. It is such individual morality based on the recognition that morality is social in origin that secularists would support.

Freethinker Fund

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"Gay News" Appeal. The final appeal in the blasphemy trial against "Gay News" began at the House of Lords on 20 November. Evidence (including details from "The Freethinker" 1921 and 1922) and legal argument are expected to last two weeks, but it is not thought likely that judgement will take place for a further several weeks.

"Why not have a Vice-Pope?" Suggestion quoted in the "Catholic Herald".

BOOKS

SEX LAW, by Tony Honoré, Duckworth, £8.95.
THE LAW AND SEXUALITY, by Steve Cohen and others. Grass Roots Books and Manchester Law Centre, £3.95 cloth, £1.00 paper.

For anybody interested in sex—and who isn't?—the Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford has written an important, indeed an indispensable, handbook. Most readers coming fresh to the subject will probably be amazed, and I hope appalled, by the seemingly endless list of things which English law says you mustn't do with your own body, or other peoples', even if everyone concerned is willing and in private. Starting from the admirable notion of protecting people, the law—especially in Victorian times—became infected with puritanical zeal to enforce morality and to protect people *against themselves*. It does not seem to strike Professor Honoré as odd to have to list so many situations (still more numerous for homosexual than for heterosexual behaviour) where consent freely given *in fact* is not consent *in law*, and for which totally misleading legal labels such as "indecent assault" are used. The law is also imbued with Victorian concepts of women and children as inferior in status and rights to the dominant male: so, presumably to "protect" the weaker parties, it discriminates against men in a variety of ways which are offensive to current concepts of sexual equality.

"Messy" is a term which the author applies more than once to this area of the law. He himself advocates some sensible and much-needed reforms designed to bring the law more into line with modern notions of personal freedom and responsibility, and with the growing acceptance of a right to sexual self-expression so long as others are not harmed or unwillingly involved. "This single idea, that human beings have the right to use their bodies as they choose, and to touch others with their consent, is all that is needed to furnish a technical basis for the right to sexual freedom." We are, however, quite a long way as yet from wholehearted popular, and certainly from legal, acceptance of such an elementary human right—even attempts to contact like-minded partners for sexual activity which is not itself criminal is at present denied to homosexuals under the archaic common law offence of "conspiracy to corrupt public morals" (*Kneller v DPP*, 1973).

Though Professor Honoré does not refer to the Sexual Law Reform Society's proposals for a radical recasting of the laws relating to sex, his own suggestions are based upon almost identical principles to the Society's, and only differ on matters of detail such as the best way of ensuring adequate protection for teenagers who have reached puberty but are below the legal age of majority from sexual ex-

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ploitation while allowing them the necessary freedom to experiment and discover for themselves their own best path to sexual happiness. As Bishop John Robinson has put it (in his lecture *The Place of Law in the Field of Sex*), the proper function of the law is "not to prohibit but to protect, not to enforce morals but to safeguard persons, their privacies and freedoms". The principle of sexual freedom or self-rule is a principle of conduct, not of education, says Professor Honoré. Nevertheless, people require educating for sexual responsibility just as they do for all other responsibility: and sexual responsibility includes respect for the sexual freedoms of others whose tastes one may not share or even comprehend.

In contrast to the recent national hysteria about paedophilia, Professor Honoré's book comes as a welcome breath of fresh air and common sense. He is excellent on the existing law and suggestions for its reform. But while his discussion of the changing social status of marriage as against cohabitation, and the need to reflect this in contemporary law, is interesting and thought-provoking, some of his other digressions into social aspects are too sketchy. (He does not seem to be very clued up about homosexuality, for instance.)

I have only one big grumble about *Sex Law*. £8.95 is a very stiff price, even in these days, for 180 pages of text. Hopefully the publishers will issue an early cheap paperback edition, and the Professor will use the opportunity to have some more copious second thoughts in some respects and to prune the occasional lapses in his generally crisp and very readable style.

Anyone who is still in any doubt that the laws about sex are antediluvian will have their illusions shattered by *The Law and Sexuality* (or "How to Cope with the Law if You're Not 100% Conventionally Heterosexual"). Its main thesis is that the legal disabilities imposed upon male and female homosexuals, transsexuals and transvestites—and the social discrimination against them which the law underpins—stem from the historic assumption that women are dependent upon, and subordinate to, men both socially and sexually. So the law gives husbands and fathers rights which are not shared by wives and mothers; ignores lesbianism (though NOT, authors please note for future editions, because Queen Victoria couldn't credit its existence); and oppresses male homosexuals because of their 'unmanly' desires and behaviour.

Two of the book's merits are its often very funny cartoons, and a string of preposterous magisterial and judicial pronouncements culled from the press and the law reports, but which could scarcely have been invented by great legal wits like the late Sir

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Alan Herbert or Henry Cecil if they weren't mind-bogglingly true. While its implications are very serious indeed, it is in parts a very funny book.

It is also a clarion call to urgently needed radical reforms. No-one who reads *The Law and Sexuality* can remain in any doubt that the legal ignorance it reveals is not bliss—it is a national disgrace. I hope the Lord Chancellor's Office will see that a free copy is supplied to each of Her Majesty's Judges, and that a great many Members of Parliament will read it too as a prelude to drastic action.

ANTONY GREY

THEATRE

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN by Keith Dewhurst. Cottesloe.
NIGHT AND DAY by Tom Stoppard. Phoenix.

Freedom of speech, in one form or another, is the theme of two new major productions at the National and in the West End. With the *Secrets* trial and the Bingham Report already fresh in the public mind, these plays provide a timely forum for extended debate of the issues.

Keith Dewhurst's adaptation of the Christopher Hill account of Cromwellian England reminds us once more of the mammoth social upheaval out of which our cherished civil liberties and democratic institutions were born. The period is a familiar one in recent drama. Caryl Churchill with *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and David Storey with *Cromwell* have also looked to the Revolution to illuminate contemporary questions. Mr Dewhurst's focus is on the various radical groups that emerged following the king's execution, principally the communistic Levellers, the fanatical Ranters and, interestingly, within the New Model Army itself. Each hoped for a foundation of prosperity and harmony among themselves and comity with their neighbours, and found instead poverty, pestilence and official disfavour. Some were killed outright; others were imprisoned and tortured. The bloodshed continued, and disorder was protracted into a creeping paralysis and national rot.

The pattern of decay traced through the course of events pinpoints important parallels with our own age, notably with regard to the spread of radical ideas. Then as now, the army was kept on the move, in isolation, and the mere hint of dissent was rapidly checked at source. Not surprisingly, both the Levellers' doctrine of rule by "Agreement of the People" and the Ranters' belief in heaven on earth were founded in the army, and proponents were discharged before their ideas infiltrated the ranks. Once outside, the leaders (Winstanley of the Levellers and William Clarkson, "Captain of the

Rant") formed rural communities based on their beliefs.

Yet, as the play makes clear, the main opposition was not among the two groups, but from Cromwell's men. Clarkson is captured, imprisoned and forced to recant. Winstanley's community is broken up, scattered, and its members are compelled to forage a living from gathering in the harvests as casual labourers. The harvest metaphor at the end of the play symbolises new beginnings. But when one thinks of the fate of a Ranter, charged with blasphemy and executed, the beginning is deliberately muted. Indeed the Ranters are said to blaspheme for advancing an essentially Christian dogma. Shades of the 1977 Blasphemy Trial.

Tom Stoppard's brief has to do, too, with the circulation of ideas. He, too, sees access controlled by the powerful few and ultimately muzzling free speech. "We are working to keep the rich men richer than us", says a journalist of his omnipotent employers. He does not write essays, he says, he writes facts. Do these facts contain any value, or are they merely sensational headlines set down in "lego-set language"? Is the vested interest of the press baron best served by keeping the populace as ignorant as possible with such stories as "Tug-of-Love Mother in Pools Win"?

The play is set in a fictitious African country in the throes of a military coup. A team of British journalists have come down to cover the story and find out whether the disturbance is Soviet-backed. Yet the reporter, a hard-bitten Australian veteran, denies any crusading impulse. "I cover fires", he says. Watford or Kambawe, it makes little difference. His rival, a novice from the provinces fired from the same paper for refusing to join the union, has managed to get an exclusive interview with the rebel general. The veteran quickly wires home to have the "Grimsby scab's" copy blacked. In the meantime the team are ensconced in the home of the local industrial magnate, a British expatriate with an interest in keeping the president in power. While he is out reconnoitering, his beautiful wife keeps house for the journalists. She has slept with the veteran on a flying visit to London the week before. She will presently bed-down with the neophyte before sending him out to be ambushed at dawn.

These, in broad outline, are the events round which Mr Stoppard frames his debate. His sympathies are most immediately with the new man, the man who resists strong-arm tactics in the interests of serious investigative journalism. Yet, despite the barbed comments of the wife in support of this argument, a deal of sympathy is shown for the professional and his colleague, the photographer. Yes, the play seems to be saying, such is the way of the world. Regrettable, but necessary, so long as the status quo is maintained.

The fully rounded irony is that in blacking the

journalist's scoop, the veteran prevents his own story from appearing, for the union calls an all-out strike, and the newspaper will not appear. The onus, however, is not on either camp, but on the readership. We receive the kind of news coverage we deserve, and if we want an improved press to avoid reading newspapers is no sensible protest. The play is, in a way, an existential argument. Mr Stoppard does not find issue with the practitioners, but with the wife, whose criticism is largely unfounded, since she has given up reading newspapers altogether. The author clearly admires activity, for its own sake, rather than inert abstinence. His real concern is voiced by the photographer in a closing speech on the tireless effort of journalists to shed light, however narrow, and continue to do so at whatever cost.

JAMES MACDONALD

LETTERS

HENRY II AND BECKETT

It is a pity Europeans so often have such extraordinary muddled ideas of English history. Rafael de la Llave ("The Freethinker", November) is quite wrong that Henry II, one of our best lawgivers, "killed" Thomas à Beckett, least of all on a matter of heresy. The opposite is rather the case.

Henry made Beckett, his Chancellor, Archbishop of Canterbury in the hope that he would continue to support his policy, which was to break the power of the Church over civil justice. Canon law had become an abuse by which anyone with the slightest claim to clerical status or office could demand to be tried by the ecclesiastic courts, which regularly, through bribery or negligence, let off even murderers and felons without punishment: thus making a mockery of attempts to preserve justice, law and order.

Beckett chose to defy the King on this matter and proclaim the supreme authority of the Church and ecclesiastic courts. Whether Henry's hasty words about being rid of "this churlish priest" were really intended to provoke Beckett's murder seems highly questionable: in any case it defeated its object and Henry found himself and England once again fettered by church dominance in this and other matters. The "sainthood" of Beckett was a blow to English civil progress.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

ABORTION STATISTICS

You reported last month (November) that abortions on girls under sixteen had risen from 1,732 in 1970 to 3,592 in 1977. It may be helpful if this is put into perspective.

The number of abortions on girls under 16 changed little between 1975 and 77; figures for the first half of 1978 suggest a reduction to the 1974 level (a 6 per cent reduction).

The increase between 1970 and 75 was due to an increase in the proportion of schoolgirl pregnancies aborted as well as to the increase in the number of such pregnancies.

However there is certainly no place for complacency and Brook are quite right to call for the NHS to make contraceptive advice and supplies more easily available to young people.

DAVID FLINT,
Abortion Law Reform Association

FOETAL BAPTISM

Intending, quite rightly, to point to some logical absurdities that follow from the Christian belief that a fertilised ovum is a complete human being with an immortal soul, Nicolas Walter satirically suggests (November "Freethinker") that there should be a baptism and funeral for every miscarriage. But you have to be more absurd than that to exceed the lengths to which some believers will actually go. The fact is that a Catholic member of my own family who had a miscarriage in hospital connived at the disgusting baptismal ceremony carried out by an Irish nurse over the messy contents of the slop-bucket.

BARBARA SMOKER

PITY THE POOR PRINCE

In News and Notes (August 1978) you offer advice to "the blundering prince" to begin "to sort out his own ideas about existence . . . before he makes any more well meaning pronouncements" of the kind he made to the Salvation Army, which gave you and an army of other sharpshooters a critical field day. Having castigated as "worse than folly" continuing argument and bickering over doctrinal matters he went on to say, in a passage to which you refer, "Surely what we should be worried about now is whether people are going to become atheists".

Many of your readers would no doubt agree that evangelism is often counter-productive: for instance it would be astonishing if all those Church Parades, at School and in the Services, were responsible for the production of even one True Believer out of a previous non-believer. Prince Charles quoted a toastmaster as saying of the eloquent Commissioner Catherine Bramwell-Booth that if she chose she could convert the Chief Rabbi: but then the Chief Rabbi, traditionally a believer in God, might fairly be regarded as already half-converted from atheism. And the history of the Salvation Army suggests that conversion of infidels is not its soldiers' primary aim when they express compassion in selfless work with the wretched and the deprived.

My impression is that there is a rudimentary atheist, an undercover unbeliever, in everyone who claims (as I do myself) not to be an atheist. He would be the part of one's being likely to worry about "whether people are going to become atheists", rather than any other part which is sustained by faith. The father who cried "I believe" so that his child might be cured by a miracle (Mark ix:24) yet begged for help with his unbelief though in no apparent danger of becoming an atheist. Some atheists may seem, judged by their conduct, to be closer to God than many who claim to be believers. How confusing! But then being confused is like being worried, a state of mind existing where faith is absent.

Of course if an unbeliever were hiding in every believer it would be astonishing if every unbeliever did not, "per contra", harbour a believer, in the closet. A belief in the existence of "God" is regarded, by all those who lack conviction, as a matter of faith: all who reject such a belief must be sustained by faith alone (since they face an insuperable logical obstacle to rational conviction that that rejection is valid).

Sustained thus by faith, I wonder whether atheists are ever worried or confused?

MICHAEL RUBINSTEIN

(Although this letter has been held over for some time because of pressure on space, we feel it still raises important points. Ed.)

Privacy

FRANCIS BENNION

A collection of fifteen essays' by academic writers associated with Southampton University provides a valuable interdisciplinary study of the important social issue of privacy. Francis Bennion discusses some of the questions of personal identity and social organisation which the book raises.

Living means being addressed, but from generation to generation we perfect the defence apparatus. People close themselves so as not to be influenced. There is fear of losing one's "me", but it may be a mistaken fear. One cannot be influenced, except by what one already possesses in oneself. Tell me who influences you, and I will tell you who you are.

Privacy means many things; above all control over the immediate environment. Where one is, whom one is with, what noises assail one's ears, are things over which control is sought. We desire personal autonomy, and this is an aspect of it. We have our social roles to play, resenting interference.

Consciously or not, the individual selects his or her roles from a large repertoire of available behaviours. There are different roles for home and work, and subdivisions within them (role-for-spouse, role-for-one's offspring, role-for-colleagues, role-for-one's boss). Normal social interaction is impossible if people use plays foreign to their expected role. Harold Garfinkel (no doubt remembering *She Stoops to Conquer*) arranged for students in a class he was teaching to treat their mothers as lodgers deal with their landladies. Similarly, he had customers in a bookshop approached as if they were sales staff. Roger Ingham, author of one of the essays in this collection, says: "In both cases the effects were quite startling, and led to a breakdown in social interaction similar in kind to that produced when, on another occasion, he began moving his opponent's pieces in a game of chess."

Roles import rules, and it is understood that the rules corresponding to one's current role will be complied with by others as well as oneself. Thus an unintentional belch in company is ignored, although people within earshot are perfectly aware of the occurrence of this role-inappropriate behaviour. Roles are divided by Goffman into front-region and back-region roles, with corresponding onstage and offstage behaviours. Clothes and other personal physical characteristics are used as props. Hair-style and make-up are manipulated to support a role, or indicate its rejection. Sometimes, as with gays who have not come out, offstage as well as onstage be-

'PRIVACY, essays edited by J. B. Young. John Wiley & Sons, £12.00.

haviours are elaborate deceptions from beginning to end. With many people it may be difficult to determine where acting ends and truth begins. If the waiter puts on one performance for the diners and a quite different one for the kitchen staff, where is he ever himself? "Indeed has he even got a self or are his successive performances all he is?"

Goffman speaks of "personal space" to describe the area surrounding an individual, anywhere within which an entering other causes him to feel encroached upon. You may not stand close to another in a lift unless it is crowded. You may not intrude into a conversation. Complex signals indicate resistance. "The lady signals 'Don't come closer' and the gentleman recognises the sign and defers to it. Two parties to a dialogue ignore a third party and he goes away".

Role-playing and personal space signals need to be distinguished from other signals which are involuntary and drive people away against the wishes of the signaller. These can give the disabled, for example, much more privacy than they want (and make them lonely). People's inability to cope with their feelings about the maimed or disfigured leads to avoidance. So does any defect that makes a person look or sound odd or different, or hinders mobility, or renders social intercourse difficult or troublesome. The deaf suffer deeply from this.

Among both normal and disabled people, individuality is expressed through personal possessions. A car owner identifies with a mass-produced car 'personalized' by fancy wheels at a fancy price. A pet animal or favourite pipe is regarded as intensely personal, fully private. "It is as if a man vests part of himself in his personal belongings. They are part of who he is".

Interference with such complex and delicate patterns is a fundamental breach of privacy, though sometimes there are compelling reasons for it. Gadgets now exist for directing the thoughts of an individual without his knowledge, but we do not need such extremes to make us uneasy about the trend of events. This book abounds with more mundane examples, particularly from the "total institutions" which fill our society. A council children's home allows no personal belongings and allocates clothing from a daily communal pile. Total denial of privacy to prisoners of war causes "irritability and resentment, revealed in excessive fault-finding and boasting." A claim by mental patients for a degree of privacy, or territorial behaviour such as liking for a particular chair or corner, is interpreted as a further symptom of their illness. A convicted criminal "cannot be left alone with his private identity: the institution has a responsibility to change him". It may change a neat and clean

young man by banging him up with an old lag who is dirty and careless in matters of hygiene, or with a powerful homosexual who rapes him. Good citizens serving in the armed forces, the police or even the prison service are denied privacy in their living quarters. At the end of life, the terminal patient may suffer from the conditions in the open hospital ward. As he feels progressively weaker and worse, he may increasingly want to spend his last days with familiar things. One of our authors cites a terminal patient who kept his eyes closed and when asked why said: "I'd prefer an ordinary life."

It seems that respect for privacy, having greatly increased in Western society, may now be on the decline. In medieval times Royalty were expected to perform all bodily functions in public. The Younger Committee found many societies, primitive and modern, "that do not have and would not admire the norms of privacy accepted in Western Europe or North America." Lenin told the Young Communists in 1920 "We recognize nothing private. Our morality is entirely subordinate to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat". Young pupils in East German schools are asked to draw the television clock. If they draw the clock shown on West German television they reveal breach by their parents of the order to confine viewing to the state programme. Reisman shows that inner-directed morality is on the wane, its bulwarks weakening. In place of such defences for autonomy as pride in work, property, class, hierarchy and conscience, other-directed values take over. "Privacy has become clandestine. Not in solitary and selfish contemplation but in doing things with other people does one fulfil oneself."

In his essay on medical problems of privacy, Ted Cantrell divides privacy into "solo-type privacy", with which we have been dealing so far in this review, and "data-type privacy" or the desire to keep personal information to oneself. This also is an aspect of the wish for personal autonomy. Even the theist, who believes that an Omniscient Being knows all he ever thinks, objects if fellow-humans claim to know it too. Nor is the objection limited to information which may cause harm if known. In his essay Lubor Velecky, a philosopher, says that I cannot reasonably object if without my consent others are told my height, my married status, my Christian name. "It is sheer vanity if a person objects to his or her real age being known and the moral defence of vanity seems to be impossible." Yet reasonably or not many people feel threatened even by the disclosure of "neutral" facts about themselves. H. Hart tells us of a survey in which no less than 83% of respondents said they would object to the amount of their income being freely available to anyone who wanted to know.

There are many more concrete objections to breach of data-type privacy however. Christopher

Bryant, a sociologist, gives a useful summary. After referring to our apprehension "at the prospect of continuous surveillance, of the composite dossier on the desk of the secret policeman, of the print-out in the office of the Minister of Good Intentions" he continues:

"It is partly that we have something to hide. All of us, unless we are psychopaths, are ashamed of some of the things we have done. It is partly that we have done things which we are not ashamed of but which are open to misrepresentation. It is partly that we have blundered, suffered grief or ridicule, changed our minds. It is partly that we fear that mistakes have been made in drawing up our file or that information given maliciously has been added . . . We fear that the dossier or print-out will be used against us, perhaps wilfully, perhaps not. We are daunted by the time and energy it would take to explain even the things we are not ashamed of and do not consider to have been mistaken."

We particularly fear the errors and manipulation of those who handle the ever-growing army of computers. Despite technical improvements there will always be grounds for mistrust. A local police chief in the US was accused of deleting the record of his own traffic offence from the State's computerized police records. He could equally have inserted a fictitious entry in the records of citizens who had annoyed him (or had failed to meet his demand for a bribe).

The book gives many instances where infringement of individual privacy is justified. Living means being addressed, and excessive regard for private life endangers society by leaving the body politic unattended. We are resigned to yielding our secrets to the tax inspector; and by embarking on tax evasion we bring upon ourselves even greater intrusions on our privacy. If we desire social security payments we accept some degree of official prying (there are 44 different types of means test currently used in Britain). Comparison of social security files can save the taxpayer money. (D. W. Barron, a mathematician, tells how in California comparison of the school registration files with the files of payments for dependent children showed several hundred non-existent children!) Family privacy is justly invaded where baby-battering is suspected or an application for adoption is made. Growing paternalism may take such trends too far. P. J. Tomlinson, a sociologist, quotes C. S. Lewis:

"Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busy-bodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the

approval of their own conscience.”

Another justification for infringement of privacy is the existence of a competing social good. Gerald Dworkin, writing on privacy and the law, shows that the US Supreme Court, while recognizing privacy as a fundamental constitutional right in itself, has strengthened the rival constitutional right of free speech at the expense of actions for invasion of privacy. In Britain, Brian Walden's Right of Privacy Bill foundered on opposition from those concerned with press freedom. As P. J. Tomlinson puts it, “restrictions on the freedom of the press can lead to the protection of the privacy of the tyrant and oppressor”. Conflict also arises with the social need for open justice. Sometimes privacy wins here (cases involving official secrets, sexual impotence or the welfare of children are heard in camera). Even truth can be a casualty. The Government countered criticism of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Bill in 1974 by saying that truth is not any more paramount than any other principle of civilised conduct, such as the need for compassion and understanding.

The book is valuable in its discussion of how justifiable rights of privacy can best be protected. By human rights procedures? By the civil or criminal law? By self-regulation, through such bodies as the Press Council? By conciliation procedures? By social norms? All these have their value. Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 17 of the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 8 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms all specify a basic right to privacy. Domestic legal systems confer protection which is fragmentary and incomplete

(trespass, defamation, breach of confidence, copyright). Criminal law gives little cover: theft of the board room table is a crime, but not theft of the board room secrets. New South Wales passed the Privacy Committee Act in 1957, establishing a statutory body with broad powers of investigation and conciliation. Denis McQuail, discussing privacy and the mass media, concludes however that “it is better to encourage tendencies to self-regulation and to develop existing institutions, rather than to formulate new legislative controls.” A practical note is struck by Roger Ingham, psychologist, who points out that physical factors in architecture or planning can help or hinder privacy. As we saw with the lamentable history of high-rise flats, architects carry heavy responsibilities for welfare. Most important of all perhaps are social norms. Civilised society depends after all on obedience to the unenforceable.

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ARE YOU THE
"ODD MAN OUT"

?????

WE WANT THE

"ODD MAN"

IN

SAINTS
ARE THOSE WHO



IN THEIR QUEST

the wars of religion".

Some people claimed that these horrors were a thing of the past, but the example of Northern Ireland showed that this was not the case. It was sometimes argued that religion was not the basic cause of the troubles in Northern Ireland, but to indict religion it was enough to show that divisions were worsened by religious segregation. "To create divisions between our children is quite mad, but religion is so idiotically fixed in our society that we encourage it. If we *have* to separate children, it would be more sensible to separate them on the basis of the colour of their eyes than by religious belief." But people did not say this because they stuck to the idea that religion was somehow decent. "It isn't decent" said Hermann Bondi, and the example of segregation in Northern Ireland was a good one for humanists to give. It was no good standing by and saying nothing can be done—that was not a humanist principle. "Something can be done about religious segregation and we must say so."

He turned to the immigrant problems that were arising in England. Here was another area where it could only make things worse to separate people and to allow divisive education. Muslim schools were now a likelihood and we could not argue against Muslim segregation while Church schools existed. We could only avoid a difficult situation by getting rid of old denominational schools before new ones were established.

EVENTS

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.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Professor James Sang: "A Scientist Looks At Humanism". Sunday, 7 January, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Havering and District Humanist Society. David Porter: "The Christmas Truce of 1914". Tuesday, 19 Dec-

ember, 8 pm. A personnel officer: "Industrial Democracy". Tuesday, 2 January. Both 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Rev. A. B. Downing (Unitarian): "Life and Philosophy of Tom Paine". Tuesday, 12 December, 8 pm. Swarthmore Education Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Saturnalian Party. Thursday, 14 December, 7.45 pm. 41, Bromley Road, Catford SE6.

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

London Young Humanists. Peter Sutherland: "Work"—a discussion. Sunday, 17 December, 7.30 pm. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. Jean Robb, Women's Aid: "Women Today". Wednesday, 13 December, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Enquiries telephone 051-608 3835 or 342 2562.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group: George Walford: "The Power of Ideology". Tuesday, 12 December, 8.30 pm. 30 Archibald Road, N7.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 10 December, Lord Brockway: The Humanist's Dilemma. 17 December, Peter Cadogan: Programmes of the Brain. 31 December, Richard Clements, OBE. Tuesday Discussions, 7 pm. John Freeman: Recreating Communities in London. 19 December, Ralph W. King: The Expert and the Public Enquiry.

Sutton Humanist Group. The work of the London Fire Brigade. Wednesday 13 December, 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, 10 Cedar Road, Sutton.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Group Party. 16 December. Enquiries to W. Grainger. 24 Glanrafon Gardens, Sketty.

Humanist Holidays. Easter 1979. April 12 or 13 to 17 or later. Small private hotel fairly near the front at Boscombe, Bournemouth. £7 per day, breakfast and dinner. 11-25 August 1979. Similar accommodation at Lowestoft, Suffolk. About £64 per week. Camping and caravan possibilities. Details Mrs M. Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

THE FREETHINKER

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