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LONG-AWAITED REPORT ON OBSCENITY— NO CENSORSHIP, BUT LESS DISPLAY

The Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship, chaired by Professor Bernard Williams, has published its report after two years study. The main thrust of its proposals is to make greater restrictions on the general availability and in particular display of pornography. At the same time the committee recommends that people should have the legal right to obtain pornography if they want it. The report respects both the individual's right not to be offended and the right to buy and see anything one wants. Restrictions on the showing of films would become more complicated, but probably would allow adults to see a wider range of sexually explicit films.

The committee finds that the tests of "obscenity" and "to deprave and corrupt" are of no relevance today, and were too subjective. The existing law is far too unclear and riddled with inconsistencies and anomalies. The proposed new law would introduce a test based on what is "offensive to reasonable people". The display or unrestricted sale of material "offensive to reasonable people" because of the way it deals with "violence, cruelty or horror, or sexual, faecal or urinary functions or genital organs" would be forbidden.

Nevertheless, so-called hard-core pornography would be available at shops confined to those over 18 and possessing a prominent warning about the type of material therein. No visible material would be on display to the public.

It may be questioned whether the committee's concept of a "reasonable person" — particularly since the special class of "reasonable" people most likely to be confronted with the test are magistrates — is a satisfactory one. And the word "offensive" is just as loose and open to widespread interpretation as the phrase "obscene" or "tending to deprave and corrupt". Perhaps this is less important since it would not involve a complete ban of material. But,

it is arguable whether the backstreet porn shop, with its black front, its warning notices, and its deep associations of guilt and seediness is really more desirable than a range of material in a variety of shops, some of which runs the risk of offending people. There will be people who will be offended by the very idea of porn shops, even if they never go near them. Besides, rather ridiculous arguments about where to draw the line between page 3 of *The Sun* and explicit hard-core pornography are bound to ensue: will *Forum* or *Playboy* be available in any newsagent or only the porn shop? (will it have three balls outside?)

Although permitting legal availability of pornography, the report, if implemented, might well initiate a "clean up" campaign of the type which Mrs Whitehouse has been longing for. Moreover, once this stage has been completed, the specialised shops will all be clearly located and an easy target for those puritans who want complete restrictions.

The idea that we should always be able to avoid that which is offensive is dubious. Can freethinkers avoid objectionable Christian symbols? Surely it is better to tolerate and learn to cope with what we don't like, rather than giving way to the instinct to sweep all that is unpleasant out of sight. That way lies fig leaves for all public nakedness.

The report recommends no censorship of the written word at all. The defence, used considerably in actual cases in the last decade, of literary merit or of public good will no longer be needed. The committee suggests a complete ban on pornography showing anyone who appears to be under 16 or where there is reason to believe that any physical harm has been involved in producing the material.

Turning to films, the committee recommends five main categories: suitable for all ages, suitable for under 11 accompanied by an adult, no children

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under 16, no person under 18, and restricted to persons over 18. A film examining board, consisting of 12 people from various parts of the community, would label the films. They could refuse a certificate altogether. Pornographic films, which would be viewable only by people over 18, could only be shown in cinemas designated by a local authority and would be forbidden from using photographic display outside the cinema.

The consequences of these proposals would depend a great deal on what approach the film examining board took in practice. They would presumably be unlikely to act in the ridiculous way that some local authorities do at present (as for example Harrogate council's decision to ban the film *The Life of Brian*). But an increase in categories and legal powers of censorship leaves the way open for stupid and narrow-minded censorship.

The report as a whole takes a cautious attitude and veers towards moralism. It is welcome that they state (as was emphasised by the National Secular Society in its submission to the committee) that there is no evidence of any direct relationship between crimes of a sexual and/or violent nature and visual or literary material. The arguments of the Australian psychologist, Dr Court (much quoted by the Festival of Light), that there is a link between pornographic and violent material and crime was not borne out by the committee's careful examination of his evidence.

The report describes pornography as "trash: ugly,

shallow, and obvious"—a description which could apply to much of Sunday newspaper colour supplements. The report does little to remove the veil of secrecy, shame and guilt with which sexually explicit material is covered. In fact, the proposals would probably increase the association of sexuality and nudity with guilt. The idea that human sexuality is one of God's slip-ups, which is one of Christianity's major contributions to society, might have been more carefully examined.

There is, according to the report, a very substantial demand for pornography—some eight million people buy it from time to time. This in itself is an indication of the need for a wide range of sexual satisfaction, which Christian puritans are foolish to pretend can be suppressed. It also indicates that commerce will meet demand—a good Conservative free market principle, which should commend itself to Mrs Thatcher's Government; and it is silly to condemn sale of pornography as "commercial exploitation" any more than the sale of cars (polluting the atmosphere) or butter (polluting the arteries).

The Williams Report has some thoughtful sections, and some useful legal suggestions—but it is doubtful if it will provide satisfactory solutions in this contentious area. It is yet to be seen whether the present Government, with its very full parliamentary programme, will give House of Commons time for sensible, rational reform of laws relating to obscenity and film censorship.

The Rationalist Association of New South Wales

RON MARKE

We intend to publish brief accounts of activities of freethought, secular humanist groups throughout the world. An article last month gave an account of the campaigning of the Israel Secular Society. Other organisations are invited to contribute short items giving the background and describing current campaigns.

The Rationalist Association of NSW was founded in Sydney in 1912. Since that time the Association has experienced quite a number of changes in its own ranks and that of the society in which it attempts to help change for a more humane, free secular society. The Association has a long tradition of being a militant anti-religious, anti-clerical organization.

The main function of the Association, in accordance with its own constitution, is the dissemination of freethought literature; and it has been importing this literature—mainly from Britain and America—for years, for sale to the general public. It now has

its own freethought bookshop inside the Association's permanent building. In fact, the Association is the largest importer and distributor of freethought literature in the Southern Hemisphere. It is also engaged in publishing small pamphlets and leaflets and its own 28-page bi-monthly journal the *Rationalist News*.

It holds regular Sunday evening meetings—forums, films, lectures—at its own head office in Regent Street, Chippendale, and sells literature in the Sydney Domain and elsewhere. It encourages its members and supporters to become public speakers, to write articles and letters for its own journal and to newspapers as a whole.

The Rationalist Association enjoys cordial relations with other freethought organizations throughout the world, and the *Rationalist News*, now in its thirteenth year of publication, is widely received throughout the world and in Australia.

The Association's present position is strictly an independent one: it owes allegiance to nobody, no

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Farewell to the Seventies

FRANCIS BENNION

Last month Francis Bennion began his review of "The Freethinker" in the seventies by considering key matters like freedom of speech and blasphemy law. Here he continues by reminding us of developments in areas such as religious education, disestablishment, euthanasia and religious broadcasting.

The issue of religious *instruction* changed during the decade to one of religious *education*. This marks some advance, due mainly to a campaign waged by the NSS since 1963. The change was assisted by the publication in 1970 of *The Fourth R*, a 400-page report by a Church of England committee headed by the Bishop of Durham. *The Freethinker* found the report in many respects fair and unbiased. It set out the arguments against religious instruction and admitted that religious education in schools had been over the centuries a process of indoctrination. However, though the report recommended that the statutory provisions relating to school worship in the 1944 Act should be repealed it sought to retain religion (along with "morals") in the statutory curriculum. In fact the Act has not been amended.

An unsuccessful attempt was made in January 1971 to disestablish the Church of England. This followed the publication in 1970 of another Church of England report, that of the Archbishops' Commission on Church and State. The report argued for retention of establishment, while admitting that the abolitionists had "abstract justice" on their side. The antidisestablishmentarians not surprisingly found that the Church would lose effectiveness if the organs of the State were severed from all public connection with Christianity and the Church were forced to hand its endowments back to the people. The 1971 disestablishment attempt came in the House of Lords from Lord Grantchester (who sounds like a pillar of the establishment). Lord Byers, leader of the Liberal party in the Lords, thought it would be a mistake for the State to cut adrift from organised Christianity. He explained why in language so familiar from hacks that it can no longer cause surprise. Disestablishment, said his Lordship, would be misinterpreted, and would give comfort to all those who apparently seek a complete free-for-all in matters of morality. Is that by any chance intended to include humanists? If so is it our own fault for neglecting to put before the public any system of humanist ethics? Lord Grantchester's motion was withdrawn.

Another great secular issue prominent throughout the decade was euthanasia. A poll in 1976 showed that more than four times as many people in Britain

are in favour of the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia as are against it. Optimistically, the editor of *The Freethinker* commented that this "will have a profound effect on Parliament". In a later poll, 62 per cent agreed that the doctor should be allowed to supply a patient with the means to end his life if he is suffering a distressing and incurable illness and wishes to die. So far Parliament has remained unmoved.

Finally among the big issues I should mention religious broadcasting. In 1977 the Annan Committee deeply disappointed *The Freethinker* on this issue. It followed the Beveridge Committee (1951) and the Pilkington Committee (1960) in refusing to take seriously the general humanist criticism of the privileged position of the Christian religion on radio and television. The submissions made severally by the humanist organisations were "completely distorted and contemptuously dismissed". David Tribe later described this section of the Annan report as careless and muddled.

There were of course many more issues debated, often with intense fervour, in *The Freethinker* of the Seventies. For example in the 1970 volume a review of *The Creed of the Celtic Revolution*, a book by Berresford Ellis, excited a heated and prolonged response, including nine letters and three articles, spread over the ten succeeding issues. It will surprise no one who knows him that in the course of this Nigel Sinnott was reduced to signing his letters Niall Aodh Sionoid! More relevant to its main theme were attacks by *The Freethinker* on such dangerous sects as the Children of God, the Divine Light Mission and the Moonies. Here the NSS was alone in speaking out and alerting the public. Other issues in constant debate were Sunday observance, charity law, Northern Ireland, capital punishment and blood sports.

I conclude with four small items which I think will appeal to readers. The first illustrates the constant tribulations of any editor, and especially an editor of *The Freethinker*. When he opened a copy of the issue for February 1974 the editor was surprised to see a letter printed which was entirely new to him. It was from Mr Crimpton, the compositor, who had taken advantage of his opportunities to insert it. A devout chapel-goer, Mr Crimpton complained of the fact, apparent to him over many years of typesetting, that the "*The Freethinker* is only concerned with making blasphemous references to the Lord Jesus Christ and religion in general". Readers will be distressed to learn that Mr Crimpton's growing propensity for interfering with the text later forced *The Freethinker* to change its printers after nineteen years with his employers, G. T. Wray Ltd.

The second item is the most remarkable in all the ten years' issues. Early in 1973, an elderly Polish immigrant to Britain was found dead in bed. He had choked to death on a piece of garlic. The inquest was told that he kept this in his mouth as a protection against vampires!

The third item is the most disgraceful of the decade. In Dade County USA car bumper stickers appeared in 1977 reading (apparently in earnest): "Kill a Queer for Christ".

The last item is the most bizarre. A reader's letter in 1972 revealed that in 1932 Michael Rinder gave George Bernard Shaw dancing lessons in Madeira. Shaw sent him a postcard reading: "To Michael Rinder. The only man in Madeira who could teach me anything".

What is one to say as the Seventies end, and we face a new decade? Calendar divisions mean little, but it is useful to stand and take stock at a moment like this. If I were presumptuous enough to issue advice to *The Freethinker* on its policy in the Eighties, what would it be?

I think I would stress the tremendous tasks that still lie ahead for the freethought movement, and therefore for this, one of its leading journals. We fight over familiar issues: blasphemy law, religious education, oath-taking, euthanasia, abortion, and so on. But these issues are but symptoms of a fundamental malaise. The majority of people in our society still order their lives by reference to the supernatural. By placing their trust in illusion, they fail to relate to reality. There are other, more sinister, symptoms of the dangers this brings. Religious zealots, from Iran to Northern Ireland, remind us daily of the savage cruelty and barbarism that lies in wait for mankind when he deserts reason and follows faith.

So I hope *The Freethinker* will gain in circulation and influence during the Eighties. For this purpose it needs to attract committed writers who will interest and inform its readers. It needs to eschew unnecessary conflict and acerbity within the movement. It needs to work hard for the long-awaited triumph of humanism.

Misconceptions About Evolution TOM CAVALIER-SMITH

Tom Cavalier-Smith here comments on Hare Krishna Das's arguments concerning evolution and Audrey Williamson's remarks about the weakness of Darwin's theories (Letters, "The Freethinker", October). He covers genetic evidence and the law of entropy.

There is nothing scientific about Hare Krishna Das's arguments concerning evolution. Nor is there in Audrey Williamson's remarks.

First, man's relationship with apes is so close that one is tempted to say "with *other* apes"! Matching human DNA directly in the test tube with ape DNA shows that the sequence of nucleotides (the molecular units from which DNA is built) is almost the same in humans and apes. The DNA sequences of chimpanzees, orang-utans, and gibbons differ from our own by only two or three per cent, very much less than the difference between apes and monkeys. As it is the nucleotide sequence in the DNA of our chromosomes that determines our inherited characters, this means that we are very closely related indeed to apes. By far the best explanation for this is descent from a common ancestor.

There are about 5,000 times as many nucleotides in the DNA of a human or ape egg or sperm as there are words in the Bible: yet 98 per cent of them occur in the same order in apes and humans. Imagine finding two books 5,000 times as long as the Bible but with 98 per cent of their words in an iden-

tical order. To suggest that they were written entirely independently would be absurd: yet this is what von Däniken's idea that man arose from a crashed space creature implies for human and ape genes.

All living things use exactly the same genetic code, though there is no reason why if life evolved on other planets it should use the same code as earthly life. The best explanation for this and the numerous other similarities between all living things is that we all, whether humans, slugs, ferns, bacteria or viruses, stem ultimately from a single ancestral species, as that great freethinker Erasmus Darwin first realised two hundred years ago.

Audrey Williamson is wrong to imply that the formation of new species has never been observed. A new species (a primrose) was first seen to evolve in 1929 by a rapid process very common in plant evolution, but rarer in animals (unknown in mammals) i.e. hybridisation followed by spontaneous doubling in chromosome numbers. Most species formation in animals is by the splitting of one species into two or more, which is much more gradual: many examples are known in every stage of species formation, though because it is long drawn out one does not expect to be able to observe all stages in succession in a single species during a human life time. Neither process of species formation is of *one* species developing into *an* other: where this occurs (and in all cases of species formation in non-sexual organisms) the distinction Audrey Williamson makes between variation within a species and between two species is quite invalid, because the distinction

between one species and the next (e.g. between *Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens*) is then purely arbitrary.

H. K. Das's arguments are riddled with scientific errors. What he calls the law of entropy in no way contradicts evolution, or prevents large increases in complexity: if it really said that such increases must "soon be lost" it would not be a scientific law at all but a falsehood, for we have evidence that complexity persists, in both geology and biology for thousands of millions of years. In fact it says nothing whatever about the rates of processes, or that complexity cannot increase.

He is also quite wrong to say that complexity increases as a result of random movement or chance. Materialist explanations involve many non-random, non-chance processes of key importance in producing complexity, e.g. gravitation, electromagnetic forces, natural selection. Using these we can explain the major features of evolution, and the nature (and in broad terms the origin) of life in materialist terms, without invoking such archaic ideas as "spirit", which are as dead and useless in biology as "phlogiston" in chemistry. As a biologist, I no longer consider the basic nature of life to be a mystery, though some of its more complex manifestations are not yet explained in detail.

"Real" evolution does not always involve increases in complexity. Decreases in complexity and in the total amount of DNA in the genes also occur. Natural selection (in conjunction with DNA replication and mutation) explains both increases and decreases in complexity as well as the frequent lack of change over millions of years. It does not produce "a consistent increase in complexity".

Fundamental Error

H. K. Das's fundamental error is to suppose that complex properties like smell or consciousness must either be "within" atoms or else "added" from outside. Neither need be the case: the scientific view is that such complex properties depend not just on the properties of fundamental particles, but also on their arrangement and behaviour in accordance with basic laws. Not surprisingly he does not mention this third possibility, for it totally flattens his arguments.

Barbara Smoker's remarks on evolution contained two small errors; though they do not invalidate her basic argument, I would like to correct them. Amino acids did not "develop into DNA chains". Amino acids are the constituents of proteins, not of DNA. DNA and proteins are chemically quite different; one could hardly develop into the other. Both are essential for replication. Life is not a property of one kind of molecule (whether DNA or proteins) but of an ordered system of molecules. The origin of the genetic code, which provides an indirect link between DNA and proteins, was the key step in the origin

of life, as I explain in a forthcoming article in the *New Humanist*.

It is also misleading to say that mutation is "related to adaptation", because most mutations are not adaptive (as Das rightly says). It is not the occurrence of mutations, but their spread through the population that is related to adaptation: natural selection is what causes the spread of mutations that improve adaptation and the weeding out of those that reduce it, both of which have been repeatedly observed. Neither mutation nor selection on their own can explain evolution: together they can easily.

CENSORSHIP

"All freedom is risky," quoted Ben Brewster in his introductory remarks at the Annual General Meeting of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society, held at the House of Commons on 14 November. He also referred to the Protection of Official Information Bill (since dropped as a consequence of the Blunt affair), and a new Indecent Displays (Control) Bill to be presented by Dr Mawhinney in December. Two areas of censorship of importance in the near future were the pressure on reporting of news, especially from Northern Ireland, and the report from the Williams Committee on obscenity due to be published soon.

Lord Goodman gave a general talk on the topic of censorship. He said it was a subject with which people easily became bored, but those assailants who intrude into the area of the creative mind were the least likely to get bored. In England, Lord Goodman pointed out, we were mainly concerned with "soft" censorship unlike some areas of the world where the political situation meant that people feared the dire consequences of the police knocking at the door. The logical consequences, however, of the unbridled extension of soft censorship was the rigid iron censorship of dictatorship.

Literature and the arts are an area where censorship acts most viciously. If censors had their way the plays of Ibsen would not have been staged and *Jude the Obscure* would have been renamed *Jude the Obscene*. Artists were often criticised for "going too far", but it is not possible to go too far in expressing one's creativity. But what is possible, in Lord Goodman's view, is to go too far in what other people are expected to accept.

Complete abolition of censorship was not recommended by Lord Goodman, not because it is not desirable, but because it is not attainable. You cannot devise rules to control what people think, but there is a case for protecting people from what offends them.

The protection of children was a difficult area. But the best form of protection was not putting

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The "vision" at Knock and the beliefs about the Shroud of Turin both show mankind's preference for accepting "miraculous" explanations to examining practical solutions.

The Rev Michael Bourke, Vicar of Southill in Bedfordshire, came to conclusions similar to those of Barbara Smoker in her article "No Shroud of Evidence" after reading Ian Wilson's book, "The Turin Shroud". He wishes to point out, however, that he had no ideological prejudices against the Shroud, and would be delighted if it should prove authentic, since he believes in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. He knows of Geoffrey Ashe's reservations about the possibility of scorching using a heated metal statue, and would like to see the question decided by an experiment.

Having read Ian Wilson's fascinating book, *The Turin Shroud* (Gollancz 1978), I have the uncomfortable feeling that the current research is concentrating too much on the analysis of photographs and samples, and not enough on possible ways in which the image on the Shroud could have been forged. As an Anglican parish priest I have not the slightest prejudice against the Shroud, and would be delighted if it should prove to be authentic. However, the doubts remain.

If the Shroud is a forgery, then the photographic qualities discovered by Secondo Pia and the 3-dimensional properties unveiled by Jumper and Jackson must have been produced unconsciously. It is no good looking for a mediaeval forger who "deliberately" produced these phenomena to mislead twentieth-century investigators. The problem is rather like that of the accurate value of Pi in the construction of the Egyptian pyramids: this has now been explained, not by speculating about advanced knowledge or contact with flying saucers, but by supposing that the builders used a road drum in laying out the measurements, thus inadvertently incorporating the value of Pi into their work.

I found Ian Wilson's chapter on the Templars suggestive, and it made me realize that the Shroud image is vaguely reminiscent of the figures of mediaeval knights and clergy which one finds on monumental brasses. Like the Shroud these show a full frontal picture, and the hands are sometimes crossed above the loins (e.g. the figure of Geoff. Byschop, Vicar of Fulbourn, Cambs).

Two references in Ian Wilson's book are particularly intriguing: the first, on page 18, to Blinzler's suggestion that the image was created by a life-sized statue covered with some image-forming substance, and the second, on page 208, to the demonstration by Geoffrey Ashe that a Shroud-like image can be

made by scorching a piece of cloth with a heated brass ornament.

Is it not possible that the Turin image could have been made by someone scorching the cloth with a heated, life-sized metal statue? Life-sized mediaeval crucifixes and statues are common enough throughout western Europe, and the idea of scorching a pattern on to a piece of cloth could have been discovered by accident in any foundry or kitchen. If there is anything in this idea, I suggest that the imprint was made in the following way: first, the statue was heated, and laid on the cloth on its back. Then it was re-heated and laid on the cloth again, only this time face downwards, to produce the "frontal" impression. Only by doing it in this way could the distortion of draping the cloth over the face be avoided; instead of the cloth lying "relatively flat over the body" (Wilson, op.cit., page 207), it would be lying completely flat under the "body".

I have not tried out this idea, so I do not know if it is possible to produce a scorched image with all the detail of the Turin Shroud in this way. I do not know how to explain the "bloodstains", nor am I competent to say whether a statue could account for the anatomical details which have so impressed the medical authorities. Nevertheless I believe that this relatively simple explanation would clarify the following "mysteries":

- (a) the "non-directionality" of the image;
- (b) the fact that there is no image of the top of the head or the sides of the body;
- (c) the fact that the intensity of the image is inversely proportional to the distance of the cloth from the surface of the "body";
- (d) the accurate 3-dimensional properties of the image (which is simply the converse of the last point);
- (e) the "negative" properties of the markings, discovered by the Pia photographs.

All these phenomena would have been produced inadvertently by the method suggested. If the pollen grains and cotton traces indeed show a Palestinian origin for the cloth, this could be explained by a crusader having brought it home as a souvenir from the Holy Land.

Experiment Needed

I hope that all this is wrong! However it is only fair that someone should experiment with it before the idea of a forgery is dismissed as impossible. Of course, if the Shroud is dated by the carbon-14 method to the first century, then a forgery would be ruled out, because no one had a motive for forging relics at that time, and there is no evidence of such an object ever being used to persuade people of the truth of Christianity.

Evangelical Evils: An Ex-Christian's View

ANTONY GREY

When I was a Christian, it was in spite of Evangelicals, who then struck me as cranky but harmless. I no longer see them as such, but as positively evil; and this conviction is one big reason why I have recently left the Church. For I have become convinced that people who imagine themselves to be set apart from the rest of us frailer mortals because they believe they are "born again", "saved", or "washed in the Blood of the Lamb" partake of the demonic for that very reason, and are as far from being of God (if he exists) as it is possible to be. I can no longer share a Faith which breeds such spiritual elitism.

Jesus said: "By their fruits you shall know them". What are the fruits of Evangelicalism? Just some which I have personally experienced are: arrogance, bigotry, condescension, deviousness, fanaticism, humbuggery, ignorance, malice, unscrupulousness and untruthfulness. If theirs is authentic spirituality, I want none of it.

I have spent more than twenty years dealing professionally, as a lawyer and a social worker, with peoples' difficulties connected with sexuality. I have observed how many of these difficulties are exacerbated, and some are initially caused, by traditional Christian attitudes to sex—which is still regarded by all too many Christians as a Cosmic Mistake. Evangelicals in particular, whilst professing to "hate the sin and love the sinner", frequently go out of their way to make life still more difficult and unhappy than it already is for those who—even though they may never give way to the temptations of the flesh — have emotional preferences which diverge from the so-called "norm".

I think particularly of the Goebbels-like vilification of homosexual people which is constantly carried on by some well-known Evangelical groups. Much of the "information" they circulate is inaccurate; some is downright lies. I recall their recent endeavours to smear, with the totally false tag of encouraging "child molesting", individuals and organisations who had courageously shown humane concern for the plight of those least understood of all sexual minorities — paedophiles. I am utterly shocked by the ludicrous twaddle being dished out to confused young people under the banner of "Christian counselling" (it is neither). The amount of hysteria generated by Evangelicals is in fact making it extremely difficult to discuss the sexual and emotional development and needs of adolescents rationally and calmly.

So my mounting disgust with the obnoxious activities of these people has prompted me to quit with relief a religion which nurtures such deplorable adherents. Some of these blinkered worthies, indeed,

seem to hanker for the Biblical moral law (Old Testament style of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth") to be written in its entirety into the criminal law, and for Britain in the 1980s to revert to a Cromwellian "rule of the Saints"—or perhaps to a Khomeini-style theocracy.

When Jesus said: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things?" was he addressing only the Pharisees of his own generation, I wonder?

The above article was submitted to, and rejected by, the "Church Times".

Owing to increase in costs, the price of "The Free-thinker" is being raised to 25p from January 1980. We shall continue to pay the postage, so postal subscriptions will now be £3 p.a. or £1.75 for 6 months. American subscription: \$7 p.a. Foreign cheques add 50p (\$1) for bank clearance.

Even at these increased prices the paper is still subsidised from donations which are therefore always welcome.

The prices of our books and pamphlets have not been reviewed for a long time and so have remained unrealistically low. There will, regrettably, be a substantial increase in prices from 1st January 1980. For example, "The Bible Handbook" by G. W. Foote will be £2 + post and packing. We would add that at today's costs many of our publications are going to be irreplaceable and will become rarities. Orders received by 31st December will be executed at old prices.

COLD FEET

An article was published in the October "Free-thinker" by David Berman offering a rational explanation of the "vision" of the Virgin Mary at Knock. The hypothesis that the vision could have been produced by a magic lantern was examined in detail.

It was stated that the article was also appearing in the "Irish Times". Although the editor had agreed to publish the article after the papal visit, and although the article was set up in preparation, the "Irish Times" editor decided at the last minute not to publish the article. Copies are available from The Freethinker, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL on request with s.a.c.

"Jottings" will not now continue as a regular column. William McIlroy, however, hopes to make occasional contributions to "The Freethinker" in the future.

A booklet is to be produced giving practical advice on how to commit suicide. The Voluntary Euthanasia Society agreed at its Annual General Meeting on 27 October that such a booklet should be prepared and made available to members next year. Publicity about the suicide advice ensured that the meeting was well attended and widely reported by the press. Although the booklet was expected to be controversial the idea has received enormous support from members, and there has been much favourable response from the general public.

The aim of the booklet is to give people practical advice so that they do not fail in an attempt to end their own life. Arthur Koestler said at the meeting that there was nothing worse than a bungled suicide and that after 70 "keeping going *could* in some cases be a nightmare". He also pointed out that voluntary euthanasia could place a heavy burden on GPs and that no one else had to be involved with suicide.

The contents of the booklet will cover a general discussion of suicide, and some consideration of the circumstances in which it would be highly undesirable (such as a depressed teenager) and in which it could be highly desirable (such as the final stages of a terminal illness). The practical advice, which would be drafted with medical and legal advice, will tell people how not to commit suicide as well as giving clear instructions on ending life. The Society's Secretary, Nicholas Reed, says that accurate medical information is not easily obtainable and that there is a considerable demand for a booklet such as the one planned.

The main speaker at the AGM was Dr Colin Brewer, a consultant psychiatrist, who spoke in favour of changing the law with regard to euthanasia. He said that he spoke as a convert who had at one time felt that a change in the law would be fruitless. He had thought that the law should be left out of personal matters altogether and enough doctors would be sympathetic. But his experience as a doctor led him to see that the suffering of many patients was not alleviated by doctors. He drew parallels between the way an abortion had been opposed in the past and was now accepted by most of the medical profession and public and the way he expected euthanasia to be accepted in the future.

A survey, quoted by Dr Brewer, had shown that one-third of doctors would be prepared to give euthanasia if asked. The alternative was Do-it-yourself and a booklet giving practical advice would enable this to be done successfully. He emphasised that people should be allowed to make their own decision, and the Society stood for freedom in death as well as in life.

In order to prevent the booklet being obtained by irresponsible people or those likely to take over-

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hasty decisions it has been agreed that it will only be available to members of at least three months' duration and there will be an interval before the booklet is sent out when requested. The widespread interest shown in the idea of the booklet is seen in the numerous enquiries (over 100 letters a day) since the idea was publicised, and the worldwide interest from places as far as Australia, America and Japan.

The VES changed its name to EXIT, The Society for the Right to Die with Dignity at the same meeting. The new title indicates a concern that includes the right to suicide as well as euthanasia.

Further details from EXIT, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

HAPPY BRIAN MASS

The Life of Brian is a film by the Monty Python comedy team which parodies the life of Christ, satirises the Hollywood biblical epic, and sends religion up sky high. The film is set in New Testament times and revolves around the life of Brian, born in a stable, who gets involved in anti-Roman liberation movements, is pursued as a religious leader despite his dislike of disciples, and ends up being crucified.

The film was shown in the USA earlier in the year and received outraged condemnation from religious leaders. Jewish, Catholic and Protestant leaders denounced the film as "blasphemous, sacrilegious and obscene". Outside some cinemas were warnings that the film could be offensive to religious people. Despite the warnings it has been sufficiently popular to amass £6 million in four months.

In England criticism has been more muted. Mrs Whitehouse said that she was not going to condemn it in case this encouraged people to go and see it—a lesson she has taken a long time to learn, but hopefully will abide by in the future. The Nationwide Festival of Light, however, did issue a statement urging local authorities to prevent children from seeing the film, which it said was in "the worst possible taste". Harrogate has the distinction of being so far the only council stupid enough to oppose the film. The council's film selection subcommittee banned it without seeing it.

The film is thoroughly enjoyable — if you like Monty Python-style humour. It is completely irreverent and specialises in scenes of poor taste; some might find the humour childish, but the same could be said of other comedy teams such as the Goon

AND NOTES

Show and the Carry On films.

Among *The Life of Brian's* funniest scenes is the opening in which three wise men offer gifts of myrrh, frankincense and gold to the squealing baby Brian. Moments later they rush back from Jesus' crib having discovered their mistake and hastily retrieving the gifts. Rather like an animated Heretic Card.

Another delicious moment is when Brian, totally naked after an exhilarating night with Judith, opens the curtains to find himself confronted by a vast multitude of followers. He urges them not to follow anyone. Despite this his followers chase him across the desert and when he drops a sandal in his rush to get away, it is picked up and pronounced "A sign". The conclusion shows lines of people being crucified, in their last hours swaying and singing "You got to look on the bright side".

An example of the humourless over-reaction of religious people was seen on television. On the BBC2 programme "Friday Night and Saturday Morning", Malcolm Muggeridge and the Bishop of Southwark, Mervyn Stockwood, claimed to have been deeply offended by the film. John Cleese and Michael Palin insisted that the film had not been made specifically to lampoon Christ and had made it clear that Brian was not Christ. But Stockwood and Muggeridge refused to accept this. Cleese and Palin, who both grew visibly angry as Stockwood and Muggeridge became more and more offensive about the film and the motives behind it, tried to explain that if there was any significant message in the film it was this: don't just follow other people, think for yourself.

Neither Stockwood nor Muggeridge were able to muster a scrap of reasoned argument to back their gut-reaction to *Life of Brian*, and the latter kept burbling on about how Christianity had served during the ages to inspire great works of art. All the greatest men in history, insisted Muggeridge, were Christians. What this had to do with *The Life of Brian* neither the Python Duo, nor the many Brianophiles in the audience could make out. The whole confrontation smacked of a Monty Python Sketch.

The film is obviously not technically blasphemous and will not fall foul of blasphemy law. However it is an example of the utter absurdity of blasphemy law that it is irrelevant to a film which so palpably makes religion look very silly indeed, while all the might of the legal system is brought to bear on the blasphemous nature of a primarily religious poem like "The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name".



"I had a vision last night
of being rich for life"

(Reprinted by kind permission of *The Telegraph*)

Freethinker Fund

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Please note increased prices of books and of "The Freethinker". See page 183

IQ, HERITABILITY AND RACISM by James M. Lawler. Lawrence and Wishart, £2.95.

Few subjects raise as much heat as the intelligence of different races, and the causes of the observed differences, if any. Fear of strangers and alien races is very deeply imbued in our most primitive biological instincts and raises strong emotions. The fervour of racists is evenly matched by the fervour of those who are determined to fight the basic unfairness of life, but who sometimes become blinkered from the facts. When the subject of debate is something as ill-defined and diffuse as intelligence, the dispute can be guaranteed to be utterly befogged both in misuse, or vast variation, in the meaning of words, and in misunderstanding of statistics.

Study of the facts of the matter requires surely the coolest scientific detachment, and James Lawler, a New York professor of philosophy, starts with the severe handicap of being avowedly politically biased. He writes from a specifically Marxist stance, and he sets out to demolish the theories of Eysenk in England and Jensen in the USA that an individual's intelligence and the average intelligence of a race is primarily determined by inherited genetic influences.

Now it is probably true that committed racists who wish to denigrate, deprive and segregate from certain races other than their own, can find support for their actions in such theories (though without such theories they would doubtless carry on with their actions just the same). However, it is a wild overstatement to say, as Lawler does on his very first page, that if "the level of intelligence that students will reach or fail to reach was basically decided once and for all in the genes, then schools should therefore not be thought of as providing an enriching and creative environment, but should be adjusted to the function of sorting out . . . the 'bright' from the 'dull' ". He declares later that the genetic theories lead to "resignation, passivity, fatalism and despair". He seems all too conscious of "us-and-them" racist and class attitudes, and forgets that the genetic theory applies to the bright as well as the dull; there is obviously a fixed upper limit to the physical or mental performance of every individual, but there is virtually no limit to how much new knowledge or how many new skills anyone can acquire, however slow he or she may be in acquiring them. Lawler makes the quite unwarranted assumption that the genetic theorists are only concerned with those who are better endowed.

The political issue of how much effort is spent relatively on "brighter" or on "duller" people—faster or slower would be fairer terms—is related not to the cause of their capabilities, but to whether one is a ruthless follower of productivity and elitism, or whether one has a true educator's concern for all

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individuals. Even if one believed that genes were totally responsible for mental ability, a caring teacher or politician would still want to allow each person to fulfil his or her own potential and to provide an "enriching and creative environment" for all.

Although Lawler jumps straightaway into the trap of misconstruing his enemy, he is certainly not alone in misjudging the implications of intelligence theories. I should therefore like to consider these implications. At the root of much misunderstanding is a statistical blindness: facts about the average intelligence, or height, etc., of a group or race of people say almost nothing about any one individual. We all know that the differences between individuals are usually much more significant than the average differences between groups. Now within groups, most characteristics follow the normal distribution curve; if we consider the heights of two different races, and take ten people at random from each race, we of course do not find that all ten from race A are taller than all the ten from race B, even though, on average, the ten A's are, say, one inch taller than the average from the B's. What we do find is that four of group A might be all taller than six of the B's and yet, at the same time, three of the other B's would all be taller than six of the other A's.

Looked at another way, by superimposing the two races, we see that nearly half of the averagely shorter race are all taller than nearly half of the averagely taller race. If we recognise this vital fact about all measurable characteristics, it can be seen that statements about averages can never lead to a political action which totally discriminates against a given group, since there will always be a substantial minority of individuals who differ markedly from the average.

Most *Freethinker* readers do not believe in spirits or souls that are independent of the physical body, and they would agree that mental capabilities stem purely from the electrical and chemical interactions in the brain cell structure. Now the whole concept of race would not exist at all if there were not marked exterior physical differences between groups of people who have evolved in different parts of the globe. The exterior and the interior of a body are all part of the same organism, so that, if we cut open people's brains, we would expect to find as much variation in shape and size as we find in peoples' faces. It is therefore absurd wishful thinking to imagine that we all have identical potential mental abilities; this could only be believed by someone who has a religious belief in some mysterious all-controlling silver mystical globule of "soul" which enters a person's brain sometime before birth and

REVIEWS

floats back again to heaven after death.

In short, common sense suggests to me that different races will be bound to have different average mental characteristics and abilities which are biologically determined, but that individuals can always deviate greatly from any average and no social policy can be substantiated on such a belief. Any compassionate humanistic policy will always seek an individual's fulfilment of potential, regardless of the extent of her or his limitations.

To return to James Lawler's book: he covers in reasonable depth the history of IQ testing and the problems of establishing a measure of intelligence which takes account of cultural and language differences and of the way in which a child's ability changes with age. He brought home to me the fact that IQ tests do not measure a set of clear basic aptitudes that can be isolated, but that such tests are designed and constructed in order to give results that correlate with "common-sense" assessment of intelligence, and with the ranking of performance given by teachers, based on their social and cultural norms. In other words, an IQ test does not give insight into a person's performance or analyse his abilities, but merely enables some prediction to be given of how well the person would perform in a course of study which assumed the same social and cultural norms as had underlain the test.

Coming to this book as a general reader, I of course found it thought-provoking, but I cannot honestly recommend it as an introduction to the subject; I found the writing foggy and heavy going, with a too petulantly aggressive tone much of the time. Indeed, the many quotes from Jensen and Eysenck had a most welcome clarity in contrast (though I admit the danger of being beguiled by smooth easy prose). A reader who knows the field quite well would probably find it a useful comparative study, being fairly thorough but not overlong at 180 pages.

One devious way of demonstrating that intelligence tests are useless is to redefine intelligence to such an extent that it cannot possibly be relevant to the tests. This is where Lawler draws conspicuously on his Marxist-historical approach, and really seems to run away from the issue: he defines intelligence in terms of knowledge and scientific theory and then says that since this "intelligence" has grown so enormously over the centuries, the differences between people today are by comparison quite insignificant. He says that "the greatest 'brains' in the middle ages were groping in the dark compared with the rapidity of learning that is possible today as a result of vast developments of scientific theory and

techniques of processing knowledge, both of which involve the co-operative effort of thousands and even millions of humans." This seems to me quite extraordinarily muddle-headed and ignorant; has he never come across Leonardo da Vinci, and would not today's college student be totally baffled by the theories of the alchemists? Of course, knowledge and intelligence are completely different concepts.

I myself would not dare to attempt a permanent definition of intelligence, but, if it is seen as an ability to solve problems in a computer-like fashion, then I think it can be a meaningful concept; I doubt whether, in this sense, average human intelligence has changed much since the start of recorded history.

I would like to mention one more example of Lawler's misunderstanding of science; he says that IQ, as a 'relative' measurement is entirely different from an 'absolute' measurement like height or temperature. This is incorrect: height is a relative measurement—I am taller than you, shorter than her and nearly six times taller than an arbitrary standard piece of platinum which we choose to call one standard foot. Similarly, it would be possible to construct a computer which had a fixed arbitrary standard speed of doing, say, mental arithmetic, and, after due measurement, i.e. comparison, one could say that I was 10.67 times as fast as the standard. This rating would be no more and no less relative than my height rating; all scientific measurements are relative. IQ is different only because of its complexity of interwoven factors, and because there is no agreed standard.

In conclusion, I find myself inclined to think that IQ test results can be abused, misused and given too much importance, (especially since intelligence in the problem-solving, IQ, sense is not a factor of great significance in the way we value our own personal friends; qualities like reliability and sensitivity are so vastly more worthwhile). However, the know-how of testing techniques that has been developed over the course of this century does no doubt have genuine usefulness in helping to select people for specific tasks, jobs or courses. As far as races and heritability are concerned, I find the predominance of genes in determining abilities inescapable, but socially and politically irrelevant. I feel that priority in our thinking in these areas must go to achieving the best education for *all* individuals, and towards the further mutual understanding of each other's racial cultures.

CHRISTOPHER FINDLAY

BRITAIN AND THE JEWS OF EUROPE 1939-1945 by Bernard Wasserstein. Institute of Jewish Affairs/Oxford University Press, £7.95.

This is a profoundly disturbing book—all the more so because the author's masterly marshalling of his material and the urbane elegance of his style make

it so compulsively readable.

Any book about the bestial Nazi slaughter of millions of Europe's Jews must sicken all who are not utterly depraved and devoid of human pity. This one is peculiarly shaming to those of us British who like to look back on the 1939-45 war as "our finest hour".

In some respects, it found us behaving at our most contemptible. Dr Wasserstein's chronicle of the negative shifts and evasions with which the British Government and Civil Service met repeated Jewish appeals for positive help to stop the holocaust and for the reception into Palestine or other parts of the British Empire of adequate numbers of Jewish refugees while the escape routes were still open, and of the paltry nature of what was done to implement some fine-sounding promises, leaves me feeling sickened and appalled.

His story raises uncomfortable questions for humanists. How can supposedly civilised peoples' inhumanity to their fellows plumb such depths? How, in an increasingly dangerous, violent and irrational world, can we ensure that our rulers and public "servants" do not again lurch into even worse failures of imagination and craven betrayals of decency?

With steely restraint, Dr Wasserstein draws his conclusion that expediency—primarily the desire to avoid a massive influx of Jewish refugees into Palestine with all that that would have meant in terms of Arab hostility and the consequent impact upon British strategic and economic interests in the Middle East — meant more to practically everyone involved in British decision-making than the fundamental claims of humanity. Winston Churchill stands out as an honourable exception, but even he — the most powerful of prime ministers — was more than once circumvented and stultified by his own colleagues and bureaucrats.

Nor does anti-Semitism provide the whole explanation—though there was a good deal of it around ("I am convinced that in their hearts they hate us and have always hated us; they hate all Gentiles" minuted one senior Colonial Office official: while a Foreign Office colleague observed — in 1944 — "In my opinion a disproportionate amount of the time of this office is wasted in dealing with these wailing Jews") — aid to the Jews was simply seen as a low priority in the strategy of total war against Hitlerism.

Most significant of all was sheer lack of imagination on the part of Whitehall-bound, bowler-hatted civil servants commuting on the 8.43 from Orpington or Purley who simply did not comprehend the reality of what was happening in the slave-death camps of Auschwitz, Dachau and elsewhere or grasp that their petulant, old-maidish minutes added up to death warrants for millions of their hapless fellow human beings. As an inmate of the Warsaw Ghetto prophesied in 1941: "The English will finally arrive, declaring, 'We have conquered!'—to our graves."

When the full impact of the terrors of Buchenwald and its kind struck a horrified Allied public four years later, millions of Europe's Jews had been butchered. And Britain—as this book makes plain—shares some of the responsibility for their deaths. It is an ignominious responsibility, and a sombre thought.

ANTONY GREY

THE DEAD HAND OF ISLAM by Colin Mayne. Rationalist Association of New South Wales. 20p + 8p postage (from G. W. Foote & Co., 702 Holloway Road, London N19).

As its name implies, this little booklet (20 cyclostyled pages) is a sustained critique of Islam, gathering all the negative points the author could put together. Such a one-sided treatment has its own value because it has enabled the author to substantiate all the evils associated with Islam by quotations from the Koran itself or from authors like Glubb Pasha or Anthony Nutting, who could not be accused of being hostile to Islam. There can be no dispute that flogging and mutilation are sanctioned by the Koran as the introduction of these punishments is being advocated by fundamentalist leaders in some Muslim countries. What they have missed out is crucifixion which is permitted by one verse from the Koran.

The position of women in the Muslim world is obviously inferior to that of men and the author makes out his case against the Koran convincingly with numerous quotations. What is controversial is whether the position of women in pre-Islamic Arabia was better or worse. The author brings some evidence to show that it was better. The fact that Mohammed's first wife, Khadiva, much revered by Muslims, was a wealthy business woman and married him as a younger man of her own choice in the pre-Islamic period of their lives, adds strength to his case. On the other side is the fact that Mohammed abolished female infanticide and introduced a restriction on the number of wives to four.

Religious intolerance in Islam springs from Koranic texts such as "Fight those who believe not in Allah". However, I think, the author misses the point when he says "It's always the Muslims who are involved—apart from Protestants and Catholics fighting each other in Northern Ireland". Perhaps the tendency towards intolerance is an attribute of all the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The most unconvincing part of the author's case is reached when he maintains that Islam suppressed knowledge. To the average Muslim, the civilisation which did develop in Muslim countries is part of the Islamic heritage. To describe Yazid III (744 A.D.) as a rationalist Caliph is simply begging the question. This is like describing John XXIII as a rationalist Pope! If Yazid was the Caliph, he was a Muslim. His decree that the doctrine of predestination should

give way to that of freewill suggests that the stranglehold of Islamic orthodoxy was capable of being loosened by believing Muslims if they were prepared to think.

The author has very harsh words for Mohammed, whom he judges by today's standards. Muslim fundamentalists have themselves to blame for this result. In their enthusiasm for their religion and its prophet, they have constantly made the claim that their religion is true for *all* times and its prophet the highest example for men for *all* times. However, I believe that rationalist writers ought not to compound the folly of Muslims by overstating their own case, using language which would drive the Muslim rank and file further into the arms of the Mullahs.

G. N. DEODHEKAR

CINEMA

MY CHILDHOOD (A), MY AIN FOLK (AA), MY WAY HOME (AA). Directed by Bill Douglas. Academy 3, Oxford Street, London.

In the naughty, moribund world of British cinema, Bill Douglas's trilogy shines out like a good deed. It explores anew the territory covered by numerous naturalistic films, TV documentaries and Plays for Today. Spanning the first ten years or so of the immediate postwar period, and set in a brooding, windblown mining village near Glasgow, it is about the boyhood of Jamie, whose mother is in an asylum, and who lives with his grandmother and his cousin Tony in hopeless poverty.

Jamie's only friend is a POW, who is sent back to Germany at the end of the war. When their grandmother dies, Tony is sent to a children's home and Jamie goes to live with his paternal grandparents — the old man senile, but loving, the woman half-crazed. The grandfather dies; Jamie runs away to the children's home, where his gift for painting is encouraged. It is rare and laudable for a writer to portray the head of a welfare institution as being humane and uncondescending. Jamie's father comes to take him back to his loveless *ménage* of squabbling women, who try to force him down the mine. He runs away again, is fostered out, steals apples from his foster-mother, finds himself homeless again, sleeps in a Salvation Army hostel, and is conscripted.

While serving at a "ghost" RAF station in Egypt, a fellow-conscript, Robert, strikes up a tentative friendship with him. Robert is perceptive, educated and upper-middle class (another welcome departure, this introduction of a sympathetic middle-class catalyst into a drama of working-class life). Robert gently coaxes and teases him to become more relaxed and giving. The trilogy ends with Jamie's demob, the sounds of a plane taking off and landing, the screen flooding with light.

Contrasting darkness and light, and off-screen

noises (footsteps, passing trains, birdsong) play an important part in the trilogy. The sequences are short and angular, the dialogue is minimal, there is no background music. Apart from the opening frame of *My Ain Folk*, the photography is black-and-white, coarse-textured, arrestingly beautiful. The camera looks down obliquely on damp streets, houses so mean that stretchers and coffins have to be passed through the front window, on fields and railway lines stretching away into emptiness, on stones and desolation, on pinched, watchful faces. It is as though an excellent, rather arty photograph exhibition came fleetingly to life. Certain images recur: Jamie standing in sullen immobility in the corner of a room or curled foetal on an unmade bed. Other images appear just once to haunt us: Tony's mouth open in a silent scream as he stares at his dead canary; Jamie's hands pressing his grandmother's over a teacup scalded to give warmth; Jamie eagerly leading Robert to a mosque he has discovered.

This trilogy is triumphant proof that a film can show social and emotional deprivation in a highly stylised way without exploiting the deprived or sacrificing one jot of integrity or truth.

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

HOLY CLUTTER

May I be allowed to put on record that my reason for disposing of "holy clutter" ("Jottings", November 1979) to Amphlett Micklewright for Cross Street Chapel was not my notorious preoccupation with tidiness, kindly noted by Mr McIlroy, but a deep-seated distaste for icons and ecclesiastical furniture, which I had inherited. I doubt if my dissenting blood (also inherited) was made to boil, like that of the congregation at Cross Street, but I fear that in spite of lifelong attachment to literature and the arts, I show myself to be like them "philistine and . . . positively illiterate".

H. J. BLACKHAM

EVOLUTION AND BELIEF

I could not agree more with William McIlroy's October "Jottings". Mr Bennion, like others enthusiastically inspired, overlooks the fact that major belief systems are accepted as an alternative to a desperate situation, and offer, however marginally, a degree of stability to individual need and desire. Lack of rational understanding of a belief's full implications prevents its devotees from relating their needs compossibly to the facts of their situation, and as Prof Renfrew has shown, leads to the "system collapse" of the beliefs that underwrite the structure of the institutions, customs and traditions they give rise to.

Understanding this gives us the power to rationally influence the evolution of human belief but it cannot be done in the idealised way Mr Bennion thinks. Rationalism and thus atheism is far more than a reaction to religion as Geoffrey Webster (October Letters) thinks. It is an expanding and self-critical means of testing human understanding against the facts of our own and the world's nature.

Unfortunately for Audrey Williamson (October Letters) there is direct evidence for evolutionary theory.

Evolution is a fact of biology and the psychological and social phenomena derived from it. To quote from "A Statement Affirming Evolution as a Principle of Science" sponsored by the American Humanist Association, Isaac Asimov, C. D. Leakey, Linus Pauling and others: "Scientists consider that none of their principles, no matter how seemingly firmly established—and no ordinary facts of direct observation either—are absolute certainties. . . They use such terms as 'firmly established' only for conclusions founded on rigorous evidence that have continued to withstand searching criticism. The principle of biological evolution . . . meets these criteria exceptionally well. It rests upon a multitude of discoveries of very different kinds that concur and compliment one another."

JOHN SUTCLIFFE

EUTHANASIA

I would like if I may, to reply to Lord Raglan's letter ("The Freethinker", September) on the subject of voluntary euthanasia, about which he also spoke at the annual dinner of the National Secular Society.

If my previous letter caused any offence to Lord Raglan, I apologise, but I would be less than honest if I did not say that I am extremely disappointed that voluntary euthanasia has not yet been made possible for every dying patient.

For those of us in our seventies and eighties who have seen, and in many cases nursed, relatives and friends through cruel suffering and degeneration, it is only natural that we feel that something should have been done by now. There appears to be sufficient evidence to show that the majority of people would be very relieved to know that this fear of prolonged dying could be swept away by a little unbending of the law. Great care and vigilance would need to be exercised, but surely this would be worth-while. We have to be watchful over many things in this world.

Lord Raglan asks if, as it seems to him, that I want access to a legal right to be killed, at what stage in my decline, and on whose opinion is a court to convict a doctor for non-compliance? My answer to this is, that I would hope legislation would include the condition that no doctor be compelled to act against his own convictions. Most would be in agreement with that, I should think. The words used by the Society are . . . "That the law should allow but not compel doctors, to help incurable patients to die peacefully at their own request". And as quite a number of doctors now support the idea of voluntary euthanasia, it should be possible to avoid the need for prosecution.

Incidentally, I was heartened to note the support for voluntary euthanasia given by Dr David Parfitt of St Crispin's Hospital, Northampton, after 50 years of his working life caring for elderly people.

Lord Raglan points out that the Advance Declaration Form (supplied by The Voluntary Euthanasia Society), is not an instruction and could not be more than a guide to a doctor. This is quite true and in view of this fact, I have armed myself with a Talisman, which I never remove from my wrist. This contains a record of my express wish for active euthanasia as I have an incurable disease. With these two testimonies and the luck to be in the hands of a humane doctor, I would hope to be released from prolonged suffering and distress. It seems so wrong to me though, that we should have to depend on luck.

GLADYS WITHERS (Mrs)

WAR AND NATIONALISM

There is evidence that there would have been a war in Europe about 1940 even if Hitler had never lived, and the Germans had done nothing wrong.

The military historian Michael Howard reveals in his

book "The Continental Commitment" (Penguin 1974) that soon after the First World War Britain began to consider a war against France. The British Government was alarmed about air attack. Since France was the nearest Great Power capable of launching such an attack, the British Government began to think about war with that country. In 1922 a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence was set up to consider the matter (op. cit, chapter 4, "The Locarno Era 1919-31"). As a result an independent air ministry and air force was set up, with France in mind.

The British Government only stopped thinking of a war with France when Hitler became a menace.

The lesson of this is that war is caused by national independence—national sovereignty. If the world is divided into different nations each nation has to try to be as strong as it can be and to intrigue against others, to prevent itself being pushed about. So there must be a world government.

In February this year (or thereabouts) Dr Luns, the Secretary-General of NATO, at a public lecture at Newcastle upon Tyne, stated definitely that (1) the Russians do not want war (2) the Russians are doing dreadful things in Rhodesia, Ethiopia, all over the place. If the Russians don't want war why are they doing these things which they must realise might cause it? Is it because they think it necessary to stop the things the USA and its allies might do to them? It looks as if national sovereignty is still causing trouble.

Yours faithfully,

I. S. LOW

WAR AND CATHOLICISM

Adolf Hitler was born and bred in the Roman Catholic faith and Paul Josef Goebbels, the German Minister for Propaganda under the Nazi regime—the man who had the job of conditioning the German people into accepting the Nazi creed, was educated by the Jesuits.

Significantly, in Bamber Gascoigne's book, *The Christians*, (Granada Publishing, page 16) we read: "Only in 1974 did the Vatican finally announce that the Jewish people were no longer to be held collectively responsible for the crucifixion."

PETER BROWN

OBITUARY

MR W. E. WIMBLE

Walter Ernest Wimble, who died in a Brighton hospital last month at the age of 92, was a lifelong free-thinker. He was a member of the Brighton and Hove Humanist Group of which his daughter Joan is hon. secretary.

Mr Wimble worked for the Workers Educational Association from 1912 until 1923 and for the Workers Travel Association from 1923 until 1947. He was also actively involved in the affairs of the National Parks Commission and the Students Bookshop movement.

There was a secular committal ceremony at the Downs Crematorium on 23 November.

Hundreds of elderly people were duped into paying £2 for a ticket to see the Pope during his trip to Eire. Police and the Catholic hierarchy are making enquiries about the confidence tricksters.

PUBLICATIONS

(A full list is available on request with s.a.e.)

(See announcement on page 183)

The Dead Sea Scrolls, John Allegro. £1.25 (15p).
 The Humanist Outlook, Ed: A. J. Ayer. 95p (26p).
 Religion in Modern Society, H. J. Blackham. £1 (29p).
 Classics of Freethought edited by Paul Blanshard £1.00 (19p)
 What About Gods? Chris Brockman. 75p (12p).
 The Longford Threat to Freedom, Brigid Brophy. 10p (7p).
 God and the Universe, Chapman Cohen. (Unbound) 50p (12p).
 Essays in Freethinking—1st, 2nd, 3rd Series. Chapman Cohen 50p each (15p). Three series £1.75 inclu. postage.
 Thomas Paine, Chapman Cohen. 15p (7p).
 Woman and Christianity, Chapman Cohen. 5p (7p).
 The Life of Bertrand Russell, Ronald W. Clark, £2.95 (36p).
 Women's Rights, A Practical Guide, Anna Coote and Tess Gill. £1.25 (19p).
 The Devil's Chaplain, H. Cutner. 10p (10p).
 What is the Sabbath Day? H. Cutner. 20p (11p).
 Origin of the Species, Charles Darwin. 60p (22p).
 Bertrand Russell's Best, Robert E. Engar. £1.00 (26p).
 Fact and Fiction in Psychology, H. J. Eysenk. 90p (15p).
 The Bible Handbook, G. W. Foote & W. Ball. 65p (19p).
 Frauds, Forgeries and Relics, G. W. Foote and J. M. Wheeler. 15p (7p).
 The Presumption of Atheism, Antony Flew. £3.50 (26p).
 Causing Death and Saving Lives, Jonathan Glover. £1.25 (15p).
 The Nun Who Lived Again, Phyllis Graham. 5p (7p).
 Bertrand Russell: A Life, Herbert Gottchalk. 25p (12p).
 The Humanist Revolution, Hector Hawton. 95p (19p).
 Controversy, Hecter Hawton. 95p (19p).
 RI and Surveys, Maurice Hill. 5p (7p).
 Middle Eastern Mythology, S. H. Hooke. 90p (12p).
 Speakers Corner, an Anthology, Ed Jim Huggon. £1.75 (26p).
 Oration on Paine, R. G. Ingersoll. 20p (7p).
 Rome or Reason, R. G. Ingersoll. 10p (10p).
 Mistakes of Moses, R. G. Ingersoll. 15p (7p).
 The Little Red School Book, S. Jansen. 30p (12p).
 Honest to Man, Margaret Knight. £3.75 (26p).
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(Censorship)

people in the dock, but offering other balancing influences for children.

Lord Goodman referred to the test in our law of whether an article tended to "deprave or corrupt" and said that any such test would be ludicrous. He recalled a number of famous cases, such as the Lady Chatterly trial and the Oz case, which had rendered this country ridiculous in the eyes of the world. He also pointed to the benefits of removal of censorship seen in the example of the abolition of the powers of the Lord Chamberlain, whose activities in censoring stage plays had been quite grotesque.

What should render censorship unnecessary was, in Lord Goodman's opinion, a change in social practice. We needed a wide degree of choice—so that no individual had control and we also needed people of better judgement and taste in positions of decision in making programmes and plays for the media. He remained unrepentantly of the view that money and time spent on censorship was much better spent on education and creating a public climate of moral responsibility.

Lord Goodman concluded by commending the work of the DLAS and suggesting that its work was of importance since censorship was an area where if you nod for a moment dangerous intrusions can result.

DLAS, 4 Croham Close, South Croydon, Surrey.

(Rationalist Association of NSW)

political party or sectarian group. It has enjoyed a fairly harmonious atmosphere during the past 8 years or more due largely, I think, to members realizing that, if the Association is to continue to propagate Freethought views and opinions, it must be free of dogma in the political and secular sphere.

Any reader interested in the Association's journal or its literature is invited to write for free booklet and details to: The Literature Secretary, the Rationalist Association of NSW, 58 Regent Street, Chippendale, NSW 2008, Australia.

(The author is currently editor of the Rationalist News and the Honorary Literature Secretary).

THE FREETHINKER

Editor: JIM HERRICK

702 HOLLOWAY ROAD
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TELEPHONE: 01-272 1266

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

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. "The Peace Movement" by a member. Thursday, 13 December, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade, Castlereagh. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co. Antrim. Tel: White-abbey 66752.

Berkshire Humanists. David Williams: "The Pagan Origins of Christmas". Friday, 14 December, 8 pm. The Council Chamber, Town Hall, Wokingham.

Having and District Humanist Society. Discussion: "Revival, or New Year Resolutions for Humanists". Tuesday, 18 December, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre, Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road.

Leicester Secular Society. John O'Higgins: "Hitler's Economics". Sunday, 9 December, 6.30 pm. Alan Bates: "Proust and Religious Belief". Sunday, 16 December, 6.30 pm. Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester.

London Secular Group. (Outdoor meetings). Thursdays, 12.30 pm. at Tower Hill; Sundays, 2-5pm. at Marble Arch. ("The Freethinker" and other literature on sale.)

London Young Humanists. Peter Sutherland: "Einstein and Humanism". Sunday, 16 December, 7.30 pm. BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. Peter Dawson: "School—Is It The Right Place For Children?" Monday, 17 December, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

Sutton Humanist Group. Peter Fairweather of CASE: "The Education Cuts". Wednesday, 12 December, 7.30 pm. Friends Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton.

South Place Ethical Society. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 9 December, Robert Waller: "The Ethics of Ecology". 16 December, Peter Cadogan: "The Radical Reformation and the Future of Christianity". 6 January, Beata Bishop.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Ivor Russell: "The Moors in Spain". Friday, 28 December, 7.30 pm. Friends Meeting House, Page Street, Swansea.

Humanist Holidays. Small Christmas Party, quiet comfort. Brighton, 24-28 December. £56 incl. Twin and Double rooms still available. Contact Mrs Mephram: 01-642 8796. Easter: Isle of Wight. Summer: Isle of Man. Contact Mrs Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12. Tel: 01-673 6234.

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