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CENTENARY

- Harold Blackham
- Edward Blishen
- Hermann Bondi
- Brigid Brophy
- Maureen Duffy
- Margaret Knight
- Dora Russell
- Barbara Wootton

ISSUE

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*Cartoon of G. W. Foote in gaol
by Nigel Sinnott*

*Cover and photograph
by Christopher Findlay*

HAROLD BLACKHAM. Formerly Secretary of the Ethical Union. Very active in humanist organisations. Formerly President of the BHA. Books include "Six Existentialist Thinkers" and "Humanism".

EDWARD BLISHEN. Author of many autobiographical books including "Sorry, Dad". Writer and reviewer of children's fiction. Broadcaster on literary and educational matters.

SIR HERMANN BONDI. President of the British Humanist Association. Chairman of the National Environment Research Council. Professor of Mathematics at Kings College, London. Many publications in theoretical astronomy and physics, including popular books.

BRIGID BROPHY. Writer whose novels include "Hackenfeller's Ape" and "Palace Without Chairs". Writings include works on Mozart and Beardsley. Active in the Writers' Guild.

MAUREEN DUFFY. Novelist, playwright and poet, whose novels include "The Microcosm" and "Capital". Most recent volume of poems "Memorials of the Quick and Dead". Active in the Writers' Guild. President of the Gay Humanist Group.

JOHN GILMOUR. Director of Botanic Gardens, University of Cambridge (Retired). First Chairman, now President, of the Cambridge Humanists (founded 1955).

MARGARET KNIGHT. Lecturer in psychology at Aberdeen, now retired. Author of "Morals Without Religion", "Honest to Man", and "Humanist Anthology".

DORA RUSSELL. While married to Bertrand Russell founded a school on experimental lines. Deeply concerned with world peace and the position of women. Two volumes of autobiography, "The Tamarisk Tree 1 and 2".

BARBARA WOOTTON. An extensive public life has included the position of a Deputy Speaker at the House of Lords and a concern with many social issues such as penal reform. Numerous publications on economics and the social sciences.

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Retrospect and Prospect

BARBARA WOOTTON

As I am only sixteen years younger than *The Freethinker*, that journal's centenary celebration seems an appropriate opportunity to weigh up the pros and cons of the period of our joint lives.

Materially, as everyone knows, the Western World has become much richer, but the gap between the rich and the poor nations has not been correspondingly narrowed. In fact the chief accomplishment of the Third World seems to have been to have got rid of its colonial rulers; and the advantages of that sometimes turn out (at least for a time) to be political and social rather than economic.

Meanwhile in the West nearly every country has erected some kind of "welfare state". Today it is hard to realise that in the England into which *The Freethinker* and I were born there was absolutely no public provision for the needs of the sick, the unemployed, the aged or the widowed—no national health service, no social security, no child benefit—nothing but Poor Law Relief on harsh terms for the totally destitute. Today our welfare legislation (though still inadequate) is so extensive and complex that only experts can fully master it. Over the same period also most wages have gone so far ahead of prices that, as Guy Routh claims in a recent book, the manual workers of today are three times as affluent as their grandfathers—but, he adds, only "if one permits affluence to be measured apart from the quality of life, about whose changes opinions differ".

Many Changes

Certainly the files of *The Freethinker* bear witness, and have themselves contributed, to many changes during the past century in individual freedom of thought and action, by which the quality of life has been improved. Agnostics can now publicise their views even on radio and television (which of course did not exist in the days of Darwin or Thomas Huxley's battles with the church) without fear of social ostracism. Gone too are the days when a University Professor's divorce could cause him to be threatened with dismissal, if not actually dismissed.

Yes, we have come a long way—even to the point of having once had a divorced Prime Minister. But, as recent prosecutions for blasphemy have reminded us, we are still far from attaining all the listed objectives of the National Secular Society. A strong public demand for the legalisation of euthanasia has so far produced no relaxation in the law, nor can Britain (or most other countries) put up any pretence of having established racial or sexual equality.

But most striking of all the past century's achievements has been its inventiveness. Radio, television, aeroplanes, plastics, domestic refrigeration, test-tube

babies, are all still years away from a centenary and even motorcars have not yet arrived at theirs. No doubt, in the estimation of those who care for the quality of life, these and hundreds of other modern inventions will be very unequally rated. Radio, I think, scores high: it has saved many lives in shipwrecks and such-like disasters, and given pleasure and interest to millions, without as far as I can see doing any significant harm. But might we not have hesitated in welcoming motor vehicles had we foreseen that in this country alone (and comparably in others) they would regularly kill 6-8,000 people a year and seriously injure another 80,000?

Knowledge and Wisdom

While it would be wrong to try to stop the flow of invention, the danger is that we lack any criterion by which to judge and control its products. Man's accumulated knowledge, stored in brains, tapes, films and libraries is now so vast, that he cannot or will not tackle the question of what to do with it. Knowledge, it seems, has outstripped wisdom. Nor is this just the result of the decline in religious belief in the more developed countries. After all, a fairly wide consensus about the fundamental values of human life stretches right across many religions as well as philosophies that recognise no supernatural sanction; and both religious and secular morality have their origins in an act of faith, either in belief in God or in a duty to others. The Christian believes that in caring for his neighbour he is doing the will of God: the secularist, unsupported by any supernatural sanction, believes that in caring for his neighbour he fulfills a moral obligation to help make the only life he knows as good for others as he would wish it for himself.

But do any of us think enough about what, in practice, caring means? Consider, for example, the case of the micro-chips by which, it seems, we are threatened (why cannot we say thrilled?) with the prospect of an immense increase in low-cost production of all sorts of goods and chattels. To this the general reaction seems to be that millions must be condemned to enforced "leisure"—as though there could be no use for additional products, because everybody has already enough of everything he needs. That may be the easy way out, but abolition of poverty, not of work, is one of the NSS's declared objectives, and ought we not to be thinking about how to give priority to that?

Worst of all, of course, is the indifference with which we calmly watch our ever-increasing knowledge and skill being diverted to production of the means of mutual destruction. To quote only one of

the Brandt Report's examples, half a day of the world's military expenditure would finance the whole of the World Health Organisation's malaria eradication programme. But both the military budget and the malaria continue on their way undisturbed.

Yet there cannot be many in either the religious or the secular camp who honestly believe that the best conceivable use of man's superb skills (though some regard it as an unwelcome present necessity) is to devote them to a race in stock-piling ever more sophisticated weapons, in which every country must

outstrip every other in the hope that then no one will ever dare to use them, and in the knowledge that, if they ever should be used, this would once and for all solve every human problem in the simplest possible way.

In the years before the bi-centenary of the NSS surely the brains which have performed all the technical miracles of the century behind us must be competent to match that achievement by switching to the problem of how to make the wisest use of what they have themselves created.

Greetings to The Freethinker

DAVID TRIBE

Journalism may deal in differences but history should concentrate on continuity. Thus, for the centenary of *The Freethinker*, it is fitting to recall the words of its founder: "It will wage relentless war against Superstition in general, and against Christian Superstition in particular. It will do its best to employ the resources of Science, Scholarship, Philosophy and Ethics against the claims of the Bible as a Divine Revelation, and it will not scruple to employ for the same purpose any weapons of ridicule or sarcasm that may be borrowed from the armoury of Common Sense." It is also important to recall that in 1881 there were other British freethought weeklies: *The National Reformer*, then largely political, and *The Secular Review*. Both disappeared before the First World War, as did a diversity of secularist monthlies. Now only *The Freethinker*, no longer weekly, and *Watts' Literary Guide (New Humanist)*, no longer monthly, survive; and have to supply news, comment, philosophy, arts, politics—and ridicule—in a judicious blend.

My own association with *The Freethinker* extends for over two decades, first as casual correspondent and feature writer, then as anonymous pamphleteer (a number of NSS leaflets on contemporary themes first appeared in the paper), then as editor, then as theatre and film critic, then, till I left the United Kingdom, as chairman of the board, and finally as book critic. Stirring, exhausting, controversial but never dull times. For the journal is one of the very few places where, short of libel, one can say exactly what one likes and, subject to commonsense, at whatever length seems most appropriate.

With my early articles about the unfrocked Anglican vicar Bryn Thomas (which together constitute the only inside story of this case that, as far as I know, ever appeared in English) I sailed about as close to libel—legally defined—as anyone could. At the same time I also managed to offend "kidglove" secularists by a bogus advertisement for Jesus as if he were a brand of detergent and "boots-and-all" secularists by satirical spoofs ostensibly

penned by a "Reverend Humanist".

Colin McCall, my predecessor as editor, is to be commended for his courage in publishing such polemics. On bowing out he defined his editorial policy: "It has been to keep *The Freethinker* independent and non-sectarian; to encourage—though not uncritically — all branches of the secular-humanist movement; to give expression to varied and opposing points of view when they seemed worth considering and were reasonably stated." It was a policy I was happy to endorse.

Fearless Policy

Mr McCall was kind enough to say that I had "livelier things in store" and to wish me every success. How far his forecast and felicitations were realised is not for me to say; but I believe I did, as promised, adopt a "fearless policy of seeking the truth and censuring the obscurantist". In my seventh issue I wrote an editorial uniquely critical of the "Church" of Scientology, just officially condemned in Victoria, Australia, but still trendy in British libertarian circles, and was surprised when its spokesman, normally quick with his writs, sent me a conciliatory letter. So too did the Salvation Army, given the George Orwell treatment three issues later. On the other hand, a critical reference to "ecumenical" humanists evoked a sharp response from the PRO of the BHA, accompanied by a letter challenging me to publish it. I was delighted to publish it, and two revealing symposia from readers, without comment under one of its own phrases, "Twisted and Disgraceful". But positive achievements by the BHA also got ample coverage; and when the PRO, wiser if not sadder, moved on to London radio, I was invited to broadcast.

Though not unappreciative of historical or "theological" articles, I quickly relegated them to inside pages and began with editorials on "Vietnam", "Rhodesia" and other issues of 1966. Personally liking sarcasm and even invective when they are

effective, I was equally quick to merge ritualistic pages of "Notes and News" and "This Believing World" (successors to Foote's "Sugar Plums" and "Acid Drops" but without his style) into "This World". With mixed success (for the quality varied and the length sometimes became disproportionate to the paper's size) I introduced reviews of stage, cinema and television, dramatic sketches and verse. Such features were sometimes reversions rather than innovations; but to emphasise an overriding concern for topicality I redesigned the masthead and other

headings. These changes may collectively have alienated some readers but they stimulated contributors; and while I inherited an empty basket I bequeathed a full one.

As with the presidency of the NSS I was pleased to arrange an historic succession for the paper's editorship. Kit Mouat became the first—and only—woman editor and gave it the sparkle of her personality. Other editors have done likewise. I am sure they will continue to do so as centenary succeeds centenary.

Twenty-Five Years On

MARGARET KNIGHT

When the Editor of *The Freethinker* invited me to contribute to this centenary issue, he suggested that I should deal with some of the changes in the climate of thought that have taken place in the twenty-five years since my famous (or notorious) broadcasts on *Morals without Religion*. (For the benefit of younger *Freethinker* readers I should explain that these broadcasts provided the first occasion on which Christian beliefs and values were openly questioned and criticised on the BBC Home Service—the 1950's equivalent of Radio 4.)

The furore the talks provoked seems in retrospect unbelievable. Letters flooded in, both to me and the BBC. Infuriated clerics gave press interviews, in which my mildly-worded exposition of what I then called Scientific Humanism (the term "scientific" has now to my regret been dropped) were described as pernicious, irresponsible and vicious propaganda. The gutter press came out with headlines like "Stop this dangerous woman" and "Keep this woman off the air"; and even the respectable *Daily Telegraph* caricatured me with horns and a tail, and compared the public advocacy of Scientific Humanism with the public advocacy of polygamy or homosexuality (homosexuality, of course, being at that time a dirty word).

Temporary Excitement

It was all quite exciting while it lasted, but the fuss soon died down; and today the views that so shocked believers in the 1950's are expressed freely by Anglican bishops and nobody turns a hair. And many secularists and humanists are beginning to feel that the battle is won, and that we are wasting our time in continuing to flog a dead horse.

But I fear this view is too optimistic. The grip of Christian dogma has undoubtedly greatly weakened in recent years, but there is still a vague but widespread feeling that Christian beliefs, even though they are not exactly in the ordinary sense of the word "true", are none the less unquestionably a Good Thing, and should not be openly criticised. This

feeling receives considerable tacit support from the broadcasting authorities. The BBC, admittedly, is far less one-sided than it was (it is many years since it broadcast an "argument" between a Bishop and an atheist in which both sides of the argument were written by the Bishop, and the part of the atheist was read by an actor). But it is still reluctant to allow the open expression of humanist views (which it is inclined to call "humanist propaganda") on the air; and it still turns out regular instalments of nebulous quasi-Christian moralising under such titles as "Thought for the Day".

Weak Protestantism

And of course children in Britain are still supposed to receive regular religious instruction in school. "Supposed", however, would now seem to be the operative word. Many schools have tacitly (though illegally) dropped the "R.I." lesson altogether, and most of those who retain it have replaced supernaturalist teaching by a form of watered-down sociology. All-in-all, it is not unfair to say that Protestant Christianity, at all events in its Anglican form, is rapidly becoming little more than humanism with a dash of cosmic purpose.

The Roman Catholic church, however, is an altogether tougher proposition. With its immense wealth, its entrenched, international hierarchy, its sheer size (in the world as a whole, Catholics easily outnumber members of the Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches together), and its inflexible dogmas that are held to be divinely guaranteed against error, it presents a carapace which will not easily be pierced by the shafts of enlightenment.

In October last year a month-long, international synod of Roman Catholic bishops was held in Rome, and for a time considerable hopes were aroused, both among the Roman Catholic laity and many members of the priesthood, that it foreshadowed some liberalisation of the Church's attitude on such matters as contraception and divorce. But these hopes proved groundless. In his concluding address

to the synod on October 26, the Pope uncompromisingly reaffirmed the hard-line doctrines contained in Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

Clearly the gulf between the Vatican and the Catholic-in-the-street is widening. But all this is familiar ground to freethinkers, and rather than treading it further I will conclude by turning to a different issue which would seem to repay discussion.

What, it may reasonably be asked, should be the humanist attitude towards the various sub-rational or pseudo-rational cults that are now proliferating with such vigour — Scientology, the Spiritualist Church, Mormonism, the Pentecostal Church, the Unification Church (the Moonies), the Transcendental Meditation (TEM) movement, ESALEN and the rest?—to say nothing of the older and more respectable forms of bunkum like freemasonry and Christian Science. We may seem to be caught in a dilemma here between the claims of reason and toleration.

Open Society Principles

Perhaps the best escape from this dilemma is to be found by adherence to the principles regarded as basic to the Open Society—namely that we should seek (a) to minimise avoidable suffering, and (b) to maximise the freedom of individuals to live as they wish. Contemporary crankeries, obviously, are by no means all tarred with the same brush. They range from the harmlessly dotty (such as the TEM movement, which apparently claims that it can teach its members to levitate), *via* the puritanically restrictive (such as Mormonism, which forbids not only alcohol, tea and coffee, but also television and radio), to the pathologically dangerous (such as the appalling "People's Temple" in Guyana, whose minister, the Rev Jim Jones, induced some nine hundred of his followers to commit mass suicide in the belief that "the time had come for them all to go to heaven").

Clearly the principles of the Open Society enjoin whole-hearted opposition to fanatical cults of the Rev Jim Jones's variety. But they also enjoin, I would suggest, a resigned tolerance towards, eg the

Transcendental Meditators and the spiritualists — with the Mormons, perhaps, regarded as a borderline case.

Current Irrationalism

A historical point in conclusion: the current surge of irrationalism is not perhaps as surprising as it appears. There is historical evidence for the view that when an established orthodoxy decays and collapses, eccentric cults tend to spring up amongst its ruins like weeds round the stump of a fallen tree. Lecky vividly describes how such a process occurred with the collapse of the Roman religion in the last years of the Republic, and I make no apology for quoting him at length.

"The complete subversion of the social and political system of the Republic, the anarchy of civil war, the ever-increasing concourse of strangers, bringing with them new philosophies, customs, and gods, had dissolved or effaced all the old bonds of virtue. The simple juxtaposition of many forms of worship effected what could not have been effected by the most sceptical literature or the most audacious philosophy. . . There [developed], to a large extent, a kind of superstitious scepticism which occupies a very prominent place in religious history. There were multitudes who, declaring that there were no gods, or that the gods never interfered with human affairs, professed with the same breath an absolute faith in all portents, auguries, dreams and miracles. . . Astrology, which is the special representative of this mode of thought, rose to great prominence. . . Except, perhaps, among the peasants in the country districts, the Roman religion, in the last years of the Republic, and in the first century of the Empire, scarcely existed, except in the state of a superstition, and he who would examine the true moral influence of the time must turn to the great schools of [humanist] philosophy which had been imported from Greece [*ie* Stoicism and Epicureanism]." (*History of European Morals*, Chapter 2)

Mutatis mutandis, this surely offers some striking parallels with the situation today.

THE BIGGEST GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE

This is the biggest garden of remembrance.
It used to be called Londinium,
Afterwards London.
The bombs fell some thousands of years ago,
And when it was safe to move
Back to this hemisphere
We laid out this garden
To show where one of the towns had been.
You see how large it was.
We have eighty thousand acres in rose bay willow
herb.

I think you'll like our vivarium
Where we put the animals we could find.

The dedication explains it all in Tagalog and Aleut,
The languages of the new U.N.
Formed to keep the threats from following suit
Until all this madness happens once again.

SARAH LAWSON

Charity Suffereth Long

BARBARA SMOKER

The charity law of England and Wales is anomalous, archaic, absurd, and unjustly biased—especially in favour of religion. One glaring injustice is that of two organisations campaigning on opposite sides of the same issue, one out of fully taxed income, the other out of untaxed income—this having been the situation for the past 115 years as between the National Secular Society and the Lord's Day Observance Society on the issue of the liberalisation of our Sunday observance laws. Here the President of the NSS summarises the operation of the charity law and argues for its radical overhaul.

The Moonies have done one good thing, at least, to set against all the bad: their unsuccessful libel action against the *Daily Mail* has focused public attention on the absurdities and anomalies of the charity law in this country.

On April 4, at the end of the longest-ever libel hearing, the jurors added a rider to their verdict against the Unification Church, recommending an investigation into the right of that body to charity status for the advancement of religion — not only because their activities had been found to be harmful, but also because they are largely political, and political activity is not charitable in law. The initial response of the Charity Commissioners was to set aside the jurors' recommendation: their hands were tied, they claimed, since any church (a body of worshippers) is automatically charitable.

Injustices

The media, having largely ignored the glaring injustices of charity law (however often it was brought to their notice over the past century and more), now suddenly discovered it and made it a burning topical issue. A large all-Party deputation of MPs (also suddenly noticing what had often been pointed out to them) then shook the Charity Commissioners out of their rigidly bureaucratic minds. Miraculously, their hands were untied; with one bound, they were free—and have now undertaken to reconsider the charity status of the Unification Church.

What, in effect, they have to reconsider is their own customary practice, based on arbitrarily selected case law, and raised to an authority equal to the Ten Commandments. Not that they are always consistent in their decisions, but their inconsistencies are random rather than flexible, and not informed by changing needs.

They do not even pretend to be satisfied with the situation: "Charity law is not always governed by logic nor are the decisions entirely consistent" they wrote in their 1967 Report. But they see their job as the impossible one of administering the hope-

lessly muddled case law handed down by generations of judges. To some extent this is so—though, all too often, the Commissioners seem to use the muddle of the law to rationalise an illiberal decision rather than a liberal one. And the only appeal against their decisions is the very expensive one of recourse to the High Court.

Interpretation of the Law

The judges themselves are bound by the same mass of case law (their own previous decisions and those of their predecessors), and spend a great deal of time and verbiage in each case going over the same old ground and picking a tortuous path between "on the one hand" and "on the other". Like the Charity Commissioners, most of them tend toward the less liberal interpretation each time—and then that, in turn, becomes one of the precedents for the next judge. And that applies not only to the actual decisions, but often to the *obiter dicta*, the definitions and rationalisations leading up to those decisions.

So the Charity Commissioners and the judges are able each to blame the other for the existing muddle; but most of all they put the responsibility on Parliament. And certainly, though Parliament has done little to create the muddle, it now needs an Act of Parliament to put it straight. But MPs are generally too busy with less important things to do anything as useful as that.

The last Charity Act was that of 1960, which tightened up the procedures but failed to come to grips with the anomalies and injustices of the situation. It ducked the basic requirement of a statutory definition of "charity" that would supersede all the past judicial pronouncements—let alone the more radical alternative of getting rid of the whole concept of legal charity, in favour, say, of tax exemption for all organisations that contracted not to distribute any of their profits for private gain. (This latter solution to the problem was proposed by the Charity Law Reform Committee eight years ago.)

Amazing though it may seem, there never has been a statutory definition of "charity" in the legal sense, though so much depends upon it. It was the 19th-century Judge Macnaghten who, faced with a particular decision in 1891 in this area of the law, devised a formulation of charity that has bedevilled every charity case in the ensuing ninety years. Harking back almost three centuries before that date, Macnaghten analysed the examples of charitable activity set out in the preamble to the Statute of Charitable Uses, 1601, and arbitrarily grouped them under four headings — which have since been regarded as exclusive categories, into one of which

every charity must be squeezed. These are (1) the relief of poverty; (2) the advancement of education; (3) the advancement of religion; (4) other purposes beneficial to the community. The inclusion of the third category rests solely on the one word "churches" in the 1601 preamble—picked out by Macnaghten as an excuse for a separate religious category, simply because of his own Victorian predilection for religion as "a good thing".

The actual phrase in the 1601 preamble that gave him this excuse reads (in modernised spelling): "... the repair of bridges, ports, havens, causeways, churches, seabanks and highways . . .". Out of that, the learned Judge might have made a separate category of "the promotion of travel" (package tours?) with no less justification than "the advancement of religion". But this one man's bias has, ever since, formed the basis of charity law that gives fiscal privileges to religious organisations and denies them to non-religious causes unless they are judged (by later judges or the Charity Commissioners) to keep strictly to one of the other three Macnaghten headings.

But it has not stopped there. For some reason (or none), the Charity Commissioners have always let the churches get away with making "political" statements without any threat to their charity status, though every charity under any of the other categories has to be scrupulously apolitical for fear of being struck off the charity register. Remember the former Archbishop of Canterbury's notorious "Call to the Nation"? Not a word of warning was heard from the Charity Commission. Yet in 1979 both Oxfam and War on Want were threatened with loss of charity status because they dared to make general statements about the causes of poverty, in an attempt to prevent some of it, instead of sticking to their charitable brief of merely alleviating some of the results once the damage was done.

Religious Privileges

Another privilege that religious charities enjoy is the right not to register with the Charity Commissioners (as most other charities of any size have to do), but directly with their chosen denominational authorities, whose scrutiny as to maladministration or political activity is comparatively lax. And there are other privileges, too.

Because of these extra privileges in the third legal category of charity, an organisation that I helped to found twelve years ago was forced, hypocritically, to become a project of Christian Action so as to get religious charity status. This was the pressure group called Radical Alternatives to Prison. (You can hardly get more "political" than that!) I chaired its inaugural meeting, and most of the other founder members were atheists, agnostics, or something tenuous and unorthodox. But our research and propaganda could be financed only out of large charit-

able trust funds, which are of course precluded from donating a penny to anything other than a recognised legal charity. So what could we do but pretend to be Christian for the sake of the cause? I agreed with the decision, but, being President of the National Secular Society, felt I had to resign from the RAP executive to prevent confusion in the public mind.

The memory of that always rankles, especially when I hear or read the frequent Christian jibe that secular humanists are all talk and do not work much for social causes.

Charity Law Reform

A year or two after Christian Action took RAP under its charitable wing, two other secular humanists (Antony Chapman and David Pollock) and myself set up the Charity Law Reform Committee, with the aim of investigating the charity law, publicising its innate injustices, and proposing changes in the law to make it less of "a ass". After months of research and deliberation, we found that the only feasible reform was something far more radical than we had at first envisaged: the creation by statute of an entirely new category of organisation, to be the Non-Profit-Distributing Organisation (NPDO), outside the existing charity law—initially to run parallel with it, but eventually perhaps to supersede it altogether. The NPDO would be entitled to all the advantages of a charity (in particular the relief from taxation) and be subject to none of the specific disadvantages (in particular the ban on "political" activity). It should be subject to stringent financial restrictions to ensure that its un-taxed funds could not be "leaked" out of the organisation into private hands without paying all the back tax involved. No organisation would be allowed to be both a charity and an NPDO, but many existing charities (especially the more active) would be likely to switch to NPDO status. (The reverse, we thought, should not be allowed.)

The proposal, though radical, was startlingly simple, and would have correspondingly simplified the whole operation of charity law, allowing a large number of civil servants, lawyers, and judges, to take early retirement or a golden handshake. (Unemployment was not at that time the problem it is today.)

The three of us drafted an explanatory leaflet, and the Charity Law Reform Committee was launched—with affiliations from a considerable number of charities (including most of the big ones) and non-charitable organisations. The chief vested interest of the former lay in removing the perpetual fear of any statement or activity being construed as "political". Also, in the case of those charities set up by non-charitable bodies to deal with the charitable side of their work, there was the motive of eliminating the need for this double identity, with

all the waste of work and time involved in keeping separate accounts and records of time spent by each employee on each type of work. The non-charitable organisations that joined us were of two kinds: those that had applied to be put on the charity register and had been turned down by the Charity Commissioners (or, as in the case of the British Humanist Association and the Rationalist Press Association, had been struck off, simply because the Charity Commissioners suddenly decided on a reinterpretation of "education"); and those (such as the National Secular Society) which had never applied for charity status because, in spite of the financial inducements, they preferred to remain free to make "political" statements rather than succumb to muzzling by the Charity Commissioners.

The Charity Law Reform Committee achieved good media publicity and support from individual members of both Houses of Parliament — but one excuse for no parliamentary action at that time was that it would be wiser to wait for the report of the Goodman Committee which was then sitting. It was not a Royal Commission, but had quasi-official status, having been set up by the National Council of Social Service under the chairmanship of Lord

Goodman, to look into all aspects of charity law.

Goodman Report

The Goodman Report was finally published in December 1976. And fell on stony ground.

Although unsatisfactory in many respects — its piecemeal proposals would have made confusion even worse confounded — it did point to many of the defects of the existing law, and recognised the need for parliamentary action of some kind. Four years have gone by since then, and Parliament has found no time to consider the matter at all.

As for the Charity Law Reform Committee, after publishing two excellent pamphlets that put the Goodman Report to shame, it began to fade away in the manner of most pressure groups when they see no tangible results of their labours. Though still technically in being, it has not even made its voice heard in the past few weeks with all the media hungry for informed comment in the wake of the Moonies case. However, some of the comments that have been published or broadcast have included references to the not-quite-forgotten Charity Law Reform Committee proposals, so they are not irretrievably buried.

Family Furore

ANTONY GREY

The "Family Forum" was set up to act as a consultative body on "matters of public interest concerning families". Its aims are wide, but Christian and moralistic pressure groups have attempted to turn it into a battleground, with emphasis on preventing girls under 16 being prescribed contraceptives. Antony Grey was formerly director of the Albany Trust and is active in the field of counselling.

The tiny, loud-mouthed clique of fundamentalist evangelical Christians who constitute the core of the morally self-righteous Moral Right in this country cannot be lightly brushed aside. Bullfroglike though they are, they pose a serious threat not only to Freethought but also to our society's basic shared values of democratic free speech and tolerance. In recent years, as readers of *The Freethinker* are only too well aware, they have spawned a coterie of campaigning pressure groups, nominally distinct and independent but all emitting that peculiarly distinctive odour of rancid, persecutory pharisaism which was formerly confined to the nowadays low-profile but by no means defunct Moral Re-Armament.

One of the totem-poles to which this lot nail

their dubious colours is the Sanctity of Family Life. They apparently hanker after the revival of the Victorian-style nuclear family unit where wives and children are reduced to the status of unquestioning chattels of a lordly Paterfamilias. But since the subjection of women is no longer feasible to that extent, they campaign vigorously to assert and uphold parental authority, indignantly denying that children (including teenagers) should have any rights, or even any opinions which conflict with their parents' views or wishes. The parents, of course, are visualised as being of a certain sort: properly married and monogamous; morally sound (i.e. practising Christians); and, above all, implacably opposed to their daughters being on the Pill.

Social Standards

An undercurrent of concern—some of it justified—about slipping social standards and the decay of community life led, a few years ago, to leading politicians of both major parties flirting with the notion of a Government department being set up with responsibility for the family. How the idea would have worked out was never clear; and not

altogether surprisingly, it came to nothing. What has emerged, however, is an agency called "Family Forum", set up last year under the wing of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations to act as a central consultative body "in matters of public interest concerning families" and currently bringing together some 70 member-organisations. Conspicuous amongst these—need I say—are our old friends the Nationwide Festival of Light, the Responsible Society, the Community Standards Association, the Order of Christian Unity and similar national and local groups. Their first ploy was to nominate a high proportion of the candidates for election to Family Forum's executive committee. Nothing wrong with that, of course: but it was what followed after only two or three of their nominees were elected that gives yet another interesting sidelight on how these folk strive to discredit everyone and everything they cannot dominate.

"Sinister Conspiracy"

On 21 January their tame *Times* fogleman Ronald Butt wrote one of his characteristic "vials of wrath" diatribes pitching into Family Forum and all its works, and bellyaching about its £30,000 Government funding. According to Butt, Family Forum's birth was the outcome of a sinister conspiracy masterminded by Alastair Service of the Family Planning Association ("and formerly lobbyist of the Abortion Law Reform Association")—who, needless to say, is one of the Moral Right's most unfavourite persons—"to tap public resources by brandishing a word that (in its common meaning) has everybody's approval, and then to promote social change by re-defining the word's meaning". Service, it appears, had been "most active" since Family Forum's inception in opposing a close definition of the family, and in supporting the inclusion of such maverick groups as single-parent families and — horror of horrors! — homosexuals.

Worst of all, the dire question of contraception for the under-16s had promptly reared its ugly head — not really surprisingly, Butt insinuated, since Alastair Service had actually told the *Sunday Times* in 1976 that his own children thought they would want their first sexual relationship at "around 16" (Butt's italics). And the slimy Service had even had the gall to express his disquiet—in private correspondence to Family Forum's chairman, Peter Bottomley, MP, which somehow found its way to hawk-eye Butt—at the "plethora of nominations from small local pressure groups" of the Parents and Children Concern type which he believed were offshoots of the Responsible Society, and had proposed that Family Forum membership should be restricted to national organisations. "I don't think he has much to worry about," sneered Butt (with a passing side-swipe at another of his *bêtes noires*, the "wretched book" *Make It Happy*): Family Forum, he pre-

dicted, was all set to emulate American experience in which the word "family" has been taken over by the social engineers and applied to communes, group marriage and homosexual varieties. The family, Butt stoutly maintained, means only "those who are linked together by marriage, by blood or by formal adoption". And why was Mr Service so frightened of "grass roots opinion" (forsooth)?

The stage was now all set for the concerted assault which was promptly mounted in *The Times'* letter columns. A ritual reply by Family Forum's chairman, Peter Bottomley, MP—whose view was that "it is neither Christian nor sensible only to regard families as containing two parents and their children", and who bravely hoped that Family Forum would be a meeting place rather than a battle ground—went virtually unheeded. All that the angry correspondents (nearly all ladies) who piled into Family Forum were really interested in was to get across loud and clear the simple message: "Don't put your patient on the Pill, Dr Worthington".

Contraception Prescriptions

The President of the Mothers' Union—attacked by Butt for endorsing the hated DHSS Memorandum which (according to him) "virtually licensed doctors to prescribe the Pill to girls below the age of consent without telling their parents"—protested that at no time had they ever agreed to the indiscriminate prescription of contraceptive pills to the under-aged; but the alternative to the policy laid down in the memorandum was to deny such girls any form of counselling or contraception, however much they might need it. "We have however never ceased to urge that the proper course of behaviour for all is chastity before marriage and fidelity within it." So presumably, chimed in Lady Grantchester, the Mothers' Union expects the proposed counselling to be given along these lines? But "permissive counselling" may accompany contraception and encourage rather than inhibit promiscuity. No advice had been offered by the Minister as to who precisely is to counsel, or what their professional standards should be. "Parents should not be deprived of their legal right and moral obligation to counsel and protect their children."

Dr Adrian Rogers—chairman of Responsibility in Welfare, a Devon-based group which has been spearheading the campaign to get the DHSS memorandum withdrawn—wrote: "If the nation's teenagers are entitled to run into Brook advisory centres or family planning clinics and obtain contraception, albeit in 'exceptional circumstances', exceptions will become—and are quickly becoming—the rule and the whole principle of protecting children within a family will have been thwarted and irreparably damaged." Dr Margaret White, JP—a leading light of the Order of Christian Unity, and co-author of its moralistic tract *Sound Sex Education*—followed on

with her reminiscences of a "government-funded course" on counselling which she had attended and had been shocked to be told that "counselling means helping the 'client' to discover what she wants, and when she has done so, to provide it for her". Dr White claimed that she had been informed that it was "wrong" to give clients relevant information, such as that sex with under-16-year-old girls is illegal, or that there are medical and psychological risks attached to "premature" sexual intercourse, because that would be "moralising".

Counselling Approach

I have an interest here, as I am an active member of several British Association for Counselling committees, and I know full well that no reputable counsellor thinks that to impart such information to a client is "wrong". On the contrary, all the counsellors I am aware of would regard it as totally unethical not to give a client all the essential factual information she or he needs in order to make responsible decisions. I also happen to know which course it was that Dr. White attended, and I have the strongest doubts that whatever took place there could credibly bear the interpretation she has placed upon it. I wrote a letter to *The Times* to this effect, and to my knowledge several other people involved in the counselling movement, and concerned to protect its good name, did so too. But none of our letters were published, and so readers of *The Times* were left with the impression that Dr White's account was more than just a travesty. For "the defence", the chairman of Brook Advisory Centres, Caroline Woodroffe, wondered whether Dr Adrian Rogers would prefer to see a girl under 16 suffer an abortion or childbirth rather than allow her doctor to protect her from pregnancy, and asked: "Can moral outrage really be so cruel?" (The answer would appear to be an eager "Yes".) Lady Brook herself wrote that "a doctor who moralises and scaremongers instead of listening may simply be writing a prescription for pregnancy", and explained that counselling at Brook involved a full and careful exploration of all aspects of each client's situation.

Back on the attack, Responsible Society warhorse Valerie Riches maintained that "the more contraception has been made available to under-age children, the more recruits have been drawn in, resulting in more sexual activity", and asked what is obviously for her the \$64,000 question: have we, as a nation, lost control of our children to the extent that the only care and help we can offer them is the provision of "protectives" behind the backs of their parents? True courage and foresight, announced a Mrs Beasley—a near neighbour of Dr Rogers—are shown by those girls who risk the mockery of their peers by using the simple device of saying "No" to sex before marriage.

This peculiar correspondence, which although it bore throughout the heading "Family matters" was conducted on the assumption that all that mattered was whether or not under-age girls were to be allowed access to contraception if they desired it, ended after a weighty and thoughtful letter from Dr Michael Thomas, chairman of the BMA's Central Ethical Committee. Dr Rogers, he said, failed to appreciate that "medicine is best practised when a doctor acts in the best interest of an individual rather than a group". Would Dr Rogers prevent a doctor from supporting a 15-year-old girl in continuing her pregnancy in the face of her parents' demands that she should be aborted? Since Dr Rogers' massive publicity campaign started, there had been an unprecedented upsurge in calls to "agony aunties" from young girls who state that they are now frightened to visit their doctors for fear of their parents being told. How sad it was that parents and doctors were being set at odds in this way when both seek the same end—the best for the child.

Sad, too, isn't it, that those of us who seek what is best for society and *all* its members—the irreligious as well as the religious, and the unconventional as well as the conventional—are set at odds by the crude oversimplifications and the moral humbuggery of the Butts and the Beasleys, the Riches and the Rogers, the Whites and the Whitehouses. Family Forum, if it survives, looks like having quite a bumpy ride. I, for one, am quite relieved I don't have a ticket. I just wish the crew the best of British luck. They'll need it.

BRIGID BROPHY: *The Longford Threat to Freedom*. 12p (12p postage)

MARGARET KNIGHT: *Humanist Anthology*. 95p (25p postage)

BARBARA SMOKER: *Humanism*. 70p (25p). *Good God: Satirical Verse*. 95p (18p)

BERTRAND RUSSELL: *Why I am Not a Christian and other essays*. £1.95 (22p)

Dr Adrian Rogers is a moral crusader who has been campaigning against birth-control facilities for under-sixteens. He has contributed an article to "Hospital Doctor" entitled "Castrated for the Lord" about a nineteenth-century Russian sect which mutilated its male and female followers.

"BUSINESS PROSPECTS: Become an ordained minister. Start a nonprofit organisation. Many benefits! Credentials and information, 10. Universal Life Church, Santa Cruz."—From an advert in the American journal "Mother Jones".

Most academic subjects have a given content. In history and geography, one studies the past and the present, as there in space and time; what is studied in physics and chemistry is reactive, if not always tangible. Philosophy is a subject invented by its professors, although there in the time-table for the student. The better known divisions are yesterday's inventions, metaphysics, ontology, logic, ethics, epistemology, aesthetics; current inventions include axiology, phenomenology, linguistics. Every one of these older established lines is a precarious business today, threatened with take-overs, bankruptcies, redundancies. "Metaphysics", arbitrary in origin and engaged in dubious practices, sometimes in association with ontology, said to have a bogus prospectus, is almost a dirty word; logic takes over mathematics, or mathematics logic; ethics, most frequently on the lips, and more comfortably down to earth, has been in serious trouble; an early essay by one of the acutest modern thinkers on the subject had the title, "Does moral philosophy rest on a mistake?"; epistemology has been described as a nineteenth century chestnut; aesthetics was always a slippery if not sloppy business, and recent practices in the arts have not given confidence to investors. As for the new enterprises, they have mushroomed, and there may even be reason to think that they are better founded than fashions, but is there any reason to think that they are any fitter to survive than the once thriving businesses they are pushing out?

As with the break-up of the arts, this disintegration of traditional philosophy has taken place in the last half-century. Most of the classical features have vanished from the present scene: system-building, enunciation of first principles, the quest for certainty, reductive analysis, preoccupation with origins and causes. Partly, this follows the hand-over to the sciences begun in the seventeenth century. Philosophy then formally withdrew from the business of building knowledge. In the words of John Locke, the philosopher was left to be "employed as an underlabourer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge". However, the rhetoric of change is a herald far in advance of the marching columns. Moreover, having left the natural sciences to make their own way in the world, philosophy still had the human sciences on her hands, psychology, political economy, sociology, subjects taught by philosophers in their department of the university until the first decades of this century.

Relieved of the fundamental task of building empirical knowledge, or of doing the preliminary arm-chair thinking, philosophy has also been relieving itself of fundamental mistakes, ancient and

modern. It is no reproach against wisdom that it makes mistakes, unless it fails or refuses to learn from them. Thus Plato's "Battle of the Giants", Idealism versus Realism, it is now pointed out, is a pointless confrontation, since what each side has to say is equally consistent with all the appearances they have to go on in what they say, so that what they say is not to any purpose. The question is dissolved, not resolved. A conclusion rather happily anticipated in the old quip: What is Mind? No matter. What is Matter? Never mind. A nice formula to represent and ridicule the intransigence of both sides. Indeed, *the reductio ad absurdum*, which goes beyond a joke, is a distinctly philosophic argument. With the pursuit of positive knowledge out of their hands, philosophers have been preoccupied with questions of meaning, and have explored several dead-ends, including the analysis of statements into unmistakable elements with which to construct an unequivocal language, the litmus test of sense and nonsense, a quest that returned to rediscover the language of ordinary experience.

Is this to play ducks and drakes with philosophy, or is it philosophy playing ducks and drakes? What's wrong with a game? Some of those most seriously engaged have been known to call it a game. It invents puzzles, which then vex minds, but provide scope for the art, and glee, of disposing of them; and it affords a living. Zeno's paradoxes of motion are only among the longest lasting.

Need for Philosophy

When all is said, however, if philosophy did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it, like God, but with more reason. For it remains the most persistent attempt to think clearly, however maimed or marred by human follies and errors, from which a "love of wisdom" exempts no one. Philosophy, like humanity so far, survives its errors and follies. A philosopher takes his stand on his thinking, not on his principles nor his conclusions. If this sounds more like a confession of futility than a claim to virtue, its alternative is acceptance of dogmatism. For better or worse, philosophy is the most determined and systematic opposition to dogmatism, in its own cloister or out in the world. A philosopher is engaged in an activity, not in the production of a commodity, in a secondary reflective activity, not a primary goal-seeking activity. He turns back to turn over what is said, what is done, what is going on, to take possession of it in awareness; for any of several purposes, for a larger view, for reconsideration, for critical examination, or simply for contemplation. The halt for attention may lead anywhere; and philosophy starts anywhere, since any-

thing may prompt reflection. Wherever it starts, it is likely now to go on to synoptic views, that are neither syntheses nor systems, for it is concerned with the general, even the universal, and at the same time has reason to be distrustful of constructing harmonies in a world of discordancy that cannot be resolved and of discontinuities that cannot be bridged. A detached attention to the way things are is still the order of the day, but former ways of going about it have been abandoned, whether by building up a theoretical model from within on the basis of step by step certainty, or by reconstructing it from without with the bricks of which its representation is constructed. Instead, if the philosopher steep himself reflectively in things as they are found to be by the empirical sciences, he gains an informed awareness more fertile in illuminating insights than abstract speculation could ever be. To marry concrete and abstract, knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, is a match-making apt to produce useful general views.

One needs to have some reasonable idea of the way things are in order to decide rationally how to respond, how to live. Of course, everyone does have some idea, reasonable or not. Whether one simply goes haphazardly by impressions and assumptions, or gets a ready-made outfit off the peg, provided by one of the traditional, or new-fangled, religions or philosophies, neither way is one that could be defended as entirely satisfactory. But what alternative is there? Has anyone else the time, capacity, training, and inclination to think things out for himself to match these advantages of the philosopher? Are the conclusions of a philosopher's own thinking any use to anyone else? Do contemporary philosophers, anyhow, show any interest in doing their thinking for the public on general questions about the way things are and the way to live? The fast and easy answer to all three questions is No. Consider, however, what lies behind each of them, beginning with the last.

When philosophy in the universities was stripped of all "real" subjects of study, what was left for it to do, what kind of inquiry remained? The turning of philosophy in on itself with this question co-incided with the prevailing tendency to professionalism, organised specialism. No longer a province of clerical scholars, philosophy in the universities was in lay hands, with its own forums and journals. That is, philosophers were writing for and speaking to professional colleagues, on topics which, for one reason or another, preoccupied them. This contrasts with the situation in the nineteenth century, when thinkers like J. S. Mill and Herbert Spencer would write on topics of general interest in the *Contemporary Review* or the *Fortnightly*, long edited by John Morley, or in periodicals of equal repute. Philosophy had then to speak the language of ordinary experience. However, before today's

philosophers are written off as sophisticated specialists inhabiting a world of their own, two restraining considerations.

Thinking rather than Conclusions

The first goes back to the point that a philosopher takes his stand on his thinking, rather than his conclusions. He proclaims a standard of clear, consistent and justified thinking, faithfully pursued and resolutely upheld. That is his public calling—and can equally well be hers. The actual thought, the conclusions, are always provisional and corrigible, and for that reason progressive, as in the empirical sciences. The second consideration goes along with this. However a particular philosopher may be engaged academically, embedded in the establishment, embodied for him in specific tasks and professionally set interests, he remains essentially an independent thinker, a freelance. There is every reason why he should apply his standard of clear, consistent, justified thinking to whatever is said, in his own circle or in the media. There are always shared assumptions and dominant ideas overdue for critical examination. The philosophic standard of thinking counts for little if its upholders fail to intervene when they find it is being violated on important issues.

(It is interesting that a philosophically trained mind, rather than one legally trained, has been chosen in two notable recent cases to head a committee of public inquiry: Bernard Williams on the law of obscenity; Michael Dummett in the NCCL's unofficial inquiry into the Blair Peach case. The reason may be that philosophy now stands with the public for disciplined thinking rather than speculative thought, and that is the impression made by contemporary philosophers on the public not versed in their professional concerns.)

Turning to the second of the two questions, whether or not a philosopher's conclusions are of general use, there is never a conclusion to be handed over; there is a course of thinking to be exposed. A philosopher is not an authority, like a scientist in his special field; he is an exemplar, but not merely of a skill which can be rivalled only by his peers. He is not demonstrating faultless logic; he is exhibiting a deliberated decision, with his own weighting of the evidence, and his indication of the considerations which influenced his decision, and why. Acute, highly trained minds come to opposed conclusions on ultimate beliefs: take A. J. Ayer and his successor, Michael Dummett. This seems baffling: how can it be so? The answer is likely to owe more to psychology and autobiography than to the logic of intellectual procedures. That does not discount the intellectual procedures. Philosophers may choose different grounds for their beliefs, but if they state what those grounds are, others know

where they stand. When the mathematician and philosopher A. N. Whitehead (with whom the young Bertrand Russell collaborated) attempted to draw general conclusions from findings in the empirical sciences, in the two lectures "Nature" and "Life", he exposed his thinking fully enough for others to decide how far they could go along with it, or where and why they must differ. When thought depends not merely on evidence, but mainly on the selection, emphasis, and interpretation of the evidence, there is room for difference. Philosophers should be exemplary in the candour of their exposure, the clarity and consistency of their statements, and the force of their justification. But thought remains personal, as well as liable to mistakes: "personal" implies passions and attitudes and aspirations, which are not exorcised by the use of reason.

The first of the questions, whether one can think for oneself unless a philosopher, is answered in the light of the other answers. Nobody can think for another. Even those who join a church, or otherwise borrow their thinking, pick and choose for themselves, taking what they can get on with, for-

getting or playing down the rest. This is more indulgent than intelligent, and quite different from the taking and leaving that may be practised on a piece of exposed thinking. Whether one comes to one's own conclusions or takes them from another, it is all one if they remain on the shelf as verbal possessions never used, a stock of opinions. The American pragmatist C. S. Peirce put it this way: "The elements of every concept enter into logical thought at the gate of perception and make their exit at the gate of purposive action; and whatever cannot show its passport at both gates is to be arrested as unauthorised by reason." Unless one goes by what one thinks, and modifies it by the experience it generates, one is not thinking to any purpose.

Philosophy, then, is disciplined free thought, independent of all conclusions, and totally opposed to dogmatism of any kind. If *The Freethinker* raises this standard, then its free-thought is indeed "the best of causes". Loyalty to that cause, however, is exacting, for mere solidarity is no match for an enemy that lurks also within the ranks, and within the free-thinker.

Free Thought and Science

HERMANN BONDI

The conflict between science and Christianity was so acute and famous in the late nineteenth century that it is not always easy even now to distinguish the permanent and universal elements of the tension between science and religion from the purely temporary and evanescent features of the celebrated arguments of that day. Science has much advanced in sophistication since those days, and a wide gap has opened between refined forms of theology (Christian, Jewish, Muslim) and the fundamentalist and often aggressive faith of many believers of these dogmatic religions. The central issues between Thomas Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce seemed so clear to both of them that the fuzziness of their successors would come as a shock to them. Yet in my view the underlying cause of the difference is as crystal hard as ever, only the (unnecessary) superstructure has softened.

The nature of science has been so well described by Karl Popper. The genesis of scientific theories is invariably an imaginative leap from a known background, itself an amalgam of mental images and empirical data. The task of a theory is not merely to be compatible with the empirical knowledge of the day, but to forecast the results of future experiments or observations which are potentially capable of *disproving* it. Since theories are general in their nature, while experiments are necessarily particular, a single non-conforming experiment may disprove a

theory, but since the general can never be logically deduced from any number of particular instances, no set of experiments can ever prove a theory. Thus all our theories are essentially and necessarily *provisional*, however many tests they may have stood successfully. The most famous example of this is Newton's theory of gravitation, which for over 200 years was used most effectively to analyse and to forecast the motion of the planets and their satellites down to the extreme detail needed for predicting the incidence of eclipses of the Sun and the Moon. Yet in spite of all this wealth of success, the disproof of the theory occurred in the first quarter of this century. It is of interest to examine with some attention how this disproof occurred. It involved three elements: First came a minute but well confirmed difference between the Newtonian prediction for the orbit of the innermost planet, Mercury, and the observations. Though this discrepancy was at first thought to be accountable by the hypothesis of the existence of a planet, Vulcan, very close to the Sun and thus too difficult to observe by nineteenth-century instruments, early in this century the existence of Vulcan could be denied and thus there arose a discrepancy inexplicable in Newtonian terms. Next there came an *alternative theory of gravitation* due to Einstein, which was readily seen to account for this fine detail in the motion of Mercury. Finally there came another test, the deflection

of light by the Sun, a test successfully stood by Einstein's but not by Newton's theory.

The example shows the *undogmatic* nature of science (not always brought out by all scientists) in which even the most trusted theories are liable to disproof, indeed need to be so, for if a theory cannot be disproved empirically it is not scientific.

This method of empirical testing is in principle open to all. The crucial experiments are repeatable, and indeed many of the great classical experiments are redone in school and university teaching laboratories every day. Of course the more sophisticated and expensive the equipment, the rarer the event studied, the more difficult and sparse the repetitions. But in principle it is always possible. In essence, what can be empirically tested is *manifest*. Even when the ultimate object is historical (hypothetical temperature of a certain ocean in the cretaceous period) and thus, in some sense, unique, the tests (isotope ratios in a family of fossils) are repeatable by everyone with the right apparatus and skill on every such fossil. Though people with the right apparatus and the skill to use it may, in some specialities, only number hundreds, yet they can be anywhere on Earth, of any race, of any religion, of any ideology. Thus science has this potential of universality, and in fact there are people practising any science in every quarter of the globe.

Testability is Vital

Because testability is so vital, if there are two alternative theories, the more testable is always to be preferred. It is of course very clear that if a theory cannot be proved wrong, i.e. if it is compatible with every conceivable outcome of every conceivable experiment (this is true, in Medawar's analysis, of psychoanalysis), then it says nothing and is valueless.

I am always a little shy of the term "atheism", for this seems to deny the existence of an undefined and arbitrary concept. The very denial gives substance to a notion "as long as a piece of string". Disbelief should only be asserted when the object of disbelief is well defined. Nor does a theist with an undefined (and therefore uncommunicative) God have anything to say. The essence of dogmatic religion is not a God, but *knowledge* of him. Such knowledge is admitted by all to be hard to come by. Only on rare occasions, in the view of the three Western religions, has God revealed himself. The essence of the faith of a believer is that there exists, in a form accessible to him, such revelations, a way of knowing that is not manifest, not repeatable, not in any sense ordinary. Here lies the fundamental difference between the private "knowledge" of the believer (who regards himself as fortunate to have been chosen or selected to believe and therefore as superior in knowledge to those who do not share his

beliefs) and the "public" knowledge of science. I therefore prefer to call myself neither an atheist nor an agnostic, but an *anti-revelationist*. I abhor the very idea of revelation not only because it is untestable, but because it sets man against man. Religion is the most divisive thing in human affairs, because the believer, in his faith, regards himself as *knowing*, where all those who think otherwise are ignorant. It is this feeling of superiority that has been the cause of some of mankind's greatest disasters. My dislike is centred on those elements of belief that make adherents think they have a private wire to the office of the Almighty, whether through personal inspiration or through reading and interpreting holy texts. Sadly, often (particularly perhaps in Christianity) this leads to a truly anti-human orientation, against sexual activity and in favour of the mortification of the flesh. The authority for such bizarre attitudes is knowledge vouchsafed only to the intensely religious directly or via a holy scripture. The passing on of revelations requires *authority*, whether vested in individuals, in traditions, or in texts.

Science Anti-Authoritarian

Science, by its very nature, is anti-authoritarian. The youngest and least recognised researcher may in principle revolutionise his subject. In practice this is less rare in theoretical subjects where there are plenty of examples of the successes of very young scientists (Einstein, Dirac, Crick and Watson, etc) than in experimental ones where the need to acquire more practical skills and having to build up the confidence to be permitted to use expensive equipment invariably take time. Yet even here there are examples such as Jocelyn Bell, to show that age, reputation and position can be irrelevant.

But, above all, it is the repeatability and the universality as well as the anti-authoritarianism that distinguish science from religion. The conflict, in essence, is a *total contrast in method*, whereas a century ago the conflict was seen as one of results. That there was such a conflict of results dividing Huxley from Wilberforce is true enough but it arose from a difference in approach. The infinite flexibility with which the modern theologian endows his craft allows him to retreat with some dignity from the rigidities of a Wilberforce, but cannot hide the conflict of method and outlook. The sophisticated theologian can rightly laugh away the battles of a hundred years ago; he cannot deny tracking back his faith to some form of revelation. This is the root of the contrast, and its existence cannot be denied.

The fundamentalist attack, on the other hand, is centred on the theory of evolution which seems to stick in his gullet. It is important that one should be clear about its status, for otherwise it would be difficult to defend it. Of course it has not been

proved. No scientific theory has ever been proved. Of course there is much about evolution that is unknown. In particular one would refer to the reconciliation of genetic and of geological rates of change in species, of an understanding of the suddenness of extinction of some species, of an appreciation of the ecological balance in former times. But it is of the essence of any science and of its very attraction that there should be vast areas crying out for investigation.

A more serious criticism is that the theory of evolution is not scientific because it is not disprovable by empirical tests. Popper himself has been hinting at this point, while stressing its enormous heuristic value. I am more positively inclined, but would stress the need to describe conceptually possible discoveries that might be regarded as empirical disproof of the theory of evolution. But, as the example given earlier of the theory of gravitation showed, the existence or potential

existence of an *alternative theory* creates a mental outlook in which empirical disproof of one of them becomes easier to construct because one can concentrate on experiments that would discriminate between these alternatives. The greatest weakness, in a sense, of the theory of evolution was that no alternative had ever been proposed. We had no choice. This is still true of the evolution of higher forms of life, but an astronomical rather than a terrestrial origin for primitive organisms is now a serious option, following the work of Hoyle and Wickramasinghe. Yet even for higher forms of life, the finding of the skeletons of primate-like animals in the lowest and oldest sedimentary rocks would surely come close to a disproof of the theory of evolution? Thus I believe it is right to consider it as a scientific theory, and to answer the fundamentalist by saying that no alternative scientific theory has ever been proposed. This is surely a hard enough line on which to take a stand.

ZED'S CREDO

A lowly rhesus monkey, I . . .
born to suffer, born to die;
 bred (my mother said) by man,
 as part of some important plan
designed by human mind on high.
And mine is not to reason why.

My master man, whose name is Ted,
gave me (in likeness) my name, Zed.
 Unnerved by needle? Scared of knife?—
 when Ted (to whom I owe my life)
has cared for me and kept me fed?
I'll never fear to hear his tread!

A lonely rhesus monkey, I . . .
I miss my sisters, Ex and Wye.
 But master is my company:
 herein he walks, and talks to me.
Albeit monkeys all must die,
he'll reunite us by-and-by.

Yet, faithlessly I sense with dread
my time approaching to be bled.
 What is the purpose of research?
 Might man leave monkey in the lurch?
My mighty master, tender Ted,
he'll surely raise me from the dead.

Else how could mankind justify
denying monkey sight of sky,
 imprisoning in metal mesh,
 withholding warmth of kindred flesh . . . ?
Ted's just! In Ted I trust for my
reward, when I (to schedule) die.

BARBARA SMOKER

BELIEF IN GOD

Belief in God
Is odd—
A blessing and a curse;
It makes a good man better,
And a bad man worse.

JOHN GILMOUR, 1977

TANTUM RELIGIO . . .

Patterned totem
Breeds hatred, fear, taboo;
Father-gods
Spawn favoured sons.
Allah divides,
Christ divides
Brother from unsaved brother;
Cradled man lies battle-torn.
When will he wake to find that no hand rocks,
And rise re-born?

JOHN GILMOUR, c.1960

The title is the opening of line 101 of Lucretius, Book 1: "Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum" (Such heinous acts could religion prompt.) First published in "The Humanist" for March 1967.

The Freethinker, Past and Future

JIM HERRICK

G. W. Foote stated his intentions in plain language when he founded *The Freethinker* 100 years ago in May 1881. He said: "The *Freethinker* is an anti-Christian organ, and must therefore be chiefly aggressive. It will wage relentless war against Superstition in general and against Christian Superstition in particular." How far has it remained true to that intent?

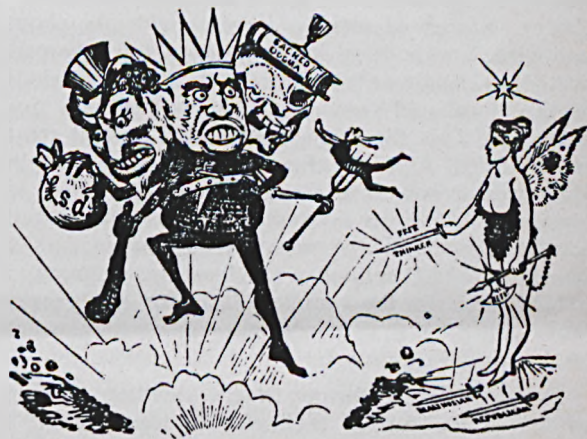
Where it has altered, in what ways is this a necessary reaction to changing times? Would readers who were startled or delighted by the bold beginnings of *The Freethinker* have expected it to survive for 100 years?

There are many reasons why early readers might not have expected their descendants to be reading *The Freethinker* in 100 year's time. For entirely practical reasons magazines flourished and vanished with great speed in the nineteenth century; G. W. Foote had earlier been involved with other short-lived secularist papers. The *National Reformer*, Bradlaugh's sober and detailed account of politics, might have seemed more firmly set for immortality than its cheeky younger brother *The Freethinker*. The fortunes of journals were tied to uncertain financial support and the shifting enthusiasms of individual editors. It is therefore a tribute to G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen, who edited *The Freethinker* from 1881 to 1915 and 1915 to 1951 respectively, with a gap while Foote was in gaol, that *The Freethinker* has survived. G. W. Foote said, when he became President of the National Secular Society in 1890, that the heroic age of freethought was over, but he ensured that *The Freethinker* had a continuing role as a campaigning journal by his own determination. Chapman Cohen was Foote's obvious heir-apparent and had done much of the writing of *The Freethinker* during Foote's last few years. He took over at a difficult time in the middle of the First World War, but his astute organisation and business sense placed *The Freethinker* on a stable financial basis and his fluent and wide-ranging pen kept *The Freethinker* alive through the first half of the twentieth century.

Apart from practical considerations, there are other reasons why early readers might not have expected *The Freethinker* to survive. Clergymen who came across it might have expected the challenge of atheism and secularism to be only a temporary set back in the history of the progress of God's work, soon to vanish with a religious revival. They would have been wrong for Christianity has steadily declined in Western industrial countries, and the world has been widely secularised. Politicians no longer refer to their task as a religious one (as Gladstone did)—even though the maverick Mrs Thatcher may make obeisance to a figure such as St. Francis

of Assisi and use a London church to preach that morality and money-making are the same thing. In general, world politics is conducted in secular terms (notable exceptions such as Iran or Ireland stand out as unusual). Christians in Britain have been pointing to a revival just around the corner for the last 100 years, but it has never come. There are minor fluctuations, at present, for instance, churches are pointing to small increases of membership, but it is Christians themselves who talk of a post-Christian society.

While Christians might, wrongly, have expected atheists to disappear as a temporary phenomenon, secularists, equally wrongly, might have expected



THE REAL TRINITY

Esq., gross ignorance, and sacred dogma v. *The Freethinker*, *National Reformer*, *Malthusian*, and the *Republican*. (11 September, 1881)

religion to wither away. An article *Is Christianity Played Out?*, from an early *Freethinker* (to be republished next month) refers to the "dying of an old faith". Christianity, in particular, and religion in general are not dead. A broad superstitious deism pervades Western Europe, and Christianity and other religions are expanding in some parts of the world. The established churches, although their active membership is now small, have retained a power and authority, both in the media and in the government of the country, quite out of proportion to their size. New sects and cults bemuse and befuddle us. Those who seek to oppose social progress and social freedoms can always rely on support at the church porch for petitions, letter campaigns, and so on: euthanasia, sexual freedoms, the abolition of censorship are all strongly opposed by religious groups, though not all religious people join that opposition.

For these reasons *The Freethinker* retains a vital campaigning role today. The emphasis is now on a broad spectrum of human rights and needs, combined with a spotlight on the more ridiculous and obscurantist aspects of religion. G. W. Foote's avowedly aggressive tactics were appropriate at a time when fundamentalist tub-thumping was widespread and the little education which ordinary people received encouraged a literal reverence for the word of the Bible. His use of humour in attacking religion was deliberate and it outraged his contemporaries, even some agnostics. The Bible cartoons, which were published in early issues of *The Freethinker*, do not annoy or even surprise people any more, and I suspect that some of the early cartoons reprinted in this issue would only irritate some Christians and cause mild amusement among sceptics. G. W. Foote's aim was to demonstrate that religion was not a subject to be treated differently from politics or ideas about society: if you could joke about politicians and political ideas you should also be permitted to laugh at religious leaders and religious ideas. It should not be a taboo subject for humorists. This aim was achieved—but only at great personal cost to G. W. Foote, who spent a year in Holloway Prison after having been convicted of blasphemy. (A fuller account of that significant and remarkable blasphemy case will be contained in a history of *The Freethinker* which we are planning to publish later in the summer. It is for this reason that the centenary issue does not contain an account of the journal's history.)

Today a *Punch* cartoon might lampoon religion without a murmur of the need for legal action, a film such as Monty Python's *Life of Brian* can thoroughly ridicule the Jesus story and have queues outside the cinemas waiting to view it, and a television comedy programme like *Not the Nine O'Clock News* can send up the Iranian Ayatollah or a trendy Anglican cleric with deadly satire. In this climate it is not *The Freethinker's* primary role to provide anti-religious cartoons, though humour and ridicule are always useful in exposing nonsense and muddled thinking.

Humour and Argument

Serious argument is much more lacking in our society than sceptical humour. Without the free-thought and humanist movement the arguments about the existence of God or an after-life, the need for men to worship or indulge in ritual, could go by default. I try not to forget that new readers to *The Freethinker* may be at early stages of thinking about man's place in the universe, of the meaning of life, and of the nature of moral behaviour.

The extent to which *The Freethinker* should aggressively attack religious activities has always been contentious. Very early G. W. Foote defended

his regular items entitled "Acid Drops" and "Sugar Plums" with the comment: "The public now-a-days is in a great hurry, and you must attract its attention before you can be heard." A monthly or weekly journal cannot adopt the style of a philosophical university quarterly. I have been criticised, while editing *The Freethinker* since 1977, both for allowing its columns to become too anti-religious and for not attacking religion enough. I take a pluralist attitude: there is room both for vigorous criticism of religion and for cooler analysis of the place of religion in the world. There is a case for calling a spade a spade and a piece of nonsense a piece of nonsense; but even religious nonsense will not vanish because of loud condemnation; it also needs comprehension and discussion. Chapman Cohen said that it was not enough to blast at religion, it had to be understood as a social and historical phenomenon.

I take a similarly pluralist attitude to other humanist organisations: *The Freethinker* is most closely associated with the National Secular Society (though strictly independent of it), but news from and debate within other humanist groups like the British Humanist Association and the Rationalist Press Association is relevant to *The Freethinker* pages. *The Freethinker* has readers in countries as far apart as Australia and South Africa, France and Israel, and news of matters of worldwide interest to secularists is therefore important. As early as October 1881 *The Freethinker* gave an account of the International Freethought Congress held at the Hall of Science, London, at which delegates were present from America, France, Holland and Belgium

Religion Worldwide

Instant worldwide communication has increased our awareness of the world religions other than Christianity. An advantage is that knowledge of comparative religion, of the extraordinary diversity of religious beliefs and rituals, makes it harder to believe in the particular truth of any one religion: God's messages to humanity have come in many conflicting versions! A disadvantage is that where some religions decline others may expand: human folly can be given new clothes. *The Freethinker* has contained comment about the current role of Islam. Its political and fundamentalist manifestations in places like Pakistan and Iran have produced appalling consequences: religion linked to nationalism is a doubly dangerous force. In Britain, which is now a multi-faith society, freethinkers need to argue against all religions, while defending the freedoms of minority groups. Islam has hit the headlines with an atrocity story such as a current news item reporting that an Islamic court in Abu Dhabi has sentenced a couple to death by stoning for adultery. But Islam, like Christianity, has different wings and diverse

interpreters, and Christianity has presented an equally hideous face in the past. Like Christianity, Islam is a proselytising religion and it has been suggested that freethinkers should be prepared with a sequel to Foote and Ball's *Bible Handbook* — the *Koran Handbook*.

Across the range of religions common features can be observed. Religion turns people away from the difficult attempt to solve and endure human problems in human ways. Like all devotion to groups (including secular groups such as the nation state at war) it can bind and drive towards fanaticism. Even in its mildest and most altruistic form, religion says: "There are things we cannot know." "There are mysteries beyond us." Now there are, of course, things which we do *not* know and mysteries *not* yet explained. But they are not areas we should put a Keep Out notice round and revere from afar: reason and imagination should reach and search in all areas.

Harms of Religion

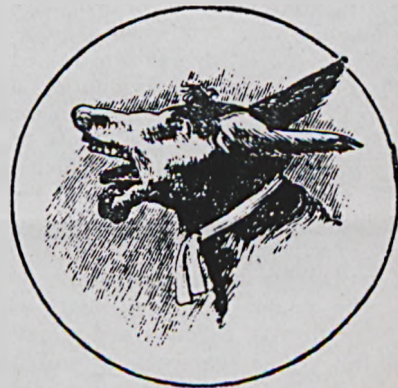
Despite these manifest harms of religion, freethinkers know that the world is not divided with neat simplicity into black and white, religious and non-religious. Religious followers are capable of acts of great humanity, and the non-religious are not free from behaving with stupidity and cruelty. It would be dogmatic and untrue to squawk parrot-like through the ages "All religion is all bad", to screech endlessly "Down with religion". Nor should freethinkers fall into the trap of interpreting all religion as literally as its most fundamentalist followers. Many religious people accept their religious ideas as partly allegorical. It is not necessary to believe in the supremely unlikely idea of a literal resurrection to understand, as a poetic idea, the feeling of being dead and springing alive again; from the troughs to the peaks of human experience such feelings are universal. Allegory is relevant to an understanding of the force of religion and myth. But these basic emotions have nothing to do with a deity, and organised religion is more closely allied to social control than poetic truth. *The Freethinker* will continue to provide a critique of religion at all levels, from the topical and the anecdotal to the philosophical and the political, the historical and the psychological.

Secularism has always been a radical approach. Its general principles are laid out on page 95. *The Freethinker* is not a supporter of one political faction. Perhaps it is a weakness of secularism that its economic ideas are not clear-cut (socialism divided secularists deeply in the 1890s). Two strands of secularism make it very important in the world of politics today: it is not revolutionary and utopian, and it is firmly committed to free inquiry. The Judaeo-Christian tradition is messianic—and secular

versions of the messianic tradition have led to expectation of heaven or hell on earth. Secularists believe in neither. There is no expectation that revolution will suddenly produce a perfect world: that is why it is so important to reform and ameliorate the worst aspects of the world as we find it. Nor do secularists follow the inverted messianism of those who prophesy an imminent end to the world. Nuclear stockpiling and rampant pollution present problems on a scale not known hitherto. But they will not be solved by doom and gloom prophecies or romantic pastoral notions of starting society afresh. We must look at the human animal realistically, with both co-operative and selfish instincts, with potential for anger and tenderness, cruelty and kindness; and with realism, reason and imagination we must move forward from one problem to the next, from one reform to the next.

The Freethinker will not cease to offer a dual programme of a critique of religion and a secular humanist approach to the world. *The Freethinker* will continue with the aid of distinguished thinkers and writers, some of whom have generously shown their support by contributing to this centenary issue (and, of course, regular contributors over the years) and the equally important general reader, whose thoughtfulness and concern for the world provides a significant haven of freethought in society.

The Freethinker will, I predict, be relevant 100 years hence. The major issues of our time such as disarmament, race relations, unemployment and equitable sharing of the world's resources of food and energy, do not allow us to look to the future with easy optimism. Freethought—"the best of causes"—will continue to clear the ground by exposing religions where they obscure issues and cloud thought. The secular humanist outlook—whatever phrase is used—will continue to provide an essential ingredient of civilisation. Long may *The Freethinker* flourish.



A PREACHING ASS

"And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass."
(Christmas, 1881). —Numbers xxii., 28.

George William Foote

J. M. WHEELER

Joseph Mazzini Wheeler was a close friend of G. W. Foote and this portrait of him was published in "The Freethinker" of 1 July, 1883, while he was in prison. J. M. Wheeler was a regular contributor to "The Freethinker" and did much sub-editing until his death in 1898.

Mr Foote, whose counterfeit and certainly unflattering presentment is given to our readers this week, is still a young man, but it is many years since he first threw his well-filled and well-trained mind into the Freethought service. An early love of literature had brought him into contact with the writings of such men as Mill, Carlyle, Ruskin and Darwin, and while still in his teens, a thorough-going spirit of inquiry resulted in his complete emancipation from the superstitions in which he had been nurtured. Restless in propaganda, in 1869 he was concerned in starting the Secular Sunday School of which he became superintendent. In the same year he formed a Young Men's Secular Association, with the object of organising the young men of the Secular party in London and training them for debate. He afterwards conducted classes in logic with the same purpose. He contributed to the *National Reformer* from as early as 1870, and many of his early papers such as the one entitled "Joys and Sorrows" and those upon "The Poetry of William Blake", bear witness to his poetic insight, as well as to his critical ability and purity of style.

Orthodox Christians who take it for granted that opposition to their creed must proceed from some bad qualities of head or of heart, probably look upon Mr Foote as a very vulgar person, justly incarcerated for coarse and offensive attacks on the religion of the land. Nothing could be further from the mark. Justice North, who made it evident how inferior in all the qualities of a gentleman a judge could be to the person he convicted, was constrained to speak respectfully of his intellectual abilities, and Lord Coleridge spoke in the most admiring manner of his striking and able defence in the Court of Queen's Bench. Mr Foote has the culture which is incompatible with vulgarity; but he has also the earnestness which is above hypocrisy. In the volume entitled "Arrows of Freethought", some of Mr Foote's most trenchant onslaughts upon Christianity have been reprinted. The reader will find smart wit, satire, vigorous home-thrusts, ridicule, and relentless logic, but he will fail to find coarseness or scurrility there, or indeed, in any line of our paper, for editing which he is now herded with criminals. Strange as it may seem to the Christian, Mr Foote has something of the fastidiousness which goes with the poetic and artistic temperament. His love of art is intense but

particular. In painting he prefers Titian, Angelico, Turner. In music, Beethoven, Wagner, Chopin. In poetry, Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley; and among moderns, Browning. George Meredith is his favourite novelist. In the course of his itinerant apostleship of Freethought he has very frequently lectured on the poets of progress and the prose teachers of our time. The very first public discussion on the merits of Darwin *versus* Moses was, I believe, that held for two nights in Glasgow between Messrs G. W. Foote and H. A. Long. Mr Foote has also defended



Freethought in set debates with Dr Sexton, the Revs Harrison, Woffendale, and others. On the platform his bearing is easy and impressive. His speech is deliberate but unhesitating—well-chosen words and sound argument, seasoned with mother wit, wide reading, and upon occasion, impassioned eloquence.

In 1876 Mr Foote started the *Secularist*, a publication in which many thoughtful and high-toned articles appeared. In 1879 he became editor of the *Liberal*, a Radical and Freethought magazine. The principal contributions, both political and anti-

theological, were from his pen. Some papers on Gambetta, a favourite of whom he always speaks with enthusiasm, are certainly among the best that have ever appeared on that statesman. Looking on the clerical party as the obstructives and *obscuranti* of Europe and believing that our hopes centre round the French Republic, Mr Foote has for many years taken the keenest interest in watching every turn of the ever-shifting game of French politics.

Thinking the time had come for a thorough clearing of the ground from the wreck and lumber of the past; and deeming that its best work was to be done by attacking superstition, he started the *Freethinker* with the avowed purpose of being aggressive and destroying hypocrisy by openly speaking out what so many think secretly. The pictures were chosen deliberately with the purpose of exciting thought and confidence in dealing with so-called sacred matters. Many who would never otherwise think of questioning their presumed infallible fetish, the Bible, will pause upon seeing a picture of Jonah inside a whale, or any other literal representation of Bible miracles. The success of this journal was soon

a thorn in the side of the bigots.

From time to time Mr Foote has put forth various pamphlets. The series of biographies entitled "Heroes and Martyrs of Freethought" were, I believe, entirely written by him and are written with care and deliberation. Most readers of the *Freethinker* will be acquainted with the series of "Bible Romances", in which Mr Foote has joined the resources of a clear, vigorous style, to sparkling wit and critical scholarship, making the re-reading of the Hebrew narratives most enjoyable for any who have an appreciation of fun and a sense of the ridiculous.

Mr Foote is now enduring the severest penalty for the expression of opinion which has been given within this century. What influence prison life may have upon his once superb physical health I know not, though there is too much reason to fear, from the effect of confinement and hard treatment upon Mr Kemp, that it must be extremely detrimental to one of such constantly active habits. But I know him well enough to be sure that suffering will neither alter his convictions nor daunt his spirit.

"Where Does Thinking Get You?"

EDWARD BLISHEN

"I don't allow myself to think as far as that," my father used to say: as if he were boasting of some remarkable feat of self-control. Tenderest of nurses when his children were ill, he had the distress of seeing me infected by a disease quite beyond his control: I became given to thought. "That boy thinks too much. Where did thinking ever get you?" Believing he was in search of an answer to this question, I'd name one or two thinkers who'd got, by their thinking, so far as being household names. I might rashly begin (it was in the 1930s) with Bernard Shaw. "Oh my God," my father would say. For some reason, Bernard Shaw was the perfect illustration of his view that thinking was disastrous. "What did the man ever do?" my father would demand.

Doing was the opposite of *thinking*. The thinker *sat about* ("on his arse," my father would say: as if it might have made some difference if he'd chosen some other part of himself to sit on): the man who sensibly eschewed thinking was brisk and busy—largely occupied, as my father saw him, with cleaning shoes, painting and repainting the house and weeding the garden. Thought led to questions and dissatisfactions: it led to the taking of strong political and moral positions: and at the same time it resulted in people *not* making up their minds. It could end, in short and God help us, in *tolerance*.

I remember this aspect of my childhood and youth with no animus whatever against my father. He was

a victim: and I see that much of my life has been an exploration of the means by which he was made one. Potentially he was an intelligent man who was persuaded, like a large number of people then and many of their descendants to this day, to disown and disclaim his own intelligence. It was what the free-thinkers of the nineteenth century were warring with: that subtle network of inhibitions and repressions that made unthinkingness respectable, and even in the 1930s could, in a very ordinary household, cause a child in his 'teens to come under fire because he read books and was amusedly uncertain of almost everything. To make it all worse, he did not believe in setting limits to his thoughts, being only too sadly aware that quite sharp limits had been set by nature. It made him a troublesome son: an awkward school-boy: and a damned miserable fellow, to be avoided, since he was always inquiring and querying.

All of which astonished me, at the time, only too aware that I had a dreadfully ticklish nature. Almost anything that happened, almost any idea, could make me laugh. How could someone like myself, for whom the word "thoughtless" might have been invented—someone who was struck by the comedy of even the most serious human scenarios—how could such a person be held in disfavour by fathers, headmasters and already-solemn coevals, for *thinking too much*?

I am, of course, reminded of Hamlet: a young Dane who was in similar trouble. I leap very readily

from Hamlet to the nineteenth-century freethinkers and their twentieth-century successors. Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, all of us. And ruddied o'er with the coloured thrill of thought, too. There's a long human tradition, of not being taken in: not consenting to have one's mind dulled and doctored. Hamlet was obstinate in insisting on the freedom of his mind. Owing to the exigencies of drama, he's on his feet most of the time. But there's no doubt as to the part of the body the fellow would in reality have depended upon. My father would have seen him as one very much given to sitting about *on his arse*. A thinker: which is positively to say, a free-thinker.

As my father knew, in his suppressed intelligence: to think at all, in any real sense, was to think freely.

In the 1930s, as a stumbling schoolboy, I came

upon the freethinking tradition, and was at once cheered and refreshed. Now, as a man of sixty, I see that that tradition is as necessary as ever it was: indeed, now more necessary than at any time in the past. The dreadful skill of persuading men and women to discount their own intelligence is more potent than it was when it worked upon my father, and made his life a desert of deliberate thoughtlessness—or unfree-thought.

I don't suppose anyone who was ever a secularist and freethinker would suppose that the battle was won. But it is important, one hundred years after the foundation of *The Freethinker* (I believe both as one-time adolescent and as current sexagenarian), to affirm our continuing and inexhaustible need of this tradition.

Tempress or Saint? How Religion Sees Woman

DORA RUSSELL

A paradox of religious views on the character and status of woman is that she finds herself extolled for piety, prayer, and spiritual devotions far exceeding those of men, and, in the very same breath, abused and obscenely reviled, as embodying all the snares of the world, the flesh and the devil. These absurd opposing concepts proceed, of course, from men, since century after century resounds with the silence of women, not one bold enough herself to challenge by offering a definition of her own psyche. Whether slave or free, she has had plenty to say about the character of men.

The relation of the sexes is one of the enigmas, and, in many respects, tragedies of history, in which religion has played a dominant role.

There are indications of the worship of goddesses, as expressions of fertility, in the early stages of settled communities, but these disappear with the increase of men's power over shaping the environment. Even the Greeks, who appointed priestesses to their oracles, and whose sculpture shows a superb appreciation of the beauty of the female form, abandoned their loyalty to the earth mother for veneration of the intellectual, childless Athene. In the pagan civilisations of the ancient world and among savage tribes, so the orthodox Christian would tell us, women had no rights. They were property, slaves, the booty of soldiers in conquering armies. With the coming of Christianity, centering on the actual moment of birth of a child to a human mother, and with that child — the adult Jesus — preaching love, compassion and pacifism, it might have been expected that women, and possibly even their children, would be honoured, or at the very least attain a higher status.

Quite the reverse. Unhappily for women, the interpreters of that gospel were St Paul the apostle and after him, St Augustine, but most of all the Holy Fathers, who sought refuge from all temptation in the barren deserts of North Africa. Of all the desires that burned within them, none was more insistent than sex. Accordingly, one after another, they accuse and curse woman.

St Paul writes to Timothy: "I will therefore that woman adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array, but (which becometh professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence and all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression."

"Woman for the Man"

To the Ephesians and the Corinthians, he lays it down that a woman is subject to man; in the church women must cover their heads (or be veiled). "But a man indeed ought not to cover his head, for as much as he is the image and glory of god: but the woman is the glory of man. . . Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man."

As to sex: "it is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and every woman have her own husband . . . if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn. He that is unmarried careth for the things

that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of this world, how she may please her husband."

Then the Church Fathers: Clement of Alexandria states that a woman should be entirely covered unless in her home, nor should woman go in for elaborate modes of dressing the hair and gazing into mirrors. He even interprets an infant's wail as a complaint at having been brought into this world. "Dreadful, O Mother, is the course of life, which has death as the goal of the winner. Bitter is the road of life we travel, with the grave as the wayfarer's inn."

Tertullian is even more nihilistic. He considers the having of children itself a folly; "desirous as we are ourselves to be taken out of this most wicked world and received into the Lord's presence". He continues "no wise man would willingly have sons. What has the care of infants to do with the Last Judgment?" and he looks forward to that day of resurrection when: "There will at that day be no resumption of voluptuous disgrace between us". Nor could contempt for women go further than this: "Nothing disgraceful is proper for man, who is endowed with reason, much less for women, to whom it brings shame even to reflect of what nature she is".

We may well say that today all must feel ashamed of these insults to women. But the shadow of them lingers on and hovers over every attempt of women to overcome discrimination and denigration. Christian doctrine, thus shaped in the third century, continued, as far as women were concerned, with savage rules about chastity, persecution of unmarried mothers, the burning of witches, damnation for unbaptised infants, right up to the trumpet call of our first true champion of women's rights, Mary Wollstonecraft, inspired by the French Revolution.

There have been at all times plenty of women of fine character, in all classes of society, who managed to shape their lives and endure (in the early days under threat of hell fire) within the rules. In so far as tolerance and understanding increased, this was due to those who, like the secularists of the past hundred years, broke through religious fanaticism and bigotry to espouse the cause of women in humanist terms.

Causes of Rift

It would be well, however, not to leave the subject without an attempt to look for the underlying causes of the rift between men and women. Subjection of women prevails wherever there is some public consensus of religious belief or custom. Its basis is almost invariably sex, which is why I chose these

extreme early examples of the orthodox Christian view.

Why did Adam feel that to love Eve was disobedience to god? Is not this the very first sign of man's aspiring to escape from his biological origins, the first male flight from the body, which was to lead on to man's entire rejection of his obligation to his animal—and to all organic-nature?

In seeking to impose chastity and asceticism on woman, man expresses what is his own ideal—to be higher and nobler than what he calls "brute creation" to which inevitably, because of her pregnancy and child-bearing, woman must belong.

Imagination and Intellect

That both men and women have a spiritual and intellectual nature has never yet been fully recognised by both sexes. The spiritual, the imagination—non-rational—may express itself in a thousand ways. When devoted to one god—as dictator—outside the universe, it has, historically, become disastrous. Is not man's resolve to live only in the spirit and intellect also a historical disaster, not only for women, but for the whole human species? Is there not here a salutary warning as to the direction in which man uses his intellect today? The intellect is a powerful and flexible instrument. It can be used in the service of power and death, or of creative endeavour and life. Today more than ever this is the question to which women, in view of their past sufferings, demand an answer from men.

FOR THE FREETHINKER CENTENARY

Thought is never free. It is bought in pain
loneliness. Comfort clothes conformity.
Thought's a dole child, threadbare with fallibility
patched pants braced up with reason's tangled twine

is sometimes stubborn, says: "Yet it still moves",
before the belly tucks in; is shot through
with dark tales we sucked up in childhood's pew
guilt, need, envy, rage, or the wailing groves

of never-had and never-was that hang
with offerings in our family trees.
How can thought free who in this twilight sees
adrift, widdershins or we ask it be strong

to take on death, eternity, those two
sharp blades that slice poor flesh? Yet we do.

MAUREEN DUFFY

The Freethinker and Blasphemy

BRIGID BROPHY

The Freethinker hasn't been prosecuted for blasphemy since 1883. On that occasion its editor was sentenced to 12 months' hard labour. The trauma, imposed when the paper was two years old, helped to form its identity and has perhaps made it particularly alert to the fact that, if you leave an anti-blasphemy law lying about, an officious person will sooner or later pick it up and point it at someone.

By tradition *The Freethinker* continues Charles Bradlaugh's campaign for repeal. Sadly (and disappointingly for tacticians who still believe that martyrdoms advance the cause of reform), repeal did not result even from the last-but-one prosecution, which took place in 1922 and ended in the cruel punishment of a pamphleteer named J.W. Gott. Eventually, the statutes against blasphemy were repealed, in the course of administrative tidying-up during the late Sixties, but the common-law offence of blasphemy remained intact. There was an attempt to use it, which failed on a technicality, in 1971. *The Freethinker* uttered warnings but was generally judged, even by its fellow civil libertarians, alarmist. In 1976 both Merlyn Rees and the Archbishop of Canterbury chose to drop public hints that the law was still extant and employable. Again *The Freethinker* noticed. At the end of 1976 Mrs Whitehouse obtained leave to point the law at *Gay News*, and in the summer of 1977 it went off.

As a matter of fact, there is a connecting thread (personal, not of office) between *The Freethinker* and James Kirkup's "blasphemous" poem in *Gay News*. A former editor of *The Freethinker*, William McIlroy, appeared at Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court in September 1977. The charge was not this time of blasphemy but of that still more mysterious, indeed perhaps mystic, offence of sending "an obscene or indecent article" (the Kirkup poem) through the post. This is an offence that contravenes the Post Office Act of 1953, which is said to be designed to protect postal workers. Sadly, however, the trial did not elucidate the slightly psychic relationship of English law to postmen. Apparently the law does not allow postmen the right to protect themselves from performing acts *they* consider immoral (such as delivering mail to a business address like Grunwick's); but it insists on protecting them, regardless not only of their will but of their knowledge, against miasmatic seepages of immorality through the pores of the sealed envelopes they handle.

The Freethinker itself wouldn't, I think, have published James Kirkup's poem in the first place. It is, after all, as its defending counsel pointed out, a religious poem. Indeed, it is a work of religious propaganda, designed to attract the reader to Jesus by sentimental means. It reminds me of the Christian doggerel I was brought up on, "Gentle Jesus,

meek and mild, Look upon a little child", with the *faux naïf* lisp of the original ("Pity my simplicity") merely transposed into a homosexual one. For the poem's necrophilia, Christians, if they must blame someone (and there's no compelling reasons why they should, given that necrophilia, though no doubt distasteful to onlookers, is by definition unable to inflict hurt on a sentient being), must blame their own cult of the image of the Pietà and their own ritualised cannibalism at the eucharist.

Heresy Hunting

Hurling the thunderbolt of "blasphemous libel" at this pious poem was no crusade against infidels and scoffers. In fact, the blasphemy trial was scarcely about blasphemy. Rather, it was a revival of the old Christian blood sport of heresy hunting, in which Christians of one persuasion let the law loose on Christians of a slightly different one. This time it was the Christians who cleave to *Leviticus XX, 13* ("If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death") versus the Christians who have persuaded themselves that that essentially nice person God couldn't really have meant a piece of legislation so irrational and bloody-minded.

For the moment (success may widen their ambitions), the heretic hunters seem to be after the soft fringe of their own side. Perhaps the poem would have escaped prosecution if *The Freethinker* had been where it appeared. For other reasons, however, it probably wouldn't have been offered there. *The Freethinker*, whose cover price is 25 pence, which carries virtually no advertising and which runs a fund to which its supporters donate the odd pound when they can, doesn't pay its contributors. (Trade unionist writers should, however, set against this blemish the fact that neither does it, in the manner of some of its big brothers, annex its contributors' copyrights.) And, though the parent publishing company sells Kit Mouat's verse in volume form, the magazine itself carries poetry only rarely—though its August 1977 number made up for drought by including Maureen Duffy's anti-religious but prymythological *Ballad of the Blasphemy Trial*.

What comes most strongly off *The Freethinker's* nine-and-a-half by seven inch monthly pages of (in the main) prose is the authentic atmosphere of British nineteenth-century radicalism. It wouldn't have shocked Sir Charles Dilke, but its egalitarianism and rationalism would probably seem quite rudely naked (or "politically naïf") to people accustomed to the jargon and social pieties of present-day leftist, feminist or trade-union discourse. Its tone is generally though uninsistently working-class (WEA is

probably the exact nuance), but it ascribes no luminous properties to proletarians.

Its review pages give a goodish, selective coverage to non-fiction books and to the theatre, but don't seem to have heard of any other arts. Its general coverage is detailed and informative on such "progressive" causes as abortion and homosexual law reform, which it champions with the same inevitability of natural logic as Bradlaugh championed contraception, and on the halting advance of toleration in schools and broadcasting. It reports periodically on secularism in India. It has a sharp eye for space-filler cuttings about doctrinal obscurantism in Rome and personal eccentricity in Anglican pulpits. It slices into the new mystery cults along with the established orthodoxy (which it recognises as one of the new mystery cults of the ancient world)

and has no time for post-scientific trendiness. It holds, on considerable evidence, that Uri Geller performs conjuring tricks.

Nevil Beauchamp, the radical (and freethinking, vegetarian and republican) hero of George Meredith's *Beauchamp's Career*, intended to found "a popular journal in the true sense, very lungs to the people". Its contributors were to be "well-paid" (Beauchamp had inherited a fortune) and it was to be "actually independent of circulation and advertisements". Meredith drowned his hero before he could put his plan for a free and freethinking press into fictional action. But five years after the publication (in 1876) of Meredith's novel, *The Freethinker* was founded in fact. It represents Beauchamp's grand design in minuscule and may be the nearest British journalism has yet come to fulfilling his career.

A Humanist Sermon

NICOLAS WALTER

Nicolas Walter, Editor of the "New Humanist" was invited to contribute a Thought for the Week for the London Broadcasting Company. It was broadcast in part on Sunday, 23 November 1980, and in full on 15 February 1981. Here we print his "sermon" in considerably abridged form.

When religion is discussed, it is nearly always forgotten that about half the people in this country take virtually no part in any religious activity and that between 10 and 20 per cent have no religious belief; yet all these people get on quite well without it. Like religion itself, the absence of religion may be the result of sheer ignorance or mere indifference, but it is usually a perfectly sincere and serious position, and it is just as interesting and important as any other kind of belief. I am myself one of the five or ten million completely non-religious people in Britain, being brought up by parents with no religion and bringing up my children with no religion, and all of us really quite well-informed and well-behaved people.

The most common question people like us are asked is: If you don't believe in religion, what do you believe in? As a full-time worker for a humanist organisation, I have to answer this question in various ways on many occasions—most recently as one of dozens of signatories to the international Secular Humanist Declaration which has just been issued in the United States, and as the humanist representative on a committee writing a new agreed syllabus of religious education which has just been issued by the London Borough of Harrow where I live. I want to take this opportunity to give a short answer which is as clear and simple as possible.

Like religious people, non-religious people may be described by several names, which sound difficult but can easily be explained to show what they mean. Thus, we are unbelievers and infidels—which means that we don't share the supernatural beliefs of most people, and we don't think faith is a good guide to the truth. We are sceptics and pragmatists—which means that we tend to doubt what we are told, and to believe only what seems to work. We are empiricists and rationalists—which means that we think experiment is the best way of finding and reason the best way of testing the truth. We are secularists and humanists—which means that we think this is the only world we know and the only life we have, and we think our first loyalty is to each other as members of the same species. We are agnostics or atheists—which means that we think it is impossible to know whether there is any kind of God or else impossible to believe in any kind of God. We are individualists and egalitarians—which means that we think every human person has a unique and equal value and should be treated as an end rather than as a means. We are liberals or libertarians—which means that we think freedom is the highest political good in any human society.

Religion and Myth

Of course we accept the significance of religion and myth, but we think that science and common sense tell us more about what really happens. On this basis, we believe that the universe has no beginning or end, no purpose or design, and that everything in it is part of some natural process. We believe that life on earth is the result of spontaneous evolution rather than divine creation, and that human beings are animals distinguished only by

skilful hands and clever brains. We believe that we didn't come from anywhere and aren't going to anywhere, that there is nothing outside or above us which cares about us, and that our short existence here is all we can be sure of, so it is up to us to make the best of it for ourselves and for one another. We have no sacred texts or great leaders, and most of us have no need for ceremonies or organisations. But many of us do feel a need for some written or spoken material to explain our ideas to ourselves and to outsiders.

Among the other questions we are asked are: If there isn't a God, why should we be good? And, if there isn't a God, what is the point of anything? Our answers are roughly as follows. We believe that we are good rather than bad, not because we have been given orders by any person or institution or because we shall be rewarded or punished for our behaviour, but because we have worked out ideas of right and wrong as part of our long development as a species

and a society, and that these ideas should be based on our knowledge of the practical consequences of our conduct rather than on any theoretical doctrine. In the same way, we believe that we find a point in what we do, not because we have been given a part in some grand destiny, but because we have gradually worked out ideas of purpose and value which should be based on what makes sense to us here and now. So we think that things like good and value are human creations, and because of this all the more important to us. Good is what makes people feel good, we say, and the point is that we are the point. Finally, we believe that death is the end of us, but this makes our life more rather than less significant, because it is literally everything we have.

All our beliefs were summed up in one sentence a century ago by the great American humanist, Robert Ingersoll: "Happiness is the only good; the time to be happy is now; the place to be happy is here; the way to be happy is to make others so."

The Papal Visit to Britain

AN INDIAN RATIONALIST

The Catholic Church is already making plans for Pope John Paul II's visit to Britain next year. In this article consideration is given to the reaction of freethinkers to the papal visit.

Pope John Paul II's visit to Britain, planned for May 1982, raises a number of problems, not least in the minds of freethinkers. Clearly the complications are based on the varied capacities in which the Pope can be said to be acting. This is recognised by the Government when it was explained that they were inviting the Pope not as a Head of State but as the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. This was in anticipation of the expected reaction from the extreme Protestants. They may not be satisfied and may well stage vociferous protests. These manifestations, when they appear on our screens, succeed in giving an impression of religious intolerance and to most thinking people they appear as the first step towards putting the clock back to the days of discrimination against the Catholics. Obviously, most, perhaps all, freethinkers would agree that our reaction must be completely separate and independent from Protestant intolerance.

Though the Pope is not coming as a Head of State, kites are being flown to suggest that he might be invited to speak to both Houses of Parliament; an honour reserved for the monarch and once extended to General de Gaulle. (This was reported by the *New Standard* on 27 March.) To some people this may sound like giving him an invitation as a Head of State, without saying as much. I think this would

be quite wrong. Heads of State do not normally speak to the Houses of Parliament, and this extraordinary honour, if extended, can only be interpreted as recognising the Pope's crucial role as an inspiration to the Polish trade union-cum-political struggle. It is quite irrelevant, for my argument, whether the Pope is playing any active role at all or whether his role is one of restraining Solidarity or otherwise, or whether the Polish trade unionists are devout obedient Catholics or not. The point remains that the Pope provides an alternative centre of attraction and the Polish movement may well lead to greater freedom for people in the Communist block. It would be ironic, indeed, if such a happy outcome is brought about with the help of a totalitarian and hierarchical institution such as the Roman Catholic Church. If the Mother of Parliaments decides to accord this honour to the Pope it will be because of his political influence and then, having thus brought an accretion of strength to the Pope, it will be incumbent on Parliament, I feel, to counteract the harm which Roman Catholic teaching on social matters is doing in the whole world. Since Parliament is hardly likely to exhibit such a political will, it ought, I think, to refrain from doing anything which will strengthen the hold of the undemocratic and anti-social doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.

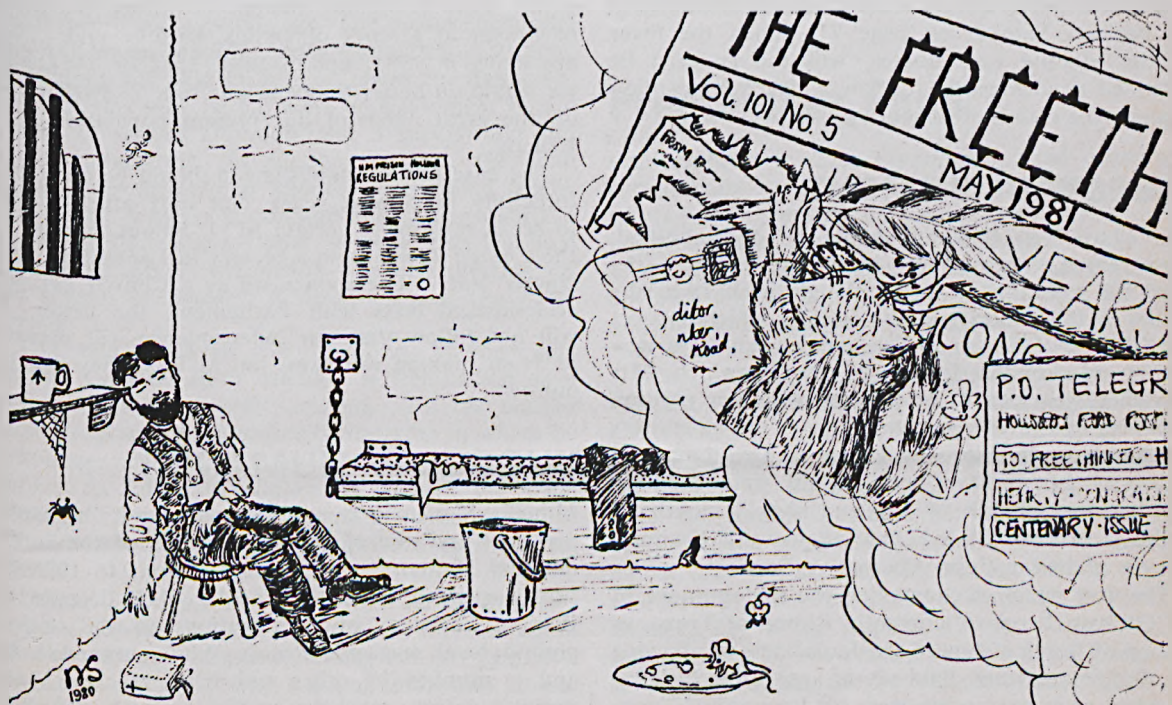
Assuming that the Pope is not invited to speak to the Houses of Parliament, it could be said that he would be coming as a religious and moral guide to the Roman Catholics in this country and his visit should be a matter of indifference to those who are not Roman Catholics. There could be some validity in this argument if the Pope were coming merely

to carry out the technicalities of Roman Catholic worship such as the distribution of communion wine and wafers. Even then some freethinkers could argue that when a person comes to distribute the flesh and blood of a man-god, symbolic or real, to the multitudes, it cannot be a matter of complete indifference. Once the ignorant Hindu peasant has accepted the foolish idea that the cow is goddess, one can see the logic of his accepting the next step that he should not eat her. I never cease to wonder how modern Europeans can accept the foolish idea that man was God and the next absurdity that he should therefore be eaten! It would be very provocative to religion-struck people to have this question posed to them when they are in the middle of the act and so it might be left to private or smaller occasions. But anyway, the Pope is not coming only for purely technical acts of worship or benediction. He is coming as a moral guide to put pressure on Roman Catholics who have among other things defied his ban on artificial means of family planning. This cannot be a matter of indifference to freethinkers. Indeed, freethinkers have the right and in fact duty to put forward the alternative moral view to the Roman Catholics that it is wrong to bring more children into this world than can be fed and cared for adequately. As for the Pope's objection to artificial means (as against the rhythm method) it is the right and the duty of freethinkers to point out the intellectual dishonesty involved in the Pope's spread-

ing his message by using artificial means of transport and amplification of his voice!

It may be argued that Roman Catholics in Britain know all this and have, generally speaking, opted for family planning including artificial means. There is therefore no need to propagate this viewpoint among them. The point here is that while they set aside the authority of the Church in this matter, they continue to help the Church with their resources, to spread its reactionary message on family planning in the third world, to the grave detriment of its people. Soup kitchens, admittedly, bring some relief in famines, but over-population causes them. It is time therefore that Roman Catholics in Europe converted their private, individual, often guilt-ridden, decisions into public, guilt-free and corporate ones and carry the message to their fellow Catholics or fellow humans in the rest of the world and possibly force a change of policy in the Vatican.

This alternative moral message must be carried to the Roman Catholics without hostility, with dignity, even with love, and certainly not with shouts and squabbles. Perhaps it might best be carried by the written word in varied forms. Surely there are enough moral resources in the non-RC population in this country to make a dignified contribution to the scene. Otherwise the field will be left almost entirely to the handsome shepherd, misleading his flock, while a few wolves are baying on the periphery.



G. W. Foote in Holloway Gaol

MOONSHINE

The libel case which the Moonies brought against the *Daily Mail* has received a great deal of attention in the press and has revealed some of the worst aspects of religious brainwashing. Members of the Unification Church are popularly known as Moonies, because of the name of their founder the fanatical anti-communist, the "Rev" Sun Moon, a Korean-born leader based in America. The jury decided that the *Daily Mail* was justified in calling the cult "the church that breaks up families" and saying that the power of the Moonies was "sinister and wide-ranging".

For many years *The Freethinker* has been criticising the Unification Church and the revelations now taken up by the popular press will come as no surprise to freethinkers. In 1975 a "News and Notes" piece was entitled "Mr Moon's Mugs" and criticised the church's fund-raising activities and business interests.

It is now of great importance to emphasise that the Moonies are not the only religious cult to use appalling indoctrination methods. The public will be on the alert for the Moonies for a short period. Will they beware of the other sects and cults whose loony surface and vague idealistic clichés may seem harmless, but which can have an authoritarian and money-grabbing under-belly?

The other issue of why tax-exemption is automatically given to charities with religious claims has been raised in Parliament. The whole question of charitable status needs a radical overhaul—as is explained by Barbara Smoker on page 71. When the fever of the Moonie case abates, will the concern be extended to changes in the law and greater caution towards the claims of religious groups?

DISESTABLISHMENT

The Church of England should be disestablished. Two recent controversies have demonstrated the need for government to disentangle itself from the affairs of the minority in the country which support the Church of England. The appointment of a new Bishop of London led to a row in which Mrs Thatcher was seen to have been using her position as leader of the Government to interfere in matters of church leadership. The House of Commons and House of Lords have both wasted time debating whether the Church of England should mouth its nothings to a no-thing in the language of Cranmer or one of the modern Alternative Services.

The row which accompanied the appointment of Dr Graham Leonard, currently Bishop of Truro, as Bishop of London showed the foolishness of allowing the Government any final say in appointing bishops. The two main contenders were Dr Leonard of Truro and Dr Habgood of Durham. Dr Leonard is a high-

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churchman with a record as a conservative on social matters. He wrote a notoriously illiberal introduction to the Gloucester report on homosexuality and referred to Princess Margaret's holiday with Roddy Llewellyn as "foolish". Buckingham Palace and the Crown Appointments Commission put forward Dr Habgood as first choice. But Mrs Thatcher preferred Dr Leonard, and is said to have been disappointed that he did not succeed Coggan as Archbishop of Canterbury. Dr Leonard may be the most popular choice among London Anglicans and Conservatives, but it should be up to the Church not the Government to decide. If a conservative Prime Minister used her or his influence to ensure an excessively reactionary rank of bishops, would this have an effect on the climate of opinion in the country? It is difficult to say, but one thing is certain: the squabbles for senior church positions should be left to the Church alone.

The Prayer Book Protection Bill put forward in the House of Commons and the House of Lords sought to ensure that the 1662 Book of Common Prayer is used at least once a month in all churches where at least 20 parishioners petition for its use. The Bill was passed by both the Commons (152 to 130) and the Lords (28 to 17 with voting late at night). Lord Hailsham, though he praised the Book of Prayer as a work of genius, sensibly said: "We are living in 1981, not in 1681, 1581 or 1481, and we would do better to spend our time in Parliament on the great needs of our present population. . ." Exactly.

The case for disestablishment should be put more forcefully in coming years. Not only atheists wish to see a reform. A certain M. J. Smout, writing to the *Church Times* from a rectory in Lancashire, succinctly said: "The sooner we as a Church cut our ecclesiastical links with Parliament, the better. It will not follow that our independence will prevent us from making mistakes, but at least they will be our own."

YUGOSLAV HUMANIST

Mihailo Markovic is a philosopher and "humanist marxist" and one of the co-chairmen of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. In 1975 he was suspended from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade because of contributions to the critical philosophical magazine *Praxis*. While suspended, he and a number of other university teachers were prohibited from teaching, publishing or lecturing in public, but they retained 80 per cent of their salaries

AND NOTES

and got free health service. This year they have been fired and lost all salary, health and pension rights.

Markovic and the other professors have been accused of being "increasingly political and anti-socialist". Markovic has replied: "If a professor's desire to return to his students knowing that the authorities would not permit it is anti-social, that only reveals the conception of socialism of these authorities." He also countered criticisms that he has been paid by overseas reactionary organisations: "My friends abroad are not bankers, businessmen and politicians but philosophers and social scholars dedicated to the search for truth and human dignity."

IHEU have written to express their concern at the violation of human rights. Others who wish to express their support for Markovic and other humanist philosophers could write to: The Honorable Cvijetin Mijatovic, President SFR, The Presidency, Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

SCIENCE, SUPERSTITION AND THE PARANORMAL

We live in a superstitious age. The media encourage this with spoon-bending, crystal-ball gazing, astrology predictions and wild imaginings about the unknown. Some of this may be harmless entertainment barely worthy of serious attention. But if superstition and mystery-mongering pervade our culture, they can damage our attitude to science, to thinking freely, and to our sense of autonomy and responsibility in a complicated world. That is why the National Secular Society is organising a public meeting on the subject of *Science, Superstition and the Paranormal*.

The two speakers will be John Maddox and Jeremy Cherfas. John Maddox is well-known as a broadcaster on scientific matters with his regular radio programme *Scientifically Speaking* in which he introduces new scientific developments to the general public. As Editor of *Nature* he presents the latest scientific research to the scientific community. He will talk about the scientist's attitude to the paranormal.

Jeremy Cherfas, who has written about astrology in the *Guardian* and the *Freethinker*, will talk about astrology from a sceptical stance. He has described himself as a scientist with a strong interest in human gullibility. He is a member of the British Committee for the Scientific Study of the Paranormal.

CHILD'S VIEW OF RELIGIOUS STORIES

A twelve-year-old schoolgirl writing to the President of the National Secular Society said that she agreed with the Society's aims. However she wrote "I hope you don't manage to ban RE, because it's my favourite lesson." She continued: "RE is my favourite subject because I find it hilarious, I love disagreeing with my teacher. I like writing fairy stories, which I can in RE but in English they are thought too fantastic."

SCIENCE, SUPERSTITION AND THE PARANORMAL

A PUBLIC MEETING

Organised by the National Secular Society

Speakers:

John Maddox (Editor of *Nature*, Broadcaster of *Scientifically Speaking*)

Jeremy Cherfas on Astrology (Member of the Committee for the Scientific Study of the Paranormal)

THURSDAY, 4 JUNE, 7 pm

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE,
LONDON WC1

Freethinker Fund

Contributions to *The Freethinker* fund contribute substantially to its costs. Inflation and extra expenditure due to the centenary make contributions more important than ever. For the remainder of the year a special centenary appeal will be launched (see enclosed appeal leaflet). We thank donors for their generous and valuable contributions:

B. Able, £7; C. Anderson, £2; D. Berman, £5; E. Cecil, £5; C. F. Clarke, £2; J. Cornish, £2; J. Coward, £2; S. Eadie, £2; M. J. Garner, £2; W. B. Grainger, £1; O. Brubiak, £3; P. Harding, £1.25; D. Harper, £6.50; J. K. Hawkins, £3; D. J. Holdstock, £2; M. Jakeways, £2; S. D. Kuebart, £1; J. C. Lewis, £5; C. Lovett, £2; J. McCorriskien, £1; A. J. Martin, £2; E. H. Martin, \$2; M. O. Morley, £7; E. A. W. Morris, £2; M. E. Nichol, £2; G. Orchard, \$15; R. Orr, £2; D. F. Paul, £2; P. Ponting-Barber, £2; J. C. Rapley, £7; R. Saich, £7; N. Sinnott, £2; T. Stevenson, £3; W. G. Stirling, £2; R. H. E. Torode, £2; F. Villiers-Stewart, £2.50.

Total for the period 19/3/81 to 13/4/81: £103.25 and \$17. Total for the year to date: £757.65 and \$32.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE VICTORIAN SUNDAY
by John Wigley. Manchester University Press, £14.50

The atmosphere was more funereal than festive when members of the Lord's Day Observance Society recently assembled in a London church to celebrate their organisation's 150th anniversary. Vacant seats were plentiful, and as the ageing warriors for "Our Lord and His Day" droned hymns and listened to bible readings, the suspicion that many of them would not be around for the Society's 151st anniversary added to the dolefulness of the occasion. Clearly Britain's last remaining Sabbatarian organisation is on its last legs.

Yet there was a time when the LDOS had considerable clout. It and other evangelical pressure groups, like the Anti-Sunday Travelling Union and the Central Association for Stopping the Sale of Intoxicating Liquors on Sundays, could bend politicians, including national leaders, to their will. Their endeavours for the cause of keeping Sunday a day of dreariness and boredom were highly successful until within living memory.

John Wigley traces the development of the Sabbatarian movement from post-Reformation times until its zenith in the Victorian era, and then its decline. Although Sabbatarianism drew its support largely from the Protestant middle class, every section of society was affected by it. There was no escape from the restrictions and gloom that religious fanatics inflicted on the nation. Every conceivable leisure activity was condemned as being in defiance of the Fourth Commandment. Travelling, cooking and buying food were taboo, while to shave or have a bath on Sunday was regarded by many as defilement of the holy day.

This book is peppered with examples of religious arrogance and pettiness which are infuriating and occasionally hilarious. But it is the Sabbatarian's hypocrisy when posing as defenders of the working man and woman that Dr Wigley exposes with deadly effect. Whenever Bills to restrict Sunday labour were promoted in the Commons, domestic servants, the most exploited and vulnerable group of workers, were exempted. Sabbatarian fury was directed against Sunday working in corporate or nationally owned concerns like the railways and the Post Office. The rights of the private employer were upheld with the same vehemence as the sanctity of the Sabbath. Sabbatarians were at pains to avoid advocating legislation that would interfere with the Sunday domestic arrangements of the rich. And they were totally indifferent to the dreadful conditions under which men, women and children worked the other six days.

Sir Andrew Agnew, the LDOS parliamentary spokesman, argued that the Fourth Commandment gave masters complete religious and civil authority over their servants. The Religious Tract Society warned domestics that they "must not, under the

pretence of keeping the Sabbath day holy, refuse to do any necessary work, such as making fires or beds". Lord Shaftesbury, an ardent Sabbatarian, wrote disdainfully of political rights: "... how mean, how trumpery, how unworthy of consideration are they, when compared to those rights which assert the sanctity of the Lord's day."

Sabbatarian excesses now add to the gaiety of the nation. *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* is a notable study of the period when Sunday observance enveloped Britain in gloom.

WILLIAM McILROY

FACELIFT APARTHEID — SOUTH AFRICA AFTER SOWETO by Judy Seidman. International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, £1.20

A major publicity drive by the South African regime over the last year or so has done a lot to convince people that "real change" is taking place in that country. There is an element of truth in the claims. But, if one were to demand a more objective view than that provided by the expensive newspaper advertisements and glossy brochures produced by the South African propagandists in an effort to put an acceptable face on apartheid, one would discover that most of the changes are, in reality, for the worse.

To date, International Defence and Aid have done an extremely good job in countering pro-South African propaganda with a series of well-researched, reasonably-priced publications examining various facets of apartheid and its effects not only on Blacks, but the White population as well. The latest is *Facelift Apartheid*, which succeeds admirably in showing what cynical disregard the ruling South African National Party has for both people and truth.

Furthermore, it reinforces a point I have stressed in *The Freethinker* on several occasions: that the doctrine of apartheid was spawned by a conviction, based on Old Testament thinking, that Whites in South Africa had been appointed through divine law to control the lives of "inferior" black and coloured people.

Most telling proof of this is the preamble to a new constitution which, once accepted, will offer a new deal to Coloureds and Indians, but will totally exclude Blacks from the National Government. It reads: "In humble submission to Almighty God, Who controls the destinies of nations and the history of people, Who gathered our forebears together from many lands and gave them this their own; Who has guided them from generation to generation; Who has wondrously delivered them from the dangers that beset them; we declare that whereas we are conscious of our responsibility towards man and God; and believe that the Black nations of the



THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY: GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Secularism affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge, and that human efforts should be directed wholly towards its improvement. It asserts that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance, and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.

Secularism affirms that progress is possible only on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; and that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised State.

Affirming that morality is social in origin and application, Secularism aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind. Secularism demands the complete separation of Church and State and the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organisations. It seeks to spread education, to promote the fraternity of all peoples as a means of advancing universal peace, to further common cultural interests, and to develop the freedom and dignity of mankind.

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JOIN THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Membership only £1 annually.

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702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

Barbara Smoker, NSS President, and Jim Herrick, Freethinker editor, outside 702 Holloway Road.

Republic should each be given separate freedom in the land allotted to them for the exercise of political aspirations of all the members of those nations. . . ."

What this religio-legal garbage means, of course, is that South Africa, or rather 87 per cent of the land mass that constitutes South Africa, is for the Whites, while the least viable 13 per cent, is divided into fractured areas called "homelands" into which Black "ex-South Africans" are herded to enjoy the "freedom" of unemployment, malnutrition, and the absence of anything approaching adequate medical facilities.

This is apartheid's Grand Plan. But because of the revulsion it has generated all over the world, and the subsequent isolation it has placed South Africa in, the need arose for apartheid to be given a much more humane appearance. Thus came talk of "change" followed not by any meaningful reform, but just more talk — a smokescreen for the continued iniquities perpetrated by the odious regime.

Under the heading "Concealment", Ms Seidman exposes how the Botha government hopes to proceed under cover with its "white-ification" of South Africa while feeding the world a liberal line. This, she shows, consists of "concealment and confusion — so that no-one is quite clear what, if anything, is being altered".

"'Facts and figures' are issued, apparently invented out of thin air; 'changes' are announced which never occur, or turn out to be only a change in name. Some of this, no doubt, reflects disagreements within the government . . . some can only be explained as downright lies."

What I appreciated most about Ms Seidman's book is that it served to put convincing flesh on the bones of a statement made in a letter to me recently by a South African friend involved with the anti-apartheid Black Sash Movement. She wrote: "There is nothing good to be said about the general South

(continued over)

African situation—talk of reform is all bullshit.”

Defence and Aid, incidentally, have just published an excellent companion piece to *Facelift Apartheid*—a superb collection of photographs by Eli Weinberg entitled *Portrait of the People*. The collection spans a period of twenty years—from the 40s to the 60s in South Africa—and constitutes a powerful pictorial indictment of South Africa’s avowedly racist rulers.

BARRY DUKE

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Editor: JIM HERRICK

702 HOLLOWAY ROAD
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THE FREETHINKER, PAST AND FUTURE

A Talk by
JIM HERRICK (Editor)

11 am, Sunday, 17 May.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Open discussion evening. Thursday, 11 June. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co. Antrim. Tel: White-abbey 66752.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Jim Herrick: 100 Years of The Freethinker. Sunday, 7 June. 5.30 pm. Queen’s Head, Queen’s Road, Brighton. (Junction Road entrance opposite Brighton Station.)

Lewisham Humanist Group. John Evitt: An Eternity of Shrugs. Thursday, 28 May. 7.45 pm. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, SE6.

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

London Young Humanists. The Samaritans, Sunday, 17 May. Humanism in London, Sunday, 7 June. Both at 7.30 pm. BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, Kensington, W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. Stephen Edwards: Unemployment—is there an alternative? Monday, 18 May. 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. Jim Herrick: The Freethinker Past and Future, 17 May. W. H. Liddell: Liberty—an English Radical Tradition, 31 May. Dr Henryk Skolimowski: On Wild Strawberries, Bears and the Epistemology of Context, 7 June. Sunday Forums, 3 pm. Tuesday discussions, 7 pm. (Not 24 and 26 May.)

SPES AGM (for SPES members only), Wednesday, May 27.

Worthing Humanist Group. AGM. Sunday, May 31. 5.30 pm. Worthing Trades Council Club, 15 Broadwater Road.

Gay Humanist Group. Talk and film: Campaign against the Arms Trade. Friday, 12 June. 7.30 pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.