

The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 105, No. 1

JANUARY 1985

30p

MOUNTING CAMPAIGN AGAINST NEW TAX ON KNOWLEDGE

The National Book League has launched a campaign to warn the public against the danger of Value Added Tax being put on books and journals. Reports that the Government is considering such a move have been circulating for nearly a year. Such a tax would be catastrophic not only for the book trade, but for libraries, schools and universities, already seriously affected by expenditure cuts.

A petition has been organised by the League, and opponents of VAT on publications are also being asked to urge Members of Parliament to resist the imposition of such a tax. The League warns that "whether you buy or borrow books from a library, whether you are a student or have a child at school, VAT on books which is threatened will make reading more expensive. It will be a tax on knowledge as well as leisure".

It is estimated that VAT would increase the price of a paperback book by 40p and the average hardback by around £1.50.

"Although public and school libraries might be able to claim the tax back, libraries already hit by spending cuts would have to face higher book prices and the consequent need to reduce further the range of books they can stock on their shelves.

"Unless the Government were to impose VAT on books on the one hand and give it back with the other, students would be able to afford to buy still fewer texts. (Already students are buying one in four fewer books than they did five years ago.) Alternatively student grants would have to be increased—some estimates suggest by as much as £15 million a year".

VAT would certainly force some independent bookshops out of business. Many already operate on a small profit margin, and past experience shows that price increases result in a fall in sales. Not only the bookshop owners, but the community they serve, would be the losers.

Authors would also be badly hit, particularly new authors whose first books are rarely profitable.

The NBL points out that publishers sell over one-third of their books abroad, contributing a massive £400 million to Britain's exports. "Not only would falling sales erode the base of their export business", the League claims, "but they would have to reduce the range of books published".

Commenting on the suggestion that educational books might be exempted from VAT, the League regards this as most unlikely. It points out that the problem of defining an educational book is insuperable.

"A cookery book and a car manual are as 'educational' in their way as a learned journal. In fact 75 per cent of all books published have an educational value".

Already there have been proposals that the churches should take steps to persuade the Government not to impose VAT on bibles, hymn books and general religious literature.

Viscount Macmillan, chairman of the National Book Committee's anti-VAT working party, recently warned a meeting of the Society of Bookmen that the Government's intention to impose Value Added Tax on publications became clear last May. And Macmillan, a grandson of the former Conservative Prime Minister, added: "Proof positive came from an interview with the Chief Secretary at the Treasury, Peter Rees, who produced such an elegant confection of denial, demurral and deception that I left his imposing office convinced that books, magazines and newspapers, were not only on the list, but dangerously close to the top".

Government spokesmen have steadfastly refused to deny that removal of the VAT exemption was being considered. "The gravity of the threat cannot be over emphasised. Remember that this is a Govern-

(continued on back page)

The Freethinker

UK ISSN 0016-0687

Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

The Freethinker was founded in 1881 by George William Foote and is published mid-monthly. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Publishers or of the Editor.

Articles, Reviews, News Reports, Obituaries, Letters and Announcements should be sent by the 10th of the preceding month to the Editor at 14 Coundon Road, Coventry, West Midlands (telephone Coventry 20070). Unsolicited reviews should not be submitted.

Vol 105 No 1 CONTENTS January 1985

MOUNTING CAMPAIGN AGAINST NEW TAX ON KNOWLEDGE	1
NEWS AND NOTES	2
A Sea of Troubles; Victoria's Values; Ethiopia; Christians and Apartheid; A Hollow "Victory"	
ONLY AN INHUMAN SOCIETY NEEDS A GOD	5
Michael Duane	
THREE BRAVE WOMEN: AGNES, MATILDA AND STELLA SYMES	8
Nigel H. Sinnott	
FREETHINKER REVIEWS	10
BOOKS	
Lies, Damned Lies and Some Exclusives, by Henry Porter	
Reviewer: Peter Cotes	
Ask the Family: Shattering the Myths About Family Life, by Jeanette Longfield	
Reviewer: Rose Hacker	
THEATRE	
Mother Courage, Barbican Theatre, London	
Reviewer: T. F. Evans	
THE THEOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF EVOLUTION	13
Karl Heath	
LETTERS	14
Leslie Scrase, Antony Milne, A. T. Lambert, Colin Mills	
OBITUARY	15
D. H. Calcutt, Mrs. D. Cleverly, S. Parfitt, the Rev. J. Rowland, E. S. West	

Postal subscriptions, book orders and donations to the Freethinker Fund should be sent to:

G. W. FOOTE & COMPANY,
702 HOLLOWAY ROAD, LONDON N19 3NL
(Telephone: 01-272 1266)

SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Twelve months: £3.60; Six months: £2. U.S.A.: Twelve months: \$8.00; Six months: \$5.00. Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if the remittance is in foreign currency (including Eire) please add the equivalent of 60p or US \$1.20 for bank charges.

Printed by David Neil & Co., Dorking, Surrey.

NEWS

A SEA OF TROUBLES

The year 1984 was not a happy one for the faithful. It will be remembered as a time when Christianity took a sound buffeting, much of it from its adherents. Evangelical Protestants will smugly point to the Billy Graham and Luis Palau missions as evidence that their brand of Christianity is alive and well in Britain. But it is extremely doubtful if such crusades make a lasting impact. Despite the vast expenditure on advertising and organisation, the star evangelists preached mainly to the converted who dutifully turned up in church coach parties. And even the cosmetic skills of Saachi and Saachi, public relations advisers to Margaret Thatcher, could not conceal the ugly reality that Luis Palau is a nasty piece of work.

The Roman Catholic Church's obsession with procreation continued unabated. Its front organisations' campaign against contraception, abortion and sex education plumbed new depths. A parish priest in Derbyshire hit the headlines when he refused to marry a couple because the man could not consummate the union. The local bishop intervened and they were eventually married in church. But the unseemliness of the situation, in which a priest who is celibate by choice refused to marry a paralysed ex-soldier, was not lost on the public.

Jesus: the Evidence was the first of several television programmes which aroused Christian ire. The series, transmitted during the Lenten season, was strongly attacked from the pulpit and in the religious press. Christian criticism of the programme was reflected in the verdict of a clerical writer in the Catholic weekly *Universe* who described it as "abominable".

An "act of God"—he was a trifle careless with bolts of lightning—resulted in a conflagration at York Minster. Irreparable damage was done, not by fire to the Minster but by dippy Christians to the faith. The fire coincided with the consecration of Professor David Jenkins as Bishop of Durham. Professor Jenkins has doubts about some basic Christian doctrines. But unlike many of his more cautious colleagues who, it later transpired, also have misgivings about virgin births, resurrection from the dead and other tall biblical stories, he did not keep quiet. Christian zealots entertained readers of *The Times* and other newspapers with their claims that the York Minster fire was a punishment from God for appointing Professor Jenkins to high office in the Church.

AND NOTES

The controversy rumbles on and no doubt the bishop's unorthodox views will continue to agitate Christians long after York Minster has been restored to its former glory. Religious dogma, unlike bricks and mortar, cannot be protected by insurance premiums.

The next major upset for believers was Don Cupitt's six 50-minute television programmes entitled *The Sea of Faith*. Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, wrote of the series that theologians are now doing our job for us. The editorial and correspondence columns of the religious press indicate that this view is held by a large number of our Christian opponents.

Gerald Priestland is about the most religious of religious affairs correspondents, but his misnamed series, *The Case Against God* (BBC Radio 4), caused quite a furor. It would have ruined Mr Priestland's Christmas if the programme had caused a single listener to abandon the faith. But the title alone was enough to infuriate those Christians who still regard Broadcasting House as a "Temple of the Arts and Muses . . . dedicated to Almighty God by the first Governors of Broadcasting in 1931".

Yes, the faithful are squirming and squabbling very nicely. Freethinkers can look forward with quiet confidence to 1985 and beyond.

VICTORIA'S VALUES

Last year we reported the case of a 15-year-old girl who concealed her full-term pregnancy and gave birth to a 6½-pound baby in horrifying circumstances. One of a family of nine, she was unable to confide in her mother or any of the teachers at the convent school she attended. Before giving birth, she went into a churchyard where the baby was born. Seven hours later they were found. The baby was dead and the girl died shortly after admission to hospital.

That tragedy occurred in the Church-ridden Republic of Ireland where abortion is outlawed, contraceptive facilities are severely restricted and Victoria Gillick's description of sex education as "rubbish" is generally accepted. Mrs Gillick, a Roman Catholic mother of ten and Heroine of Labour as understood by the breeders' lobby, has won her appeal against a previous court ruling in favour of the Department of Health and Social Security. The Department had issued a circular informing doctors that they could give advice on abortion and contraception to girls under 16 without

their parents' consent.

Victoria Gillick said that the Appeal Court's decision was "the best possible Christmas present". But it has caused alarm in the medical profession and in agencies that help the young. The British Medical Association has predicted that there will be an increase in teenage pregnancies and abortions if total confidentiality between doctors and young patients seeking advice on sexual matters is forbidden by law.

The Appeal Court's decision will give encouragement to Mrs Gillick and a group of fanatically Christian, mainly Roman Catholic women in politics and the media. They have been gunning for the Family Planning Association and Brook Advisory Centres in an endeavour to put the clock back several decades. Although Mrs Gillick has received solid backing from religious organisations—notably the Salvation Army and evangelical churches—the Roman Catholic bishops have been only politely supportive. They can afford to be cautious; front organisations like Life, SPUC and the Responsible Society are waging the Church's traditional battle against rational and humane attitudes to human sexuality.

As a recipient of legal aid, Victoria Gillick conducted her crusade for the promotion of fear and ignorance at the taxpayers' expense. Unless the Law Lords reverse the Appeal Court's decision, a far higher price in terms of human misery will result from her foolish and irresponsible action.

• Over a thousand women from the Republic of Ireland travelled to Britain for an abortion during the first quarter of 1984. The official figure of 1,049 was exceeded only by women from Spain. It is believed that the true figure is much higher as Irish women often give false addresses to abortion agencies in Britain. Abortion is forbidden in the Republic and in Northern Ireland.

ETHIOPIA

There have been varying reactions in Britain to the Ethiopian famine disaster. The public response to appeals for money, food and equipment has been extremely generous. The Government's attitude has, to put it mildly, been rather tardy.

Keston College, a religious institution that specialises in churning out anti-Communism on every conceivable occasion, contributed another batch of accusations of religious persecution by the Marxist authorities in Ethiopia. These were promptly discounted by leading Christians, including the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, who visited the country two months ago.

Cardinal Hume, a more flexible and sensitive man than his hard-nosed immediate predecessors, was

clearly shocked by what he saw in Ethiopia. On his return to Britain he made some rather pointed comments, describing a proposal to cut the Government's overseas aid budget as "a scandal, given the present situation".

Cardinal Hume does not make such an impact as other Catholic leaders, but his genuine compassion more than compensates for a lack of charisma. So having seen at first hand the terrible effects of mass hunger, perhaps he will privately but firmly advise Pope John Paul, Mother Theresa and other adequately-fed celibates that it is time they stopped undermining the vital work of population control agencies.

Dramatisation of the situation in drought-stricken Ethiopia must not be allowed to conceal the continuing plight of millions in other countries.

• Mother Theresa had words of comfort for the victims of drought and famine when she visited eastern Ethiopia last month. She told journalists that the disaster was "God's way of teaching the world a lesson in charity".

CHRISTIANS AND APARTHEID

Despite the publicity given to opposition by courageous individual Christians to apartheid in South Africa, and the election of the Rev Desmond Tutu to the position of Bishop of Johannesburg, the majority of white Christians in the country wholeheartedly support the repressive measures used by the Nationalist regime to maintain white supremacy. They have always found strong theological justification for maintaining divisions between the races, and the churches which serve 60 per cent of South Africa's white population have actively promoted apartheid as God's will.

None of the Afrikaans churches has seriously challenged the Government, nor uttered a single word of condemnation against institutionalised violence and murder against its opponents, black or white. In fact an analysis of crime statistics in South Africa shows that the greatest amount of violence against black people is inflicted by the strongly Christian Afrikaans section of the population.

It is they who formulated the infamous laws against sexual relationships between people of different races, and ironically it is they who persistently get caught breaking those laws. Afrikaans clergymen and policemen are the worst offenders. They spend half their lives braying about God's plan for the separation of the races and fulminating about the evils of liberalism and communism; and the other half assaulting blacks or devising ways of humiliating them.

The English churches in South Africa have helped to entrench the system by trying to reconcile the blacks to their place in society. They have been com-

elled to make a token stand against the excesses of apartheid, but not against the systems itself. They are loath to accept that it is pointless to just criticise the Nationalist regime for its panoply of degrading laws, detention without trial, the killing of detainees and torture in prisons and police stations. These are merely the symptoms of a foul disease.

• Six black mourners who attended the funeral of their former white employer were ejected from the church at Randfontein, near Johannesburg, last month. The Rev N. H. Kerk said the rule of the church was that if people of other races wished to attend a service they had to submit an appeal to the church council. Each case was considered on its merits. The black mourners were told by an elder that they "were not allowed to enter the white people's church".

A HOLLOW "VICTORY"

The *Methodist Recorder* has invited its readers to send information about appropriately named streets where secretaries of campaigning organisations live. It has already listed one: "Victory Avenue, an appropriate address for Mr J. G. Roberts, general secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society, now battling with sweeping recommendations on Sunday trading".

While not wishing to deprive Mr Roberts of any glory, it is reasonable to point out that Victory Avenue is a singularly *inappropriate* address for the general secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society. True, that esteemed organisation has managed to survive although others with similar aims have sunk without trace. Nevertheless, the LDOS's influence—particularly over the past 60 years—has steadily declined, not least in religious circles.

Although the LDOS can still announce the occasional triumph—like forcing a corner shop or garden centre to close on Sunday—there is now little to cheer those who do battle for "Our Lord and His Day". And when the Auld Committee's recommendations are implemented, it will be curtains for Sabbatarian narks and informers.

In fact the Sabbatarians have lost every important battle. They opposed the Sunday opening of museums, cinemas, theatres, dance halls and public houses. Sunday sport, newspapers, travelling and shopping have been among their targets for prohibition. And Britain's cheerful abandonment of Sunday gloom has been accompanied by a dramatic decline in church and Sunday school attendance.

If the general secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society wishes to live at an appropriately named address, he will have to forgo the suburban bliss of Victory Avenue, Morden.

Only an Inhuman Society Needs a God

MICHAEL DUANE

"God is the God of the humble, the miserable, the oppressed and the desperate, and of those that are brought even to nothing; and his nature is to give sight to the blind, to comfort the broken-hearted, to justify sinners, to save the very desperate and damned".—Martin Luther.

I have listened with growing incredulity to Don Cupitt and Gerald Priestland seeking on the one hand to strip away the fairy-tale element in conventional views of God, and on the other to bring back into the refined abstractions of professionals in theology and science something that can be seen or felt to have human dimensions. Over and over in my mind rises the question: "What is it that drives them so desperately — and it is an air of desperation that comes through what they have to say — to find something that will assure them that they are *loved*, and that the being that loves them has *power*".

I know nothing about the personal histories of these two good men that might cause me to seek for the origins of their search in youthful unhappiness, nor indeed would it suffice if such unhappiness could be found since there have been many with joyous and untroubled lives who yet are driven, in their own words, "to seek God". I am more inclined, therefore, to see the search for God in such men and women as a restless dissatisfaction originating in the discrepancy between their own vision of what human energy and love could make of our condition and the actual state to which mankind has been brought during the period of recorded history. Personal *weltanschauung* is built up over time as an interaction between external events, acquired knowledge and the personality of the individual.

If a man cherishes novelty, risk, opportunity and a variegated aesthetic reality, he will certainly reject any belief in Monism, when he clearly perceives the import of this system. But if, from the very start, he is attracted by aesthetic harmony, classic proportions, fixity even to the extent of absolute security, and logical coherence, it is quite natural that he should put faith in Monism.

Thus John Dewey on William James and the role played by instinctive sympathy in the choice of philosophy.

For a time questions centred around "the nature of God" and not on whether or not God existed, for the very obvious reason that to have questioned the existence of God would have invited imprisonment or death; so it is naive of Gerald Priestland to wonder why the emergence of atheism was so late in history. Further, since in our own western

civilisation the central text in Christianity has been the Bible, a book based on a rural and pastoral culture, it had an obvious relevance for Europe up to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. It is no accident that it was *after* that revolution had begun to change western civilisation that the number and quality of doubts about God increased markedly. The revolution began a cultural explosion that destroyed old assumptions, beliefs and habits, and blasted space for new systems of behaviour and thought. Dora Russell in *The Religion of the Machine Age* looks at some of the effects.

Before the Industrial Revolution nine-tenths of the population lived in small villages of a few hundred people or in small market towns of a few thousand. Each village was self-supporting: it fed, clothed and housed itself and imported only what it could not make, such as iron, steel or luxuries such as tobacco, silk or brandy. Machines were those that sprang from local need and local resources: the windmill, the watermill, the plough and the loom lasted for centuries because they satisfied the needs of those who used them and could be made and maintained easily.

The squire and the parson ruled the community; the former because he owned most of the land, acted as magistrate and representative of the Crown in peace and war. The latter was the spiritual counterpart of the squire and a powerful political support in maintaining law and order. His function was that of inducing "controls from within" in his parishioners, since as we now know more clearly they are more powerful than the lash or imprisonment in maintaining stability of relations between the wealthy and the oppressed whose labour produced that wealth. The parson was commonly the younger son of one or other of the local wealthy families and so identified with the culture of "the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate". The "internalisation of controls" was brought about by fear of punishment for transgression in this world or the next and by hope of eternal reward for virtuous obedience.

The doctrine of love, so much a preoccupation of modern Christians, was not stressed because the total care and education of children — there being schools only for the children of the wealthy or for aspirants to the Church — and the exercise of ordinary neighbourliness in health and sickness were themselves daily acts of love. Welfare, education and medicine had not yet been made into institutions. The "presence of God" in the poetic sense of the interdependence of people and the organic unity of nature and people was part of daily experience. Love and unity, those distinctive features of frail humanity necessary for survival because we do not

possess natural weapons or armour for personal protection, were part of daily life in small communities without resources beyond personal action. After all it was in such small communities that human beings evolved their intellects and their imagination to the peak.

With the Industrial Revolution all that changed. Ousted from their communities by the Enclosure Acts and rendered unemployed by the thousand as the new agricultural machines were invented and brought into use, people flocked to the new towns for work in the new factories. Old relationships broke down because the old communities, the old patterns of work were disappearing. New relationships had to be formed in a new environment of back-to-back houses crowded together as close to the factories as possible. New relationships to work had to be formed because the purposes, the methods and the periods of work were different.

On the land the pattern of work varied according to season, weather and crop; animal and human energy supplied the power to till the soil, to reap the crops and to make the tools; wind and water power drove the mills. Good work depended on skill, judgement and co-operation. In the factory artificial light abolished the differences between summer and winter, day and night. Hours of work were ordered so as to extract most production from both machines and workers or "hands" as they came to be called, since brains were deemed not to be needed. Production was no longer for the needs of people who were their neighbours, but for unknown customers. Profit replaced need. Movements and routines were tied to the movements of machines; people became "appendages to machines". From patterns of work that varied from day to day and was done in the company of friends and neighbours, work became unvarying, regular, dull and solitary. It became drudgery. The activities of work and of leisure became divorced because their environments and their purposes were different.

The importance of the changes in the nature of work is vital to an understanding of the changes in the psyche of those who had to undergo those changes. Communal work under the old conditions could be accompanied by conversation, laughter and, to lighten boredom or achieve concerted effort, by songs. Technical problems could be discussed and solved by collective intelligence. The young, who took parts that accorded with their strength and understanding, were supervised and taught as they worked. The transmission of knowledge and skill took place at work, so theory and practice ran together. Differences of method were argued out and the result tested in action. Qualities of character and disciplined behaviour became evident in work. The young learned by example and under conditions where the purposes of the work were evident in their daily lives, an educational environment that

only the very wealthy or the few hardy spirits who live in communes can find today.

In the towns the influence of the squire and the parson declined. The squire remained on his estate, now run by fewer people with machines. The parson had to contend with larger numbers and in an alien climate where subversive notions could abound, especially as news of the French and the American revolutions seeped through the counter-revolutionary censorship. He could no longer isolate himself in a style of life beyond the reach of his parishioners. If he was to do his work he had to live among them, in the crowded streets of the manufacturing towns, and to see at first hand the conditions under which they lived.

The function of the squire was taken over by the local official as government was centralised and became more remote. The market and the market stall gave way to the shop, the chain store and, eventually, the supermarket, as commerce also came under more centralised control. The humanity of government, claimed as desirable by the Macmillans, the Heaths and the Pym of the Tory Party and based on the romantic tradition of the good squire's relations with his villagers, has yielded to the impersonal commercialism of Thatcher and Tebbit, based on profit as the overriding criterion.

Modern government, industry and commerce appears to aim to eliminate men and women from production in the interests of "competitive efficiency" and has introduced computer-controlled robots on the production line and computers in banks, supermarkets, offices — wherever fallible human beings can be replaced. Current discussions about the extension of the use of computers, even in education, opens up the possibility that work will be even more dehumanised; that for more and more people it will consist of sitting at a computer console, pushing keys in response to coloured lights or to what appears on a visual display unit. It would be desirable that dangerous and dirty work should be done by machines rather than by people, and certainly where that work is done in isolation. Miners cling to their mines and to the communities that live by the pits because they are bound by a comradeship and a culture that means more than money, that provides a humanity and stimulus fast disappearing in other industries.

The mechanisation, and even more the computerisation of work uses even fewer human faculties, quite apart from rendering more millions workless. Pre-industrial work certainly used human power more widely than at any time in the last one hundred and fifty years, but it also made many more demands on his intellect and his emotions. Why do we consider it important that work should make wider demands on the worker? Why is "work satisfaction" an increasing requirement by workers? For the reason that the shift from work for need to work

for profit has been seen to do far-reaching damage to the worker. For the reasons that the worker owns neither the materials nor the tools he uses; that he has little or no say in the organisation of his work, especially on a production line; that he has no contact with those who use the product he makes; that so often what he makes has no obvious meaning; that he is isolated by noise and/or the organisation of the work from his fellow workers; that, in the end, this isolation and the meaninglessness of his work alienates him from himself and he has to see an "alienist", a psychiatrist.

It is now a commonplace of knowledge about ourselves that the brain is not a separate organ lodged in the skull and manipulating the body by remote control. Nerve tissue reaches into every part of the body so that, in effect, the brain is coterminous with the body, each acting on and reacting to changes in the other; each is unthinkable as a functioning whole without the other. At very obvious levels we cannot think coherently if we have more than minor pain. At more subtle levels the body plays a very important part in our thinking. I remember talking with my Corps Commander, the well-loved Lieutenant General Richard O'Connor, about how he had found that, when the number of units placed under his command rose above five or six, errors would begin to occur: "It is as though I identify each of the major units with a particular finger of my left hand. When the number of units is five I feel totally at ease in operations, but when the number rises above that, doubts and uncertainties start to creep in and I have to spend more time and energy in checking details".

This virtual identity of brain and body is reflected in language. Language uses images taken from our daily experience of work and of the functioning of our own bodies. Even when we are communicating abstract ideas we find it difficult to get away from concrete imagery. We "dig" for knowledge or "quarry" information in "fields" of interest. Theories become "ripe" for action; we "leave no stone unturned"; we "fathom" (Old English "embrace" or the distance from fingertip to fingertip with the arms extended); we "plough a solitary furrow"; troubles "come home to roost"; we study cybernetics (from a word meaning "steersman") for feed-back control mechanisms. . . .

The mind grows from physical experience through the senses becoming allied to social symbols, mainly words. The associative cortex produces symbols "like a fountain" as Suzanne Langer wrote in *Philosophy in a New Key*. If children, especially twins, are left to their own devices for long periods they will develop their own idiosyncratic language, intelligible to themselves but meaningless for others, and showing the characteristic features of normal language (A. R. Luria *Speech and the Development of Mental Processes*). But the mind can only be "captured" to the extent that we invent symbols that have agreed

meanings for communication — speech, writing, art, music, dance, mathematics, gesture. . . . What we receive through the senses when we touch, see, hear, taste or smell from what Pavlov called "the first signal system".

When we can associate words with those signals so that we can refer to objects and events even when not experiencing them, then we have "the second signal system". The power of language as a tool for civilisation is too well understood for me to have to develop a description of its functions. Edward Sapir called it "the greatest force for socialisation". Without it we should all be back at the beginning. Language, or "encapsulated experience" as Luria calls it, enables us to transmit our collective experience.

For my purpose here language is the only means we have of breaking away from direct physical experience. Piaget in *The Growth of Intelligence in the Child* traces in great detail the transition from the first direct sensory stimulus, through gesture, action, social interaction and then language. He shows with great clarity how the most refined abstractions are built up gradually from concrete experiences, through more and more remote references to those experiences. There are no entities corresponding to "length", "time" or "speed", we have built such concepts up from observing objects called "long", becoming aware of intervals between events called "time" and seeing objects in movement. So what are the realities that enable people to abstract the concept called "God"? Is it an extension of the imagination comparable to "the square root of minus one", a concept that has no meaning and no basis in reality, but that enables us to perform calculations that result in conclusions that accord with reality.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* William James examined many kinds of what were described as "religious" experiences by those who underwent them, and showed that many of them had nothing to do or were felt to have nothing to do with God. He formulates the essence of religious experience as follows:

The individual, as far as he suffers from his wrongness and criticises it, is to that extent consciously beyond it, and is at least possibly in touch with something higher, if anything higher exist. Along with the wrong part there is thus a better part of him, even though it may be but a most helpless germ. With which part he should identify his real being is by no means obvious at this stage, but when the stage of solution or salvation arrives, the man identifies his real being with the germinal higher part of himself; and does so in the following way. He becomes conscious that this higher part is coterminous and continuous with a *more* of the same quality which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his lower being has gone in pieces in the wreck.

Clearly the "better part" and the "wrong part"

may simply be what he has been taught to aspire to, such as generosity, and the wrong part feelings of envy or, if his society has thus categorised normal drives, sexual feelings or the desire for beautiful clothes. Concepts of "something higher" arise in the course of comparing different aspirations; our memories and our experiences of different levels of satisfaction makes it inevitable that we will always postulate "something higher". When we try to bring together all those things that we imagine as "something higher" and fuse them into one entity or hypothetical entity then we may give it a name.

Suppose for the moment that the word "God" means the ideal ends that at a given time and place one

acknowledges as having authority over his volition and emotion, the values to which one is supremely devoted, as far as these ends, through imagination, take on unity. . . This idea of God or of the divine, is also connected with all the natural forces and conditions—including man and human association that promote the growth of the ideal and that further its realisation. . .

A religious attitude . . . needs the sense of a connection of man, in the way of both dependence and support, with the enveloping world that the imagination feels is the universe. Use of the words "God" or "divine" to convey the union of actual with ideal may protect man from a sense of isolation and from consequent despair or defiance.

(John Dewey—*A Common Faith*)

Three Brave Women: Agnes, Matilda and Stella Symes

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

This month marks the 50th anniversary of a tragic accident which caused the deaths of Joseph Syme's widow and of his daughter, thus closing a chapter in Australian freethought history.

Joseph Symes (born 1841) was an English Wesleyan preacher who trained for the ministry but eventually turned to militant freethought. He became a vice-president of the National Secular Society and a regular contributor to Charles Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* and G. W. Foote's *Freethinker*. On Bradlaugh's recommendation Symes decided to go to Australia. On his arrival in Melbourne he was elected president of the Australian Secular Association and started his own weekly paper, the *Liberator*, which lasted 20 years. Exhausted from his labours and disillusioned with Australian society, Symes eventually returned to Britain where he died shortly afterwards.

Joseph's first wife was a widow called Matilda Wilson (*née* Weir) who was born at Kilmarnock, Scotland, somewhere between March 1834 and January 1835. During — or perhaps after — her first marriage she apparently fostered or adopted two young girls. Her first husband, Hugh Wilson, died, and on 12 January 1870 Matilda married Joseph Symes in Kilmarnock during the trying period when he was having doubts about going forward to ordination. Marrying, as he frankly admitted, allowed his probationary period to be extended for two years, and indeed Symes finally severed his connections with the Wesleyans in 1872. The couple moved to Newcastle-upon-Tyne where Joseph wrote and lectured and in 1876 joined the secularists.

Matilda must have helped him through the difficult transition which cannot have been easy for her either. They moved to Leeds in 1878 and then to Birmingham where Matilda helped her husband run a secular boarding school in Hagley Road around 1881. The school only lasted a year or so.

Matilda loyally went to Melbourne with her husband. Initially the change was an enormous success: Joseph Symes flourished as an editor and lecturer and as the *bête noire* of Australian Christians. But Matilda's health deteriorated and she died in Prahran (an inner suburb of Melbourne) on 21 March 1892, at the age of 57. She is buried in St Kilda Cemetery. She had a keen mind and was a great reader, but did not adopt all the radical views of her second husband. "Constitutionally", he wrote, "she was the reverse of an enthusiast either in religion or in Secularism".

Documentary references to the origins of freethought publisher and bookseller, A. T. Wilson, are peculiarly inconsistent. She was born probably between May 1858 and March 1859, presumably in Scotland. She and her younger sister were allegedly orphaned and then taken in by Matilda who called them Agnes Taylor Wilson and Matilda (junior) respectively. Of the sister I know nothing more. Taylor was evidently not the girls' original surname: Matilda senior's mother was Agnes Weir *née* Taylor. Was there something to hide about the origin of Joseph's "step-daughter"?

Agnes Wilson also went out to Australia but she does not appear with Joseph and Matilda Symes on the shipping list when the *Lusitania* docked at Williamstown, near Melbourne, on 10 February 1884. Did she follow later, perhaps when Matilda's health deteriorated? The Sydney *Bulletin* refers to

her in 1889 as Joseph's amanuensis on the *Liberator*, and Joseph praised her a year later for her "really heroic" work. She published many of Symes's pamphlets, and when overseas consignments of free-thought literature, such as D. M. Bennett's *Open Letter to Jesus Christ*, were confiscated by the Victorian customs, Agnes reprinted this and other titles which had been seized.

By the early 1890s the Australasian Secular Association was torn by bitter factionalism and Melbourne's economic boom had given way to a severe depression. Banks closed, work and money were scarce, and the city's population fell considerably. However, in the midst of all these troubles Joseph and Agnes married on 4 May 1893. Agnes continued to use A. T. Wilson as her publisher's imprint. The next few years were ones of grinding poverty, hard work trying to keep the *Liberator* going, lawsuits, intimidation and constant changes of abode. John Latham, who befriended the couple during these grim times, commented that "hard as Mr Symes worked Mrs Symes worked harder". And when the *Liberator* finally folded in 1904 Joseph wrote:

I could not have kept the paper going for the past ten years and more but for my wife's devotion to it. She has done a man's work—much against my will—the whole of that time in the printing and machining office, and has denied herself nearly all the luxuries a woman generally cares for. Go where you may, you will not find any similar case of devotion to principle or of drudgery performed and endured in the discharge of public duty.

Joseph and Agnes had one child, born on 18 February 1894, only a few hours after a hurried change of residence to the suburb of Coburg. On 6 April 1894, at a secularist meeting in Melbourne, Joseph proudly named the baby Stella Bradlaugh Symes. He and Agnes evidently adored her.

After the *Liberator* ceased publication the family moved to a small farm at Cheltenham, about 12 miles from Melbourne and near the sea. But Joseph grew restless and pined for action again. Agnes tried to dissuade him from returning to Britain, but without success. On 5 August 1906 the family arrived at Tilbury. Joseph — "the unsubduable one" as G. W. Foote called him — was greeted with acclaim and undertook a lecture tour of the National Secular Society's branches. But he was unused to British winters and went down with bronchitis. Pneumonia set in and he died on 29 December 1906. He was cremated at Golders Green on 4 January 1907.

Agnes decided that she and Stella would return to Australia. Foote organised a Symes Memorial Fund and presented Agnes with £302 11s 11d before she and her daughter sailed from Liverpool on 14 March 1907.

Back in the Melbourne area Agnes lived a life of quiet obscurity bringing up her daughter and earning her living as a shopkeeper, dealing in stationery and

fancy goods. Stella grew up into a reserved, but earnest and eager young woman. She had her father's rather sallow complexion and his sense of loyalty, but not his pugnacity. At the University of Melbourne she obtained her medical qualifications in 1925 and then held resident appointments at a number of Victorian hospitals before going into partnership in central Melbourne with an old student friend, Dr Louisa A. Bosschart (a Methodist, incidentally). They specialised in gynaecology and venereology. Joseph Symes—staunch protagonist of birth control and of the admission of women to medical schools — would have approved.

Stella never married. Her life revolved around her practice, her mother, and a few close friends. Eventually Agnes and Stella moved to a house in Panorama Avenue, Lower Plenty, which in the 1930s was a secluded, semi-rural area 11 miles from Melbourne.

Mother and daughter spent the afternoon of 10 January 1935 together in Melbourne. When they returned to Panorama Avenue, Agnes went into the kitchen to make tea while Stella put the car into the garage. As Agnes tried to light the large kerosene stove something went wrong and within seconds the kitchen was a mass of flame. Agnes got out into another room but was overcome by heat or smoke. The weatherboard house turned into an inferno.

Stella made repeated attempts to find her mother in the blazing building, but the heat drove her back. Eventually it took two men to restrain Stella, bleeding and badly burnt, from further rescue attempts. The fire brigade arrived, but was hampered by lack of water pressure. The five-roomed house was reduced to two brick chimney stacks and a heap of charred timber.

Agnes was perhaps 77 years of age at the time of her death. She was buried at Warringal Cemetery, Heidelberg (Victoria) on 12 January 1935. Stella was admitted to hospital in Melbourne with burns and other injuries. She failed to respond to treatment and, like her father during his last illness, was a considerate and uncomplaining patient. She was almost 41 when she died on 27 January. Dr Stella Bradlaugh Symes was buried beside her mother on 29 January 1935.

The wreckage in Panorama Avenue was cleared away. A concrete water tower was erected to improve water pressure and a sign was put up to mark the turning into Symes Street.

General Zia, in his crusade to make Pakistan a totally Islamic state, has launched a campaign to compel everybody to pray five times a day. Prayer wardens are to be appointed in every village to ensure that prayers are said by using "persuasion and suggestion".

BOOKS

LIES, DAMNED LIES AND SOME EXCLUSIVES, by Henry Porter. Chatto and Windus, £9.95

Randolph Churchill asserted that "one of the most insidious things about the Dog Don't Eat Dog rule is that there is a further conspiracy to pretend that no such rule exists". There have been quite a few exposures of the newspaper world both in Fleet Street and many places abroad — in fiction, documentary pamphleteering, movies such as *Ace in the Hole* and *The Front Page*; plays by such freelance newspapermen in their day as Edgar Wallace (*The Squeaker*) and J. B. Fagan (*The Earth*). Arnold Bennett's *What the Public Wants* was perhaps the best ever satire on the "Street of Shame". Written before the first world war and based upon the life and quirks of Northcliffe, Sir Charles Hawtrey was to make a big success with the public (if not the press) with his portrayal of The Chief.

The play was included in my Manchester theatre season in the late 1940s, and I later directed it for BBC television with the late Patrick Wymark playing Hawtrey's role and making arguably the biggest hit of his all too short career as one of our best character actors. Despite Bennett's stature as a novelist, and although it had good ratings with a cast that in addition to Wymark included such stalwarts as Dulcie Gray and Hugh Burden, it was barely noticed by the press.

Henry Porter's book is concerned, bravely and trenchantly, with the goings-on in Fleet Street in our own time. To date I have seen few reviews that were downright bad or any that were wildly enthusiastic about Porter's book. Perhaps to ignore any criticism is the best way for newspapers to follow that Dog Don't Eat Dog rule. It was much the same before and between the two world wars, and since 1945 onwards when Hugh Cudlipp was writing *Publish and be Damned*, Nye Bevan was castigating what he described as "a prostitute press" and the disparity between pop and quality newspapers was growing less and less.

Even Stanley Baldwin, that true blue Tory Prime Minister, was showing his dissatisfaction in the 1930s with a national press that was predominantly Right-wing but seen to be corrupt and patently unjust in its vendettas against political opponents. He observed that the press aimed to exercise the prerogative of the harlot — enjoying power without responsibility. A century earlier the freethinking pamphleteer, Richard Carlile, was imprisoned for publishing Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* and Elihu Palmer's *Principles of Nature*. Blankets of silence covered works of a secular nature that tilted at the powers that be in Carlile's time, just as the anti-Nazi speeches of Winston Churchill went largely

FREETHINKER

unreported in the 1930s. It is an old technique, much employed by the present Government's supporters in the media.

If Henry Porter's colleagues have for the most part chosen not to publish criticism, for or against him, he has ignored their warnings; being an experienced journalist he must surely have known what would come with the lid he has taken off the press in this book. The book's dust-jacket is correct when it claims to expose "the distortion, inaccuracy and downright dishonesty which is presented as a true record of events" in 12 months of Fleet Street history that extended into the early part of 1984. Raising the important issue of the role of the press today, Porter's conclusion is that we do not get the press we deserve. He cites many instances to support this claim.

Perhaps Beaverbrook, despite a notorious "black list" attributed to him by his enemies, was a comparatively decent influence after all? For the man behind those devilish mischievous "stories" was a literate showman, with allies in all the political parties, such as past friends of mine like the late Edgar Lustgarten felt glad to testify. Michael Foot, Alan Taylor, Woodrow Wyatt and James Cameron — all of them "political" opponents of what the Beaver stood for in his newspapers and known to me either personally or through their writings — all had a love-hate relationship with him; their admiration having the edge on their disapproval of his methods. Certainly he encouraged others to follow that golden Beaverbrook rule of printing any criticism that is made about yourself. He was said to have made an exception to his blacklisting rule when that happened. They don't grow them like that any more.

PETER COTES

LUDOVIC KENNEDY

AN END TO BELIEF?

THE 1984 VOLTAIRE MEMORIAL
LECTURE

Price 50p plus 15p postage

National Secular Society,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

REVIEWS

ASK THE FAMILY: SHATTERING THE MYTHS ABOUT FAMILY LIFE, by Jeanette Longfield. Bedford Square Press (National Council for Voluntary Organisations), £2.95

The first and most surprising myth to be shattered is the belief that most families consist of a father at work and a mother in the home caring for two children. The fact is that only five per cent of households are of this type. People live alone, in groups and in families of children with one parent. There are widowed, divorced, separated, common-law couples with their own children or with those of previous marriages; single people care for elderly or handicapped relatives. Patterns are constantly changing and there is no accepted norm.

The author of this attractively designed book sets out the myths that are widely held and often repeated, and contrasts them with the facts which are well documented and illustrated with vivid and moving case studies. Myths act as a barrier, setting groups apart, perpetuating prejudice and serving as an excuse for inaction when urgent needs should be met.

Myth: "People don't want to look after their elderly relatives". Fact: Three-quarters of those over 65 don't need to be looked after. In 1901 there were 152,900 over 65, but in 1981 the number was 7,413,000. Yet in both those years only five per cent were in institutions. People over 85 numbered 50,000 in 1901, but in 1981 there were 514,000. This increase in numbers means that families are supporting the aged, often at tremendous cost in money, time, health and happiness of the carers.

Myth: "Little children are bound to suffer if their mothers go out to work". Fact: 50 per cent of all married women go out to work. Fifty per cent of women with dependent children go out to work. In 1981, 3.7 million children were living on or at the margin of poverty, and their mothers cannot afford to stay at home.

Myth: "One-parent families have only themselves to blame, they are mostly young unmarried women". Fact: 11 per cent are men; 56 per cent are divorced and separated women; 17 per cent are widowed. Only ten per cent are single women; 40 per cent are on social security. Poverty and bad housing or homelessness are the major worries.

Myth: "Marriage used to really matter, but not now. Divorce is too easy these days". Fact: In Victorian times only 70 per cent could expect to marry. Today over 90 per cent get married. In 30 per cent of all marriages, one or both partners have been married before. Marriage is more popular than

ever, and 80 per cent of all divorcing couples surveyed felt the need for special family courts and for counselling and mediation. Marriage Guidance councils gave 209,000 interviews in a year, but in most areas there is a four to six weeks waiting list. Divorce inevitably brings hardship and poverty, and children suffer most.

Myth: "The welfare state looks after the disabled nowadays, families don't take their responsibilities any more". Fact: Eight out of ten handicapped children live with their families; four out of ten severely handicapped adults live at home; 75 per cent of those suffering from muscular dystrophy live with their families. It is estimated that caring for a handicapped person from the age of two until 40 costs the carers £119,800. Carers are exploited by the State; support in cash and in help as well as respite care would ease the burden and enable families to continue to care without breaking down.

Myth: "Young people have no respect for their parents these days, that is why there is so much trouble". Fact: This has been said for countless ages, but evidence shows that most young people live tolerably well with their families. A survey in 1979 showed that 80 per cent of 15 to 24-year-olds felt that their parents understood them, while 87 per cent claimed to understand their parents. Unemployment causes most suffering, especially among ethnic minorities.

Myth: "If people are not fit to look after their own dependents properly then the State has to do the job for them". Fact: Families mostly want to cope; but poverty, bad housing, unemployment, illness, especially mental illness, lack of counselling and advice, all undermine the good intentions and lead to despair or desperation.

The author cites these and many more facts which speak for themselves and reveal the urgent need for preventive measures. If we do not provide more home help, respite care, counselling, youth services, marriage guidance, and above all if we do not pay attention to the evils of poverty and unemployment, then future generations, whatever patterns of family life prevail, will bear intolerable burdens of misery, ill-health and stress, as well as vastly increased costs. It is imperative to sustain the love and caring that so miraculously flourishes, whatever the adversity or however varied the pattern of family life.

ROSE HACKER

Church authorities in Italy are alarmed by the sharp decline in attendance at Mass. Archbishop Margassi told the 23rd Episcopal Conference that only 20 per cent of the country's 56 million population go to Mass. The figure for city dwellers is about 15 per cent. People were lapsing for various reasons, many of them because they had become "convinced atheists".

THEATRE

MOTHER COURAGE, by Bertolt Brecht. Barbican Theatre, London

A leading dramatic critic recently called Brecht a "great minor dramatist". It depends, of course, what you mean by "great" and "minor". Argument could rage about this particular estimate for a long time but another judgement would be hard to contest. This is that *Mother Courage and her Children*, to give the work its full title, is the greatest play written on the theme of war in the 20th century.

Mother Courage was written by Brecht, a refugee from Nazi Germany, just before the outbreak of the last war. It was first produced in Zürich in 1941, and in 1949 it was produced by Brecht himself in Berlin. In 1956, only days after Brecht's death, his production was brought to London and played at the Palace Theatre. It was revived at the Old Vic in 1965 and has now been staged again, and most impressively, at the Barbican. The play is a great spectacle and has most moving moments, but it is hard to avoid the feeling that, as often before, the main thing that Brecht is trying to say has been missed or to some extent distorted.

Mother Courage is an old harridan. Her nearest equivalent on the English stage is Buttercup, the "bumboat woman" in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera, *HMS Pinafore*. She sells comforts to the troops but, in contrast to Buttercup who cares for the upright tars of the Royal Navy, Courage takes her wagon round the widely spread battlefields of the Thirty Years War. What happens in the war is of no account to her as long as her own final account is on the credit side. The essential thing that Brecht is trying to say is that the business carried on by *Mother Courage* is much the same thing as the war being carried on by the leaders who spent a third of a century laying waste the whole of Germany and, incidentally, for those whose historical imagination reaches wide, preparing for some of the European disasters that came many years later.

Yet as well as a capitalist, in a small way, Courage is also a human being. During the course of the action, she loses her two sons and her daughter and, at the end of the play, she is seen struggling on pulling the cart by herself, on which she sat so cheerfully at the beginning with her daughter while the boys pulled it.

When the play was first produced in Zürich, Brecht was furious at the way in which the comfortable bourgeois audience of neutral Swiss took the play as a "Niobe tragedy" of the mother struggling on, in spite of the loss of her children. That reaction was not what he wanted at all. He wanted to drive home the lesson of the waste and cruelty of the war,

and to identify this with the grasping money-making of the old trader. Perhaps one conclusion could be that, while Brecht puts his anti-war criticism with great and effective force, he is also a great enough dramatist to make his play not simply a political outburst but a human document as well.

There is a great deal of theory behind Brecht's drama. He enunciated a principle that is translated into English as "alienation effect". By this is meant that, contrary to great traditions of European drama, he wanted the audience to remain detached. He did not want them to enter into the lives and spirits of the protagonists. The word which he used for some of his other plays was "parables", by which he meant to teach his lessons. In his original production, therefore, it was not possible to forget the author drawing the attention of the audience to the things that he wished to be noted with special care. Thus, there were labels hung from the flies showing where the scenes were set. There were also short passages on screens, giving a brief indication of what was to follow in each scene. These made it easier to follow a play which can be confusing, but they are not used at the Barbican.

However, there were the songs. These, in a sharp ironic style serve to sum up, and comment on the development of the story. Judi Dench, one of the finest and best-loved actresses in the theatre today, was not quite right as *Mother Courage*. She was far too clean and "normal", with a cheerful bright face, beneath a flaming red head of hair, which, incidentally, never showed the slightest sign of being affected by the smoke and grime and general filth of the battle-fields. She was sprightly and resourceful, but she did not manage to suggest the vileness that Brecht saw beneath the surface. In addition, she was not helped by some of the staging. In the Brecht production, the cart was a much smaller vehicle than was used at the Barbican. On a revolving stage, the impression of continuing motion was more effectively produced than at the Barbican where the cart revolved but the stage did not. There was an enormous amount of clanking and doing and undoing of the type of clamp that attaches a large caravan to a car. All this pushing around of great lumps of ironmongery detracted from the central effect.

In spite of these faults, the play is overwhelmingly worth seeing. The Thirty Years War was a religious war (almost always the worst type, if distinctions can be made), and there are enough ironic digs at the force of religious conviction and the lengths to which it drives its adherents, to satisfy the freest of free-thinkers.

Mother Courage will play in repertory at the Barbican Theatre until 21 March.

T. F. EVANS

The Theological Consequences of Evolution

KARL HEATH

Was it Freud who claimed that man has never recovered from the traumatic shock of being convinced that he was related to an ape? If so, it was hyperbole. The mass of humanity shrugs these things off as easily as it ignores books claiming that Jesus was a mushroom. Nevertheless, a century ago, in the years following the publication of *The Origin of the Species*, 1859, there was excitement and disquiet, especially in clerical circles. It is worthwhile to recall the celebrated encounter in 1860 between Thomas Henry Huxley, the champion of Darwin, and Bishop "Soapy Sam" Wilberforce, regarded as religion's champion because he had some pretensions to scientific knowledge. The occasion was the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science held at Oxford. A large number of students present found the morning's proceedings rather boring. They relieved their feelings upon one unfortunate, but tedious, speaker who had the idiosyncrasy of pronouncing "monkey" to rhyme with "donkey". After he had used the former word several times, the students took it up, with his pronunciation, as a chant. Everyone was keyed for the great debate of the afternoon.

Wilberforce not only hoped to be accepted as a scientist; he also fancied himself as a wit and skilled debater. It proved his undoing. Addressing himself directly to Huxley, he asked: "Is it on your grandfather's side, or your grandmother's side, that you claim descent from a monkey?". Predictably, there was a round of laughter and applause, from people ignorant or forgetful of the truth, namely that Darwinian theory never suggested such "descent".

Huxley is supposed to have whispered to his neighbour, invoking the very deity Wilberforce thought he was defending: "The Lord hath delivered him into my hands". A narrator present describes him as rising to his feet "pale and stern", "quiet and dignified". His words were: "If, then, the question is put to me, would I rather have a miserable ape for a grandfather, or a man highly endowed by nature and possessing great means and influence, and yet who employs those faculties and that influence for the mere purpose of introducing ridicule into a grave scientific discussion — I unhesitatingly affirm my preference for the ape". The narrator said: "The effect was tremendous. One lady fainted and had to be carried out".

The Church, as its doctrines then stood, had good reason for alarm. If man, present man or Adam, "Homo Sapiens" man, had evolved from previous species or genera of man, and earlier from other species altogether, how could this be reconciled with the special creation of man in God's image? And souls? Christianity, unlike some other religions, had

not acknowledged that any living things other than man possessed souls. Dogs, cats and horses perhaps posed no problems except to their doting owners, but what about Neanderthal, and the later discoveries of even earlier men, Pithecanthropus, Sinanthropus, Heidelberg, Sinjanthropus, Homo Habilis? Did they all have souls? And if not, at what point in the evolutionary process was the soul injected? Or did the soul itself evolve? If anyone should suggest that I am flogging a dead horse, or raking up old arguments resolved long ago, may I say that I have yet to hear a theological answer to this problem.

A stock answer to 19th-century sceptics was that they should read Archdeacon Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* which contained the celebrated "Argument from Design". Paley began his career as an indefatigable pamphleteer at the end of the 18th century. His incredible justification of terrible living and working conditions in the Industrial Revolution is argued in a tract entitled *Reasons for Contentment — Addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public* (1793).

The Argument from Design was not original. The mediaeval scholastics called it the cosmological argument. The 17th-century philosopher, Leibniz, produced an elaborate and sophisticated version called the theory of Pre-established Harmony. Briefly, the idea was that the apparent orderliness of the Universe pre-supposed an intelligent Creator.

Paley popularised it. He imagined a savage who has never encountered civilisation, finding a watch. He has no idea what it is, or what it is for, but he opens it and studies the intricate arrangement of springs, wheels and gears. Despite his continued ignorance of its function, he will, says Paley, have no doubt that it is an artifact — not something which has come together accidentally, but the creation of a conscious intelligence with a purpose in mind.

Now, says Paley, leaping over a number of logical hurdles as if they were not there, look at the heavens, the stars in their course, the beauty of the universe. Surely all this is proof of Divine Creation.

The Argument seems to have impressed many people, who may have failed to perceive that, even if it was true, it merely demonstrated a Creator, and not His character. A pink and green monster would suit the Argument as well as God.

Natural Selection, however, destroyed the Argument. If the state of the universe, at any time one happens to observe it, is the product of a process which continually eliminates the elements which do not "fit" the totality, then it will always look like a Design, even though this has not come about by an act of conscious creation.

LETTERS

NON-RELIGIOUS OR ANTI-RELIGION?

My annual subscription to *The Freethinker* fell due recently. I always hesitate before renewing. It seems to me to be a pity that the most regular British free-thinking magazine should be so negative and belligerent. Nearly every issue contains some first-rate material but the value of that is often undermined because the paper clings so closely to its past.

Where religion is concerned we need to draw a distinction between being critical and being hostile. I share the relief of many others that the British Humanist Association is prepared to say openly that it is not an anti-religious organisation. If those of us in secular movements spent less time looking at fringe and freak groups and more time in dialogue with mainstream religious people, we would find that the common ground between us is enormous. It is in the best interests of all of us to develop that common ground. Much of the rest can be quietly forgotten because it is irrelevant to daily life anyway.

LESLIE SCRASE,
Editor: *The Humanist Theme*

A MISREADING OF ORWELL

Michael Duane's article, *Just Who is Leading us to 1984?* (December 1984), is brilliantly poignant proof that George Orwell was right after all. Nothing can have illustrated Orwell's message better than to have socialist intellectuals maintain that the internationally acclaimed satire, *1984*, was about capitalist rather than socialist societies. Not only does Duane coin Orwell's *Newspeak*, but he uses it precisely in the way that Orwell predicted: to say that black is really white.

Thus Britain and America become Oceania, "led by Big Brother who has a close and intimate relationship with Big Sister". Duane dismisses the Western alliance as defensive, and uses terminology very similar to that I heard on Radio Moscow recently, referring to a "massive arsenal of nuclear weapons designed to obliterate the Soviets and the rest of the Warsaw Pact countries at the touch of a button. . .".

Western democracy ("democracy" is in quotes, of course) is similarly attacked. Law and order is imposed "by means of a national police force armed with truncheons, equipped with riot gear and having plastic bullets and gas in reserve". The computerisation of vehicle licensing, medical and credit records (all quite innocent in themselves since they are not designed to build up a political profile of individuals, nor even to record their occupations) are purported to exist for sinister reasons.

Quite apart from all this, Michael Duane has misread Orwell's work (many socialists, indeed, refuse to read it on principle). *1984* was not a critique, as Duane puts it, of "false" socialism. It instead described with devastating plausibility a system known as *Ingso*, or English Socialism, by transposing onto the institutions of his mother country the Soviet example of socialism in theory and in practice. Realising the inevitable unworkability of socialism (first spelled out allegorically in *Animal Farm*), he cruelly parodied both the Left intelligentsia and the working classes. The workers were pilloried for failing to appreciate the evils of Stalinist collectivism, and they were the victims, in Orwell's eyes, of the duplicity and naivety of influential Left fellow-travellers.

Duane's article is an excellent example of Doublethink, whereby Britain is condemned for imperialistic, oppressive and manipulative characteristics applicable

only to present-day Socialist states. Living in the West, however, he knows his criticisms must be taken with a large pinch of salt, so he must be able to mentally adjust to the contradictions inherent in theory and reality.

Moreover, he carefully ignores Orwell's warning — to which the major part of the book is devoted — against the emasculation of the English language in order to limit political self-expression. The purpose of *Newspeak*, explained Orwell, "was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world view and mental habits proper to the devotee of *Ingso*, but to make all other modes of thought impossible". Orwell was uncannily right in this, too. Postwar manipulation of the language by intellectuals has succeeded in blunting the cutting edge of our critical faculties. "Freedom", "democracy" and "imperialism" are fast losing their original *Oldspeak* meanings, and are inexorably on their way to mean the reverse of the truth.

In the meantime if they are used often enough they begin to have an incantatory effect. They lack any precision, but induce the right quiescent frame of mind, in the same way that public resistance to law-breaking, violence and terrorism is slowly being worn down as it daily becomes more prevalent.

What puzzles me is why a journal like *The Freethinker* with such a distinguished reputation for defending freedom of thought and liberal values should wish to publish such a gross misrepresentation of Orwell's most seminal work.

ANTONY MILNE

TOWN HALL INTOLERANCE

I read with great interest your report (November 1984) on homosexuals being banned from employment by Rugby Borough Council. One wonders exactly how they intend to impose such a ban, as the average "gay", far from being the effeminate creature so often portrayed in television comedy, is indistinguishable from any other man in the street.

The education of Councillor Gordon Collett, chairman of Rugby Council has been sadly neglected, otherwise he would know that the "enemy" would already be inside the gates. For according to statistics published recently in a book entitled *The Alternative Sex*, not only are many married men bisexual, but they outnumbered your common-or-garden Gay by six to one! So perhaps Councillor Collett should start with the married men already on his Town Hall staff.

But where does it all end? We tend to give people neat little labels — "straight" or "gay", although the reality is far from being that simple as any psychiatrist will confirm. Some of the most famous men in history have been gay or "bi-guy". Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great both had several wives and male lovers. And of course there were famous artists like Michaelangelo, musicians like Tchaikovsky . . . the list is endless.

In conclusion, thank God (or the supposed Almighty, as Barbara Smoker would say) for *The Freethinker* and a breath of sanity in this mad, mad world.

A. T. LAMBERT

SPOOKS AND SOCIETY

Readers of *The Freethinker* may have been surprised by Sid Parker's letter welcoming me to the individualist federation (December 1984). Rest assured, fellow free-thinkers, I remain a libertarian collectivist!

While I did not expect to convince Sid Parker—that was not the object of my letter—he has managed to perform a polemical sleight of hand by interpreting words used by me in a collectivist sense, in his own individualistic sense. His comments would have more force if he addressed the points I actually made.

For instance, I define society as a collection of persons having mutual relationships, rather than as an aggregation of atomized individuals or as an entity in its own right. In fact, I regard the atomized individual, so admired by Sid Parker and his ilk, as a "spook", to use his own expressive word. The concept of "human nature" is likewise a "spook" which mystifies and obscures the possibilities for social change.

A judge condemning a criminal as a "menace to society", to use Sid Parker's example, often—if not always—means that the offender threatens existing power relationships. That is why such people, like picketing miners, socialists and so on, are vilified as "the enemy within".

COLIN MILLS

OBITUARY

Mr D. H. Calcutt

Douglas Howard Calcutt has died at the age of 90. He had a long association with Warwickshire Humanist Group, and there was a secular ceremony when the burial took place at Whitnash Cemetery, Leamington Spa.

Mrs D. Cleverly

Doris Cleverly, whose death occurred recently at the age of 62, had been an unbeliever for most of her life. There was a secular committal ceremony at Stourbridge Crematorium.

Mr S. Parfitt

Sydney Parfitt was well known in Humanist circles in Sussex. There was a secular committal ceremony at Worthing Crematorium.

The Rev J. Rowland

John Rowland, editor of *The Unitarian* and a retired minister, died while on holiday. He was 77. Mr Rowland wrote extensively for the freethought press during the 1930s. His last *Freethinker* article was published in July 1984.

Mr E. S. West

Ernest Sydney West, who has died at the age of 82, had been a member of the National Secular Society for many years. There was a secular committal ceremony at Norwich Crematorium.

Glasgow Rangers football club has signed on its first Catholic player since it was formed in 1873. Although John Spencer, 14, will be the first Catholic player for Rangers in its 111-year history, club officials deny that there has been sectarianism or discrimination. But the secretary of the Official Rangers Supporters Association commented: "I think the majority of the Association don't want to see a Catholic signed. It is a tradition Rangers have always had". One supporters' club cancelled buses to the first match after John Spencer was signed on.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. The Prince Albert, Trafalgar Street (adjacent to Brighton Station). Sunday, 3 February, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. John Maynard Smith: Science and Myth.

Gay Humanist Group. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday, 8 February, 7.30 pm. Jim Herrick: The Work of Joe Orton.

Glasgow Humanist Society. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 339 Kilmarnock Road, Glasgow, G43, telephone 041 632 9511.

Hasving and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood, Tuesday, 5 February, 8 pm. Chris Pelling: Pharmacy 1985.

Humanist Holiday. Easter at Buxton, Derbyshire, 4-11 April. Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. The Swarthmore Institute, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 12 February, 8 pm. Rabbi D. S. Charing: A Jewish View of Jesus.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 24 January, 7.45 pm. S. E. Parker: Equality—is it a Myth?

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 13 February, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Annual General Meeting. Diana Rookledge, BHA Development Plans.

Freethinker Fund

A generous donation of £100 has resulted in a healthy total this month. Our thanks are expressed to the anonymous supporter and to other contributors listed below. The grand total for 1984 will be announced next month.

Anonymous, £100; £2; T. Atkins, £5.75; R. J. Beale, £1.40; D. Berman, £2.40; D. H. Bowers, £1.40; M. D. M. Carter, £1.40; F. Coubrough, £1.40; F. Dahl, \$6; P. Danning, £1.40; R. J. Delaurey, £1.40; J. Fitzgerald, £1.36; J. Gauley, £1.40; F. E. Geary, £2.40; J. G. Gerrard, £2.20; M. Gerrard, £1; N. Haemmerle, £1.40; M. D. Hallett, £1; H. Hilton, £1.40; C. G. Houston, £1.40; J. L. Hutchinson, £4.15; R. Huxtable, £2; N. Levenson, £1.40; K. Mack, £1.40; C. Maine, £11.40; U. Neville, £6.40; J. B. Reader, £1.40; F. E. Seward, £5; C. J. Simmonds, £1.40; J. Simpson, £3; W. Steinhardt, £6.40; C. Sumner, £5; J. C. Thompson, £1; R. J. M. Tolhurst, £5; G. A. Vale, £6.40; O. Watson, £1.40; B. Whiting, £1.40.

Total for the period 5 November until 4 December, 1984: £197.66 and \$6.

(Mounting Campaign Against New Tax)

ment of conviction, not compromise, of confrontation, not consensus", Macmillan added.

"The argument has been put forward that there might be a different rate for published material generally or for certain categories of publication. To date, both the Customs and Excise and the Treasury have steadfastly turned their faces against multiple rates, because of the resultant over-burgeoning bureaucracy, to say nothing of significantly reduced revenue. I am hopeful that this will remain the position. . .

"Another option has been put forward: tax in exchange for subsidies on paper/newsprint or production. This would be tantamount to censorship and must be resisted at all cost. Who would decide which publisher, newspaper or author would get how much subsidy?

"To try to differentiate between education and entertainment, the high-brow and the low-brow, the good and the bad invites similar Government interference.

"The last time that the State tried to control publication with any degree of success was when Mary Tudor ordered the Worshipful Company of Stationers to burn heretical books in the courtyard by Stationers' Hall. The hall remains, the Company remains, a mighty tree planted amid the ashes remains, but Mary Tudor's tyranny has gone and I trust we will never see its like again. . .

"Taxing the printed word is not only unnecessary, uneconomic and essentially illiberal, but the mechanisms of its imposition are, I suspect, probably corrupt and tyrannical in the most insidious fashion. If we allow this tax to be imposed, we shall be branded as appeasers and rightly so. For we shall have opened the way to the control of publication by the State and the gradual but inevitable erosion of the freedoms of speech and expression that have been won with so much toil and pain".

Mr Norman Buchan, Labour Party spokesman on the arts, has warned that "the Chancellor has his beady eyes upon books and publications—hardbacks, paperbacks, newspapers, magazines. Such a proposition must be fought".

Mr Buchan recalled that a tax on publications was proposed in 1940 when Winston Churchill was exhorting the people of Britain to fight on the beaches, the Germans were ready to invade and the Battle of Britain was raging overhead.

"Even in that perilous situation", he added, "when every penny was needed, the proposition was thrown out with contempt. . .

"The proposition was swept out in a roar of laughter, but swept out also by the more serious argument that, if we were fighting for anything at that time, we were fighting for the free dissemination

of knowledge and the free dissemination of information, because this is what a tax on books and publications would have threatened.

"Yet this Government is seriously considering it again. The Library Association is warning-us of the prospect; the newspaper publishers are terrified of the prospect; and the Publishers' Association, led by Viscount Macmillan himself are ringing the alarm bells.

"And they are right. Democracy can only exist when information is freely available. Tyrannies can be maintained by censorship and secrecy as well as by force. A tax on newspapers and publications is a kind of financial censorship.

"So with books. Everyone would suffer. Already the price of books is so high that democracy itself is weakened. The daily information in the newspaper is buttressed by the creation of ideas, the building of understanding, which still comes primarily through books.

"And it is no use arguing that books are just 'paperbacks'; that books are just 'entertainment'; that books are just 'popular reading'. In the first place, today's popular reading is tomorrow's classic.

"Besides which, it is the production of popular literature that helps to subsidise the production of 'serious' publications — biography or history or politics. So it would be in quite literal terms a tax on knowledge. It is a tax which would diminish all of us. . .

"It was rejected with honour in 1940 at an hour of peril. I hope it will be rejected with contempt in 1985".

The Society of Authors in its newsletter says that VAT on books and publications "would be little short of cultural, social and educational disaster. . .

"It is hard to understand why such a measure should be seriously considered by a British government except one suffering from a kind of spiritual arthritis and ideological myopia once unknown at the top of the Conservative Party".

The historian Lord Briggs regards a tax on books "with horror". He writes: "To introduce VAT would be to put history into reverse. It would be like re-enacting the old taxes on knowledge".

The poet, Philip Larkin, who is a Conservative, believes that if the tax is introduced "the resulting damage would far outweigh the additional revenue so generated".

Sir William Rees-Mogg writes that the tax would do great harm to booksellers.

● **Freethinker readers are urged to support the campaign against VAT on publications. Please write to your Member of Parliament at the House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1. Leaflets and petition forms are obtainable from the National Book League, 45 East Hill, London SW18, telephone 01-870 9055.**