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Free thinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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BBC's God Squad holds on to power

TEN to eight is the precise moment at which I reach out, turn off the radio, and make my way down to the kitchen, and I don't turn it back on again until 'Thought For the Day' is safely over. I can hear it even at a distance. There is something about the change of tone, and pace, the soft and resonant soupy tones of the unctuous religious voice that I can identify at a hundred yards - in such stark contrast to the crisp, sensible down-to-earth tones of the rest of the 'Today' programme... Whether it's Rabbi Lionel, or Sister Lavinia, a Sikh, a Jesuit or a Wee Free, they all sound pretty much the same to me, a conspiracy of platitudes.... For years, successive editors of the 'Today' programme have wanted to get rid of it. It falls like a tombstone across the prime time of their show. It is a slot produced not by the 'Today' programme, but by the BBC's Religious Unit. The 'Today' editor has no control over its content, or over who appears on it. The current editor finally thought he had won the argument, and the BBC over the last few months has been reviewing its policy on this bizarre, protected God-slot. The idea which many of us had been pushing was that 'Thoughts' should not be limited to those with certifiable religious beliefs, belonging to certain specified religious groups. But thinkers of all

kinds should be invited to have their say. Yes, Humanists, Rationalists, scientists, writers, philosophers, interesting people of all kinds. Anyone with a breadth and depth of vision worth listening to, regardless of religious affiliation.

Finally, alas, a few weeks ago, the Religious Unit issued a public statement saying the old policy would remain. This is, of course, partly a turf war between BBC departments. The Religious Unit did not want to lose their prime slot and refused to hand it back to the 'Today' programme. If any distinguished person could appear on 'Thought for The Day' (which as you may remember used to be called 'Lift Up Your Hearts') then plainly the Religious Unit was not the outfit to run it. That was a bitter blow. For there should be space in the day for a comment, for thoughts of all kinds, for an editorial view from an outside voice. But it was over-ruled. The power of the God Squad remains quite phenomenally intact. I don't know quite why, since their pews are emptier every Sunday, yet they do still command authority, nowhere more influentially than in the BBC.



Photograph: Hulton Deutsch Collection

Journalist and broadcaster POLLY TOYNBEE speaking at the joint annual dinner of Humanist and Secularist organisations.

UP FRONT

with The Editor

Delighting in death

WIDELY and wildly popular among the Christians of the American South these days is the demand that Government base itself upon the philosophy of Reconstructionism – a cure for all social ills calling for strict application of Old Testament law. Books and periodicals reaching this office indicate that the more overtly psychopathic tenets of The Word hold a particular charm for such people:

*Life for life,
Eye for eye, tooth for tooth,
hand for hand, foot for foot,
Burning for burning, wound for
wound, stripe for stripe.*

And, as was horribly brought home to the 31-year-old British-born murderer Nicholas Ingram on April 8, the rednecks really mean it when they spew such obscenities.

International pleas and protests notwithstanding, and after 13 years of cruel and inhuman punishment on Death Row, Ingram

became the 15th person to be executed by the American godly this year – after J Wayne Garner, Chairman of the Clemency Board of Georgia (how Orwell would have loved that title), upheld the death sentence. (J Wayne, it is scarcely necessary to mention, is a strict Baptist who, *The Times* reported on April 7: "...insisted on grace before meals at the Garth Cottage Hotel near Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, where he spent last weekend.")

There are, of course, high-powered precedents for Georgia's stand. When, as Governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton approved the killing of a severely brain-damaged prisoner, Ricky Ray Rector, he, too, was basing his decision on the Book. Earlier, he had asked his Little Rock Pastor, Dr Worley Vaught, for advice on such matters. Dr Vaught duly eased the future President's conscience, arguing that the ancient Hebrew translation of the sixth commandment was *Thou shalt not murder* and not *Thou shalt not kill*.

Freethinkers have traditionally opposed the death penalty and were prominent in the campaign which brought about its abolition in Britain on a trial basis in 1965 and permanently (one hopes) in 1969.

However, with 75 per cent of Britons favouring a return to hanging for serious crimes (*Survey of British Social Attitudes*,

1994), it is important that we restate our case from time-to-time – even at the risk of outraging one of BBC Radio's favourite sons, Professor Roger Scruton, a Patron of the Conservative Christian Fellowship.

Citizens are brutalised

FREETHINKERS tend to believe that, whatever the crime perpetrated, there can be no civilised justification for similar behaviour by the State: capital punishment brutalises the citizens and the officials who carry out the sentence on their behalf.

It is frequently inflicted on the innocent and is therefore an entirely unacceptable gamble with life: it is irrevocable; mistakes are beyond rectification.

In the US – where 2,948 people are awaiting execution as I write – researchers have estimated that 350 innocent people have been wrongly convicted of murder this century: for 23 of the prisoners, the evidence establishing their innocence appeared after they had been executed (*The Guardian*, April 18).

And in 1993 a House Judiciary Committee report noted that 52 innocent men and women had been released from America's death rows in the previous two decades, and concluded: "The chances are high that innocent people have been or will be executed" (*The Times*, April 7).

In our own country, we have had so many people wrongly convicted of capital crimes, some of them were executed. We remember Timothy John Evans, who in 1966 was granted a free pardon – 16 years after being despatched for a murder he did not commit (the infamous Christie case). James Hanratty, it now seems, was innocent of the A6 murder of 1962, for which he was executed. And the childish Derek Bentley did not kill PC Miles but was executed just the same on January 28, 1953.

And what of all those freed from prison in recent years who doubtless would have been strung-up on suspicion of their having flaunted Irish accents with malice aforethought in Guildford and Birmingham, had capital punishment still been in force?

What of poor, sick, Stefan Kiszko, who was convicted of a murder he didn't commit and spent 16 years in prison before being let out to die? What of Judith Ward, who in 1973 was convicted of the murder of 12 soldiers in a coach explosion on the M6? She served 18 years in prison for a crime of which she was guiltless before winning her appeal.

"If the death penalty had still been in force

Keep up the war on superstition

BECAUSE we believe in free expression (and entertainment!), we publish the occasional article and frequent letters which do not accord with our editorial standpoint. But there must be no doubt in readers' minds about why *The Freethinker* exists.

G W Foote, its first Editor, summed it up in the first issue: "*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. 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."

So far as the present Editor is concerned, those words have the same

force today as they did in May, 1881 – except that we have been compelled to extend the range of our "aggression" beyond Christianity.

Please, if Foote's principles mean anything at all to you, help keep *The Freethinker* waging its relentless war with a donation to the fund.

Send cheques, POs, stamps to: G W Foote & Co., Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

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Total for April: £275.

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Judith W
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UP FRONT

with The Editor

From Page 82

in Britain, I would have been executed," says Judith Ward. "No country which resorts to legalised murder can claim to be truly civilised."

For many Freethinkers, opposition to capital punishment is based on its being so patently motivated by the ancient Christian principle of *revenge* – because certainly it does not work as a deterrent. This view is supported by the findings of Roger Hood, Director of the Criminological Research Centre, Oxford University, who found in a survey carried out for the UN that there is no scientific proof "that executions have a greater deterrent effect than life imprisonment."

A survey in the US found that two-thirds of the country's police chiefs do not believe the death penalty reduces murder – and 82 per cent believe murderers do not think about punishment when they kill.

We all know that many murders are committed under the influence of alcohol or drugs – or of a violent emotion, such as sexual jealousy – when fear of the possible consequences is surely the last thing on the perpetrator's mind.

Hungry people still stole sheep when you could be hung for the theft of a lamb.

Abolitionists across the world say the death penalty violates the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights because it denies the right to life and the right not to be tortured or subjected to any cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.

Authority on execution



WHICH brings us to Dr Harold Hillman, occasional contributor to *The Freethinker*, who is described in a full-page feature in the *Independent on Sunday* (April 9) as "the world authority on execution."

He believes that the electric chair, as experienced by Nick Ingram in Georgia, is second in cruelty only to the Biblical punishment of stoning – still popular among the Mohammedan ultra-faithful – as a method of killing.

Shooting, hanging, beheading, gassing and lethal injections are all surpassed by electrocution in the degree of pain inflicted on victims, says Dr Hillman, Reader in Physiology at the University of Surrey.

Director of the University's Unity Laboratory of Applied Neurobiology, Dr Hillman has long been researching death, dying and resuscitation.

In an academic paper, "The Possible Pain Experienced During Execution by Different Methods" (*Perception*, Volume 22, 1993), he provides what is believed to be the world's only comparative study of suffering during capital punishment.

Dr Hillman, who presented an affidavit for the defence in the Ingram case, undertook the research when American lawyers called on him as a witness for Death Row appeal cases.

Their aim was to prove that, by being "cruel and unusual," electrocution contravenes Amendment 4 of the American Constitution, and his affidavit for a 1991 case convinced the State of Louisiana to drop it in favour of lethal injections.

"His paper is based on the reported observation of condemned criminals during execution, post-mortems and interviews with witnesses," records the *Independent on Sunday*. "It documents in clinical detail the physiological effects of the seven different execution methods in use around the world."

Dr Hillman concludes: "All of the methods used for executing people, with the possible

exception of intravenous injection, are likely to cause pain." He suggests that some of the reactions are overlooked because the condemned is physically restrained or dressed in a way that conceals the more dramatic effects.

The paper features three remarkable tables: one lists "signs of severe pain or distress" in victims, such as screaming, violent movements or defecation, another lists factors likely to cause pain, from skin burns to asphyxia; and a third lists the evidence for pain being likely.

Dr Hillman tells the *Independent on Sunday* that he considers stoning the most cruel way of death, as it can go on for hours. It is still used in at least seven Islamic countries: Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, the Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and Mauritania. The victim is bound and buried up to the neck in sand and a sheet is placed over the head. The rocks, according to Iran's Islamic Code of 1980, should *not* be large enough to kill at once.

But the electric chair, he insists, is not instant either. It can take minutes, and involves great pain: "The normal body temperature is 37C and anything at 47C is too hot to hold; 47C is an intolerable temperature. In electrocution, the body's flesh chars under the electrodes, and we know that flesh chars at 300C. Because tissue is a bad conductor of heat it can take a long time to die."

Of Nick Ingram's death, he comments: "The fact that he was English is irrelevant. It is the pain that I am concerned with, and I equate the use of the electric chair with torture."

And what of hanging, the preferred choice of so many of the British MPs and others who would like to restore state killing? The pain is *severe* (the top classification in the Hillman system), caused by stretch of skin, fracture or dislocation of vertebrae, asphyxia. The victim suffers the sensations of: "Burning, stretching, fracture, dislocation, suffocation."

It both infuriates and depresses me to know that such a vile operation was ever carried out on my behalf – your behalf – *even on the guilty*. But, then, I am not a Christian and my way of thinking is not based upon the remnant documents of ancient Middle Eastern tribesmen.

Spread the word!

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A Decalogue for today

ANY simple checklist of Do and Don't is ethically flimsy. Ten meaningful Commandments cannot be set out convincingly; the best we can hope for is Ten Draft Guidelines (DGs). Simple ethics is usually fraudulent ethics. Perhaps...

DG 1/2: I claim, with by no means complete conviction, to exist and to be the only True God. Do not believe in me merely for the sake of conformity. I could do business with honest belief and with honest unbelief, but do not pretend and try to play safe – for if I exist, I will take a poor view of your taking me for a sucker.

DG 3: Do not try to use my name to bolster what is only your opinion. If I am non-existent you are issuing a fraudulent prospectus; if I exist I probably don't agree with you anyway.



Suggested by
ERIC STOCKTON

DG 4: I wouldn't care two ecus about the sabbath. You might care to try a decimal, 10-day, week including a three-day weekend.

DG 5: Remember that fertility is not positively, or negatively, correlated with personal worth of any accepted sort. So, obediently to honour your father and your mother – assuming that you can actually identify

them after the multiple vicissitudes of matrimony and the erratic machinations of the Child Support Agency – has no firm foundation in fact; view your parents fairly on their merits. Most of you will find that you do not need to be commanded to honour your father and your mother; some of you would be perverse to do so.

DG 6: I, possible God, am reported to have killed or to have encouraged killing since the year dot but you should not kill unless you happen to believe that in some circumstances any of the following may seem-reasonable: capital punishment, war, abortion, euthanasia, meat-eating, mousetraps, flypapers, carbolic soap and much else.

DG 7: Rape, and the sexual exploitation of the vulnerable generally, are inexcusable, but adultery has its uses in facilitating the termination of a mistaken marriage. But do not make the logical error of comparing unlike things – one's spouse *in practice* is likely to compare unfavourably (at least sometimes) with the wo(man) next door *in theory*. Indeed, you have probably formulated the theory precisely as an escape from the practice of the marriage you actually have. Obviously there are other pebbles on the beach; not quite so obviously, that's probably the best place for them in most cases.

DG 8: You should not steal but perhaps you should first establish just criteria of ownership – otherwise you may not be able to distinguish theft from redistributive justice. Do not steal from your employees by underpaying them; do not steal from your employer by not working reasonably hard in his time.

DG 9: Try to tell the truth, except when to do so would cause unhappiness while achieving nothing of value, but understand that, actually to tell truth, you first have to find out what the truth is; this is not as easy as it looks. The "whole truth" is especially elusive.

DG 10: Do not be so fond of possessions that you envy others theirs, and do not be fond of possessions in the hope that others will envy you. People are not possessions; personal autonomy should not be seen as negotiable.

CAMPAIGN FOR CHINA'S 'SAKHAROV'

by Matt Cherry

THE International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) has started an international campaign against the Chinese government. The IHEU is protesting against the treatment of Dr Xiao Xuehui, a humanist philosopher in Sichuan province, China.

The persecution of Dr Xiao began after she led the pro-democracy movement in Sichuan in 1989. Dr Xiao had previously caused nationwide controversy by rejecting the official Marxist doctrine that morality was determined by economics. She argued that individuals must take responsibility for their own actions. Her pro-democracy campaign put this humanist principle into practice.

IHEU Co-President Jane Wynne Willson said: "The great humanist Andrei Sakharov suffered similar persecution in the USSR when he made a stand for a democratic society respecting individual rights. Although persecuted and isolated, Sakharov became the most admired person in the Soviet Union and was the moral leader of its democratic revolution.

"Like Sakharov, Xiao Xuehui is a leading thinker who has the great courage to make a stand for her principles, no matter what the personal cost. On behalf of her millions of fellow humanists, IHEU pledges to do everything, in its power to help her."

Dr Sakharov was given the IHEU's

International Humanist Award in 1988.

In 1989, Dr Xiao was imprisoned without trial. In prison, the 45-year-old professor was regularly beaten, worsening serious kidney and liver problems. International pressure forced her release after 19 months. But Dr Xiao was then deprived of her teaching post and is now continually harassed. She is under constant surveillance, she cannot publish new work, and her family and friends have been forced to disown her.

Government-supported academics have been allowed to plagiarise her writings, shamelessly taking credit for the work of a persecuted colleague.

The IHEU has protested to the Governor of Sichuan Province and the Mayor of Chengdu. It is also using its representative status at the United Nations and UNESCO to press the Chinese authorities to honour Dr Xiao's human rights. And IHEU is pressing its 97 member organisations, in 35 countries, to lobby their governments to raise Dr Xiao's case with the Chinese authorities.

● IHEU is at Nieuwegracht 69A, 3512 LG Utrecht, The Netherlands. Protests and resolutions of support for Dr Xiao may be addressed to The Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 49-51 Portland Place, London W1.

Modern messages – from the 18th Century

Tom Paine: A Political Life by John Keane. Bloomsbury. £25.

Review: COLIN McCALL



● Thomas Paine

tial life, and his writings “shocked and thrilled audiences not only in England, America and France but...in towns as different as Dublin and Dubrovnik, Philadelphia and Warsaw, Berlin and Santo Domingo.”

Moreover, “In each place, he forged a reputation as the world’s chief public defender of republican democracy – a living symbol of the modern fight for the rights of citizens against warring states and arbitrary governments, social injustice and bigotry.”

It is, as Geoffrey Robertson QC has said, “an adventure story of kings and constitutions, with a remarkable relevance to current reform movements in Britain,” and no one has told it better than John Keane.

Paine wasn’t a “born writer,” whatever that may mean; he read widely in 18th Century literature, and Keane mentions Defoe and Swift among the particular influences on Paine’s “thoroughly modern language.” He was also keenly interested in science. Indeed, he tells us in *The Age of Reason*, “The natural bent of my mind was to science...As soon as I was able, I purchased a pair of globes, and attended the philosophical lectures of Martin and Ferguson”

which, as Keane says, “brought him inside the circle of two of England’s most reputable itinerant lecturers, whose energies were poured into bringing Newtonian science to captivated audiences otherwise excluded by prejudice from advanced education.”

And whereas Jack Fruchtman Jr describes Paine as “something of a country bumpkin,” who was “clearly out of his element in these circles” (*Thomas Paine: Apostle of Freedom*), Keane seems much nearer the mark. Paine, he says, “found himself in familiar company. The men and women who attended the lectures of Ferguson and Martin were mainly self-educated shopkeepers and artisans, many of whom leaned towards unorthodox religious views, and religious Dissenters, with strong leanings towards political radicalism...These audiences were decidedly modern in outlook.”

Keane therefore sees this period in Paine’s life, following his “adventure” on the *King of Prussia*, as adding to his scepticism about organised religion and bringing him “a step closer to Dissenting politics.”

These are, of course, the subjects on which his world renown rests, but fascinating, too, were his abiding scientific and technical interests. Keane calculates that when Paine was editing *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, soon after his arrival in America, he “published at least seventeen and perhaps as many as twenty-six essays, poems, and reports” and, whereas the majority dealt with controversial social and political matters of the day, there were others on a new electrical machine and “A Mathematical Question Proposed” (January 1775); a discussion of the geological and fossil collections of the Philadelphia Library Company and the development of mining in America (February 1775); a brief report on a new method of building simulated brick houses in England (April 1775); an account of the manufacture of saltpeter (June 1775), and reports on a new type of furnace for distilling sulphur and the latest method of desalinating seawater (January 1776).

Here and there, though, signs of a new Paine were emerging: “of crisp, lean, lightning-quick sentences, hammering out political point after point for an audience of self-educated artisans and ordinary folk like himself, for whom reading and being read to were new and exhilarating experiences.”

Keane cites a superbly sardonic paragraph on Clive of India, a stanza from Paine’s elegy to James Wolfe, and a scathing

THOMAS PAINE, as you may have noticed, has been in the news lately. The American magazine *Wired*, which claims to be “launching the digital revolution,” chose a picture of Paine for the cover of its first British issue, along with the quote that also appealed to Ronald Reagan: “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.”

More importantly, we have another, probably definitive biography, *Tom Paine: A Political Life*, by Australian-born John Keane, Professor of Politics at the University of Westminster, and Director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy.

A “recently discovered” late 18th Century portrait graces the book jacket, and there is a great deal of new material inside this substantial work of 600 pages. As the recipient of an American Philosophical Society fellowship, Keane was the first Paine biographer to have access to the society’s Gimbel collection; he has drawn on newly available material from Poland, Hungary Germany and Belgium, as well as the United States, Britain and France (adding to the “surprisingly little” that is known about the long period Paine spent across the Channel); and he has “managed to identify some 620 individual contributions by Paine,” which will be published in a bibliography, *The Writings of Thomas Paine, 1737-1809: A Guide*. All these items were consulted during research for the biography, and at least 70 “have not hitherto been available to or used by” previous biographers, most of whom Keane considers to have been guilty of “sniping” or “sermonising.”

David Freeman Hawke is rightly found guilty on the first count, “to the point where readers are left wondering why Hawke ever bothered to write a biography of Paine.” And while full credit is given to the “considerable achievement” of Moncure Conway, who still provides “the most valuable and fully documented sourcebook for readers of Paine’s life,” he is placed in the “sermonising” camp.

Conway had, of course, to counter the “vicious scandalising” of George Chalmers who was paid £500 by the Pitt government for his “labours of libel”) and the “muck-taking” of James Cheetham.

Paine, as I have said, is in the news – and will widely read – and Keane’s first paragraph suggests the reason. “More than any other public figure of the eighteenth century, Paine strikes our times like a trumpet blast from a distant world.” He led an extraordinarily exciting, as well as influen-

Anything goes as 'seas of unreason' loom – Toynbee

SEAS of unreason are welling up all around us, the journalist and broadcaster Polly Toynbee warned the 130 guests at the first joint annual dinner of Secularist and Humanist organisations, held at Conway Hall on May 6.

She said: "The poor old Church of England may be down on its uppers – directionless, at sea like this government, uncertain what to do or be, or why it is established. It may, indeed, become disestablished before too long, if ever we are to get sensible constitutional reform of Parliament and the House of Lords.

"But just as conventional religions are on the wane, so a New Wave of nonsense is rising up to engulf us. Cults, superstitions, astrology, numerology, every kind of *ism* and *ology* seems to gain an astonishing tolerance and credulity these days in the most surprising places. As people turn away from the church, all too often they turn towards things that are even worse. Anything goes these days, in the way of belief.

"What I find even odder is that the beleaguered conventional religions are responding by drawing closer together. Ecumenicism is everywhere. The

Methodists want to join the C of E. Many Protestants even want to get into bed with the Pope, if only he were willing to use contraception.

"Multi-faith worship is all the thing. The Jews who killed Christ are being forgiven by Christians who have been killing them in pogroms for generations. Sikhs and Hindus are welcomed by Christians keen on cultural diversity. Religious leaders everywhere are coming together across ancient divides in an attempt to protect their interests collectively."

Ms Toynbee saw this as a fascinating and revealing development: "What it shows us non-believers as never before is that they don't really believe either. After all, if you believe that Jesus Christ is the one and only son of God, sent to Earth with a unique message; if you believe the secret of your particular religion had been revealed to you exclusively and that it is your duty to go out and proselytise the rest of the world, how can you suddenly decide that somebody else's religion is just as valid as yours, just as worthy of respect, understanding and so on? They were more honest in the days when they cut each other to pieces over small doctrinal points. If one God and one

Prophet is as good as another, if wearing a turban and a dagger is just as good as putting a wafer on your tongue, then it's all exposed as the nonsense that it really is."

Polly Toynbee added that, as we approach the Millennium, "a kind of irrational frenzy about the state of western society could increase."

She declared: "Prophets of doom abound on every side. American political thinkers seem particularly prone to a one-sided or one-eyed view of society that sees only the dark, the failures, the turbulence and the fear for the future. A climate is created in which, unsurprisingly, millenarians prosper."

"Only a fool would deny the bad news. But if you were to put the telescope to the other eye, you could paint a remarkably and brightly different picture. More countries than ever before are democratic. Within the Western world, more individuals have greater freedom, wealth and opportunity than ever before.

Opportunity

"We agonise inordinately about our failures – crime, unemployment, poverty, and social dislocation – but it is important not to lose sight of the complete picture, which takes in growth in income and wealth, improvements in the health of the nation, better prospects for older people and, despite the problems of the schools, an unprecedented opening out of opportunity for young people.

"These things are connected because societies that are afraid lose their nerve – no longer believe in their own capacity to shape their destiny. In their fear, people turn to strange beliefs, false gods, anxious superstitions that only fuel their state of alarm. A self-confident society believes that it is for us to shape our destiny and is secure in its conviction that we can. Without complacency it recognises its strengths and its successes and can then turn to tackle its problems without neurosis and attacks of moral panic."

Other speakers at what was judged a successful and enjoyable event were Frances D'Souza, Director of Article 19, the international human rights organisation (who has been asked to contribute an article on her work to *The Freethinker*), Professor Sir Hermann Bondi, President of the British Humanist Association, and Nicolas Walter, Managing Director of the Rationalist Press Association and a Vice-President of the National Secular Society, who presided.

Modern messages – from the 18th Century

• From Page 85

passage on Christian justifications of slavery. *Common Sense*, the *Crisis* pamphlets and, of course, *Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason* receive full treatment.

Horace Walpole considered Paine's *Rights of Man* style "so coarse that you would think he means to degrade the language as much as the government"; the "gentleman-author" Isaac Hunt found it "coarse and rustic." Yet it broke every extant publishing record, becoming "the most widely read book of all time in any language."

Where stands Walpole by comparison? Voluminous correspondence *et al* gathering dust on library shelves. As for the gentleman-author, vanished without trace.

In fact, as Keane points out, "Paine deliberately set out to expose the pseudoelegance of Burke's argument by answering him with an entirely different style of writing. *Rights of Man* sparkled with diamond-hard prose written in a colloquial style. It avoided pur-

ple passages, sentences without meaning, and general humbug." Paine explained that he was testing "the manner in which a work, written in a style of thinking and expression different to what had been customary in England, would be received."

He replaced what he called "the vassalage class of manners" by the language of common speech, without, as Keane says, "losing sight of the twin goals of publicly airing fundamental political issues in a serious way and publicly questioning a political class accountable only to itself."

And his democratic republicanism speaks vividly to us today.

"I have always considered monarchy to be a silly contemptible thing," he said. "I compare it to something kept behind a curtain, about which there is a great deal of bustle and fuss, and a wonderful air of seeming solemnity, but when, by any accident, the curtain happens to open, and the company see what it is, they burst into laughter."

How more up-to-date can you be?

The universe, our solar system and biological life on earth are all the outcome of chance

Humanism: the compassionate philosophy

by Leslie James

Retired barrister and former Chief Officer of Police

become determining factors themselves, affecting one's actions, and being in turn affected by them."

In *The Times* of December 17, 1986, Wilfrid Beckerman, a Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, wrote convincingly on the theory of determinism. "Suppose," he wrote, "we took two people with identical genetic endowments and identical environmental experience, would we expect them to behave differently in any particular situation? If the answer is 'Yes' then I would like to know what exactly it is in them that would explain the difference." And again: "The suffering in this world is already enough to make most people despair of the human race. It is the product of a strange mix of genetic and environmental characteristics for neither of which are people morally responsible. To accuse them of being so can only generate further hatred and vindictiveness, perpetuate the spirit of revenge and intolerance and corrupt even those most appalled by the type of behaviour that they rightly condemn. An ideal – but no doubt unattainable – society would know how to maintain a spirit of revulsion for acts which hurt other people and how to minimise them without cultivating an instinctive hatred for the perpetrators of such acts. Probably the best we can do is to recognise that any increase in the sum total of hatred and intolerance can only make the world an even more unpleasant place for most people to live in."

I suggest that these two basic scientific concepts – the prevailing element of chance in the distribution of the beneficent and maleficent circumstances of life and the deterministic inevitability of the thought processes of humanity – impose an extremely demanding and compassionate philosophy upon Humanists.

In the first place, we need to accept an over-riding duty to seek to ameliorate the injustices of the natural world. This does

not imply a total egalitarianism. We must, as practical, pragmatic people, recognise the significance of ambition and motivation. It is important that the potential of everyone should be recognised and encouraged. Human progress depends to a very considerable extent upon the efforts and achievements of able people. Without their application, society would be condemned to an inescapable mediocrity. An essential principle for Humanists, therefore, must be the greatest possible equality of opportunity, the greatest possible scope for every man and woman for self-development. At the same time, determinism should prompt the most gifted and successful among us to recognise their good fortune and to exercise the utmost humility. Pride in personal achievement and denigration of the unsuccessful are regrettable universal attitudes and need to be resisted.

On the social level, we need to have a much more generous and constructive approach to the poverty in our own country and for the desperate situation in the Third World. And we must acknowledge that extending this kind of aid will involve the acceptance of a lower standard of living for ourselves. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has pointed out of recent date, there is no evidence of the operation of the trickle-down theory, that wealth acquired by the top earners finds its way to those at the bottom. If there is to be a more just distribution of wealth, it will require determined positive action on the part of individuals and governments and will not occur as the result of any instinctive benevolence or the operation of economic laws.

Events at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and then at the UN Summit at Copenhagen, demonstrate all too clearly how difficult it is for governments and politicians to abandon self-interest and take

IN THE 1970s, two notable Humanist publications made their appearance. Barbara Smoker's *Humanism* stated the case for rejection of religious beliefs with lucid simplicity, and *People First: A Humanist Manifesto* offered Humanists a rational and ethical programme for life. One conclusion we can draw from these two publications is that a purely scientific, atheistic ethic is no easy option. The moral demands imposed upon Humanists are no less exacting than those imposed upon religious adherents. The Humanist credo "This life is all and man is on his own" gives no ground for self-interest. The sheer blindness of scientific forces calls for a massive altruism, a compassionate consideration for all mankind, worldwide and for generations to come.

The first and crucial principle to be accepted is that the universe, our solar system and biological life on earth are all the outcome of chance, of a cosmic accident. Having abandoned belief in a creating, directing God, we must accept, as a logical consequence, that human evolution is the outcome of the operation of blind forces – for example, natural selection and the survival of the fittest. And insofar as each individual human being is the product of a random division of the genes of his or her parents and the unpredictable events of his or her environment, this element of chance dominates the lives of each one of us.

We are creatures of chance. Whether we were born in the First World or the Third, in England or in famine-torn Sudan, in a prosperous suburb or in a poverty-stricken inner-city, whether we were born male or female, white or black, strong or weak, clever or dull, mentally stable or unstable, and what environmental events befell us in our lives, all these circumstances are determined by chance, beyond our control. So whether we have a good brain and are motivated by ambitious parents or a discerning teacher, whether we are successful or virtuous, are not circumstances for which we can claim credit or in which we can take pride. Nor should we despise the less successful or less virtuous of our fellow human beings. In all humility, we should say: "There but for the grace of different genes and a different environment go I." Even the fact that we are Humanists is the outcome of our intellectual dissatisfaction with religion, and our ability to weigh dispassionately the logical arguments underlying Humanism.

Barbara Smoker was right, therefore, to jettison free-will. "The interaction of genes and environment," she wrote, "determines one's desires, moral fibre, sensitivity, strength of will, intellectual integrity, and so on, and these facets of one's character then

NEIL BLEWITT, *God-bothering* Air

A likeness of

DEAR LORD, When I wrote to you some time ago, I asked – as I am curious about your appearance – if you would send me a likeness of yourself. You replied that one had never been taken, but suggested that I might care to draw a portrait of you myself, using the clues to your features in the Bible.

I thought this a good idea and set to work on the project. You warned me not to believe everything that was written about you there, and this did present me with some problems. For example, John said that you are Love, but Moses that you are a man of war – and I assume he meant a warrior rather than a jelly-fish. Again, John said that no man had seen you at any time, but Moses and Aaron saw you; so did Isaiah and Amos and Ahab. In fact, it seems that everybody who was anybody saw you at some time or other. The unfortunate thing is – from my point of view – that none of them described you. All Isaiah and Ahab observed was that you were sitting – quite correctly for a god – on a throne. Amos noticed only that you were carrying a plumbline one day and a basket of fruit another. And I must say, in passing, that this seems most undignified for a god. I would have expected you to be carrying a caduceus, an ankh, a thunderbolt or, at the very least, a trident.

However, despite the difficulty of separating fact from fiction, I eventually completed a portrait, but it would be dishonest of me to pretend that you were anything other than a disappointment. I shall explain why later.

But first – my studies. I have to admit that I tended to ignore those curious laws in the Pentateuch, such as the one which states that any man who has had his privy member cut off would not be welcome at church; I tried not to linger over the indelicate passages as in Genesis 19 and Ezekiel 23; and I passed over all those tables showing who begat whom. It was of no conse-

quence, for example, that Methuselah was 187 years old when he begat Lamech. I have always admired his vitality and, indeed, his powers of memory, but that's about all. In any case, I don't care to think on men of such advanced years attempting parenthood; it gives me palpitations.

Neither did I pay much regard to John's Revelations. His opinion that you resemble a sardine stone was not only difficult to comprehend, it also lacked confirmation. For me, John has little credibility anyway, with his talking trumpets, calves with four wings, locusts like horses with men's faces and his angel standing on the sun calling the birds in for supper.

Rivals

I was also at a disadvantage in that you are not the only god mentioned in the Bible. So, if any of the features I ascribe to you refer to one of your rivals, I apologise. I am conscious that, in the old days, even the mention of other gods kindled your anger, and you sought to prevent the Israelites from worshipping them by decreeing that it was a capital offence to do so. I hope that I have not incurred your displeasure in this matter. If I have, I can only plead in mitigation that some Biblical passages lack clarity. I'm sure I don't need to adduce examples. You know them, I suspect, as well as I do.

And so to my portrait. You must have a face since you told Moses that he should not see it. I know he eventually did, but that is not the point. And you must have a head because of the references to your nose, ears, eyes and mouth. They must be attached to something. With your nose you smelled the sweet savour of Noah cooking a fowl. With your ears, according to David, you heard the voice of his prayer; and, in another of his psalms, he issued the invitation "Bow down thine ear, O Lord!" (And, if I may digress for a moment, I own to rendering this in ignorance as a choirboy as "Bow down thine ear-'ole Lord!" I hope you have long forgiven me). With your eyes you saw that the world you had made was good; and you must have a mouth

since you were always speaking to people in the Old Testament and calling down fire from clouds in the New. And, according to John, you are perfectly capable of speaking. I don't really know what your voice is like but David said it melted the earth at one point, though when you spoke to Elijah it was still and small. Isaiah expected you to hiss and Joel to roar – so it is obvious you have a voice and are capable of using it in a variety of ways. And a voice implies lungs, mouth and throat (and I can't help wondering if there isn't an Adam's apple there somewhere).

I can find no reference to your hands, but it may be that, because of your age at the time the books of the Bible were written, you were sensitive about the lack of a hand. I persuaded the authors not to draw attention to the defect. If it is any consolation, I know the feeling. John did write of his visions in which he saw someone who I think he was hinting that it was either you or a person close to you – with hair as white as snow, but I have discounted that because he added that he had also seen a fine brass, a face burning like the sun and a sharp two-edged sword in his mouth. I can't believe that this is a portrait of you. No god would appear in a vision without like a supporting act in a circus.

It is clear that you have hands. Although the Bible does not state how many, I would guess two. I used to think you had only one because there are so many references to the power of your right hand. The fact that some of the saints in the Bible rose from the earth to be seated at your right hand and knees is in your favour, and, on further investigation, I found evidence for it. David pointed out that the heavens are the work of your hands, but it is clear that you have at least two. Obviously they are versatile – perfectly capable of making not only large objects like the sun and the sun but also smaller ones like coats you ran up for Adam and Eve. Incidentally, I can't recall any other god who is also a skilled tailor.

Hands suggest fingers and their presence is confirmed in the Bible. One is particularly potent since with it you wrote the Ten Commandments, and Pharaoh's

again, tries to draw...

The Lord

reported that it brought about the
ng down. There is evidence, too, that it is
accomplishable because, according to Luke,
e of spirit used it to cast out devils.
voice is certain that you had arms. Isaiah was
urth at the firm on the point, recording that you
to Elijah them on one occasion, presumably to
ected you that there was nothing else in your
obvious ways with which you worked your mira-
f using. Moses said that your arms were
implicated in death, but this conjures up such a pre-
can't be a serious picture that I have assumed he
am's mistaken.

know you have legs and feet because it
ur hair recorded that you walked in the Garden
ge at Eden and with Enoch. The Bible does
re write how many but, as with your
ck of ribs, I assume two. It is possible that
aw at feet are larger than average as you
ation. Able to tread mighty men and virgins
le of death them. If this is not the case, you
neone to blame Jeremiah for his careless use of
as either. I'm not certain that you have
hair about I suspect you do. Feet look odd
unted about them.

Picasso

now, if you have arms, legs and a head,
n look must be attached to something –
y, although you resemble an abstract Picasso –
ny. But that something has to be a trunk. It is
k you read in Genesis that your heart was grievan-
many re that you made the earth, and a heart has
t hard to be somewhere and a trunk is as conven-
n the place as any. There are no scriptural
at or references to your other organs such as
lies liver and kidneys, but there seems little
ount about in your having one without the oth-
hat I did read of liver being poured upon
nds. earth, but it proved to be Jeremiah's
Observed not yours. He had, apparently, good
able cause for his lamentations.

ce that I may descend a little farther down the
s like. I know that you have back parts
Eve because you told Moses that he might see
her from. Now it may be that they are not
r pleasant to behold since you made their
r possible exposure sound more like a threat
penetrate a prospect of enjoyment. Further, back
wants simply front parts. Your possession of
sh's form is not supported in the Bible but, as

The Freethinker

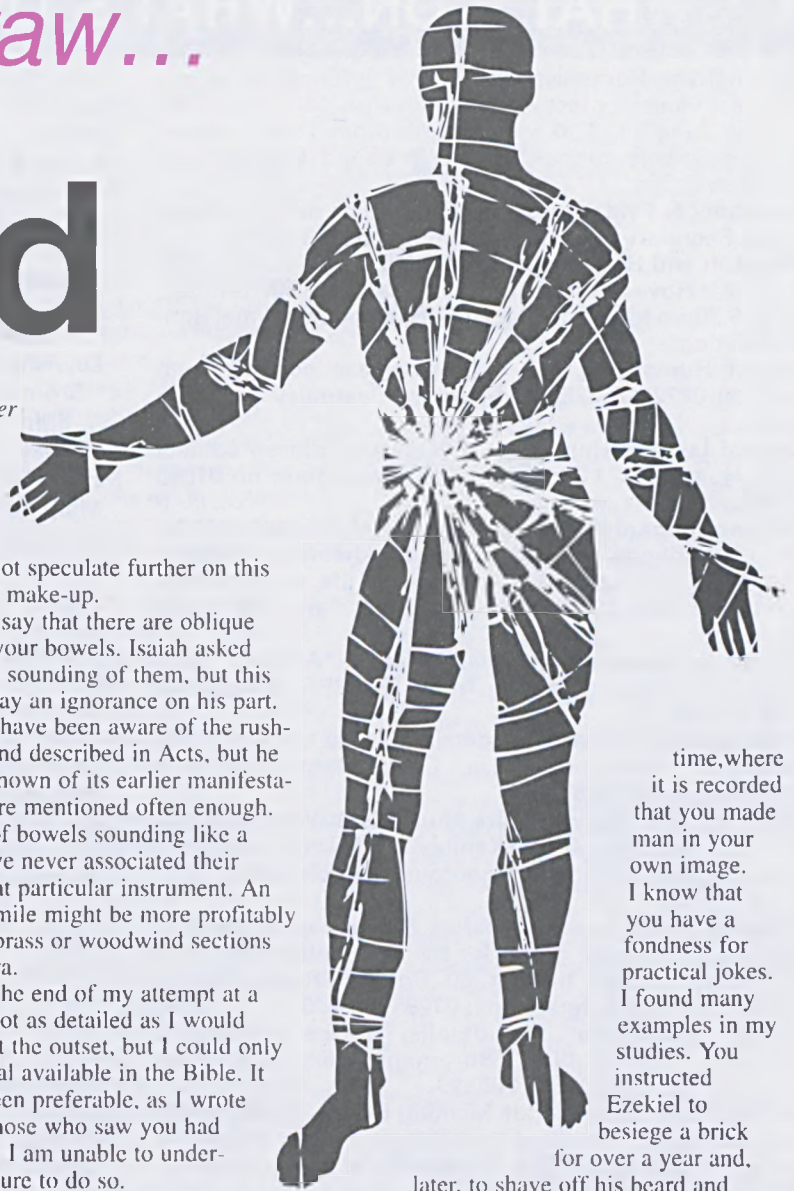
is a journal which does not care to bring a blush to an innocent cheek. I will not speculate further on this aspect of your make-up.

Suffice it to say that there are oblique references to your bowels. Isaiah asked where was the sounding of them, but this seems to display an ignorance on his part. He would not have been aware of the rushing mighty wind described in Acts, but he should have known of its earlier manifestations; they were mentioned often enough. He did write of bowels sounding like a harp, but I have never associated their music with that particular instrument. An appropriate simile might be more profitably sought in the brass or woodwind sections of the orchestra.

This marks the end of my attempt at a portrait. It is not as detailed as I would have wished at the outset, but I could only use the material available in the Bible. It would have been preferable, as I wrote earlier, if all those who saw you had described you. I am unable to understand their failure to do so.

One contradiction remains. You obviously have a physical presence and this was confirmed by Jesus, who said that the pure in heart would see you. Yet John reported him as saying on another occasion that you are a spirit. But there are so many references to your body and its components that I have to accept you are tangible until the contrary is proved. But herein lies the reason for my disappointment, mentioned at the beginning of my letter. I expected the portrait to be of a unique being. What I have extracted reveals that you are as human in appearance as I am, although I will concede that the proportions may not be identical.

I can't help wondering if, when you challenged me to draw this portrait, you were not playing a practical joke. You see, I spent several months examining the 1,200 pages of my edition of the Bible only to realise at the end of my labours that the answer was at the top of page two all the



time, where it is recorded that you made man in your own image. I know that you have a fondness for practical jokes. I found many examples in my studies. You instructed Ezekiel to besiege a brick

for over a year and,

later, to shave off his beard and weigh it; you kept the Israelites for 40 years in the wilderness on their journey to the Promised Land when a stroll in the right direction would have brought them there in a month; you took the wheels off the chariots of the pursuing Egyptians before Moses unleashed the Red Sea on them; you instructed Noah to build a vessel 450 feet by 75 and then fit a million creatures into it (and I thought it unkind to send a 600-year-old man to the Arctic to hunt for polar bears and to the Antarctic for penguins); and you caused several of your prophets to walk about naked – Isaiah for three years. So, if I have been the victim of another of your practical jokes I can, at least, claim to be in distinguished company. Yours, Neil Blewitt.

PS: There is one other question to which I was unable to find an answer in the Bible. What is the nature of your piece which passeth all understanding?

WHAT'S ON...WHAT'S ON...WHAT'S ON

Birmingham Humanist Group: For information about Group activities contact Adrian Bailey on 0121 353 1189. Monday, June 12, 7.30 for 8pm, Martineau Hall, Balden Road, Harborne: Jane Wynne Willson: *International Humanism*.

Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group: For details, please contact Secretary D Baxter. Telephone: 01253 726112.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: 40 Cowper Street, Hove (near Hove Station, bus routes 2a, 5 and 49). Sunday, July 2, 5.30pm for 6pm. Tea party followed by annual general meeting.

Bristol Humanists: For details, please contact John Smith on 01225 752260 or Margaret Dearnaley on 01275 393305.

Central London Humanists: For details, please contact Cherie Holt on 0171 916 3015 or Hilary Leighter on 01895 632096.

Chiltern Humanists: Details of group from 01296 623730. June 13 at Friends' Meeting House, Berkhamsted, 7.45pm: Soap Box - come and have your say on life, the universe, everything! July 30: Summer Social at Farnham Royal; details later.

Cornwall Humanists: Contact: B Mercer, "Amber," Short Cross Road, Mount Hawke, Truro TR4 8EA. Telephone: 01209 890690.

Cotswold Humanists: For details, please contact Philip Howell, 2 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Telephone: 01242 528743.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road, Kenilworth: Monday, June 19, 7.30pm: Public meeting: *Scientology*. Information: telephone 01926 58450.

Crawley, West Sussex: Charles Stewart is working to establish a Humanist group for the area. Interested readers should contact him at 50 Boswell Road, Tilgate, Crawley RH10 5AZ. Telephone: 01293 511270.

Devon Humanists: For details, please contact: C Mountain, "Little Gables," Burgmanns Hill, Lympstone, Exmouth EX8 5HN; 01395 265529.

Ealing Humanists: Friends Meeting House, 17 Woodville Road, Ealing W5. Meetings start at 8pm. Details: telephone Derek Hill 0181-422 4956 or Charles Rudd 0181-904 6599.

Edinburgh Humanist Group: Programme from secretary, 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD; 0131 667 8389.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): Information from 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HD; telephone 01926 58450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. June 9: Pride Forum: *Achieving Legal and Social Equality*. July 14: Maureen Duffy: *A Humanist Approach to Animal Rights*.

Hampstead Humanist Society: Information and programme of meetings from NI Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP.

Havering & District Humanist Society: HOPWA House, Inskip Drive, Hornchurch. Tuesday, July 4, 8pm: Public meeting: *Is There an Answer to Extreme Violence?* For further information, contact J Condon 01708 473597 or J Baker 0708 458925.

Humanist Society of Scotland: Secretary: George Rodger, 17 Howburn Place, Aberdeen AB1 2XT (telephone: 01224 573034). Convener: Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire; telephone: 01563 526710.

Humanist Society of Scotland, Glasgow Group: Information regarding meetings and other activities from Hugh H Bowman, 25 Riverside Park, Glasgow G44 3PG; telephone 0141 633 3748.

Kent Humanists: Information from M Rogers, secretary, 2 Lyndhurst Road, Broadstairs CT10 1DD; telephone 01843 864506.

Leeds & District Humanist Group: Swarthmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Meetings at 7.30pm. Tuesday, July 11, 4pm to 8pm: Summer Social at 15 Victoria Crescent, Horsforth. Details: 2585748.

Leicester Secular Society: Details from the Secretary, Lyn Hurst, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB (telephone 0533 622250).

Lewisham Humanist Group: Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, June 29, 8pm: S E Parker: *Is There Life After Anarchism?* Saturday, July 8, 1pm to 6pm: LHG stall at People's Day, Mountsfield Park, Stainton Road, London SE6.

Manchester: Greater Manchester Humanist Group: Information: 0161 432 9045. Meetings begin at 7.30pm, St Thomas' Centre, Ardwick Green. September 8: Barry Thorpe: *Democracy Ancient and Modern*. October 13: Eric Paine, of the Thomas Paine Society.

Norwich Humanist Group: Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich: Thursday, June 15, 7.30pm: The Work of the Greenhouse Trust. Thursday, July 20: Simon Rathbone: *Unitarians' Beliefs*. Information about group from Brian Snoad on 01603 455101.

Preston and District Humanist Group: Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Peter Howells, telephone 01257 265276.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street (adjoining Bank Street), Sheffield. Wednesday, July 5, 8pm: Peter Sudbury: *Recent Advances in Human Genetics*.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1 (telephone 0171-831 7723). List of events obtainable from above address.

Stockport Secular Group: Details of activities from the Secretary, Carl Pinel, 85 Hall Street, Offerton, Stockport SK1 4DE. Telephone: 0161 480 0732.

Sutton Humanist Group: Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Meetings 7.30pm for 8pm. Wednesday, June 14: Peter Heales: *David Hume - a Key Figure in the Development of Humanism*. Wednesday, July 12, 7.30pm for 8pm: Don Pincham: *The Case for the Disestablishment of the Church of England*.

Teesside Humanist Group: Friends Meeting House, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees. Meetings second Wednesday of each month. Contact J Cole on 01642 559418 or R Wood 01740 650861 or write to J Cole, 94 High Street, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees.

Tyneside Humanist Group: Meets on third Thursday of each month (except August), starting 6.45pm in the Literary and Philosophical Society building, Westgate Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. June 22: Harry Clark: *Environment Issues*. July 20: David Boulton, *Sea of Faith: Humanism in the Churches*. September 21: Freddie Everett: *David Hume, Philosopher, 1722-76*.

Ulster Humanist Association: Meets second Thursday of every month, Regency Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast BT7. Details: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE.

Worthing Humanist Group: Information: Mike Sargent, 01903 239823.



DOWN TO EARTH

with Bill McIlroy



Quickstep to Sabbath rationality

ONE hesitates – but only momentarily – before kicking a sabbatarian when he is down. And John Roberts, general secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society, is on the canvas. Already weakened by a series of painful blows like the Sunday Trading Act and the now general practice of Sunday non-observance, the champion of "our Lord and His Day" has been flogged by a cruel punch delivered by Michael Forsyth, the Home Office Minister.

Mr Forsyth, an implacable opponent of petty restrictions on Sunday recreation, has brought forward plans to abolish the ban on admission charges to public dances on the Sabbath. And, as a seasonal bonus, the reform will take effect in time for Christmas Eve and New Year Eve, which this year fall on Sunday.

A Sunday Observance Act had been on the Statute Book for more than a century when Anglican evangelicals pressed for and secured the Act of 1780. Their aim was to abolish, or at least seriously curtail, entertainment and recreational activities on "the Lord's Day." Under the 215-year-old Act, it is illegal to charge for admission to a Sunday hop, be it a flashy disco or a sedate tea dance at a pensioners' club.

If the truth were known, Mr Roberts and his

happy band probably regard dancing as worldly and sinful on any day of the week. But even worse, according to the LDOS secretary, taking your partner on Sunday undermines "our great heritage as a nation... a backbone of our cultural life."

Furthermore, he warns, "we lose the holiness of Sunday at our peril." Sunday freedom has allegedly led to an increase in crime and immorality, delinquency and the destruction of family life. If only we could return to the Victorian Sunday of long sermons and longer faces.

It is quite understandable that John Roberts should be fearful. He took over the LDOS secretaryship as the organisation entered a state of terminal decline. It was already ignored by mainstream churches, and now even The One Above has turned a deaf ear to prayerful appeals on behalf of the sabbatarian cause.

The careers of other indefatigable upholders of "the holiness of Sunday" – "Misery" Martin and Harold Legerton come to mind – were success stories of a kind. John Roberts, by contrast, is ministering to the LDOS on its death-bed. It is passing away, unmourned even by its ever-so-grand younger cousin, the Keep Sunday Special Campaign.

Freethinkers have been in the vanguard of a long struggle for people's freedom to observe Sunday as they wish. It has been a hard slog. When Charles Bradlaugh and his colleagues formed the National Sunday League in 1855 to combat repressive sabbatarianism, they undertook a formidable task. On this and other social issues, they prepared the ground for reform. We benefit from their endeavours.

Sowing the seeds of doubt

UNLIKE political party canvassers, who appear only before an election, Jehovah's Witnesses turn up at any time. They work in pairs, a veteran of the doorstep accompanied by a slightly apprehensive novice. Their opening gambit is usually an inane question like "would you like to see all the world's problems solved?" or "do you think there is too much crime and violence?" The temptation to say "no" is at times almost irresistible.

A recent encounter with two Witnesses at my garden gate is a case in point. The ladies were obviously accustomed to polite indifference or a "not today, thank you" response to the proffered copy of *The Watchtower*. So they were somewhat taken aback when their glib assertions were challenged.

A confession of atheism on my part caused the saccharine smiles to disappear. One pilgrim turned slightly pale; her embarrassed companion looked away and affected keen interest in a passing cat.

Realising that she was getting nowhere with standard claims about creation and the existence of her god, the senior Witness became a bit stropic and changed tack. "How can you look at that beautiful garden and say there is no God?" she demanded. "Everything is created by God."

Created by God, indeed! Remembering many back-breaking hours "down to earth" (literally) planting and weeding, one was nearly provoked into saying "sod off!" But the nerve of the woman left me in the unusual state of being quite speechless.

Tories get the needle

WHEN John Major delivered his "Back to Basics" proclamation to the Tory pure in heart at their 1993 conference, he did not expect it to backfire within a matter of weeks. But soon his Government was up to its ears in embarrassment over Ministers' sexual shenanaghens and financial trickery. And last month came another devastating blow, when Dr Clive Froggatt was convicted on drug offences by Bristol Crown Court.

Dr Froggatt was Margaret Thatcher's medical attendant at party conferences. As adviser to five Health Secretaries, including Virginia Bottomley, he was a keen privatiser who played a key role in the Tories' onslaught on the National Health Service.

During this time, Dr Froggatt was a heroin addict and cannabis-user on and off for nearly 30 years. Any suggestion that the use of cannabis should be decriminalised has always been greeted by a storm of ridicule and abuse in Tory circles. Many young people have a criminal record because they were in possession of the weed.

The Tories' favourite physician was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment. The sentence was suspended for two years. Dr Froggatt is neither young nor black-skinned.

Psst! Wanna buy Brian Boru's Rolls-Royce?

RADICALLY inclined friends look askance when one praises the very conservative *Daily Telegraph*. But pro-Tory editorials and Auberon Waugh's sour outpourings are atoned for by a comprehensive news coverage and the excellent Peterborough column of mordant comment and "unconsidered trifles."

An item in a recent column caught the attention.

A growing number of visitors to Ireland has led to an increase in vendors of souvenirs. Knowing the market for trumpery, they are particularly enterprising at Catholic shrines. For example, one group of pious American tourists visited Croagh Patrick in County Mayo. Their host, a Belfast priest, reported that they came away as the proud possessors of "genuine, signed photographs of St Patrick."

More! More!

YOU'RE TELLING US!

The 'faith' of atheists

ALAN R BAILEY (May letters): You seem to have gotten hold of the wrong stick, never mind the wrong end. Where do I assert that anyone should adopt "my truth"? Certainly you are entitled to claim there is no God, based on what you perceive as lack of evidence "for God," but this is as much of an assumption as the reverse case.

As you say, the only truth for any individual is in what we experience and understand. This is a subjective process. Facts are objective.

Without objective universal proof (for example, God found...Dead) the individual *accepts* proof according to their – subjective – experience and understanding. This holds whether the decision is to believe in God or not, making both matters of "faith." Failure to prove a positive (for example, that God exists) provides no more grounds for assuming the negative than failure to prove the negative does for assuming the positive.

I agree it is arrogant and insulting to assume "our truth" must apply to all. But many professed Atheists do exactly that, while simultaneously decrying religionists for doing the same. That an individual be convinced by what they see as "evidence" does not necessarily make their subjective belief incontrovertible fact – hence why I present mine as opinion, not assertion.

To quote Sir Leslie Stephen, 1832-1904, (extract lifted from *The Skeptic*, number 33): "...The race collectively is Agnostic, whatever may be the case with individuals...There is no plainer fact in history than the fact that hitherto no knowledge has been attained. There is not a single 'proof' of theology of which the negative has not been maintained as vigorously as the affirmative..."

Z Finkelstein: You'll be telling me there's no Father Christmas next.

Does my not (often) seeing little Green Men or Pink Elephants mean others don't? To an alcoholic, the DTs are plenty real. To a Christian, God is real. In that sense my agnosticism *does* extend that far. By the way, I didn't initiate the convention of putting a capital "G" in God, much less assuming God to be "He," and see no reason why Pink Elephants should not be similarly honoured.

Incidentally, I am advised that, technically, Atheism is about not believing in God, and not about believing there is no God. It is *absence* of belief, not *negative* belief. Thus I still contend that the stance of the "popular Atheist" who claims there is no God is as much a matter of faith as the religious dogmatist who claims God exists.

S J GULA
Leicester

HAVING returned to *The Freethinker* after a few years' absence, I was puzzled by the letter from S J Gula of Leicester (April). Surely he or she put it in the wrong envelope – shouldn't it

have appeared in the *Catholic Herald* or similar? If S J Gula cares to write to me I'll guarantee a reply.

DONALD WOOD
Powys

S J GULA starts his letter (April) with the assertion that "surely, atheism is as much a matter of faith as religion" and, making doubly sure, "atheists are every bit as much 'believers' as their religious counterparts, often showing the same missionary zeal in their endeavours to refute all but their own brand of bigotry." As unfair accusations go, this one must win a few prizes.

Is Mr Gula really saying that it is perfectly all right for any cult or religious sect to assail society with a set of totally unsubstantiated statements and actions without there being a right by reluctant recipients to utter a few words or actions in protest and without them being branded bigots of equal status? Is Salman Rushdie a bigot because he protests against the actions of Islam? Must Humanists/Atheists sit back without a murmur while their children are subjected to religious indoctrination in schools?

What S J Gula, and others like him, must take on board is that atheists *did not start it*. Atheism is merely a rejection of theism. It is not a belief, *it is the absence of belief*. Atheists do not have to prove anything. We are merely saying there is no evidence for your assertions – until such time that there is, we do not accept them and in the meantime leave us alone. I think that much Mr Gula must allow us. Would that religionists be as tolerant!

TONY AKKERMANS
Leeds

S J GULA'S letter (April) is typical Christian nonsense. Faith, in this context, is belief in a superstition that defies all natural laws. Atheism says: "Prove it!" Where is the faith in that?

God is impossible. The Christian idea of God, which has continually needed to grow as man's knowledge has grown, has now reached impossible dimensions and powers. A little scientific knowledge, sadly lacking among Christians, tells you that God operates far beyond all limits of matter. If such a thing as God existed, *it could not be matter*, which means *it could not be part of, or even in, the Universe*. Such a God would be unknowable and undetectable to us, but by the same standards, we would be unknowable and undetectable by this God. Also, God would have *nothing* in common with us, being independent of everything we know, everything to do with matter.

There is no zeal among atheists. We are appalled that Christians call empty superstition "truth," that they insist that these lies be taught as truth to children, that others be forced to obey such rubbish. Like the people who fought against the idea of the "Flat Earth," we merely want to reveal the lies of religion, put it in its proper perspective.

Science does disprove God, as I demonstrated above. To say it proves nothing and that the truths are not absolute shows ignorance of science. The speed of light is absolute. Convert all the matter in the Universe into energy, and it would still not be enough to make a speck of dust go faster than light. Even God cannot do that. Sound cannot pass through a vacuum. Absolute zero is absolute zero. We keep getting nearer to it, but we cannot reach it. The truths *are* truths because they can be repeated by others, unlike the "truths" of Christianity, which are hearsay from people dead for almost 2,000 years and more.

S J Gula's ideas of God using evolution would have gotten him tortured to death only a few hundred years ago – by Christians. The Bible tells it like Creation was a series of magic tricks with the rest of the Universe created almost as an afterthought. There is no mention of the stages leading up to modern man from ape-like ancestors. In fact, nowhere do History and the Old Testament agree with each other.

Gula makes a number of statements regarding God for which there is no evidence. If God wants us to believe in "him," why leave us no evidence? Why leave a Bible that is so contradictory and muddled that there are more than 20,000 different versions of "the truth" (that is, Christian sects)?

Gula blames man for greed, stupidity and so on, yet if you believe in Gula's God, then there was only God in the beginning. *Everything* came from God, all good and all evil. It's like the officials who blame the computers for mistakes, when the computer is only reacting to mistakes fed into it or mistakes in its design.

Gula's god will go the way of all the other nonsense gods before it. Science ignores such claptrap, since there is no bigger waste of time than proving to the ignorant that they are ignorant, but we atheists are willing to try. The empty churches show our successes.

God was/is used to explain natural forces like sunshine, rain, thunder and the like, but, as science explains more and more, "God's Kingdom" gets ever smaller. It is a kingdom of ignorance which has no place in an educated mind.

MICHAEL HILL
Neufchâtel-en-Bray

Preparing for peace

ONCE again the quotation "If you desire peace, prepare for war" is trotted out (AG Stephens, March letters). Vegetius, the source of this saying, flourished in the 3rd Century AD, at a time when the Roman Empire, one of the most militaristic in history, was starting on its progressive decline and fall. Many historians believe that excessive spending on the army and their arms and activities was a major factor in this decline. By no means were many

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of their activities defensive; another Roman, the historian Tacitus, on some of the more militaristic earlier emperors, wrote that they "created a desert and call it peace." And so it has continued to this day.

While it is difficult not to accept the right to self-defence, both for individuals and nations, it is clear that the weapons to permit this can and will be used aggressively. It is essential to go beyond self-defence to the prevention of war, by drastically curbing the arms trade which provide the tools of war, and by eliminating the causes of war – fear, injustice and poverty.

If you want peace, prepare for peace.

(Dr) DOUGLAS HOLDSTOCK
Woking

Christianity without God

SEE that Dr Bourne (May letters) is back promulgating his absurd Christianity without a God, Resurrection or miracles. "Bourne-again Christianity" perhaps?

The Gospels minus the myths and fables would be a very slim volume, but Dr Bourne believes that what is left is a "great and valuable" ethic expounded by a "genius of immense power." This "genius" according to the Gospels has a fanatical hatred of those who don't accept his message and condemns them to eternal punishment. This ethic includes rejecting one's family for the same of the faith, giving everything you have to the poor, giving no thought for tomorrow, and in the 'thirties we would have "resist[ed] not evil" and allowed the Nazis to take us over.

Does Dr Bourne regard these ethical absurdities as great and valuable, or would he perform even more drastic surgery on the "beautiful literature of the Gospels"?

RAY McDOWELL
Co. Antrim

Animal rights

ROBERT Tee in his letter (May) claims that Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* does not advocate anything. Dawkins is indeed careful not to "preach" but his ideals are clear: he writes: "We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators" and "There is no reason why we should not rebel in a large way too."

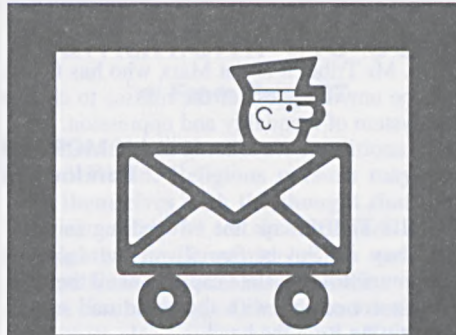
So we, as humans, can choose to behave morally, refusing to be indifferent to the suffering we are inflicting on other species. Robert Tee is actually going along with this to some extent when he advocates "good welfare practices."

A final thought to ponder. As a nation of

"animal lovers," why do we pamper and cosset our chosen pets while complacently consigning other similarly sentient animals, with equal need of simple comforts, to the horrors of modern factory farming? Animal apartheid?

HEATHER EVANS
Kenilworth

ROBERT Tee states that our ability to communicate with a race of superior beings would protect us from them abusing us in the same way we abuse animals, but what, then, is an animal doing when it cries in pain, or when it struggles to release itself from our hold? And



Preferably short and clearly-typed letters for publication should be sent to The Editor, The Freethinker, 24 Alder Avenue, Silcoates Park, Wakefield WF2 0TZ. Please include name and address (not necessarily for publication) and a telephone number.

why do vivisectionists have to use restraining devices?

It seems to me that, on a simple basic level, animals can communicate with us very well; it's just that with our "Lords of Creation" complex we feel arrogant enough to ignore what they are trying to convey to us, or consider it of no importance.

DAVE GODIN
Sheffield

'Easter message'

THIS is in reply to Derek Roberts' letter (May) concerning my "Easter Message" (April).

If I gave the impression that Jesus was both the "leader" of the Zealots and of the Essenes, may I now be more exact. Jesus was the Hasmonean (Maccabean) Messiah King of Israel, and as such he would certainly have been supported by the fanatically Messianic Zealots and others, including some Essenes.

Jesus was simply the figurehead and the authority in matters pertaining to the Jewish revolt against Roman rule and occupancy. I did not say, or intend to imply, that Jesus led the

Essenes – merely that some of them supported him and other Messianic visionaries who were definitely engaged in one of their periodic bids to restore the throne of the Maccabean Kings. (When Herod Antipas executed John the Baptist, Jesus was then probably the last of them).

If Jesus were a myth, how come he is mixed up in the affairs of: Pilate, Herod, Herod Antipas, John the Baptist etc? Were they mythological, too, or did some Gospel "editor" insert this phantom among them?

Just because the Gospels are now to a large extent a farrago of myth, Messianic hysteria and plain lies, this does not exclude them from the very real probability that they once reported one of the restoration attempts made by the Messiah Kings of Israel.

ROBERT SINCLAIR
Coventry

To the point

EVOLUTION: People out of monkeys.

RELIGION: Monkeys out of people.

DAVID YEULETT
Greenwich

Popes and rape

I AM very puzzled! Can you, or another reader, enlighten me? When the then Belgian territory in Africa was given self-government, in what is now Zaire, and the forces of the colonial power left, outrages against the remaining Belgians occurred. They included the rape of many nuns. Now, does my (admittedly ageing) memory serve me false? Was it not reported that the then Pope sanctioned abortions for the victims who were forced into pregnancy? If this is correct, why has it gone unmentioned in the reactions to the encyclical of the present Pontiff, who expressly forbids abortion – full stop.

Barbara Smoker's excellent article "A Matter of Life and Death" (May) made no mention of this matter, so what happened? Was this a misreport? Or what?

JESSIE BOYD
Gwent

Two questions

ANTONY Grey (May letters) quotes a definition of "homophobia" which includes the words "an irrational fear, revulsion and hatred of homosexuals..." Does this mean that there can be a rational fear, revulsion and hatred of homosexuals?

We live on a planet where resources are finite. Can Dan J Bye (May letters) explain how this planet can support an infinite increase of population?

S E PARKER
London W2

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Fascism past – and present

IN the May issue of *The Freethinker*, David Tribe takes me to task when he says that I can produce little evidence to support my assertion that Fascism has with some success been attempting to make a comeback.

He says Nazi groups in Germany and elsewhere are fragmented outfits with minuscule chances of coming to power. I don't know so much.

Nazi groups in Germany were successful in stopping a friendly football match between England and Germany, for fear of rioting, and Fascist-type rioters were successful in stopping a football match between England and the Irish Republic. Le Pen in France, although leading a minority party, cannot be ignored.

David Tribe says the Tory Government is not Fascist. I agree. But it has Fascist-like tendencies: it abolished the GLC when it couldn't win it by election, with a strong Socialist like Ken Livingstone in charge. It introduced a law of stop and search, giving the police powers they never had before.

As for Mosley, I can speak with some very first-hand experience from the 1930s, as a result of my opposition in anti-Fascist demonstrations, followed by frequent arrests, fines and imprisonment. Mosley was supported by a lot of Tory-like newspapers (the *Daily Mail* printed letters from readers on "Why I Like The Blackshirts"). The National Government of the 1930s was notorious for its support of Nazi Germany. It was only the strong opposition to Mosley by the masses which, in my opinion, stopped him from being successful. The Second World War probably had a lot to do with it, too.

David Tribe criticises Marx, whose predictions have not come true. But surely that is not Marx's fault, but rather the fault of the masses,

including the so-called advanced middle-class, who have failed to take advantage of many opportunities to change the system.

The 1945 Labour Government, with such a powerful majority, should, in my opinion, have turned the organs of oppression into organs of emancipation: they didn't do it.

In the 1926 General Strike, the entire Central Committee of the British Communist Party was arrested and imprisoned – not, Mr Tribe should notice, the non-Marxist parties' leadership.

As for the Civil War in Spain, it was the Communist Parties internationally who did everything possible to help the Spanish people: the non-Marxist parties didn't, in Britain or anywhere else.

No, Mr Tribe, it is not Marx who has failed, but the unwillingness of the masses to change the system of inequality and oppression.

J H MORTEN
London W9

DAVID TRIBE says the "dwindling faithful" now say it (Soviet Socialism and incipient Communism) was state capitalism all the time. If he's concerned with the same nail as me, he's hitting it on the head.

Yes, that is exactly what we in the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) have always said, and are still pointing out. Consistency is something we have exhibited since 1904 and, well, yes, it is quite gratifying to be right sometimes.

A R PITTS
Manchester

DAVID Tribe's Last Word closes the book on Fascism and Marxism. We live in neither a Fascist nor a Marxist state; we live in a capitalist nation-state which is part of a world dominated by capitalism (though the word is rarely used by modern politicians).

The question that inevitably arises is whether capitalism is for the good of us all, wholly or in part. No freethinker in possession of the facts can possibly answer the first part of the question in the affirmative. Therefore, the need

arises for an understanding of the workings of capitalism in order to ensure the changes, which are constantly taking place, are changes for the better and not changes which lead to the degradation of our quality of life.

Where would David Tribe direct our attention for a full understanding of the workings of capitalism, bearing in mind that the accepted economic/philosophic authorities have had their shortcomings exposed? Capitalism in the past has led us into world wars; will it do the same in the future? Without a proper understanding of its workings, it is not possible to ensure that changes are for the better and not the worse.

It seems to me that few of us do have an understanding of what capitalism does to us and to the world at large – or we would not be in the sorry state that we are in. Fellow human beings are being slaughtered without mercy in Bosnia, in Ruanda, in Chechnya; is this the best that capitalism can do? Closer to home, people are sleeping in cardboard boxes in the streets at the end of the 20th Century; is this capitalism at its best? If capitalism is the only system that remains, is it not our bounden duty to understand and control it?

R G SARGENT
London

• Turn to page 95

McIlroy pamphlet selling well

THE Sheffield Humanist Society publication *Foundations of Modern Humanism* is selling widely and well. When Bill McIlroy, former Editor of *The Freethinker*, gave a lecture of this title to the society in February, it was suggested that it should be published in pamphlet form. Barry Johnson, Chairman of the society, writes in an Introduction that "we felt it would fill a need for a straightforward introduction to Humanism based on the history of the movement."

Foundations of Modern Humanism is a 20-page, illustrated pamphlet. Its publication represents a service to the national movement; it would be useful if readers of *The Freethinker* were to order copies from the local library (ISBN 0 9525644 0 8).

Single copy: 75p plus 25p postage. Two copies £1.50 post free. Quantities (minimum six): 20 per cent discount, post free. Cheques payable to Sheffield Humanist Society and sent with order to 117 Springvale Road, Sheffield S6 3NT.

Fiona McCall memorial fund

STAFF at *The Guardian* have established the Fiona McCall memorial fund to help young people in the theatre. The move follows the death of Fiona, at the age of 32, on May 13. She was Arts Page secretary at the newspaper, whose office, said a moving obituary notice on May 17, was "silent with regret and misery" at the news of her death.

Fiona was the daughter of Colin and June McCall, to whom we extend our affectionate condolences. Colin is a former Editor of *The Freethinker* and a one-time General Secretary of the National Secular Society; he remains one of our journal's most respected and versatile contributors.

The obituary in *The Guardian* said:

"There are few pure people in the world. Fiona McCall was one of them. She was gentle and kind, funny and generous, a Marxist with a brilliant, non-dogmatic mind and a huge, quiet heart that caused her too much pain. She could have been a great critic – in film, theatre, art, opera, anything..."

In fact, Fiona had just agreed to start writing for the paper, in addition to her administrative duties, and her work was described in the obituary as "quite brilliant."

Donations to the Fiona McCall Fund should be sent c/o Claire Armitstead, Arts Editor, *The Guardian*, 119 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER.

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Contentious correspondents

LIKE Derek Roberts (May letters), I too read the April full-page article "How the son of the son of God was saved" (obviously, the editor's tongue-in-cheek headline) with amazement.

Instead of debunking the so-called Easter story as the fable it obviously is, author and

seer Robert Sinclair adds to it with a whole new mythology of his own.

He not only asserts "This man lived and was crucified and he emerged from his tomb – just as the Gospels say he did," but also, after suggesting the so-called Mary Magdalene was the wife of the so-called Jesus, he claims they had a son. Mercifully for readers of *The Freethinker*, he preserves us from the date of birth!

I also think that another contentious correspondent in the April issue, S J Gula, of Leicester, should bear in mind that evolving man invented all words and alphabets and that

the onus of proof that a coined noun relates to something in concrete existence in the universe rests with the person who coined or uses the noun.

If the three-letter noun "God" cannot be proved to relate to anything in concrete existence outside the brain, then it only relates to an abstract mental concept in the brain of the person who coined or uses that noun.

The abstract noun "science" derives from the Latin *scientia*, meaning knowledge.

ERNEST WAKEFIELD
Mansfield

OBITUARIES

GEORGE MEPHAM 1916-1995

WE regret to announce the death of George Mepham, secretary of Sutton Humanist Group. He collapsed on Tuesday, May 9, and died the following day. George was an energetic worker in the Humanist cause. With his wife, Marjorie, he founded the Sutton Humanist Group in 1955 and remained its moving force.

A long-time subscriber to *The Freethinker*, he was active for many years on the Executive Committee of the British Humanist Association. He was a member of the committee of Humanist Housing Association, serving as treasurer and vice-chairman. George was a founder of Humanist Holidays and enjoyed relaxing at the holiday centres.

George's ideals led him to work enthusiastically in the local community. He served on Sutton SACRE and was chairman of the local branch of the United Nations Association.

National Secular Society President Barbara Smoker officiated at the largely-attended funeral ceremony at North East Surrey Crematorium, Morden, on May 18.

Professor John Fremlin

DESCRIBED by Harry Stopes-Roe as "a humanist to be proud of," Birmingham Humanist Group member John Fremlin has died at the age of 82. Professor of Applied Radioactivity at the University of Birmingham, he had interests which, again in the words of Stopes-Roe, ranged widely over areas which were humanly important, and where a reasoned scientific approach was necessary.

John Fremlin's books include *Be Fruitful and Multiply and Power Production: What are the Risks?* – both skilfully written for a wide audience. The former title was ironic: the book rejected the Biblical injunction and demonstrated in vivid terms the necessity of population limitation, world-wide.

Humanism: the compassionate philosophy

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positive steps to ameliorate conditions in the Third World. Religious persons may console themselves with the thought that matters can safely be left in the hands of the Almighty. The Humanist has no such easy escape from personal responsibility.

The combination of chance and determinism must also have a profound effect upon our attitude to crime and punishment. The criminal must be recognised as the end-product of an unfortunate assortment of genes and environmental factors, and crime must be seen as in part the outcome of disadvantageous social arrangements – as, for example, unemployment and the deprivation of some of our inner-cities. This does not entail a milk-and-water attitude to crime. Dangerous criminals must be restrained and confined; sentences must be both deterrent and reformative, and sometimes compensatory; and the deterrent element may need to be manifestly disagreeable to deter the rest of us. But punishment for punishment's sake, for revenge or retribution, must be abandoned.

We have to accept with considerable compassion that the criminal serving a sentence

of life imprisonment is serving it in part to discourage us from following his example. Of course, it is easy to point out those individuals who have been able to rise above the circumstances of their lives, morally or economically. But the explanation for this lies in the latent mental ability of the individual to react to some fortuitous event in his life which motivated him to exploit his ability or to revise his moral outlook.

Penology itself is one of the most intractable of our social sciences, in that the reformative processes which we would wish to apply cannot easily be reconciled with any necessary deterrent effect. We may wish in many cases to help the under-privileged criminal with a measure of compassionate, positive discrimination, but the need to give a deterrent lesson to others frequently bars such action. Reform and deterrence are often incompatible, and individual need must give way to public interest.

Here, then, are some of the fundamental philosophical challenges which confront Humanists in the modern world – and which can only be met with ruthless intellectual effort and quite sophisticated self-sacrifice.

God 'wills' death of child leukæmia victim

THE parents of Tony Hays, who died of untreated leukæmia on November 4, have been charged with manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide, reports *Freethought Today* (USA).

The couple, from Brownsville, Oregon, belong to the Church of the First Born, which teaches followers not to seek medical treatment for sick children. The elders of the church anointed Tony's head with oil and prayed over him as he died from a form of leukæmia which is often successfully cured with chemotherapy.

According to the *Oregonian*, more than a dozen children remain in the care of followers

of this church, who insist they will never consult medical science if their children are taken ill, calling Tony's death "God's will."

The Church of the First Born is a denomination made up of about 100 congregations determined literally to obey the teachings of the New Testament.

The Children's Health Care Is A Legal Duty organisation says Tony was the 20th child to die in as many years after followers withheld treatment.

A neighbour told the *Oregonian* that Lloyd Hays wears a hearing-aid in his left ear and spectacles, yet refused to get his son medical attention.

The English Quislings who might have been

CELTS need not complain about the “English” in my title since they are thus exempted from this indictment of Fascism and treachery. Another review drew my attention to *In the Highest Degree Odious* by A W Brian Simpson (Clarendon Press, Oxford) which deals with the internment of suspected persons under the Defence Regulations in World War II. The review mentioned the “Nazi parsons of Lincolnshire,” in whose internment I was indirectly involved. Like the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) in World War I, the Defence Regulation 18B in 1940 suspended *habeas corpus*, enabling the authorities to imprison without trial. Oswald Mosley and his wife, and thousands of others were interned.

In 1938, just graduated from Cambridge, I was at home in Lincoln. I became increasingly irritated by anonymous death-threat postcards from the local Mosley Fascists. Accordingly, I wrote to the *Lincolnshire Echo* challenging them to a public debate. After some shilly-shallying, the challenge was accepted by a person from Nottingham, described as “East Midlands Regional Organiser.” I was not at that time a member of any political party. Consequently, my part in organising the meeting was a one-man show. To make arrangements, booking a hall, advertising and so on, I had to meet the local Fascists. Their chosen venue was Whitton’s Wine Bar near the High Street level-crossing. Their only articulate spokesman was a young man called Greaves. The meeting, in the Old Co-operative Hall, was successful: 300 people attended, and I believe I dealt adequately with my Nottingham opponent.

My indirect involvement with the internment of the Nazis relates to what happened to Greaves in the following year, 1939. A General Election was due not later than 1940 and would have taken place but for the war. Mosley arranged a conference in Grantham to select prospective Fascist candidates for all the East Midlands. Greaves, summoned to the conference, was told that he was to be the candidate for Grantham. Greaves demurred, but Mosley declared: “You will take orders!” Instead, Greaves resigned, taking with him a book of names and addresses.

Mosley had copied Hitler in making a dual appeal – to the rank-and-file on the one hand, and to wealthy secret supporters on the other. A wealthy man himself, his practice was to

LAST WORD

by Karl Heath



● **Oswald Mosley – friends in high places?** (Picture: Hulton Deutsch Collection)

book private dining-rooms in the best hotels in provincial towns, inviting local Establishment figures to dine at his expense. Mosley would then suggest that his guests should become secret financial supporters. In Lincoln, it was The Saracen’s Head, long demolished. It was Greaves’ responsibility to collect the secret subscriptions. In 1940, Greaves handed over his book to the police – which resulted in the internment of a surprising number of Lincolnshire people. The “Nazi parsons” included a known Fascist, the Rev Nye, Vicar of Scampton, who was also chaplain at the large RAF bomber base nearby. Another was the Vicar of Wragby, the Rev Vivian Thomas. But Brian Simpson does not mention all the county squirearchy – the hunting, shooting, fishing, hunt ball Establishment types who were rounded-up.

Yet, were these Mosleyites the likely Quislings? In the countries Hitler occupied, loathsome creatures crawled from under the stones to serve the Nazis. The Quislings did not come from the working class, but from the Establishment élite who put privilege, power and profit before patriotism. Would Britain

have been different? Who might the Quislings have been? I believe we should look higher than the Mosley rabble – indeed, to the highest levels of British Government.

In 1940, when I was a young British Expeditionary Force soldier in France, I was thrilled to hear that Neville Chamberlain had been forced to resign, to be replaced by Winston Churchill Coalition Government. With no love for the *Tory* Churchill, I admired the resignation of Churchill who had opposed the appeasement of Hitler by Baldwin and Chamberlain. In 1935, they had given Hitler unilateral permission to build a navy. The keels of the *Schenck*, *Horst* and the *Gneisenau* were laid – and hundreds of British sailors were to lose their lives at the hands of these commerce-raiders. In 1938, the Tories connived with Hitler in the Munich betrayal. When, against their instincts, they found themselves at war with Nazi Germany, they spent the “phoney war” period, 1939-40 trying to wriggle out of it. Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, seemed active in seeking a deal with Hitler. To this day, we still do not know why a party of British diplomats vanished near the Dutch frontier with Germany.

Churchill stopped the rot. He put an end to the shameful story of Tory support for the Nazis – the Tory MPs in the Anglo-German Fellowship and the more sinister Link organisation, the Cliveden Set, and those who supped with Ribbentrop and drank his champagne. These were the potential traitors who might have become Hitler’s lackeys in occupied Britain. No depth of contempt and disgust can be withheld from those who wrapped themselves in the Union Jack, and yet, with total greed, considered only their own upper class instincts.

It is outrageous that Burgess, Maclean, Philby and Blunt should be called traitors. They passed on secrets to our ally, the Soviet Union. The so-called Fifth Man, Cairncross, probably helped to win the war for us. When Hitler, in desperation, planned a last massive offensive to destroy the Red Army in 1943, an attack in the Kursk salient which became the greatest tank battle in history, the British Government, for some reason, failed to pass on to the Russians vital intelligence about German preparations and troop dispositions. Cairncross supplied the information and changed the course of history. After Kursk, the Nazis in Russia moved only one way – retreat.

Traitors? Those who supported our ally, the Soviet Union? Or those who, from 1933, collaborated with the Fascist enemy, Nazi Germany?