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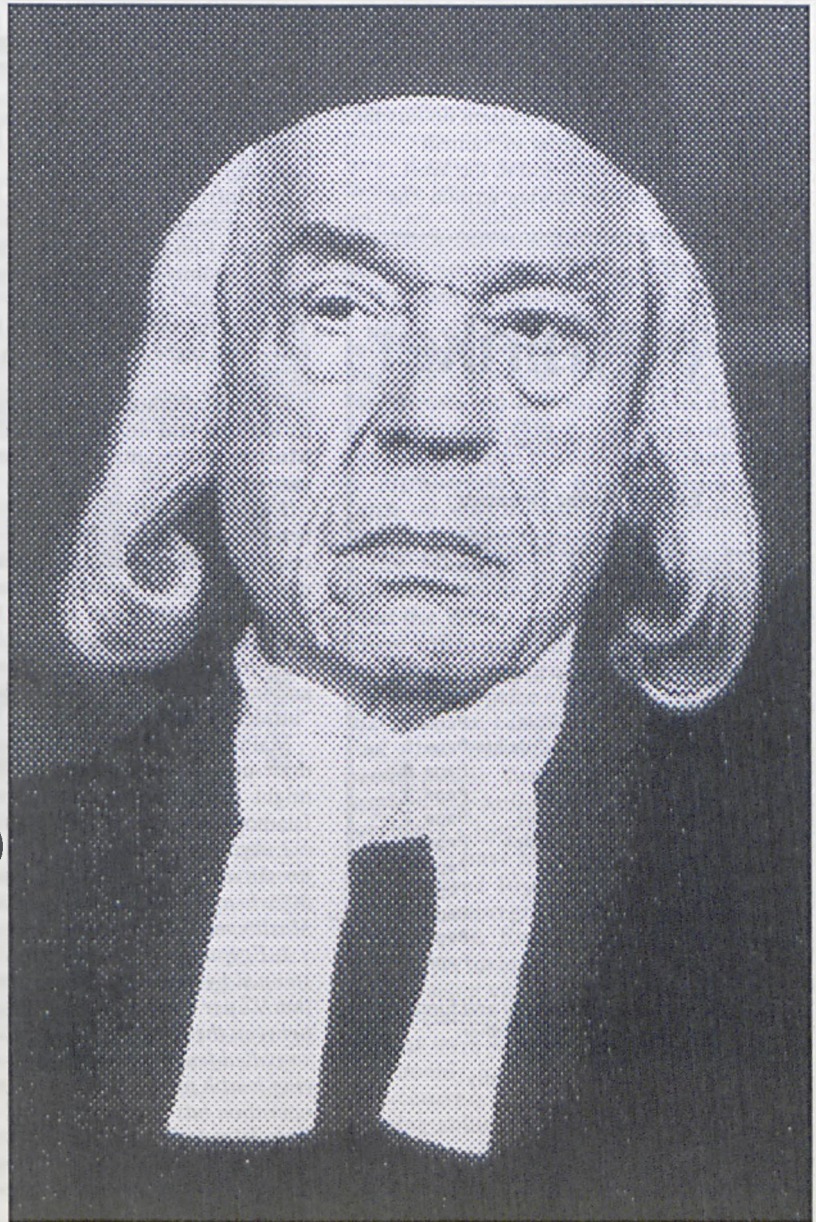
The Freethinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

Vol 117 No 4

April 1997

WHEN WILL WE EVER LEARN?



Terry Sanderson reviews
The Crucible on Page 5
– and draws startling
parallels between
17th Century America
and 1997 Britain.

● Brilliant actor Paul Scofield plays Judge Danforth, the magistrate who presides over the Salem witch trials in the film version of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.



**Run, Rabbi, run:
Split in British
Jewry - Anna
Freeman Page 11**

**Hello Dolly:
Barbara Smoker
on the cloning
debate - Page 3**

**Islamophobia:
new British
disease? Peter
Brearey - Page 2**

Up Front

Old ideas spark new affliction

A CONSULTATION paper prepared by a commission of academics and church-people for the Runnymede Trust has identified seven distinguishing "tell-tale features" of a new British disease: Islamophobia.

How appropriate that this painfully liberal document should have appeared in the very month that the mad and mangy mullahs increased to two-and-a-half million dollars the blood-money for the murder of Salman Rushdie (who is remembered in the West Riding not so much for having written *The*

Satanic Verses as for having experienced its reduction to shreds of carbon on the streets of Bradford).

The paper lists the features of the new malady:

(1) Islam is seen as monolithic, unchanging and intolerant of pluralism and dispute.

(2) Muslim culture is seen as wholly different from other cultures – for example, Muslims mistreat women and are fundamentalist in their interpretation of scriptures.

(3) Islam is often seen as implacably threatening – a likely successor to Nazism and Communism.

(4) Islam's adherents use their faith mainly for political purposes, and for strategic and military advantage.

(5) Hatred of Islam is often mixed with racist opposition to Asian immigration and its impact on indigenous British culture.

(6) Muslims have "important perspectives and insights" to contribute to debates about Western liberalism, modernity and secularism – but these are frequently dismissed out of hand.

(7) "Islamophobia" is becoming accepted as natural and unproblematic, and anti-Muslim sentiments are increasingly respectable.

The trouble with this sort of "don't let's be beastly" approach is that many – although of course not all – Muslims appear increasingly determined to be beastly to others who don't share or knuckle under to their faith.

Mutual tolerance requires mutual respect; but a lot of Muslims clearly despise the values and traditions of those whom they regard as "infidels".

Mainly from *Associated Press* reports, let us draw-up our own seven events of the sort which might well have contributed to the onset of Islamophobia (I have enough material for 70):

1. *Anti-Christian riots erupted in Indonesia for the third time in four months on January 30, when four churches were burned by Muslim mobs in the city of Rengasdenklok.*

2. *Egyptian Public Health authorities were stunned by a recent national survey showing that 97 per cent of married Egyptian women between the ages of 15 and 49 had undergone so-called female circumcision; a decree barring health professionals from performing the operation has encountered stiff opposition from Islamic fanatics who defend the practice as medically necessary to "protect women from the consequences of excessive sexual desire."*

3. *A couple caught in adultery were sentenced to death by stoning by the Taliban religious movement, which has replaced the Communist government in much of Afghanistan. Thousands of spectators crowded near a Kandahar mosque to watch as Taliban fighters hurled stones at the condemned couple.*

4. *Algerian Muslim fanatics told President Chirac that they would continue their terror campaign to "destroy your country" (The Times, December 26).*

5. *More than 1,000 people have been killed during a four-year insurgency to overthrow the Syrian Government and impose Islamic rule.*

6. *The Algerian government reported in December that a group claiming to be Islamic*

militants massacred 28 villagers in Ain Defla during a two-hour rampage; more than 60,000 people have been killed in Algeria by Islamic militants.

7. *Ten Coptic Christians were killed and five others wounded at a church in southern Egypt when suspected Muslim extremists opened fire with automatic rifles on February 12.*

Readers are free to amuse themselves by matching the appropriate one of my seven features to a suitable example of Runnymede's symptoms of the new affliction.

A phobia is defined as an abnormal and irrational fear or dread. However, in the case of Islamophobia, there is, as I have shown, a good deal of solid evidence to explain at least its first four "tell-tale features", which is not the product of paranoid delusion.

Will the Runnymede Trust condemn the horrors I have noted, to help us take its consultation paper seriously? Will the "Muslim Parliament" in this country reject these occurrences as un-Islamic, so that we may begin the cure for Islamophobia? It would be a start.

Of course, it could be argued by our liberals that these atrocities were perpetrated "abroad", and that there is some important qualitative difference between British Islam and the other Islams. But wouldn't our acceptance of this view compel us to grant home-based European Christians immunity from criticism for the outrages perpetrated by the Crusaders, the *Conquistadors*, and, especially, the missionaries who trailed their slime across Africa and other benighted regions?

No Secular Humanist will condone racist objections to immigrants (Point 5), but their cultural characteristics cannot be ignored: "In 1980, two Birmingham sisters were sold as teenage brides to the Yemen," recalled *The Observer* on March 9. "One escaped, leaving her son behind; the other is still there, unwilling to abandon her children." And the father who sent the girls to the Yemen? "This is my family," he says. "This is my culture. I am the father and I give my consent – and that is the end of the story. That is the best way." Is this the sort of "cultural attitude" which Runnymede would have us respect? Are we not entitled to regret that, having almost eradicated Christianity's hegemony over daily life in the UK, we now see another sect imposing its dead hand on sections of the population?

The authors of the paper favour the extension of the blasphemy laws to cover the Muslim religion and, presumably, would tolerate, with suitably bleeding hearts, *The Freethinker* Editor and his infidel associates being punished for daring to question the desirability of a religion-based "culture" which, *inter alia*, locks-up in a Bangladesh jail a British Muslim and her husband for daring to marry against the wishes of her father (*The Observer*, March 16).

The paper's Point 6 may well be true – but British Muslim perspectives and insights into such matters as the Rushdie *fatwa* have not in the main been encouraging for those of us who set store by tolerance and pluralism.

Point 7 is just a consequence of the failure of nearly everybody concerned – and, not least, the authors of the Runnymede paper – to face up to the crunch points at which Western and Islamic values do conflict, and cannot be reconciled by a syrupy fudge of emollient words.

Peter Brearey

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BARBARA SMOKER looks at the cloning debate – and counsels against hysteria

EAT a clone most days for breakfast. No, not a lamb – that just shows how the media fill your mind: what I mean is a fried tomato. Artificial cloning of fruit and vegetables is ages old, and natural animal cloning, including humans, is older still. We call natural clones identical twins, identical triplets, and so on. Centuries ago they were killed at birth, but no one fears them today.

However, the first successful artificial cloning from an adult mammal which was achieved last year by Dr Ian Wilmut and his team at the Roslin Institute in Scotland, with the exact reproduction of a ewe-lamb, is a stupendous historic breakthrough. If the scientists are “playing God”, at least it gives the phrase “Lamb of God” a meaning it never had before.

When the news broke on February 23, the animal – jokingly named Dolly by the geneticists, after Dolly Parton, because the cloning tissue had been taken from a mammary gland – was given full celebrity treatment, the favourite newspaper heading and caption being “Hello Dolly!” But the jocularity was combined with sensationalism and alarm bells concerning the possibility of artificial human cloning – which has an unsettling effect on religious superstition. A cloned ewe is one thing – but what about another you?

During the thousands of attempts made to clone mammals, it was found that it is technically easier to clone sheep than mice and that human beings would come halfway between the two. So it is quite feasible for humans to be artificially cloned in the near future: though not by the hundred, as envisaged in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, for that would require thousands of surrogate mothers. And what would be the point? Far more important than cloning complete human embryos will be cloning parts of the body for surgical treatment. Human skin is already propagated in culture for skin grafts; farm animals produce genetically engineered milk for human medicine; other animals are used as organ-donors for human transplants. And the cloning technology offers the best chance yet of combating cancer and various genetic diseases.

A few arrogant, narcissistic, and extremely wealthy people might order one or two replicas of themselves – reminiscent of the doctrine that God made us in his own image – but no one would be harmed by that; except perhaps the clones themselves, who would need to be protected from the sort of freak status that traumatised the childhood of the Dionne Quins 60 years ago. The idea that a complete clone might be developed to maturity simply as a store for matching spare-part surgery is of the stuff of horror-stories, and it is unimaginable that teams of embryologists and surgeons would ever be willing to go along with this form of human sacrifice, or be allowed to do so.

The possibility of using frozen tissue for cloning has been sensationalised as the “nightmare scenario” of “raising people from the dead”. In fact, Dolly’s biological mother/twin was already dead when Dolly was conceived. But even if a dead person were cloned, the living result would not be the same person, any more than identical

twins are the same person. Indeed, an artificially cloned human would grow up less like his/her sole biological parent than identical twins who have been separated at birth are alike – for, though genetically identical, they will have been separated not just by distance but also by time and events and the evolution of knowledge.

Christians who maintain that a unique immortal soul is present in a human zygote from the moment of conception are bothered about God having to create new souls for every human clone – but they ought to have been bothered about this long ago, for not only do natural identical twins divide from a single zygote, but also they sometimes merge again. Does God create an additional soul at the moment of division? And what does he do if the two embryos then merge again to become a single person? The feeling of many believers is that when it happens naturally, that is up to God, but if we interfere with conception we are responsible.

On February 26, the Vatican predictably called for a worldwide ban on human cloning on theological grounds, and an article in the Vatican newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, asserted that it is “not acceptable because it contradicts the creative plan of

Hello Dolly!

God ... it offends the dignity of the person and of marriage”. Catholicism is manifestly privy to “the creative plan of God”, as well as being the self-appointed preserver of marriage. And, of course, it clones its own “flock”. It insists that human beings have a right to be born in the “natural” way – but stillbirths, neonatal deaths, and maternal deaths, were far more common when we simply left obstetrics to nature. “Natural” is not a synonym for good.

The Catholic MP David Alton, babbling about “the sanctity of human life”, tabled a Commons motion on February 27, calling for a public debate on cloning. The matter should certainly be open to the widest possible public debate, but on the basis of reason and situational ethics, not of theology and misinformation. The aim should not be to ban research, which offers opportunities that are awe-inspiring rather than threatening, but to establish a continuous process of cautious (though not over-cautious) international monitoring. The main safeguard must be openness, greater access to advances in scientific knowledge, and education towards more public understanding of the real issues.

Even one of the greatest living moral thinkers among scientists, Joseph Rotblat, has come out strongly against cloning, on the grounds that it impedes diversity and that diversity is the very stuff of evolution. But

the diversity on which evolution depends is governed by natural selection, which human civilisation has gradually replaced by artificial selection – thus creating dogs, domestic cats, and farm animals. Cloning is simply one method of artificial selection, from a permanently diverse gene pool.

The media have screamed alarm – especially in America and Germany. One reason for the American hysteria is doubtless chagrin that the breakthrough they themselves had been trying for was made in Britain, while the German hysteria is associated with memories of the Nazi régime. But our efforts should be directed at preventing such a dictatorship ever arising again, not at trying to curb scientific advance. Anyway, the gene genie can never be put back in the bottle now; it must simply be made to serve global human welfare, and never be allowed to serve an evil élite.

Though sperm is no longer strictly necessary for procreation, men may still be wanted for themselves – some of them, anyway!

Dolly’s surrogate mother gave birth, of course, to a newborn lamb, but because it was well grown and woolly by the time the cameramen got to it many people are under the impression that it was born adult, like the characters in the last act of Shaw’s *Back to Methuselah*. But scientists have yet to catch up with a method of artificial gestation, as in Shaw’s science fiction.

The Ministry of Agriculture has short-sightedly announced that it will no longer fund the Wilmut team for further research. There will be no dearth of commercial offers for practical applications of their technique – indeed, the price of shares in one company that got in an early bid has shot through the roof – but team-based pure research always needs public funding. Dolly’s birth has inspired the American owner of the wonder racehorse Cigar to apply for permission to attempt to have him cloned – because, since being retired to stud last October, he has failed to impregnate any of more than 20 brood-mares. Even artificial insemination, however, is forbidden in racehorse-breeding, so the racing authorities are hardly likely to permit cloning in the foreseeable future, and if Cigar were successfully cloned, they would presumably keep the clone off the world’s race-courses; but they could not prevent its running ability from being tested elsewhere.

The American Association of Equine Practitioners has suggested that “when the clones start to breed, they’ll bring out recessive traits ... you’ll open up some problems you don’t want to think about” – though in fact every racehorse in the world is descended from one particular Arab stallion, with no apparent deleterious effects. If a racehorse clone were indeed unable to breed true, that would be a setback with repercussions beyond the breeding of racehorses.

Dolly the lamb, having already made genetic history, will presumably be impregnated as soon as she is old enough, and the outcome will point to genetic possibilities for all animals, including humans. So we will know much more about it by the end of the century. And we must allow neither the religionists’ irrational fear of knowledge nor government parsimony to inhibit scientific research.



Down to Earth

with Colin McCall

Miller's tale of terror

AS HE watched the film of his play about the Salem witchcraft trials, *The Crucible*, taking shape, Arthur Miller recalled how he came to write it nearly 50 years ago. And he saw the "biting irony" of its being made by a Hollywood studio, "something unimaginable" in the days of the Committee on Un-American Activities.

"I remember those years", Miller continued, "they formed *The Crucible* skeleton – but I have lost the dead weight of the fear I had then" (*The Observer*, February 2).

He went on to describe a visit to Salem in Spring, 1952, and his reading of the transcripts of the notorious trials of 1692. When he walked the streets of the town by night, he said, "I could imagine my terror before a gaggle of young girls screaming somebody's spirit was chasing them".

It was a fascinating account, particularly valuable to the new audiences who will see the film (it is reviewed by Terry Sanderson on Page 5). But Miller was not quite right when he said that, in the 17th century, "the existence of witches was never questioned by the loftiest minds in Europe and America".

Rarely, perhaps, and almost never by religious writers. The Cambridge Platonists, for example, insisted on the belief in devils and witchcraft in their opposition to Thomas Hobbes. But for Hobbes it was a superstition and the practice of it was a fraud. Having noted the "ignorance of how to distinguish dreams and other strong fancies, from vision and sense ... and nowadays the opinion that rude people have of fairies, ghosts, and goblins; and the power of witches", he declared, "as for witches, I think not that their witchcraft is any real power, but yet that they are justly punished for the false beliefs they have, that they can do such mischief, joined with their purpose to do it if they can".

Not very humane, but consistent with Hobbes' condemnation of "crafty ambitious persons", who "abuse the simple people" by playing on their "superstitious fear of spirits".

Hobbes' lawyer friend, John Selden, expressed a similar disbelief.

Cardinal polish ...

IF PETER Stanford is right, a very serious constitutional change is taking place in England. The former Editor of the *Catholic Herald* and biographer of Basil Hume told the *Independent on Sunday* (January 5) that the Cardinal "has replaced the Archbishop of Canterbury as spiritual leader of the nation".

Past Roman Catholic leaders like Cardinal

Heenan were of Irish origin and "firebrands" who would make a lot of noise, but Hume is a member of the English establishment, and his views "are given a good deal more weight in Whitehall". As I quoted Stanford in this column in February, Hume will "go to see a minister privately first, and politicians know that making a public fuss is his ultimate threat".

I recount this after reading that he has done precisely this. "Following a letter and a personal visit from Cardinal Hume", Michael Howard has "now promised that the police will not be permitted" to bug the confessional "in any circumstances" (*The Guardian*, March 6).

I must say, at once, that I, too, oppose police bugging of the confessional, but it should not be the only place out-of-bounds to Inspector Knacker.

It is, however, the much broader issue that concerns me here: that the leader of the minority Roman Catholic Church should wield such influence – behind the scenes or in front – in a Protestant country.

It is good to know that, in spite of Cardinal Hume, more people now support abortion on demand than 17 years ago. A MORI poll carried out for the Birth Control Trust and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service found that 64 per cent of those questioned agreed that "abortion should be made legally available for those who want it" (*The Guardian*, February 28). That is 10 per cent up on 1980.

The figure rose to 90 per cent when the mother's life or health was threatened. The only percentage down on 1980 concerned abortion if the child would be mentally or physically handicapped (66 per cent against 84 per cent).

I don't suppose the news will deter Roman Catholic MP David Alton and his Movement for Christian Democracy but, as his fellow Liberal Democrat Sir David Steel remarked, plans by anti-abortionists to field General Election candidates would alienate the public and be unlikely to gain many votes.

Other election candidates should take heed.

Gone with the wind?

IN ANNOUNCING England's "Christian Heritage Year" with a fund of more than £20 million, Sir Jocelyn Stevens, Chairman of English Heritage and a member of the Church of England, said he detected a religious "stirring", a "spiritual breeze blowing through the trees, a spirit which we can see in the attitude of the clergy, who are full of energy and ideas" (*Daily Telegraph*, February 14).

He hoped that putting the churches "centre-stage" would induce more people to "visit our churches and cathedrals and then decide to pay regular visits".

What a hope! His announcement follows hot

on the heels of 1995 statistics showing the biggest decline in Anglican Sunday attendance for 20 years – 36,000 down on 1994.

Bubbling over

"*SACRA AQUA*", said Anita Roddick, Roman Catholic founder of the Body Shop. "This is my greatest spiritual breakthrough since I gave soap to the Kayapo Indians in the rainforest and found them lathering themselves in the river the next morning".

She was referring, tongue-in-cheek, to the service at Bradford Cathedral on February 16, when young "worshippers" anointed themselves with her firm's orange bubble bath, sipped drinks at cafe-style tables instead of pews, burned incense at a barbecue and sang hymns to jazz-funk music.

Full of energy and ideas, the Rev Dave Banbury, one of the two officiating priests, explained that the bubble bath was "to demonstrate that God wants the vibrancy and colour of Christian living [brought] into our often grey world". And Ms Roddick's brand had been chosen for its vivid colour and strong scent.

Now there's a new selling point – holy bubble bath!

Hitting the rite note?

ANDY HAWTHORNE, leader of the nine-piece Tribe band, also has ideas for boosting falling Church of England congregations (*The Guardian*, February 10). "I know if I put a sign outside a church saying Youth Service tonight", he said, "we'd get no new kids coming. But if we put video screens in and dancers and flashing lights and very loud music, we get 1,000".

A different sound from Sir Jocelyn's spiritual breeze but a tad more effective.

Dirty story

"GOD moves in a mysterious way ..." Or rather, human beings put a convenient supernatural gloss on natural happenings.

When *The Guardian's* Ronald Bergan asked former film star Kim Novack if she had withdrawn from Hollywood to marry a vet and study wildlife of her own free will (February 28), she preferred to "give God a lot of the credit for that".

She explained: "God made it very plain by causing a mud-slide to take my house away".

Which sounds as clear as mud to me.

Story of bigotry 'will always be topical'

WHEN Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* in 1953, he intended it as a commentary on the anti-Communist witch-hunts – inspired by the House Committee on Un-American Activities – which were to become most notorious after Senator Joseph McCarthy became chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

Since then, the play's theme – the manipulation of irrational fears for political ends – has attained a kind of universality. There has been no shortage of sexual, political and religious witch-hunting since the play was first produced. Now, director Nicholas Hytner has transferred the story to film, with a new screenplay by Arthur Miller.

Forget any idea you may have of this being a worthy, wordy school-study type of play. *The Crucible* is a powerful and gripping exploration of religious paranoia and its resulting mayhem. Set in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, the film portrays a community completely in the thrall of its religious leaders, who, in turn, are utterly convinced by primitive beliefs in which demons, witches and *incubi* are accepted facts of life.

A gang of teenage girls, stifled by the crushing piety of their elders, sneaks out at night to dance naked in the woods. One of the girls, Abigail Williams (played by Winona Ryder) has an obsession with a local farmer, John Proctor (Daniel Day-Lewis). They have had a sexual encounter which Proctor now regrets, but the girl is determined that she will take him from his wife.

In order to further this aim, Abigail drinks a "love potion" prepared by a West Indian servant, Tituba. But this foolish prank is discovered by the local priest and his cry of "witchcraft" quickly consumes the whole community.

In an effort to save herself, Abigail and the other girls begin pointing the finger at others, and soon a whole battalion of local women and men are plucked from their homes and imprisoned on suspicion of having truck with the Devil.

Realising the power she has over her credulous neighbours, Abigail begins using it to wreak revenge on those for whom she bears a grudge. Old scores are settled, arguments over land rights are finalised with an accusation of witchery. Terror is suddenly afoot as people are blamed for causing natural calamities, such as swine fever and infertility.

Inexorably, the accusations ensnare the wife of Abigail's reluctant lover, John Proctor. Daniel Day-Lewis's portrayal of Proctor is one of rugged decency. As the whole town is carried away on a tidal wave of irrational fears and hysterical accusations, Proctor remains unmoved, a voice of reason among the screams. His good sense shines like a beacon amid the uncontrollable victimisation of the elderly and inadequate.

"Let us blame ourselves and not the Devil,"



● Winona Ryder as Abigail and Daniel Day-Lewis as John Proctor in a scene from *The Crucible*

he says. He refuses to become part of what he sees as the stupidity and cruelty of his neighbours, and eventually he pays the price for this refusal. As the authorities – in the shape of Judge Danforth (Paul Scofield) – become involved, it is soon apparent that even the noblest and best educated of men can fall victim to religious frenzy.

The Crucible is a film that could have been made specifically for readers of *The Freethinker*. It skilfully explores many of the issues which concern Secularists, but it does so within the framework of a very human story and an entirely engrossing presentation. There are no simple stereotypes here. Judge Danforth seems to be completely deceived by the conniving Abigail and her accompanying chorus of "the afflicted". But he is also a wily old bird, not without humour and a sense of mischief. Paul Scofield suggests all kinds of conflicts which are never verbalised but are very apparent.

Terry Sanderson reviews the film version of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (Twentieth Century Fox)

Joan Allen, who plays John Proctor's wife, Elizabeth, gives a portrayal of amazing control. Her quiet courage and inviolable dignity in the face of the hurt occasioned by her husband's infidelity with a young girl has earned the actress an Oscar nomination.

By the end, when the hangman is busily engaged in breaking old women's necks, John Proctor is faced with a terrible choice: either to save himself or to speak the truth and end the madness. His decision leads the authorities to realise that they have been duped, and immediately the political cover-ups begin.

Nicholas Hytner, the director of the film, says: "The sad truth about this story is that it will always be topical. It speaks directly about the bigotry of religious fundamentalists across the globe, about communities torn apart by accusations of child abuse, about the rigid intellectual orthodoxies of college campuses. There

is no shortage of contemporary Salems ready to cry witchcraft."

These words rang depressingly true last month, when a 67-year old man called Francis Duffy was beaten up and covered in blue paint by a mob which had mistaken him for a convicted paedophile. Mr Duffy, who lives in a Manchester hostel, is suffering from dementia and is described as "frail". The attack followed newspaper reports which had named a convicted paedophile living in the area.

Worked up by the reports, local women distributed a photograph of the man. Poor old Francis Duffy had the misfortune to resemble the named offender.

While no one can convincingly make a case for the activities of paedophiles, there is something *Crucible*-like about the latest reports that a private British publisher intends to bring out a directory of known paedophiles. Some sources claim that it will contain not only the names of those who have been convicted, but also of those who are merely suspects.

Such tactics can only lead to more witch-hunts, sometimes targeting innocent people.

Paedophiles need to receive treatment and to be kept away from children. Hounding them in this way – like some kind of modern-day witches – will only drive them underground, where they will be more dangerous than ever.

We have only to look at what has happened, when unfounded accusations of "satanic child abuse" (often engendered by fringe religious groups) have led to children being taken into care, and their parents being branded child abusers. The ludicrous "satanic" hysteria has spread through official circles at a frightening pace. Police officers and otherwise intelligent and compassionate social workers have somehow come to believe – without a speck of corroborated evidence – that black magic rituals have been performed by their neighbours and friends on their own doorsteps.

At times like that, *The Crucible* should be mandatory viewing. If the film is not showing at a cinema near you, make sure you catch it when it comes out on video.

No place for spirit

IT MAY go back to the seventeenth century, as my Shorter Oxford Dictionary tells me, but the term *wellness* grates on me. It's apparently popular in America, though, especially in Wisconsin, where there is a National Wellness Institute at Stevens Point. And Donald B Ardell, Professor of Education at the University of Central Florida, is one of its leading advocates.

He wouldn't mind my preference for *well-being*; he constantly encourages the reader to take an independent line. It's an idea he's trying to get across: that people should spend more time pondering the meaning and purpose of their lives.

Not that he believes life has any inherent purpose; his approach is completely secular. A life-long search for meaning and purpose, which he abbreviates to M&P, can, he suggests, "stimulate, support, and guide you to an exceptionally healthy lifestyle".

He flirts with spirituality, a little uncomfortably, and quite unnecessarily. "As the wellness movement grew in influence and sophistication", he writes, "and as the scope of the concept grew well beyond the physical, the focus of attention shifted from the body ... to the 'spiritual' dimension". This was probably inevitable, he thinks, "since health in general and wellness in particular were always described as body, mind, and spirit propositions".

If that is the case, it was a mistake; physical and mental health are obviously desirable, but

***The Book of Wellness, a Secular Approach to Spirituality, Meaning & Purpose* by Daniel B Ardell. Prometheus Books. £19.50 cloth.**

Review: COLIN McCALL

there is no place for spirit: it is superfluous and quite meaningless. Secularists may, in his words, "want to address matters pertaining to the inner life", which might well involve the emotions, but doesn't imply anything spiritual.

It is surprising that Dr Ardell should bother with spirituality at all, even in his title, when he has no time for religion. True, he goes on to cite Tom Flynn who, in the *Secular Humanist Bulletin* (Fall 1994), suggested that America was awash in neospirituality, which he labelled "transcendental double-talk signifying nothing". And Ardell lists Flynn's "95 ways not to say spirit".

So, he opts for "secular spirituality", on which I will make no comment.

The second part of the book deals one-by-one with Ardell's 10 wellness propositions about meaning and purpose, and the various responses to them that he received from members of the National Wellness Institute.

The first two propositions set the tone: "1. Life is without inherent meaning; to be optimally well you must invest life with M&P; 2. It is better to reflect on possibilities than to adhere to dogmas and creeds". And the decalogue ends with the proposition that "the search for M&P should never end". Most of the intermediate

ones are unexceptional.

Wellness is not a religion, Ardell says. There are many zealots of all kinds who would love to give you an answer to the question, what is the meaning of life? "and take your money and your brain at the same time". Wellness isn't even pseudo-religious or metaphysical, it's just "a way of perceiving things, a mindset or philosophy", though obviously a non-metaphysical one. It is "simply a practical set of ideas for pursuing lifelong physical and psychological well-being in accord with one's changing potentials".

Ardell urges people "to think about and nourish their passions", and warns them not to fall for "psychic babble, ESP nonsense and anything of the kind that defies reason and science". And we can all say yes to that.

What seems more questionable is whether "one can experience wellness in the midst of any disease or disability". Wellness in illness? The most I think we can expect here is stoicism.

Life may not be nasty, brutish or meaningless, although it will be short, says Ardell, and he quotes the materialist George Santayana, that "There is no cure for birth and death, save to enjoy the interval". As I look around the world, however, I would add "as much as you can".

Dr Ardell himself provides a 25-point "M&P Existential Test", based on the principles of Secular Humanism as printed in the American journal *Free Inquiry*, with which, needless to say, I have no quibble. And I can say that, too, for the thesis on wellness, although the chatty Ardell style is not exactly to my taste. But, as he is given to ending chapters, "Cheers".

PAYING FOR OUR GREAT LEAP FORWARD

IN THE very best of causes, we have been spending a great deal of money.

This is a special appeal to all our readers – and not only to those who give regularly to our vital "fighting fund" – to help fill the chasm which has opened up in the current account.

● We at last have the technology to put *The Freethinker* on the Internet, not only making our secularist ideas – your secularist ideas – available to hundreds of thousands of new contacts but also enabling us to draw upon information from the world-wide "electronic village."

● We have an e-mail address, to be published shortly, which will greatly speed-up communications between ourselves and our contributors and supporters.

● We now possess a modem, which again will streamline our communications and reduce some of the actual drudgery associated with production of *The Freethinker*.

In addition to our joining the late 20th Century in this way, we have made a huge – and costly – marketing effort. Leaflets have gone out to 18,000 people, explaining what our atheist journal is all about and urging them to take out subscriptions.

Also, we are the middle of setting-up a

by The Editor

more efficient distribution system for the paper – and, again, this is costing money.

Think of what all of this means to the propagation of our view of the world – to the spread of atheism, rationalism, secularism, freethought, humanism. Think of the likely upsurge in our campaigns for voluntary euthanasia, abortion on request for all women, gay rights, freedom of expression, animal rights, superstition-free education, disestablishment ...

Breakthrough

We may be on the verge of a great breakthrough in the history of *The Freethinker* and the causes it advances. Be part of it by helping us to pay the bills. Please make a special effort. Please don't let us down.

We need a one-off boost of £2,000 to cover all this additional expense.

Making cheques payable to GWFoote & Company, please send as much as you can afford today to: Freethinker Appeal, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

For their vital contributions to the monthly appeal, many thanks to: R H Peirce, £23; C Pinel, J Ryan, £20 each; N Getty, G Lucas, £15 each; C Cotton, B Peacock, £13 each; A Bailey, H Barrett, A Benakis, G Bigley, N Blewitt, L Coddington, I Davidge, W Eaton, G Gibbard, B Hartley, W Johnston, M Kerr, D Lennie, A Negus, R Sinclair, A Stevens, N Thompson, R Tutton, L E West, D Yeulett (in memory of Dev), A Zakrzewski, £10 each; C Fletcher, N Gibbard, J Millichamp, £8 each; J Cass, N Collins, M Edwards, G J Meaden, L Millar, T Nattress, H Pugh, P Pullen, C Shrives, R Thomas, C Tott, M Ward, £5 each; C McNicoll, £3; L Georgiades, £2; A Nicholls, £1.

Total from February 24 to March 21: £371.00.

'Let us all remember him with happiness'

DEEP affection for the man and respect and gratitude for his work for the Freethought movement were the keynotes of a memorial meeting for Govind Narayan (Dev) Deodhekar, BA BSc LL B, held at Conway Hall on March 15.

As reported in the March issue of *The Freethinker*, Dev died in Muscat Oman on February 12 at the age of 77 – an event which caused “much sadness to his friends and colleagues,” said Bill McIlroy, who presided at the memorial meeting.

Bill, a former Editor of *The Freethinker* and one-time General Secretary of the National Secular Society, added that, although Dev had belonged to all the movement's main organisations, he had been most actively involved with the NSS: “Dev will always remain in my memory for his kindness, sociability, loyal friendship and unswerving commitment to the Secular Humanist cause.”

Jim Herrick, NSS Vice President and Editor of *New Humanist* and *International Humanist News*, noted: “His work as Treasurer of the Society was of inestimable value and it can certainly be said that the NSS would not be in the satisfactory financial state that it now is, if it had not been for his careful harbouring of our resources.”

Jim also emphasised that Dev had continued to support Humanist causes in India: “He was a life member of the Indian Secular Society and he established the Rationalist and Scientific Attitude Promotion Trust in Bombay, to which he gave financial assistance, and he also supported other groups such as the Streehitkarini for women and children in the slums of Bombay.”

NSS President Daniel O'Hara said: “We can truly say that he placed his unique gifts, dogged perseverance and cheerful sense of proportion at the service of the cause he believed in so deeply. He is remembered with much affection, and will be sorely missed.”

Former NSS Treasurer David J Williams said that as well as being Treasurer of the NSS, Dev also served as Managing Director of each of the two companies responsible for the publication of *The Freethinker* – Secular Society Limited and GWFootc & Company Limited, but: “To say that Dev was Treasurer of the NSS is to understate and undervalue the totality of his contribution to the Society in this office. For not only was Dev a conscientious, honest and competent steward of the Society's financial resources, but also he was effectively the Society's business and administrative manager over those many years ... Let us all remember him with happiness.”

In a message to the meeting, Peter Brearey, Editor of *The Freethinker*, said that Dev had been “a true revolutionary” who had actually risked his life for the cause of Indian independence, and also had a deep vein of humour: “When I think of him, I remember Dickens'

Dev's devotion to 'the best of causes' recalled

description of a Cheeryble brother – there never was such a clear, twinkling, honest, merry, happy eye as that.”

In their message, Keith Porteous Wood and Terry Sanderson, of the NSS and GALHA, spoke of Dev as having “selflessly contributed so much to our movement over so long,” and Joan Wimble, of Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, of which Dev was a member, said: “We remember him with respect and with love.”

The Rationalist Press Association's Nicolas Walter recalled: “I knew him for rather more than 20 years, and, although I often argued with him, I always respected his opinions, which were not only rational but sincere, and his attitude, which was always one of complete devo-

tion to what George Meredith called 'the best of causes'.”

Denis Cobell, Chairman of the NSS Council of Management, struck a practical note: “If we were to consider any form of living memorial, it should be based on his pioneering support for a scheme to enable those in sympathy with our aims, but not interested in active involvement, to have some form of 'one off' membership for a nominal sum – the purpose being to increase the numbers in our ranks, and thus indicate wider interest in our policies. It would be a shame if the whole idea were to die with Dev.”

A delightful programme of piano music for the memorial meeting was provided by Chris Findlay.

SPECIAL OFFER TO READERS OF *THE FREETHINKER*

The Publisher of *The Freethinker* is proud to be associated with the publication of Nicolas Walter's new book, *Humanism: What's in the Word*, which is reviewed by David Tribe on Page 8.

The book's cover price is £6, but readers of *The Freethinker* may obtain it for only £5 – including postage and packing. Special rates for bulk orders on application.

Send remittance and completed form to: Rationalist Press Association, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP. Cheques and POs should be made payable to RPA Ltd.

Please send me a copy of *Humanism: What's in the Word*. I enclose £5 cheque/PO/cash.

Name (block capitals).....

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IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO CUT YOUR COPY OF THE MAGAZINE, SEND REQUIRED INFORMATION ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER, INDICATING THAT YOU ARE A READER OF *THE FREETHINKER*.



IF THOUGHTS and emotions are the generators of actions, words are the generators of thoughts. Yet too often we see them as simply a means of communication and, like most dictionaries, then fail to notice how variegated and variable this function is.

Take "Humanism", as Nicolas Walter does in an important new book whose object is "to tell the story not of a tradition but of the words". The other word is "Humanist", which surprisingly surfaced in 15th Century Italy whereas its companion emerged as late as 18th Century Germany. Fortunately the author doesn't keep strictly to his object or this survey would have started in the 15th Century (AD), as in most small dictionaries and encyclopedias, and not the 5th Century BC, and would have excluded important 19th Century figures like Charles Bradlaugh and Robert Ingersoll.

Among its hundreds of quotations is one, for which I adduced some evidence, from *Nucleoethics: Ethics in Modern Society* (1972): "The fact that many people of widely differing world-views can lay claim to humanism reflects a complex history and an inherent vagueness." Now this claim has been vindicated, with all the evidence any student of the subject might desire.

Only those who have done archival research in historical journals and books, especially foreign-language ones, will know how difficult it often is to both access and process them. Though he may be called (as I have been) "pedantic" by sloppier authors and reviewers, Walter has cited the time, place and original language of first editions, title changes in later editions and "free" English translations. This is more than a service to scholarship; it reveals the impact of *Zeitgeist* and contemporary ideological baggage. And all this has been done felicitously, with no padding, hardly any factual, editorial or sub-editorial errors, no obscurities and no

FROM HOMARANISM TO HUMORISM ... NICO

Our use must be for such

Humanism: What's in the Word by Nicolas Walter. Rationalist Press Association with the British Humanist Association and the Secular Society Limited (GW Foote & Company), Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP. £6 or £7 by post.

ambiguities.

Some statistics may indicate the thoroughness of the project: according to my count, 67 synonyms for Humanism, including 11 from the same Latin root (simple "humanity" to bizarre "homaranism") and seven from the Greek equivalent, *anthropismos*; 27 antonyms; six prefixes and 83 adjectives qualifying Humanism.

We are reminded (if we ever knew) of the likely authors who first spoke of Humanists and Humanism; who first applied the terms as characteristic of the Renaissance; when they were first used as a journal or an organisational title or in their modern non-religious, philosophical sense; who, from different standpoints, were their unlikely supporters (Karl Barth, Joseph McCabe and HLMencken) and unlikely opponents (Stanton Coit, Ernst Haeckel and JMRobertson). Other interesting tidbits are chapter-and-verse for Karl Marx's first description of religion as "the Opium of the people" and his view of communism as "positive" or "practical" Humanism because it transcends private property as well as God, and such unlikely interwar phenomena as a *Hollywood Humanist* (1927-33) and Nazi Humanism.

A useful feature of the work is a progression of perceptive definitions of Humanism (or the bundle of attitudes to which the word was later applied). We begin with "intellectual" Humanism as in antiquity and the Renaissance, defined as "concerning our relationship with the world, and concerning our relationship with one another" and characterised in Greek and/or Latin culture, balance, intellectual curiosity, the pursuit of excellence and limited democracy. During the Enlightenment this narrowed or broadened

(depending on how you look at it) to embrace free enquiry, tolerance, a study of the natural world and empiricism. Finally we come to the modern freethought definition where "religion is replaced by philosophy, magic by science, God by Man, Divinity by Humanity – and Theism by Humanism", which rejects the superhuman and the supernatural.

This last/latest stage has known hyperbole and hype. In the 19th Century there were the pompous "religions of humanity" associated with Robert Owen (who gets scant mention), Auguste Comte and "utopian" French socialists. The 20th Century brought claims rather than communities: "new" Humanism "looks forward, creating its values as it progresses" (JA CF Auer); it is "the belief in the endless progressibility of mankind" (Cassius Keyser); "it claims to be the truth of human life and requires the adherence of all men" (Harold Blackham); and "the next century can and should be the humanistic century" (Paul Kurtz). While Walter is diplomatic about Ethical Union - Rationalist Press Association relations with the 1963-66 British Humanist Association, he records that "Blackham was later disappointed by the failure to turn British Humanism into a major national movement". But he observes that "it was he who was mainly responsible for the success of turning it into a movement at all", dedicates the book to him and quotes his definition of Humanism (the best philosophical one by far): "an assumption that man is on his own and this life is all and an assumption of responsibility for one's own life and for the life of mankind". It could have been recorded that Kurtz is also less optimistic today (*New Humanist*, December, 1996).

Does a work so admirable contain any other sins of commission and omission, how-

COLAS WALTER'S 'UNIQUE' NEW BOOK REVIEWED BY DAVID TRIBE

of Humanism 'good enough a good word'

ever venial? Inevitably, yes, in the estimation of opinionated reviewers. The text is almost Germanic in its use of initial capitals. I suppose "Humanism" is in order, though it leaves no scope to distinguish between unpretentious "humanism" and that brand of it which deifies Man as it reifies god.

An issue with a truly inevitable personal bias is the inclusion or exclusion of names. With 434 in the index, *Humanism* cannot be called niggardly. Neither, with Hitler and Mussolini mustered, can it be branded parochial or politically correct. There are, however, omissions of several names featuring in Wheeler's and McCabe's biographical dictionaries of freethinkers and rationalists respectively; though if Walter asserted the tag "Humanist" had never been hung around their necks I couldn't in most cases deny it. Also unrepresented are English divines, notably the three Johns: Colet (named in almost all reference material on Humanism), Colenso and Robinson. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, Inga Kichanova's compilation *Humanism, Atheism: Principles and Practice* (1967) and other writers connected with the journal *Science and Religion* might usefully have been mentioned. But only so much can fit in fewer than 100 pages.

Are there more general concerns? Again inevitably, yes. Despite its far-ranging contents, in its Preface, in "A Manifesto of Modern Humanism" at the back and in sundry references to "us", the work seems to be addressed to supporters of the publishers. This is unfortunate for two reasons. Firstly, because its author rightly associates himself with SHSwinn's "we certainly claim no proprietary right in the word Humanist" and "we welcome all to the Humanist name". Secondly, because a study so useful and – as Walter himself suggests – probably unique deserves a wider audience.

There's a further, related difficulty. It's stated, with apparent approval, that "most Humanists and most Existentialists have alike

doubted whether Existentialism is really a Humanism". Yet with so many brands of Humanism and almost as many brands of existentialism in circulation, can such distinctions validly be made? More importantly, the issue arises in one of the "seven points" that underlie the whole text. This is the paradox that "most of the people who are now considered as Humanists didn't call themselves Humanists, and many of the people who have called themselves Humanists aren't now considered as Humanists", juxtaposed with the inhibiting comment that "this study is mainly concerned with those people who did call themselves Humanists and with those ideas which were called Humanism at the time".

As Walter doesn't attempt to resolve this paradox, it may be presumptuous of me to try. But here goes. When I first read the book I accepted without further reflection its literally correct statement that "whereas *humanismus* didn't appear in Ancient or Medieval Latin, *anthrôpismos* did appear in ancient Greek". The Greek appearance, by the way, wasn't in the writings of Protagoras, whose "man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not" is generally regarded as the first expression of Humanism. Coming back to Humanism after an enforced absence, I suddenly thought: "Wait a bit – I don't recall any word in ancient Latin ending in *-ismus*." Dexter Hoyos, Associate Professor in Latin at the University of Sydney, confirmed that this was so and that *humanismus* probably emerged in Church Latin during the Reformation.

The Romans were practical people and kept abstract terms to a minimum. They didn't embrace, or practise, or study Humanism, but humanity (*humanitas*) or man (*homo*). To assert that, as many intellectuals did, made them Humanists with all that it implied (or didn't imply). Similarly, in expressing a preference for *studia humanitatis* over *studia divinitatis*, Renaissance scholars were pro-

claiming themselves Humanists, albeit in a largely academic sense. In reacting against the medieval scholastics, who slavishly followed Aristotle, and returning to Plato, they were rejecting a philosopher who in his own day demonstrated a scientific bent, in favour of one who was an armchair pontificator. This tendency grew with the bureaucratic growth of *litterae humaniores* in Oxbridge. It wasn't surprising that during the 17th to the early 19th Centuries the freethinkers / deists / libertins / philosophes / utilitarians of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment, who looked to the future instead of the past and reintroduced science (empiric in addition to Aristotle's observational and classificatory) to their world view, rejected a term appropriated by a powerful branch of science. Later in the 19th Century this domination was loosened by the democratisation and diversification of education, with the emergence of red-brick universities, technical colleges, mechanics' institutes, halls of science and the like, so that freethinkers felt free to seize Humanism and inject fresh meaning into it. This process accelerated in the 20th Century with its love of *isms*. As it's possible not to see the wood for the trees, so it's possible not to see the reality for the words.

With equal presumption, I now address another conundrum not, in my view, fully resolved in the text. This is the changing relation between Humanism and patriotism. While the early Renaissance was associated entirely with classical languages and hence with the "universal" Roman Church and Holy Roman Empire, the later Renaissance and Reformation were increasingly attracted to vernacular languages, if only to translate the Bible for the masses. This involved submerging regional dialects and class argot into national languages and in the process boosted national patriotism at the expense of

Women contemplating an abortion because they cannot afford to bring up a child are to be offered financial help in a controversial move by the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, reports *The Observer*, March 9. Cardinal Thomas Winning is certainly being generous with his flock's money; the question is – how well does he know his Bible? Scripture, insists **GENE KASMAR**, presents abortion as an ethical and moral alternative ...

How the 'holy' Bible sanctions abortion

THE "holy" Bible throughout condones, sanctions, supports, promotes, encourages, and tolerates abortion. Several typical biblical arguments favouring abortion might include the following:

First, in the interest of unravelling what the holy Bible says regarding abortion, consider the matter of "soul". The Hebrew *nephresh* and the Greek *psyche*, mistranslated hundreds of times throughout the King James Bible as "soul", correctly translate to "breath-of-life", "living creature", and simply "breath". It is equally applicable to humans and animals (see Numbers 31:28 and Eccl 3:19 for typical examples). Nowhere in the Bible can be found even a hint of the existence of a "soul" apart from the living creature itself. Nor is the *nephresh* or *psyche* anywhere therein claimed to be eternal or immortal. The conclusion is therefore inescapable that a foetus is not a human being until it takes its first "breath-of-life".

Second, the fact that a foetus is valued only as property and not as a person is illustrated in Exodus 21:22: "If men strive and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow; he shall be surely punished ... and he shall pay as the judges determine." Here the loss of the foetus is represented as a simple property loss resulting in a civil fine for the loss. (Note: The next verse mentioning "... life for life ..." only applies to any further mischief that then follows, and not to the loss of the woman's "fruit".)

Third, the Bible contains the "trial by ordeal" procedure for determining whether a pregnant wife had been unfaithful. In substance, the story has the suspicious husband delivering the poor woman before the priests to engage in a test of her faithfulness. The priest mixes a potion, applies a curse, and requires the woman drink the concoction. If she is guilty, her "... belly shall swell and her thigh shall fall out ...". If she is innocent, she shall be free and "... bear seed ..."(Numbers 5:11-31). In effect, her foetus would abort if she had been unfaithful. The resultant abortion is neither offensive nor punishable. Instead it is a divinely authorised process to abort the foetus that resulted from the suspected adultery. Absolutely no sanctity is placed upon nor granted the foetus.

Fourth, the fact that God supposedly created mankind in His own image (Genesis 2:7), and then is instrumental in permitting almost one-third of all conceived human foetuses be spontaneously aborted during the first trimester (ref. *Williams Obstetrics*), offers a measure of the importance the biblical God places on foetuses before they take their first "breath-of-life".

Fifth, the Bible clearly instructs its brother-



● Gene Kasmar

hood to count only children over one month old as part of the tribal and cultic community (Numbers 3:15-50, 26:62; Leviticus 27:1-6). Neither foetuses nor new-borns are considered viable human beings.

Sixth, the Bible continually authorises, tolerates, justifies, and encourages the killing of unborn and newly-born children, as in "King Menehem ... smote Tiphshah, and all that were within, and the coasts thereof ... and did dash their children, and rip up their women with child" (2 Kings 8:12). And revenge against Israel's enemies includes: "Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones" (Psalms 137:9; Nahum 3:10; Ezekiel 9:5-6), and "... have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children" (Isaiah 13:16-18), and "...their infants shall be dashed in pieces ..." (Hosea 13:16; Deuteronomy 7:2, 20:16-17), and so on and on.

Seventh, under duress, people will "... eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and daughters ... her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: she shall eat them ..." (Deuteronomy 28:53-57) and "... the women eat their fruit, and children ... (become) ... their meat" (Lamentations 2:20 and 4:10). The Hebrew words *periy* and *shilyah* translated "fruit" and "young one" actually mean "foetus" and "after-birth". No, there is no sacredness involved in eating one's own offspring, as condoned and permitted (and never banned!) by the "holy" Bible.

Eighth, the biblical God was always willing

and eager to punish people by token of aborting their foetuses. Typical examples are found in "Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth ..." (Psalms 21:10); and "... for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth" (Isaiah 37:3); and "As for Israel ... Give them, O Lord ... Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts ... they shall bear no fruit ..." (Hosiah 9: 11-16); and "The Lord hast fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech ... (Genesis 20:18); and so on.

Ninth, the Bible deals with the traffic and cultic use of ancient abortifacients like rue, hys-sop, myrrh, wormwood, and gall ("hemlock"). All these can cause violent convulsions and induce menstruation in women. And in the case of biblical willow, date palm and pomegranate, these stimulate the production of female sex hormones and thereby reduce fertility. This is exactly how modern birth control pills work.

Tenth, the Bible conveys a subtle message of hatred towards human life. Typically we read Christ's "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, mother, wife, brethren, and children, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26), and "... he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25) etc., etc., etc. The Greek word *miseo* translated "hate" also means "detest". "despise", "abhor".

Eleventh, the Bible proclaims that stillbirth is preferable to an unproductive life, as in the typical "If a ... soul be not filled with good ... an untimely birth is better than he ..." (Eccl 6:3-4), and "... let every one of them pass away: like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun" (Psalms 58:8). And the despondent prophet regrets that "... the Lord slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to always be great with me" (Jeremiah 20:17).

And so, a formidable argument exists for the legalisation of abortion that would be fully in accordance with biblical precepts on the issue. The Bible throughout promotes, encourages, tolerates, permits, and sanctions abortion. Nowhere is it prohibited or banned in that holy book. The feeble and unbiblical argument that "Thou shalt not kill" clearly doesn't apply to unborn children. The Bible is quite clear that the foetus is not a human person, is neither sacred nor sanctified, and can be aborted at will, as demonstrated therein.

● Gene Kasmar, author of *ALL the Obscenities in the Bible*, may be contacted at 5559 N. Lyndale, Brooklyn Center, MN 55430, USA. His E-mail address is: kerry@mntn.org

ANNA FREEMAN reports on British Jewry's sectarian strife

JONATHAN SACKS would like to be the leader of all the Jews in the country, but he can't. His official title is Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations, generally known as the United Synagogues. This is the mainstream Orthodox denomination which claims fewer than half of all religious Jews – themselves fewer than half of all British Jews – and which has links with mainstream Orthodox Jewish denominations in other countries, especially the religious establishment in Israel.

Ever since Sacks became Chief Rabbi in 1991, he has had problems with Jewish survival and continuity in British society, with attitudes to women and gays in the Jewish community, and above all with his relations with other Jews. Here he has to tread the usual narrow path between right and left. On his right are various ultra-Orthodox Jews who condemn the United Synagogues for making dangerous compromises with the modern world; on his left are various Progressive Jews (Traditional, Reform, Liberal) who remain religious but are condemned by all Orthodox Jews for making even more dangerous compromises with the modern world. (There are also a few Humanist Jews, but this tendency is very small here.)

Most religious Jews define themselves not so much by theoretical doctrine as by practical observance of ritual or attendance at synagogue. But the formal boundary between the Orthodox and the rest is marked by doctrinal differences over the Bible. The Orthodox doctrine is expressed in the phrase *Torah min ha-shamayim* (Teaching from the Heavens) – the fundamentalist belief that the Hebrew text of the Bible comes directly from God (the first five books directly through Moses), and should be interpreted according to rabbinical tradition; the non-Orthodox view is that the Scriptures were written by human beings with various degrees of divine inspiration, and should be interpreted according to rational needs. (The resemblance to Christian divisions is obvious.) The problem for all religious Jews is what this division means in practice.

Here Sacks has stumbled badly. He is at the same time an enlightened intellectual and an Orthodox fundamentalist. He has tried at times to reach out to non-Orthodox Jews as fellow Jews and at times to keep them at a distance as false Jews. After a series of minor disputes, a major row began over his reaction to the death last year of Hugo Gryn, the Senior Rabbi of the West London Synagogue, a respected leader of Reform Jews and also a popular broadcaster. Sacks was first condemned by Progressive Jews for not attending Gryn's funeral, and then condemned by Orthodox Jews for attending Gryn's memorial meeting. Whatever he might do was wrong. The row exploded when his letter to an ultra-Orthodox leader was published in the mainstream *Jewish Chronicle* (March 14), alongside the text of his tribute to Gryn. What he did do was worse.

In his private letter to Chanoch Padwa, the head of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew

Run, Rabbi, run!

Congregations (*Adath*), Sacks said that he was an "enemy and opponent" of all forms of non-Orthodox Judaism and that pluralism within the Jewish community was "a false principle", that he did not recognise Gryn as a "Rabbi" and saw him as one of "those who destroy the faith"; but at the same time he said that Orthodox Jews should work with non-Orthodox Jews outside religious contexts, and that despite their religious differences he honoured Gryn as a human being. And in his public tribute he repeated this commitment to *menschlichkeit* (Humanity), without all the hostile comments.

The effect was dramatic. The *Jewish Chronicle* devoted much space and emotion to the story, with eloquent reactions from all sections of this vociferous community (no wonder many non-religious Jews join the Freethought movement!). There have been mutual accusations of *Chilul ha-Shem* (profanation of the Name [of God]), and Sacks has desperately demanded a Coalition for Peace in the Community. It has been seriously suggested that he should resign. It has been frivolously suggested either that he is actually two people – Rabbi Jonathan and Dr Sacks – or else that he should be cloned into two people to act as both Tough Rabbi and Nice Rabbi!

Much of his defence against critics on both sides has concentrated not on his position in the Jewish community but on his reputation in wider society, of which he is inordinately

proud. Fortuitously but unfortunately, this controversy has coincided with the publication of his latest book attempting to reinforce this reputation. *The Politics of Hope* (Cape £15.99) is his most overtly political statement so far, a contribution to what is called "communitarianism" – a tendency originating among right-wing American intellectuals (many of Jewish origin), who advocate the abandonment both of the collectivism of the welfare state and the individualism of the free market and a return to what is supposed to be the organic community of the good old days.

Sacks is quite out of his depth in this area. His ostentatious scholarship degenerates into scholasticism, and his obsessive reasoning into rationalisation. He accepts that the Enlightenment may have been a good thing, but alleges that too much of a good thing has led to a "demoralisation" of society associated with the loss of faith and authority, and that we need a "remoralisation" of society based on a recovery of "the Judæo-Christian tradition". He poses false oppositions between liberalism and absolutism and covenant and charity and the social (good) and libertarianism and relativism and contract and welfare and the political (bad). He relies on too many secondary rather than primary sources, and his references include too many minor mistakes and major misinterpretations. As a result, most of his facts are inaccurate, and most of his arguments are invalid. His use of religious material is predictably tendentious, and his invocation of biblical morality is simply offensive (has he actually read his Bible?). Anyway his theoretical communitarianism is belied by his practical conduct in his own community.

A leading article *The Times* (February 22) ludicrously hailed Jonathan Sacks as a worthy successor of Jewish sages like Moses and Maimonides, Marx and Freud. A better comparison would be with journalistic Jeremiahs like Paul Johnson and Mary Kenny, Bernard Levin and Melanie Phillips. But his sad story ultimately proves his own complaint, that there is no longer any room for religious authority in a free society.

Walter's new book

➤ From Page 9

transnational, foreign-dominated empires (Holy Roman, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Turkish) and the Papacy. From the enlightenment on, freethinkers tended to become, like Thomas Paine, in a literal and metaphorical sense citizens of the world and hence to appear anti-patriotic to traditional Humanists. His successors in the 20th Century, now calling themselves Humanists, have pioneered in moves towards world government (though growing increasingly sceptical about its practical consequences).

If history is any guide, the part of the book likely to provoke most discussion is its two-page manifesto. This lists 17 "assumptions, positive and negative" on which "modern" Humanism is said to be based. Most of these are familiar *isms* like naturalism, secularism and scepticism and carry standard definitions, but there are some surprises. Rationalism is

given a modernist definition which embraces irrationality, and ethicism a common-sense one which avoids Platonism and Ethical Culture. Atheism is broadened to reject spiritualism and agnosticism popularised to admit any nonsense. Eudemonism replaces the somewhat compromised utilitarianism and humorism makes a welcome appearance. To an old-fashioned secularist the most conspicuous omissions are materialism and determinism (to say nothing of mechanism and reductionism). Are they oversights or has "modern" Humanism rejected the concepts in line with American Ethical Culture, Transcendentalism and Unitarianism, British ethicism and Dutch confessionality?

To end on the positive note with which this review began, I salute Nicolas Walter's exhortation that "it is up to us to show that our use of Humanism is good enough for such a good word".

National Secular Society General Secretary KEITH PORTEOUS WOOD delivered the 116th Anniversary Lecture of Leicester Secular Society on March 16. This extract, edited from his wide-ranging lecture, will be concluded in the May issue of *The Freethinker*.

Mumbo-jumbo waxes as Church influence wanes

CHARLES BRADLAUGH, who founded the National Secular Society in 1866, seemed to think that the spread of education would, in the end, reduce the influence of religion. Although the process is taking longer than he – or any of us – would have liked, Britain is certainly a much more secular society today than at any time in its history.

Religious influence is waning and the churches are splitting themselves into fragments. But what influence is left to them they cling to with great ferocity. It is our business, as active Secularists, to prise their fingers loose and take these last vestiges of privilege away from them.

The Catholic church is losing members at a rate of knots. Catholics cannot reconcile the inhumane and ridiculous teachings of the Pope with the realities of their own experience. Even in Ireland, which has traditionally been in the thrall of Rome, the tide has turned. It is now routine for the country to be referred to as “post-Catholic”. The Irish government has relaxed the laws on abortion, divorce – and homosexuality – the last of which is, incidentally, now more liberal there than in the UK. The reduction in the number of monks and nuns teaching in secondary schools in Ireland has been dramatic. In 1970 there were 2,300, but by 1993 that figure had declined to 1,000 – and a third of them are within 10 years of retirement.

The only increase the Catholic church seems to be experiencing at the moment is in the number of reported instances of child abuse, and of priests with families of their own! The word “revelation” has taken on a new meaning; the type that appears with tiresome regularity in the columns of the Sunday papers.

All too often, complaints of child abuse by priests were either ignored, or the errant priests were simply moved, often re-offending elsewhere. In many cases the police have still not been informed and further damage has been done that could have been avoided. Even now, in Britain and Ireland, few victims have received significant compensation – unlike in the USA where the Church has been forced to pay out millions of dollars.

A further type of child abuse that shocked Ireland was that of a group of unmarried mothers being pressurised by heartless nuns in the 1950s to give up their new-born children. These were systematically sent to the USA for adop-

tion, often losing their original identity. A help group has been set up to try to reunite the mothers and children who were victims of this church-inspired cruelty. [One of the questions after the lecture, noting that similar actions had taken place widely in secular institutions in the UK around that period, asked to what extent the Roman Catholic Church itself could be held responsible for the action of its servants on non-doctrinal matters. It could be argued that Christian “morals” of the period were at the root of this practice in both religious and secular institutions; also that when a practice is sufficiently widespread that it must be – or should have been – known about at the top, then the institution itself is constructively liable].

All over the world, Catholics are rebelling against the authoritarianism of Pope John Paul II. Individuals routinely reject his teachings on abortion, contraception and homosexuality, and despite threats of dire retribution, liberal-minded priests continue to speak out against the inhumane pronouncements – Bull, I think it is called – of the Pope

Drop

The Church of England recently released statistics showing that church attendance has experienced its biggest drop in the past 20 years. The figures for 1995 – the latest available – show that Sunday attendance for the Church of England was 1,045,000 ... down 36,000 on 1994. I cannot see this trend being reversed as the schisms and splits continue between the evangelicals and the liberals. Further schisms can be expected in the C of E over gay priests and women bishops.

One question that remains to be answered is whether the ebbing popularity of Western religions is leading to their being taken over by the evangelicals and extremists, those who have traditionally been relegated to the fringes. As the moderates are driven out by the extremism, the fundamentalists find they are left with a clear field.

Although belief in organised religion in Britain seems to be a thing of the past for the majority, the Established church itself is far from being a dead duck. Centuries of power are not going to be forfeited overnight. The Church of England still has fantastic wealth (which wasn't accrued simply from the collection plates on a Sunday morning, but from hundreds of years of exploitation). It still wields totally disproportionate power in our national institutions – including Parliament, education and the monarchy. It insinuates itself into many areas of national life, exerting far more influence than its numerical support should ever justify in a democracy.

Neither of the main political parties is at present enthusiastic about tackling the tricky question of disestablishment. But an opportunity may arise to open up a debate on the whole subject of church/state separation if Labour carries out its promised constitutional changes. Other issues I hope will be considered at that time include the removal of the Bishops from the House of Lords and who, if anyone, should succeed the Queen as so-called Defender of the Faith. I say “so-called” because this title was bestowed on Henry VIII by none other than his Holiness, for services to Catholicism!

Barbara Smoker, former President of the NSS, has asserted that during her quarter-century in office, she saw little real progress in the dismantling of religious privilege.

The common law offence of blasphemy is still intact, and we are only too aware that it was given a boost by the recent ruling of the European Court over the film *Visions of Ecstasy*. Church schools are still extant, and there is now even pressure for state funding to be extended to Islamic schools – and it seems quite likely to be granted. The clergy are still exempted from paying rates – despite the aforementioned fabulous riches of their employer. Animals are still ritually slaughtered in the most horrific way to satisfy ludicrous “religious traditions”. On the human rights side, equality for homosexuals is still awaited – and what change has been effected has been achieved by organisations outside our movement. Most of the opposition to change has come, as usual, from religious bodies.

But we should balance this account by remembering that the decade of reform in the 1960s was a hard act to follow. Also, there is no doubt that society became significantly more secular over this period – although how much credit we can claim for this is an open question.

So, while we can be happy that British society is becoming less religious, we cannot claim that it is becoming more rational. There is a huge move to fill the void left by religion with equally barmy belief-systems. Horoscopes, faith healers, flying saucers, renewed interest in witchcraft, devil worship and other nonsense abounds. So-called new age philosophies throw reason out of the window and encourage belief in unproved and sometimes dangerous systems of medicine. Such silliness is written off by the majority as “a bit of fun” and so it may be in its present limited form. But when people are encouraged to believe in mumbo-jumbo they are open to exploitation – a fact not overlooked by pernicious cults which exploit gullibility for vast profit.

● To be concluded

Correction

THE gremlins got into Colin McCall's article “No advance on creationism” (March issue, page 11). Pope Pius XII was twice referred to as “Paul XII”. Sorry!

You're telling us!

Men? Why bother?

WHEN the news of Dolly, the cloned sheep, appeared, I wrote to *The Guardian* about one consequence which seemed to have been overlooked. My letter was not published. Perhaps *FT* readers, more scientifically qualified than I, can correct me, but it seems to me that human cloning would make the male sex redundant.

The Y-chromosome is a biological afterthought, depleted in genes, and required only for bi-sexual reproduction. We possess, men and women together, three X-chromosomes to every one Y. Thus, if we can reproduce without sex, is there any good reason for cloning men – except for curiosity, entertainment, or preserving an endangered species in a zoological context?

Perhaps we men have always, subconsciously, been afraid that we are irrelevant. Hence our aggression and peacock vanity.

Like Dr Johnson's condemned man, our minds will be concentrated wonderfully, and, like Lord Dunsany's man facing the Judgement Seat, we will be searching frantically for arguments justifying our continued existence.

KARL HEATH
Coventry

Epicurus and God

THE report of the debate at the Cambridge Union (March) refers to the well-known argument about the existence of evil and the power and goodness of God which is attributed to Epicurus, the Greek philosopher of the late 4th Century BC. This attribution is highly unlikely, since the argument doesn't appear in the surviving fragments of Epicurus or in the writings of his followers or in the quotations from him or them in the writings of other philosophers, and since Epicurus wasn't concerned with the idea of the all-powerful all-good God of the monotheistic Judeo-Christian tradition but believed in the existence somewhere in outer space of the gods of the polytheistic Greek tradition.

The earliest example of this argument which I have traced is by Lactantius, a North African Father of the Church in the early 4th Century AD. In about AD 310-315 he wrote *De ira Dei* (The Wrath of God) to explain how an infinite deity may be angry with his finite creatures: an accessible text appears in Volume 7 of Migne's *Patrologia latina* (1844). Lactantius attributes to Epicurus the following argument (my translation):

God, he says, is either willing to remove evil but unable, or able but unwilling, or neither able nor willing, or both able and willing. If he is willing but unable, he is weak; which doesn't fit God. If he is able but unwilling, he is wicked; which is just as alien to God. If he is neither willing nor able, he is both wicked and weak; and thus not God. If he is both willing and able, which alone fits God, then where does evil come from, and why doesn't he remove it?

Epicurus put this objection to the growing religion of Christianity, but it seems absurd to attribute it to Epicurus himself. Lactantius, it may be added, gave no convincing reply.

Incidentally, the late 19th Century Conservative politician Lord Salisbury put it much better:

God is all-powerful, and God is all-loving – and the world is what it is! How are you going to explain that?

His objection was not to Christianity itself but to vain attempts to justify it by rational argument.

NICOLAS WALTER
Islington

Dedicated veterans

IN RECENT weeks secularism has lost two dedicated veterans in Eva Ebury and Govind Deodhekar.

When, as a wandering colonial, I was drawn into the intellectual (now the exhibitionist) maelstrom of Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park, Len and Eva Ebury were the first secularists I met. They were enormously kind in welcoming me on to their platform and into their home, where Eva was unfailingly hospitable.

Hyde Park was but one of many venues where Len spoke weekly – always with Eva on hand to lend physical and moral support – in all weathers and against all opposition. I was privileged and excited to join them at these too and later to revive old speaking sites myself.

They were both on the National Secular Society Executive (with Len as Vice-President) and it was chiefly through their influence – and especially Eva's – that I joined them there and became President in 1963. Sadly, they were disappointed by my policy of modernising and broadening the society's objectives and public image, and withdrew to form a rival body. But we remained on good personal terms and I remember them warmly.

Bill McIlroy's tribute (March) leaves me little to say about "Dev" other than to endorse its views on his unpretentiousness, reliability and integrity and the perceptiveness of his all-too-rare articles in *The Freethinker*, mostly about his native India.

He was amused by my reference to his *gravitas* in a tribute (December, 1992) on his retirement from financial office in the NSS and publishing companies. In a letter he described the highlights of this period as incorporation of the society, winding-up the Freethinker Endowment Trust, negotiating HQ moves and managing three portfolios (of shares). What he lacked in investment flair was compensated by his negotiating skill and unsurpassed dedication.

DAVID TRIBE
New South Wales

Failings of movement

IN his letter in the March issue, Denis Cobell

appears to have misunderstood the point I had made about "non-joiners" and the need for an organised Humanist movement.

I was attempting to show that the attitude of the large number of Humanists, agnostics and atheists who regard the "Humanist movement" as an irrelevance, is, to a large extent, due to failings within the "movement" itself.

I pay my subs to the BHA and the Humanist Society of Scotland; I have been a secretary of a local Humanist Group; I was for a time a member of the Council of the HSS, and I am still a practising ceremonies officiant, so Mr Cobell does not need to justify Humanist ceremonies and local group activities to me.

I support the British Humanist movement because it is the only one we have, but that does not blind me to its many defects. To be really effective, the national Humanist movement needs to have a much more broadly based membership and it needs to have a much more focussed approach to the establishment and pursuit of corporate aims, but many of the prominent members of the various constituent organisations are actively opposed to this kind of development.

I agree with Denis Cobell that there are still many battles against religion to be fought (although, as a Scot, the blasphemy law does not affect me!), but when there are battles to be fought, it helps to have a strong and well-motivated army rather than a group of individuals all doing their own thing.

JOHN CLUNAS
Aberdeen

'Confused' about sex

IT WAS nice of George Jamieson to feel pity for me (March letters), but he has confused two things. First he says that there is choice about who one sleeps with and whether one uses a condom etc. Yes – up to a point. But that's not sexual orientation, that's sexual activity. Sexual orientation is about being attracted to others, how you see yourself, and what you feel. It's part of identity. I was aware even in my childhood that, in some definitive way I could not then explain, I was different to other boys. Other homosexual men will tell you they have had the same experience. I am male, but not in the same way as other males, and I know and feel that.

George may think sexuality is about choice, but he is mistaken. I spent far too long trying to be something it is not in me to be. Bisexuals may choose between preferences; true homosexuals cannot. When Christians say that they hate homosexual actions, what I hear is that they hate me. After all, what I do is me. Therefore it is the same kind of prejudice as those based on race and nationality. Certainly it feels like that.

I know I didn't choose to be homosexual. Of course George is right. I could choose to be celibate, or only have sex with a woman, but that wouldn't make me heterosexual. In any case, why should I? Neither course would meet my sexual needs and drives. I would be incomplete as a person. Mrs Atkins, the Pope and others

It may be that some later followers of

Turn to Page 14

You're telling us!

From Page 13

have no moral right to condemn my behaviour. I don't ask them to do as I do. But I do ask for their tolerance and love. What a pity that Christians who preach love find it so difficult to practise.

George also confuses the point about Mrs Atkins on *Thought for the Day*. If Mrs Atkins was saying what she was saying on a Christian radio station, paid for by Christians and listened to by Christians, that would be one thing. But *Thought for the Day* is broadcast in the middle of the BBC's prime public affairs programme. The BBC is paid for by all of us; therefore, it is as much mine as it is Mrs Atkins'. The BBC, under the influence of religious pressure, continues to refuse a Gay Humanist, or any kind of Humanist, a spot on that programme to put a contra view about morals. That is blatant discrimination by the BBC.

The *Today* programme should not be undermined by religious dogma, or any dogma. Those of us who didn't want to hear a Christian message could avoid a Christian radio station in the same way as we avoid Christian newspapers. But if we want to be informed by the BBC through its main current affairs programme, why should we have to hear Mrs Atkins and her prejudices and suffer the real pain she causes?

ALAN R BAILEY
Southend-on-Sea

Definitions questioned

ERIC YAFFEY claims (March letters) that agnostics believe neither that there is a god, nor that there is not. Wrong; an agnostic is one who holds that nothing is known, or likely to be known of the existence of a god or of anything beyond material phenomena (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 1964). T H Huxley went further, in asserting that the existence of anything beyond material phenomena cannot be known.

A sceptic or skeptic is one who doubts the truth of religious doctrines, an agnostic or atheist; one inclined to suspend judgement or given to questioning truth of facts or soundness of inferences.

Freethinkers should not allow themselves to be conned by religious apologists into giving up a perfectly tenable position, in order to allow freethought to be exposed more easily to criticism.

COLIN MILLS
Amersham Common

IN REPLY to Eric Yaffey (March): agnosticism (not knowing) is an untenable position. If no evidence exists, why talk about "not knowing"?

The religious define God as spiritual, and by that they mean non-physical. We live in a physical universe made up of measurable, detectable matter and energy: anything which does not consist of matter or energy does not exist or is not detectable – and that includes God.

We thus begin to wonder what the term atheism (not God) might mean, if anything. If some idiot decides to believe X, why should we define ourselves in terms of an idiot's terminology – that is, call ourselves X-ist?

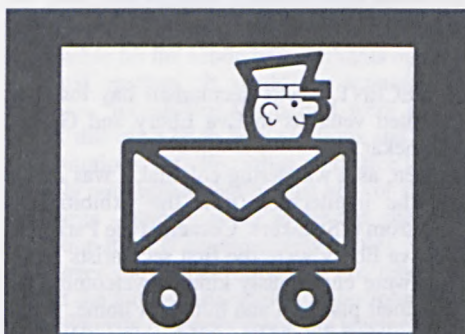
The terms atheism and agnosticism appear to me to be redundant. Readers of *The Freethinker* can reject religion using reason and evidence.

Also, the concept that a non-physical entity called the soul controls a physical person is quite absurd and redundant. The Ancient Egyptians invented the concept of the soul before 3000 BC (Moses 1250 BC). The Pharaohs had three souls!

ROBERT AWBERY
Reading

Compassion

AS A practising Catholic, I agree with Leonardo Boff in his book *Jesus Christ Liberator* that doing good makes one a Christian, whereas to be a Christian does not make one a better person.



Short and clearly-typed letters for publication may be sent to Peter Brearey, 24 Alder Avenue, Silcoates Park, Wakefield WF2 0TZ. Please include name and address (not necessarily for publication).

In consequence, I admire the moral atheist or agnostic. He or she shows love, not due to promise of Heaven for doing so, or fear of Hell for not doing so. They are solely motivated by compassion for those in distress.

ANDREW HARVEY
Carlisle

'There is no God'

AS A prisoner in a top security hospital, I have seen and heard so much suffering that one of the few happy occasions is the monthly brown envelope containing my eagerly-awaited copy of *The Freethinker*.

In a place like Ashworth, one comes across numerous religious faiths: atheists are very much in the minority as the type of person incarcerated in here desperately needs something to cling to, and most strongly believe in a form of afterlife where they will be eternally happy.

The point I try and explain to those open to discussion is that an afterlife, or an all-loving God, will not exist merely because they wish and hope it will.

Of course, if some kind of supernatural being

did exist, one who was all-powerful and all-loving, then places like this would not be in existence in the first place. There simply would be no need – because why would such a God create humans with defective brains?

There is no God up there in some blissful Heaven – but if there was he would be as cruel and as sick as any of his creatures in here.

RS
Ashworth Hospital

Capitalism

WITH all due respect to the National Secular Society and kindred organisations who are engaged in opposing that bugbear of humanity – religion – I feel that if they are to be more effective, these anti-religious bodies, while continuing with their attacks on superstition, should also focus their attention on rapacious capitalism, which sustains (and profits by) the furtherance of mass ignorance.

Without capitalism, it is hardly likely that priests and mediums would find it worthwhile to preach or to pass on messages from the Never-Never Land. After all, it was the founder of Scientology, Ron Hubbard, who said: "If you want to make a fortune, start a new religion" – and he put the precept into practice.

All this illustrates, yet again, the unacceptable face of capitalism. But, come to think of it, what is acceptable about capitalism?

DAVID YEULETT
Greenwich

Telephone technology

NOWADAYS, when one phones a large concern, one often gets a disembodied voice saying that if using a digital telephone one should press a particular key according to the department required.

At Bradlaugh House, the switchboard covers all the national secular humanist organisations, plus IHEU and Conway Hall, each with its own lines and several extensions, so we might consider modernising the system in the digital way, with the following instructions.

Unitarians: touch **One**.

Dualists: Tell your finger to activate **Two**.

Trinitarians: tap **Three**.

If humanity hinges on the Cardinal Virtues, that's **Four**.

Those who keep *half* the Commandments should fiddle with **Five**.

To know the number of Man (the Beast), strike **Six** three times.

Those who hope for eternal life may press **Seven**.

Creationists must rest upon the **Eight** humans saved in the Ark.

Believers in Spirituality, pick the **Nine** Fruits of the Spirit.

Nihilists and Solipsists: try **0** – but do not expect any reply.

BARBARA SMOKER
Bromley

ASK THE PARSON (5)

by Karl Heath

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GOD THE FATHER?

Dear Parson,

Do you discuss the Trinity with your flock?

Do they understand the Athanasian Creed when you recite it on special occasions? Perhaps we have moved some distance from the early Christian arguments of Arians, Sabellians and others. May I express it in common-sense terms?

God the Son is the Jesus story. A story with cows, pigs, fishes, a cockerel and a donkey; a story with water, wine and a fig tree. All happening in a few years in an area about the size of Wales.

But God the Father is the Creator and Controller of the Universe. The Holy Spirit would be an "also ran" if there more than three.

Your flock still sings Mrs Alexander's three best-known hymns – two about the Son, his birth and death. But the third is about the Father. Are you not faintly embarrassed when singing *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, even if you omit the rich man in his castle?

Does the relationship between God the Father and the Universe present any difficulties for you? Are you not, as a clergyman, more sophisticated than the layman who says "There must be something there"? There are two answers to that question. First, "Yes, there is something there – the Universe." But if something separate from the Universe is required, the second reply is "Why?" Why do we need a separate entity? You will have heard of "Occam's Razor", which can be paraphrased as "It is vain to do with more that which can be done with less".

Applying this to the problem of the Universe can we not say: "You do not explain one mystery by postulating a greater mystery to account for it"? If you do, you have two mysteries instead of one, and, whereas the first can be investigated, the second is transcendental."

Are you in the habit of using words like "transcendental" and "immanent" when describing God the Father? If you use both together, do you not perceive a contradiction? "Immanent" seems to lead to pantheism, and, if God pervades the Universe, and is co-existent with it, why worship it, since we would be worshipping ourselves as part of it?

"Transcendental" implies a separation between a Universe apprehensible to the senses and something else unobservable via the senses.

It also suggests "indescribable". But if you

insist on singularity, masculinity, wisdom, power, mercy and care, are you not describing?

What does God do about the Universe? Is He merely a deist explanation, creating the Universe and thereafter ignoring it? Or does He control every atom at all times? Or does he intervene from time to time? If so, can you explain His arbitrary behaviour? Is it wilful or capricious? And when He is not controlling events what other forces are at work? Cowper wrote "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform". Is this not an elegant evasion, falsely concealing ignorance?

Nor will the "Free Will" argument do. Free will does not apply to inanimate objects and natural catastrophes. Nor does it apply to most living species. Furthermore, as John Locke remarked, free will is an illicit combination of the two terms, about as sensible as calling virtue square or sleep swift. One can will the unattainable.

Freedom is freedom of choice, limited by nature or by human restraints such as pover-

ty and oppression.

You are not like the ignorant astrologers who still think that the Earth is the centre of the Universe. We do not know, and may never know, because of the time and distances involved, whether we are alone, or part of a Universe teeming with life and intelligence. While the latter can, in theory, be investigated, the former is dogma, sustainable only by faith. If you feel superior to the worship of tribal gods, can you understand that your God, geocentric and anthropomorphic, earth-bound and human-based, is equally tribal?

So perhaps it is more convenient to stick to the homespun Jesus story. Even children can understand most of it. But not quite! Thanks again to Mrs Alexander, as a little boy, I thought that "There is a Green Hill" was a pretty hymn.

Thankfully, no one tried to explain to me what "crucified" meant.

● Karl Heath urges readers of *The Freethinker* actually to put the questions posed in this series to local clergy – and to send their replies to the Editor.

OSCAR LEWENSTEIN: LIFELONG UNBELIEVER

OSCAR LEWENSTEIN, one of the most innovative and influential figures in the post-war British theatre, has died at his home in Sussex. He was 80.

During a long career he worked with Joan Littlewood, Tony Richardson, Sam Wanamaker, George Devine and Laurence Olivier. As an independent producer, he presented or co-presented works by Bertolt Brecht, Carson McCullers, Willis Hall, Brendan Behan, Shelagh Delaney, Samuel Beckett and Michael Hastings.

Oscar Lewenstein had a long association with London's Royal Court Theatre, where he became general manager in 1952. Four years later he was a founder of the English Stage Company. During his period as artistic director, plays by Edward Bond, Howard Brenton, Joe

Orton, John Osborne, David Storey and Arnold Wesker were staged.

Oscar Lewenstein joined forces with John Osborne and Tony Richardson as a director of Woodfall Films. He was producer or associate producer of *Tom Jones*, *The Girl With Green Eyes*, *One Way Pendulum* and *The Knack*.

Oscar Lewenstein's parents, Russian Jewish immigrants, were agnostics. He was a lifelong unbeliever. In his autobiography (1994) Oscar Lewenstein writes: "I am an atheist. The only Jewish religious services I ever attended were in the Army where, in answer to the question of what was my religion, I put Jewish, since I did not want anyone to think I was denying it."

There was a secular ceremony when burial took place at Bear Road Woodland Cemetery, Brighton.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
subscriptions were due in January

Members who have not already done so should send £5 (with full name and address) to the General Secretary, NSS, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP. Donations to help finance the growing activity of the Society will be much appreciated.

What's On...What's On...What's On...

Birmingham Humanist Group: Information: Tova Jones on 0121 4544692.

Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group: Information: D Baxter on 01253 726112.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: 40 Cowper Street, Hove (near Hove Station, bus routes 2a, 5 and 49). Sunday, April 6, 5.30 pm for 6 pm: Daniel O'Hara: *David Hume – 18th Century Philosopher*. Sunday, May 4, 5.30pm: Jane Quincey: *Religious Education and the Act of Worship – How Maintained Schools Meet Their Statutory Obligations*.

Bristol Humanists: Information: Margaret Dearnaley on 0117 9502960 or Hugh Thomas on 0117 9871751.

Bromley Humanists: Information: D Elvin 0181 777 1680.

Central London Humanists: Information: Cherie Holt on 0171 916 3015 or Hilary Leighter on 01895 632096.

Chiltern Humanists: Information: 01296 623730. Friends Meeting House, Berkhamsted (near The Lamb pub), Tuesday, April 8, 7.45 pm: Ralph Ison and Alan Marshall: *Ritual Practices*. Tuesday, May 13, 7.45 pm, Wendover Library, Jane Wynne Wilson: *International Humanism*.

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

Cotswold Humanists: Information: Philip Howell, 2 Clevelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ: 01242 528743.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: Information: 01926 858450. Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road, Kenilworth: Thursday, April 17, 7.30 pm: Public meeting: *Are We Alone? The Possibility of Extraterrestrial Intelligence*.

Derbyshire: Kevin W Stone, of 22A Church Street, Ashburne, would like to hear from readers of *The Freethinker* in his area, with a view to forming a group.

Devon Humanists: Information: Christine Lavery, 5 Prospect Garden, off Blackboy Road, Exeter (01392 56600).

Ealing Humanists: Information: Derek Hill 0181 422 4956 or Charles Rudd 0181 904 6599.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): Information: 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB; 01926 858450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30 pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Library, 1st floor). April 11: Political Forum with Raj Chandarana (Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights), Coun Simon Etheridge (Torche), Darren Johnson (Gay Greens), and Mark Ynys-Môn (DELGA). Free admission – all welcome.

Hampstead Humanist Society: Information: N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP.

Havering & District Humanist Society: Information: J Condon 01708 473597 or J Baker 01708 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.

Glasgow Group: Information: Alan Henness, 138 Lumley Street, Grangemouth FK3 8BL. Telephone: 01324 485152.

Edinburgh Group: Information: 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD; 0131 667 8389.

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

Lancashire Humanist Alliance: Details from Steve Johnson, PO Box 111, Blackburn BB1 8GD.

Leeds & District Humanist Group: Information: Robert Tee on 0113 2577009. All meetings at 7.30 pm, Swarthmore Centre, Leeds. Tuesday, April 8 (at 14 Foxholes Crescent, Calverley): AGM and Social. Tuesday, May 13 (at Swarthmore Centre): Senior Probation Officer Rosemary Heal: *Crime and Punishment*.

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB; 0116 2622250 or 0116 241 4060. Meetings on Sundays at 6.30 pm.

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information: Denis Cobell, 99 Ravensbourne Park, London SE6 4YA; 0181 6904645. Meetings at Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, 8 pm. Thursday, April 24: Keith Gimson, Charter 88: *The Need for Constitutional Reform*.

Manchester Humanist Group: Information: Arthur Chappell on 0161 681 7607. Meetings at Friends' Meeting House on Mount Street, Manchester, on the second Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm. April 9: *Can Humanists be Spiritual?*

Norwich Humanist Group: Information: Vincent G Chainey, Le Chene, 4 Mill Street, Bradenham, Thetford IP25 7PN; 01362 820982. Meetings at Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich, 7.30 pm. April 17: Tevor Claxton: *Spiritualism*. May 15: John Aldan: *Humanist Turning-points in History*. June 19: Brian Snoad: *Science and Ethics*. July 17: *Atheism on a Soapbox* (tape).

Preston and District Humanist Group: Now the Lancashire Humanist Alliance. Details from Steve Johnson, PO Box 111, Blackburn BB1 8GD.

Sheffield Humanist Society: The Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street (adjoining Bank Street), Sheffield. Wednesday, May 7, 8 pm: Professor R P Davies *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. Information: Gordon Sinclair, 9 South View Road, Hoyland, Barnsley S74 9EB (01226 743070) or Bill McIlroy, 117 Springvale Road, Walkley, Sheffield S6 3NT (0114 2685731).

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1 (telephone 0171 831 7723). Full list of lectures and Sunday concerts (6.30pm) from the above address. Telephone: 0171 831 7723.

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Wendy Sturgess on 01458-274456.

Stockport Secular Group: Information: Carl Pinel, 85 Hall Street, Offerton, Stockport SK1 4DE; 0161 480 0732. Wednesday, April 23, 8pm at The Railway, Wellington Road North, Stockport: Carl Pinel on *Censorship and Blasphemy*.

Sutton Humanist Group: Information: 0181 642 4577.

Teesside Humanist Group: Information: J Cole 01642 559418 or R Wood 01740 650861.

Tyneside Humanist Group: Third Thursday of each month (except August), 6.45pm, Literary and Philosophical Society building, Westgate Road, Newcastle.

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

West Glamorgan Humanist Group: Information: 01792 206108 or 01792 296375, or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0JY.

Worthing Humanist Group: Information: Mike Sargent, on 01903 239823 or Frank Pidgeon on 01903 263867.

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