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# **Free**thinker

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Founded by G W Foote in 1881



Not your actual Devil, but a close cousin – the demon Baphomet whom the Knights Templars were accused of worshipping in the 14th century.

Illustration by Eliphas Lévi supplied by Jonathon Baker

*Alas, no longer are we to see the Devil in vibrant images such as this. To find out why, read Nicolas Walter's centre page feature*

Puberty and atheism came upon me simultaneously. For the former – which allowed me to embark on a glorious life of sexual adventure from the age of around 13 – I have nature to thank. For the latter I am indebted to South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church – commonly referred to as the Much Deformed Church.

To be honest, the sex bit was never much of an issue. Urges came and they were satisfied. Discussions around the topic never happened in my family at that stage, because my parents simply did not think they were relevant at my age. Religion, however, was frequently on the agenda, and, being a bloody-minded little bugger, I took great delight in tying Mom and Dad up in theological knots by questioning every aspect of their religious belief.

I did not, however, profess to be an atheist until one distressing Sunday afternoon when I witnessed a casual act of violence less than half a mile from my home in the little Transvaal town of Bethal.

The local Dutch Reformed Church had discharged a large clot of its faithful at the precise moment that a young black man was passing along the pavement outside.

Coming face to face with the group of churchgoers, he tried to sidestep them, but found his path completely blocked. One of the group hit him violently on the side of head with a heavy bound bible, and sent him sprawling to the ground. As he stepped over his victim, the good Afrikaner Calvinist hissed: "Don't you ever walk on a white man's pavement again."

When I returned home, shaking with rage, I told my parents that they were *never* to broach the subject of religion with me again – that I was through with God and angels and prayers and all that shit.

## **"All black Christians have done is to embrace the White man's voodoo"**

Although my atheism never needed reinforcing, it took on a far more militant hue following an incident at my workplace – a local bank which had given me my first job as a junior clerk. The bank manager, a Mr Hutchinson, put me under a nerdy little senior clerk called Campbell. He warned me that the creepy Campbell was "very religious" and did not tolerate swearing of any kind, so I was at all times to mind my language.

I did – until the day of the accident. I was in the bank's vault, filing index cards in boxes at floor level. Campbell came in to the vault and opened the safe above my head. He said something to me, and I got up quickly from my crouching position, forgetting the open safe door immediately above me. I hit my head so violently that I pitched face-first onto the concrete floor. I hit the deck with a loud exclamation – "Jesus fucking Christ". Retribution was as swift as it was painful. Campbell began kicking me violently in the ribs, hysterically screaming "blasphemer, blasphemer!"

It took several staff members to drag him away from me, and I was rushed to hospital where a dozen surgical stitches were artistically employed to embroider my scalp.

Shortly afterwards, I was asked to resign.

The only person who expressed sadness at my leaving was Samson, the bank's black cleaner, with whom I had struck up a close friendship. Munching sandwiches together outside the bank on my last day, I explained to him what had happened; that my leaving was all down to

one damn crazy Christian. He laughed, and surprised me by saying that, as far as he was concerned, *all* Christians were crazy.

Did that mean, I asked, that he disapproved of the very large number of Africans who were devoutly Christian? "Of course – all black Christians have done," he declared, "is to embrace the white man's voodoo."

It's a phrase that comes back to me whenever I read reports of how, in the face of racism in this country, more and more black people are turning to Christianity – much of which is of a deeply fundamentalist nature.

Herein lies trouble. To begin filling people with the sort of twaddle and intolerance that secularists in this country have fought so hard to expunge from our society will do nothing to counter racial prejudice.

If anything, it will make matters worse, as can be demonstrated by the wave of Islamophobia generated as a result of Muslim leaders' attempts to drive their communities into fundamentalist enclaves intolerant of Western liberal lifestyles and attitudes. Someone who has an irrational dislike of

people of colour will hardly soften his or her attitude to people who take refuge in superstition – particularly if that superstition sets them on a path of hostility towards others who do not share their religious values or beliefs.

**I** do wish the *News of the World* would make up its mind as to whether "faith" or "spiritual" healing really works, or is a load of old cobblers served up by cynical charlatans to the terminally gullible.

In its February 28 issue the paper devoted a double page spread to a report about "walking miracles ... once sick men and women who have confounded long-held medical beliefs with their faith-healer cures".

But turn to the back page of the same issue, and you find a banner headline: *Oh No! Keegan uses Healer* above a report that the new England football coach Kevin Keegan has been sending footballers to see 70-year-old faith healer Betty Shine. "The astonishing revelation will send shockwaves across the country, which is still recovering from former boss Glenn Hoddle's devotion to his faith healer Eileen Drewery," wrote reporter Gary Ward. He then revealed that two players who had been "treated" by Shine had not been cured of their respective ailments. Now there's a surprise.

Eileen Drewery has meanwhile warned that God is "very angry" and intends to do something terrible to punish those responsible for Hoddle's sacking. We wait in fearful anticipation.

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# Carey puts his foot in it – again

THAT blundering Archbishop called Carey has not been having a good press in recent weeks. His latest crop of woes erupted when he declared last month that the decline in Christian congregations in the UK was due to the fact that we were no longer scared by the prospect of war, and were too affluent, and preoccupied with our creature comforts, to want to spend time in church.

Also in his talk to bishops, missionaries and clergy who had gathered to assess the impact of the Church of England's Decade of Evangelism, he declared that the British have "an allergy to religion".

This prompted the London *Evening Standard* columnist Brian Sewell to ask: "On his knees in his private chapel amid the splendours of Lambeth Palace, are [Carey's] private prayers pleas for the return to this country of widespread destitution, homelessness, starvation and near-slavery, and a healthy dose of the rape, pillage, destruction and helpless death that are the consequences of war for many a civilian, so that a terrified and superstitious

populace will run to the nearest church and light a candle?"

Further in his cutting piece, Sewell wrote: "Religion was primitive man's response to the cruel illogic of the primeval world in which he first took to his hind legs, God or gods being the explanation of the inexplicable. Christians adopt-

ed the male monotheism of the Jews and complicated it by giving the old man with the beard a son (though neatly sidestepping the sexual complication) and a pet dove. The agents of this faintly ridiculous and distinctly pagan Trinity have since striven in their various ways to take control of us with the threat of an all-seeing and all-knowing God somehow lurking in all our heads to affect our understanding; but sound reason to doubt his existence lies in his own riven and fragmented Church, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, and the physical violence that each of these has been, and is still, in

all their various derivatives, prepared to inflict on others who disagree on matters as fundamentally frivolous as the breakfast eggs of Lilliput. Someone should give this God a map of Northern Ireland."

Twisting the blade further, Sewell added: "Some of us would acquiesce to the heartfelt hellfire preachings of Savonarola rather than the mish-mash of anodyne nonsense that you too often preach. Some of us would prefer to have a church that recognises that sex is part of daily thought and practice, that doesn't care a hoot where a man puts his penis as long as the

**War, fear and poverty needed to bring the flock back to church**

**The first line of this article cries out for a limerick. If you can compose an amusing one, please send it in to the Freethinker Limerick Competition. The one judged the best will earn its author a year's free subscription.**

other party wants it there, and does not bog us down in absurd prohibitions that are irrelevant to our spiritual lives."

If you think that was a little on the savage side, hark at Auberon Waugh, whose bile in his *Way of the World* column in the *Daily Telegraph* was triggered by the "allergy" remark.

Describing the comment as possibly the "first interesting thought [Carey] has had in his eight years in Lambeth Palace, or ever in his 63 years alive", Waugh went on to say that "religion nowadays would seem to inspire an active aversion – not only in the young, but also in their more thoughtful elders as well..."

"Discussing this with a group of friends and relations over the weekend, we came to the conclusion that those who go to church are, for the most part, unpleasant people. Obviously, such a generalisation must be heavily qualified. Some of the sweetest, kindest and best people in Britain are also deeply religious and enthusiastic churchgoers.

"But it is an interesting fact, we decided, that any church congregation is likely to have a higher proportion of unpleasant people than a random collection of Britons such as you might find, for instance, on a bus or in a cinema. In any village or community it tends to be the more unpleasant members of it who are seen and heard in the pews.

"Why should this be so? One suggestion is that social misfits turn to religion for comfort. That, indeed, may be religion's great role in the years ahead..."

## Christ's teachings are "rubbish" says ex-vicar

KENT Christians are outraged by a claim that Jesus was "racist – a worthless figure and a plastic dummy of unreality".

Under a front-page banner headline *Blasphemy*, the newspaper *Kent Today* last month reported that former vicar Jonathan Blake, who left the Church of England "under a cloud" in 1994, had attacked Jesus and the Church in a book entitled *For God's sake – Don't go to Church*. In it, Blake said that Jesus had discriminatory views concerning disabled people, and that "much of the bible should find its way to the trash can".

He also said that "Jesus came out with some rubbish that needs to be binned by us".

He described the institutional church as "peddling fairy stories, playing the greatest con trick on us in history" and in doing so was "trapping church members in the nursery".

"The Church makes Jesus out to be some kind of superman, but he was racist, sexist, uncompassionate, rude and violent."

Among enraged clergy was Canon Chris Collins of Chatham who described Blake's book as "blasphemous".

"I hope people will go nowhere near it," and added: "One recoils in anger at this sort of thing, but the person to worry about is not Jesus but Jonathan Blake himself. He is simply a rebellious priest who really ought to keep his mouth shut."

Blake retorted: I don't think I'm being offensive at all – it's the Church that is offensive."

**If you would like to submit a news story or feature you think might be suitable for the Freethinker, please contact the editor, Barry Duke, on 0181 305 9603  
E-mail: editor@freethinker.co.uk**



## Carey's gaffe

BRIAN SEWELL and Auberon Waugh (see page 3) were not the only columnists deriding our prattling prelate; Andreas Whittam Smith had a field day in the *Independent* (of which he is the former Editor). He took particular exception to Carey's suggestion that the C of E was "one generation from extinction". Curiously, though, Whittam Smith then claimed that the C of E is declining much faster than the "more successful" Roman Catholic Church, opining that this was due to the RCs' "*discipline and unpopular (sic) teaching on sex and marriage*" [my italics].

*Religious Trends* published by Christian Research, however, shows some very different statistics. According to this publication, the RC decline is much worse than the Anglican one. Roman Catholic attendance dropped 31 per cent (more than any other major church) between 1980 and 1995, whereas C of E attendance declined by just 12 per cent. The NSS brought these statistics to public attention in a prominent *Right of Reply* which was published in the *Independent* on March 19.

We suggested in the same piece that the reasons for the RCs' appalling performance were its *discipline and unpopular teaching on sex and marriage* (the same reasons that Whittam Smith had proffered for what he claimed – we believe wrongly – was the RC's *better* performance than the C of E). We believe that the most unpopular teaching (and the one contributing most to the decline) has been on contraception. We made some highly critical observations about the RC policy in this area.

On the question of the C of E's extinction, we suggested that Carey's remark had probably simply been a rallying call to his troops after a failed Decade of Evangelism, but nevertheless it might have been more prophetic than he had intended.

Although he is blaming external factors, it might well be internal ones which precipitate the C of E's eventual demise. It is not yet out of the woods on women priests; and the pressure to appoint women bishops will become irresistible, despite Carey's deputy, the Archbishop of York, being unwilling to countenance them. The gay priest issue is a further irritant that probably won't go away. Multiple schisms seem the order of the next few decades.

Lest Whittam Smith took too much pleasure in these C of E problems, we concluded that if the next Pope is as reactionary as the present one, the RC Church, too, will soon be predicting its own demise in this country.

PS – In the piece about Carey's health in last

month's column I noted that the C of E hotly denied the reports that Dr. Carey's health was under strain. After we went to press last month, the Bishop of St Germain's did in fact issue a retraction (albeit belated and somewhat muted) of his comment which had fuelled the reports.

## Book Launch

A SMALL reception was held at Conway Hall Library on March 17 to commemorate the publication of *Blasphemy in Modern Britain: 1789 to the Present* by Dr David S Nash of Oxford Brookes University. Geoffrey Robertson QC was the guest of honour. He paid tribute to the courage of those who had fallen victim to the blasphemy laws and reminded us that we should continue to campaign to abolish the blasphemy law. He hopes that the new Human Rights Act will be of assistance in this endeavour.

## House of Lords

THE PEERS debated the future of the Lords on March 21 and 22 when it was announced that the Church of England would be making a submission to the Royal Commission. Predictably, there was little in the debate to comfort secularists although the bishops did concede that they originally came to the Lords simply because they held large territories.

The bishops drew attention to the Government's acknowledgement of the bishops' "special" contribution in the White Paper on Modernisation of the Lords and claimed it would be difficult to maintain it with fewer bishops in the Lords. The Bishop of Winchester almost seemed to be making a bid to nip in the bud any suggestion that there should be additional religious representatives in the Lords when he claimed bishops "sit in this House as a sign of, and as a contribution to, the Christian, and then to the more broadly religious, reference of every aspect of the Queen's Government and so of the public life of this country."

The Earl of Longford made his customary display of religious obsession: "This House has a Christian flavour which I do not think can be found in any other legislature of which I know. That is not its dominant flavour; nevertheless, it is strong. That applies, obviously, pre-eminently to the Bishops but also to the hereditary Peers."

The only comfort from two days' debate came from Lords Desai and Hemmingford. Lord Desai told the House "At the second stage of any reform of the House—if we ever get to that stage—we should have only the Cross-Bench Life Peers with, perhaps, the Bishops for the religiously-minded, which I

am not. ... I wish to say a few words about faith. Many people have said that we could use the opportunity of reforming the House of Lords to include many members who are "professional" representatives of different faiths. I am against that. The bishops are here and good luck to them, but it is a mistake to believe that all other religions consist of a priesthood or Church like the Christian Church. For example, the Hindus in this country do not have a Church and a defined priesthood. No one can be called a representative Hindu priest. It would be a nightmare. Of course, there are many sects in Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism and Buddhism—heaven knows! **Of course, there will have to be atheist representatives and I offer myself for that. I believe that if we want the faiths to be represented we should take the same stance as the Catholic Church; that faiths should be represented by the lay people who believe in them and not by the "professionals".**

The *Freethinker* gold baton for saying the apparently unmentionable must however be awarded to Lord Hemmingford, a retired newspaper director. He was the only peer I found to say "I believe that the Bishops should go. It is surely time that the Church of England was disestablished anyway ..."

## Paine in the House of Lords

IT WAS almost inevitable that the name of Thomas Paine would be invoked during the debate on reforming the House of Lords. The Government included a quote from the great man in its White Paper on the topic: "The idea of hereditary legislators is as inconsistent as that of hereditary judges or hereditary juries; and as absurd as an hereditary mathematician, or an hereditary wise man; as absurd as an hereditary Poet Laureate."

This obviously miffed the Tory Lord Chalfont who couldn't resist a jibe in the ensuing debate in their Lordships' House: "Thomas Paine seems to me to be a most unfortunate choice as a role model for New Labour and, if those who drafted the White Paper were looking for a catchy quotation, I might have suggested to them what Paine's contemporary, Edmund Burke, wrote in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* some years before Paine wrote *The Rights of Man*: 'People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors.'" But Lord Desai, who had "come out" as an atheist during the debate retorted: "That truth has been known since Tom Paine first pointed it out. I prefer him to Edmund Burke because at least Tom Paine did not praise Marie Antoinette and become a fan of Louis XVI, as Burke did."

# Oh dear, what can the martyr be?

IT WOULD seem that the hinges on the gates of heaven have recently been in need of additional lubrication. Reportedly, the present Pope has "created" more saints during his term of office than any other previous incumbent.

Possibly these promotions are intended to ensure a celestial welcome for John Paul at least equal to those he has grown accustomed to receiving during his famous world tours.

This spate of canonisations has obviously given the impression to the faithful that access to sainthood appears more easily come by these days. So a queue has begun forming.

Certainly, not the least known person on the list is one Savonarola, who is, as matters now stand, roasting his days away in hell. Sainthood would undoubtedly be of considerable benefit to his well-being.

Girolamo Savonarola (1452-98), Italian religious and political reformer, was a devout Dominican monk who preached in and around Florence during the reign of the Medici family. His sermons proclaimed the need for the Church and State to return to the principles

## Vatican in a dilemma over Savonarola's canonisation

and morality of the founders of Christianity.

This did not please the wealthy Medicis. Moreover, it did not please the even wealthier Papal Court. The pontiffs at that time were drawn from the infamous Spanish family of the Borgias.

by John Close

Pope Alexander VI (alias Rodrigo Borgia) ordained one of his sons – no celibacy here – a cardinal at the age of 17. But this was a very minor misdemeanour in a lengthy catalogue of unsavoury goings-on.

Savonarola condemned the impiety of the Pope and his retinue in no uncertain language. Thousands came to his sermons.

The Papacy, now thoroughly alarmed,

ordered him to shut up. He refused to stop preaching. He was offered a cardinal's hat and an invitation to visit Rome. He turned them down. Inevitably, Savonarola, caught off guard, was arrested, tried as a heretic and excommunicated. He was tortured, hanged and burned as a gentle warning to others. That was in 1498, and according to the tenets of the Church, he should still be languishing in hell – end of story.

But wait. The present-day Dominicans have been looking back on the whole sorry episode and are not happy to let matters rest. They are in fact proposing that Savonarola be rehabilitated and declared a saint.

This dilemma for the Vatican is further complicated by the fact that the powerful Jesuits are opposing his sainthood – their objection no doubt being based on the principle that hellbound heretics should remain where they are. A debate is currently taking place in the Roman Catholic press on this momentous affair. It's enough to give the Curia double vision.

## "We'll have nun of that," says Sydney Opera House

The world-famous Sydney Opera in Australia was forced to abandon plans to allow the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence to conduct tours of the building.

The Sisters – gay men dressed as nuns who satirise the church for being opposed to homosexuality – were invited last year by the Opera House Trust to conduct tours during Sydney's spectacular Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival in February.

However, the Catholic Church got wind of the plan, and forced the Trust to withdraw its invitation.

In announcing the Trust's capitulation to Catholic pressure, its Chief Executive Michael Lynch apologised to the Church for any offence.

## Attacked for watching TV

A 79-year-old man was beaten up and his Jerusalem home ransacked by a gang of ultra-orthodox Jews because he was watching TV on the Sabbath. The attack, which left him with broken hands and legs, was blamed on "modesty patrols" which have revived tensions between orthodox and secular Jews.

## "Weeping" Csar Nicholas II "unsuitable" for canonisation

By Barry Duke

ONE martyr the Pope need not concern himself with is Csar Nicholas II, who, according to reports emanating from Russia, belatedly started weeping 81 years after he and other members of the royal family were murdered at the start of the Russian revolution.

According to a report in *Provoslavnaya Rus (Orthodox Russia)*, the long dead csar began manifesting his distress through a paper icon in a Moscow Church.

Following up the story, a BBC correspondent visited the church and reported that some liquification had taken place behind the glass covering the icon. This, he was assured, was myrrh – a sure sign that a "miracle" had taken place.

*Provoslavnaya Rus* added: "One truly spiritually (*sic*) rejoices in our Lord our God that this miracle has taken place which proves that Csar

Nicholas II is interceding on our behalf within the Kingdom of our Gracious God" – thereby setting off a clamour to have the dead csar declared a saint. The icon was inspected by a group of priests, who then called on Metropolitan Yuvenalii, President for the Commission for the Glorification of Saints (now *there's* a job to add colour to one's CV) to put the case for canonisation before the Hierarchical Council of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Alas, although The HCMP concluded that the myrrh had no doubt appeared courtesy of the "Holy Spirit" and that "there are no words" to describe the phenomenon, they reluctantly declared the late csar's "unsuitability for canonisation". "A direct indication from God is being ignored," trumpeted the angry wife of a parish priest after their ruling.



Csar Nicholas II as portrayed in the Moscow icon

Freethinkers have a long record of challenging the status quo, so the newish word “speciesism” and all that it implies will be of special interest to them.

Newcomers to the word, however, may be uncomfortable with it at first, for the change in perception required of them is dramatic. In fact a first encounter with the idea of speciesism can be like a first experience of “seeing” one of those 3-D Magic Eye pictures that have become popular over the last few years: they both demand initial concentration and suspension of preconceptions before the new perception, quite suddenly, can be “seen”.

Speciesism is analogous with racism, sexism, etc, and it is the logical next discrimination to confront in our social evolution. Two *Chambers Dictionary* (1993) definitions follow for comparison: racism: hatred, rivalry or bad feeling between races; belief in the inherent superiority of some races over others, usually with the implication of a right to be dominant; discriminative treatment based on such belief. Speciesism: the assumption that man is superior to all other species of animals and that he is therefore justified in exploiting them to his advantage.

Dr Richard Ryder, Senior Consultant Psychologist and himself a one-time animal experimenter, coined the word “speciesism” in 1970. He had noticed the attitudes of fellow experimenters and wondered why they accepted without misgiving painful, often needless, experiments on other species and without first questioning their validity. (We might recall the famous Milgram experiments in USA which showed how easy it was, in certain circumstances, for those in authority to bring about unquestioning obedience from groups of volunteers, even when they were being asked to give painful electric shocks to other humans: the need to conform with the rest of the group is strong.) Richard Ryder concluded something more: that our own species was undervaluing the interests of other species in just the same way as racists undervalue the interests of those races they deem inferior to their own. Speciesism, like racism, is a prejudice – and therefore irrational – which we use to discriminate against those physically unlike ourselves.

Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* outraged the religious world with its revelations of our close kinship with other species, and even now its implications have not been fully accepted and acted upon. Workers for improvement in conditions for animals are sometimes accused of being “sentimental” about them. Quite the contrary. It was sentiment that made human animals choose to draw the line just beneath ourselves, *Homo sapiens*, placing us in lordly fashion well above all other species. That

sharp line could well have been drawn differently had we been less arrogant, and mindful that we ourselves were the beings (and biased maybe?) setting the criteria. For by favouring ourselves in all concerns, whether vital to us or trivial, we were simply being dictated to by our “selfish” genes.

Steadily we are learning more about other animals, and our past measures for judging ourselves to be the supremely important species have proved to be misguided. (For

**Speciesism is  
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instance, our brain is not the heaviest in relation to body size, we are not the only species with a language or complex social structure nor alone in using tools.)

All our past justifications are falling away, but we strive against the implications, the changes that accepting this knowledge might bring to our lives. Humans are just one of many interesting animals on this planet and a chimpanzee, in fact, has genes 98% similar to our own. The significant qualities we share with other animals are life and sentience: these are what we disregard when we exploit other species, now often to our own future detriment (the BSE crisis, antibiotics fed to farm animals, destruction of fauna and flora, etc.)

In the past, when slavery was generally considered morally acceptable, only the few who used their imagination/intelligence deduced that the “unlike” (eg those of another race) were sentient beings like themselves and therefore deserving of equal consideration of interest. Similarly, now, only a minority of us are rethinking our treatment of other species. Foremost among these is Peter Singer, professor of philosophy and director of the Centre for Human Bioethics at Monash University, Melbourne, whose books spearheaded the

movement against speciesism in Australia and the USA. Singer believes our domination of animals to be morally indefensible.

On what criteria precisely has the human animal claimed its superiority over all other creatures, and are they relevant in the question of the morality of inflicting pain on them? Humans often argue that our “cleverness” gives us this right. White races have often used similar arguments or claimed that coloured races were less susceptible to pain, in order to justify slavery, etc. New thinking would claim that other animals deserve equal right of consideration to human animals where inflicting pain is concerned, for the appropriate question to ask is not whether they are clever but whether they are painient (a new word meaning “can suffer pain or distress”). We choose other animals because to us they seem of less consequence than ourselves – and because they are so easy to treat badly (a bully chooses a weaker being with nobody to defend it). And – you’ve guessed! – we give the preferential treatment to those like ourselves, our own species. So you and I have the comfort/luxury of knowing we are most unlikely to end up in a meat pie or on a dissecting table – powerful allies will protect us – whilst “outsiders” are cunningly selected instead. (Hush! Don’t let us be too complacent here; tyrannical aliens, perhaps even partial to roasted *homo sapiens*, could invade our planet at any time.)

Consider how religious dogma was perpetuated through the ages, so successfully that no well-grounded argument can shake its hold on believers. Then reflect on how our attitude to animals was also formed for us in the past. How to effect changes in people’s ingrained attitudes here, too, is no easy task.

Should you surf the net for references to speciesism you will notice, alongside the serious philosophical arguments, the entry “Speciesism: whatever next Ha Ha Ha”. You will recall that it was not so long ago that the idea of women’s liberation provoked similar hilarity from the less imaginative. Resistance to new ways of thinking prevails in any age, but people do have particular difficulty with the idea of speciesism. Why is this? Because it is so entrenched in our society it is hard to see it for what it is. Because we are nearly all deeply involved in the exploitation. Because we do not want to know that we, ourselves, are the oppressors, however unintentionally. We have just been swept along with the tide, unaware.

For a thorough examination of the subject read Richard D Ryder’s *Victims of Science* (NAVS) and Peter Singer’s classic, *Animal Liberation* (Thorsons).

Strangely, it was a story in the *Daily Telegraph* about football that set me thinking about music. It concerned Aston Villa, a team which, apparently, started out as a Methodist church club. The local clergy in Aston are up in arms that the club has decided to play a game against Chelsea on a Sunday morning! The Rev Keith Sinclair, a local vicar and killjoy, says the team was "abandoning its roots by playing a home game on the Sabbath". In protest, eight local churches intend to toll their bells loudly throughout the match in the hope of pricking the consciences of congregants who prefer soccer to sermons.

The story brought to mind Ludovic Kennedy's assertion that religion has now been superseded in people's lives by other things – sport and television being the most popular. Art – particularly music and literature – follow hot upon their heels. "The spiritual delights to be found in art are equally fulfilling and, among the people at large, increasingly popular," Kennedy wrote in his book *All in the Mind: A Farewell to God*. "Since the end of the last war there has been an explosion in the arts in the shape of concerts and plays, opera and ballet performances, art exhibitions, poetry recitals, audio-tape readings, televised competitions for the BBC's Singer/Pianist/Musician of the Year, architectural competitions, success of Classic FM. So that Winwood Reade's prophecy of a hundred years ago that in the future art would take the place of religion looks like being fulfilled."

My own experiences over the past few weeks lead me to think he might have a point.

Recently I went to my local church only to find it packed to the doors, with an usher outside saying that there was standing room only. The reason? The local symphony orchestra was staging a concert, consisting entirely of secular music. This was on a Saturday night. On my way to the newsagent the following morning, I peeked in to see the congregation reduced once more to its regular handful, mournfully groaning its Hallelujahs into the vast empty chasm.

The same thing happened at the Methodist Central Hall last month. A classical concert attracted almost a full house, something which this huge building can't have seen in connection with its religious activities for many a long year. A standing ovation was awarded to the pianist who gave a spirited rendition of George Gershwin's hardly devotional *Rhapsody in Blue*. (It was

## Music, footy and telly: religion's natural successors

Gershwin, by the way, who, with his brother Ira penned the immortal lines "De t'ings dat yo' li'ble to read in de bible, it ain't necessarily so".) Yes, indeed, many churches have discovered that the only way to get a decent number of people though the doors is to put on concerts. Even St Paul's Cathedral was jam-packed a couple of years ago when it staged Delius's atheistic *Mass of Life* (with suitable apologies from the Dean to an outraged bunch of spoil-sport Christians).

We all have our own favourite pieces of music, the ones that produce the famous "tingle factor"; for many atheists, the emotional responses connected with music are probably the nearest they'll get to a transcendent experience. It is certainly a profound mystery how a great violinist can scrape a bow over five strings of catgut and produce a sound that can provoke in the listener tears of nostalgia or waves of delight.

Needless to say, religionists are very fond of claiming that without its religious roots, music in the Western World would be a much more primitive affair. If it hadn't been for the "sacred" music composed for churches, the tradition would not have progressed very far and we would still be beating drums and blowing penny whistles and singing *Ring-a-ring o'-roses*. Without the church there would have been no tradition for Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms to follow and move forward. I've never been convinced by that argument. Creative people will create. It just so happened that in the early days, the church had the money to pay them.

In an amusing piece in the *Guardian*, Stephen Moss made a heartfelt plea for concert audiences to make less noise. He had been annoyed by the amount of coughing, shuffling and movement which had disturbed recent performances. He traced the origins of this behaviour back to the 17th and 18th century when, "you either heard sacred music in church, in which case you neither spoke nor applauded; or you heard profane music in a hall, where you could eat, drink, talk, fight, and generally get your five ducats' worth". But, he contends, profane music is now sacred and deserves the same respect that religious music once did when played in church.

He quotes the Hungarian pianist Andreas Schiff who says: "A concert is not an entertainment. It should be a deep intellectual and emotional experience from which the listener takes something home to feel and think about. Of all the music I know, Schubert's moves me to tears. Schubert said there was no such thing as happy music and while his music is infinitely sad and tragic, it does not depress me. It lifts me up."

This sounds almost like something a bishop might say in a sermon when recommending a passage from the Bible. And yet Schubert was an irreligious man. He made no claims to divine inspiration.

As far as there being no happy music, Schubert didn't live long enough to hear Prokofiev's *First Symphony*, but I defy anyone to listen to that without wanting to dance around the room with joy.

## No salvation without capital punishment

The following letter was published in a local paper about four decades ago, when the *Freethinker* was campaigning for an end to capital punishment:-

Easter, with us once again, should bring sobering thoughts to those fanatics who, in opposition to God's Divine Law, advocate and campaign for the abolition of capital punishment. Many Christians must often, like myself, contemplate the terrible consequences to mankind if capital punishment had been abolished some 2,000 years ago and Our Lord had then been unable to sacrifice his only begotten son on the Cross to save us all.

## Standley Memorial Lecture

The second annual Albert Standley Memorial lecture will be held on Saturday, April 17, 1999 at 2pm at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1.

The lecture, organised by the South London Republican Forum, is to honour the contribution made by the late Albert Standley to Republicanism and other progressive causes.

He was a member of the National Secular Society, South Place Ethical Society and the Fabian Society.

This year's theme will be the English Republicans of the 1870s. The main speaker will be Terry Liddle. A speaker from the National Secular Society will also be on the platform

# The Devil gets a

By Nicolas

The Vatican spin-doctors have decided that their other client, the Devil, also needs a re-launch in good time for the Millennium. In January, following the Pope's statement amending the traditional Christian image of God (see Feb 1999 *Freethinker*), the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments issued a statement amending the traditional Christian image of the Devil.

Like God, the Devil is no longer to be imagined anthropomorphically, but is to be interpreted in a "more subtle and sophisticated" way as a force within us rather than a person outside us, "the cause of evil" rather than "Prince of Darkness", and religious exorcists are instructed to consult secular psychotherapists.

What is going on here?

It's a long story.

Monotheistic religion always has trouble with evil. If God made everything, he made evil as well as good. No amount of juggling with the theory that human beings must be free to choose between good and evil can avoid the fact that the evil must come from somewhere and that much actually existing evil has non-human origins. Other religions have less trouble. Polytheistic religion contains a multiplicity of bad as well as good deities, dualistic religion balances good and evil between two rival deities; and monotheistic religion always tends to avoid its difficulties by leaning towards either or both of these solutions.

In early Judaism, as shown in the Old Testament, evil began either as a property of God alongside good or else as a property of the rival deities of other religions. But as Judaism developed, it was felt that God must be at the same time entirely good and entirely single. In either case, evil became displaced and represented by some kind of animal or humanoid spirit.

At the beginning of the Bible, in the myth of the Garden of Eden, it appears as "the serpent" who is "more subtil than any beast of the field". He is also more subtil than Woman, since he beguiles her to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and than Man, whom she gives the fruit – the episode described in Christian doctrine as the Fall and the beginning of Original Sin, for which the serpent is cursed along with Man and Woman (Genesis 3). This looks like a relic of primitive folk belief in snakes as magical symbols both of evil (because they are poisonous) and of immortality (because they shed their skins and seem to live again).

When evil becomes a person, it isn't clear

whether he acts in opposition to or in association with God. In the myth of Job, he appears as Satan (*Shatan*, Hebrew for adversary), who comes among the "sons of God" and who challenges God to test Job's faith by inflicting evil on him. Satan similarly appears in one of the Prophetic books as the adversary of the high-priest Joshua (Zechariah 3). The confused conception of evil is revealingly depicted in the historical books of the Bible. When King David orders a census of his subjects, there are two stories of what happens. In one source, "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah" (2 Samuel 24); but in a later source, "Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel" (1 Chronicles 21): in both cases God punishes Israel with a plague. Similarly, it is God who hardens Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 7-11), sends the evil spirit which troubles Saul and has to be exorcised by David's harp-playing (1 Samuel 16), and God who sends the false spirit which persuades King Ahab to fight the Syrians, resulting in his death (1 Kings 22, 2 Chronicles 18).

In other ancient religions, evil was personified much more explicitly. Zoroastrianism, the established religion of the Persian and Parthian empires for a thousand years, has two supreme deities, Ahura Mazda (or Muzd) representing light and truth and good, and Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) representing darkness and falsity and evil. It may be under Persian influence that later Jewish thought magnified Satan into a much more significant and sinister figure. In the non-canonical books written between the Old and New Testaments the ideas about god and evil became increasingly complicated. By the beginning of our era it seems to have been believed in Palestine as well as many other parts of the Middle East that the world was full of rival hosts of good and evil spirits, angels and demons, led respectively by God and by the Devil, all engaged in continuous struggle for the souls of humans.

Thus in the Christian New Testament, just as physical illness is attributed to the effects of sin, mental illness is attributed to possession by demons, and Jesus spends more time curing the sick by exorcising their demons than by forgiving their sins. Satan himself appears as the personification of absolute evil. He is called by his Hebrew name or described equivalently as the Devil (*diabolos*, Greek for adversary) or the evil one (*poneros*, Greek for evil),

or by several old names, such as Beelzebub (the Synoptic Gospels) or Belial (2 Corinthians 6) or Abaddon/Apollyon (Revelation). He tempts Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, enters Judas in all the Gospels and Ananias in the Acts of the Apostles, and is the supreme villain of the Revelation.

Satan is seen by Jesus as the ruler and by Paul as the god of this world (John 14, 2 Corinthians 4). Paul refers to the hierarchy of evil beings when he tells us to fight against

**For most people, just as God has become little more than an oath, the Devil has become little more than a joke**

"principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in heavenly places" (Ephesians 6). There are references to the myths of Satan as the leader of the evil angels and of their expulsion from Heaven. Jesus sees him fall like lightning (Luke 10), and John sees him fall like a star (Revelation 9). John sees the angels fighting "that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan, who deceiveth the whole world" (Revelation 12), and an angel confining "the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan" in "the bottomless pit" (Revelation 20); the reference to the dragon also comes from a primitive folk belief in ancient monsters.

This melodramatic eschatology applied not only to superhuman but also to human beings. When Jesus foretells the Last Judgement, imagined as the separation of people into (good) sheep and (bad) goats, the latter will be told, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels", where they will suffer "everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25).

A curious point is that the Devil, unlike God, doesn't appear in most Christian Creeds or Catechisms, though the rituals of Baptism do include the renunciation of "the Devil and all his works".

Later Jewish and Christian thought developed an elaborate hierarchy of demons like that of angels, including all the old names, together with Ashmedai/Asmodeus, who appears in the Apocryphal book of Tobit, and



## as Walter

Lucifer or Samael, sometimes accompanied by female demons led by Lilith, and served by agents such as Mephistopheles. The demons are said to be sometimes fallen angels, sometimes the offspring of "the sons of God" and the daughters of men, and sometimes souls which have somehow sinned before being born. Early Christians reviled the Pagan gods of Greece and Rome as demons; similarly, early Buddhists and Zoroastrians saw the earlier Indian and Iranian gods as hostile spirits. During the Middle Ages, demonology became an elaborate academic exercise, like angelology, equally fantastic and equally futile.

The same phenomenon appears in Islam. Satan becomes Shaitan (inspiring the now famous Satanic Verses) and the Devil becomes Iblis, accompanied by an army of demons in opposition to Allah's army of angels. It is tempting to interpret the strongly dualistic Shi'a form of Islam, which originated in Iran, as a survival of Zoroastrian dualism, and contemporary ayatollahs' description of the United States as "the great Satan" was as atavistic as an American President's description of the Soviet Union as "the Evil Empire".

In Western folklore the Devil grew horns and a tail and took the form of a goat, and his victims were literally as well as metaphorically possessed. Witches were accused of worshipping him, and a few occultists and satanists have actually done so. In Western literature the myth of Hell with the Devil at "the bottom of the world" closes Dante's *Inferno*, the myth of the fall of the Devil and his companions opens John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and the myth of selling oneself to the Devil dominates the various versions of *Faust*.

He is an altogether more impressive figure than God – so much so that William Blake

wrote in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Hell, is because he was a true Poet, and of the Devil's part without knowing it." The Devil is still a frequent anti-hero in novels, plays and films, and demons have been metamorphosed into aliens in science fiction.

There was an interesting variation of Christian demonology. Some early Christians decided that the material world was created by a false God and only the spiritual world by the true God, that the Jehovah of the Old Testament was in fact only the Demiurge or even Satan himself and that the Jesus of the New Testament was not a man at all but the one God. Such beliefs were held by Marcionites, Gnostics and Manichees, Paulicians and Bogomils, Cathars and Albigenians. (There is some irony that the description of the Bogomils as Bulgars, because they originated in Bulgaria, was adapted as a universal nickname for homosexuals, because they avoided heterosexual intercourse as well as meat and alcohol as wrongful forms of participation in the lower, material world.) Such beliefs foreshadow the conclusion of later freethinkers, that the God of the Jews, Christians and Muslims is a personification not of good but of evil, and that the Devil is only his faint reflection. As Proudhon said, "God is evil".

Christian leaders may now be embarrassed by the traditional doctrines of a literal Heaven and Hell and the traditional descriptions of God as a literal Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and even more embarrassed by the similarly traditional references to a literal Devil in their sacred scriptures and later writings.

As it happens, the idea that the Devil isn't without but within is both very old and very new. One Apocryphal book in the Bible includes the statement: "When the ungodly

curses Satan, he curses himself" (Ecclesiasticus 21). And William Golding's allegorical novel *Lord of the Flies* includes the recognition by the visionary character that the diabolical pig's head on the stick represents not external but internal evil: "I'm part of you. Close, close, close!"

But for most people, just as God has become little more than an oath, the Devil has become little more than a joke.

Yet the largest Christian denomination can't just abolish old beliefs or amend them out of recognition without taking grave risks. Just as with God, if it is argued that the explicit passages about the Devil in the Bible and other writings should be interpreted as metaphors or parables, it must be added that he has in one form or another been an ever-present figure in millions of people's lives for several thousand years, and that he won't be eliminated without collateral damage to the whole structure of the Judaeo-Christian religion.

As late as 1972, Pope Paul VI insisted that the Devil was "an effective agent, a living spiritual being", "a terrible reality, mysterious and frightening"; in 1999 Pope John Paul II will find it hard to exorcise him, and the professional exorcists in several Christian denominations will find it hard to conduct their rituals without reference to him. Just as the demons cast out by Jesus tore their unfortunate victims before leaving them, Satan cast out by the Pope will tear poor old Christendom before he leaves it.

In the end, perhaps, they will all catch up with the freethinkers who saw long ago that the whole thing will not do. The truth is not just that there is no supernatural personification of evil any more than there is of good, but that there is no such thing as either "good" or "evil" in this cosmic religious sense, and that we must get beyond such simplistic categories altogether. To Hell with them!

### Freethinker Fund – Donations 13 February-12 March 1999

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### Peter Breary Memorial Fund – Donations September 1998-March 1999

D Bennett £20, H & B Brooks £5, D Bye £10, A Chappell £5, J Giffin £20, P Heales £10, S Rose £2, R Sharman £5, E Sinclair £20, D Sterrett £25, D Wright £12. The total raised was £1,584.



Line drawing: Nicolas Bentley

### Kathleen Nott (1905-1999)

YOU need to realise the literary situation in post-war Britain to appreciate the importance of Kathleen Nott, who died on February 11 at the age of 94. This was a time when T S Eliot reigned supreme, not only as poet, but as critic; when Graham Greene, C S Lewis and Dorothy L Sayers were, in their different ways, spreading dogmatic Christian orthodoxy; and when the *Times Literary Supplement* (January 22 1954) said the acceptance of authority in matters of religious belief "is now once more an important constituent in European letters".

It was the philosophical inadequacies of this "constituent" that Kathleen Nott had exposed in *The Emperor's Clothes* (Heinemann 1953), which the TLS (in the issue cited) called "crotchety", but which she explained in the *Literary Guide* (December 1954) "came out of alarm at a threat, at once new, old and insidious, to certain positive values which I think can still be held ... broadly the values of the liberal and humane rationalist".

Or, as Ms Nott told us in the book itself, she had particularly set out "to combat certain recent misconceptions and misstatements about the only method by which we do get public and communicable results (often negative), whose truth can be accepted by all honest people of open mind and sufficient instruction", ie the scientific method. In contrast, as Kathleen Nott pointed out, writers like the surprisingly influential T E Hulme (1883-1917) and Eliot, really disliked science more than they disliked totalitarianism.

### The missing "must"

IT MAY be 12 months before the first primary, but Martin Kettle in the *Guardian* (March 1) presented a ten-step guide to running for the US presidency, including "get an issue", "get a

(family) life", "get rich" and "get fit". What he missed out was "get a faith", a necessary ingredient for any would-be occupant of the White House today.

As Garry Wills noted in his study of American religion and politics, *Under God* (Simon & Schuster 1990), Michael Dukakis was "the first truly secular candidate we ever had for the presidency". It was his "blindness to the blinder forces in other human beings that left him so vulnerable to the Republican dirty tricks in 1988. Much of their assault on him relied upon religion ..."

### A Lenten lesson

BENEDICTINE "reasoning" can be as crafty as that of the Jesuits, if Dom Antony Sutch, monk of Downside Abbey and headmaster of Downside School is anything to go by. True, his "Face to Faith" contribution to the *Guardian* (March 6) was lightweight, the reprint of a press release on behalf of Prestat, who supply chocolates to the Queen; but the argument for eating chocolate in Lent was nonetheless perverse.

Too often, he said, "people have foregone chocolate simply as a way of symbolising, rather than embracing self-denial". This symbolism then became successively an "abuse" and a "pretence of fasting". As the piece proceeded, however, it switched from an attack on abstaining to a defence of eating chocolate during the fasting season, simply because Sutch enjoys it and Prestat supply it.

In some strange way, too, it was suggested that because women are not allowed in the monastic quarters at Downside, it would be "an excellent balance if clergy embrace chocolate as a food which brings people, male and female, together". Don't worry, then, ladies if you can't accompany your menfolk into the monastery, you can always share a bar of chocolate when they rejoin you - with Dom Sutch's blessing.

### Fast track to sainthood

THE Pope has changed his mind. He has waived the five-year rule for beatification in the case of Mother Teresa and, according to the Archbishop of Calcutta, she will soon be declared a saint. "The demand was so great and insistent that the Holy Father thought to go ahead", a spokesman told the Associated Press (*Guardian*, March 1).

Now, we read, Archbishop D'Souza can begin gathering testimony for the beatification and sainthood, but that shouldn't present any difficulty. Already two miracles have been attributed to the saint-to-be, one involving a

French woman in the United States who had broken several ribs in a car accident, and whose injuries miraculously healed when she wore a Mother Teresa medallion.

Broken ribs do, of course, heal, but not immediately. What the Archbishop ought to do, in this case, is check the full medical record and X-rays.

What the French woman *should* have done, was wear her medallion beforehand; then we may be sure, there wouldn't have been any accident in the first place. How careless these Catholics are.

### Pity the in-betweens

HINDU fundamentalists have stepped up their forcible conversion of Adivasi Christians in the western Indian state of Gujarat and extended it into neighbouring Maharashtra (*Guardian*, January 15). The Hindu extremists allege that the Adivasis were "enticed" to Christianity by faith healing and false claims of salvation, which could well be the case. In the words of one Baptist missionary, Solomon Swamidoss, "We pray to God to intervene in their life and we get their sickness cured", although he didn't say how. But, as still more Christian missionaries come, it seems to be a very nasty game of pig-in-the-middle.

### Not so direct

"HOW did this woman manage to describe this picture accurately without ever having seen it?" asked the *Observer* on February 28, the computerised picture being of an orange-and-white striped hot-air balloon sailing over fields and a river.

Reproduced alongside was a drawing of a striped balloon with a boat, some people, a bike et al, purporting to be the ESP response by a certain Hayley Blackledge, when locked in a soundproof room at Liverpool John Moores University. Psychologist Dr Matthew Smith of the Consciousness Research Unit called it a "direct hit".

But read now what Hayley Blackledge was quoted as saying: "There was a ball, the sun. I see fields, wild animals, white foaming water ... I see a bouncy blow-up ball with orange and white on it. It's an aeroplane."

It's strictly a waste of time contesting telepathic claims of this sort reported in a paper and poorly illustrated, but a hot-air balloon is not a bouncy blow-up ball or an aeroplane; if there was a sun in the original, it wasn't visible in the paper; there was no sign of foaming water and no wild animal. Blackledge's quoted description was anything but a direct hit

THE INFLUENTIAL British Medical Journal recently devoted space to an article about a condition known as Jerusalem Syndrome.

This condition, according to a report by Judy Siegel-Itzkovich, is causing considerable concern to the Israeli health services, which has met to consider ways of preparing for a major increase in Jerusalem Syndrome cases as the millennium draws closer.

So what is Jerusalem Syndrome?

According to Ms Siegel-Itzkovich, it is "a temporary psychiatric condition characterised by patients believing they have become biblical figures such as Jesus, John the Baptist, or Moses. But it is by no means a new phenomenon – "it has been known to Israeli psychiatrists for decades".

"It affects mainly Christian pilgrims, but is occasionally diagnosed in Jews who tour holy sites. Those affected begin to act strangely,

sometimes proclaiming that they are ancient religious figures sent on a holy mission. Apocalyptic Christians expect the next millennium to herald the second coming of Jesus on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, so experts have warned that the number of patients may increase sharply," Siegel-Itzkovich reported.

Professor Richard Landes, Director of the Centre for Millennial Studies at Boston University, Massachusetts, is quoted as saying that the problem has occurred before. In the year 1033 – the 1,000th anniversary of the crucifixion – crowds of people flocked to Jerusalem to mark the event, and many refused to leave. This, he warned, could repeat itself next year.

Jerusalem district psychiatrist Dr Yair Barel, who has examined many of the patients with the syndrome in recent years, said that patients tend to fall into two distinct groups: those with

a history of psychiatric problems who identify with biblical characters; and a smaller group of people who appear to have no drug, family or employment problems at all but suddenly develop the syndrome.

"Some of the pilgrims put on white toga-like clothes and start singing hymns. The symptoms pass in a week or so, and when they come to, patients are extremely embarrassed. They don't even want to talk about it," said Dr Barel.

The problems posed by Jerusalem Syndrome sufferers, and the increased influx of doomsday cult members to Israel, are insignificant compared to the growing unrest among the country's ultra-orthodox Jews, who make up around eight per cent of the population. At the beginning of February they blocked the main entrance to Jerusalem with a 200,000 strong "pray-in" – a protest against alleged religious persecution by Israel's Supreme Court.

## HUMOUR: Timmy's prayer answered



SAN FRANCISCO — For as long as he can remember, seven-year-old Timmy Yu has had one precious dream: From the bottom of his heart, he has hoped against hope that God would someday hear his prayer to walk again. Though many thought Timmy's heavenly plea would never be answered, his dream finally came true Monday, when the Lord personally responded to the boy's prayer – with a resounding "NO".

"I knew that if I just prayed hard enough, God would hear me," said the joyful Timmy, surrounded by stuffed animals sent by well-wishing Christians from around the globe, as he sat in the wheelchair to which he will be confined for the rest of his life.

"And now my prayer has been answered. I haven't been this happy since before the accident, when I could walk and play with the other children like a normal boy."

God's response came at approximately 10 am, following a particularly fervent Sunday prayer session by little Timmy. Witnesses said God issued His miraculous answer in the form of a towering column of clouds, from which poured forth great beams of Divine light and the music of the Heavenly Hosts. The miraculous event took place in the Children's Special Care Ward of St Luke's Hospital, where Timmy goes three times a week for an excruciating two-hour procedure to drain excess fluid from his damaged spinal column. Said Angela Schlosser, a day nurse who witnessed the Divine Manifestation: "An incred-

ible booming voice said to Timmy "I am the Lord thy God, who created the rivers and the mountains, the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon and the stars. Before Me sits My beloved child, whose faith is that of the mustard seed from which grows mighty and powerful things. My child, Timmy Yu, I say unto you thus: I have heard your prayers, and now I shall answer them. No, you cannot get out of your wheelchair. Not ever."

Paralysed in a 1996 auto accident that also claimed the lives of both his parents, Timmy has served as a shining example to his fellow churchgoers at Lord In Heaven On High Church, inspiring others with his simple, heartfelt devotion. Now that Timmy has received an answer, Christians the world over are celebrating his story as a stirring testament to the power of faith.

"The Lord has answered a little boy's plea to know if he would ever walk again, and that answer was no," Rev H Newman Gunther of the San Francisco School Of Divinity said.

"For years, this boy had been plagued by the question of whether or not he would ever walk, and now Our Lord, in his wisdom and mercy, has forever laid to rest any lingering doubt.

"Young Timmy can rest assured in the immutable truth that the Lord has bestowed upon him. Now and for all time, he finally knows that he will never escape the cruel prison of his chair of iron, for God hath willed it so. Praise be to God!"

Asked for comment, God said: "This kind-hearted child's simple prayer hath moved Me.

Never before have I seen such faith. His trusting soul, so full of innocent devotion to Me, hath offered seventy times seven prayers asking, 'God? Can I please walk again?' It was indeed right and fitting that I, in My infinite wisdom, should share with him the One True Answer to this long-repeated question he put before Me."

"My will be done," God added.

Witnesses to the miracle said Timmy begged God for several minutes to change His mind and heal his shattered vertebrae, but the Lord stood firm.

"God strongly suggested that Timmy consider praying to one of the other intercessionary agents of Divine power, like Jesus, Mary or maybe even a top saint," Timmy's personal physician, Dr William Luttrell, said.

"The Lord stressed to Timmy that it was a long shot, but He said he might have better luck with one of them."

Despite all the attention he has received, Timmy remains humble in the face of his newfound fame as the only human ever to have a prayer directly answered by God Himself.

"I know that God loves me, because it says so in the Bible," Timmy said. "So right now, I am just glad that God took the time to answer my prayer. If only I could walk, this would be the greatest day of my life."

(This item, from the American satirical magazine, The Onion, was submitted by Freethinker reader Tony Green.)



"THE CHILD is father of the man". Wordsworth's familiar line seems particularly applicable to Bryan Magee, who has been toying with unsolvable problems since childhood. On the first page of *Confessions of a Philosopher*, he tells us how baffled he was, as a little boy, because he could never remember actually falling asleep at night. One moment he would be chatting to his older sister in the darkness; the next he knew he would be waking up in the daylight. His sister, like most of us, I suspect, never gave the matter a second thought, but for years it was "a source of active mystification" to Bryan Magee.

Then, at school, he was appalled to find that when he closed his eyes, the scene before him disappeared – until he opened his eyes again. This rather unsurprising discovery struck him as "nightmarish"; and from that day on he has "wrestled with demons for at least a part of every day" of his life, especially when alone and, most of all, in bed at night. We must hope that sleep "knits up the ravelled sleeve of care" but, if so, the respite will only be until the next morning, when Magee's abiding problem will raise its awful head again.

The problem is self-imposed. Following Kant, he posits a noumenal world of "things as they are in themselves, and of reality as it is in itself", but of which "we are permanently unable to form any conception". There is nothing religious in this. Magee is not and never has been religious, although he was impressed with the Upanishads in his teens. They reflected his own view that the world of knowledge and experience consists only of fleeting images and that we can have no conception of "real reality", that which exists permanently. And it is interesting to note that Schopenhauer, the philosopher Magee most admires, used to read the Upanishads every night before going to sleep.

### Instant appeal

The "pessimist" philosopher had instant appeal for Magee. "Never have I had the feeling of being so directly and vividly in personal contact with an author", he says, as when he read *The World as Will and Representation*. Arthur Schopenhauer was "in the room there with me, sitting in front of me, talking to me". Far from the boring old German Magee had been led to expect, here was "the first now-famous philosopher to campaign against pseudo-profundity in philosophy". Like Hume, "he is a model in this regard". Indeed, his writing is "even better than Hume's because although no less clear it is strikingly rich in aesthetic qualities" and "brilliantly aphoristic".

Schopenhauer was the first great philosopher in the West to be explicitly atheistic. Others like Hobbes and Hume may have been atheists in fact but, as Magee says, they could not be explicit about it in their writings "without incurring the wrath of the law". For Schopenhauer, to talk of a personal God or immortal soul was "incoherent and therefore, literally, meaningless". And it was

*Confessions of a Philosopher: A Journey Through Western Philosophy*  
by Bryan Magee. Phoenix  
paperback, £8.99.

Schopenhauer who remarked rather nicely of Spinoza, that "To call the world 'God' is not to explain it, it is only to enrich our language with a superfluous synonym for the word 'world'".

Bryan Magee has expounded Schopenhauer's thought in *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*; he has also written a short study of Karl Popper, whom he knew personally and regards as the foremost philosopher of the age. But Popper was a thoroughgoing realist who, surely rightly, and despite Magee's enticements, saw no point in speculating about "anything that lies permanently outside the range of all possible knowledge because we do not have even the concepts to do the speculating".

What Popper did, says Magee, was "combine a fundamentally empiricist view of reality with a fundamentally rationalist view of knowledge – an empiricist ontology with a rationalist epistemology". Popper's own term for it was "critical rationalism". He had no desire for a future life and thought that people who yearned for it were rather pathetic egotists. His first principle for public policy was "minimise avoidable suffering".

Magee also met and admired another rationalist and realist, Bertrand Russell, not least because Russell resisted the linguistic analysis that dominated Oxford philosophy when Magee was there. Although Russell could be regarded as the "founding father" of analytic philosophy, he never regarded analysis as an end in itself: it was a method, "a way of making crystal clear to ourselves what our statements really mean, or what accepting them would commit us to..." The aim of philosophy was the understanding of the world, the nature of reality, including ourselves.

In contrast, philosophy at Oxford for a decade and a half after the Second World War scarcely concerned itself with any of the "real prob-

lems" that Magee legitimately argues should be its subject matter. He was trained in linguistic analysis, and appreciates the mental agility it fostered, but he never believed in its validity as a conception of philosophy. It is perhaps a pity, therefore, that the only mention of Ernest Gellner, whose critique of linguistic philosophy, *Words and Things*, appeared as long ago as 1959, dismisses him as a "somewhat brash" publicist of the ideas of Popper.

In his introduction to *Words and Things*, and in contrast to Bryan Magee, Bertrand Russell considered that Mr Gellner's book "deserves the gratitude of all who cannot accept the linguistic philosophy now in vogue at Oxford ... the power of fashion is great, and even the most cogent arguments fail to convince if they are not in line with the trend of current opinion. But, whatever may be the first reaction to Mr Gellner's arguments, it seems highly probable – to me, at least – that they will gradually be accorded "their due weight".

Magee's philosophical revelation came when he read Kant, with whom, as mentioned above, he shares a belief in an "independent reality", the nature of which "must lie permanently outside all possibility of experience".

All we can ever encounter in direct experience, as Magee puts it, "is experience, and experience as such is *subject-dependent*" (his italics). Or, as Schopenhauer imagined it, there is "an immaterial, undifferentiated, timeless, spaceless something of which we can never have direct knowledge but which manifests itself to us as this differentiated phenomenal world of material objects (including us) in space and time". And I say "imagined" because that is what it is. Indeed, Magee compares it with the mainstream traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism.

There I must leave Bryan Magee's voyage through Western philosophy for a brief reference to his politics. Once a liberal socialist and a Labour MP, he is now a "liberal non-socialist" on the grounds that "most people in Britain have ceased to be poor and badly housed" and he has become "disillusioned with the efficacy of many forms of state intervention".

I don't think he could be more wrong. And I must correct him when he accuses atheists of "knowing that there is not a God". We don't. What we say is that we can see no evidence for a God. No more, I might say, than there is for Kant's noumenal. In Laplace's famous phrase, we have "no need of that hypothesis".

In spite of our differences, however, I have no hesitation in recommending Bryan Magee's *Confessions of a Philosopher*, which is now available in a reasonably-priced, 600-page paperback.

**A**bram was not having a good day. When you're 99 years old the very last thing you need is an order from on high to change your name and lose a bit of your penis.

Come to think of it, he hadn't been having much of a good time since the day The Voice – persuasive but quite definitely psychotic – began booming in his head.

The trouble started when Abram heard The Voice tell him to up and leave his home “and go to a country that I am going to show you”.

The Voice, Abram believed, belonged to none other than the Lord God Almighty, and he felt impelled to obey it, especially since it held out some interesting promises.

“I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing,” it said.

“Yeah, right,” said Abram, who had every cause to be sceptical. He was knocking on a bit, and his wife Sarai – also his half-sister – was as barren as the moon, so how the hell was he to produce descendants?

Nevertheless, at the age of 75, Abram, together with his spouse, his nephew Lot and all his worldly possessions, set out as ordered on a trek through Canaan, stopping periodically to build altars at which to worship and get further instructions from his celestial travel agent.

He finally reached the border of Egypt, where he told his wife – 10 years his junior – to pose as his sister. “You are a beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you, they will assume that you are my wife; they will kill me and let you live.”

He wasn't far wrong. The moment the King of Egypt – who clearly had a penchant for the more mature woman – clapped eyes on Sarai he claimed her for his own, ensconcing her in his palace, and rewarding Abram with “flocks of sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys, slaves and camels”.

The arrangement was perfect, but for one glitch. Abram's God disapproved of the set-up, and somewhat perversely decided to punish the Egyptians, rather than Abram who'd initiated it, by inflicting “terrible diseases” on the King and on the people of his palace.

Abram and Sarai were promptly expelled from Egypt as liars, troublemakers, and purveyors of yucky germs and wound up in the southern part of Canaan, where the childless couple was once again promised great rewards – including a son – by The Voice.

Shortly afterwards, Sarai came up with a cunning plan. “As I cannot bear children,” she suggested, “why don't you knock up my

**Following a recent TV**

**programme about the**

**Jewish ritual of male**

**circumcision, Barry**

**Duke went in search of**

**the origins of this**

**barbaric practice – and**

**traced it to a 99-year-old**

**man who was prone to**

**hearing voices**

Egyptian slave girl Hagar?”

“That *would* be nice, m'dear,” said Abram, and promptly set about doing the necessary. Some feat, considering his age, and the fact that thousands of years had yet to elapse before the advent of Viagra!

Alas, the moment Hagar started going pear-shaped, so did the arrangement. Her pregnancy gave her ideas above her station and she began treating Sarai disrespectfully.

Sarai blamed Abram, who snapped: “She is your slave and under your control; do whatever you want with her.” Sarai then treated Hagar so abominably that the pregnant slave girl ran away. She did not get far. An angel waylaid her, ordered her back to Abram's household and informed her she would bear a son called Ishmael.

The angel was right – angels always are – and Hagar *did* bear Abram a son, and he was called Ishmael. Abram, at the time was 86.

Not a lot happened for the next 13 years. Then, suddenly God again appeared to Abram – now 99 – with some good news and bad news.

The good news was a repeat of that hoary old promise – that the Almighty had decided to give Abram “many descendants”, so many in fact that “they will become nations”.

The bad news was that, in order to comply with this covenant, Abram was to have himself and all the males in his household circumcised.

Abram: “Excuse me?”

God (chuckling sadistically): “You and your descendants must all agree to circumcise every male among you. From now on you must circumcise every baby boy when he is eight days

old, including slaves born in your homes and slaves bought from foreigners.

“This will show there is a covenant between you and me. Each one must be circumcised, and this will be a physical sign to show that my covenant with you is everlasting. Any male who has not been circumcised will no longer be considered to be one of my people, because he has not kept the covenant with me ... oh, and by the way, your name is no longer to be Abram, but Abraham, because I am making you the ancestor of many nations.”

**T**his announcement hardly had time to sink in when God added, again without any apparent reason or logic, “and you must no longer call your wife Sarai, from now on her name is Sarah. I will bless her and give you a son by her”. And off God swanned, cheerfully humming *Que Sarah, Sarah*, while Abraham was left with the distasteful task of separating himself and all the males of his household from their foreskins.

But a moment of doubt *did* cross his mind: If God wished all the men of his Chosen People not to have foreskins, why did he not see to it that baby boys were born without the offensive prepuce in the first place? Furthermore, if man was made in God's image, did it not follow that God himself had a foreskin?

However, devotion, as always, triumphed over common sense, and – dismissing the thought as blasphemous – he proceeded to do the bloody deed.

A while later, following a visit to Abraham's home by three strangers, Sarah miraculously became pregnant, and nine months later – when she was 90 and Abraham 100 – she bore a son called Isaac, who, in accordance with God's wishes, had his poor wee willie assaulted with a sharp instrument eight days after his birth.

All of this, I swear, is true – and if you don't believe me, just ask any of Abraham's male descendants to drop his trousers and display his ritually docked dick.

**Postscript:** Sarah lived until the age of 127; Abraham until 175. After Sarah's death, he remarried, produced six children, and embarked on quite a few more zany capers masterminded by God, now an accomplished practical joker.

This is clear from his order to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. His obedient servant was just about to plunge a knife into the child when an angel called from heaven: “Only kidding.” At that moment Abraham spotted a ram entangled in a bush, and sacrificed that instead. Hilarious or what?

**Divine non-existence**

THE November/December *Freethinker* editorial doubted if any *Freethinker* readers would disagree with such "Faith Atheist" stands as their denial that the non-existence of God is provable, or that ethical first principles are rational. I'll bet I am not the only reader writing in to correct you on that.

Take the non-existence of God. In all honesty, how much in science is any more provable than that rather obvious truth? Don't natural science and its history show pretty plainly that no overall universal order prevails throughout all time and space? For, whenever any supposed universal law has been announced, it has always proved later to hold good, if at all, only conditionally – and so not universally. And the universal prevalence of any overall pro-human order, worthy of our serious approval, is surely disproved amply by flood, fire, famine, plague, pestilence and drought. So much for the theistic idea that all existence is governed by some single all-powerful, all-good Creator who loves human beings.

I'm not saying the non-existence of God is quite as certain as  $2 + 1 = 3$ , or tomorrow's sunrise, but the available evidence surely does back it up more strongly than it backs up the theory of evolution or anything in physics. Perhaps divine non-existence is (approximately) as certain as the roundness of the earth.

**DAN GOLDSTICK**  
Department of Philosophy  
University of Toronto  
Canada

**Separating cults from religions**

APPROPOS your feature *When is a Cult not a Cult?* (*Freethinker*, January) I would suggest that the distinction between a religion and a cult is quite clear cut: a cult becomes a religion when:

- Information and core philosophy is published openly and not restricted to members passing initiation tests
- Members are not separated from the rest of the world; and
- It progresses from killing its own members to killing non-members.

By these criteria Scientology remains a cult no matter how powerful its organisation has become, whilst Islam and Christianity are most definitely religions. However, Judaism appears to be slipping from being a religion into a grey area as, since biblical times, it has rarely engaged in much rape and pillage despite the intermittent efforts of right-wing Likuds.

How much weight one gives to each criteri-

on is moot. In my opinion a band of believers reaches full religionhood only when its members begin to massacre indiscriminately in the name of their leader.

**CHRIS OLDMAN**  
Cheltenham

**Printworthy women**

AFTER reading Bill McIlroy's letter (*Freethinker*, February), I decided that it was not worth a reply, and that unless others support the observations I was making, I would not waste any more time on the topic – there being no point if this is the predominant attitude prevailing among FT readers.

However, thinking about the contents of his letter and its offensive and sneering tone, the following thought occurred to me:

That Bill McIlroy can count eight of the most well-known women activists or writers of the last 50 years or more as contributors, rather makes my point for me.

How long would the entire list of contributors be? And is such elevated status the criterion for women to be printworthy?"

**SUE LORD**  
Kent

**Free to choose**

FREETHINKERS should certainly be free to adopt any political stances they wish – and as a freethinking humanist I am drawn to socialism (which could work if we were all better human beings), because in general I prefer co-operation to competition.

Moreover, while Conservatives condemn what they refer to as "the dependency culture", I doubt if they ever ponder on their own dependence – on good health, on affluent and/or supportive backgrounds, on inborn assertive temperaments and on the "old boy" network. These things tend to be taken for granted.

Humans are basically unfair – always have been and always will be – but at least we should try to reduce that unfairness. The trickle-down theory manifestly fails in this direction.

And before anyone utters that other parrotcry of "the politics of envy", may I ask what is it other than envy which has "fat cats" whining for equality with even fatter felines?

**VIVIEN GIBSON**  
London

**What is Socialism Today?**

MY *Concise Oxford Dictionary* explains

socialism as advocating "that the community should own and control the means of production, distribution, and exchange".

Most of Europe's political parties appear to have discarded advocacy of public ownership, but the concept of socialism still receives occasional support in your letters pages.

Am I to understand that in using this word your correspondents intend to convey the COD meaning? Paul Bennett (August 1998) defined socialism "briefly as a moneyless, classless, society". Is this generally accepted?

Until the meaning of socialism is clarified, I shall not know whether I am witnessing the defiant last support for an old faith, or the dawning of a new one.

**JOHN RAYNER**  
North Wembley,  
Middlesex.

**Depressing review**

Terry Sanderson's review of Ludovic Kennedy's book *All In the Mind: A Farewell to God* made for a very depressing read. It did not sit well in the pages of the *Freethinker*. It was as derisive as something which could have been written by a religious correspondent.

Sanderson's criticism was that "for most readers of the *Freethinker* its long trawl through the wrongdoings of Christianity over the ages will be well-trodden ground" and do we really need another book to remind us of the horrors of religion?

The answer is of course we do!

What Sanderson fails to grasp is that most people don't read the *Freethinker* and these very people may be those who would be interested in a book by a prominent and respected figure. This could kick-start a lot of minds, especially young ones, and get them thinking.

Ludovic Kennedy's book is by no means "tilting at windmills" as Sanderson states. As Professor Richard Dawkins has observed, religion is a virus of the mind as virulent as rabies and it will not disappear in the foreseeable future.

Religion is something each generation will have to fight against. Until now I thought the *Freethinker* was contributing to this fight – even leading it. With reviews like this I have to ask: has the *Freethinker's* agenda changed?

**JIM CASS**  
Bishop Auckland  
County Durham

**Spirit Zone presence**

Reading about all the current fuss and bother over the religious content of the Spirit Zone in



the Millennium Dome Exhibition, I wondered if the secular humanist movement was to be offered space for its own exhibit – even if only a humble table-top with a few leaflets? If so, may I suggest that an appropriate text to be emblazoned over our space might be Thomas Hardy's sceptical couplet, surveying the carnage of the First World War:

*After 2000 years of Mass*

*We've got as far as mustard gas.*

Or, if a more updated version is preferred, may I humbly offer my own:

*Two thousand years since Jesus died*

*We've got as far as genocide.*

JOHN HUGHES  
Sheffield

### Muscling in

The Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Hume have joined forces to threaten a boycott of the Millennium Dome inauguration unless the programme devotes "significant time" to Christian prayers. Their argument: that the occasion is primarily the 2000th anniversary of Christ's birth.

Does that mean they reject the gospels as a true record? Herod the Great, who figures largely in the nativity story and the alleged "slaughter of the innocents", is known to have died in the year we now designate 4BCE. So why didn't Christians have their birthday party in 1996, instead of trying to muscle in on the secular celebrations? And what is the Christian significance of midnight on December 31, when they usually celebrate the nativity on the 25th?

BARBARA SMOKER  
Bromley  
Kent

### Unpleasantly surprised

I read *Freethinking out Loud* in the March issue and was unpleasantly surprised at the sentiment expressed.

Early in the article you speak of "this obsession with longevity". What can you mean by that expression? Do you mean the wish not to die – yet?

Do you think 50 a nice robust age to stop maintaining life? By suicide? Refusing food?

Perhaps you think unemployment is a good reason for suicide – since many unemployed people are dependent on the state. And indeed

some in employment without adequate private retirement pensions.

Or do you think a return to a not-too-distant past when poverty and the disease that went with it ensured that only the wealthy should live long?

It would be interesting to know at what age you consider you will have lived long enough!

PAUL PAYNE  
Dymchurch  
Kent.

### A pleasure to read

Margaret Knight's radio talks, published in the *Freethinker* (February and March) were a pleasure to read: humane, rational and enlightening. But even today, over 40 years later, her views would still not be acceptable on BBC's *Thought for the Day*. Cause and effect, I suppose?

DENIS WATKINS  
Pembrokeshire

### Hoddle sacking

Glenn Hoddle was sacked because he made public comment which could only be construed as denigratory of people with disabilities.

How far particular groups should be protected against derogatory comment is arguable – we are probably all open to criticism on one count or another – but to defend Hoddle's remarks as religious dogma is akin to defending, or refraining to criticise, intolerable cultural practices simply because they are *cultural* practices.

D HARROP  
Sheffield

### Insulting and untrue

I much enjoy the great diversity of articles and letters in the *Freethinker* but I was saddened by the crudity and the attitude of Michael Hill in the February correspondence.

To describe an interesting regular contributor as a "fanatic" is insulting and untrue however much opinions may differ on any matter.

I certainly do not regard Mr Hill as a fanatic because he opposes socialism. I simply think he has the wrong end of the stick. Socialism is essentially an idea for improving human society by taking certain things into collective

ownership, especially natural resources and basic man-made industries. The failure to achieve the condition in practice does not prove socialism is trash. It proves humanity is not yet enlightened enough to take the great step forward. To argue that an idea is a proven failure because people show insufficient interest in it is bereft of reason. For many centuries humans dreamt of being able to fly. Many attempts were made to achieve it, but all failed. Only early in this century was the idea finally realised in practice. Was aviation therefore a ridiculous, "trashy" idea from the beginning?

I hope I need not add that I am a supporter of democracy and have never endorsed the idea of any violent road to socialism.

MARTIN SKINNER  
Powys  
Wales

### Good argument can win votes

The report of the recent student debate on belief in God (*Freethinker*, March) attributes large majority votes for God at the Oxford and the Cambridge Unions to artificially large turn-outs by believers. It is certainly true that student debates do usually have such results – as I have witnessed for more than forty years – but it is surely wrong to take no account at all of the effects of speakers and arguments.

I must mention that after many lost votes at both Unions over many years, on the last occasions I spoke at Oxford and Cambridge – at the beginning of 1995 – we actually won the votes after crowded debates by large majorities.

NICOLAS WALTER  
London

### More Widdecombe nonsense

JUST RECENTLY Ms Ann N Widdecombe MP (Maidstone & The Weald), once a faithful supporter of the English Established Christian Church, was asked on a television news programme for her opinion on the new poster of Christ which portrayed him as a revolutionary. In her reply she said among other nonsense "God is not made in our image – we are made in his." I was reminded of another devout Christian's comment made earlier. "I did not have sex with that woman. She had sex with me."

RALPH ISON  
Farnham Royal, Bucks

Please address your letters (preferably typed) to Barry Duke, Editor, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. The E-mail address is editor@freethinker.co.uk. You can also fax a letter to 0181 305 9603

## HUMANIST CONTACTS AND EVENTS

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

**Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group:** Information: D Baxter: 01253 726112

**Brighton & Hove Humanist Group:** Information: 01273 733215. Cornerstone Community Centre, Church Road (corner of First Avenue), Hove. Sunday, April 11, 4 pm. Public meeting.

**Bristol Humanists:** Information: Margaret Dearnley on 0117 9049490.

**Bromley Humanists:** Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. Information: 0181 777 1680.

**Chiltern Humanists:** Information: 01296 623730

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

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

**Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists:** Information: 01926 858450. Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road, Kenilworth. Thursday, April 15, 8pm. Public meeting.

**Devon Humanists:** Information: Christine Lavery, 5 Prospect Gardens, off Blackboy Road, Exeter. Tel: 01392 56600.

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

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

**Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):** Information: 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB. Tel 01926 858450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30 pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. April 9: Duncan Lustig-Prean (of Rank Outsiders): *Gays in the Military – Prospects for Reform*.

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

**Harrow Humanist Society:** Information: 0181 863 2977. Monthly meetings, December – June (except January).

**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. Tel. 01224 573034. Convener: Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire. Tel. 01563 526710

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

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

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

**Leeds & District Humanist Group:** Information Robert Tee on 0113 2577009. The Swarthmore Centre, Leeds. Tuesday, April 20, Annual General Meeting and supper at 14 Foxholes Crescent, Calverley.

**Leicester Secular Society:** Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 0116 2622250 Or 0116 241 4060.

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** Information: Denis Cobell: 0181 690 4645. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, April 29, 8pm. Colin Jones: *Ethical Issues Around Animal Experimentation*.

**Manchester Humanist Group:** Information: Arthur Chappell. Tel. 0161 681 7607. Monthly meetings at Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.

**Musical Heathens:** Monthly meetings for music and discussion (Coventry and Leamington Spa). Information: Karl Heath. Tel. 01203 673306.

**North East Humanists (Teesside Group):** Information: J Cole 01642 559418 or Christine Wood 0191 2763123.

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

**North London Humanist Group:** Monthly meetings. Information: Anne Toy on 0181 360 1828.

**Norwich Humanist Group:** Information: Vincent G Chainey, Le Chene, 4 Mill Street, Bradenham, Thetford IP25 7PN. Tel. 01362 820982.

**Rationalist Press Association:** Centenary Conference at Westhill Conference Centre, Selly Park, Birmingham, June 25-27. Information: John Metcalfe, RPA, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP. Tel: 0171 430 1371.

**Sheffield Humanist Society:** Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, May 5, 8 pm. Sheila Banks: Subjects or Citizens? Programme from Gordon Sinclair, telephone 01226 743070 Or Bill McIlroy, 0114 2509127.

**South Place Ethical Society:** Weekly talks/meetings/concerts, Sundays 11am & 3pm at Conway Hall Library, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0171 242 8037/4. Monthly programme on request.

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

**Stockport Secular Group:** Information: Carl Pinel, 85 Hall Street, Offerton, Stockport SK1 4DE. Tel. 0161 480 0732.

**Sutton Humanist Group:** Information: 0181 642 4577.

**Ulster Humanist Association:** Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel. 01846 677264. Meetings second Thursday evening of the month at Ulster Arts Club, Elmwood Avenue, Belfast.

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

**West Kent Secular Humanist Group:** Information: Ian Peters. Tel. 01892 890485 or Chris Ponsford on 01892 862855.

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Please send your What's On notices to **Bill McIlroy, 115 South View Road, Nether Edge, Sheffield S7 1DE. Tel: 0114 2509127.**