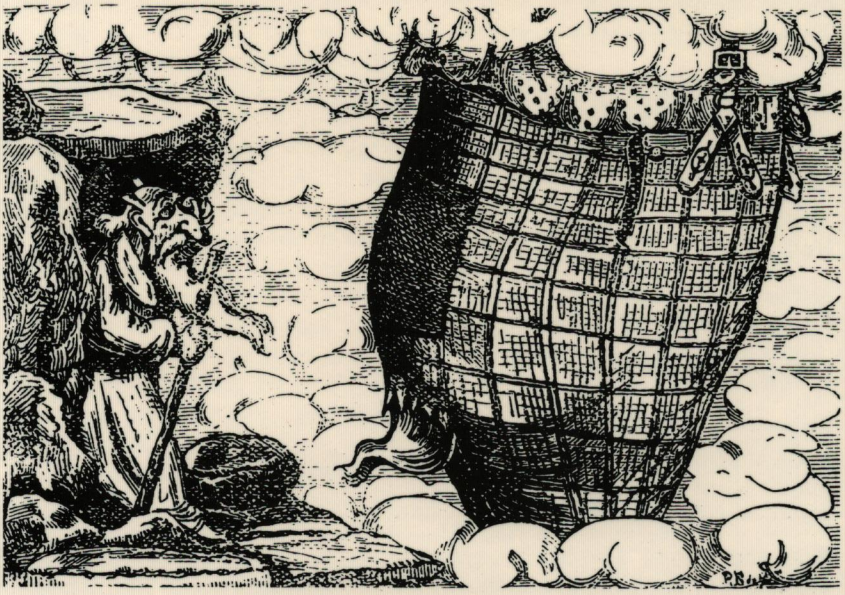
Religion

Freethinker Christmas Number



MOSES GETTING A BACK VIEW

And it shall come to pass that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and I shall take away my hand, and thou shalt see my back parts — Exodus xxxiii.,23

THE RAVEN ANARCHIST QUARTERLY 25

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Editorial

Religion has been much in the news lately because of fundamentalism. One can scarcely pick up a newspaper, it seems, without reading some horrific story of a suicide bomber or a woman shot for infringing dress customs in the Middle East. The press gives prominence to such stories in direct proportion to the 'violence' involved, but the phenomenon is not confined to any one country or one religion, and in the West it has been seen particularly in demands by religious minorities for separatist schooling.

In the nineteenth century it had been supposed by advanced thinkers that religious beliefs would wither and die as progress and enlightenment spread over the world; today, we are faced with the eruption of the irrational. It is natural that liberal-minded people, believing the irrational to be innate to humanity, should want its manifestations restrained by democratic process; the more politically-minded will observe that fundamentalism, like xenophobia, racism and fascism (all of which, we were assured, were things of the past) arise because of the failure of the political 'left' to present a viable alternative to the ills of society for which capitalism is to blame – but a Marxist analysis is the most likely response, and again an alternative government is seen as the answer.

'Neither God nor master' was the traditional anarchist slogan, and when the anarchist movement came into being at the time of the First International there was no doubt in the mind of Bakunin that, to use a recent catch-phrase, 'anarchism implies atheism'. Bakunin was concerned with the question of human liberty as manifested in society, and in his writings he showed religion as idealised authority. It was in his clash with Karl Marx in the First International that he crystallised the theory of anarchism, and in doing so he identified Marxism as a religion, with 'a little army of fanatical adherents', making a cult of the state.

A century ago, those who from anarchist platforms attacked religion as well as capitalism became known as 'Bakuninists', and they were criticised by those of their comrades who regarded it as a tactical mistake to attack the religious beliefs of 'the workers' especially since, they said, there was no 'necessary connection' between anarchism and

atheism. This question has not, to the knowledge of this writer, been addressed in the anarchist press in recent years and we are therefore obliged to Nicolas Walter for clarifying the issue and attempting a solution in the opening essay of this collection.

We hope that a significant number of readers may be found whose primary interest is in *religion*, and who are curious to know the anarchist position; for such readers some explanation is necessary of what *anarchism* is. Colin Ward does this in his essay. Naturally enough, writing for a dictionary of theology, he emphasises certain quasi-anarchist tendencies which were of historical significance but which would not be regarded as anarchist by most anarchists.

Many of the readers of this issue may be atheists but not anarchists. Anarchism may imply atheism, but no one would argue the converse, that atheism implies anarchism. Indeed, there are 'right-wing' secularists, but even atheists who support the political left may be far removed from anarchism – an obvious example being Bertrand Russell whose *Why I Am Not a Christian* has had a vast circulation, but who advocated world government at the same time as he was an active member of the Committee of 100. Nevertheless, many who became anarchists did so having first discarded religious beliefs – one such was Sébastien Faure, whose classic text is here given in a new translation.

When this issue of *The Raven* was projected it was hoped that it would deal with the subject of fundamentalism, amongst other matters. In fact, a substantial article has been received and the editor has been promised important studies of Hindu fundamentalism in the Indian sub-continent, and of state funding of religious schools in Britain. In view of the importance of the topic and of the quality of the material received, a second issue on 'Religion' dealing specifically with fundamentalism will be published, for which contributions are invited; while this issue, as it were, clears the ground by providing an anarchist view of religion in general.

Nicolas Walter

Anarchism and Religion

For the present purpose, anarchism is defined as the political and social ideology which argues that human groups can and should exist without instituted authority, and especially as the historical anarchist movement of the past two hundred years; and religion is defined as the belief in the existence and significance of supernatural being(s), and especially as the prevailing Judaeo-Christian system of the past two thousand years. My subject is the question: Is there a necessary connection between the two and, if so, what is it? The possible answers are as follows: there may be no connection, if beliefs about human society and the nature of the universe are quite independent; there may be a connection, if such beliefs are interdependent; and, if there is a connection, it may be either positive, if anarchism and religion reinforce each other, or negative, if anarchism and religion contradict each other.

The general assumption is that there is a negative connection – logical, because divine and human authority reflect each other; and psychological, because the rejection of human and divine authority, of political and religious orthodoxy, reflect each other. Thus the French *Encyclopédie Anarchiste* (1932) included an article on Atheism by Gustave Brocher: 'An anarchist, who wants no all-powerful master on earth, no authoritarian government, must necessarily reject the idea of an omnipotent power to whom everything must be subjected; if he is consistent, he must declare himself an atheist.' And the centenary issue of the British anarchist paper *Freedom* (October 1986) contained an article by Barbara Smoker (president of the National Secular Society) entitled 'Anarchism implies Atheism'. As a matter of historical fact the negative connection has indeed been the norm – anarchists are generally non-religious and are frequently anti-religious, and the standard anarchist slogan is the phrase coined by the (non-anarchist) socialist Auguste Blanqui in 1880: '*Ni dieu ni maître!*' (Neither God nor master!). But the full answer is not so simple.

Thus it is reasonable to argue that there is no necessary connection. Beliefs about the nature of the universe, of life on this planet, of this species, of purpose and values and morality, and so on, may be independent of beliefs about the desirability and possibility of liberty in human society. It is quite possible to believe at the same time that there is a spiritual authority and that there should not be a political authority. But it is also reasonable to argue that there is a necessary connection, whether positive or negative.

The argument for a positive connection is that religion has libertarian effects, even if established Churches seldom do. Religion may check politics, the Church may balance the State, divine sanction may protect oppressed people. In Classical Greece, Antigone (in the Oedipus myth) appeals to divine law in her individual rebellion against the human law of the ruler Creon.* Socrates (the greatest figure in Greek thought) appealed to the divine demon within him to inspire his individual judgement. Zeno (the founder of the Stoic school of philosophy) appealed to a higher authority than the State. Within Judaism, the Prophets of the Old Testament challenged Kings and proclaimed what is known as the 'Social Gospel'. One of the most eloquent texts in the Bible is Hannah's song when she conceives Samuel, which is echoed by Mary's song when she conceives Jesus – the *Magnificat*:

> My soul doth magnify the Lord; and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour. . . . He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats; and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

Within Christianity, Jesus came for the poor and weak, and the early Christians resisted the Roman State. When Christianity became the established ideology in its turn, religious heretics challenged both Church and State. Medieval heresies helped to destroy the old system – the Albigensians and the Waldensians, the Brotherhood of the Free Spirit and the Taborites in Bohemia, the Anabaptists in Germany and Switzerland.

This pattern may be seen in Britain. John Ball, the ideologist of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, was a priest who proclaimed in a sermon

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* In Sophocles' play *Antigone* (c. 440BC), Creon actually says in response to her rebellion, 'There is no greater evil than anarchy' – one of the earliest uses of the word in the pejorative double sense.

to the rebels: 'Things shall not go right until there is neither master nor slave.' Later religious dissent led to political dissent, and the extreme Puritans in the English Revolution of 1649-1659 were the pioneers of the native tradition of anarchism. Gerrard Winstanley, the ideologist of the Diggers or True Levellers, who came nearer to anarchism than anyone before the French Revolution, moved within a few years from quoting the Bible to invoking 'the great Creator Reason'. The tradition was continued by the Ranters and Seekers, the Quakers and Shakers, and later the Universalists and Unitarians, and may be seen in the modern peace movement.

The argument for a negative connection is that religion supports politics, the Church supports the State, opponents of political authority also oppose religious authority. In Classical Greece and Rome, the religious sceptics – Protagoras, Diogenes, Epicurus, Lucretius, Sextus Empiricus – were the real liberators (and the same is true in Ancient India and China). Within Judaism, God is the archetypical figure of (male) authority, the Jewish State was a theocracy ruled by priests, and the few good Prophets (and the good Rabbis who followed them) should be seen as dissenters. In Christianity, Paul told his followers that 'the powers that be are ordained of God', Church and State stand together as the 'two swords' of the Gospel of Luke, and the good Christians have been rebels against ecclesiastical as much as secular power – the heretics and sceptics, *esprits forts* and *libertins*, the freethinkers and *philosophes*, Jean Meslier and Denis Diderot (who both wanted to see 'the last king strangled in the guts of the last priest') and Voltaire (whose motto was '*Ecrasez l'infâme!*'), Thomas Paine (the pioneer of freethought and also of free society, the opponent of Priestcraft as well as Kingcraft) and Richard Carlile (who led the shift towards both atheism and anarchism), and so on to the historical freethought movement.

Within the historical anarchist movement, these two attitudes exist together. Revolutionary anarchism, like revolutionary socialism, has quasi-religious features – expressed in irrationalism, utopianism, millennialism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, sectarianism, and so on. But anarchism, like socialism and liberalism, also has anti-religious features – all of them modern political ideologies tending to assume the rejection of all orthodox belief and authority – and is the supreme example of dissent, disbelief, and disobedience. All progressive thought, culminating in humanism, depends on the assumption that every single human being has the right to think for himself or herself;

and all progressive politics, culminating in anarchism, depends on the assumption that every single human being has the right to act for himself or herself. (A point worth mentioning is the connection of anarchism, as of liberalism and socialism, with the alternative religion of Freemasonry, to which several leading anarchists have belonged – Proudhon, Bakunin, Louise Michel, Ferrer, Volin, and so on.)

There is no doubt that the prevailing strain within the anarchist tradition is opposition to religion. William Godwin, the author of the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), the first systematic text of libertarian politics, was a Calvinist minister who began by rejecting Christianity, and passed through deism to atheism and then what was later called agnosticism. Max Stirner, the author of *The Individual and His Property* (1845), the most extreme text of libertarian politics, began as a left-Hegelian, post-Feuerbachian atheist, rejecting the 'spooks' of religion as well as of politics – including the spook of 'humanity'. Proudhon, the first person to call himself an anarchist, who was well known for saying, 'Property is theft', also said, 'God is evil' and 'God is the eternal X'. Bakunin, the main founder of the anarchist movement, attacked the Church as much as the State, and wrote an essay which his followers later published as *God and the State* (1882), in which he inverted Voltaire's famous saying and proclaimed: 'If God really existed, he would have to be abolished.' Kropotkin, the best-known anarchist writer, was a child of the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution, and assumed that religion would be replaced by science and that the Church as well as the State would be abolished; he was particularly concerned with the development of a secular system of ethics which replaced supernatural theology with natural biology. Errico Malatesta and Carlo Cafiero, the main founders of the Italian anarchist movement, both came from freethinking families (and Cafiero was involved with the National Secular Society when he visited London during the 1870s). Elisée and Elie Reclus, the best-loved French anarchists, were the sons of a Calvinist minister, and began by rejecting religion before they moved on to anarchism. Sébastien Faure, the most active speaker and writer in the French movement for half a century, was intended for the Church and began by rejecting Catholicism and passing through anti-clericalism and socialism on the way to anarchism. André Lorulot, a leading French individualist before the First World War, was then a leading freethinker for half a century. Johann Most, the best-known German anarchist for a quarter of a century, who wrote ferocious pamphlets on the need for violence to destroy existing

society, also wrote a ferocious pamphlet on the need to destroy supernatural religion called *The God Plague* (1883). Multatuli (Eduard Douwes Dekker), the great Dutch writer, was a leading atheist as well as anarchist. Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, the best-known Dutch anarchist, was a Calvinist minister who began by rejecting religion before passing through socialism on the way to anarchism. Anton Constandse was a leading Dutch anarchist and freethinker. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, the best-known Jewish American anarchists, began by rejecting Judaism and passing through populism on the way to anarchism. Rudolf Rocker, the German leader of the Jewish anarchists in Britain, was another child of the Enlightenment and spoke and wrote on secular as much as political subjects. In Spain, the largest anarchist movement in the world, which has often been described as a quasi-religious phenomenon, was in fact profoundly naturalistic and secularist and anti-Christian as well as anti-clerical. Francisco Ferrer, the well-known Spanish anarchist who was judicially murdered in 1909, was best known for founding the Modern School which tried to give secular education in a Catholic country. The leaders of the anarchist movements in Latin America almost all began by rebelling against the Church before rebelling against the State. The founders of the anarchist movements in India and China all had to begin by discarding the traditional religions of their communities. In the United States, Voltairine de Cleyre was (as her name suggests) the child of freethinkers, and wrote and spoke on secular as much as political topics. The two best-known American anarchists today (both of Jewish origin) are Murray Bookchin, who calls himself an ecological humanist, and Noam Chomsky, who calls himself a scientific rationalist. Two leading figures of a younger generation, Fred Woodworth and Chaz Bufe, are militant atheists as well as anarchists. And so on.

This pattern prevails in Britain. Not only William Godwin but nearly all libertarians have been opposed to orthodox religion as well as orthodox politics – William Morris, Oscar Wilde, Charlotte Wilson, Joseph Lane, Henry Seymour (who was active in the National Secular Society before he helped to found the British anarchist movement), James Tochatti (who was active in the British Secular Union before he turned to socialism and anarchism), Alfred Marsh (the son of the son-in-law of G. J. Holyoake, who founded the secularist movement), Guy Aldred (who rapidly moved from evangelical Christianity through secularism and socialism to anarcho-syndicalism), A. S. Neill

(whose educational work was opposed to religious and ethical orthodoxy as much as to political and social orthodoxy), and so on. And of course Shelley is the poet laureate of atheists and anarchists alike.

There have been few serious studies of anarchist psychology, but those that do exist agree that the first step on the way to anarchism is frequently the rejection of religion. Nevertheless, there are plenty of exceptions to this rule. In Britain, for example, Edward Carpenter was a mystic, Herbert Read saw anarchism as a religious philosophy, Alex Comfort moved from scientific to quasi-religious humanism, Colin MacInnes saw anarchism as a kind of religion; in the United States, Paul Goodman rejected Judaism but retained some kind of religion, and New Age nonsense has infected anarchists as well as so many other radicals. But the great exception is the phenomenon of Christian anarchism and religious anarcho-pacifism. Above all, Leo Tolstoy, who rejected all orthodoxies of both religion and politics, exerted a powerful double pressure towards anarchism – although he always repudiated the anarchist movement – and towards religion by pushing Christians towards his idiosyncratic version of anarchism as much as he pushed anarchists towards his idiosyncratic version of Christianity. He influenced the Western peace movement (including such figures as Bart de Ligt and Aldous Huxley, Danilo Dolci and Ronald Sampson), and also movements in the Third World (especially India, including such figures as M. K. Gandhi and J. P. Narayan). A similar development in the United States is the Catholic Worker movement (including such figures as Dorothy Day and Ammon Hennacy).

So the conclusion is that there is indeed a strong correlation between anarchism and atheism, but that it is not complete, and it is not necessary. Most anarchists are non-religious or anti-religious – and most take their atheism for granted – but some anarchists are religious. There are therefore several valid libertarian views of religion. Perhaps the most persuasive and productive one was that expressed by Karl Marx (before he became a 'Marxist') in the famous passage from his essay *Towards the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844):

> Religious distress is at the same time an expression of real distress and a protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the soul of a soulless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about their condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions.

The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears whose halo is religion.

The true anarchist attitude to religion is surely to attack not faith or the Church so much as what it is in so many people that needs faith and the Church, just as the truly anarchist attitude to politics is surely to attack not obedience or the State so much as what it is in most people that needs obedience and the State – the will to believe and the will to obey. And the last anarchist hope about both religion and politics is that, just as the Church once seemed necessary to human existence but is now withering away, so the State still seems necessary to human existence but will also wither away, until both institutions finally disappear. We may yet end with *Neither God nor master!*

Based on a talk given at the South Place Ethical Society on 14 July 1991.

Tony Gibson

Should We Mock at Religion?

Many people, perhaps the majority, hold that although we should freely express our atheistical views, we should carefully avoid mocking at religion. Such mockery does, of course, gravely offend the sensibilities of religious people. It is held that in the presence of religious people we should speak in terms of respect about their beliefs, however ridiculous or indeed offensive we find them, especially when they are being taught to children who are too young to reason for themselves. I have not noticed that religious people show the least respect for the opinions of atheists, or refrain from speaking of them in the most derogatory terms; they seem to expect that their own views are the only ones worthy of respect.

In the present century we have seen the rise of what might be termed secular religions, systems of belief which are held with utter fervour, contempt for evidence, and held to justify the most atrocious and inhuman acts. I refer to such world-wide cults as Marxism-Leninism, Maoism and the brand of Fascism that gripped the German people under the Nazi regime. I think that it is justifiable to refer to them as religions for they differed only from the better established religions such as Christianity, Orthodox Judaism, Islam and Shinto in that they do not postulate a supernatural God. These secular religions have been short-lived in our twentieth-century experience, although there is no guarantee that they will not rise again to power at some time in future history. To some extent they resemble the dominant religion during one period of the Roman Empire in which the Emperor was held to be a God, and to be worshipped as such, at least in some parts of the Empire. Religious figures such as Stalin, Hitler and Chairman Mao were, to all intents, regarded as God during the latter part of their reigns and it was blasphemy, and punishable by death, to ridicule them.

I have noticed that many Christians did not hesitate to mock figures such as Stalin, and pour scorn on Marxism-Leninism in the presence of devout Communists; they did not seem concerned that they were deeply hurting the feelings of their listeners. Yet if anyone expressed

the opinion that Jesus Christ was a silly twit – and much of what he was alleged to have said was nonsense, boring platitude, contradictory and just plain silly – they would feel that this was in very 'bad taste'. Some centuries ago they would have demanded that the speaker should be imprisoned, hanged or burnt for expressing such opinions, but now that they have lost their power in Christendom they can only fall back on 'bad taste', although there are still trials for blasphemy in this country, as Nicolas Walter points out.[1] I have never encountered a devout Christian who will seriously debate the point that Jesus Christ (if he ever existed) was simply a *very conceited* young man, equal in his brass-faced conceit to Stalin, Hitler or Mao. Why should we treat this man of straw, whose very historical existence is in doubt, with special respect?[2] Why should we treat all the muddled blether attributed to him as being beyond criticism? The Christian story is no better and no worse than any other recorded mythology, and we must acknowledge that its emotional power is comparable to that of other legends. We acknowledge the dramatic power of the legends of Oedipus, Orestes, Iphigenia, Medea and other Greek myths; but to pretend that these things actually happened, and to teach children that this is true and not to be questioned, is to tell them a pack of lies.

The Christian Bible, Old Testament and New, is part of our cultural heritage and, written as it is in the magnificent language of Jacobean English, it is a valuable piece of literature and children should certainly become familiar with it as part of their general education. Someone who does not know who Noah was, or Samson, or Judas Iscariot, has certainly missed out in part of his education – just as if he had never heard of Oedipus or Odysseus. What the modern Christians have done is an act of cultural vandalism. They have taken the Jamesian Bible and vandalised it by rendering it into 'modern' English. Thus legendary happenings, such as the feeding of the four thousand, told in the original Jamesian translation has a certain dignity and grandeur appropriate to legend:

> And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.
>
> And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.
>
> And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.
>
> And they did all eat and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. (Matthew 15, 34-37, The King James Bible)

It is almost poetry, and we can accept this impossible happening as a piece of romantic hyperbole, like Samson killing ten thousand men with the jawbone of an ass! But what have the modern churchmen done with it? They have pretended that *it actually happened* and reported it much as it might appear in *The News of the World*:

> 'How many loaves have you' Jesus asked. 'Seven' they replied, 'and there are a few small fishes'. So he ordered the people to sit down on the ground; then he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and after giving thanks to God he broke them and gave to the disciples, and the disciples gave to the people. They all ate to their heart's content; and the scraps left over, which they picked up, were enough to fill seven baskets. (The New English Bible)

A conjuring trick worthy of Uri Geller! Told like that, it is a monstrous lie devised to deceive children and the simple-minded, and deserving to be mocked and ridiculed.

During the 1930s when Hitler and Mussolini were extending their power, the cartoonist David Low produced a series of very funny satirical cartoons depicting them in various clownish situations. These men were responsible for very great villainy, but moral condemnation was not enough; they could be cut down to size most effectively by being mocked as clowns. Later, when Hitler and Stalin formed a pact and dismembered Poland, Stalin also became the butt of Low's satirical brush, and depicted not only as evil but as a blundering oaf. I think that we should not fail to expose the ridiculous aspects of religion and to prick the pomposity of priests and their gods and icons with satire.

Children are too immature to appreciate the extensive harm that religion has caused, and continues to cause, world-wide. However, we can and should show them the ridiculous aspects of the solemn and powerful figures who strive to intimidate and corrupt them by pretending that a set of thumping great lies are sacred truths. We will enlighten them more effectively by showing that priests and churchmen are clowns peddling piffle, than attempting to explain the full tragic consequences of their religious endeavours. Full understanding of the meaning of religion, which is like a mental disease of humankind, will come later.

Belief and make-believe

Belief and Make-believe is the title of one of George Wells' books.[3]

Children learn to discriminate between fact and fantasy very early on, and it is essential that they should do so in order to grow up into independent-minded individuals. They fully enjoy such tales as Jack and the Beanstalk, Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, Aladdin and his Lamp, and Sindbad the Sailor, but they do not believe that such exciting adventures ever took place in reality. They can easily accept that the Christian myths, or those of other religions, are similarly in the realm of fantasy, and not that of reality. Our various folk-festivals, which we should all enjoy, have their associated myths; Christmas has the baby in the manger, the three wise men following a star, etc. (myths that date from many centuries before their alleged occurrence at the time of King Herod), but there is also the myth of Santa Claus travelling with his reindeer over our roof-tops. But while children enjoy these myths, they soon appreciate that anyone who seriously pretends that reindeer really do clatter over our roof-tops is a joker, a buffoon, a jester at the feast who is not to be taken seriously. But when churchmen solemnly pretend that all sorts of impossible marvels really did take place, and demand that children should believe them on pain of punishment, these people are both clowns and bloody liars and should be recognised as such by children.

I have been referring to children and the attempt by religious people to abuse and corrupt them by attempting to make them accept that a pack of lies is sacred truth. But what of mature and intelligent adults who claim to believe in the literal truth of what their Church (or other religious institution) teaches? Here we must examine what we mean by 'belief'. Do they really believe, or do they only believe of themselves that they hold such absurd beliefs? This question is one of considerable psychological interest.

By analogy, I must refer to people whom we regard as mentally sick, and appear to believe, perhaps temporarily, that they are someone other than themselves – generally famous or notorious historical figures. When working at the Maudsley Hospital I was seeing a patient who apparently believed that she was Joan of Arc, and demanded that she be treated as such. This lady suffered from a condition known as manic-depressive psychosis, a disorder in which the manic phase is of a temporary nature, but during which the person may be subject to extraordinary delusions. When she was coming out of her 'high' and returning to normal, no longer claiming to be Joan of Arc, I was able to discuss the matter quite rationally with her. I asked her if it had worried her during her deluded state that she, a medieval woman, was living in twentieth-century London. She said no, because she never

actually *believed* that she was Joan of Arc; she knew all the time that she was a housewife, but acting in the role of the medieval figure was so immensely gratifying to her that she could not bear to admit, either to herself or to others, that she was not the historic figure she claimed to be. We must consider whether an intelligent and well-balanced adult who claims to believe all the nonsense that his religion teaches, is in a similar position. He cannot bear to admit, even to himself, that it is all rubbish, for such an admission would have serious consequences for his emotional life and mental balance. 'Losing faith' sometimes brings on a mental breakdown, and I have known this happen with a devout Communist who 'lost faith' at the time of the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian rising in 1956.

Intelligent but religious adults may also be compared with small children who go through phases of acting out a fantasy over a short period. A little boy may go through a phase of apparently believing himself to be a squirrel, and demand that he be treated as such as far as is compatible with his normal life. When his hair is brushed he insists that it is to be referred to as his 'fur'; he asks to be given plenty of nuts, and accumulates a store of them under his pillow. Sometimes he will eat his tea up a tree. He goes to school quite normally, and tolerant teachers must overlook his squirrel-like behaviour provided that it does not disrupt the classroom. The acting out of such fantasies by children is generally quite brief, and sensible parents do not mock his squirrel role but are indulgent towards it. But is it true to say that he *believes* that he is a squirrel?

Some intelligent adults may go through a period of apparently holding a quite bizarre belief with great fervour, without being otherwise mentally unbalanced. I remember that at the LSE there was a group of young women who belonged to a James Dean Club. James Dean was a film star who died young. The central tenet of these students' club was that they firmly believed that Dean was still mysteriously alive and actively performing. This belief was very rewarding to them and acted as the social cement that held the group together. When they acquired steady boyfriends they dropped away. Their sisterhood was rather like that of nuns who are supposed to believe that they are 'Brides of Christ'. But can we really call this 'belief'?

What then is 'belief'? There are some physicists who are devout Christians. Ask such a physicist whether the mass of the planet Earth was diminished by about nine or ten stone when Christ left it and ascended to Heaven, and what does he reply? Inwardly he may be

somewhat disturbed and annoyed that you are trying to bait him by ridiculing his belief. Outwardly he will probably remain calm and try to demonstrate that it is an ignorant question that cannot properly be answered because the questioner does not properly understand the nature of science or religion. He believes that he believes, and it would be emotionally catastrophic for him to admit doubt.

Does mocking harden belief?

In some cases mocking hardens the outward expression of belief. The manic patient who claimed to be Joan of Arc, the little boy who said he was a squirrel, the students who claimed that James Dean was still alive, the Communists who worshipped Stalin or Mao, the physicist who said that of course Christ ascended to Heaven, would all be more strident in their affirmation of belief if they were mocked. But in the long run mockery will create a climate of scepticism in which the intended victims of religious propaganda will be less vulnerable, and some of the 'believers' may eventually come to admit to themselves that they truly do *not* believe such a lot of nonsense, and it is merely a crutch on which they have to depend because of their personal inadequacy. They may learn to do without this crutch, and to trust their own rational judgement. Eventually, like the lady coming out of her manic state, they may admit to themselves that they never really believed in the nonsense, but that claiming to believe it served a purpose for a time. It is possible that humanity may eventually outgrow the tragic legacy of religion, with all the bloodshed and strife. Humanity may become rational and humane.

Flogging a dead horse?

A. N. Wilson, the well-known biographer, novelist and erstwhile Christian apologist, writes:

> It is said in the Bible that the love of money is the root of all evil. It might be truer to say that the love of God is the root of all evil. Religion is the tragedy of mankind.[4]

Very true, and being of this opinion also, I find it heartening that a man of his intellectual power should have shaken off the chains of irrational belief that were put upon him as a child.

Christian apologists sometimes use the argument that people of considerable intellectual power, such as Dr Johnson, were religious.

But a man's beliefs, his deepest principles, are not simply the product of his intellect; they are powerfully buttressed by emotion, and all too often maintained by fear. The weak and terrified child lives on deep within us long after we have attained adult status. Although fear and intimidation are at the heart of religious indoctrination, children's positive emotions are also manipulated. The myth of gentle Jesus, the darling baby cradled in the manger, is played up every Christmastide, and the pathos of the crucifixion is invoked, with the monstrous implication that it is he or she, the little child, who is somehow responsible for this cruel torture because of acts of sin! Yet it is this same Jesus who, according to the Gospel of St Matthew, declared: 'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword' (Matthew 10, 34-36).

There are plenty of similar contradictions in the Gospels to bemuse and confuse the child, and they are not a source of weakness, but of strength, as they serve the essential purpose of religion: to administer a resounding slap in the face of reason and common sense.

If one refers to all the cruel horrors that are practised in the name of religion, religious people declare that there is nothing wrong with Christianity (Islam, Judaism, etc.); the horrors, they say, are due to the wickedness of human nature. The fact is that although people can be cruel, intolerant and irrational enough when acting in their own personal self-interest on occasion, they are infinitely more beastly when acting in the furtherance of a religious purpose, as history and modern tragedies bear witness. Strengthened by religion, ordinary weak, moderately selfish and sometimes kindly human beings can become transformed into monsters: monsters of arrogance and intolerance, unflinchingly flouting all human values, because they believe that somehow they are doing it to the greater glory of God.

By castigating religion like this in the late twentieth century in Britain, am I merely flogging a dead horse? Non-believers can regard the Church of England, and other such religious bodies, with amused tolerance, and do and say what they please. But what degree of freedom of thought, speech and action we have achieved has been hard won through centuries of struggle, and such freedom as we have is tenuous. Among the preachers who coo to us so gently over the radio, are those who would dearly like to get back to the days when their ancestors imprisoned, hanged and burnt us for questioning their power and dogmatism. The death threats against Salman Rushdie demonstrate that fanatics in Britain can get away with open incitement to murder and snap their fingers at British law. It is


This is an argument from John Stuart Mill:
The concept **love** includes the idea, that if the lover knows the beloved is suffering, and has the power to prevent that suffering, then the lover will save the beloved from pain.
Men, women, and children suffer horribly in earthquakes, floods, and other "acts of God."
It follows, that if an all-knowing, all-powerful Being exists, then He, She, or It does **not** love children, women, or men.
Blasphemy !! Fined a lot, six months prison, fatwah, burned alive, gobbled up, and eternity in the everlasting fire, for doubting God's love!!
RECYCLED JOKE

permissible because it is a matter of religion! A. N. Wilson speaks truly when he says that 'Religion is the tragedy of mankind'.

I have dealt mainly with the Christian religion in this essay, but of course all I have written applies equally to other religions all over the world, including the non-theistic religions that some people like to designate as 'political'. Anarchism implies not only atheism but active struggle against religion itself, and where satire proves an effective means of combating it, then we should certainly engage in mockery and not be deterred by any feeling that religion holds any special right to immunity.

Footnotes

1. N. Walter *Blasphemy: ancient and modern*, London: Rationalist Press Association 1990.

2. For a discussion of the historicity of Christ, see G.A. Wells *Did Jesus Exist?*, London: Pemberton 1986.

3. G.A. Wells *Belief and Make-believe*, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court 1991.

4. A.N. Wilson *Against Religion: why we should try to live without it*, Chatto CounterBlasts No. 19, London: Chatto & Windus 1991.

Colin Ward

Anarchist entry for a theological dictionary

Colin Ward had a rather unusual request, which was to write the entry on anarchism for the 'Dictionary of Theology and Society' edited by Dr Paul A. B. Clarke and Professor Andrew Linzey, to be published in January 1995 by Routledge.

Bearing in mind the particular needs of the kind of reader who might refer to such a work, this is what he wrote.

* * *

The word derives from the Greek *anarkhia*, meaning without a ruler, and was used in a derogatory sense until, in the mid-nineteenth century in France, it was adopted in a positive way to describe a political and social ideology arguing for organisation without government. In the evolution of political ideas, anarchism can be seen as an ultimate projection of both liberalism and socialism, and the differing strands of anarchist thought can be related to their emphasis on one or the other of these aims. Historically, anarchism was a radical answer to the question 'What went wrong?' that followed the outcome of the French Revolution. Conservatives like Edmund Burke, liberals like Alexis de Tocqueville, had their own responses. Anarchist thinkers were unique on the political left in affirming that workers and peasants, grasping the chance to overturn the result of centuries of exploitation and tyranny, were betrayed by the seizure of centralised state power by a new class of politicians who had no hesitation in applying violence and terror, a secret police and a professional army to maintain themselves in power. The institution of the state was itself the enemy. They applied the same criticism to every revolution of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The main stream of anarchist propaganda for more than a century has been *anarchist-communism*, which argues that property in land, natural resources and the means of production should be held in mutual ownership by local communities, federating for innumerable joint purposes with other communes. It differs from state socialism and from Marxist communism in opposing any central authority

which, it has always argued, inevitably leads to governmental and bureaucratic tyranny, enforced by terror. *Anarcho-syndicalism* puts its emphasis on the organised workers who, through a social general strike, could expropriate the expropriators and establish workers' control of industry. *Individualist anarchism* has several traditions, one deriving from the 'conscious egoism' of the German writer Max Stirner (1806-1856) and another from a series of American nineteenth-century thinkers who argued that in protecting our own autonomy and associating with others only for common advantages, we are promoting the good of all. They differed from free-market liberals in their emphasis on *mutualism*, usually derived from the French anarchist Proudhon. *Pacifist anarchism* follows both from the anti-militarism that accompanies rejection of the state with its ultimate dependence on armed force, and from the conviction that any morally-viable human society depends upon the uncoerced good will of its members.

These, and other, threads of anarchist thought have different emphases. What links them is their rejection of external authority, whether that of the state, the employer, the hierarchies of administration and of established institutions like the school and the church. The same is true of more recent varieties of anarchist propaganda, *green anarchism* and *anarcha-feminism*. Like those who believe that animal liberation is an aspect of human liberation, they claim that the only ideology consistent with their aims is anarchism.

It is customary to relate the anarchist tradition to four major thinkers and writers. The first was William Godwin (1756-1836) who in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* set out from first principles an anarchist case against government, the law, property and the institutions of the state. He was an heir both to the English tradition of radical nonconformity and to the French *philosophes*, and although social historians have traced his influence on nineteenth-century organs of working-class self-organisation, he was not rediscovered by the anarchist movement until the 1890s.

The second was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), the French propagandist who was the first person to call himself an anarchist. In 1840 he declared that *Property is Theft*, but he went on to claim that *Property is Freedom*. He saw no contradiction between these two slogans, since the first related to the landowner and capitalist whose ownership derived from conquest or exploitation and was only maintained through the state, its property laws, police and army, while the second was concerned with the peasant or artisan family with a

natural right to a home, to the land it could cultivate and to the tools of a trade, but not to ownership or control of the homes, land or livelihoods of others.

The third of these anarchist pioneers was the Russian revolutionary Michael Bakunin (1814-1876), famous for his disputes with Marx in the 'First International' in the 1870s where, for his successors, he accurately predicted the outcome of Marxist dictatorships in the twentieth century. 'Freedom without socialism', he said, 'is privilege and injustice, but socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality'.

The last was another Russian of aristocratic origins, Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921). His original reputation was as a physical geographer and in a long series of books and pamphlets he attempted to give anarchism a scientific basis. *The Conquest of Bread* was his manual on the self-organisation of a post-revolutionary society. *Mutual Aid* was written to confront misinterpretations of Darwinism that justified competitive capitalism, by demonstrating through the natural history of animal and human societies that competition within species is less significant than co-operation as a pre-condition for survival. *Fields, Factories and Workshops* was his treatise on the humanisation of work, through the integration of agriculture and industry, of hand and brain, and of intellectual and manual education. The most widely read of all anarchist authors, he linked anarchism both with social ecology and with everyday experience.

Some anarchists object to the identification of anarchism with its best-known writers. They point to the fact that its aspirations can be traced through the slave revolts of the ancient world, the peasant uprisings of medieval Europe, in the ideology of the Diggers in the English revolution of the 1640s and in the revolutions in France in 1789 and 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871. In the twentieth century, anarchism had a role in the Mexican revolution of 1911, the Russian revolution of 1917 and most notably in the Spanish revolution that followed the military rising that precipitated the civil war of 1936. In all these revolutions the fate of the anarchists was that of heroic losers.

But anarchists do not necessarily fit the stereotype of believers in some final revolution, succeeding where the others failed, and inaugurating a new society or utopia. The German anarchist Gustav Landauer (1870-1919) declared that 'The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently'.

Anarchism has, in fact, an endless resilience. Every European, North American, Latin American and Oriental society has had its anarchist publicists, newspapers, circles of adherents, imprisoned activists and martyrs. Whenever an authoritarian or repressive political regime collapses, the anarchists are there, a minority among the emerging ideologists, urging their fellow citizens to learn the lessons of the sheer horror and irresponsibility of government. The anarchist press re-emerged in Germany after Hitler, in Italy after Mussolini, in Spain after Franco, in Portugal after Salazar, in Argentina after the generals and in the Soviet Union after seventy years of suppression. For anarchists this is an indication that the ideal of a self-organising society based on voluntary co-operation rather than coercion is irrepressible. It represents, they claim, a universal human aspiration.

The main varieties of anarchism are resolutely hostile to organised religion. Blanqui's slogan *Ni Dieu ni maître* reflects their attitude, particularly in countries like France, Italy and Spain, with long anarchist and anti-clerical traditions. But beneath the anarchist umbrella there are specifically religious trends. The novelist Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) preached a gospel of Christian anarchism, especially in essays like *The Kingdom of God is Within You* which profoundly influenced several generations of pacifist anarchists, as did the social attitudes of the Society of Friends, particularly the Quaker approach to decision-making. Similarly several of the radical tendencies in the Catholic church, particularly the Distributist movement associated with G.K. Chesterton, with its links with the ideology of Proudhon, or the Catholic Worker movement in the United States, and its later equivalents in Latin America, have been strongly attracted by some aspects of anarchist propaganda.

In India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) acknowledged that his campaigns for civil disobedience in the form of non-violent non-cooperation with government, and his hopes for self-governing village democracy built around local food production and craft industry, derived from Tolstoy, from the archetypal American advocate of individualist anarchism, Henry David Thoreau, and from Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops*. His work, and that of successors like Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan has been evaluated from an anarchist standpoint by Geoffrey Ostergaard. And there are, needless to say, Western writers who have discovered strongly anarchist elements in Taoism and Buddhism. One of the best revaluations of the thought of Proudhon, Kropotkin

and Landauer was made by the theologian Martin Buber in his book *Paths in Utopia*.

It has even been suggested that anarchist movements themselves resemble 'chiliastic' or 'millenarian' religious sects. This view has been propagated by Marxist historians, designating, for example, rural Spanish anarchists as 'primitive rebels'. More recent work by historians and anthropologists has destroyed this interpretation. Those villagers were found to be rational people with a realistic assessment of their situation.

But the mere mention of the millennium leads us to consider the future of anarchist in the twenty-first century. Anarchists argue that if they are simply a marginal curiosity in the evolution of political ideas in the twentieth century, how do we evaluate the major political theories? Marxism may survive in universities, but as a ruling ideology it exists only in those countries where the army and secret police remain loyal and unintimidated by popular discontent. The Fabian variety of socialism through nationalisation has been abandoned even by its inheritors. The economic liberalism of the free market, even in the world's richest countries, creates an 'underclass' of citizens with no access to it, while capital investment shifts around the world in search of ever cheaper sources of labour.

From an anarchist standpoint the history of the twentieth century has been an absolute justification of the anarchist critique of the state. It has been the century of the totalitarian state, subverting every other form of human organisation into organs of state power. It has consequently been the century of total war, reaching out to enrol every last citizen into the war machine, promoted by rivalry for markets among the great powers and by the free market in weapons, where every local dictator is fed by the state-sponsored arms trade of the rich nations. Similarly anarchists see the anti-clericalism of the nineteenth-century precursors vindicated by the late-twentieth-century re-emergence of militant religion, whether in the form of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu or Sikh fundamentalism, as a justification for persecuting, attacking and slaughtering adherents of other faiths.

Finally, they see themselves as precursors of universal yearnings for the humanisation of work. Kropotkin urged the decentralisation of industry on a small scale and its combination with food production for local needs, arguing for 'a new economy in the energies used in supplying the needs of human life, since these needs are increasing and the energies are not inexhaustible'. He was almost unique in

foreseeing current issues in these terms, just as he foresaw the history of economic imperialism in the twentieth century, leading to wars which 'are inevitable so long as certain countries consider themselves destined to enrich themselves by the production of finished goods and divide the backward nations up among themselves ... while they accumulate wealth themselves on the basis of the labour of others'.

A century and a half of anarchist propaganda has had no visible effect on the world outside. But the concerns it has raised are bound to become the overwhelming social issues of the coming century. Can humanity outgrow nationalism and the religious loyalties that have become inextricably entangled with it? Can we overcome differences without resort to weapons? Can we feed, clothe and house ourselves and stay healthy without the obligation to win purchasing power by selling our time and talent to organisations we hate? Can we organise ourselves to gain a livelihood that does not add to the destruction of our own environment and that of other people and other species, far away?

This series of questions is very far from the preoccupations of any political party with the faintest hope of electoral success. Anarchists are, as they have always been, among the people who, by raising them, condemn themselves to exile to the fringe of political and social agitation. Rejecting both the polarities of the voting system and the simplicities of a *coup d'état* to replace the existing order by the imposition of a new order, the anarchists, whether they want or not, pursue a path of permanent opposition. They stress that the history of the twentieth century is crowded with new orders, installed and subsequently dethroned at a vast human cost. In predicting this, the anarchists have been steadfastly correct.

One of the most interesting and suggestive modern anarchist propagandists was the American writer Paul Goodman (1911-1972) who wrote, later in life, that:

> For me, the chief principle of anarchism is not freedom but autonomy, the ability to initiate a task and do it one's own way ... The weakness of 'my' anarchism is that the lust for freedom is a powerful motive for political change, whereas autonomy is not. Autonomous people protect themselves stubbornly but by less strenuous means, including plenty of passive resistance. They do their own thing anyway. The pathos of oppressed people, however, is that, if they break free, they don't know what to do. Not having been autonomous, they don't know what it's like, and before they learn, they have new managers who are not in a hurry to abdicate ...

Any inquirer, chancing upon his words, will recognise that he is describing not only the problem of anarchism but that of any liberatory ideology. The anarchists emerge from the dilemma with rather more credit than most.

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Peter Lumsden

Only the atheist can understand religion

The idea that we can live without religion is a common one in our society, so the following quotations may come as a surprise:

... the vitality of any society depends upon the continued affirmation of mythical symbolism created by the collective imagination to the ordering of experience and that a *pure rationalism can only result in social disintegration.*[1] [emphasis added]

Anthropology seems to show that these 'inherited conglomerates' (i.e. myths) have practically no chance of being true or even sensible, and on the other hand, *no society can exist without them.*[2] [emphasis added and (i.e. myths) added]

Society has been built and cemented to a great extent on a foundation of religion and it is impossible to loosen the cement and shake the foundation without endangering the superstructure.[3]

But if human society is impossible without a myth, does that mean we have to support something we know to be false? Many would answer yes, Christianity must be upheld and maintained not because it is true but because society could not exist without it. The immense authority of Plato is behind this view, that in effect the 'establishment' of any society must sacrifice its integrity to hold society together. Make no mistake, such a view is often held with sincerity, of which Dostoyevski's 'Grand Inquisitor' is the most forceful example.

But Christianity is only an illusion because of its belief in God, not because of its belief in Christ. And Christ's message was not about God, but about the Kingdom of God, which he saw as a future ideal state of humanity, the original classless society. Judaism being a religion of history, such a vision is the central doctrine of the Prophets, the reward that Yahweh has promised to his people. Such a doctrine is, of course, an illusion if one believes (as Christ and the Jews did) that such a state is to come about through supernatural power but is clearly a possibility if regarded as a result of human effort. Thus Christianity, while a myth, is not in essence an illusion.

The Enlightenment set out to discover a rational ethic, rather in the same way as the alchemists searched for the Philosophers' Stone, and

although David Hume showed such a search to be futile, present-day rationalists, in an absurd alliance, support the traditional religious view that there is an objective basis for ethics. They and the theologians agree that the solutions to questions of right and wrong can be discovered and are not invented – they just differ on where to look! They both say you can derive an 'ought' from an 'is', values from facts – they both commit the 'naturalistic fallacy'. But the harsh truth of the matter is that we are forced to invent solutions, we are 'condemned to meaning' as Heidegger said, ethics are created by us *ex nihilo*, only our imagination tells us what is good or bad. Every conscious action we do is controlled by our ideas of right and wrong, so all our lives are dominated by myth. But because all theisms imply an objective value system, only to the atheist can religion make sense, only someone who sees the cosmos as essentially meaningless can really appreciate the necessity of religions, seeing them as humanity's greatest works of art, 'the heart of a heartless world', creating sense, out of nothing, from the senseless; order from chaos.

The power of the fundamentalists and their grip on politics, especially American, derives from a sound intuition that the End is at Hand, that traditional Christianity is powerless to stop the advance of Godlessness. For them a world without God is the End of the World, and as the apocalyptic language of Reagan and Robertson shows, they may well feel the time has come to press the button. But in truth it is a time of liberation, for Christianity is a means, not an end.

But as Christians we can look up and be glad, for now Jesus can be revealed to the modern world as the liberator of humanity. If the purpose of Jesus's life is the salvation of humanity, and salvation as defined by humanity is a fully human society, then we can say that Jesus has given himself totally to us to be used and interpreted in any way we see fit. If the central doctrine of Christianity is the establishment of the Kingdom, then any belief which hinders this, even if held by Jesus himself, must be rejected. This is the fiery river that modern 'progressive' Christianity will not cross, for there is no doubt he believed in God and thought God's power would establish the Kingdom in the near future. Hence Christians must have faith in Jesus, not in God, for it is by Jesus's power, which is a human power, that the Kingdom will come.

At the heart of all religious life lies ritual, the re-enactment of those primordial events from which all meaning is derived. For Christians this is the Eucharist and this should now be seen as the celebration of

the death of an illusion, the death of God, and our redemption is the deliverance from, the exodus from, the Almighty Power of God, which we now see to have no objective reality whatsoever. Such deliverance is achieved through Jesus, for only through him has humanity been freed from illusion, only the Christian 'Western' culture has advanced to a scientific world view. The Father gives everything to the Son, even his own existence. All power is given to him, the human being now inherits the whole world. Through Jesus, God's power is incarnate in us and now exists nowhere else. It is through the Eucharist that, metamorphically, God's power comes to us, and we are given the ability to build heaven on earth. As the bread and wine become human flesh, so God becomes man.

So nothing now stops us from forming the world to our heart's desire, the world is our playground, the last bell has rung, and the world of school with God as headmaster is now seen to have been an illusion, a childish dream from which we have now awakened. So the Good News is that the way is opened for a return to Paradise, a Garden of Eden of our own making, 'the substance of things hoped for', that foretold by the Prophets, when 'they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and not make war any more'.

Footnotes

1. Bamford Parkes *God and Men*, Vintage 1965, page 3.

2. Gilbert Murray *Greek Studies.*

3. Sir James Frazer *The Belief in Immortality* (both quoted by E.R. Dodds in *The Greek and the Irrational*, University of California Press 1963, page 192).

George Walford

Through Religion to Anarchism

Although it would be going too far to say that all anarchists oppose all forms of religion, we can safely say that nearly all of them would like to do away with the authoritarian versions. Are they justified? Certainly this form of religion has done a great deal of harm, but after taking full account of this we have to add, for a complete picture, that it helped in the emergence of the anarchist movement. It did not set out to do this but it did do it. And, in spite of itself, it is still helping people to become anarchists.

Religion has been with us for many thousands of years, and for most of that period many of the sharpest minds have worked on it. It comes in many different varieties, providing more than enough material for a lifetime's study; nobody can explain it, or account for it, or pronounce any sensible judgement upon it, in one short article. I shall be trying to do just one thing: to show that authoritarian religion helps with the first step towards anarchism.

This word 'religion' covers a wide range of doctrines and practices. Zen Buddhism has a good deal in common with some versions of anarchism, and a group calling themselves Christian atheist anarchists also claim to be religious. Without taking up the question whether such activities have a good claim to the title or not, I leave them aside. Here 'religion' carries its ordinary everyday meaning, it indicates the orthodox doctrines of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism and the organisations promoting them. These (and perhaps one or two more like them) are the great religions. They provide the main weight of religious activity and each of them (except the last) presents a great god, a tremendous, dominating figure, all-powerful, all-knowing. Creator, Lord, master of earth and heaven, disposing not merely of life and death but of eternal life and death.

Buddhism forms an exception, a religion without a god. We in the West sometimes think of it as quite different from the others, but in fact it's not all that special. Like them it presents a dominating hero-figure. It calls him Lord, it offers him prayer and sacrifice, it studies his words and worships his holy relics. It regards him as to

some extent a saviour; Buddha delayed his own entry into Nirvana in order to spread his message for the sake of others. About the only thing Buddhism doesn't do is to credit him with having created the world. Although Buddha may not be technically divine he's a lot more than human, and Buddhism urges us to follow him on the Noble Eightfold Path.

Each of the great religions, Buddhism like the others, offers a figure greater than ourselves. It sets him on one side, the world, the flesh and the devil on the other, and demands that we choose between them.

Having undertaken to show that religion helps with the first step towards anarchism, I am saying that it brings people to believe in personal leaders, something anarchism strongly opposes. But those who come to believe in a personal leader *do* thereby take the first step towards anarchism. This is so because we all begin life in a condition even farther from anarchism than that.

As children and young people we have our interests centred on individual people and personal affairs, taking no interest in wider issues, accepting the society around us in the same unquestioning way as we accept air and gravitation. We live totally merged in the state, submitting to it without question, not even knowing that we are doing so. *That* is the farthest from anarchism that it's possible for a civilised person to be, and religion tries to shake us out of this condition.

It makes little use of rational argument, for that has little impact on people holding this attitude. It appeals to them in their own terms, offering immense personal advantage – eternal blessedness, and often worldly benefits too – if they will only love and follow the superhuman leader. Presented as a person, with all the immediacy that implies, this hero-figure yet reaches far beyond the sphere of merely personal affairs. He is engaged in the universal struggle between good and evil (in Buddhism the quest for Nirvana), so that those who follow him find themselves carried into a wider sphere of activity. Religion brings people to take part in affairs that turn out eventually to be social, and it thereby lifts them over the first step on the climb towards anarchism.

Once we join a movement, any movement, once we step into line behind a leader, any leader, our unquestioning submission to the state starts to break down. Totalitarian states gain that title from their attempts to suppress every activity in any way independent of the state, churches among them, and they do this because every movement, even an authoritarian, conservative, government-supporting established Church, forms a distinct power-centre possessing a degree

of autonomy; the people who choose to join a Church thereby begin to distinguish themselves from the state. Thomas Beckett was only one of many turbulent priests. Christ told his followers to pay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but his teaching had raised the question. Once Christians began to *think* about what was due to Caesar, instead of just paying it, Caesar no longer enjoyed his former security.

Some of the biggest early states, Egypt and China for example, operated as theocracies under a divine ruler, state and church merged together. Yet even here a distinction appears; priests busy collecting taxes cannot at the same time perform religious ceremonies, and this difference of function leads to structural distinction, the church hiving off from the state. Once a distinct church with its own hierarchy has appeared, then pluralism is on the way, to be followed by democracy, and whether the priests like it or not, whether they know it or not, these bring anarchism behind them.

In a recent issue of *Freedom* Donald Rooum has a cartoon that makes the point, though he may not have meant it in quite this way. A preacher smugly condemns the Irish bombers as godless, selfish, anarchic and cowardly. Donald's hairtrigger heroine, Wildcat, goes through the roof at this, protesting that it's just the opposite of the truth. The bombers are highly disciplined, prepared to sacrifice themselves. Far from being godless or anarchic they are religious, potential martyrs, the very stuff of which the Church is made. We can say the same of other terrorists. They are not anarchists, but neither are they simply accepting what they find around them; by standing up and fighting it they show the beginnings of independent individuality. When people choose to attack a government, even if they do so in support of another one, and however misguided they may be in their reasons or their methods, they approach closer to anarchism than the great numbers who simply accept the state. Everybody who takes up religion sets out along that same path, even though few of them go beyond verbal dissidence and many never have occasion to realise the distinction between church and state.

We'll get to anarchism in just a minute. First, look as fascism. Here the Leader comes about as close to deification as civilisation permits and, significantly, Nazism tried to set up rituals and institutions replacing orthodox religion. Move along to conservatism, and the leader-figure, although still prominent, starts to shrink. Where Hitler set himself above the law, Major submits to it; he and his ministers can doubtless find gaps to wriggle through, but they can't just ride

over it. In conservatism impersonal institutions, things like law, tradition, parliament, the monarchy, start to attract the loyalty enjoyed in fascism by the Leader. In the more thoughtful movements, in liberalism, humanism, freethought, socialism, atheism, communism, the leader shrinks still farther, his place being increasingly occupied by ideas and theories. These movements all differ from religion, but they all carry forward the pattern of behaviour that religion introduced, offering something bigger than ourselves and urging us to join it. As they become more critical of present society the god, the hero, the personal leader, plays a smaller part, and when you get to anarchism this figure has pretty well disappeared. Instead of a leader anarchism offers a movement, a body of ideas, the universalised individual, the community, the conception of a desirable society, the idea of freedom. These things occupy the position once held by God and later by the personal leader. Anarchism retains the pattern of behaviour first introduced by religion.

Anarchists will sometimes go along with this far enough to agree that religion has had its uses, while arguing that now it has become a burden we would be better without. They would do away with it, explaining to people in the first place why it's better to go straight for anarchism. Their efforts in this direction have not met with overwhelming success, and the reason begins to appear when we compare the mass media with anarchist publications. On the one hand, pictures and personalities. Television, almost wholly pictorial and the supreme mass medium, is also the one which comes closest to presenting actual people as we meet them in daily life, and this holds good especially for the programmes which draw the mass audiences. Coronation Street, EastEnders, Neighbours, all the great popular successes which run and run, present stories of real people, identifiable personalities whom the audience can get to know almost as they know their own families, people living ordinary lives with just enough of the unusual to add dramatic novelty. The mass-circulation newspapers follow suit to the best of their abilities. On one ordinary day recently a count showed the *Sun* and *Today*, taken together, averaging approximately two pictures to the page, excluding cartoons and advertisements. Most of these were large, from a quarter-page upwards, and almost without exception they showed named people, *personal* people. As mass entertainment, literature comes a poor second to the pictorial media but here, too, the works winning the big sales almost invariably offer stories of people presented as individual personalities.

Anarchism, too, takes great interest in people, but from a different angle. The individual anarchism speaks of will never burgle you or break a truncheon over your head, but it will never sleep with you or buy you a drink either; it is not a concrete human being at all but a sexless, classless, colourless, jobless, ageless, raceless, featureless, impersonal abstraction, quite as real as the person immediately apparent to the senses, but in a different way; it has the same sort of reality as the average family with two-and-a-bit children. In the ordinary course of daily life anarchists take the normal interest in people as persons; this is fundamental and it does not disappear in the course of development. But when they act or speak as anarchists, when they apply the results of their thinking, when the anarchist movement or anarchist journals concern themselves with particular people, they do so less for the sake of their personal qualities than for their value as symbols or instances, either of oppression and suffering or of resistance to these. Anarchism interests itself less in persons than in ideas, concepts of freedom, hierarchy, anarchy, the state and the like. These abstractions cannot be pictured, and as one consequence of this anarchist publications consist mainly of cold print.

On the one hand the mass media, offering pictures and personalities virtually without ideas. On the other anarchism, offering ideas with rarely a personality or a picture. And between them, offering ideas *in the form of* pictures and personalities, forming a bridge between the other two, stands religion.

Each of the great religions offers personifications of its ideals, usually in the form of one supreme figure, a God or Messiah, surrounded by minor entities, saints and the like, presenting secondary features. Unifying concrete and abstract, these figures provide a route from the primal interest in personalities towards the sophistication of a commitment to general ideas; in philosophical terms, from the particular to the universal.

Opening the way to individual development transcending its own limitations, religion performs a similar function in social affairs. It has been largely the religious people insisting, against all attempts at suppression, on giving voice to their particular doctrines, who have established the rights and liberties that now enable anarchism to function. Buddhist monks have immolated themselves in protest against attempts at suppression; Christian martyrs have suffered at the pillory and the stake for the right to speak freely, to assemble and to publish.

The freedom of speech which religious people demand seldom extends to those differing from them. A long history of religious wars shows them trying to suppress other faiths, and even in the most advanced countries today this tradition continues in a milder form, each congregation seeking to impose its own regime on the schools. Milton's *Areopagitica*, with its subtitle *A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicens'd Printing*, is a foundation document here. He is already near the limits of orthodoxy, perhaps beyond them, yet his work still shows, alongside the courage and determination that supported the movement for freedom in religious affairs, also the narrowness of its intentions. He would restrict permissible dissidence to Protestant sects, excluding Roman Catholicism and banning freethought: '*that also which is impious or evil absolutely either against faith or maners no law can possibly permit*'. When feeling enthusiasm for his famous declaration, in the same work, that '*a good Booke is the pretious life-blood of a master spirit*', one needs to enquire rather carefully just what he meant by 'good' in this connection. Milton was no humanist. He and his fellows would have been horrified to learn that they were ensuring a considerable degree of freedom for anarchism to operate, but their efforts have produced that result. And their success in promoting the freedoms of speech, publication and assembly arose, very largely, from the fact that they were not revolutionaries, outside the pale, but adherents of a respectable religion, people committed not to human welfare, or rationality, or freedom, but to religious beliefs. The freedoms anarchists now use arose as a side-effect of authoritarian religion.

I don't say a word against atheism, rationalism, reason and argument in their place. We need them among ourselves, and we need them for dealing with people who are anywhere near becoming anarchists. But they offer little help in getting anybody started, in arousing the first awareness that things are wrong in the world and we ought to be doing something about them. For that you need the power, the emotion and the drive that religion brings to bear.

Religion as we have known it for so long goes sharply against anarchist beliefs, using authority rather than reason. It recognises your freedom to accept or reject it, but adds that if you make the wrong choice you will burn in hell. (In Buddhism, that you will remain bound and suffering on the wheel.) Offering a love prepared to destroy your body for the good of your soul, it operates on a level that bypasses the ordinary attachment to comfort and custom, using images and symbols making their appeal to deep levels of the psyche. Even so, it

fails at least as often as it succeeds, many remaining absorbed in their own affairs, taken up with pictures and personalities, immersed unquestioningly in the state, throughout their lives. (And of those who do start on the long climb, many become fixated at each intermediate stage, never reaching anarchism.)

Once religion has persuaded or frightened you into adopting a definite set of standards, aims and principles, once it has kick-started you into accepting responsibility instead of just taking life and society and rulers for granted, then other movements can usefully approach you, movements more thoughtful than religion, more analytical, more critical. As those movements, one after another, show themselves incapable of doing what they aim at, as liberalism, freethought, socialism, atheism and communism all fail to bring any rapid and radical improvement, eventually anarchism gets its chance. But it is religion, more than anything else, that gets these changes started.

A great many anarchists believe that people have a natural tendency towards anarchy but get turned away from it, religion being one of the forces responsible. This has no more validity than the equivalent belief of conservatives, fascists, communists and in fact the members of every political movement, that people generally would support them if only some evil influence – bosses, extremists, agitators, Jews or immigrants – did not interfere. For people to live together without external government they need a high level of *self*-control, and we are not born with this. It has to be learnt, and religion, ordinary, orthodox, conventional, authoritarian religion, is the most effective method yet found for getting that learning process started.

Let me wind up with two quotations from one of the more prominent religious authorities of recent times. In his novel *Loss and Gain*, John Henry Newman, later Cardinal, talks about the change which commitment to one of the great religions produces in a person's thinking; he presents two pictures, Before and After:

> When, then, men for the first time look upon the world of politics or religion ... they have no consistency in their argument; that is, they argue one way to-day, and not exactly the other way to-morrow, but indirectly the other way, at random. Their lines of argument diverge; nothing comes to a point; there is no one centre in which their mind sits, on which their judgement of men and things proceeds. This is the state of many men all through life; and miserable politicians or Churchmen they make, unless by good luck they are in sage hands, and ruled by others, or are pledged to a course. Else they are at the mercy of the winds and the waves; and, without being Radical, Whig, Tory or Conservative, High Church or Low Church, they do Whig acts, Tory

acts, Catholic acts, and heretical acts, as the fit takes them, or as events or parties drive them.

In the next passage Newman's hero, a likeable, easy-going young student of divinity, begins to experience the effect upon his thinking of a serious commitment to religion:

> Contradictions could not both be real; when an affirmative was true, a negative was false. All doctrines could not be equally sound; there was a right and a wrong. The theory of dogmatic truth, as opposed to latitudinarianism (he did not know their names or their history, or suspect what was going on within him) had ... gradually begun to energise in his mind.[2]

That is how religion works on people who have been content to get by as best they can. It gets them started on facing the big issues and making responsible decisions. People who think in the way Newman describes, accepting doctrine and dogma, are not anarchists, but such thinking forms a stage in the progression towards anarchism, for only to the extent that people formulate their ideas clearly, and hold them firmly, can they appreciate the force of an attack upon them.

Let us hope that Newman's young hero went on to become an anarchist.

Notes

1. E. Conze, 1957, *Buddhism, its Essence and Development*, Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, page 43.
2. J.H. Newman, 1986 (1864), *Loss and Gain*, Oxford: OUP, pages 15-16 and 27.

Sébastien Faure

Twelve Proofs of the Non-Existence of God

Introduction

Sébastien Faure was a leading member of the French anarchist movement for half a century, and one of the most effective of all anarchist propagandists, though he is little known outside France.

Auguste Louis Sébastien Faure was born in 1858 into a middle-class Catholic family in Saint-Etienne (near Lyon in central France). He was very well educated at Jesuit schools and intended for the priesthood, but after his father's death he went into the insurance business. After military service, he spent a year in England. He married and moved to Bordeaux (in south-western France). He soon lost his faith and became a socialist. He stood unsuccessfully as a candidate of the Parti Ouvrier (the Marxist Workers Party) in the Gironde in the 1885 election, but under the influence of Peter Kropotkin, Elisée Reclus and Joseph Tortelier he moved towards anarchism.

In 1888 he broke with the socialists, settled in Paris, and devoted the rest of his life to a career as a full-time propagandist for anarchism. He and his wife separated, though they were reconciled many years later. He became a very active writer and speaker, earning a living from giving lectures all over the country. He never pretended to be an original thinker, but he was an effective populariser of other people's ideas. He took a moderate line in the movement, and advocated an eclectic approach which attempted to unite all tendencies. He wasn't convinced by the new syndicalist movement of the late 1890s, but was an active trade unionist himself. He wasn't an individualist, but took individualism seriously. He didn't support violent methods, but sympathised with those who used them. He was by no means a mere armchair theorist, but was frequently searched, arrested or prosecuted and occasionally imprisoned for his activities.

At first he was closely associated with Louise Michel, but he soon became a major figure in his own right, and one of the best-known

anarchists in the country. In 1894 he was one of the defendants in the Trial of the Thirty, when the French authorities tried unsuccessfully to suppress the anarchist movement by implicating its leaders in criminal conspiracies, and was acquitted. He was involved in several papers at various times in several parts of France, the most important of which was *Le Libertaire* (The Libertarian), which he started with Louise Michel in November 1895 and which appeared weekly on and off until June 1914. He was active in the Dreyfusard movement, replacing *Le Libertaire* with the daily *Journal du Peuple* during 1899. He also produced *Le Quotidien* (The Daily) in Lyon during 1901-1902. From 1903 he was active in the birth-control movement. From 1904 to 1917 he ran a libertarian school called La Ruche (The Beehive) at Rambouillet (near Paris).

He was a moderate opponent of the First World War, and issued a manifesto *Vers la Paix* (Towards Peace) at the end of 1914. He produced a general left-wing weekly *Ce qu'il faut dire* (What Must Be Said) from April 1916 to December 1917. In 1918 and 1921 he served short prison sentences for sexual offences involving young girls; this damaged but didn't destroy his career.

After the war he revived *Le Libertaire*, which continued from 1919 until 1939. In 1921 he led the reaction in the French anarchist movement against the growing Communist dictatorship in the Soviet Union. In January 1922 he began *La Revue Anarchiste* (Anarchist Review), the leading monthly magazine of the French anarchist movement between the world wars. In the late 1920s he opposed the sectarianism both of the authoritarian Platformists and of their critics, and advocated what he called an 'Anarchist Synthesis' in which individualism, libertarian communism and anarcho-syndicalism could co-exist. In 1927 he led a secession from the national Union Anarchiste, and in 1928 he helped to found the Association des Fédéralistes Anarchistes and to begin its paper, *La Voix Libertaire* (Libertarian Voice), which lasted from 1928 until 1939. He was reconciled with the national organisation and *Le Libertaire* in 1934. During the 1930s he took part in the peace movement as a prominent member of the International League of Fighters for Peace. In 1940 he took refuge from the war in Royan (near Bordeaux), where he died in 1942.

Apart from innumerable articles and lectures (many of which were printed as pamphlets and some of which were collected as books), several anarchist and atheist pamphlets (a few of which were translated into English), and accounts of La Ruche, his main work

was an ambitious trilogy of books – *La Douleur universelle: Philosophie libertaire* (Universal Sorrow: Libertarian Philosophy), an account of the problems caused by authority, which was published in 1895; *Médicastres: Philosophie libertaire* (Quacks: Libertarian Philosophy), an account of false solutions to the problems caused by authority, which was not published; and *Mon communisme: Le bonheur universel* (My Communism: Universal Happiness), a fictional account of libertarian revolution, which was published in 1921. In 1923 he published *L'Imposture réligieuse* (Religious Imposture), a full-length attack on religion (of which a revised edition appeared in 1948). In 1926 he began his most ambitious project – the preparation of the *Encyclopédie Anarchiste*, one of the most impressive and valuable libertarian publications ever produced. This appeared from 1927 as a series of separate parts and then in 1932 in a set of massive volumes. The whole work, containing nearly 3,000 large pages, consisted of a general alphabetical reference-book with entries contributed by leading anarchist writers from all over the world. Faure was the editor-in-chief, and also the author of many of the most important articles.

* * *

The pamphlet *Douze preuves de l'inexistence de Dieu*, which was based on a lecture he gave many times, was first published in Paris in 1914. It was frequently reprinted, and also occasionally translated. Just before his death a translation by Aurora Alleva and D. S. Menico was published in the United States as *Does God Exist?*. The present translation has been made by Nicolas Walter.

As will be seen, Faure directs his arguments against the God of the theologians, especially the Roman Catholic fathers and doctors of the Church, rather than against the God of the philosophers, and his case was fitted to his audience of French working people a century ago.

Twelve Proofs of the Non-Existence of God

Comrades,
There are two ways of studying and attempting to solve the problem of the non-existence of God.

The first consists of eliminating the God hypothesis from the field of plausible or necessary conjectures by a clear and precise explanation, by the exposition of a positive system of the Universe, its origin, its successive developments, and its final state. This exposition would render the idea of God useless and destroy in advance the whole abstract scaffolding on which metaphysical philosophers and theologians have placed it.

Now, *in the present state of human knowledge*, taking it as it is, there is no such explanation of what is demonstrated or demonstrable, verified or verifiable, and such a positive system of the Universe is lacking. True, there exist ingenious hypotheses which in no way violate reason; there exist more or less plausible systems which are supported by a quantity of statements and rest on a multiplicity of observations which have built up an impressive degree of probability; and it could be boldly claimed that these systems and suppositions could well be maintained against the affirmations of theists; but, in reality, there are in this area only theses which do not yet possess the status of scientific certainty, and since each of us is free to give preference to one system or to another which is opposed to it, the solution to the problem seen in this light seems, *at least for the present*, to be in suspense.

The adherents of all religions so readily seize the advantage which the study of the problem gives them when put in this way that they attempt, every one in every way, to bring it back to this position; and, if even on this ground – the only one where they can put up a good fight – they cannot leave the encounter such as it is with battle honours, it is at least possible for them to maintain doubt in the mind of their coreligionists, which is for them the main point.

In this hand-to-hand struggle, where the two opposing theses fight one another, the theists take some heavy blows; but they give some too; whether well or badly, they defend themselves, and since the

outcome of this duel remains uncertain in the eyes of the audience, the believers can claim victory, even when they have been knocked to the ground.

They do not fail to do this, with the effrontery which is characteristic of the papers on their side; and so this comedy succeeds in keeping the immense majority of the flock under the staff of the shepherd.

This is all that these 'bad shepherds' want.

The problem put in precise terms

Nevertheless, comrades, there is a second way of studying and attempting to solve the problem of the non-existence of God.

This consists in examining the existence of the God whom the religions present for our adoration.

Is there a sensible, thoughtful man who can accept that he exists, this God we are told about, as if he were not surrounded by any mystery, as if nothing about him were unknown, as if all his thoughts had been made open, as if all his secrets had been revealed – thus: 'He did this, he did that, then this, then that. He said this, he said that, then this, then that. He acted and spoke to such-and-such an end, for such-and-such a reason. He wants this thing, and he forbids that thing; he will reward these acts and punish those. He has made this and wants that, because he is infinitely wise, infinitely just, infinitely powerful, infinitely good'?

Very good! Here is a God who makes himself known! He leaves the empire of inaccessibility, dispels the clouds surrounding him, descends from the summits, speaks with mortals, confides his thoughts and reveals his will to them, and charges some privileged ones to spread his Doctrine and propagate his Law and, not only that, but to represent him here below with full powers of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth!

This God is not the God of Force, Intelligence, Will, Energy, which like all Energy, Will, Intelligence, Force, can be from time to time according to circumstances and therefore indifferently good or evil, useful or harmful, just or wicked, merciful or cruel; this God is the God in whom all is perfection and whose existence can be compatible – since he is perfectly just, wise, powerful, good, merciful – only with a state of things of which he would be the author and by which are affirmed his infinite Justice, his infinite Wisdom, his infinite Power, his infinite Goodness, and his infinite Mercy.

You recognise this God; it is the one who is taught to children

through the Catechism; it is the living and personal God to whom temples are erected, to whom prayers rise, in whose honour sacrifices are performed, and whom all clergies and priestly casts claim to represent on earth.

This is not that 'Unknown', that enigmatic Force, that impenetrable Power, that incomprehensible Intelligence, that unknowable Energy, that mysterious Principle: a hypothesis to which the human mind likes to resort in its impotence to explain the 'how' and 'why' of things; this is not the speculative God of the philosophers, it is the God whom his representatives have abundantly described and luminously detailed to us.

This is, I repeat, the God of the Religions and, since we are in France, the God of that religion which for fifteen centuries has dominated our history: the Christian religion.

This is the God whom I deny, and it is this one only whom I wish to discuss and who is worth studying, if we wish to bring this meeting to a positive conclusion, a practical result.

What is this God?

Since his representatives here below have been kind enough to depict him for us with a great profusion of detail, let us take advantage of this generosity of his plenipotentiaries; let us examine him at close quarters; let us put him under a microscope: in order to discuss him properly, it is necessary to know him properly.

This God is the One who with a powerful and fruitful act made everything from nothing, the one who called being out of nothingness, who through his sole will substituted movement for inertia, universal life for universal death: *he is the Creator!*

This God is the One who, when this act of creation was over, far from retiring into his age-old inaction and remaining indifferent to his creation, is involved with his work, is interested in it, intervenes when he thinks it appropriate, cares for it, administers it, governs it: *he is Governor or Providence.*

This God is the One who as a Supreme Tribunal summons every one of us after our death, judges them according to the actions of their lives, establishes a balance between the good and evil actions, and as a last resort pronounces judgement on them, without appeal, for all ages to come, the most happy or the most unhappy of beings: *he is Judge or Magistrate.*

It stands to reason that this God possesses all the attributes and that he possesses them not only to an exceptional degree; he possesses them all to an infinite degree.

Thus he is not only just: he is infinite Justice; he is not only good: he is infinite Goodness; he is not only merciful: he is infinite Mercy; he is not only powerful: he is infinite Power; he is not only wise: he is infinite Wisdom.

Once again, such is the God whom I deny and whose impossibility I shall demonstrate by twelve different proofs (though, strictly speaking, one would be enough).

Division of the Subject

This is the order in which I shall present my arguments.

These will form three groups: the first of these groups will be particularly directed at God as Creator; it will comprise six arguments. The second of these groups will especially concern God as Governor or Providence; it will contain four arguments; finally, the third and last of these groups will apply to God as Judge or Magistrate; it will consist of two arguments.

So: six arguments against the Creator-God; four arguments against the Governor-God; two arguments against the Judge-God. That will indeed be twelve proofs of the non-existence of God.

Now that you know the plan of my argument, you will be more easily able to follow its development.

I: AGAINST GOD THE CREATOR

1: The Creative Act is inadmissible

What is understood by creation?

What is it to create?

Is it to take scattered, separate but existing materials, then, using certain empirical principles, applying certain known rules, to bring together, group, order, associate, adjust these materials, in order to make something?

No! This is not to create. For example: May one say of a house that it has been created? No! It has been built. May one say of a piece of furniture that it has been created? No! It has been manufactured. May one say of a book that it has been created? No! It has been written, printed.

So, to take existing materials and make something from them is not creating.

So what is creating?

To create – I must say I am quite perplexed by trying to explain the unexplainable, to define the indefinable; I shall nevertheless try to make myself understood.

To create, is to take something from nothing; it is to make something from nothing; it is to call nothingness into being.

Now, I imagine that there is not a single person devoted to reason who can conceive and admit that it is possible to take something from nothing, that it is possible to make something from nothing.

Imagine a mathematician; choose the most expert at calculation, place before him a gigantic blackboard; ask him to draw on this blackboard some zeros and some more zeros; he will in vain add, multiply, subject them to all the operations of mathematics; he will never extract from the accumulation of these zeros a single unit.

From nothing, nothing is made; from nothing nothing can be made, and the famous aphorism of Lucretius, *Ex nihilo nihil*, remains the expression of manifest certainty and evidence.

The creative act is an act which it is impossible to admit and an absurdity.

'To create' is therefore a mystical, religious expression, which can have validity in the eyes of people who are pleased to believe that they don't understand and on whom faith imposes more than they understand; but 'to create' is an expression void of sense for every man who is informed, attentive, in the whose eyes words have meaning only to the extent that they represent a reality or a possibility.

In consequence the hypothesis of a Being who is genuinely a creator is a hypothesis which reason rejects.

The creative Being does not and cannot exist.

2: 'Pure Spirit' could not have determined the Universe

To the believers who, despite all reason, persist in admitting the possibility of creation, I shall say that it is in any case impossible to attribute this creation to their God.

Their God is *Pure Spirit.* And I say that Pure Spirit – which is Immaterial – could not have determined the Universe – which is Material. Here is why.

Pure Spirit is not separated from the Universe by a difference of degree, of quantity, but by a difference of kind, of quality. So far as Pure Spirit is not and cannot be more than an amplification of the Universe, the Universe is not and cannot be more than a reduction

of Pure Spirit. The difference here is not merely a distinction, but a contradiction, a contradiction in terms: essential, fundamental, irreducible, absolute.

Between Pure Spirit and the Universe, there is not merely a more or less wide and deep ditch which could strictly speaking be climbed or filled; there is a genuine abyss, whose width and depth are of such an extent that, whatever the effort made, nothing and no one could climb or fill it.

And I challenge the most subtle philosopher, like the most skilled mathematician, to throw a bridge – that is, to establish a relationship, of whatever kind (and moreover a relationship as direct and narrow as that which links cause and effect) – between Pure Spirit and the Universe.

Pure Spirit tolerates no material admixture; it comprises neither form, nor body, nor line, nor matter, nor proportion, nor extension, nor duration, nor depth, nor surface, nor volume, colour, sound, density.

How can one admit that this could be determined by that?

It is impossible.

Having arrived at this point in my demonstration, I stand squarely on the two preceding arguments, with the following conclusion.

We have seen that the hypothesis of a genuinely creative Power is inadmissible; we have seen, in the second place, that, even if one persists in believing in this Power, one cannot admit that the essentially material Universe was determined by essentially immaterial Pure Spirit.

If, nevertheless, you insist, you believers, in affirming that it is your God who created the Universe, the moment has come to ask us where, in the God hypothesis, Matter may be found, at the origin, in the beginning.

Well, one of two things: either Matter was outside God; or else it was in God (and you cannot put it into a third place). In the first case, if it was outside God, God had no need to create it, since it already existed; it coexisted with God, it was concomitant with him and, therefore, your God is not its creator.

In the second place – that is, if it was not outside God – it was in God. And in this case, I conclude:

(1) That God is not Pure Spirit, since he carried within himself a piece of matter, and what a piece: the totality of material worlds!

(2) That God, carrying matter within him, didn't have to create it, since it existed; it only had to come out of him; and, therefore, the

creation ceases to be a genuine act of creation and is reduced to an act of exteriorisation.

In either of the two cases, there was no creation.

3: Perfection cannot produce Imperfection

I am certain that if I put to a believer this question, '*Can imperfection produce perfection?*', the believer would reply without the least hesitation and without fear of contradiction, 'Imperfection cannot produce perfection.'

Now, I say, 'Perfection cannot produce imperfection,' and I insist that my proposition possesses the same force and the same precision as the previous one, and for the same reasons.

Here again: between perfection and imperfection there is not merely a difference of degree, of quantity, but a difference of quality, of kind, an essential, fundamental, irreducible, absolute contradiction.

Here again: between perfection and imperfection, there is not merely a more or less deep and wide ditch, but an abyss so wide and deep that nothing could fill or climb it.

Perfection is absolute; imperfection is relative. In relation to perfection, which is everything, the relative, the contingent is nothing. In relation to perfection, the relative is worthless, it doesn't exist, and it is in the power of no mathematician and of no philosopher to establish a relationship – whatever it might be – between the relative and the absolute; a fortiori, this relationship is impossible, when it is a question of a relationship as rigorous and precise as that which must necessarily unite Cause to Effect.

So it is impossible that perfection could have determined imperfection.

On the contrary, there is a direct, fatal and in a way mathematical relationship between the work and the person who is its author: the value of the work is the value of the worker; the value of the worker is the value of the work; it is by the work that one recognises the worker, just as it is by the fruit that one recognises the tree.

If I examine a badly edited publication, with many errors in language, with badly constructed phrases, or with a poor and lazy style, with few and flat ideas, with imperfect knowledge, I would not dream of attributing this poor page of French to a sculptor of phrases, to one of the masters of literature.

If I cast my eyes on a badly made design, with badly drawn lines, with rules of perspective and proportion violated, it won't occur to

me to attribute this rudimentary sketch to a professor, a master, an artist. Without the slightest hesitation, I shall say: this is the work of a pupil, an apprentice, a child; and I may be assured that I am not making a mistake, because it is so true that the work bears the mark of the worker and that by the work one may appreciate its author.

Now Nature is beautiful; the Universe is magnificent, and I passionately admire as much as may be the splendours, the magnificences of which it offers a ceaseless spectacle. However, even someone as enthusiastic as I am about the beauties of Nature, and however much homage I may give it, cannot say that the Universe is a work without defect, irreproachable, perfect. And no one would dare to support such an opinion.

So the Universe is an imperfect work.

By consequence I say:

There is always between a work and the author of it a rigorous, strict, mathematical relationship; now the Universe is an imperfect work; so the author of this work can only be imperfect.

This syllogism succeeds in forcing the imperfection of the God of believers, and consequently in denying him.

I can again reason as follows.

Either it is not God who is the author of the Universe (and thus I express my conviction);

Or else, if you insist on affirming that it is he who is the author, since the Universe is an imperfect work, your God is himself imperfect.

Whether by syllogism or by dilemma, the conclusion of the reasoning remains the same:

Perfection cannot determine imperfection.

4: The eternal, active, necessary Being cannot at any moment have been inactive or useless

If God exists, he is eternal, active and necessary.

Eternal? He is so by definition. It is his reason for being. He cannot be conceived as being enclosed by the limits of time; he cannot be imagined beginning or ending; he cannot either appear or disappear. He exists from all time.

Active? He is so and he cannot not be so, since it is his activity which engendered everything, since his activity is affirmed, believers say, by the most colossal, the most majestic action: the Creation of the Worlds.

Necessary? He is so and he cannot be otherwise, since without him

nothing would be; since he is the author of all things; since he is the initial point from which everything sprang; since he is the single, prime source from which everything poured; since it rested on him alone, sufficient to himself, from his own will either that everything should be or that nothing should not be. So he is: eternal, active and necessary.

I claim and I shall demonstrate that, if he is eternal, active and necessary, he must be eternally active and eternally necessary; that consequently he could not for a moment be inactive or useless; and consequently that he never created.

To say that God is not eternally active, is to admit that he did not always exist, that he became, that he began to be active, that before being he was not; and, since it is by creation that his activity is manifested, it is to admit at the same time that, for millions and millions of centuries which perhaps preceded the creative act, God was inactive.

To say that God is not eternally necessary is to admit that he did not always exist, that he became, that he began to be necessary, that before being he was not; and since it is the Creation which proclaims and proves the necessity of God, it is to admit at the same time that for millions of centuries which may have preceded the creative act, God was useless.

God idle and lazy!

God useless and superfluous!

What a position for an essentially active and essentially necessary Being!

So it must be confessed that God is at all times active and at all times necessary.

But then he cannot have created; for the idea of creation absolutely implies the idea of beginning, of origin. A thing which begins cannot have existed for all time. There must necessarily have been a time when before existing it did not exist. However short or long was this time which precedes the created thing, nothing can eliminate it: in some way, it is there.

From this it results that:

Either God is not eternally active and eternally necessary; and in this case he became so by creation. If this is the case, God lacked before the creation these two attributes: activity, and necessity. This God was incomplete; he was a fragment of God, no more; and he needed to create to become active and necessary, to complete himself.

Or God is eternally active and necessary; and in this case he created

eternally, creation is eternal; the Universe never began; it existed all the time; it is eternally like God; it is God himself and is combined with him.

If this is so, the Universe had no beginning; it was not created.

Therefore: in the first case, God before the creation was neither active nor necessary, was incomplete, that is to say imperfect; and then he does not exist. In the second case, God being eternally active and eternally necessary, cannot have become so; and then did not create.

It is impossible to get out of that.

5: The immutable Being cannot have created

If God exists, he is immutable. He does not change; he cannot change. Whereas in Nature everything is modified, metamorphosed, transformed, whereas nothing exists definitively and everything becomes, God is a fixed point, immobile in time and space, is not subject to any modification, does not and cannot know any alteration.

He is today as he was yesterday; he will be tomorrow what he is today. Whether God is envisaged from the point of view of past ages or from that of future ages, he is constantly identical to himself.

God is immutable.

I claim that if he created, he is not immutable, because in that case he changed twice.

To decide to wish, is to change. From all evidence, there is a change between a being who does not wish and a being who does wish.

If I wish today what I did not wish, what I did not even dream, forty-eight hours ago, there has been produced in or around me one or more circumstances which made me wish. This new wish constitutes a modification; this cannot be doubted; it is indisputable.

Equally: to decide to act, or to act, is to be modified.

It is moreover certain that this double modification – to wish, to act – is all the more considerable and marked, that it is a question of a more serious resolution and of a more important action.

God created, you say? All right. Then he changed twice: the first time, when he made the decision to create; the second time, when, putting this decision into execution, he carried out the creative act.

If he changed twice, he is not immutable.

If he is not immutable, he is not God, he does not exist.

The immutable Being cannot have created.

6: God cannot have created without a motive: but it is impossible to discern one

In whatever way it is envisaged, the Creation remains inexplicable, enigmatic, void of sense.

It is clear that, if God created, it is impossible to admit that he carried out this grand act whose consequences were to be fatally proportionate to the act itself, and therefore incalculable, without deciding to do so for a very good reason.

Well, then, what can this reason be? For what motive could God have decided to create? What could have moved him? What desire overcame him? What design formed him? What aim did he pursue? What end did he have in mind?

Multiply questions and more questions of this kind; turn the problem and turn it again; envisage it from all sides; examine it in all senses; and I defy you to resolve it except by claptrap and sophistry.

Look: take a child brought up in the Christian religion. His Catechism assures him, his teachers teach him that God created him and sent him into the world. Imagine that he asks himself this question, 'Why did God create me and send me into the world?', and that he wishes to find a serious, reasonable answer. He will not succeed. Imagine again that, trusting the experience and knowledge of his educators, persuaded that the sacred character with which priests and pastors are clothed affords them special enlightenment and particular grace, convinced that by their holiness they are closer to God than him and better acquainted than him with revealed truth – imagine that this child has the curiosity to ask his teachers why God has created him and sent him into the world, I declare that they will not be able to give any plausible or sensible reply to this simple question.

In truth, there is none.

Let us push the question further, let us go more deeply into the problem.

Let us take thought and consider God *before* the creation. Let us take him in his absolute sense. He is quite alone; he is sufficient to himself. He is perfectly wise, perfectly happy, perfectly powerful. Nothing can enlarge his wisdom; nothing can increase his happiness; nothing can strengthen his power.

This God cannot experience any desire, since his happiness is infinite; he cannot pursue any end, since nothing is lacking to his

perfection; he cannot form any design, since nothing can extend his power; he cannot resolve any wish, since he feels no need.

Come on, then! Profound philosophers, subtle thinkers, skilful theologians, reply to this child who is questioning you, and tell him why God created him and sent him into the world!

I am quite confident; you cannot reply except by saying, 'The designs of God are impenetrable,' and by holding that this reply is sufficient.

And you will be wiser if you refrain from replying, for every reply, I graciously tell you in advance, would be the ruin of your system, the collapse of your God.

The logical, relentless conclusion is forced on you: God, if he created, created without motive, without knowing why, without aim.

Do you know, comrades, where the consequences of this conclusion inevitably lead us?

You will see.

The distinction between the actions of a man devoted to reason and the actions of a man struck by madness, what makes one responsible and the other not, is that a man of reason always knows or at least always can know when he acts what forces impelled him, what motives decided him to act. When it is a matter of an important action whose consequences may bear heavily on his responsibility, a man of reason needs only to turn to himself, to undertake a serious, persistent and impartial examination of his consciousness, needs only through recollection to reconstruct the order in which the events unfolded, in a word to relive the past hour, in order to succeed in discerning the mechanism of the factors which made him act.

He is not always very proud of motives which impelled him; he is often ashamed of the reasons which decided him to act; but, whether these motives are fine or vile, generous or low, he always succeeds in discovering them.

A madman, on the other hand, acts without knowing why; when his action is completed, even the most loaded with consequences, question him; ask him questions; insist; pester him. The poor fool will stammer some nonsense and you will not be able to extract him from his incoherence.

So the distinction between the actions of a sensible man and of a senseless man is that the actions of the former may be explained, have a reason for existence, that their cause may be distinguished from their aim, their origin from their end; whereas the actions of a man deprived of reason may not be explained, and he is himself incapable

of discerning in them their cause and aim, that they have no reason for existence.

Well, then! If God created without aim, without motive, he acted like a madman, and *the Creation seems to be an act of insanity.*

TWO CAPITAL OBJECTIONS

To finish with the God of creation, it seems essential to examine two objections.

You know well that there are many objections here; however, when I speak of two objections to study, I speak of two capital, classic objections.

These two objections have all the more importance because by getting into the habit of the argument it is possible to deal with all the other objections in the same way.

1: 'God escapes you'

They tell me:

> You have no right to talk about God as you do. You present us with a caricature God, systematically reduced to the proportions which your understanding allows. This God is not ours. Our God you cannot conceive, because he overtakes and escapes you. You should know that what would be fantastic for the man who is most powerful in strength, wisdom and knowledge is for God child's play. Do not forget that Humanity could not move on the same level as Divinity. Do not lose sight of the fact that it is as impossible for man to understand the way God works as for minerals to understand the way vegetables work, for vegetables to understand the way animals work, and for animals to understand the way humans work.
>
> God rises to heights which you cannot reach; he occupies peaks which remain out of your range.
>
> You should know that whatever the magnificence of human intelligence, whatever effort this human intelligence may make, whatever the persistence of this effort may be, human intelligence can never rise to God. Finally take note that however large it may be, man's brain is finite and therefore cannot conceive the Infinite. So have the loyalty and modesty to confess that it is not possible for you to understand or to explain God. But from the fact that

you can neither understand nor explain him it does not follow that you have the right to deny him.

And I reply to the theists:

You give me, gentlemen, advice about loyalty which I am very much inclined to accept. You remind me of legitimate modesty which suits a humble mortal like myself. I do not wish to deviate from them.

You say that God overtakes and escapes me? Fair enough. I agree to recognise this; and to state that the finite cannot either understand nor explain the Infinite is a truth so certain and evident that I do not have the least wish to oppose it. Up to this point we are in full agreement, and I hope you are quite satisfied.

Only, gentlemen, allow me in my turn to give you the same advice about loyalty; allow me in my turn to recall you to the same modesty. Are you not men, as I am? Does not God overtake you as he overtakes me? Does he not escape you as he escapes me? Would you claim to move on the same level as Divinity? Would you have the pretension to think and the folly to declare that with a flap of the wing you have conquered the summits which God occupies? Would you be impudent enough to claim that your finite brain has encompassed the Infinite?

I do not mean the offence, gentlemen, of believing that you have been struck by such an extravagant vanity.

Have then, as much as me, the loyalty and modesty to confess that, if it is impossible for me to understand and explain God, you run into the same impossibility. Have finally the honesty to recognise that if, because I cannot conceive or explain God, I have no right to deny him, then since you just as much can neither understand nor explain him, you have no right to affirm him.

And do not imagine, gentlemen, that we are henceforth in the same boat. It is you who first affirmed the existence of God; so it is you who must first withdraw your affirmations. Would I have ever dreamt of denying God if I had not been forced when I was quite small to believe in him? If as I grew up I had not heard him being affirmed all round me? If, when I became a man, I had not seen churches and temples erected to God?

It is your own affirmations which provoke and justify my negations. You cease to affirm, and I shall cease to deny.

2: 'There is no effect without cause'

The second objection seems more formidable. Many people still

consider that it is unanswerable. It comes from metaphysical philosophers.

These gentlemen say confidently: 'There is no effect without a cause; now the Universe is an effect; therefore this effect has a cause which we call God.'

The argument is well put; it seems to be well constructed, solidly built.

The point is whether it is really so.

This method of reasoning is what in logic is called a syllogism. A syllogism is an argument comprising three propositions – the major premise, the minor premise, and the conclusion – and containing two parts – the premises, composed of the two first propositions, and the conclusion represented by the third.

For a syllogism to be impregnable, it is necessary, first, that the major and minor premises are accurate, and, second, that the third proposition is logically derived from the first two.

If the syllogism of the metaphysical philosophers fills these two conditions, it is irrefutable and it remains to me only to bow to it; but if one of these two conditions is lacking, it is void and invalid and the whole argument breaks down.

In order to test its validity, let us examine the three propositions comprising it.

The first proposition, the major premise: '*There is no effect without cause.*'

Philosophers, you are right. There is no effect without cause; nothing is more true. There is not, there cannot be an effect without a cause. The effect is only the consequence, the continuation, the outcome of the cause. To say 'effect' is to say 'cause'; the idea of an effect *necessarily* and *instantly* demands the idea of a cause. If it were otherwise, an effect without a cause would be an effect *of nothing*; which would be absurd.

So we are in agreement on this first proposition.

The second proposition, the minor premise: '*Now the Universe is an effect.*'

Ah! Here I ask for reflection and I beg for explanations. What is such a clear and assertive affirmation based on? What phenomenon or collection of phenomena, what observation or collection of observations allows it to be put in such a categorical tone?

And to begin with, do we know enough about the Universe? Have we studied, scanned, examined, understood it well enough to be able to be so positive? Have we penetrated its depths? Have we explored

its unmeasurable spaces? Have we descended to the depths of the oceans? Have we scaled all its heights? Do we know everything there is to do with the Universe? Has it delivered up all its secrets to us? Have we torn aside all its veil, penetrated all its mysteries, discovered all its secrets? Have we seen everything, heard everything, touched everything, felt everything, observed everything, noted everything? Have we nothing more to learn? Is there nothing left for us to discover? In brief, are we in a position to put a formal valuation on the Universe, a final judgement, an unquestionable verdict?

No one could answer all these questions in the affirmative, and the bold, not to say mad, person who would dare to claim that he knew the Universe would deserve profound pity.

The Universe! that is to say not only this humble planet on which we live and on which we drag our wretched bodies, not only those millions of heavenly bodies and the planets we know which belong to our solar system, or which we shall discover in the course of time; but also those Worlds and Worlds whose existence we know or guess and whose number, distance and extent remain unmeasurable!

If I said, 'The Universe is a cause', I am certain that I would immediately unleash jeers and protests from believers; and, nevertheless, my affirmation would be no crazier than theirs.

My boldness would be the same as theirs; that is all.

If I consider the Universe, if I observe it as far as is possible for a man of today from the knowledge so far acquired, I see what seems to be an incredibly complex and involved entity, an inextricable and colossal tangle of causes and effects which determine, link, succeed, succeed and repeat and penetrate one another. I notice that the whole seems to form an endless chain whose links are indissolubly linked and I observe that each of the links is at the same time a cause and an effect: the effect of the cause which determines it, and cause of the effect which follows.

Who can say, 'Here is the first link: the link Cause'? Who can say, 'Here is the last link; the link Effect'? And who can say, 'There is necessarily a first cause, there is necessarily a last effect'?

The second proposition, 'Now the Universe is an effect,' therefore lacks the indispensable condition: accuracy. As a consequence, this famous syllogism is worthless. I must add that, even if it were the case that the second proposition were accurate, it would remain necessary to establish for the conclusion to be acceptable, that the Universe is the effect of a single Cause, a First Cause, the Cause of Causes, a Cause without Cause, the eternal Cause.

I await this demonstration without worry or anxiety. It is one of those which has been attempted many times but has never been done. It is one of those of which may be said without too much boldness that it will never be seriously, positively, scientifically established.

I must add finally that even if it were the case that the whole syllogism were unobjectionable, it would be a simple matter to turn it against the thesis of the Creator God in favour of my demonstration.

Let us try: There is no effect without cause? – Right. Now the Universe is an effect? Indeed. So this effect has a cause and it is this cause which we call God? Right again.

Don't rush to triumph, theists, and listen well.

If it is clear that there is no effect without a cause, it is just as rigorously clear that there is no cause without effect. There is and cannot be a cause without effect. To say 'cause' is to say 'effect'; the idea of a cause *necessarily* implies and *immediately* demands the idea of an effect; if it were otherwise, the cause without effect would be a cause of nothing, which would be as absurd as an effect of nothing.

So it is well understood that there is no cause without effect.

Now you say that the effect of the Universe has the cause of God. It is equally possible to say that the cause of God has the effect of the Universe.

It is impossible to separate the effect from the cause; but it is equally impossible to separate the cause from the effect.

You affirm though that the God-cause is eternal. I conclude from that the Universe-effect is equally eternal, since an eternal cause must ineluctably correspond to an eternal effect.

If it were otherwise, that is if the Universe had a beginning, then during the millions and millions of centuries which may have preceded the creation of the Universe God would have been a cause without effect, which is impossible, and a cause of nothing, which would be absurd.

As a consequence, God being eternal, the Universe is also eternal, and if the Universe is eternal, then it never began, and it was not created.

Is that clear?

II: AGAINST GOD AS GOVERNOR OR PROVIDENCE

1: The Governor denies the Creator

There are those – and they are many – who despite everything insist on believing. I accept that strictly speaking it is possible to believe in

the existence of a perfect creator; I accept that strictly speaking it is possible to believe in the existence of a necessary governor; but it seems to be impossible for a reasonable person to believe in one and the other at the same time: these two perfect Beings categorically exclude one another; to affirm one is to deny the other; to proclaim the perfection of the former is to confess the uselessness of the latter; to proclaim the necessity of the latter is to deny the perfection of the former.

In other words, it is possible to believe in the perfection of one or the necessity of the other; but it is unreasonable to believe in the perfection of both; it is necessary to choose.

If the Universe created by God had been a perfect work, if in its entirety and in its smallest details, this work had been without defect; if the mechanism of this gigantic creation had been faultless, if its construction had been so perfect that there was no fear that it might suffer a single failure or damage – in brief, if the work had been worthy of this maker of genius, this artist beyond compare, this fantastic constructor who is called God, the need of a governor would never be felt.

Once the first touch of a finger had been given, once the formidable machine had been put into motion, there would be no more to do than leave it to itself, without fear of possible accident.

What would be the need for this engineer, this mechanic, whose job is to supervise the machine, to direct it, to intervene when necessary, and to give the moving machine minor adjustments and running repairs? Such an engineer would be useless, such a mechanic pointless.

In this case, there would be no Governor.

If the Governor exists, it must be because his presence, his supervision, his intervention are indispensable.

The necessity of the Governor is an insult, a challenge thrown at the Creator; his intervention proves the clumsiness, the incompetence, the impotence of the Creator.

The Governor denies the perfection of the Creator.

2: The multiplicity of Gods proves that none of them exists

The Governor God is and must be powerful and just, infinitely powerful and infinitely wise.

I claim that the multiplicity of religions proves that he lacks power or justice.

Let us ignore the dead gods, the abolished cults, the extinct religions. They are counted in thousands and thousands. Let us speak only of current religions.

According to the most reliable estimates, there are at present eight hundred religions which contest the domination of the six hundred million souls populating our planet. No doubt each one supposes and proclaims that it alone is in possession of the true, authentic, unquestionable, sole God, and that all the other Gods are ludicrous, false, contraband, fake Gods which it is a pious work to fight and crush.

I add that, if there were only a hundred religions instead of eight hundred, or if there were only ten, or if there were only two, my argument would remain just as strong.

Well, then. I say that the multiplicity of these Gods proves that none of them exists, because it guarantees that God lacks power or justice.

If he were powerful, he could have spoken to all people as easily as to a few. If he were powerful, he could have shown himself, revealed himself to all people with no more effort than was needed to reveal himself to a few.

A man – however powerful he is – can show himself, can speak only to a limited number of men; his vocal chords have a strength which cannot exceed certain limits; but God!

God can speak to all people – however large the number – as easily as to a small number. When it is raised, the voice of God can and must resound to the four cardinal points. The divine word knows no distance, no obstacle. It crosses oceans, climbs summits, leaps space without the least difficulty.

Since he wished – so Religion asserts – to speak to men, to reveal himself to them, to confide his designs to them, to inform them of his will, to make them know his Law, he could have spoken to all of them without more effort than to a privileged handful.

He didn't do so, since some don't believe in him, others don't know him, and yet others oppose God with one of his rivals.

In these circumstances, would it not be wise to believe that he has not spoken to anyone and that the multiple revelations are only multiple impostures; or else that if he spoke only to a few, it is because he couldn't speak to all?

If this is the case, I accuse him of impotence.

And, if I do not accuse him of impotence, I accuse him of injustice.

What are we to think after all of this God who shows himself to a few and hides himself from others? What are we to think of this God

who directs his word to some and keeps silent with others?

Do not forget that the representatives of this God claim that he is the Father and that all of us, in the same way and to the same degree, are the beloved children of the Father who reigns in Heaven.

Well, then! What do you think of this father who, full of tenderness for a privileged few, rescues them by revealing himself to them from the anguishes of doubt, the tortures of hesitation, while he deliberately condemns the immense majority of his children to the torments of uncertainty? What do you think of this father who shows himself to a section of his children in the dazzling brilliance of his majesty, when for the rest he remains covered in darkness? What do you think of this father who, demanding from his children worship, respect, adoration, calls a few elect to understand the word of Truth, when by deliberate choice he refuses this signal favour to others?

If you judge that this father is just and good, you will not be surprised that my appreciation is different.

So the multiplicity of religions proclaims that God lacks power or justice. Now God must be infinitely powerful and infinitely just; believers affirm it; if he lacks one of these two attributes – power or justice – he is not perfect; if he is not perfect, he does not exist.

The multiplicity of Gods demonstrates that none of them exists.

3: God is not infinitely good: this is proved by Hell

The God as Governor or Providence is and must be infinitely good, infinitely merciful. The existence of Hell proves that he is not.

Follow my reasoning carefully: God could – since he is free – not have created us; he did create us.

God could – since he is all-powerful – have created us all good; he created some good and some evil.

God could – since he is good – admit all of us into his paradise after our death, contenting himself with this time of trial and tribulation which we pass on earth.

And God could – since he is just – only admit into his paradise the good and refuse admission to the depraved, but extinguish these at death rather than doom them to hell.

For he who can create can destroy; he who has the power to give life has that to extinguish life.

Let us see: you are not Gods. You are neither infinitely good, nor infinitely merciful. However, I am certain that, without attributing to you qualities which you may not possess, if it were in your power

without a hard effort and without costing you any material prejudice or moral injury – if, I say, it were in your power in the conditions I have just indicated, to spare one of your brothers in humanity a tear, a sorrow, a trial, I am sure that you would do it. And, nevertheless, you would not be infinitely good, nor infinitely merciful!

Would you be better and more merciful than the God of the Christians?

For, after all, Hell exists. The Church teaches it; it is the horrific vision which is used to terrify children, old people, and timid souls, the spectre which is invoked at the bedside of the dying, at the time when the approach of death deprives them of all energy and lucidity.

Well, then! The God of the Christians, the God who is said to be the God of pity, of forgiveness, of indulgence, of goodness, of mercy, throws a section of his children – for ever – into this abode stocked with the cruellest tortures, the most unspeakable punishments.

How good he is! How merciful he is!

You know this text of Scripture: 'Many are called, but few are chosen.' This saying means, if I am not mistaken, that the number of the elect will be tiny and the number of the damned will be considerable. This statement has a cruelty so monstrous that it is tempting to give it another sense.

No matter: Hell exists, and it is clear that the damned – a large or small number – will endure the most painful torments there.

Let us ask who can benefit from the torments of the damned.

Will it be the elect? Clearly not! By definition the elect are the just, the virtuous, the brotherly, the compassionate, and it could not be supposed that their happiness, already inexpressible, could be increased by the spectacle of their tortured brethren.

Would it be the damned themselves? No more so, since the Church affirms that the punishment of these unhappy people will never end and that for millions and millions of centuries their torments will be as intolerable as on the first day.

Then?

Then, apart from the elect and the damned, there is only God, so it can be only for him.

So is it God who would profit from the sufferings of the damned? So is it this infinitely good, infinitely merciful father who would sadistically relish the pains to which he had deliberately consigned his children?

Ah, if it is so, this God seems to be the most ferocious executioner, the most implacable torturer one can imagine.

Hell proves that God is neither good nor merciful. The existence of a God of goodness is incompatible with that of Hell.

Either there is no Hell, or God is not infinitely good.

4: The problem of evil

The problem of evil provides my fourth and last argument against God the Governor, and at the same time my first argument against God the Judge.

I do not say that the existence of evil – physical evil, moral evil – is incompatible with the existence of God; but I say that it is incompatible with the existence of a God who is *infinitely powerful and infinitely good.*

The argument is well known, if only for the numerous refutations – always powerless, all the same – which have been set against it.

It has been attributed to Epicurus. It has therefore already existed for more than twenty centuries; but, however old it may be, it has retained all its force.

Here it is.

Evil exists; all feeling beings know suffering. God, who knows everything, cannot be ignorant of it. Well, then; one of two things is true:

Either God would like to suppress evil, but cannot.

Or God could suppress evil, but does not wish to do so.

In the first case, God would like to suppress evil; he is good, he has compassion for the sorrows which overwhelm us, the evils which we endure. Ah, if it depended only on him! Evil would be extinguished, and happiness would flourish on the earth. Once again, he is good; but he cannot suppress evil and so he is not all-powerful.

In the second case, God could suppress evil. He would need only the will for evil to be abolished: he is all-powerful; but he does not wish to suppress it; and so he is not infinitely good.

Here, God is powerful but not good; there, God is good but is not powerful.

Now, for God to exist, it is not enough for him to possess one of these perfections – power or goodness – it is essential that he possess both of them.

This argument has never been refuted.

Let us be understood: I do not say that no one has attempted to refute it; I say that no one has ever succeeded.

The best-known attempt at refutation is this:

> You put the problem of evil in completely false terms. It is quite wrong for you to hold God responsible. Yes, indeed, evil exists and this is undeniable; but it is man who should be held responsible. God did not wish man to be an automaton, a machine, who acts mechanically. In creating him, he gave him liberty; he made him an entirely free being; with the liberty which he generously bestowed on him, God allowed him the faculty of making in all circumstances whatever use he wanted; and, if man pleases, instead of making a judicious and noble use of this inestimable gift, to make an odious and criminal use, it is not God should be accused, for this would be unjust; it would be fair to accuse man.

Here is the objection, a classic one.

What is its value? Nothing.

I shall explain:

Let us distinguish physical and moral evil.

Physical evil is illness, suffering, accident, old age with its train of defects and infirmities; it is death, the cruel loss of those we love; some children are born who die a few days afterwards without knowing anything other than suffering; there is a host of human beings for whom existence is a long succession of sorrows and afflictions, such that it would be better that they had not been born; it is in the arena of Nature, plagues, cataclysms, conflagrations, droughts, famines, floods, tempests, all that load of tragic fatalities which are reckoned as sorrow and death.

Who would dare to say of this physical evil that man should be held responsible?

Who does not understand that, *if God created the Universe*, if it is he who endowed it with the formidable laws which rule it, and if physical evil is the sum of those fatalities which result from the normal play of the forces of Nature – who does not understand that the author responsible for these calamities is surely the one who created this Universe, the one who governs it?

I imagine that on this point there is no possible disagreement

God, who governs the Universe, is therefore responsible for physical evil.

This alone should be enough, and my reply could stop there.

But I claim that moral evil is imputable to God in the same way as physical evil, since, if he exists, he has presided over the organisation of the moral world as of the physical world and consequently man, the victim of moral evil as of physical evil, is no more responsible for the one than for the other.

But I must link what I have to say about moral evil to the third and last series of my arguments.

III: AGAINST GOD AS JUDGE

1: Man, being irresponsible, can be neither punished nor rewarded

What are we?

Did we preside over the conditions of our birth? Were we consulted on the simple question of knowing whether we wished to be born? Were we invited to fix our destinies? Did we have a say on any point?

If we had had a say, each of us would from the cradle have bestowed on ourselves all advantages: health, strength, beauty, intelligence, courage, goodness, &c., &c. Each would have been an epitome of all perfections, a sort of God in miniature.

What are we?

Are we what we would wish to be?

Indisputably not!

Granted the hypothesis of God, we are, since it is he who created us, what he wished us to be.

God, since he is free, could have not created us.

He could have created us less depraved, since he is good.

He could have created us virtuous, healthy, excellent. He could have filled us with all physical, intellectual and moral gifts, since he is all-powerful.

For the third time, what are we?

We are what God wished us to be. He created us as he wished, according to his taste.

There is no other answer to this question, What are we?, if we admit that God exists and that we are his creatures.

It is God who gave us our sense, our faculties of understanding, our sensibility, our means of perception, of feeling, of reasoning and of acting. He foresaw, willed, determined our conditions of life; he conditioned our needs, our desires, our passions, our fears, our hopes, our hates, our tendernesses, our aspirations. Every human mechanism corresponds to what he wanted it to be. He conceived, regulated all the details of the environment in which we live; he prepared all the circumstances which at every instant will affect our will and determine our actions.

Before this formidably equipped God, man is irresponsible.

He who is under the authority of no one is entirely free; he who is *partly* under the authority of another is *partly* a slave, and free only in part; he who is *largely* under the authority of another is *largely* a slave, and free only a little; and he who is *completely* under the authority of another is *completely* a slave and enjoys no liberty.

If God exists, man is in the last position, that of a slave, in relation to God, and his slavery is all the more complete because of the great distance between him and his Master.

If God exists, he alone has knowledge, power, will; he alone is free; man has no knowledge, no power, no will; his dependence is complete.

If God exists, he is everything; man is nothing.

Man who is held in slavery, placed in full and entire subjection to God, can have no responsibility.

And, if he has no responsibility, he cannot be judged.

Every judgement implies a punishment or a reward; and the actions of an irresponsible being, having no moral value, do not relate to any judgement.

The actions of an irresponsible being can be useful or harmful; morally, they are neither good nor bad, neither meritorious nor reprehensible; they cannot be equitably rewarded or punished.

In appointing himself Judge, in punishing or rewarding irresponsible man, God is simply a usurper; he arrogates an arbitrary right and employs it contrary to all justice.

From what I have just said, I conclude:

(a) That the responsibility for moral evil is imputable to God just as physical evil is imputable to him;

(b) That *God is an unworthy Judge, because man who is irresponsible cannot be either rewarded or punished.*

2: God breaks the fundamental rules of equity

Let us admit for a moment that man is responsible, and we shall see that, even in this hypothesis, divine Justice violates the most elementary rules of equity.

Admitting that the practice of Justice cannot be exercised without involving a sanction, and that the magistrate has the duty to fix this sanction, there is a rule about which opinion is and must be unanimous: that just as there is a scale of merit and blame, there should be a scale of rewards and punishments.

Accepting this principle, the magistrate who exercises justice best is the one who most precisely fits the reward to the merit and the punishment to the blame; and the ideal, impeccable, perfect magistrate will be the one who establishes a rigorously mathematical proportion between the action and the sanction.

I believe that this elementary rule of Justice is accepted by everyone.

Well, then! God, through his use of Heaven and Hell, disregards this rule and violates it.

Whatever the merit of a man may be, it is limited (like the man himself) and, nevertheless, the sanction of reward – Heaven – is unlimited, if by nothing else then by its character of eternity.

Whatever the blame of a man may be, it is limited (like the man himself) and yet the sanction of punishment – Hell – is unlimited, if by nothing else then by its character of eternity.

So there is a disproportion between merit and reward, a disproportion between crime and punishment: disproportion everywhere. Therefore, *God violates the fundamental rules of equity.*

My thesis is complete; it remains only to recapitulate and to conclude.

Recapitulation

Comrades,

I promised you a rigid, substantial, decisive demonstration of the non-existence of God. I think I may say that I have kept that promise.

Do not lose sight of the fact that I did not propose to offer you a system of the Universe which would have made useless all recourse to the hypothesis of a supernatural Force, an other-worldly Energy or Power, a Principle superior or prior to the Universe. I was honest enough, as I had to be, to tell you that from this perspective, the problem does not admit, *in the present state of human knowledge*, any final solution, and that the only attitude appropriate to reflective and reasonable minds is one of waiting.

The God of which I wished to establish – and of which I may now say that I have established – the impossibility is the God of the religions, the God who is Creator, Governor and Judge, the infinitely wise, powerful, just and good God whom the clergy imagine that they represent on earth and whom they attempt to impose on our veneration.

There is not and there cannot be any equivocation. It is this God whom I deny; and, if there is to be a productive discussion, it is this

God who must be defended from my attacks.

All debate on any other ground will be – I warn you now, for you must be on your guard against the tricks of the enemy – all debate on any other ground will be a diversion and will be moreover further proof that the God of the religions cannot be defended or justified.

I have proved that, as Creator, he would be inadmissible, imperfect, inexplicable; I have established that, as Governor, he would be useless, powerless, cruel, hateful, despotic; I have shown that, as Judge, he would be an unworthy magistrate, violating the essential rules of the most elementary equity.

Conclusion

Such, however, is the God who from time immemorial has been taught and who today is still being taught to a multitude of children, in a host of families and schools. How many crimes have been committed in his name!

How many hatreds, wars and calamities have been furiously unleashed by his representatives! What sufferings he has been the source of! What evils he is still creating!

For centuries Religion has held humanity bowed in fear, wallowing in superstition, prostrated in resignation.

Will the day never dawn in which, ceasing to believe in eternal Justice, in imaginary decrees, in problematic atonements, human beings will work with tireless ardour for the coming on earth of an immediate, positive and fraternal Justice?

Will the hour never strike when, disabused of fallacious consolations and hopes which are suggested to them by belief in a compensatory paradise, human beings will make of our planet an Eden of abundance, peace and liberty, whose doors will be fraternally open to all?

For too long the social contract has been inspired by a God without justice; it is time that it was inspired by a justice without God. For too long the relations between nations and individuals have derived from a God without philosophy; it is time that they derived from a philosophy without God. For centuries, monarchs, governments, castes and clergy, rulers of the people, directors of conscience, have treated humanity as a base herd, fit only to be fleeced, devoured, thrown to the slaughter.

For centuries, the disinherited have passively borne poverty and slavery, thanks to the deceitful mirage of Heaven and the horrific

vision of Hell. They must put an end to this hateful trickery, to this abominable fraud.

Oh, you who hear me, open your eyes; look; observe; understand. The Heaven which you have incessantly been told about, the Heaven with whose help they try to numb your poverty, to anaesthetise your suffering and to suppress the complaints which, despite everything, pour from your heart – this Heaven is unreal and empty. Only your Hell is populous and genuine.

Enough lamentations: lamentations are vain.

Enough prostrations: prostrations are sterile.

Enough prayers: prayers are powerless.

Stand up, oh man! And, upright, vibrant, rebellious, declare implacable war on God whose humiliating veneration has been imposed on your brothers and on yourself for so long.

Get rid of this imaginary tyrant, and shake off the yoke of those who claim to be his representatives here below.

But remember that, once this first act of liberation has been achieved, you will have completed only part of the task which is incumbent on you.

Do not forget that it would be no use to break the chains which were forged for you by the imaginary, heavenly and eternal Gods, if you did not also break the those forged for you by the transient and genuine gods of the earth.

These gods are prowling around you, attempting to starve and enslave you. These gods are only men like you.

The rich and powerful, these gods of the earth have filled it with innumerable victims, with inexpressible torments.

May the wretched of the earth rebel at last against these scoundrels and build a City where such monsters will for ever be impossible!

When you have got rid of the Gods of Heaven and of Earth, when you have freed yourselves from Masters above and Masters below, when you have achieved this double act of deliverance, then but only then, oh my brothers, will you have got out of Hell and got into Heaven!

Brian Morris

Matriliny and mother goddess religion

The notion that 'matriarchy' was an original form of social organisation was a central doctrine of many early anthropologists. The writings of Jacob Bachofen (1967) on classical mythology and religion were particularly influential. Bachofen suggested that 'all civilisation and culture are essentially grounded in the establishment and adornment of the hearth', and that 'matriarchy' was an intermediate cultural stage in the development of human society, between hunter-gathering and the rise of the city state. It was associated with the development of agriculture, mother-right (which did not necessarily imply the political domination of women), a reciprocal rather than a Promethean attitude towards nature, and a religious system that emphasised human's dependence on the earth, expressed through chthonic deities. But although Bachofen suggested that at this stage of human evolution women were 'the repository of all culture', he also emphasised that in all the classical civilisations – Egypt, Greece, Rome – an intrinsic relationship existed between 'phallic' gods like Osiris – associated with water as a fecundating element – and female deities like Isis which were equated in myth with the earth, even though the latter were given prominence. Whenever we encounter matriarchy, Bachofen writes, we find it bound up with 'chthonian religions', focused around female deities (page 88). He also makes the interesting observation that whereas the transience of material life goes hand-in-hand with matrilineal kinship, 'father-right is bound up with the immortality of a supramaterial life belonging to the regions of light'. With the development of patriarchy in the classical civilisations of Egypt and Greece, 'the creative principle is dissociated from earthly matter', and comes to be associated with such deities as the Olympian gods (page 129). With the 'triumph of paternity', humans are seen as breaking the 'bonds of tellurism' (earthly life), and spiritual life rises over 'corporeal existence'. The 'progress', as Bachofen views it, from matriarchy to patriarchy is thus seen by him as an important 'turning point' in the history of gender relations (page 109).

The contrast between matriarchal and patriarchal cultures, as portrayed by Bachofen, can be expressed as follows:

Matriarchy	**Patriarchy**
Chthonian deities important	Sun / phallic deities important
Demeter / Isis	Apollo / Osiris
harmony with nature	superiority to nature
materiality	spirituality
sociality	individualism
reciprocity	heroic struggle
earth	sky
left	right

Bachofen emphasises that among matrilineal peoples universal freedom and equality are ubiquitous, and there is a strong sense of kinship and hospitality. They are, he suggests, generally free of internal strife.

The writings of Bachofen have had an enormous influence. Engels considered his discovery of matrilineal kinship – the original 'mother-right gens' – as a crucial 'stage' in human evolution, as on par with Darwin's theories in biology. And in an oft-quoted phrase, Engels suggested 'the overthrow of mother right was the world-historic defeat of the female sex' (1968, page 488). Feminist anthropologists who have been influenced by Engels – such as Reed, Leacock and Sacks – have thus strongly argued against the idea that the subordination of women is universal. They suggest that women have been significant producers in virtually all human societies, and that in many societies – particularly matrilineal societies – women have shared power and authority with men.

Anthropological and historical studies in recent decades have indicated the complexity and diversity of human cultures, and thus have questioned whether 'matriarchy' (however conceived) can be viewed simply as a 'cultural stage' in the evolution of human societies. Yet in various ways Bachofen's bipolar conception of human history still has currency. For example, Bachofen has an unmistakable presence in the writings of the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop (1989), though Diop gives Bachofen's thesis a strange twist in giving it a geographical and racialist interpretation. Thus matriarchy is seen as having flourished only in the 'south' (Africa), and has as its correlates a settled agrarian way of life, a territorial state, gender equality, burial of the dead, and an ethic of social collectivism.

Patriarchy in Africa is linked to the intrusions of Islam. For all his scholarship, and his attempt to provide a more authentic anthropology, Diop's work hardly captures the complexity of the history and culture of either Africa or Eurasia. But in this article I want to focus on the writings of some eco-feminists, especially those who espouse the 'wisdom of goddess spirituality' (Spretnak, 1991). They too present an update and re-interpretation of Bachofen's simplistic bipolar conception of human history.

Whereas early classical scholars like Bachofen, Harrison and Murray saw chthonic deities as co-existing with male deities associated with the sun or sky – Ra, Apollo, Zeus, Amun – and implied that the latter deities came to have primacy only with the development of patriarchy and state structures, many eco-feminists now see the goddess as a 'cosmic mother', a universal deity existent in all cultures prior to patriarchy. The male deities seem to be identified not with state structures – for mother goddess cults find their apotheosis in the theocratic states of Egypt and Crete – but with a later period of history, with the emergence of imperial states and/or capitalism. Mother goddess cults are thus seen as a universal phenomenon, an expression of 'ancient women's cultures' that once existed everywhere (Sjöö and Mor, 1987, page 27).

While the proponents of the hunting hypothesis, like Ardrey, suggest that all aspects of human life – language, intelligence, sociality and culture – are derived from the 'hunting way of life', with eco-feminists we now have the exact antithesis of this, and it is suggested that all cultural life is essentially the creation of women. As Sjöö and Mor exclaim, 'women created most of early human culture' (page 33). Unlike both Ardrey and these eco-feminists, perhaps early human communities were not obsessed with the gender division, and it is therefore probable that most basic life-tasks were shared, and thus human culture is the creation of both men and women.

Unlike Bachofen, who emphasised the 'materiality' of matriarchy – based as it was on organic life – and thus associated 'spirituality' with patriarchy, contemporary eco-feminists reverse this distinction and loudly proclaim the 'spirituality' of matriarchy.

Aware, however, that there seems to be no historical evidence for matriarchy (as rule by women) feminist scholars have used terms like 'communal matrifocal systems' or 'matristic' to describe the more or less egalitarian communities that existed in the palaeolithic (hunter-gathering) and neolithic (agriculture) periods. Generally speaking eco-feminists have tended to ignore anthropology, and have

focused more on archaeology and classical studies, especially on mythology. They have, therefore, like Diop, presented us with a highly simplistic bipolar conception of human history. The latter is described in terms of an opposition between 'ancient matriarchies' and a patriarchal system centred on men. We have the same kind of gnostic dualism that Diop presented in his postulate of two 'cradles' of humanity. Sjöö and Mor (1987) present this dualism with cogency, and it may be summarised as follows:

Ancient matriarchies	**Modern patriarchy**
religion based on deities associated with mother/earth	religion based on male deities
gender equality	gender hierarchy
partnership	domination
no sexual jealousy	sexual jealousy
harmony with nature	control over nature
matrifocal kin group	nuclear family
communalism	private property
holism	individualism
cyclic conception of time	linear conception of time
nurturing	greed and violence
CHALICE	BLADE

What is of interest, however, is that although Diop equated 'matriarchy' with Black Africa, and even implied that the Dravidians of India were 'Black Africans' – many classical scholars seem to follow their Victorian forebears in conflating race, culture and language – contemporary eco-feminists see the historical dialectic between the 'two social systems' as occurring within the European context itself. Sjöö and Mor's account of the 'ancient religion' of the mother goddess largely focuses on Europe and on the cultures of classical antiquity – Egypt, Greece, Crete and Sumeria. Riane Eisler's theory of cultural evolution, expressed in the readable *The Chalice and the Blade* (1987), focuses almost entirely on the European context and makes no mention of Africa at all.

Eisler's thesis is fairly straightforward and represents an elaboration and popularisation of ideas put forward long ago by Bachofen and Harrison. This suggests that the cultures of 'old' or 'ancient' Europe were based on settled agriculture, and were matrifocal, peaceful, ecocentric and focused on 'mother goddess' cults which emphasised the life-generating and nurturing powers of the universe. Gender

equality was the norm. It was a culture symbolised by the chalice, the drinking cup.

This 'golden age' of female-oriented society that existed in 'old Europe' (which Diop had argued was based on pastoralism and patriarchal) was either slowly transformed, or suddenly shattered – according to the archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (1974) – by marauding pastoralists migrating from the Asian steppes around 4000BC, or patriarchy was facilitated by the rise of a military dictatorship, as in Babylon and Egypt (as Sjöö and Mor contend, 1987, page 253). Whichever theory is embraced there is the contention that European neolithic culture was radically transformed; from a peaceful, sedentary, egalitarian, matrilineal society to one based on patriarchy. There was a 'patriarchal shift' in old Europe, and the patriarchal society which emerged was based on pastoralism, with its warrior ethic. Its socio-cultural correlates were: the worship of male sky gods, the desacralisation of the natural world and an attitude of domination towards nature, gender and social hierarchy, private property and the state. In this process the mother goddess cults were suppressed. This transition, according to Eisler, represents a 'cataclysmic turning point' in European history, and the new patriarchal culture that emerged is symbolised by the blade – the sword. A society based on partnership between men and women gave way to one based on domination – including the domination of women by men. Eisler presents this as a 'new theory' of cultural evolution. But it is hardly new: it is a Eurocentric re-statement of the theory of Bachofen and Engels.

What is new is the suggestion that the 'mother goddess' cults are not simply a reflection of a particular stage in human history, associated with 'matriarchy' and early neolithic agriculture, as Bachofen contended. Such cults are now seen as existing throughout human pre-history. Thus the red ochre found on early burial mounds, the so-called Venus figurines evident throughout Europe, the megalithic tombs (seen as wombs), the masked horned dancers and schematic patterns found on rock paintings, the vagina-shaped cowry shells that have been unearthed – all these are interpreted as evidence of 'mother goddess' cults, or some primitive fertility rite among palaeolithic peoples (Eisler, 1987, pages 2-7). Whereas early Freudian scholars saw phallic symbols everywhere, eco-feminists now find mother figures.

Yet when we examine the ethnographic record concerning the religion of hunter-gatherers, or even some small-scale horticultural

societies, neither matrilineal kinship nor mother goddess cults loom large. The religious ideology of the Khoisan hunter-gatherers of Southern Africa and of the Australian Aborigines hardly offers much support for the universality of 'mother goddess' forms of spirituality. Although there is a close identification with the natural world, particularly with animals, though totemic spirits, or through spirits of the dead, there is little evidence among foragers of the deification of the earth itself as female, still less of the whole universe. Equally, although there is a matrifocal emphasis among many hunter-gatherers, as I discussed in my study of Hill Pandaram of South India (1982), there is little emphasis on descent groups, and the key social groups are the family and band. Kin groups may have salience for ritual or marriage purposes, and may have totemic significance, but often, as with the Australian Aboriginals, these are as likely to be patrilineal as matrilineal. Among small-scale horticulturists in Melanesia and Amazonia, patrilineal kinship has ideological stress, raiding and homicide are endemic, and male initiation put a focal emphasis on the training of young boys to be fierce warriors and to dominate women. Mary Mellor (1992, pages 141-150) has drawn on this ethnographic material to question the assumption that clan-based or pre-state societies are necessarily peaceful, or exhibit gender equality. Even matriliny, she remarked, was 'no guarantee against male violence' (page 147).

There is a unwarranted assumption among many feminist scholars that matrilineal kinship, gender equality and mother goddess cults go together, and necessarily entail each other. But the evidence suggests that this is not so. For what is of interest is that cults focused on the 'mother goddess' and on the 'earth-mother' find their richest elaboration not among hunter-gatherers, nor among small-scale horticulturists, nor indeed among societies that have a focal emphasis on matrilineal kinship – like the Iroquois and Bemba – but rather among theocratic states based on advanced agriculture, as Bachofen suggested. In an important survey of politics and gender among hunter-gatherers and small-scale horticulturists, Collier and Rosaldo (1981), much to their surprise, found little ritual celebration of women as nurturers nor of women's unique capacity to give birth. Motherhood always formed a natural source of emotional satisfaction among women, and was culturally valued, but among such people fertility was not emphasised, and the deification of the 'mother' as a source of all life was generally absent. It is where you have complex states, where you have divine rulers like the Pharaoh and Inca, who

incarnate deities associated with the sun, that you find the earth deified, and 'motherhood' ritually emphasised. For it was precisely among such theocratic states, hierarchical societies based on intensive agriculture, that there was a necessary emphasis on the fertility of the land and on the reproduction of the labour force. Babylon and Egypt were not egalitarian 'gardens of Eden' to the nomadic Hebrew pastoralists, but places where they were enslaved and subject to forced labour.

In an important sense, then, the deification of the earth as female, and the emphasis on fertility – both of the land and of women – is a central tenet not of matrilineal societies like the Iroquois but of the patriarchal ideology of theocratic states. This ideology was clearly expressed in the writings of Francis Bacon, who identified women with nature, and advocated the knowledge and domination of both. Sherry Ortner indeed, in a famous essay (1974), suggests an explanation for supposedly universal male dominance (patriarchy) by linking such dominance to an ideology that equates women with nature. For Ortner, then, 'mother goddess' cults are a reflection of patriarchy, not of a matricentric culture. One feminist anthropologist has indeed argued that the 'myth of matriarchy' is a fiction, and is used as a tool to keep woman 'bound to her place' (Bamberger, 1974).

When we thus examine the early theocratic states of Crete and Egypt (for example), which are alleged to be matricentric paradises that exhibited gender equality and a peaceful social environment, what do we find? According to Janet Biehl (1991) what we find are highly developed bronze-age civilisations which as theocratic states were hierarchical, exploitative and oppressive. The theory of Gimbutas, that hierarchy emerged when a group of pure pastoralists arrived out of the Eurasian steppe and conquered pristine neolithic farmers, Biehl argues, is a naive simplification of European history, and scholars like Renfrew and Mallory would seem to agree.

Gender equality with regard to property, as in Egypt, may well have been restricted to the political elite, but in any case it co-existed, as Biehl points out, with an extremely hierarchical social structure, focused around the pharaoh and a vast theocracy. The expansionist warfare, capital punishment and ritual sacrifices that were characteristic of most of these theocratic states – both in the Fertile Crescent and in the Americas – is generally overlooked or even dismissed by eco-feminist scholars. In the same way, Diop is an apologist for African state systems and the caste system as a form of social organisation.

'Matriarchy' has two distinct 'foci' of meaning, which Bachofen tended to conflate. One of its connection with chthonic deities that associate the earth with motherhood. The other is with matrilineal kinship, which is a social group or category whose membership is determined by links through the female line. In social terms the two meanings are not coterminous. For whereas mother goddess cults are associated with theocratic states and advanced agriculture, matrilineal kinship is associated with horticultural societies that lack both domestic animals and plough agriculture. Out of 564 societies recorded in the World Ethnographic Survey, David Aberle (1961) found only 84 (15%) where matriliny was the predominant form of kinship. He thus thought matriliny a 'relatively rare phenomena' (page 663). Contrary to Diop's theory, matrilineal kinship is found throughout the world, but it is mainly found among horticultural societies that have developed chiefdoms. It is not found where there is intensive agriculture, nor generally among pastoralists, nor where state structures have developed – for patriarchy is intrinsically bound up with the state. Bachofen was of the belief that matriarchy was 'fully consonant' with a situation where hunting, trade and external raiding filled the life of men, keeping them for long periods away from women, who thus became primarily responsible for the household and for agriculture. Thus one may conclude that matriliny – but not mother goddess cults – seems to be particularly associated with horticultural societies that lack the plough, in which one finds developed political systems in the form of chiefdoms, and where there is what Poewe (1981) described as a complementary dualism between men and women. In these situations subsistence agriculture is the domain of women, and men are actively engaged in hunting and trade that takes them for long periods away from the home base. Given their dominance in the subsistence sphere, women are not necessarily excluded from the public domain, and may be actively involved in public rituals and political decision-making. All the classical matrilineal societies that have been described by anthropologists essentially follow this pattern – the Bemba, Yao and Luapula of Central Africa, the Trobriand Islanders, the Ashanti of Ghana, the Iroquois and Ojibwa of North America. All express a high degree of gender equality, sexuality is positively valued and there is an emphasis on sharing and reciprocity, but significantly there is little evidence of 'mother goddess' cults. For such cults are bound up with the state and hierarchy, which is why they continued to flourish as an intrinsic part of Latin Christianity and Hinduism.

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Arthur Moyse

Boo

There comes that traumatic moment in the life of the young male when he chooses to believe that masturbation is an act of guilty frustration, that the grip on the female knocker is the culmination of mankind's ultimate desire and that his father is a fool. That this trinity is true cannot be questioned, for generation after generation have demonstrated theory to be fact. The tragedy is that age and physical infirmities kill the desire for the first two, and incontinence and senility turn us all into irritating fools in relation to the new-spawned young. All this is but part of the human comedy, for all tragedy is comedy when it finally makes the front page of the tabloid press and a well staged Grand Guignol or a well filmed mass-mutilation murder will always fill the entertainment seat of the local flea pit. What makes the young so obnoxious in the presence of their aged and betters is when they have reached the age when they believe that they have the answer to every problem and every situation and a complete mastery of all religions, philosophies, histories and have the logical answer to all social and political problems. Having boasted of having spewed up their first pint of beer before an admiring audience of friends, had their first dark doorway grope and publicly bayed abuse at the manager of the local football team, the world is theirs to move into the great intellectual arena and win the hatred of their father and the adoration of their mother and the newly-gripped 'girlfriend' for every problem demands no more than a whispered 'Oh God' and tired eyes raised to the ceiling as the intellectual rebuttal of the aged. What the young have not yet learned to accept is that the ancients are stupid but so are the young and the only saving grace for the young is that they do not control economic, political or social authorities. I accept all knowledge as appertaining to the physical for politics are of the supermarket shelves and the coins in the pocket, medical science is the 'free' prescription for easement of pain, and the Dead Sea Scrolls and the usual ramblings of a Pope are valid to those to whom the grave is an open wound and the long night no longer a matter of statistics. I no longer know the answers to the many mysteries and I am grateful

that I can witness space being opened up, the journey into the final unsolvable infinity that lies beyond all final mapped universes, the unearthing of our world's history foot by foot below the earth's crust and the desire and the attempt by men and women to humanise a socialist society wherein anarchist belief in the individual freedom of the individual should be a major concern.

In the matter of religion it is foolish to believe that anyone calling themself an anarchist has a definitive answer of 'I don't believe in god' or 'God does exist' for both claims to nothing are both unprovable assertions. As an authority within the boozing crowd within the London (Whitechapel) White Hart pub, I do not feel that there is any supernatural being controlling our lives upon this earth and that we are no more than a chemical accident and that at the closing down of our personal sun we will revert back to that chemical change, worm bait and to dust and to the theist and the atheist claims of a God or a non-God demonstrate the validity of your claim and I will continue to drink Guinness. Within the pages of this magazine I know, without seeing them, I know that there will be those who will write of the horrors of the religious wars, of the duplicity of church bureaucracies, the evils of the Inquisition and the entrapment of people's minds, yet this is not peculiar to religious orders for Stalin's Russia could put into practice all these things and in the name of a Godless State and the welfare of the people. No matter what the colour of the coin there will always be those who seek to gain control over their fellow men and women and religion is but one such weapon. When Nietzsche made the book of favourable quotations with 'God is dead' he spoke to a disinterested audience for, interpret the quotation as you so wish, we are of the generation who have long lost interest in that belief even within the White Hart. What destroyed a belief in a supreme being was the acceptance that the earth was no longer centre of a fixed universe and the Church, in its own self interest, was correct to say to Galileo 'Don't call us we'll call you' for in the acceptance of this earth as no more than the fringe theatre in the great universal circus God died. To tell me, one who does not believe in spoon-bending, that scientifically I cannot walk on water or that not even the late Colonel Sanders, who demonstrated hell to so many hundreds of thousands of chickens, could feed thousands of people with only a handful of loaves and fishes, is to be told that, comrade, you cannot kid a kidder. But, and this is what is so fundamentally important comrade, we must go back thousands after thousands of years to move into the minds of men sitting on dark hillsides trying to come to terms


MY HOUSE HUSBAND SAYS GOD DOES NOT EXIST
SAVE THE WHALE
ARTHUR MOYSE

with that dark infinity that lies beyond the stars and trying to find out not only why they, as single individuals, came into existence and why, as thinking reeds, they must cease to exist and does anything lay beyond the final closing of the eyes. They sought answers, comrades, just as in 1994 there are those who still seek answers.

What we must never do, comrades, is to mock the folk-law, the fables, the political/nationalist propaganda and the recorded mythology that in its own way can be interpreted by the informed historians, but never mock the questing thinking of those men who thousands upon thousands of years ago sat in the darkness of the hillsides seeking the answers to universal questions, for 'what is truth'? I would hold that mankind is ready to throw off the old skin of this earth, for the measureless universe was ready to be taken over when the first man stepped upon the moon's surface. I know that the future of mankind lies in self-contained spacecraft the size of our cities, and shred the illusion, comrades, that we will live and breed within them for, just as government all over the world built huge (RSG) nuclear shelters for their particular élite to survive in, so it is inevitable that technology and physical survival will dictate the mechanical creation of these cities roaming space and for their own élite and selection, as always, will be from the barrel of a gun. All religions, laws and customs conform to the seasons and when huge city-size spacecraft wander through space seasons no longer exist and all religions, laws and customs have no validity and time and the passing and recording of time will, curiously, return to the heartbeat and the living of life must become meaningless. All that world of blonde blue-eyed super-race, in vast space, must become meaningless and existence without meaning will have finally been achieved. Only the mystic will have a goal, for without proof they will prophesy and in those floating cities in barren space men and women will in desperation seek an answer to a hedonist barren existence. I have a great admiration for the tomb robbers who, in spite of the teaching of the priesthood, broke into the tombs as soon as McAlpine's boys had left the site, yea all those thousands of years ago and, in spite of the populist religion of the day or the graffiti upon the tomb walls, ignored it all and did their own antiques fair for their own car boot sales among the dark of the mummified dead, for tomb robbing has always been a seller's market and religion, comrades, birth, marriage and death supervised by women.

The Town and his rosary-fingering frau may be rationalists and card-carrying free-thinkers, but given Jesus Christ Superstar they will

hot foot it to that theatre to turn it into a long-running hit musical for it shows the ol' Godfather type of respect for de Lord, but 'Bad Boy Johnny' and the Prophets of Doom have been shown the door of the Pentecostal Union Chapel in Islington for staging a musical wherein the Pope drops dead after going back to basics with a suspender-belted nun, uses obscene language and a priest pees into the communion cup, but they didn't show de respect and the £40,000 fringe production was condemned to outer darkness (see Milton).

It was left to Father Kit Cunningham of St Ethelreda's Church to give the musical the final whammy when he declaimed 'Why is it that we Catholics get such a kicking from libertarians because of our belief in morality?' and the answer, comrades and Father Kit of St Ethelreda, is 'Whose morality?'

Michael Duane

Church, State and Freedom

'Religion' from the Latin '*religio* – a binding' originally had no necessary connection with the concept of 'God'. After the Roman armies had extended the Empire throughout Europe and Latin had replaced or been incorporated with the existing languages, the word was used to indicate a state of mind or behaviour towards a divinity. So it referred both to an individual person or to a group such as the group of monks living a celibate life under vows in a monastery. If, in an individual, it flows from love of and desire to emulate, e.g. Christ, it will be unlikely to include any element of fear from failure to live up to standards set up by that individual. If standards are set up by a group, that may not remain so, especially if the group becomes very large.

Organised religion has, as one of its main objectives, the establishment of internal control in the individual through the 'voice of conscience' or the 'voice of God' for the purpose of lessening the realisation of those of his personal desires which would appear to defy the authority of the Church and its doctrines. To be 'good' in the eyes of *any* Church is to put God's wishes (as enunciated by that Church) before those of the believer.

How does organised religion achieve its objectives? It relies on the frequent and regular repetition of prayers, stories, hymns, incantations, litanies; on ritual and on the practice of meditation about religious concepts to instil a thorough psychic foundation of unquestioning belief and the creation of desired attitudes of mind in response to certain words, phrases and rituals. In some forms of organised religion music and art are used to strengthen these associations and to shape the psyche of the child to the pattern of the 'good' Christian, Jew, Muslim or Communist.

Both rewards and punishments form part of the process – sweets or slaps for infants; excommunication or public honour for adults; the threat of Hell or the promise of Heaven. Thinking or questioning is discouraged, unless about trivia – such as whether certain forms of prayer or ritual observances should be taught to infants – and then

only when the questioner has demonstrated his unswerving loyalty to the central tenets.

Most prayers and hymns use imagery that stresses the ubiquitous power of God and the weakness and fallibility of Man. Begging for forgiveness, renouncing the temptations of the flesh (women, food and drink), the world (material prosperity) and the Devil (intelligent curiosity); acknowledging that God is omniscient, omnipotent and ubiquitous while Man is ignorant and corruptible are constant and unvarying themes (one is reminded of the 'confessions' extracted from erring members of Russian, Chinese and British Communist Parties). Even the rare prayers or hymns that seem to rejoice in beauty – 'All things bright and beautiful' – are used to stress God's omnipotence and, by implication, Man's insignificance.

Even the act of confession, itself a therapeutic act when it is spontaneous, is made to depend on God's power and his ubiquitous presence and mercy, or on the priest's supposed role as intermediary with God. The final end is the *total* subjection of the individual to the Church's formulation of what it supposes is the 'will of God'.

The fires of Hell and the wrath of God are now used less blatantly to discourage 'sin' than when I was a child, but they have not ceased. The image of a man tortured on a cross as a result of *our* sins is calculated to induce a deep feeling of guilt in the observer, especially when that observer is a young child. Nothing acts so powerfully as a brake on joy as guilt. Waves of guilt are built up to reinforce one another – guilt for offending a loving Father and, in Catholic and High Anglican forms, His loving Mother.

Despite recent attempts by a few members of the Church of England to remove guilt from sex, guilt is most strongly associated with all forms of sexual activity. The very insistence on having celibate ministers itself indicates that sex is regarded as dangerous and wicked. It is even implied that sex is superfluous since Mary is held to have remained a virgin even when she conceived Jesus. Marriage is regarded as inferior to celibacy – 'marry rather than burn'. Celibacy is set before boys as the highest form of life. How deeply this doctrine has permeated our thinking can be seen in the embarrassment that young people (and even more so, old people) experience when they think of their parents, especially their mothers, making love or having sexual feelings. Even now, it is commonly assumed that it is more important that a bride should be a virgin than that a groom should be.

But sexual energy is the physical mainspring of all creative thought

and action – always recognised intuitively not only by writers and dramatists but, since Freud, as a verifiable fact. No wonder the Church has sought to crush the expression of sexual thoughts, feelings and activities, since one of the more obvious characteristics of people with a background of loving sex is their accessibility to rational thought and the coherence of their thoughts, actions and beliefs.

The real question, however, is *how* it has been possible for the Church, membership of which is, theoretically, voluntary, to have such an effect over so many centuries, especially since it professes to be based on the love of God and on the love of Man – 'love thy neighbour as thyself'. More than that, why has the Church, from the time when the State first emerged, become so identified with it and particularly with its more reactionary elements? The rule, enunciated by Christ, 'Render unto Caesar', is now quoted only by those few clerics and others who think that the Church has become too closely identified with the State, to the point of formally and publicly blessing weapons of war and weapons of mass destruction designed to obliterate whole nations.

The answer to this question will begin to become clear only after we have looked more closely at the State and some of its institutions and activities.

The State

The State is composed of institutions – Parliament, the armed forces, the police, prisons, banks, universities, schools, the family, the Church, the Civil Service, etc. – which act in generally coherent ways to ensure continuity of ownership of property and of laws so that the prevailing culture is maintained. In Britain it is normally assumed that most people are conservative in their habits and thinking, so that most interventions by any of the major institutions, e.g. the Bank of England or the police or parliament, should be to maintain the existing order or to restore it should it have been disrupted. Let us look now at the first institution directly to affect the child from birth and for the whole of the most formative years of life.

The Family

The child in industrialised society lives in a home with parents and, if he has any, with brothers and sisters. Today's house or flat is plugged in, like an extension to a machine, to systems of

communication – telephone, radio, television (even now we are seeing houses connected to banks as computer terminals). News and propaganda are fed to all at the same times, with different channels on television and radio, and different styles of newspaper, edited to suit the supposed intellectual and occupational grades of the recipients, while most of the actual news comes, in any case, from central agencies like Reuters and Associated Press.

Houses are empty during the working day and children are at school. They are occupied only at night and at weekends or when any member of the family is unemployed. Houses in cities and large towns are built in tenement blocks or in tower blocks in a bleak, barrack-like environment. The number of children with access to fields, woods or rivers is a minuscule fraction of one percent. A few housing estates, public or private, have recreation centres with gymnasia and youth clubs for the older ones. None have space for privacy – like Orwell's *1984*.

Within these homes, designed for holding masses of people in small areas and equipped for the convenience of adults who spend little time in them, no special provision is made for the needs of children. The child is surrounded by hazards to life and health – gas taps, electric points, windows far above the ground and fast traffic close by. The parents, out of proper concern for the child's safety, find themselves constantly thwarting his natural curiosity. Slaps, cuffs or at best a stream of prohibitions – 'No, that's dangerous!', 'Don't do that!' or 'Don't touch!' – form a constant refrain. Young mothers, harassed by such worries and unable to share their worries or their work with other women, form a sizeable proportion of those who are prescribed tranquillisers. Further, the parents who are 'the agents of society' (Fromm, *The Sane Society*) by their own system of values and attitudes are the most powerful instruments in passing on culture, because, for the helpless infant they provide food, care, affection and love, which are therefore associated with the values for which they stand.

Even at the most elementary levels of basic needs – defaecating, urinating – every effort is made to control by fitting the child with napkins (look at the time devoted to television advertisements to devices for the control of the child's faeces and urine) so that the fitted carpet is not soiled. In 'primitive' societies such natural acts would not be regarded as important: earth floors or floors covered with straw or leaves are easily replaced. What is inconvenient in the small modern house becomes 'bad' as children are made to associate adult disapproval with natural functions.

Again, since so many people live in terraced, semi-detached houses or flats where a high proportion of people work on night shifts, strenuous pressures are exerted on children to be quiet. Shouting, singing or screaming – all expressions of real and usually spontaneous feelings – are discouraged or punished. Real feelings become 'bad' and we have the modern phenomenon that so many adults so often complain of not knowing how they feel, and psychotherapeutic techniques so often have to concentrate on giving patients enough confidence to discover and express their feelings.

Under such domestic conditions the child early come to the conclusion that there must be something wrong with him since his own desires lead him so often into trouble and he himself causes such anxiety to his parents. Things are only okay when he is closely supervised or when an adult has given him permission. He comes to rely on adults in or outside the home – an old threat was 'I'll tell the policeman!' All his own activities and eventually his desires have to be approved: he has begun to develop the 'fascist character-structure', the character that needs to be told what to do, what to believe, what to think and what to feel.

Authority outside the home tends to be unseen and all-powerful: the child cannot keep a pet unless the council approves; council notices forbid playing of ball games on whatever patch of green happens to be adjacent to the houses; washing must not be hung out at certain times – all doubtless intended to make life more tolerable for the majority, but all communicated in an impersonal manner and, commonly, with a veiled threat. The total effect of all regulations affecting the behaviour of the inhabitants and the appearance of the houses is to produce a drab uniformity that reinforces the anonymity and the insignificance of the individual.

School

The next institution of the State that affects the child is school. Religion is introduced from the very beginning. The morning assembly is made the focal point of the school – everyone, children and all staff must be present. Prayers, hymns and homilies take up as much as three-quarters of an hour, with great stress laid on the 'proper' attitudes to be adopted during prayer – eyes closed, hands together, head bowed and a general air of 'reverence'. Those who will not or find it difficult to conform are classified as 'naughty', 'bad' or even 'wicked' and may be punished by public rebuke, by slaps (now

confined to church schools) or by being made to stand against the wall so that all may feel sorrow, contempt or anger. The induction of guilt starts early.

In the junior school more emphasis on academic learning reduces time spent on play and direct experience. This emphasis was meant to ensure that children could score well in the 'eleven plus' tests for the grammar school. Comprehensive education should have abolished the 'eleven plus' since all children would attend the same school, but political pressures kept some grammar schools and changed the character of education in the comprehensives by encouraging 'streaming' and an academic bias in the 'A' forms. So the old function of academic education continues to foster social-class divisions, since entry to universities and the professions is by academic examinations. Even the best junior school teachers are therefore compelled to 'cover the curriculum' and use tests of comprehension and attainment as a new form of 'eleven plus'.

Shortage of staff and money makes it impossible to take all children to see and work on a farm, to visit areas of geographical interest or to engage in simple forms of social service. Schools that keep animals and teach children to understand their needs and their place in the living world are now rarer than ever. Practical subjects may be skimped or even omitted, modern languages left out, the teaching of the mother-tongue reduced to exercises from a text book, but religion is a *must* – the only subject that, by law, has to be included on the curriculum. The 'act of corporate worship' has to be held every day and at least two periods a week devoted to 'religious education'. The same rituals of prayers, hymns and homilies, with the usual implied or actual threats for non-conformity, characterise morning assembly. What happens in religious education lessons depends on the teacher.

It is when the child enters secondary school at the age of eleven (or the public school at the age of thirteen) that the process of conditioning for social roles really hots up. Private schools (including the so-called public schools) form about ten percent of the secondary spectrum of schools and cater for the children of wealthy parents or for a few academically bright children who gain scholarships or grants from public funds. These children can look forward to careers at the top levels of professional and managerial occupations. They are trained to adopt, if they do not already belong to that class, the speech, dress, manners, beliefs and attitudes of the élite.

The next eight or ten percent are selected for education in grammar schools whose main aim is to get their pupils into the universities and

thence into the professions, so their aim is academic excellence in terms of gaining large numbers of A levels. Although they often profess to provide a broad or 'liberal' education, the real priorities are seen by the size of the 'special allowances' awarded to those who teach mathematics, science and English, in addition to their basic salaries. Their pupils will belong to that class in society which controls, regulates and administers a complex society, so they must gain high levels of skill in the understanding and manipulation of those systems of communication which are necessary to those tasks. In both the grammar and the private schools the teaching of religion and the corporate act of worship continue, but now with a much greater emphasis on the linguistic aspects.

This greater stress on linguistic competence does its own work. As Edward Sapir wrote in his book on the function of language: 'Language is a great force of socialisation, probably the greatest that exists.' So concentration on the linguistic aspects of religious studies serves to reinforce the message already carried by ritualistic observances.

In general these schools encourage 'good form', 'esprit de corps', 'duty', 'responsibility', and, above all, 'loyalty' as desirable qualities. The ruling classes and their technical assistants – bankers, lawyers, financiers and the officer groups within the armed forces and the police – have to act in unison and with common objectives if they are to remain in power. Within the public schools the possession of wealth and power is taken for granted. The problem is how to deal with those on whose expertise the wealthy and the powerful rely to maintain what they have got – the products of the grammar schools and the universities. Here again religious education plays its part. Service to others; the dedication of one's talents to a higher authority; loyalty to the Crown as representative of the authority of both church and state; the purging of selfish inclinations; the stress on 'purity' of thought, both in the sexual sphere and in the sphere of self-evaluation. In cruder terms it would be a disaster to public order if bankers, financiers and members of the Stock Exchange were to use their skills to enrich themselves rather than their employers. What a to-do is made when the occasional unscrupulous broker uses inside information to make a quick few million bucks! Hence the bitter resistance to the Labour plan to turn all secondary schools into comprehensive schools. Were they to become genuinely comprehensive, which they most certainly are not, the task of maintaining clear divisions between classes or occupational groups

would become so much more difficult.

In comprehensive schools the teaching of religion again takes forms that parallel the differences between class functions. After studying many hundreds of exercise books used in religious lessons, I found that those worked by children in the higher forms paid more attention to the words and their meanings whereas those worked by the lower forms were more often filled with simple maps of Palestine and illustrations of tents, camels, Palestinian dress and the impedimenta of life at the time of Christ. The reasons given for such differences, when I questioned the teachers, were that 'dim' children could not cope with words and ideas so easily as 'bright' children!

At all stages in education – or rather schooling, since so little of real education is seen for the mass of our children – the lesson is reinforced, not only by content and methods but by what Ivan Illich called 'the hidden curriculum', that external authority is the irresistible arbiter of our present activities and our future careers. The marking system rather than the experience of joy and fulfilment in learning is the criterion of success. Education is bound hand and foot to the economic and political system. That is why critics of our system of education and of our educational objectives rarely achieve more than superficial analyses. The system is doing what it has evolved to do in a capitalist economy, viz. to prepare children for life in a social system based on the exploitation of the majority in the interests of the wealthy and powerful minority; to prepare a population both technically and psychologically to play (and even more important, to *wish to play*) the roles appropriate to the class into which they have been born.

Why then, if religious education is so powerful, do the unskilled manual workers so rarely attend church or claim membership of particular churches? As Basil Bernstein and others have shown, there is a conflict between the ideology of universal love as expressed in religion and the actual conditions of work and life forced on them. The failure to foster in work their linguistic skills neglects the socialising power of language and, therefore, the internalisation of religious values, so when external control over his religious behaviour is relaxed the individual feels no internal compulsion to behave as expected. The use of fear by the churches to control the lower social classes is self-defeating – that is the dilemma that some churchmen are now facing. But tradition dies hard, so church schools continue to use the cane when others have abandoned it.

Work

Because it is in work that people expend most of their conscious time and energy, and because, for most people, their styles of life and their status in society depends on their work, it is here that we see most clearly the changes that have come about in the last two hundred years. Two hundred years ago nine-tenths of the population lived and worked on the land, so work was patterned by the seasons and the climate. Work was also seen to arise directly out of the needs of those who worked and could be directly affected by their energy and intelligence.

Today work has quite a different character. It takes place in factories, offices and institutions where specialisation effectively isolates the individual or small group from general knowledge of the work as if they were physically separated from their fellow workers. Most workers, with the exception of some artists or craftsmen, rarely take part in any other stage of production than their own. The man who casts engine blocks has nothing to do with engine assembly or testing; the bricklayer will rarely have seen a kiln; the milk roundsman almost certainly has never milked a cow. Very often the workman does not even know what his product will do. More and more the response of the worker in stopping a machine by pressing a button is in response to a red light rather than to his having observed a broken thread in a loom or a liquid appearing where it should not. The novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* describes how a machine operator has to rely on his own, largely erotic, fantasy world to pass the time while he goes through the mindless motions dictated by the machine. A go-slow or a strike can, for many, provide a welcome break in seemingly endless monotony.

The organisation of work is done by others; the financing of the work and the disposal of the products is done by those who are never seen by the workers – they may live abroad and be part of an international corporation. Further, because such workers own neither the tools they use nor the objects they produce, they cannot feel emotionally concerned in the work which, for them, is simply a way of earning the money they need to live or to do more interesting things in their leisure. They often have no contact with their fellow workers outside the workplace, so talk in the teabreak can only be about work, complaints, football or television. The coherence of life in which work, leisure, personal relationships, values and rationality flow together is not evident. Workers are alienated, detached from work,

detached from fellow workers and, in the end, detached from themselves, so that more and more have to take drugs or see an 'alienist' or, as we now call him, a psychotherapist.

Work, therefore, reinforces the disintegration of the psyche and makes possible the treatment of people as mere units to be manipulated like machines. People have become 'cogs in a machine' moved by forces beyond their control. Modern religions, using external authority – God – can now manipulate people in ways that were inconceivable before the era of radio and television. The Moonies and the mass suicide and multiple murders 'inspired' by God are not abnormal events totally set apart from general religious beliefs and practices: they are the logical, if extreme, result of the systems responsible for mass production man.

Fascism and Religion

What do we mean by 'fascism'? How can it be seen to affect our lives in the democracy called Britain? It is commonly held that fascism exists only when there is political oppression, racism, the denial of liberty and civil rights, and concentration camps. These are all found in States that call themselves socialist or communist as well as in those that are right-wing dictatorships.

To understand how such forms of inhumanity can arise it is necessary to understand the processes that take place in the human psyche to prevent the mass of the people in any population simply refusing to allow power to be taken over by the individual and the small group that was seen to arise in Italy and in Germany. In *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Wilhelm Reich, who had become a psychologist and worked for many years with Freud in Vienna and Berlin until the arrival of Hitler, outlined the meaning of fascism as a form of character-structure which makes possible the domination of millions of people by a ruthless gang of political crooks masquerading as national leaders. As in the relationship between a sadist and a masochist each of the neuroses is necessary to the functioning of the other, so in dictatorships such as Hitler's it is necessary that the majority of the people should have a neurotic need for a dominant leader.

Reich places the frustration of love and sex at the centre of the factors operating to create the fascist character-structure. I have little doubt that this is at the heart of the problem, but there are many other factors in the life of industrialised societies that reinforce this frustration and

continue throughout our lives constantly to prevent the harmonisation of bodily function with intellectual and emotional activity – the normal pattern of natural Man as outlined by both Freud and Marx. As I have tried to show in earlier paragraphs many factors operate together to produce a powerful and unrelenting psychological pressure on the individual that essentially rests on fear. Like a young tree in a steady prevailing wind, the young psyche becomes permanently bent in the direction into which it is forced; as indeed it does in all cultures, but in capitalist mass-production economies at the expense of rational autonomy. In capitalist societies, as in the State Capitalism of Soviet Russia, the forces operating on the individual in the family, in school and at work convince him that he is insignificant, worthless, prone to evil and to be tolerated only if he conforms to every requirement of authority, even to the point of sacrificing his life in war at the behest of authority.

How does organised religion in the forms of the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the Greek Orthodox Church or the religious power that sent thousands of young Iranians to die in the war against Iraq in the hope of reaching paradise through death on the battlefield; how does organised religion differ from fascism, that is from any organised system of power that compels human beings by every means at its disposal to yield up every autonomous physical, intellectual and emotional impulse to the demands of that power? As I was first writing this, a Swedish pastor described how the State in Sweden has taken over the traditional functions of the Church in Sweden. He showed how the spirituality – the sense of unity with others in love; the feeling that there are values other than the desire for wealth – that he once felt to be of the essence of what he meant by religion, are dying before the religion of the State – the hunger for material prosperity. And he sees the tide of alcoholism in Sweden to arise from the State's acquiescence in seeking to blunt Man's discontent with bread alone.

Many Christians and other religious people will be shocked to read what I have written because their lives are characterised by unselfish action for others less fortunate than themselves. Their experience of religion has arisen in the context of a loving family with open and democratic relationships among its members and with a concept of God that stresses love rather than fear. They often identify themselves with those who seek to bring more democratic reforms into our schools and into the organisation of work. They find their satisfactions in work for these ends. They tend not to be dogmatic about their

beliefs and they can work with those of other faiths or those who profess none. But their experience is not typical. They need to look more closely at those less fortunate than themselves to see *why* others have a different feeling about religion.

Others will reject what I say about the family, about schools and about work as being out of date or ill-informed. If they do, let them ask themselves by what criteria we judge the success of the family, the success of education and the success of work in raising the standards of life *for all*? If their criteria includes good physical and emotional health for all, no wide disparity between the quality of life for the richest and that for the poorest, and a marked reduction in the level of both private and public crime and violence, then how can they claim that the family, education or work are being even moderately successful in their aims?

Discuss the concept of God with twenty different people and you will find twenty different concepts. Further, the more deeply you explore the concept with each of them, the more the concept becomes an expanded portrait of the speaker: the more subtle and sensitive the speaker the more subtle and sensitive the concept of God he expounds. It appears to be universally true that Man makes God in his own image.

So, apart from those who wish to dominate others for their own ends and those who have been so spiritually battered by unhappiness that they look for recompense in a life to come, how does the concept of God arise in the first place? The answer seems to lie more and more in the way the human brain works and, especially, to arise from the fact that we evolved speech.

Human beings evolved as helpless creatures, without armour, poison fangs or wings to ensure survival. They evolved speech, the gift that has to be given afresh to each generation and thereby ensures that each generation is not locked immutably into the concepts and problems of past generations. Speech is "encapsulated experience" as Alexander Luria and Lev Vygotsky discovered in studying how children acquire speech during social interaction with adults in, for example, following instructions – 'Give me the cup' – and later in using speech so acquired to direct their own actions (see A.R. Luria, *The Role of Speech in the Regulation of Normal and Abnormal Behaviour*). Thus we, through speech, transmit our own experience to the young so that they do not have to repeat our errors.

We use language to name the objects in our tangible world, to describe our transactions and our dreams of the day and of the night,

and because the word is so powerful in recalling events, thoughts and emotions, we tend to assume that when we use a word there must be some real entity corresponding to that word. When we say 'food is good' or 'sun is good' we are describing particular experiences that we have felt through the senses. But when, in reply to the question, 'What do you get from food and the sun?' we reply 'Goodness', we run together the two groups of experiences of satisfied hunger and warmth to form a further and more remote abstraction and begin to treat that abstraction as if it were of the same category of events as our sensory reactions to food/sun.

Language, by creating a symbolic representation of the world, makes it possible for us to experiment with that world in our heads and then, in action, to test our assumptions. So long as there is a close interaction between thought and act and so long as we are prepared to correct our postulates to accord with reality, we will 'keep our feet on the ground'. But if we neglect reality and allow our thoughts to proceed without constant recall to reality then we enter the realm of fantasy. Pleasurable, exciting or fearful as that may be it cannot command the commitment to action that the categorical imperative of reality compels.

Early concepts of God and concepts of God among primitive tribes who have had little contact with modern civilisations appear to be abstractions of the natural forces in their environment – animals, wind, fire, thunder, the sun, the moon, the sea, night, and so on. Before we developed enough techniques to increase the production of food and give time for leisure to study and keep records, the natural forces appeared to act in arbitrary and unpredictable ways. As we came to see patterns in their behaviour so the spirits and gods who inhabited all natural phenomena began to recede. Gods became 'God' who now existed, not in the ruck of the here and now but situated at a distance and with greater, if more remote, powers. God moved to Heaven, a place of infinite virtue and goodness, unsullied by human squalor and evil.

But the creation of Heaven where only good existed now made necessary the creation of another domain – Hell – to accommodate evil. Spiritually we are still infants: we cannot tolerate *both* bad and good in the ones we love, in works of art and in life. Death is as natural as birth, but most of us cannot accept it. Even Christians, conscious of having committed no unforgivable sin, still fear death when they have long passed their youth when death would be viewed as an unwelcome interruption of an unfulfilled life. I suspect that we fear

death because we have created a life that makes joy conditional on acceptable behaviour rather than the natural outcome of a healthy and creative activity.

Something of the difficulty that surrounds the notion of God is seen in the fact that, officially, it is heretical for an Anglican to refer to God as 'He' or 'She' since that would limit the godhead to the dimension of humanity. The confusion extends into every aspect of the concept. As soon as God is described as omniscient, ubiquitous, omnipotent, infinitely loving, infinitely x, y or z, then absurdity creeps in. What does it mean to be infinitely wise? We cannot experience infinity except as an arbitrary mathematical symbol. Apart from its existence as a symbol it has no meaning. Parallel lines meet at infinity, we are told, but that has as much meaning as 'the number seven is purple'. The concept of God, like the concept of infinity, is nonsensical – it cannot be experienced through the senses and cannot, therefore, be demonstrated by any of the tests that depend on reasoning.

The argument for belief in God now more often relies on intuition, i.e. that the existence of God is self-evident (much as Kant thought to establish the principles of ethics cf. his deontological slogan 'Let justice be done though the heavens fall'). More recent examination of intuitive acts and beliefs suggests that: a) they rest on subtle factors of observation or deduction from visual or aural data, or b) that they result from a kind of 'short-circuit' in the brain when the input end of a series of associative firings in a chain of nerves is close enough to the output end of that chain that the initial stimulus 'bridges the gap' either directly or through a new and shorter train of cells (see D.D. Hebb, *The Science of Psychology*). The theory that intuition rests on observation or recall of data absorbed at pre-conscious levels or data subsequently repressed, receives confirmation from psychoanalytic studies.

God is the creation of undemocratic societies. He is the instrument by which tyranny enters the minds of its subjects to internalise its control over them. For the oppressed God is the hope of future relief from that oppression and the recompense of 'pie in the sky'. In Lenin's phrase 'religion is the opium of the people' in that it desensitises the tyrant to the inhumanity of his power while it blunts the sensitivity of the oppressed by diverting their energies to dreams of Heaven.

Comments on *Raven* 24

'Cosmology and the God metaphor'

This is not to disagree with the thesis of John Noble's 'Cosmology and the God metaphor' (*The Raven* 24), but to add a couple of points.

To 'suggest' that there are 'reasons for doubting man's ability to explain everything' is to put the point a bit feebly, since an explanation for the whole of existence is logically impossible. To explain an event, there must be other events in terms of which to explain it, and by definition, there are no other events than the whole of existence.

Bohr's 'Providential Authority' is not an alternative to the God metaphor. 'Providence', with a capital P, is a theological term denoting 'God, considered in relation to the foresight and benevolent care of God' (*Chambers Dictionary*). So Bohr is either expressing a literal belief in God as the (benevolent) Boss of the Universe, or using the God metaphor with an alternative name.

Donald Rooum

'Technology, Science and Anarchism'

In this stimulating essay Harry Baecker, while rightly drawing us back to physical materials and activity as the basis of our individual and social consciousness, still leaves this reader confused by his use of 'intensive' and 'extensive' in relation to definitions of 'Man'.

By rejecting the 'intensive' definition of 'homo' as 'sapiens' he rejects the possibility of it being 'extensive'. Take, for example, his own 'extensive' definition of man as 'homo aedificans' – 'man the builder'. How is this different from 'homo sapiens' – 'man the understander'? Using his own method we can elaborate the series of actions with materials and symbols, along with man's observation of others or his own experiments, to show that, as a result of these activities, man is more sapient in his behaviour – he builds houses that are more waterproof and more durable than he did before he engaged in such activities. In other words he can adapt his own behaviour to modify what he produces according to changes in tools, materials or knowledge. He has become more sapient than he was before. Observation over many years would show man behaving in this way from infancy to maturity.

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