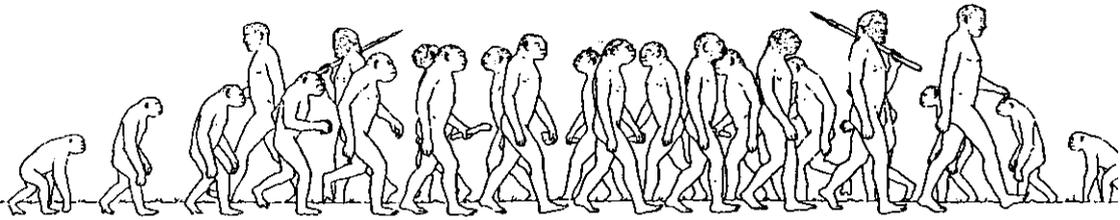


The Ethical Record

Vol. 98 No. 11

£1

DECEMBER 1993



Drawn by Phil Shaw

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

George Santayana (1865-1952)

EDITORIAL - IS PROGRESS POSSIBLE?

SPES member Phil Shaw's drawing and caption raise the question whether, in aspiring to the values of 'Truth, Beauty and Goodness' (see the article by James Hemming on p3), humanity is chasing a mirage. This topic was considered at a conference held on 4th December at Conway Hall, entitled 'The Foundations of the Modern World and the Limits of Reason'. The meeting was chaired by Patrick Lewin, the driving force behind the Society for Process Thought, which organised it jointly with SPES.

Martin Hollis, Professor at the School of Economic and Social Studies, University of East Anglia, billed as an F.E.R. (Fundamental Enlightenment Rationalist) took, as a defining statement of the 18th-century enlightenment, Condorcet's 'Knowledge, power and virtue are bound together by an indissoluble chain' (*Sketch for the Progress of the Human Mind*, 1794). Civilisation was capable of making progress through the application of reason. Moral and scientific knowledge of the world would continue to grow, and with it the *potentiality* for human betterment, in spite of the setbacks which would undoubtedly occur.

The second speaker, Keith Tester, Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Cultural Studies at Portsmouth University, author of *The Life and Times of Post-Modernity* (Routledge, 1993), challenged this optimistic view. He saw dangers in Kant's depiction of enlightenment as 'man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another... The motto of enlightenment is .. have the courage to use your *own* under-

continued on page 2

INSTEAD OF CONFUSION James Hemming	3
PETER CRONIN - AN APPRECIATION Peter Cadogan	8
PAUL KLEE: NATURE IN ART Helen Prescott	10
WHY I CALL MYSELF AN ATHEIST Barbara Smoker	13
JEWISH HUMANISM Derek Wilkes	17
VIEWPOINTS: George Wallford; Paddy Smith; Donald Baker	21
ETHICAL SOCIETY PROGRAMME	24

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Conway Hall Humanist Centre

25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Telephone: 071-831 7723

Appointed Lecturers

Harold Blackham, T.F. Evans, Peter Heales, Richard Scorer, Barbara Smoker,
Harry Stopes-Roe, Nicolas Walter.

Officers

Honorary Representative: Nicolas Walter. *General Committee Chair:* Diane Murray.
Vice Chair: Barbara Smoker. *Treasurer:* Don Liversedge. *Editor, The Ethical Record:*
Norman Bacrac. *Librarian:* Edwina Palmer. *Registrar:* Marion Granville.
Secretary to the Society: Nina Khare. Tel: 071-831 7723

Hall Staff

Manager: Stephen Norley. Tel: 071-242 8032 for Hall bookings. *Head Caretaker:* David Wright.

Obituary

We regret to report the death of Donald Goodman of Leeds.

New Members

Alan Edmonds, Julie Moss, John Rety, Peter Thorogood, Rene Wolf.

standing'. Tester averred that an intellectual who thought himself mature and called others immature might either ignore them or worse, be tempted to *force* them to be mature - leading to the totalitarian state. As a sociologist, he preferred 'the culture of reflexive discourse' - asking of an assertion not 'Is this true?' (which anyhow couldn't be answered), but 'What's in it for those who assert it?'

The last speaker, Christopher Norris, Professor of Literature and Philosophy at the University of Wales, Cardiff, did not accept the above alternatives. There was a middle way, through education, whereby societies could become more mature. The post-modernists may seek to 'rubbish' the enlightenment as monolithic and authoritarian, but actually it had questioned all assumptions, and was terrifically diverse - in short, it approached the maturity which was Kant's aim. It was important to retain the idea that the truth about contentious issues existed and that progress towards discovering it and correcting errors could be made by the methods of science and scholarship. Norris castigated Lyotard as the leading spirit of relativism and post-modernism, which was 'humanly, ethically, politically and philosophically absolutely disastrous'.

Ernest Gellner, in his Conway Memorial Lecture *Options of Belief*, (SPES, 1974), argued against relativism. His recent *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (Routledge, 1992), is in the same vein: we have three choices - in the words of Professor John Gray (who had flu so had to miss the conference) - 'the literal fundamentalism of revealed religion; the anything-goes relativism that called itself postmodernism; and what Gellner himself calls Fundamentalist Enlightenment Rationalism'.

That first alternative is certainly alive, well and living in London University; possibly elsewhere too. Islamic Societies there have already diagnosed the cause of the world's social problems to be the West's fondness for secularism, freedom and democracy; these are unashamedly decried. They scorn belief in scientific method while happily using the technical toys which are its fruit. Evolutionists e.g. Richard Dawkins are denigrated; Lewis Wolpert, defending science in a recent 'debate' at UCL, found to his evident amazement that not one student, in a large lecture-theatre full of Islamic Society members, was prepared publicly to accept the concept of human evolution. We shall, it seems, enter the 21st and 7th centuries simultaneously.

INSTEAD OF CONFUSION

James Hemming

Based on a lecture to the Ethical Society, 28th October, 1993

The emergence of a culture change is always preceded by an era of confusion in which everything seems to be falling apart. This was how things were when the roots of SPES were laid down; this is also how things are this year, when we are celebrating the bicentenary of SPES. The difference in our present situation is that, as never before, the whole globe is in a condition of devastating uncertainty. In such a situation, the future has no face. As the song writer, Paul Weller, put it recently: 'I ain't got a clue where we should go. I'm waiting for someone to tell me'.

New Perspective and Slogan Required

What I would like to consider this evening is the way forward from here. We have to find solutions to our planetary crisis, to generate a new clarity of purpose, make a fresh start. We need a new perspective to stir the imagination of the world. In the great transitions of the past, people summed up their hopes for the future in brief, challenging slogans. The Greeks gave us 'Truth, Beauty and Goodness'; the French Revolution rallied to 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity'; Lenin's dream was: 'From each according to his ability; to each according to his needs'. What should our unifying slogan be today?

Present Economic Confusion

May I start by a quick glance at our economic confusion. Huge advances in technology over the past fifty years mean that we now have it in our power to produce almost unlimited quantities of food, clothes, homes and other goods. What blocks this potential abundance is, on the one hand private greed, which is organised to siphon riches towards a minority and, on the other, a lack of customers for the goods because many people, especially in so-called developing countries, lack the money to buy what they need. This is plainly nonsense as well as being immoral. The issue is not whether 'the market' is a good or bad idea. We need markets and money to distribute the food, goods and services people need. What matters is *how* the market is run, and *how* the wealth of people and nations is distributed.

'Profits before people' is the wrong slogan for the future. We urgently need an international commission to work out the principles of a new, humanised, economic system, to be put in place over, say, five years under the auspices of the United Nations, in close collaboration with those at the grass roots. The aim for economics is *not* the exploitation of resources and people but sustainable growth geared to the benefit of everyone.

We must now take a quick look at that destroyer of hope and self-esteem — unemployment. It could be solved by a single change — a shorter working week, at the same pay, for those in employment, backed up by education in saleable skills for those who aren't. What's to finance this? No problem! At present, every unemployed person costs the state about £9,000 a year. It would save money if the national budget were to subsidise industry to employ more people. Why does this not happen? Because the exchequer and industry cannot bring themselves to integrate their balance sheets.

Ecological Confusion

Even more basic than economic is ecological confusion. Every year the world population bounds upwards. Simultaneously, square miles of forest are converted into near desert,

while vast areas of fertile land are exhausted by over-cropping. Global education about birth control, coupled with freely available contraceptives and appropriate advice, is an immediate necessity if the Earth is not to be stamped bare by too many feet. A more fertile Earth every decade, instead of the reverse, should be the agreed international aim. We need a global drive, financed internationally, to increase the fertile land available, including the reclamation of desert areas. We now have the technology to do this. Why do we not go ahead and do it? The sad old reasons: private greed and economic short-termism.

If we set out vigorously, from now on, to check population increase and to enhance global fertility, we have just about enough time left to save the planet from ultimate annihilation as a feasible — and beautiful — habitat for humanity; but only just. A few more decades of indecision and inaction will set the world on an irreversible course of degeneration. We are at the crunch point right now. More delay will be fatal.

Fortunately the prospect is not all gloom. Our intelligent young people, along with an increasing number of adults, are beginning to notice such absurdities as paying farmers *not* to produce food although millions are living on the edge of starvation, while tons upon tons of surplus food are being stored rather than used to feed hungry people.

Moral Confusion

A source of confusion even more disruptive than either economic or ecological is moral confusion, an urgent problem of our era and one in which SPES has, all along, been intimately involved. Today the former, assumed foundations for moral behaviour have given way. One erroneous idea that has lived on through the centuries is that moral principles are alien to humankind and had to be injected into a wicked world from an external divine source. This mythological approach carries less and less conviction with every year that passes.

A second, former foundation for maintaining civilised behaviour — the enduring example of the Great and the Good — has also crumpled. When I was a boy, the moral integrity of, say, Lloyds of London was considered to be on a par with that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was himself considered to be a participant in the established virtues of the aristocracy. Today the high priests of finance are involved in all sorts of dirty tricks; the clergy are revealed as sexually naughty, while aristocracy has become more of a joke than an example. The 'Great and the Good' can no longer be depended upon to sustain moral values in our society.

Psychosocial Reality

The real foundation for moral behaviour, as Humanists have held all along, is in the psychosocial realities of community life. If we did not conduct our lives on essential principles of relationships — honesty, truthfulness, concern for others, accepting responsibility for our own behaviour, and the other imperatives of a purposeful and congenial human society, social life would not be possible. What we call moral principles are as crucial to social life as are the principles of nutrition to physical health.

These social principles did not arrive on Earth through divine intervention; they were discovered in the process of evolution. In essence they are universals which need to be honoured in all successful societies, and always have been. As the anthropologist, Colin Turnbull, puts it in one of his books: 'Hunter-gatherers frequently display those characteristics we find admirable: kindness, generosity, consideration, affection, hospitality, compassion, charity and others... For the hunter in his tiny, close-knit society these

are necessities for survival; without them society would collapse.' The sociologist, Morris Ginsberg, sums the matter up along similar lines — 'Amidst variations, moral values everywhere exhibit striking similarities in essentials.'

Then why, we may ask, do people lie, cheat, steal, betray, rape, behave brutally and all the horrid rest? If the honouring of moral values is essential for social amity and creativity, why is not everybody virtuous? The conflict arises because we are all endowed with both selfish and social propensities. This is necessarily so. If an individual did not seek for self-fulfilment, he/she would be submerged by the striving of others, and his/her creative personal contribution would be lost. So evolution has seen to it that, from an early age, we are all driven to seek personal empowerment — to become significant as ourselves.

Confusion about Power

However, if society is to be nourished, not destroyed, this empowerment must be empowerment *with* others, not at the expense of others. Power over others is the dangerous, neurotic form of power, whereas power with others, the power of co-operation, is the power through which progress towards advance in the quality of life for everybody becomes possible. Our moral confusion today arises largely from confusion about power: the power of adults over children; the power of management over workers; the power of speculators over industry and over all our lives; the power of the rich nations over third-world countries; the power — still — of men over women. Moral balance is attained when the inherent, and necessary, selfish and social propensities of human beings are unified in common purpose. This has been demonstrated at all levels from home life to major industries.

Yet that balance is today frequently impaired. Too often, the selfish impulses are nourished rather than the social. When this happens in the growth towards adulthood, in an able individual, a lust for power and glory may explode which become diabolical in its intensity. We then get egotistical despots. Link them to readily-available supplies of arms and the result is brutal mayhem. This brings us to another essential for recreating our battered world. The sales of arms between nations must be internationally banned.

Self/Social Balance

Assuring a constructive self/social balance in individuals — in males particularly — requires, among other things, an educational system that is rooted, not in a competitive dash for academic prizes as the main aim, but in community involvement and co-operation. Some schools and colleges are already offering magnificent examples of this change of attitude and purpose. The effect of a good school ethos — a climate of clear purpose, caring and co-operation — is that young people come out on what the psychologist, Alfred Adler, called 'the useful side of life', that is to respect, and live by, those values upon which happy and creative communities depend. An ethos of this kind is in no way a threat to academic standards. Research has established that, on the contrary, academic attainment improves within a good social climate — that is democratic collaboration in place of a top-down authoritarian system. In the years ahead, the democratic school society will have to be the norm, not the exception, within the context of empowered local councils.

One element of great importance in a properly-organised modern education is a sensitive and thorough programme of sex education. This is the way forward from yet another confusion of our times. Young people are today maturing eighteen months earlier than at the beginning of the century. Consequently, boys are reaching maximum virility, and girls maximum fertility, while they are still at school. A common gap in

educational provision is that, instead of being given positive help towards attaining sexual maturity, young people are left to flounder and stumble their way towards adulthood. The results of this inadequacy are a high rate of illegitimacy and an increasing incidence of marital breakdown.

A New Vision

Whether we are considering economic, ecological, moral, educational or sexual confusion, what we need is a new vision capable of raising the whole level of our human thinking, feeling, understanding and commitment. Is this available? I think it is. Throughout history it has been supposed that our Earth were the only seat for life in the Cosmos. All those stars out there were thought of only as an awe-inspiring embellishment for our life-rich planet. Until recently, scientists in general, were as geocentric as theologians in their thinking.

The myth that our Earth is the only living planet is now giving way to another perspective. Radio telescopes have established that the Cosmos is everywhere composed of the same basic chemical substances. Astronomers have uncovered a Universe of unsuspected variety, from infinitesimal cosmic dust to huge galaxies. A typical cosmic component is a star like our Sun with a family of planets orbiting around it. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* puts it, our Sun is 'an average star in every respect.' In all the vast cosmic array, how many stars will have planetary systems such as our own? The current scientific estimate is about one star in 24. That truth alone is enough to jolt torpid imagination into life.

Life on Other Planets

The next leading question, obviously, is how many of the planets will have the necessary potentialities for producing life — mainly an appropriate age and size, and a temperature that permits liquid water to exist on the planet's surface. In our solar system there is one such planet, Earth, and one near-miss: Mars. The current astronomical estimate is that, typically, one planet per star system will have the potential for sustaining life.

Nevertheless, will life actually emerge on the hospitable planets? In the light of what we now know the answer is, almost certainly, yes. Until quite recently life was thought of as a rare and fragile entity that was the result of a miracle, if not a divine hand. That is all outdated thinking. We now know that life is robust and penetrative. As primitive forms it can exist in boiling geysers, in the depths of the oceans, and in cosmic dust at temperatures approaching absolute zero. On our planet, catastrophes have occurred from time to time that have wiped out almost all life, but, after the crises, life has come bouncing back in new forms. Such crises are accepted by many modern biologists as dramatic accelerators of the evolutionary process. The most recent of the cataclysmic events was, of course, the annihilation, 65 million years ago, of the dinosaurs, the dominant species for the preceding 150 million years. That gave the mammals their chance to emerge, proliferate and differentiate — and that's how we came to be here asking questions about what we are, where we are, and where we are going.

Complexity Theory

There is one more piece of information we must add to our list of transformed ideas that confirm our dawning realisation of widespread cosmic life. Earlier this century it was believed that the difference between organic and inorganic substances was so great that only a miraculous event could have bridged the gap. Gradually, however, that gap has been getting smaller and smaller. Research in different fields, aided by computerised investigations of how things may interact, has shown that self-organisation towards

greater complexity is in the nature of things. In the recently-published book, *The New Physics*, Professor Paul Davies comments: 'Spontaneous self-organisation in simple physical and chemical systems is as striking as it is easy to demonstrate.' Complexity theory has carried this self-organising propensity into all fields of life.

We now see that evolution has two aspects: simple systems tend to elaborate themselves into complex systems, and natural selection then operates upon the outcomes to produce even more complicated entities and, later, living creatures. Consequently, we can now regard life as one further advance in the complexity of chemical organisation that preceded it and paved the way for it by producing both organic substances and the means for transferring genetic information from one generation to the next.

We are not Alone in the Universe

Such advances in our understanding of how things are, make it virtually certain that inorganic matter will complexify into organic matter, and then on to living processes, wherever conditions are right for it. The rest is simple arithmetic. There are about 100 billion stars in our galaxy, of which one in twenty four is likely to be sustaining a living planet in orbit around it. We must also remember that there are something like 100 billion other galaxies in addition to the Milky Way, which is our local galaxy. So how many possible living worlds does that add up to? In his book, *In The Beginning: The Birth of the Living Universe*, published this year Dr. John Gribbin sums up the situation: 'Astronomers calculate that there may be as many as 10^{20} planets suitable for life-forms like ourselves in our Universe.' That number is, of course, one with twenty noughts after it. There are about as many brain cells in your head, or in mine, as there are stars in our galaxy. Nature goes in for large numbers.

The New Perspective

The new perspective, once established, cannot but have a transforming affect on the orientation of human beings. It is the new vision that can help humankind out of the destructive confusions of our times by focusing on the truth that we are responsible for sustaining and enriching the quality of life on our precious planet within a living Cosmos. No longer should we see ourselves as 'alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe', as the Nobel Prizeman, Jacques Monod, supposed only thirty years ago. We are alive in the midst of cosmic-wide life.

Are we to see ourselves as members of this vast system of creative life, or are we to disregard our responsibilities and continue to condone the destruction of our planet? The planet-destroyers and inimical systems have now to be replaced by life-enhancing people and systems which can secure a good future for the Earth within the living Cosmos.

The New Slogan

SPES came into existence because a few enlightened people saw that the supposed 'truths' on offer at the time were suspect. We who, today, seek to be their successors find ourselves in a situation that the initiators of SPES could not have known about. Once again, though, as on the earlier occasion, the task of those who seek to be honest is to replace myth with truth, to make a fresh start in the context of the exciting contemporary knowledge about our human situation. As for a slogan? Cultural change always needs a slogan to encapsulate briefly the essential ideas. It is hard to find an equally cogent one for our times as the ones mentioned above, but perhaps something like: 'Caring, Co-operation, and Cosmic Responsibility'. Or, more colloquially, 'Let's build a planet of which we can be proud.' ■

PETER CRONIN

Appointed Lecturer — 1972 — 1978

An Appreciation by Peter Cadogan

Peter Cronin is dead. His cremation took place at Leatherhead on October 28th. The humanist ceremony was conducted by Leslie Scrase and David Swift, the actor, who was one of his students when Peter was an extra-mural tutor in the North West. He later came to London to join the Extra-Mural Department of London University (and the Panel of *South Place Ethical Society*).

Peter Cronin had an English head and an Irish heart. It turned out to be an impossible combination that in the end destroyed him. Having read philosophy for one degree and English for another (Cambridge and Bristol) he was an intellectual polymath, always master of his material and a brilliant lecturer.

Happily we knew him in his prime in the early to mid-seventies when he was, as David Swift put it: "A Greek God of a man — handsome, brainy, courageous, athletic, eloquent, modest, sociable, charming, pioneering, humane, radical...".

In the last fifteen years of his life he was struck by personal and professional disaster and "his end was verging on ignominy, defeat, helplessness, hopelessness, mindlessness. That his mind of all minds — let alone his body — should have come to this!"

He demanded the truth and he demanded loyalty. They turned out to be impossible bed-fellows. David Swift again: "I know he would have said in lucid times, the relentless pursuit of a small, even a very small, truth is obligatory when the alternative is compromise and submission".

Peter Cronin made a very special contribution to English philosophy. Very little of it ever appeared in print. Although he was himself an avid reader he thought the Caxton revolution was greatly over-rated. If the world's greatest teachers, Socrates and JC never wrote a word, that was good enough for him. Oral communication was all important. His conversation was Coleridgean.

Head of his cast of heroes were Francis Bacon and William Shakespeare. His private view, which he did not over-broadcast, was that they were one and the same person. This involves the arch-detective exercise of English literature and one in which he took great delight. Since it is doubtful if anyone living knew more about the writings of both authors his equipment was phenomenal and he certainly made me a convert. The evidence is all circumstantial however; he hoped that one day some vintage archives would yield the vital text.

However the real importance of Bacon lay elsewhere. (What does it matter after all, who wrote the plays of Shakespeare? 'The Play is the thing!'). British and European philosophy is based on Cartesian dualism, the separation of the head and the heart, the deification of mathematics and quantities, the elevation of science (which aspires to exactitude and therefore to "truth") over the humanities and the arts (which being necessarily inexact are therefore "inferior"). The way was open to a shallow materialism and the reduction of the human spirit.

Bacon was before Descartes. It was Bacon, not Descartes, who pioneered the inductive

scientific method and inspired the creation of the Royal Society. And he did it in the context of a holistic philosophy. He never sought to put the arts down — quite the contrary. Bacon (with his Secretary Hobbes in tow) is the founder philosopher of this country and the man we need if we are to understand and overcome the lethal dangers of dualism. Dora Russell devoted much of her life to this same task. But 20th century English philosophy has been dominated by shallow fashions (those of Russell and Wittgenstein in Cambridge, Austen and Ayer in Oxford) and against these Peter Cronin set his face in the cause of the restoration of Bacon in our Universities. One of our first Appointed Lecturers — J.M. Robertson — did much the same thing.

Yet Francis Bacon was not the only great teacher he sought to restore. There were at least two others. The first was A.N. Whitehead who in the 1920s abandoned mathematics and his chair in that subject at Imperial College to go to America and to live another life as a philosopher. He made a critical discovery. We are commonly given to thinking (under the influence of 17th century science or positivism) that all things are a matter of cause and effect. Closer examination shows that it is not so. All living things, for example, live in terms of the ends they pursue, even if they be only feeling and reproduction. The pull of the future, potentiality, is every bit as important as causality. From this arose his philosophy of Process — seeing all things in the context of the past-present-future — and thus adding a new dynamic to our way of seeing the world. Peter Cronin put the case to his students to their great advantage.

His third neglected philosopher-prophet was R.G. Collingwood, Professor of Philosophy in the very University, Oxford, where everything went so wrong. Collingwood is a great subject to whom South Place should now turn. He understood with the early Greeks that philosophy is wisdom-in-action not the static analysis of alleged eternalists that it became under the influence of Plato and Aristotle.

We have permitted the destruction of philosophy. We need now to restore it and Peter Cronin showed us part of the way.

He was also my oldest friend — we met as students in Bristol in 1948 when he was presiding over the NUS Drama Festival, the very first one, that the next year became the Arts Festival and has been an annual event ever since. He did it in great style.

Let David Swift have the last word: "Conviviality was just one of his battle cries — so let us all be convivial in his name". ■

SOUTH PLACE SUNDAY CONCERTS - 103rd SEASON

JANUARY 1994

- | | |
|----|---|
| 9 | BRINDISI STRING QUARTET |
| 16 | FITZWILLIAM STRING QUARTET |
| 23 | ISRAEL PIANO TRIO |
| 30 | MUSICIANS BENEVOLENT FUND CONCERT
ALBERNI STRING QUARTET |

PAUL KLEE: NATURE IN ART

Helen Prescott

Based on a lecture to the Ethical Society, 17 October 1993

Klee is frequently considered to be a 'fantasy' artist but such a description fails to acknowledge his immense concern and enthusiasm for nature. Born near Berne in 1879, the son of a music teacher, he was historically outside the tradition of his time. He and Kandinsky, with whom he had a long intimate acquaintance, generally figure in the annals of art under the banner of Abstract Expressionism but both Klee and Kandinsky were highly individual artists with their own unique styles. Klee's work largely shows an abandonment of naturalism, classicism and often perspective which he considered a 'bore'.

Klee's Artistic Background

Klee had broken with tradition during the early part of the 20th century. Greater expression was possible with the opening up and advancement in both theories of art and music. Psychology was becoming more recognised as a discipline. There was a movement towards looking into the mind and through art with its new media and techniques; nature could be depicted very differently by showing one's personal feelings about the subject rather than simply trying to give an identical representation of a landscape. Expressionism was showing what meaning the subject had for the artist and viewer; also what meaning the subject had in itself.

Expressionism had developed spontaneously as a manifestation of various artists and groups of artists in Germany preceding the 1914 War. It emerged organically from Jugendstil, the movement for applied arts in Germany and Art Nouveau in France and Belgium. It was historically and organically related to the arts and crafts movement of Ruskin and Morris, along with Scottish architect Mackintosh.

Kandinsky's early work was related to Jugendstil and he studied under Franz von Stuck, the leading Jugendstil artist of the day in Munich. Kandinsky (1866-1944) was the dominant force in German Expressionism. Of Russian origin, he only started to paint at the age of 30 and arrived in Munich in 1896, the same year that William Morris died. He also absorbed the influence of Cézanne and Matisse.

In 1910 Kandinsky wrote 'The Art of Spiritual Harmony' and arrived at an 'original conception of non-objective painting', which he developed between 1910-13. Although familiar with Picasso from this time on, both Kandinsky and Klee were uninfluenced by Cubism; Klee found the lines too harsh. Kandinsky arrived at an 'art of internal necessity' in which colour and line are used as a means of representing spiritual states of mind. He expands on this in his book *Point, Line, Plane*. He anticipated all types of abstraction in his work over the next 40 years in what was an experimental period and gave birth to tachisme or action painting, with which Jackson Pollock is largely credited.

The Expressionists were not one unified group; Kandinsky and Klee stand out as the eccentrics of the movement. One group were chiefly of a figurative type, e.g. Modersohn-Becker, Emil Nolde 1867-1956 (much admired by Klee) and Christian Rohlf. Another group was interestingly called Die Schölle, the Soil. Die Brücke, the Bridge, based in Dresden in 1905 was a group which included Max Pechstein (1881-1955) and Otto Mueller (1874-1930). Die Brücke lasted 8 years and its work was characterised by powerful dynamic expressionism almost violent in its execution. Various movements had

Kandinsky at the helm; in the first instance, the Neue Kunstlervereinigung in 1909 followed by Der Blaue Reiter (the Blue Rider) with which Klee was associated and Der Blaue Vier (the Blue Four).

Klee was fascinated by the mystery of nature and transcendental abstraction which was based on a spiritualised idea of nature and allowed him the means to show the fullness of nature's mystery. Transcendental ambition was a tradition that ran from Van Gogh through to Kandinsky. Van Gogh had glorified ecstatically in wonderful nature with swirling trees, skies, sunflowers and ears of wheat. Kandinsky too found nature awe-inspiring. He was associated with Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophists including Rudolf Steiner. Klee was not in favour of Steiner although their views on art seemed compatible.

Fascination with Nature

From an early age Klee had shown an affinity with nature; his first drawing at the age of 3 shows a snail, a creature which was to be a subject of many subsequent sketches and paintings throughout his life. Art seemed to come to him instinctively and the bulk of his subject matter is taken directly from nature. Indeed, he had a life long rapport with nature and his diaries and letters show the bond. Like his friend Franz Marc, he believed that animals possessed an inner and outer purity and humans only an outer. He once conducted an entire telephone conversation with his son Felix in animal sounds. He adored cats and also kept an owl and two tortoises.

Klee compiled three zoological notebooks and had a large collection of pressed plants. He pressed algae between glass and this became his work "Baltic Forest". He referred to his work as his "fruits" whilst the word "fruit" appears 70 times in his titles. It is said that he knew the Latin names of all plants in the Munich Botanical Gardens. He gave Latin names to some of his works such as "Quadrupula Gracilis", a name he invented. As Ruskin was to geology, so Klee was to botany. He made copious notes in his diaries on the gardens and exotic flora he had seen, particularly when he travelled in the tropics and compared his soul with the moods of the countryside, 'the poetic-personal idea of landscape'.

To consider nature as 'all that isn't human' would have been a great conceptual error Klee would have thought. He was keen on the drawings of primitives and children and tried to show this 'purity' and unschooling in his own art. Nature was more encompassing; we have common ancestors, shapes and forms are common to all living creatures (and even the non-living, such as rocks and mountains), as are beauty and oddness. All nature is reducible to the single cell and DNA, the building block of life, is the spiral of life which Klee saw in his snails. The organism, birth, creation of form, death and time is also common to all, and usually movement too.

In 1912 Jung published the Psychology of the Unconscious and through his work on dreams, he discovered that not only dreams but the same types of dreams with identical symbols were common to all races whether Eskimo, Indian, African or Jew. These primordial images or archetypes were of immense interest to Klee. Further research in modern psychology showed that dreams, or more precisely REM sleep, is common to almost all known animals. We talk of the social life of humans but insects have immeasurably complicated communication patterns and social lives.

Klee's Philosophy

If Klee naturally fell into any position, it would probably be that of a monist or as

favouring a cosmic conception of the human within nature. After all, what is it to be human? By not including humans as part of nature but seeing them as outsiders looking in, one can envisage the start of the problem that leads to nature's abuse. Klee took an opposite attitude, his world of nature was one of organism rather than of mechanism which simply saw nature as an instrument for human whim. At times he is almost pantheistic, as shown in 'Deep in the Woods' (1939) which is a longing for nature. 'The artist cannot do without his dialogue with nature, for he is a man, himself of nature, a piece of nature and within the space of nature' (Klee's *Nature Notebooks*, 1923).

Klee, like Chagall, shows flora and fauna to have their own laws of logic and perspective. Like Kandinsky, Klee achieved his artistic objectives through the use of free forms; still life also featured in his work. Klee's work is often described as naïve, instinctive, child-like and strange, attributes that broke with tradition and in many circles aroused hostility. A large number of his works later featured in the Nazi exhibition of degenerate art.

He was influenced by German Idealist Metaphysics from Goethe onwards and the notion of 'Universal Oneness'. Goethe was greatly interested in botany and also had his own colour theory. Klee saw the world as a model to demonstrate spiritual truths. Cézanne, who interested him, had shown with his technique of colour 'swatching' how time could be frozen in a static composition which gave 'visual motifs the unfolding quality of aural ones and this sense of rhythmic disclosure, repetition and blossoming transferred itself, quite naturally, to Klee's images of plants and flowers' (Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New*, 1981).

Microcosmic Analysis

With a microcosmic analysis of nature, 'like a miniaturist he rendered nature permeable, with an ecstatic observation of the natural world of romantic extremes, close-up detail and cosmic landscape'. One could almost see the mental states of flowers and fishes. It was the age of high resolution microscopy and close up photography and there is a strong link with his plant motifs and images of plankton, diatoms, seeds and micro-organisms, that German scientific photographers were making at the same time. Klee was sensitive to nature and combined the mystery of nature with an almost scientific precision in his attempt to understand everything that was embodied in the make up of the plant and how it developed. His profound analysis of form showed his love for the organism. When asked whether we should understand everything about nature his reply was, 'I think not', which showed the extent that he valued the profundity of nature's wisdom and mystery.

Klee's monist and 'cosmic' predilections influenced his 'deconstructed' art. Thus he escaped from Classicism. It was not necessary to have the past redefined in the present. His work is the distinction between a new story and a past tale being retold. One can argue that after Kandinsky and Klee, art was never the same again.

Klee wrote, 'I place myself at a remote starting point of creation, whence I state *a priori* formulae for men, beasts, plants, stones and the elements and all the whirling forces ... There is no sensuous relationship, not even the noblest, between myself and the many. In my work I do not belong to the species, but am a cosmic point of reference'. ■

WHY I CALL MYSELF AN ATHEIST

Barbara Smoker

(SPES Appointed Lecturer and President of the National Secular Society)

Summary of a lecture to the Ethical Society, 14 November 1993

The title I have chosen for this talk is a response to a member of SPES who upbraided me recently for unnecessarily alienating many people by calling myself an “atheist”, when I could just as well use the less abrasive term, “agnostic”. It presumably did not occur to her (or, on second thoughts, perhaps it did) that I have so perverse a temperament that I actually *like* alienating people — or, at least, the sort of people who would be alienated by a word like atheist!

However, that can hardly be the sole reason why I prefer that word and gave up applying the word agnostic to myself about forty years ago.

Sitting on the Fence

So why, apart from my natural abrasiveness, do I call myself an atheist rather than an agnostic? One answer is that I like to use language that is as unambiguous as possible for communication and almost everybody knows what “atheist” means. Many people, on the other hand, do not have the word “agnostic” in their vocabulary at all, while most of those who do, have taken an agnostic to be someone who is still sitting on the fence — and I would find sitting on the fence, for years on end, a most uncomfortable position; especially on so basic an issue as whether there is some supernatural reality behind natural reality that would give our lives an ultimate purpose and to some extent affect the way we live our lives.

Of course, the labels one chooses for oneself do vary according to the situation and the company. In different contexts, I tend to use different terms to describe my religious standpoint — though never the term agnostic. For instance, I would always use the word “atheist” when confronted by proselytising Jehovah’s Witnesses on my doorstep, partly because it leaves them in no doubt as to my position on the god question, whereas they might interpret agnostic as leaving the door open — and expecting me to leave my front door open to them too.

In philosophical discussion, I might use words like freethinker or materialist; on political questions, I might call myself a secularist; in the context of ceremonies, generally a humanist; in educational contexts, I am more likely to say secular-humanist or scientific humanist; and on television or radio, words like sceptic or unbeliever, unless the subject is actually god-belief, in which case I would probably fall back on atheist again.

When the late Chapman Cohen (one of my predecessors as President of the National Secular Society) was asked at a meeting why he didn’t call himself an agnostic rather than an atheist, his reply was: “Because the word agnostic implies there is something to be agnostic about.” I feel the same.

Without Esoteric Knowledge

Etymologically, agnostic means “without knowledge”, or, more specifically, “without esoteric knowledge”. I certainly am without that, but I don’t want to seem to be confessing to the lack of some special kind of knowledge that I think others may genuinely possess. If they think they do possess it, then to my mind they are deluding themselves. For claiming to have special religious knowledge is largely a delusion of grandeur, arising

from the desire to be in an intimate relationship — even if it is a masochistic one — with the all-powerful creator of the universe. Also, of course, it usually goes along with the comforting “knowledge” that death is not really death at all. It is simply, in Winston Churchill’s phrase, “wishful thinking”. Believers, it seems, are able to put their emotional desire before reason.

It could be argued that the word “atheist”, like “agnostic”, implies that there *must* be a god for there to be disbelief in him — if him is the correct pronoun! But this argument is far less likely to be used in connection with the word atheist than with agnostic. When it is used about “atheist”, it is generally used by fairly sophisticated, educated people. Simple people assume that when one says one is an atheist, what is meant is lack of belief in a personal god. That is indeed what we do mean to deny when we say we are atheists.

When speaking to more sophisticated people — especially since the publication of *Honest to God* by the late Bishop John Robinson thirty years ago — it is necessary to ask them to define the word “god” in terms of their own belief, before one can claim to be atheistic about that particular god-idea. One cannot categorically rule out such abstract concepts as Robinson’s “ground of our being” or Cupitt’s “sum of human values”, nor the usage of the word “god” for “primal energy” or even the whole universe, except to say that it is misleading, ambiguous, unscientific and perverse to use the old word “god” for ideas so far removed from a personal supernatural being, which is what most people have always meant by it. You might just as well insist that strawberries are large, round, yellow citrus fruit — because strawberry happens to be your personal word for grapefruit.

What Sort of Entity?

Sometimes these more sophisticated believers steadfastly refuse to give any definition of their god, even in such nebulous, abstract terms as those used by the modern theologians. They often maintain that their finite human minds cannot possibly have any idea what sort of entity ‘God’ might be, but that the only rational position is to keep an open mind on his/her/its existence. They are the true agnostics — implying, as Cohen said, that there is something for them to be agnostic about.

It is difficult to get such people to see that this line of argument is tantamount to saying that one must always reserve judgment on the existence of, say, the “fogle-wogle”, though one has no idea what that word might mean and would never attempt to define it or to accept anyone else’s definition. By using the word “god” whilst refusing to indicate what is to be understood by it, they reduce the word to a meaningless sound. So it is necessary for them to attach *some* meaning to the word “god” in order to use it rationally at all; otherwise, those who use it without ascribing any limitation of meaning to it would not even know what it is they are refusing to define!

The word agnostic is generally accepted as having a more gentle connotation than the word atheist. For instance, one often hears the phrase “the reverent agnostic”, but never, of course, “the reverent atheist”. However, there is one sense of agnostic that is even stronger than the word atheist: that is, when it is used in its philosophical sense to indicate not merely one’s lack of knowledge of any supernatural being, but the impossibility of anyone else’s having any such knowledge. In that sense I am an agnostic as well as an atheist.

In a slightly different sense, the word agnostic is almost identical in meaning to the word atheist. If someone means by agnostic that he or she is simply “without knowledge” as to the existence of a creator god, then that is virtually the same as the etymological

meaning of the word atheist — “without god” — for anyone who is “without knowledge” of a god, or without evidence for any such existence, must surely be “without god”?

At my pre Second World War convent school, the nuns used to deny the existence of any genuine atheists. Paradoxically, this was said to be because no-one can rationally deny the existence of anything of which he admits he has no knowledge: to some extent I think the nuns were logical in this, because they took the word atheist to mean someone who denies the existence of any kind of god, however defined. Where they were mistaken was in that assumption as to what we mean by atheist: an atheist is not, as they imagined, one who categorically denies the existence of *any* kind of god. That would be nonsense. Obviously, denial — or, for that matter, acceptance — of a god must depend on some definition or concept of the word “god”, agreed for the purposes of the argument.

“God” can mean almost anything nowadays, from the very human and imoral Old Testament god, Jehovah, to some sort of abstract god, such as Bernard Shaw’s Life Force — or even something as indisputable as the whole of existence. There is just one objection to that last god-concept: the confusing use of the word “god” as a synonym for everything, instead of the usual word “universe”.

Primal Energy

If my opponent chooses a slightly less extreme definition — though with the same motive — defining god as primal energy (as some so-called Christians now do), I will concede that I accept the existence of primal energy — but at the same time I will point out that I cannot see the necessity of clouding the issue by calling it “god”, which would in any case be a superfluous word.

Also, how could everything be integrated into an overall purpose? The motive (even if unconscious) for choosing to use the word “god” for natural concepts for which there are ordinary words, is almost certainly to imply some ultimate super-purpose; and, of course, there is no evidence for any such purpose. Besides, if the purpose that “god” is supposed to give to our lives is supposed to be his own purpose, what could that possibly be? If he has always existed and been unchanging, why should he suddenly bring a purposeful universe into existence?

Nevertheless, the one function that most god concepts seem to have in common is to give human existence some ultimate purpose; and, while it is not possible to disprove an ultimate purpose, since, by definition, it would be outside the universe we know, there is equally no adequate evidence for it. This is not to say, of course, that there is no purpose in life at all: we all make our own purposes as we go through life. Furthermore, life does not lose its value simply because it is not going to last for ever. Rather the reverse!

However, for most believers, the important thing is that death is not the end, either for themselves or for their relationships with close friends who have died. Most of us would find it comforting to believe that — but being comforting does not make a belief true! I suppose I just happen to be the sort of person who cannot derive comfort from any belief that has no evidence to support it. In any case, for those who accept the doctrine of hell, the terror it often engenders can cancel out any comfort derived from belief in life after death.

All the available evidence is, in fact, *against* any personal survival of death: it just doesn’t make sense. How could anything that survived the death of the body still be the same person? Just think, what makes you *you*? Isn’t it the historical continuity of your

body from conception throughout life, the genes you were born with, the things that have happened to you, your likes and dislikes, funny little ways and the memories in your brain? All these things depend on a living body. Notwithstanding how one would recognise a friend in another life without his body — without his face or his voice or anything one knew him by in life? Even the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, on the last day, means having to wait till the end of time before recognising one another! Also which body are we supposed to get then? The body we had at birth, or as a teenager, or a fifty-year-old, or a ninety-year-old? If you are going to rise again as a child, so as to be recognised by your grandmother, you'll hardly be recognisable to your grandchildren.

Yet once the idea of a god is accepted, especially an all-powerful god, the most absurd notions become possibilities: "With God, all things are possible".

Who made God?

As for the idea that the universe was deliberately created, this is thought to explain existence itself — but, of course, it fails to do so; one is still left with the question, "Who made God"? If the answer is a prior creator-god, we are inevitably led into infinite regression. It is far less complicated to suppose that particles of matter and/or waves of energy have always existed and have evolved, presumably in a cyclical universe, than to suppose that everything was made out of nothing by an intelligent being who had always existed without evolution.

Besides, if I did accept the idea of deliberate creation, all the suffering there is in life — for so many people and also for animals — would make it impossible for me to worship the creator. I would have to heap curses on him — or her, or it. If there were a creator, he could not possibly be both good and almighty to have created the world of suffering in which we find ourselves: he could perhaps be sadistic and almighty, or else good and incompetent, but not both good and almighty.

There is, however, just one thing to be said for the alleged creator-god, reprehensible though he would have to be — and that is his evident non-existence.

THOUGHTS ON TRANSCIENCE

On hearing Barbara Smokers tell us that life does not lose its value because it doesn't last forever, rather the reverse, I reflected that to realise this is an important part of facing psychological reality. I am reminded of those thinkers Barbara Cartland and Sigmund Freud. The former is horrified that if death is the end the manifold talents of a Winston Churchill would be wasted; this proves eternal life! The latter was surprised that (in 1913) the famous German poet Rilke could not enjoy a summer walk in the countryside because its beauty was destined to fade.

Freud disagreed that the transience of the beautiful implies any loss in its worth, writing "A flower that blooms only for a single night does not seem to us on that account less lovely". As the poet was not convinced, Freud inferred a powerful emotional factor was at work. He decided it must be a psychic revolt against the pain involved in mourning loss. In his 1916 essay "On Transience", Freud wrote that once the mourning for the losses of the war was over "it will be found that our high opinion of the riches of civilisation has lost nothing from our discovery of their fragility".

Jennifer Jeynes

JEWISH HUMANISM

Derek Wilkes

Lecture to the Ethical Society, 17th October, 1993

Negative Early Experience

I was born into a middle class provincial Jewish family all of whom were in trade, and my life followed the usual religious pattern. My parents were neither religious believers nor unbelievers. It simply did not occur to them to ask whether their beliefs were true or untrue. It was simply part of their lives which they imposed on me by force. If I disliked it, it was wickedness on my part. Unbelief was not to be taken seriously.

Both grandfathers were immigrants from Polish Russia and my maternal grandfather had no education of any kind other than religious. He prayed three times a day, observed all the religious duties, such as the religious dietary laws and went to synagogue with his family on all Jewish holidays.

I was forced to attend synagogue and Jewish evening classes, which I found excruciatingly boring. I hated kosher food and Sabbath observance. In the small town in which we lived there were very few Jewish contemporaries and those I disliked. At school, one was permitted to be Jewish if good at games, but I was useless at them so suffered from anti-Jewish baiting.

So I grew up disliking my Jewish identity and wanted to distance myself from it. But, when I was seventeen the local rabbi persuaded me to attend a young Zionist pioneers camp and I was astonished at how much I liked it. At school I found myself sensitive and intellectually unlike the others, but at the camp, I fitted in very well with my contemporaries of similar inclination. The tendency of my new friends was, to my delight, to dislike and reject religious thinking and practice.

A few years later I remember attending a students' work camp. It never occurred to me to look around and see who was Jewish and whom I could associate with. I made friends with a student and we only discovered each other to be Jews the day before we left and that we were the only ones in the place as far as we could tell.

Awareness of the Holocaust

Later still I was working in a students' work camp in Czechoslovakia, where I met a girl whose family had been victims of the Holocaust. This was in 1948. I knew what had happened in Occupied Europe but when she showed me where it had actually happened the thing was brought home to me for the first time and I left very deeply involved. She was also a dedicated Zionist and for the first time made me conscious of a deep Jewish identity.

A waitress, who was making a pass at me, asked me my religion because she thought I looked Jewish. How can you look as if you have a belief?

In Czechoslovakia I had been asked to state my religion and I replied "agnostic". Other Jewish students accused me of concealing my Jewish identity, which I would never do. It is not easy to imagine how acute was the Jewish issue in the aftermath of the Holocaust in Czechoslovakia.

I was told by my immediate family and the Jewish inhabitants of the small town in which I lived, that it was unacceptable to be Jewish while proclaiming unbelief and not observing the minimum of religious duties. An organisation "Old Sons of the Covenant" was very influential in the town and I was not acceptable as a member, so I suffered considerable social ostracism.

I suffered abuse for publicly violating dietary laws and the Sabbath. It is interesting that Judaism is not a proselytising religion unlike most others, so if you are not a Jew, these laws, which I found so repellent, do not have to be observed. They only apply to those born of a Jewish mother. This I find unjust and illogical. A law must apply to everyone or no one.

Problems of Definition

The other side of the coin is that when I applied to the BHA on behalf of the Jewish Humanists for affiliation and for financial aid I was asked "Why do you wish to be a Jewish Humanist, just be a Humanist".

Chief Rabbi Sachs says that secular Jews are not acceptable to him because they have nothing to hand over to their children. Maimonides, perhaps the greatest of the Jewish religious sages, said that an unbeliever must not be allowed to live and that no one who did not accept the divine authority of the five books of Moses could share in the Hereafter. Shades of Christian and Muslim intolerance.

This lecture is dedicated to answering both these points of view

A year or so ago I was involved in an argument about a parking space. I was subjected to anti-Jewish remarks. Should I have told my opponent I was not a Jew but a humanist? I doubt whether he would have been impressed. How would Hitler's SS have reacted to a similar remark when apprehending a Jew?

My bosom friend at school was the son of a Christian clergyman. He attended Sunday school where he was taught that Jesus was the Messiah who had come to save all mankind. I was assured the Messiah had yet to come. My friend and I agreed that it was completely impossible that both these teachings were correct and at least one of us was being taught untruths. From then on it became obsessional with me that there were a hundred religions in the world and that at least ninety-nine of them must of necessity be false.

My Hebrew teacher told us that "we believe that the five books of Moses were dictated by God". I thought "How can he tell me what we believe. He can only tell me what *he* believes, or rather, what he is paid to pretend he believes".

The Headmaster at school was a strong Christian and he hated sex. He was very angry that someone had written four-letter words on the lavatory walls. I remember his proclaiming to the entire school that the culprits were "Hellhounds who ought to be sizzling in hell". Hopefully that is the punishment awaiting Hitler and Eichman, but eternal torture seems rather a severe punishment for a recalcitrant adolescent obsession with procreation. Even Hitler and Eichmann, though wanting many centuries of torture, should not, I feel as a humanist, be tortured for ever.

Wartime experiences

During the war I was billeted with Christian fundamentalists. They told me with terrifying certainty that all who did not share their beliefs would be tortured hereafter for

all eternity. How fortunate, I thought, that I never believed my rabbi and Hebrew teacher. Little did these gentlemen dream that the penalty for anyone listening to and being persuaded by them is eternal torture.

Larry Adler told me he was expelled from Hebrew class when he was taught the third verse of Genesis, "and God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light". Larry Adler scandalised the teacher by asking "who heard him say it?" He could have asked further, in which synagogue did he speak and whom was he addressing? Was this the first time he had ever spoken, when he had been around for all eternity in an infinite space of nothingness with nothing what ever to think about'?

If the five books of Moses were divinely inspired why are they dull to read and why do they contain so many absurdities? Why did not the Almighty create a few hundred magical copies, the writing of which would never fade'? We do not have a single manuscript. The story of Noah seemed to me to be absurd — genocide of the human race. Each species was carefully isolated from amoebae to polar bears.

I do not know how any Jew who lived through the time of the Holocaust can bring himself to worship a God who watched and saw it all and did not interfere. The only time I ever prayed was when I was dragged to the synagogue in 1938 and was deeply aroused by the sermon of the rabbi on the terrible plight of my contemporaries in Nazi Germany. I prayed for the easing of this terrible persecution. Far from this happening, the ultimate obscenity of the gas chambers lay in the future. How can I believe prayers affect anything? Perhaps it depends upon to which God one prays. Has it been tested scientifically whether better results are obtained by praying to the Holy Ghost or to the Dalai Lama?

Defects of the Pentateuch

A great deal in the five books of Moses repelled me. Violence short of killing is not condemned. Homosexuality is fiercely persecuted. Slavery is condoned. Witches are to be condemned to death. Blasphemy is a capital offence. The story of the Exodus is absurd. Why were all Egyptian firstborn slain? What had they done? And why the cattle'? And why no condemnation of slavery generally'? The Day of Atonement is not in fact accompanied by any real regret of one's transgressions. What is the use of the prayer for the Dead? Surely the Almighty has already made up his mind about one's fate and is not to be deflected?

However, the five books of Moses do give the first public health laws, the first rules against cruelty to animals and the first mitigation of the horrors of slavery. But I cannot see that religious orthodoxy, in this as in other religions has achieved anything at all in the last two thousand years.

Malevolent Influence of Religion in Israel

The Zionist Movement and the restoration of the ancient state of Israel was a secular movement and the religious side played only a negative role. Rabbi Meir Kahane and his Kach party wished to move all the Arabs out of Israel. Gush Emunim, the block of the faithful, wish forcibly to colonise Arab lands on the West Bank and the Neturei Karta of Jerusalem do not recognise the state of Israel at all.

The world notes the negative attitude of the religious elements on both sides to the recent Israel—Arab accords and indeed the AGM of the National Secular Society has a resolution on it. I cannot see that religion has caused the odd historical tact of the survival of the Jewish people for two thousand years without a land. This in my view has been caused by Christian and Muslim anti-semitism. In the non Christian countries of China, Japan and India, the Jewish members assimilated long ago.

About twenty years ago the Spiro Institute was set up to promote the study of Jewish learning, philosophy, history and literature. That was a most humanist departure. For two thousand years Jewish learning had been a monopoly of religious academics and religious law schools The Spiro Institute is entirely secular, though not specifically humanist.

Jewish Humanism Arises

Eight years ago I saw an advertisement in the Jewish Chronicle inserted by my friend Montague Miller, a retired chemist, asking anyone interested in the formation of a Jewish Humanist circle to get in touch with him.

A circle was formed with a committee and a secretary and for a season we had regular activities of a social and literary nature and lectures. We affiliated to the BHA and are quoted in the Jewish Yearbook and are mentioned in the "Who's Who of World Jewry". Monty and I were joint chairmen and we give lectures to groups from time to time. We attend Jewish meetings and ask questions and make contributions from a humanist viewpoint.

Shortly after the circle was formed we were surprised to be contacted by the Association for Secular Judaism. It appeared that in 1963 a rabbi called Sherwin Wine had declared himself a humanist and an agnostic. He is still a rabbi because a rabbi is a teacher and not necessarily a kind of priest. He is a teacher of Jewish law. He founded a congregation of Jews to whom the deistic aspect is not acceptable. He began with eight families in Detroit, USA and now there are twenty six communities with about three thousand five hundred paid-up members. Secular Jewish organisations have built twenty schools throughout North America where pupils are taught to enjoy the whole of the Jewish heritage, not merely the religious part, and the pupils are taught not what to think but how to think.

The movement has spread and there are branches in Canada, Israel, Australia, Argentina, Belgium, Uruguay and Russia.

Sherwin Wine has written a masterly book called "Judaism without God" and another called "Celebration". He edits a quarterly magazine called "Humanistic Judaism". Other rabbis have also declared themselves humanists and agnostics. It must be appreciated that among Jewish people there is a spectrum of religiosity from Neturei Karta and the Lubavich and Chassidic Sects on the extreme right through the Orthodox United Synagogue to Reform and Liberal congregations and, not to mince words, like the rest of the religions of the world, they hate one another's guts.

So Jewish Humanism is the latest addition on the extreme left. It has set up a school for teachers and officers who are Ph.Ds. in Judaic Studies. They have ceremonies for rites of passages, puberty, weddings, naming ceremonies and funerals.

It is interesting that the ceremony of full admission to the community on ones thirteenth birthday is entirely voluntary and depends on the wishes of the youngster himself or herself. He or she picks a character from Jewish history which they greatly admire, or a contemporary character, and delivers a thesis or appreciation to the entire community.

In more orthodox sects the young man (it is not a ceremony in which a girl can participate as of right) is simply expected to read aloud to the congregation, after some practice, a portion of the Pentateuch. He is not asked his own wishes or views in the matter, and he has to recite blessings which may or may not be meaningful to him. I recollect recently being sickened by a young girl during her thirteenth birthday ceremonial proclaiming to the congregation that she had studied and accepted all the thirteen principles of faith of Maimonides. I fear honesty and sincerity are not part of the strength of religious orthodoxy of any kind.

Sherwin Wine's co-chairman is Yahuda Bauer an historian of the University of Jerusalem and world authority on the Holocaust. Professor Zev Katz, also of the University of Jerusalem, teacher of biblical history, is Dean of the Institute for Secular Judaism, Abba Eban (former foreign secretary of Israel) and the Chief Justice of Israel, Chaim Cohen, are supporters.

One of the great achievements is the definition of the very difficult question of "who is a Jew?". The religious authorities have always had a monopoly of authority on this and they defined it in purely religious terms as "a person born of a Jewish mother who has not converted to any other religion". For the first time, in Brussels in 1988, there was a secular Jewish Organisation to give a definition. It said "a Jew is a person of Jewish descent who over a long period of time has shown a close identification with the history, culture, civilisation and destiny of the Jewish people".

VIEWPOINTS

An 'Ought' caught Sneaking In

Eric Stockton invites refutation of his argument (Nov ER) to show that 'ought' *can* be derived from 'is'. I propose to do this by showing that the 'ought' which he claims to derive has in fact sneaked in unrecognised by him.

His second proposition reads: "The 'is' of social being would soon be a 'was' but for some means of keeping it in being, keeping it from fizzling out". Most of us agree that it ought not to fizzle out, but this does not come as a logical consequence of any argument. It is an 'ought', one that has slipped in unnoticed.

From this point the rest of Eric's argument follows, but the 'ought' he arrives at has not been deduced from any 'is'; it is this slipped-in ought carried forward.

George Walford—London N6

I do not claim to be better versed in these things than Eric Stockton, but nevertheless I do dispute his suggestions that *ought* can be derived from *is*.

I accept that we are social animals, that our social being is an *is* and that, if we are to remain social animals, our social being has to generate sufficient adherence to a number of *oughts*.

These statements are all statements of what is the case rather than what ought to be the case. They are all *is* statements and when we try to derive *ought* statements from them we run into difficulties. It is true that our knowledge of what any particular situation is, and what is the likely outcome of any action, will help us to decide what action we want to be taken. But, unfortunately, even when there is agreement on the facts and likely outcome of action there is frequently disagreement on what ought to be done.

I presume that the 'fairly obvious *oughts* referred to by Eric Stockton include such virtues, or supposed virtues, as obedience, loyalty, co-operation and a willingness to make sacrifices for the common good. I presume, too, that most people feel a moral obligation to contribute to the well-being of what they feel to be their group or community.

However, then come the moral dilemmas; how far should we go in following our leaders when we think that their course of action is morally wrong; how do we resolve conflicting loyalties we may feel to ourselves, our family, social group, tribe, nation or human species; should we define the well-being of our group in narrow parochial terms or as part of the well-being of a large whole.

How we resolve moral dilemmas and what we each decide we ought to do derives from our own subjective feelings and beliefs and our own vision of the good life. Our vision changes, not only with changing awareness of the physical world, but also with moral argument, persuasion, example and inspiration — the proper field of endeavour of religions and of ethical humanism.

Paddy Smith—Guildford

Support for Humanist Housing

I write to emphasise Dr Hemming's appeal on behalf of Friends of Humanist Housing. However, I would stress the great importance of covenanting any financial gifts. A covenant of £7.50 is worth £10 to the charity receiving the covenanted gift.

The Humanist Housing Association is an enterprise of which the Humanist movement should be proud but not complacent. As Peter Heales reports, the present is uncertain for Housing Associations and the Humanist Housing Association is experiencing hard times. We in the Humanist Movement must give as much support as is possible.

Please do not forget to COVENANT.

Donald Baker—Hornchurch
President, Havering & District Humanist Society

The views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Society

South Place Ethical Society
BICENTENARY

The Liberty to Know

200 Years of Freethought and Dissent

A Finale to the SPES Bicentenary

***A Celebration in Poetry,
Prose and Song***

presented by John White
with

Jim Herrick, Dan O'Hara, Nicolas Walter, Lucie White
and
Tom Goddard & Barbara Lester, from Sharp's Folk Club

*"Give me the liberty to know, to utter and to
argue freely according to conscience,
above all liberties".*

John Milton 1644

Sunday 12th December 1993 at 3.00 pm

in The Library, Conway Hall Humanist Centre,
Red Lion Square, London WC1

Delicious buffet lunch available from 1.30 pm. at

HUMANIST HOLIDAYS - EASTER 1994

A Tudor Hotel, well appointed to modern standards,
situated in the centre of historic Colchester.

April 1st-5th Half-board £142.00 singles & doubles

Plenty to see and do in the area

Details from Gillian Bailey,

18 Priors Road, Cheltenham, Glos. GL52 5AA

Tel: 0242 239

SEA OF FAITH NETWORK

A group meets in the Lobby at Conway Hall
on the 3rd Tuesday of the month
from 12.30 to 1.30 pm.

Anyone interested may attend

Next meetings: Dec. 21st, Jan. 18th

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS AT THE ETHICAL SOCIETY

The Library, Conway Hall Humanist Centre
25 Red Lion Square, Holborn, WC1
Tel: 071-831 7723

JANUARY 1994

Sunday 9

11.00 am. THE 'JURASIC PARK' PHENOMENON - A SIGN OF THE TIMES
Ellis Hillman

3.00 pm. ANARCHISM, THE PEACE MOVEMENT AND THE SPES TRADITION
David Murray tells 'A sorry story of premises accepted and conclusion denied'.

Sunday 16

11.00 am. EDITH THOMPSON AND BYWATERS: A MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE
Dr. René Weis analyses the legal and moral aspects of the 1920s murder trial

3.00 pm. WILD LIFE CONSERVATION, an illustrated lecture; David Wright

Sunday 23

11.00 am. THE MORALITY OF THE GULAG
Harry Whitby reviews some 20th century practices.

3.00 pm. WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED SCIENCE? James Addison.

Sunday 30

11.00 am. PARLIAMENT AND PRIESTESSES
T.F. Evans will examine the Parliamentary debates which throw fascinating light on attitudes to religion today.

3.00 pm. VIDEO film



SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Registered Charity No. 251396

Founded in 1793, the Society is a progressive movement whose aim is the study and dissemination of ethical principles based on humanism, and the cultivation of a rational and humane way of life.

We invite to membership all those who reject supernatural creeds and find themselves in sympathy with our views.

At Conway Hall there are opportunities for participation in many kinds of cultural activities, including discussions, lectures, concerts and socials. The Sunday Evening Chamber Music Concerts founded in 1887 have achieved international renown.

A reference and lending library is available, and all members receive the Society's journal, *The Ethical Record* eleven times a year.

Memorial and Funeral Services are available to members.

Minimum subscriptions are £10 p.a. Please apply to the Secretary at Conway Hall for Membership Application forms.
