

# The American **RATIONALIST**

THE ALTERNATIVE TO RELIGIOUS SUPERSTITION

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May-June, 1988

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## **E. Haldeman-Julius and the Little Blue Books**

BY GORDON STEIN, Ph.D.

The paperback industry began in a small  
Kansas town.



E. HALDEMAN-JULIUS

## **The Ineffectiveness of Rationalist Arguments**

BY A.J. MATTILL, JR.

Eighteen reasons why mysticism prevails and  
we are immersed in a sea of irrationalism.

## **Responses to Article on Nihilism**

## A DANGEROUS THING

Sometimes a knowledge of history is a dangerous thing. Did you know, for example, that until about 150 years ago, public expression of atheism was such a dangerous thing that it virtually never occurred. In writing, we do not find openly atheistic ideas expressed until 1770, when Baron d'Holbach managed to anonymously publish his *The System of Nature*. To think that the religious forces of society had the power to suppress any public mention of atheism in speech or print for thousands of years boggles the mind.

The claims of religion about the existence of God are unsupportable logically. Men have thought logically for thousands of years, perhaps not with the sophistication we have today, but servicially. They must have known that the proofs for the existence of God didn't work, yet they were compelled to keep silent about this fact.

Such thought control on the part of society still continues to a degree on many subjects, including atheism. A recent survey showed that 65% of the general public *still* would not vote for an atheist for president, even if they agreed with his or her policies on other issues. Thought control is a powerful and

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dangerous thing. We must make it one of our top priorities in the freethought community to make the world safe for the public expression of atheism. Surely the world will not end if *every* atheist had the freedom of public expression, and used it. We still have a long way to go to achieve even this simple goal.

GS

## THE CHICKENS COME HOME TO ROOST

When all of the complaints about the laxness and inferiority of our public education system are made, most often by William Bennett, Secretary of Education, one result of that system's failure is *never* mentioned. That result is the large number of adults and teenagers who are so incapable of reasoning, and so ill-informed that they readily accept fundamentalist Christianity as *true*. I want to make clear here that anyone should be allowed as a part of freedom of religion to believe in anything they want. However, believing in something because it makes you feel good is quite different from believing in something because it is *true*. Bennett never mentions that the high number of "conversions" to fundamentalism is one of the "fruits" of an inferior educational system.

When Bennett suggests that education can be improved in the U.S., we can all agree. I wonder exactly how strongly he would push for the notable improvement of teaching children reasoning and thinking skills in elementary school. I'd bet that Bennett would be opposed, for as soon as you teach a child to reason, he or she is eventually going to reason about religion. There go the parents' teachings about religion to the child. What parent is going to be happy with that, except those parents whose teachings on religion have only been based upon accepting rational ideas? That excludes the fundamentalists right at the start.

GS

## IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

Advertising may be described as the science of arresting the human intelligence long enough to get money from it. The same goes for religion.

Proof of this is that some admen have been copy-cating the money-raising antics of the televangelists.

Allied Discount Tires in Orlando, Fla., for example, says its sales have been heavenly since it ran a controversial ad that hawked: "I just got a message from upstairs. It says we gotta sell 80,000 tires in the next month, or I'm gonna die."

Then a Highland appliance store commercial showed Sincere Sam—a blustery preacher dressed in a white suit.

Nissan also got into the act. In its commercial, organ music plays as a salesman bellows: "Friends, I have received a message! Unless your New England Nissan dealers sell all their new Sentras and trucks, I will be called home."

Is there a difference between the blather and hype of the hawkers of business and religion?

There is. The commercial companies at least are

providing things like tires and cars—the others religious hokum.

If advertising is the rattling of a stick inside a swill bucket, at least there's the swill. Televangelism is the rattling of the tongue on a bottomless pit!

BK

## SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD

"God" is the pin that's going to puncture us unbelievers—so thunders the Religious Right. All the evils of the world come from the lack of belief in God—in atheism.

"God"? What "God" or "gods" are they talking about?

What's the god called? El, Elohim, Elyon, Shaddai, YHWH, Yahweh, Adonai (Lord), Jehovah, Theos (the Father), Jesus Christ? Or being a god of mirrors, should we use all of the above?

And how is the name to be pronounced? Or shouldn't you say the name at all, substituting the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) when writing and Adonai (Lord) in talking? Why is this necessary? Is there magic here—where knowing the name will control the god?

Does god have a body—whose backside was seen by Moses? Or is he triplets as he appeared to Abraham and Sarah? Or as he was conceived by the Christians—as a trinity in unity?

How do you explain the belief in three persons in a single divine essence, of whom the second is begotten by the first, and the third proceeds from the other two—yet each of whom is truly god?

Is god a person so that we can see him as Moses did, or wrestle with him as Jacob did? How tall is he? If he walked in the Garden looking for Adam, does he have legs? Did he really confound the languages of man so we could not keep him company in heaven? Did god actually admit he could not destroy the iron chariots of the people of the plain? Did god's finger literally write on the tablets Moses brought down from his interview? Did he really compress himself into the man Jesus, thus converting spirit into flesh? While he was confining himself to Jesus, what was happening to all that was supposed to be under his control—like the destinies of all his "children" and the movements of all of nature?

Or is god a "her"? Is it the fertility goddess Jeremias calls the Queen of Heaven? Or the Astarte who was the consort of Yahweh?

Or is god an "animal"? Like the serpent Moses raised up in the desert to cure his snake-bitten followers? Or the ram-lamb-god called Jesus Christ?

If Jesus and god are one . . .

Was god (Jesus) with himself (the Father) from the very beginning? Or, who came first: the chicken of god or the egg of Jesus?

Why did god (who is all good) have to have himself baptized (to wash away his sins)? Why did god impregnate himself in a virgin? Why didn't he give birth himself, like the god Zeus? Why did god sacrifice himself to himself, allowing himself to be crucified for our sins? Why did god mutilate himself by having himself circumcised? By what means did god resur-

rect himself after his death by crucifixion?

When god (Jesus) was dipped in the Jordan for his baptism, why did god (the Holy Ghost) have to alight on his head while god (the Father) shouted down from heaven how pleased he was with himself?

Why did god (Jesus) have to have himself led by god (the Holy Ghost) into the wilderness where god (Jesus) was tempted by the devil? How could god be tempted by the devil since god controls all?

If no man has ever seen god at any time, what was he looking at whenever he saw Jesus?

If god is a spirit, what's he doing in the material body of Jesus?

If with god all things are possible, why couldn't god (Jesus) do any mighty work in his own country?

If lying lips are an abomination to god (the Father), why did god (Jesus) speak in parables so that people could hear them but not understand them?

How can Jesus be the Prince of Peace and yet god be a Man of War?

What kind of sense did it make for god (Jesus) to complain to himself: "Myself, myself, why have I forsaken myself?"

For those who believe they have the answers to the above, thereby furnishing proof of what believers believe, I have a great bargain for you. No checks please. Cash, and in small bills.

BK

## CORRECTION

The March–April issue article on Noah's Ark on page 86 there was an error in the figure for number of animal species. Instead of 923,000, this figure should have read 1,177,920. On page 85 in calculation of the number of cubic feet per animal available inside the Ark a mathematical mistake was made. Instead of .275 per animal there would be .63 cubic feet per animal. The practical effect of this error is negligible. The actual dimensions of the Ark in feet should be 450 x 112.5 x 45.

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"Anyone who claims simply to read the text (Bible) itself, as if reading bathroom scales, is resting on the naive presumption that the human mind can be turned into a blank sheet across which truth simply writes itself so long as the mind remains innocent. There exists, among the scholars who question the inerrancy and absolute reliability of the Gospels, a bewildering diversity of conjectures of what the real Jesus was like, what he taught and did, if indeed he existed in the first place . . . It is understandable, therefore, that many believers fear that without flawless Scriptures to support it, Christianity may eventually be regarded as just another ancient mystery religion doomed to fade into the night."

—Joe Edward Barnhart, in his recent book *The Southern Baptist Holy War*

"There's no such thing as a Catholic university. If it's Catholic, it isn't a university; and if it's a university, it isn't Catholic."

—G. B. Shaw

# E. Haldeman-Julius and the Little Blue Books

BY GORDON STEIN, Ph.D.

There are still many people alive who vividly remember the Little Blue Books. They were a publishing phenomenon. They were small 64-page pamphlets, often printed on cheap newsprint for 5¢ each, which brought good literature to millions. The founder and resident genius of this publishing venture was Emanuel Haldeman-Julius.

Emanuel Julius was a typical kid from the ghetto of Philadelphia. He was the son of poor immigrants, and was born in 1889. Although his father was a bookbinder, that was not a trade which held any interest for young Julius. From the time he left school at the age of 13 to go to work, it was always newspapers that interested him. A 13-year-old certainly couldn't get a very good job on a newspaper, despite his enthusiasm. Julius had to settle for holding the copy for the compositor. At the age of 17 he left for New York City. There he managed to obtain a position on the *New York Call*, a Socialist newspaper. Julius had become sympathetic to Socialism from his reading.

At this time (1906) there were many Socialist papers all over the country. Julius held positions on them in Chicago, Milwaukee, Los Angeles, and finally wound up as Sunday editor for the *Call*, back in New York. There he met Marcet Haldeman, a banker's daughter from Girard, Kansas, who lived in the same apartment building as he did. Marcet wanted to be an actress, and had come to New York to attain that goal.

In 1915 Julius was asked to come to (of all places) Girard, Kansas, to work on *The Appeal to Reason*, then this country's biggest Socialist paper. At nearly the same time, Marcet Haldeman's mother died, willing her the family bank, and she went back to Girard to manage it. Marcet and Emanuel were married in 1916, and they joined their names together as Haldeman-Julius. In 1919 Emanuel bought *The Appeal to Reason* with \$25,000 advanced to him and his partner, Louis Kopelin, by Marcet. There was also a note for an additional \$50,000, payable in one year's time by the partners.

When he was a child of about 10, Julius had bought a 10¢ pamphlet in a Philadelphia used bookstore. It was Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. He had sat on a park bench in the freezing cold and read the booklet straight through. As he was to remark many times later, he could not remember ever being so moved by the written word. He thought to himself that it would be wonderful if everybody could have a copy of this poem in pamphlet form for 10¢, as he did. Supposedly, he carried that pamphlet and another of *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam around with him for many years. One of the first actions Julius took when he became owner of *The Appeal* was to ask the linotype to set up both poems on his machine, in normal column size, and he printed them off on newspaper stock to make each into a small pamphlet. The two pamphlets were given the numbers 1 and 2, and were

advertised in *The Appeal* at 25¢ each. The project would have ended there except for a brilliant idea of Haldeman-Julius's. He took a full page ad in *The Appeal* and announced the beginning of a series of 50 volumes similar to the first two. If readers would send him \$5., he would send them 50 booklets, mailed five at a time. Five thousand readers (*The Appeal's* circulation was then about 175,000) sent in their \$5., and Haldeman-Julius (hereafter called H-J) had \$25,000 with which to work. He took 50 titles from good literature in the public domain, and soon was ready to offer another 50 titles. Again 5,000 readers responded. Before long there were 210 titles in print, and H-J had paid back the loan and note he had taken out to buy the newspaper. He also bought out his partner.

The series of booklets was initially called "The Appeal Pocket Series," but after the first 210 titles, the name was changed to "The Little Blue Books." Actually, the covers of the early booklets had been of many colors. For a period, only blue was used. Later, a number of other colors were again used. After the original 210 titles, new authors were approached for original contributions. Eventually (that is, by 1928), 75% of the 1,260 titles in print were original material. Still later, the percentage was even higher.

One interesting story in which Haldeman-Julius played a major role was the way in which Will Durant's *The Story of Philosophy* came to be published. In his search for new authors, Haldeman-Julius decided that a simply presented history of the major philosophers would be something the public would buy. As he tells it, he heard that Will Durant was lecturing in Kansas City in 1921, and dropped in to see him at his hotel. At dinner they discussed the possibility of a series of booklets popularizing philosophy. At this time, Dr. Durant was virtually unknown. By the end of the dinner, H-J had been able to persuade Durant to do a series of Little Blue Books. Eleven were finally completed. Durant tells a different version, namely that H-J dropped in on a lecture of his in New York City. H-J was so impressed by the lecture on Plato that he tried to get Durant to let him publish the lecture, and to do others. H-J finally did convince Durant. At that point, the two stories merge. Some time later, H-J was in New York with an acquaintance of his wife's, Richard Simon. Simon had just started a publishing company, Simon & Schuster, and was looking for some suggestions as to what to publish. H-J suggested a book popularizing philosophy. Simon wanted to know who could write it. H-J suggested Will Durant. Durant took his 11 Little Blue Books and wrote some material connecting them together, and they were published as *The Story of Philosophy*. The book became the number one best-seller that year, and was Simon & Schuster's first

serious book to succeed. As a result of the book's continuing popularity (it is still in print), Durant was able to live off the royalties while he and his wife Ariel wrote the ten-volume *The Story of Civilization*.

The price of Little Blue Books was soon reduced to 10¢ each. In the 1930s, the price was lowered to 5¢ each. By 1949, Haldeman-Julius had sold over 300 million Little Blue Books. The total of both Little and Big Blue Books (larger format booklets which sold for 25¢) sold by the time of the company's end in 1976 was about 500 million. How was it possible to produce a booklet of about 64 pages, containing an average of 15,000 words, and to advertise, produce and ship it for 5¢ apiece, while still making a profit? The answer was mass production and standardization, its necessary component. H-J estimated that he made a 1¢ profit on each 5¢ book sold, and a 20% profit is not bad. Of the 4¢ expenses for each book, about ½¢ was printing cost (but usually somewhat more). He figured that he could spend up to 2¢ each to advertise the books, and the other 1½¢ per book was shipping and editorial costs.

The standardization which enabled the books to be produced this cheaply was described by H-J as "making the manuscript fit the book," instead of the other way around, as is usual in publishing. What this meant was that H-J contracted with authors to write exactly 15,000 words for each booklet. He knew that he had 64 pages within each Little Blue Book, and this meant 60 pages of actual text. He used 8-point type, set on an 8-point slug, which meant that if he had 40 lines on a page, he would come out at the right length. His presses grew larger over the years, and he soon gave up the use of linotype in favor of electrotyped plates, which were made in Kansas City. There were four pages of text per plate, and 16 plates therefore held the text for a complete Little Blue Book. His presses would eventually produce four Little Blue Books at a time, on a cylinder press that could print both sides of the page at the same time. Before he had this "Perfector" press, he printed two complete booklets at a time on sheets of paper which were 29" x 42" in size. The two books would wind up like Siamese twins, including the covers, which were also put on two at a time. The final step in production was to cut the two (later four) books apart. At the peak of his production abilities around 1929, he could produce about 80,000 Little Blue Books per 8 hours, or 240,000 per 24-hour day. The production operation required about 40 employees, not counting the order fulfillment and shipping departments.

Haldeman-Julius had very strict standards about how many copies a booklet must sell in order to be continued in the series. His intention when he put out a book (with very few exceptions) was to have that title sell as a permanent part of the line. Hence, he kept careful count of how a title sold. If a book did not sell 10,000 copies per year, it went to the "hospital." There, its problems were analyzed and correction attempted. Most of the time H-J decided that it was the booklet's title which was responsible for its poor sales. People had only the title and the book's number to go by when they ordered from one of his large ads listing every title available, so the title was critical. By tinkering with a number of titles, H-J found out

that he was right about their importance most of the time. For example, he took the title *The Tallow Ball*, which was a story by Guy de Maupassant, and which was selling at an anemic rate of 15,000 copies per year, and he changed the title to *A French Prostitute's Sacrifice*. Sales went up to 55,000 copies per year. Sometimes small changes also helped. Changing *Mystery of the Iron Mask* to *Mystery of the Man in the Iron Mask* brought the annual sales up from 11,000 to 30,000 copies. Sometimes a re-classification of the subject of the book also helped. H-J's large ads were divided up by subject, so the person who was interested in one subject would be more likely to look at the titles in that subject. His putting the book where it reached the interested reader often was as effective as changing its title.

The order-filling process at Haldeman-Julius publications was also highly mechanized. Again, the aim was to increase speed and decrease costs. When the mail came in, as it did four times per day, envelopes were opened by two women, who removed and counted the money enclosed and recorded it, both on the envelope and on a deposit record. The form of payment and lack thereof were also recorded. Then the order slip and envelope went to the order room. Here two other women went by a series of 650-pigeonhole cases, in which 30 copies of each number of a Little Blue Book had been placed by number. All orders were placed and filled by number only. In fact, the H-J order slip had room only for the numbers of the books, not for the titles or authors' names. After the books had been pulled from the appropriate pigeonholes, the order was again checked, and then wrapped and sent to shipping. Other groups of people watched the contents of the pigeonholes and kept them filled.

Crucial to the success of the Little Blue Books was H-J's advertising policy. As mentioned, he figured he could spend up to 2¢ per title on his advertisements and still make a profit. In order to spend this little per title, he had to feature a large number of titles per ad. Most of his ads listed the entire 1,260 or more titles then available in the series. The number of titles available in both the Little and Big Blue Book series eventually totaled over 3,000 (2,000 Little and 1,000 Big, not including series or magazines). To get this many titles into an ad meant that the ad had to be quite large. An entire newspaper page (and sometimes a two-page spread) was the rule. Even in this vast space, each title was allocated only one column line (one agate line). This was barely enough room to give the book's number and title. There usually wasn't room for the author's name.

Haldeman-Julius figured that if he got back twice as much revenue from orders as he put into the ad, he was in the black. It is not always easy to see why this would be so. If he put \$1,000 into an ad and received \$2,000 in orders, we must remember that only \$200 of that was profit, and that does not include the cost of labor on his part to compose and place the ad. He did "key" all of his ads so that he could tell exactly what response each was bringing. The results were carefully watched, and all unprofitable ads were not renewed. He also analyzed the types of magazines which produced the best response, and also noted the

sex of the respondents to ads in various magazines. For some reason, the people who ordered Little Blue Books (even from ads placed in magazines which were largely read by women) were men (70% to 30% women).

Perhaps H-J's most famous and effective advertisement was the "IS A HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION WORTH \$2.98 TO YOU?" ad. It took sixty Little Blue Books relating to subjects that might conceivably be covered in a high school course together as a package for \$2.98. That was only 5¢ apiece, his normal price at the time. The advantage of this ad to him was that while the minimum order of 5¢ books was normally 20 (or \$1.), in this way he got people to buy 60 for \$3. The response was very large, and the Depression was certainly a factor. Nevertheless, a great many people learned a great deal on their own by means of the "\$2.98 education."

Perhaps the problem with all companies founded and run by one person (and Haldeman-Julius did all the editorial work and was the creative genius who kept things going), is that their enterprises often die with them. Haldeman-Julius had just been convicted of two counts of income tax evasion, and was awaiting the results of an appeal, when his body was found floating in his swimming pool. He had evidently suffered a heart attack while standing by the edge of the pool. The date of his death was July 31, 1951, and he was 62 years old. The income tax evasion case is quite complex, but basically stemmed from the fact that many people would send him gifts of cash to further H-J's efforts to popularize some cause or another which was their favorite. He failed to declare these gifts, and simply applied them to the expansion of the business. The IRS told him that this was not the proper way of doing things. There had been many complaints to the government from people who were offended by some of the things which Haldeman-Julius or his authors said about religion or sex. The Catholic Church came under especially heavy criticism in H-J publications for its attitude towards sex and for its role in suppressing ideas and stifling mental liberty. Exactly how important these attacks were in getting the IRS interested in H-J will never be known, but it may have played a role.

H-J was, of course, a devoted freethinker. He did much to keep the memory of Robert G. Ingersoll alive by republishing many of his writings in both Big and Little Blue Book formats. H-J also published some of Bertrand Russell, Voltaire, J.M. Robertson, Chapman Cohen, and Clarence Darrow. Perhaps his greatest contribution to freethought publishing, however, was what he did for Joseph McCabe. McCabe was a former Catholic priest and philosophy professor at a Catholic college, who became an atheist and rationalist through his wide reading. Although McCabe was largely self-educated (he claimed his Catholic education was a total waste of time), he mastered a number of foreign languages, translated about 30 works, including those of Ernest Haeckel, the founder of Monism, and eventually wrote over 100 books of his own. However, in 1928, McCabe had a serious falling out with the Rationalist Press Association, which had been his publisher (through Watts & Company). McCabe's entire source of income came from his writ-

ings, and they had been abruptly cut off after the argument. Haldeman-Julius promptly contracted with McCabe for a series of Little and Big Blue Books that would eventually reach several hundred of each. With his usual flair for promotion, H-J proclaimed McCabe "the world's greatest scholar." Although that is probably quite far from the truth, McCabe was certainly a diligent and usually accurate historian, philosopher, sexologist, and prolific simplifier of science for the masses. McCabe's favorite target, of course, given his background, was the Catholic Church. McCabe correctly viewed it as a great force for the hindering of progress and for keeping the populace in ignorance. He delighted in exposing the Church's true past every chance he had. It was, in fact, some of his writing that linked the Catholic Church's support for Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini that got Haldeman-Julius in trouble with some aspects of the public.

One of Haldeman-Julius' other big contributions to freethought was his periodical publications. He started many magazines, some of which, like *The Militant Atheist*, edited by Joseph McCabe in 1933, ran for only short periods. Most of the magazines were in either newspaper format (e.g., *The American Freeman*, *The Militant Atheist*) or in Big Blue Book format (e.g., *The Haldeman-Julius Monthly*, *The Debunker*).

*The American Freeman* (1929-51, and from 1922-29 it was called *The Haldeman-Julius Weekly*) was obviously H-J's favorite. It was published weekly, personally edited and written largely by H-J, and contained the first appearances of many items that would subsequently appear as Blue Books or in *The Monthly*. This recycling of articles was one way in which H-J was able to provide for the publication of so many different materials at the same time. *The American Freeman* was a hard-hitting and fiercely iconoclastic publication. It struck at all sorts of "bunk" in American life. Among the favorite recipients of the debunking treatment were the clergy, religion, the occult, irrationalities in general, and politicians who were acting in an irrational manner. There was much invective in the magazine, and many of the barbs fell squarely on their target. Again, H-J used this publication to announce and advertise many of his forthcoming Blue Books and special offers.

*The American Freeman* was a successful newspaper for the freethought movement. With circulation of about 20,000 it had the largest circulation in freethought history up to that time.

Haldeman-Julius's son, Henry Haldeman, tried to run the company, and he managed to make a living, but not much more. Henry kept reprinting booklets for about 20 years, and found himself the object of an obscenity trial over the contents of some of the Little Blue Books on sex at one point. The times had changed, however, and Henry lacked his father's innovative touch. In July of 1976, a fireworks skyrocket, set off by some of the neighborhood children in Girard, set fire to the roof of the plant where the Little Blue Books had continued to be manufactured. The plant was a total loss. Although some of the copyrights to the Little Blue Books had already been sold by Henry Haldeman, the fire marked the effective

end of the publishing venture started by his father.

The influence of Haldeman-Julius upon publishing is hard to evaluate accurately, but would seem to be quite large. As a publisher, he singlehandedly educated a generation of Americans during the Depression, and instilled in them a love of reading. He showed that there was a market for good literature and for reasonably-priced books. He deserves much of the credit for starting the American paperback industry, although he was not the first or only publisher to issue paperback books. Nevertheless, it was *he* who showed that they could be sold in large enough quantities to make publishing them profitable, and he did so well in advance of the Second World War, when the American paperback began to be promoted in large quantities. It was H-J who had demonstrated that low price and portability were necessary selling points for paperbacks. While the American public may have forgotten that you could slip a Little Blue Book into your pocket, and that they cost only 5¢ each, this was not lost upon the paperback publishers who followed him. The rest is history.

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Walter Hoops

## AT RANDOM

The Second Commandment: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" has turned true believers like the Lollards and Cromwell's Roundheads into destroyers of valuable art in England. They resented statues of the Holy Family, some of them full of pearls and jewels. Henry VIII encouraged this vandalism because he needed the money he could get for them.

At a time when the Vatican is reportedly squeezed for funds and is sending out cries for help, it seems incongruous that one of the poorest dioceses in the U.S.A. around Springfield, Mo. was the most generous giver. A per capita tax of \$1.50 was collected while the American average was less than \$1.00 and the world-wide average was but a small fraction of that.

Ambrose Bierce, author of the ever-fascinating *The Devil's Dictionary* (\$4.00 ppd) was mentioned lately among authors that somehow disappeared. Bierce disappeared in 1911 in Mexico as a reporter of the Zapata rebellion.

A hotel in Southern France put a \$16.95 dictionary next to the Gideon Bible in each room. 49 of the 402 dictionaries disappeared in no time but in the 15 year history of the hotel not a single Bible was taken.

The play's title *Children of a Lesser God* comes from Tennyson's *Idylls of the Kings* and reads in full: "For why is all around us here (people with various infirmities) as if some lesser God had made the world but had not the force to shape it as he would." Not a very complimentary description for an all-powerful deity.

In the *Bad Popes* by E. R. Chamberlin I found this tidbit: The wealth of the cardinals was enormous. Half of the revenue of the Holy See was theirs by right: half of Peter's Pence, half the income from gifts. At every election the Pope, by custom, gave each Cardinal handsome gifts in specie. It was gold that counted. Gold not in form of a symbol but the actual metal. . . . When Cardinal Hugh Roger died, his executors found in his house a hoard that represented almost every currency in Europe. In a red chest there were 21 bags of gold, each containing mixed coins. Elsewhere they found in bags, purses, boxes, or wrapped in cloth:

- 5000 Piedmontese gold florins
- 5000 Old gold crowns
- 2000 Aragonese gold coins
- 4500 gold crowns of England
- 850 gold francs
- 500 gold angels
- 97 gold ducats
- 1000 gold papal florins
- 363 pure florins of Florence
- 511 Sicilian florins
- 900 gold florins of the du Grayle mint.



# The Ineffectiveness of Rationalist Arguments

BY A.J. MATTHILL, JR.

A friend who has read *The Seven Mighty Blows to Traditional Beliefs* several times asked: "Granted that what you say is in general correct, why is it that the traditional religions are in a state of resurgency and the churches are full and prospering?" I had no satisfactory answer on the tip of my tongue, but after much reflection on this paradox I have listed a number of reasons why traditional beliefs and religions not only are surviving but thriving, in spite of devastating arguments against their teachings.

(1) **IRRATIONALISM.** Not rationalism but irrationalism rules the world. We are immersed in a sea of irrationality. Only a small percentage of people are capable of critical thinking. Hence the most irrational leaders gain the greatest support from the masses of people whose high level of credulity enables them to believe almost anything on the flimsiest evidence or none at all. Then they cling to their irrational beliefs no matter what reason may say. "Don't confuse me with facts. I've already made up my mind."

(2) **IGNORANCE.** As Gregory the Great (540–604) said when he burned the great library of Rome, "Ignorance is the mother of devotion." And yet today freethought literature is difficult to find. Libraries are reluctant to shelve it and commercial bookstores typically refuse to carry it. Not only the masses but all too many college graduates are unaware of the arguments against traditional beliefs. As a general rule, teachers, preachers, and the mass media do little or nothing to create doubt. And even some of those who do realize something of the untenability of their beliefs cling to them because they know of no satisfactory alternative to replace their present system, and something is better than nothing, they tell themselves, for we all need a belief system to get us through life.

(3) **DISHONESTY.** Many preachers and professors who do know better do not recognize the truth publicly because they cannot afford to lose their positions and income. Some of the more sophisticated lecturers and pulpiteres will use the language of orthodoxy but understand it in a different sense from that of their unsuspecting hearers.

(4) **MENTAL ACROBATICS.** The ability of apologists to give new meanings to old texts and to make erroneous teachings pass for truth misleads millions to assume that all is well with their beliefs. Wily exegetes seduce themselves and others with their demythologizing, remythologizing, spiritualizing, and allegorizing. With consummate skill, exegetes reassure questioners that the scriptures do not mean what they say, or do not say what they mean, or what they say applies to a different time from now, or in a different way from then.

(5) **LAZINESS.** Since we all have a natural tendency toward laziness, and since it takes work not to believe the traditional beliefs with which we have been indoctrinated since childhood and which are reinforced by a constant barrage of religious propaganda over the mass media, we find it easier to avoid

the labor of disproving what is commonly held to be true. Being lazy, at least to a degree, we do not like to exert the effort needed to swim against the stream of tradition. It takes less effort to praise the emperor's clothes with the crowd than to defy the crowd by telling the naked truth.

(6) **SOCIAL PRESSURE.** Family, friends, and churches apply pressures ranging from verbal abuse to ostracism to actual physical abuse to keep believers in line. Social pressures make it difficult to be different from others in any way, especially in an area so sensitive as religion. Some people dislike and disbelieve in religious services, yet they attend because it is expected of them to do so and they want to do what is socially acceptable. As with the Santa Claus myth, many go along with religious myths rather than resist pressures to pretend the myths are true.

(7) **FEAR.** Many people, à la Pascal's wager, continue to believe in order to play it safe so as to avoid eternal damnation. As one lady said about *The Seven Mighty Blows*: "If the author is wrong, then he stands to lose everything, and if he's right he gains nothing. On the other hand, if I'm right I have everything to gain, and if I'm wrong I have nothing to lose." A sure, irresistible bet! And not only fear of hell but fear of such dreadful things as beasts, death, hunger, lightning, and sickness—the very fears which created religion in the first place, continues to sustain belief.

(8) **GOD.** Only reluctantly do many of us give up the comfort of believing in a Father-God, a living, benevolent, supernatural Person, with a hand to direct us, an eye to look upon us, and a heart to love and pity us. We dread feeling alone in a hostile universe which has no ultimate meaning.

(9) **JESUS.** The church has transformed Jesus from a Palestinian apocalyptic preacher into a personal cosmic power ready and willing to make each of his followers into happier and more effective individuals. Multitudes find such an enabler to be the answer to their prayers.

(10) **HUMAN NEEDS.** Some churches have found "the secret of perpetual emotion," and many meet the emotional and social needs of millions of people for acceptance, beauty, commitment, consolation, entertainment, excitement, fellowship, intimacy, involvement, meaning in life and death, music, pomp and ceremony, recreation, and support—all of which are genuine needs of human nature.

(11) **AUTHORITY.** Authoritarian churches and religious figures, such as ayatollahs, charismatic cult leaders, and popes, satisfy the hunger of countless people for subservience to some authoritarian group which gives them a sense of security based upon blind trust in a ready-made set of infallible beliefs which they do not have to work out for themselves.

(12) **INTELLECTUALS.** The faithful appeal to the fact that many philosophers, scientists, theologians, and other intellectuals, some of them of world-rank, are staunch believers and regular church-goers who are unmoved by "the paper logic" of freethinkers.



(13) **PERSONALITY FACTOR.** Many religious leaders are warm and winsome persons of demonstrated good will and humanitarian concern, all of which goes a long way toward allaying any fears and suspicions people may have of churches and other religious organizations.

(14) **CERTAINTY.** Believers are certain that they already have the truth, and they do not want to be disturbed by falsehood. "Why stir up the dust? Why waste valuable time exposing ourselves to a morass of speculation and human theories found in literature that is designed to deceive, is dangerous to faith and morals, and can corrupt our thinking and leave us lost among those who have no hope? After all, free-thought writers have no special pipeline to heaven." Once one has his beliefs worked out to suit one, one does not want to go through the agonizing experience of giving up an old belief system and working out a new one.

(15) **MORALITY.** The codes of morals offered by the traditional religions give believers definite rules for living, for distinguishing between right and wrong, and for judging the personal and social consequences of their actions. The call of religions to high moral standards is especially appealing to those who are alarmed at the worldwide breakdown of conventional morality and who are convinced that secular value systems cannot hold society together.

(16) **SPECTACULAR HAPPENINGS.** Phenomena, such as the weeping madonna at St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church in Chicago, bolster belief. Similarly, "divine interventions" into the order of nature confirm, even create, faith in religion. A few days after some priests had hit some Jehovah's Witnesses, a whirlwind struck the village, destroying the roofs of many houses. "This is a punishment from God for what the priests did to Jehovah's Witnesses," commented villagers. Likewise, numerous incidents of "miraculous healings" at shrines and healing services demonstrate for many the truth of the religion under whose auspices the healings occur. For example, after many years of ill health a relative of mine has been "cured" at a prayer meeting, is able to walk again, and now travels and witnesses "for the Lord."

(17) **MYSTICISM.** Mystical religious experiences also convince many. As a lady said to me: "I have had a personal experience of Christ and am as certain that he lives as I am that my own mother is alive. No argument of yours could ever make me change my mind."

(18) **CONVERSIONS.** "Miracles of grace" which redeem people from "the slaveries of sin and shame" also lure many to belief. The glowing testimonies of converts about their "great new joy in a life of decency and self-respect" nullify rationalistic arguments, so far as believers are concerned.

There may be other reasons for the upsurge in traditional beliefs in spite of rationalist reasoning, but those listed above may help us to understand why arguments which we regard as irrefutable are so ineffective in persuading the masses of believers to break with tradition.

## Responses to Article on Nihilism

Kenneth R. Gregg, Jr., in his article "Atheism Vs. Nihilism" (AR, Jan.-Feb., 1988), quotes from Charles T. Sprading's essay, "What is Atheism?" That quotation exemplifies faulty thinking on Sprading's part and is semantically objectionable. I shall not argue about the existence or non-existence of spirits mentioned in the quotation; but I wish to point out that there is no necessary relationship between the ideas of existent or non-existent spirits and atheism or even theism. Indeed, one might believe in the existence of spirits and still be an atheist; or, conversely, one might deny the existence of spirits and yet believe in the existence of a God.

Sprading also committed the semantic error of trying to establish a necessary antithesis between a belief in dogmas and an "acceptance of the natural universe." I have purposely omitted saying "religious dogmas" in quoting Sprading at this point in order to get down to basics and to arrive at a fair judgment; to wit, there have been not only religious dogmas but also scientific dogmas, a statement I put forth despite the contradiction in coupling science and dogmatism. Scientific dogmatism can hide behind the guise of "acceptance of the natural universe." Dogmas are not merely assertions but are, more often than not, emotive statements whose rigidity and persistence derive mainly from the primary and vehement energy with which they are put forth, an energy whose presence may be suspect. Rationalists, despite their self-proclaimed title, are beset with the danger of being irrational in subtle fashion or in the defense of their position, especially during those occasions, when, understandably, they become outraged by the irrational absurdities and superstitions of religionists.

In all discussions about the existence or non-existence of God, there should always be a definition of terms at the very start. Such definitions should not be limited to the God as conceived by the Christian Fundamentalist. The religionist, as we know, does not really explain anything on the most fundamental levels—and the same can be said of the scientist. When forced into a corner, both may resort to sophistries and evasions. There can be an inescapable provinciality in both camps. That provinciality is of the nature of immurement on the part of both religionist and scientist. Both can tread narrow paths, with heads bowed, looking not upward or side to side.

As to whether the material universe that we know provides evidence or does not provide evidence of the existence of a God, is a matter of interpretation of observable phenomena on the part of both religionist and scientist. Once again I say, in such discussions the term "God" must be defined at the very outset, especially for the sake of clarity and the distinguishing of issues which otherwise might be confounded. The rationalist must recognize that the religionist believes as he does because of a need, a need that the Rationalist or the atheist does not have—fortunately for him. Rationalists, as a group, probably exhibit a rather consistent and well-defined personality profile, one in which specific traits and backgrounds of emotional and intellectual development may explain

the position that they embrace and with which they find themselves comfortable.

Finally, both religionist and irreligionist (rationalist, atheist, or whatever) must not neglect to consider the probability that there are vast fields of the unknown that may remain forever unknown and perhaps, also, unknowable. Even the laws (inferential products of a thinking process) of science are mysterious and reflect a kind of "fiat-principle" on all levels, that principle itself being a law.

James Baker

### Response by Kenneth R. Gregg, Jr.

Briefly, the four issues in Mr. Baker's letter are: 1) that there is no necessary connection between non-belief in spirits and atheism; 2) that "acceptance of the natural universe" is dogmatic; 3) that atheists do not define "god"; and 4) that unknown and unknowable realms exist. Here are my disagreements with Mr. Baker:

1) Experimental science, as I discussed in my paper, provides a foundation for questioning the existence of any supernatural event or entity. It may well be proven that, in fact, there are such events and entities, but the case has not been established so far. Thus, it is not only safe but proper to doubt the existence of the supernatural.

2) I am surprised by Mr. Baker's quandary with the phrase, "acceptance of the natural universe" and fail to see that a corollary of a basic logical principle (as *existence exists* is to *A is A*) presents a danger of either being irrational or dogmatic. I am willing to consider whether "acceptance of the natural universe" is unnecessary, but some minimal assumptions for thought (and communication) are an epistemological necessity. If apples are suddenly defined as oranges, can we discuss apples? Likewise, if sensory evidence is now defined as hallucinations instead of sensory evidence, then obviously we couldn't discuss sensory evidence. I prove the existence of the natural universe every day by my existence—I can't prove the existence of a supernatural one. Nor has science.

3) It is not the task of the atheist to define the supernatural. The religionist should define his or her god, or any other supernatural creation of his invention. The case, if not self-contradictory, can then be evaluated through scientific means for evidence of its existence. This has been done for many, many supernatural phenomena, and none have yet been established as the case.

4) Regarding the unknown and the unknowable. We all agree that there are new discoveries every day, and that what is now known was previously unknown. I think that we can also agree that some things may never be known. I don't know that this makes an unknown into an unknowable—and neither does Mr. Baker. Let him prove the existence of an unknowable, and I will agree. An unknowable, by definition, cannot be known. If Mr. Baker can make his unknowable known, then it was never unknowable in the first place. To assume the existence of the unknown is a platitude; to presume that anything could be unknowable is a non sequitor.

Kenneth R. Gregg, Jr.

This letter concerns the article ATHEISM VS NIHILISM in your January/February issue. I am a Nihilist. I don't believe in values, ethics, truth, science or the supernatural. It seems to me that clinging to beliefs in any of these things is the product of fear and superstition.

When I read the article, I felt its writer, Kenneth Gregg, was doing to my nihilist world view just what theists have been doing to atheism since there were atheists. This article made unfair assertions based on fear and prejudice, and without foundation painted a picture of the nihilist philosophy as ridiculous, dangerous and repugnant. I am used to this reaction and I choose to respond here in the interest of better understanding between people with open minds.

There is a cultural prejudice in our society which asserts that NOT believing in a value system larger than the individual and more durable than the moment is impossible for a sane person. Westerners tend to believe that rejection of belief will necessarily lead to massive violence, death and psychosis. I will start by saying that this is NOT what nihilism is. Consider the person who has a normal value system, then questions and rejects that and all other value systems. Does he or she magically become more prone to mayhem than before? On the other hand, is a highly moral person statistically less likely to lose his or her mind and kill for cause or at random? I don't think so.

Mr. Gregg explains how atheists "believe" in science. Does that mean science cannot be wrong? Does that mean science has never "proven" something that later turned out to be explained differently by subsequent generations? Science is nothing but a convenient process of using observation of causes and effects to sometimes predict desired effects. It is not a search for truth. Science is clearly fallible. Any current scientifically accepted "fact" may be proven flawed or wrong at any time. What Mr. Gregg has done is substitute the science-god for the gods of his ancestors. And he has replaced church dogma with an unexamined hodge-podge of accepted custom and superstition.

I do not believe in anything. I don't sit and vegetate. I don't constantly run amok. I live and do what I feel like doing at any given moment. In so doing, I am not that different, nor do I appear noticeably different, than other people. The only way in which I am different is in my head. I don't pretend to do things because they are right. I don't act kind because Jesus told me to. I am not cruel because of my worship of Satan. I don't seek knowledge because it is the scientific ethos. I just do what I do.

Our society does not see this as an option because the individual is to be subordinated. The individual who does not consider him or herself an impotent vassal of some externally imposed value system is naturally a threat.

I submit that the nihilist world view is not really so dangerous. Actually I have found it comfortable for myself, and even liberating.

Elisha Shapiro

## The author responds to E. Shapiro

Mr. Shapiro brings up several issues regarding nihilism and atheism which are important to consider. First, let me defend atheism.

Shapiro says that I "substitute the science-god for the gods of [my] . . . ancestors. And [I have] . . . replaced church dogma with an unexamined hodgepodge of accepted custom and superstition."

If by this Shapiro means that science has become an object of worship, I disagree, as does any person who examines the philosophy of science.

Scientific methodology is a self-correcting process which evaluates data (science is simply organized knowledge) and puts hypotheses into varying levels of confidence. Some hypotheses are considered fairly certain (at least until some new scientific revolution comes around and rearranges the contextual array, as I explained in my essay) while other notions are either disproven (through experimentation) or become unimportant for the wider set of laws built from the more significant hypotheses. This is not an infallible process, only the best one that humanity has discovered (and one clearly superior to intuition, faith, or common sense, for that matter).

If Mr. Shapiro can make a "god" out of this, I'd like to see it. I must admit, the term "god" is rather meaningless and I would like to know what he means. But since Shapiro rejects any standards, he can logically say that "god" is anything or nothing, or both, at the same time or at different times. If Shapiro defines a god, then he is using some methodology for establishing the claim and thus comes to reject his own nihilism.

If anything, rather than disproving my statements about nihilism, Mr. Shapiro has amply demonstrated the case I was making. As Shapiro jumps from one whim to another, in his search for the meaning that he denies exists, one cannot wonder whether at the flip of a coin, or a cloudy sunset, or a black cat walking in front of him, that he will suddenly decide that today is the day that he will "run amok" or suddenly become "ridiculous, dangerous and repugnant." That he is "not really so dangerous" is a testament to the fact that he does accept certain forms of behavior and certain standards and rejects his own claims of nihilism, whether he admits this to himself and others or not.

That Shapiro is even willing to argue the claims of my essay lead him into an internal contradiction. Arguing does not consist of free-floating propositions. Rather, it is an activity which presupposes truth-claiming and possibly true propositions. Thus, it follows that we both implicitly agree that some meaningful norms must exist—namely, those which make an issue arguable. This presupposes some *a priori* truth (which nihilism denies). Thus, anyone who denies that truth exists, is caught in a self-contradiction. For, contrary to what he would say, he would in fact have to presuppose the norms which underlay any argumentation whatsoever as valid simply in order to say anything at all. Ergo, even Shapiro cannot be a nihilist for the length of time it took for him to put pen to paper and write his reply.

Kenneth R. Gregg, Jr.

## QUOTELINE . . .

Collected by BERNARD KATZ

"Jesus and his disciples traveled with a band of women," says William Kirby, "a point that few modern day preachers care to mention. And Jesus was a compassionate man. A very compassionate man . . . Remember when the woman poured expensive ointment on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair? . . . Masters and Johnson were not the first to realize the usefulness of oils for sexual arousal . . . Then recall when, after the Resurrection, Mary Magdalene, a prostitute, clung to Jesus' feet. He said, 'Don't touch me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.' Well, I find it very interesting that the word 'touch' there, the Greek word, can mean anything from 'handle' to 'intercourse.'"

—William Kirby, chaplain at Princeton, item from May 27, 1983, *National Review*

Saudi Arabian King Fahd proposed recently that Islam's laws be brought up to date by a comprehensive revision, reviving a practice prohibited for more than ten centuries.

The Saudi monarch, custodian of Islam's holiest places, told an international conference of Islamic theologians the suspension of *ijtihad*, the modification of Islam's laws on such things as commercial, criminal and family matters has contributed to the decline of the Moslem world.

(*Ijtihad* was outlawed in the 4th Islamic century—our 10th century.)

Islamic scholars meeting in Islamabad, Pakistan, have denounced Darwin's evolutionary theory, Freud's psychoanalysis and Karl Marx's communism as antagonistic to Islamic beliefs. Calling for a purging of these "deleterious elements" from Islamic educational materials, one speaker said that Darwin, Marx and Freud were irreligious thinkers who presented a picture of the world from which God had been ejected.

The average attendance at Protestant churches in England every Sunday is 60 people, but one-third of the churches attract 25 or fewer worshippers.

The average congregation at Roman Catholic churches in England is 373. British churches lost one million members in the 1970s and 1,000 churches closed.

So reported World Vision, a religious research organization. It based its findings on questionnaires sent to all 39,269 churches in England, 39% of which responded.

A clergyman of Fort Worth, Texas, is offering a \$1,000 reward to anyone who can demonstrate a "miracle healing."

Pope Paul John II gave the Jesuits a firm lecture about obedience to Church tradition. In the U.S. and Europe, some Jesuits have publicly challenged priestly celibacy and the church's ban on artificial birth control.

A jury in Santa Ana, Calif., has ordered the International Society of Krishna Consciousness to pay more than \$32 million in damages to a woman and her mother. They contended the younger woman was kidnapped and brainwashed by the religious sect.

The information director of the Krishna offices in Los Angeles said: "The Hare Krishna religion is no more guilty of falsely imprisoning Robin George than the U.S. Army is guilty of imprisoning its enlistees or the Catholic Church is of brainwashing its clergy."

"The message from too many pulpits is 'me first,' instead of sacrifice; therapy, not theology; homage to humanistic values, not God's word . . . We're told what we want to hear, not shown the way of the cross."

—George Marsden, professor at Calvin College

"To claim situational ethics is a Satanic trick suddenly inflicted on us by Godless humanists would be laughable if it didn't bear the threat of state action."

—Martin McCaffrey, Alabama Civil Liberties Union

Prospective students at the University of Pennsylvania were recently asked to submit essays on the question: "If you could spend an evening with any one person, living, deceased or fictional, whom would you choose and why?" The top three choices of the 8,000 essayists were God, Jesus and Chrysler Chairman Lee Iaccocca.

From John F. Kennedy: "I have asked Cardinal Spellman how to deal with the question of the pope's infallibility. And Cardinal Spellman said: 'I don't know what to tell you. All I can say is he keeps calling me Spillman.'"

In New Delhi, India, 27 people were killed and 200 injured when the sight of a pig which strayed into a religious festival, triggered bloody clashes between Moslems and Hindus. Pigs are anathema to Moslems, who consider the animal a Satan in hiding. Moslems do not eat pork or bacon and the slaughter of pigs is banned in Moslem nations.

Freud said that God has been guilty of a shoddy and uneven piece of work. E.O. Wilson, one of the originators of "Sociobiology," adds: "That is true to a degree greater than he intended: human nature is just one hodgepodge out of many conceivable."

When Reagan proposed an amendment to allow prayer back into the public schools, he used a White-house background paper which said that school prayer had been a "widespread practice for 170 years."

Contrary to this claim is a seldom-cited survey taken 22 years ago which proves that most children in the West and Midwest never uttered an amen in class before the Court's 1962 ban. The findings show that 33 percent of the schools had prayer, 17 percent had some prayer, and 50 percent had none at all!

## Book Reviews



### THE SCIENCE CRITIC: A Critical Analysis of the Popular Presentation of Science

By Maurice Goldsmith

Every reader of articles and essays on science in newspapers and most magazines has come across misrepresentations of scientific facts. Science is news and newsmen in general are not sufficiently equipped to present a clear and comprehensive story to the average reader. They are not the only ones who do not understand the impact of new discoveries. The President of the Royal Society in England admitted that he was "in the privileged position of not understanding the paper being given and that he had given up reading a scientific journal because most of it was incomprehensible to him.

The early popularizers of science made it very clear that their stories were for a select little band and not for the masses. The widely popular lectures of Huxley and Tyndall were important only to those who could read and write and had little effect on the working classes. However, in today's world information about new inventions and new remedies in medicine is readily available and the author, Director of the International Science Policy Foundation in London, claims that few have a real understanding of what science really is and how it works. To him, science is part of the process of social and cultural evolution and gives different answers at different times.

This general theme is developed in detail in chapters on "The Press," "Books," "Film," "TV," "Radio" not forgetting the tremendous impact of "Science Fiction." Maurice Goldsmith has asked for the development of a competent science critic and the public appreciation of the impact of science since 1974. He wants the science critic to see the whole picture, an overall view.

A large section of the book is devoted to "Examples of Presentation" from the Greek Empedocles over the Russian Mendeleyev, Joliet-Curie to Einstein, mentioning only a few names in the fascinating array of inventions and their discoverers. He mentions the remarks of Mrs. Einstein, when told about the 1 Million dollar telescope being built to determine the shape of the universe, "But Albert did it on the back of an old envelope."

This is a fascinating book loaded with many facets of science. It may be a good idea to close this review with a little poems by the Czech poet Jan Skacel:

Poets don't invent poems,  
The poem is somewhere behind  
It's been there for a long time,  
The poet discovers it only.

Our author added his version:

Scientists don't invent laws  
The law is somewhere around  
It's been there for a long time,  
The scientist only discovers it.

Walter Hoops

Routledge & Kegan Paul, London/New York, 1986, cloth, 217 p.  
\$29.95. Available from Book Service AR, 2001 St. Clair, St. Louis,  
MO 63144 for price plus \$1. handling.

## CHAOS: MAKING A NEW SCIENCE

By James Gleick

It's exciting to see something which may be part of the next scientific revolution. This is precisely what James Gleick, reporter for the New York Times, has done in *Chaos: Making a New Science*. Since Edward Lorenz, a meteorologist at MIT, discovered the Butterfly Effect (if a butterfly in Brazil flapped its wings, it could well produce a tornado in Texas) two decades ago, the notion that "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" radically effects the outcome of physical phenomena has taken hold to build a new, non-linear understanding of the order that lurks behind the natural world.

The implication of chaos theory is that the world is unpredictable in terms of calculus, which assumes smooth surfaces and infinitesimally small steps, and that orthodox mathematical tools are deeply flawed in dealing with predicting normal phenomena. Rather, complex mathematics founded in computer-based fractal geometry, non-linear thermodynamics, the "Feigenbaum number," "strange attractors" and the intricacies of information theory provide better mathematical explanatory models for us. Every science that uses mathematics (which is to say every field of science)—from physics to economics—may change forever due to outcomes of this new line of research.

Gleick walks us through these concepts in an entertaining and as non-mathematical form as is likely to be found on this new field of investigation. Parts of the book are difficult to follow, but very worthwhile.

Kenneth R. Gregg, Jr.

New York: Viking, 1987, 352 page hardback, \$19.95. Available from Book Service AR, 2001 St. Clair Ave, St. Louis, MO 63144, for price plus \$1. handling.

## THE MATURE SPIRIT: Religion Without Supernatural Hopes

By Philip Mayer

No question about it: Philip Mayer is a good man, the "lovingkindness" kind of Sarah Cleghorn. He describes in this book his pilgrimage from relative conservative Methodism via Universalist and Unitarian connections to the Society of Friends (Quakers). There is not a single reference to freethought, agnosticism, atheism in this autobiography. He stops at what he calls religious naturalism. It is hard to believe that he did not come across those movements in his life and that a "mature spirit" would have not come to terms with it.

Philip Mayer has replaced the supernatural God with a naturalistic Jesus since the God believers have neglected practical concerns such as peace, race, poverty, abortion because, as he puts it, they are more concerned with their peace with God than peace with Man. I believe it is basically Mayer's concerns as an

activist for a number of good causes that has brought about his dissatisfaction with supernatural religion.

His chapters on clerical Modernism, Neo-Orthodoxy and current religious trends are revealing and so are his reports on the origin of the gospels. When he talks about the "Christianizing" of early documents and mythological texts of Mark, Matthew, John and Paul one has to admire the scholarship that went into it. He undermines the "truth" of God's word and for this an atheist reviewer is thankful.

Walter Hoops

Pittenbruach Press, Northampton, Ma. 1987, 173 p., paper, \$10.95.  
Available from Book Service AR, 2001 St. Clair, St. Louis, MO 63144  
for price plus \$1. handling.

## NO WAY—THE NATURE OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

By Philip J. Davis & David Park

When Sir James Hill wrote in 1751 that "It becomes a wise man not to think anything impossible" it made good sense because the frontiers of all sciences were pushed back almost every year. The authors of this book: Philip J. Davis, Professor of Applied Mathematics at Brown University and David Park, Professor of Physics at Williams College, takes as its motto: To live at the boundary between the possible and the impossible and to be aware of it, is to be truly alive. They prove their point by assembling essays by prominent scientists on Biology, Medicine, Technology, Physics and Mathematics. When they touch on the realm of Law, Politics, Economics, Poetry, Education and Music the contributors prefer the term impracticability and that is really a different ball game. To say that something is impossible in politics means only that changes must be made to make certain things possible. In Economics the common observation is made that it is impossible for an economist to predict individual outcomes with precision and impossible . . . to predict particular outcomes as contrasted to general patterns of events. The "impossibility" statement that makes sense in Education reads: The goal of becoming a perfect parent carries the seed of guilt, blame, disappointed expectations, and defeat. . . . It is possible to become a perfect parent by tolerating, forgiving, and transcending imperfections, our own and those of our children. We shall become perfect parents by accepting the impossibility of such a goal.

When it comes to poetry one can agree with the statement that a poem may be translated with varying degrees of success, no translator can hope to transpose the original poem into a perfect English counterpart. Looking at some modern poetry the reader may well come to the conclusion that it is not impossible to do that which has never been done. The same can be said about modern music. The chapter on "In Defense of Common Sense" concludes: If the skeptic's endeavors to show us what cannot be achieved lead to a better understanding of what can be and is achieved in science, theology, or whatever it may be, then we owe him at least a measure of gratitude.

Walter Hoops

W.H. Freeman and Co. New York, N.Y. 1987. 325 p. cloth. \$17.95.  
Available from Book Service AR, 2001 St. Clair, St. Louis, MO 63144  
for price plus \$1. handling.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ARGUMENTS FOR GOD

By Charles J. Caes

Normally we would never neglect to review a book on this subject. Yet, somehow this book got by us when it was first published in 1983. Since it is still in print, we will try to make up for our past omission. The book is a short discussion of what the author considers to be the four main arguments for the existence of God (in a philosophical sense). They are the Ontological argument, the Cosmological argument, the Teleological (design) argument, and the Moral argument. Actually, although these are the oldest arguments, there are a number of additional ones (I count 11 in my pamphlet, *How To Argue With a Theist and Win*, plus one more that I only discovered after that pamphlet was printed). But, let's deal with the four arguments the present author addresses.

He seems unaware that serious criticism has been made of some of the arguments in a way much stronger than any of the critics he cites. The author seems unaware of George H. Smith's *Atheism: the Case Against God* (1974, reprinted 1980), which deals with all except the Ontological argument in a devastating way. He also does not know of Lee Carter's *Lucifer's Handbook*, which also levels much devastation at the arguments. If fact, our author seems to grudgingly admit that none of the four are philosophically or logically convincing, yet "They point not merely to the possibility of God but to the strong probability of His existence." This is an error on the part of the author of the most serious kind. An argument that does not lead logically and compellingly to the desired conclusion is of no value in establishing the truth of that desired end. It is not a continuum with which we are dealing, but a dichotomy. A given fact is either completely true in logic or it is completely false. There are no "partially true" or "partially false" propositions. The failure to recognize this shows that the author is not well trained in logic.

Although the four arguments are presented clearly in layman's language, with historical background, the flaws in the argument are not presented thoroughly. That removes a great deal of the potential value of the book. There are others (as those mentioned above) that provide the rationalist with a better introduction to the so-called "proofs" for the existence of God.

Gordon Stein, Ph.D.

Libra Publications, 1983, 82 p. hardback, \$7.95. Available from Book Service AR, 2001 St. Clair Ave., St. Louis, MO 63144, for price plus \$1. handling.

### CHANNELING: *Investigations on Receiving Information from Paranormal Sources*

by Jon Klimo

This is a truly astonishing book. The most astonishing thing about it is that it was written by someone who supposedly has a doctoral degree in education or educational psychology (it's not clear). The major failing of the book is that it is a vast mishmash of information, gathered from all sources, and no real attempt is made to evaluate whether any of the re-

search is any better than any other. What Klimo does is to treat all claims from researchers as of equal validity, namely correct. He lumps the work of Nobel prosewinners in with the work of self-proclaimed "cranks," Surely not everything anyone says he has found in his or her research is therefore established as fact. Some research is well done, and other research is poorly done, and the results from it are therefore worthless.

By accepting all sorts of results indiscriminately, Klimo is able to claim that virtually any thing he wishes were so has been established by someone or other's research. Channeling is the new fad these days, and many of the channelers are *demonstrable* frauds. I did not say *all* are demonstrably fraudulent, although they may be fraudulent. How quickly we forget that we have seen all this before in the form of spiritualist seances, popular from 1850 to 1930. Although Klimo recognizes this fact, he fails to follow through on the additional fact that fraud was rampant in mediumship, and was continually exposed by Houdini and others. Klimo additionally complicates things when he claims that Jesus was a channeled personality (p 88). Nowhere is there a serious consideration that this whole craze may just be a gigantic ripoff. I don't think that *that* has to be the conclusion that the author reaches, but I think it *does* need to be considered.

I guess my whole criticism of this volume boils down to the fact that the author has failed to exercise his critical judgement on the material included, and, worse, his background should have made him able and obliged to do this analysis. There is much information here, but only the well-informed dare use it.

Gordon Stein, Ph.D.

Jeremy Tarcher, Inc., 1987, 384p hardback, \$18.95. Available from Book Service AR, 2001 St. Clair Ave., St. Louis, MO 63144, for price plus \$1. handling.

### GODS \* SPIRITS \* COSMIC GUARDIANS: *A Comparative Study of the Encounter Experience*

by Hillary Evans

Hillary Evans is perhaps the best theorist of the encounter experience writing today. He doesn't just examine the evidence, but he also categorizes it, organizes it and draws conclusions from it. The hallmark of his writing is rationality. He will examine any idea to see if it could possibly have merit. In fact, he lists more "way out" ideas as possibilities than you ever thought could exist. He then examines the evidence for each before deciding whether to keep it as a real possibility or not. The result, in this book, is the most meticulous and careful examination of all of the phenomena in which some being that is definitely not a normal human appears to human beings. This includes gods, angels, the Virgin Mary, ghosts, demons, and "extraterrestrials." In fact, the very originality of Evans' thought includes the idea (a good one, it turns out) of considering that all of these appearance phenomena may have a common root and therefore a common explanation.

When you take the problem as slowly and carefully as Evans does, you are bound to make some readers

say, "hurry up and get to the point," but I found the thoroughness and care to be well worth the wait. You can see that these phenomena probably are all closely related, and that there is at least the possibility that one explanation can suffice for all these types of encounters. *That* is quite an accomplishment, and, what's more, I think Evans' explanation is probably close to correct. No, I'm not going to give you his conclusions here. That would spoil the fun. You have got to read this for yourself if you value reason as a tool that can be useful in solving even the seemingly irrational problems of encounters with supposed beings from the supernatural or from outer space.

Gordon Stein, Ph.D.

Aquarian Press, 1987, 287 page paperback, £8. Available from Book Service AR, 2001 St. Clair Ave., St. Louis, MO 63144, for \$14.50, plus \$2. postage and handling.

## AT THE ORIGINS OF MODERN ATHEISM.

By Michael J. Buckley

This is a massive (445 pages) and meticulous study of the origins of atheism, written by a Jesuit priest. There have been a number of previous books on atheism (although not on this scale) written by Catholic priests. In all the previous cases that I have reviewed, the priest merely examined the works and ideas of Freud, Marx, Sartre, Nietzsche, and sometimes Camus, and thought that he had studied and refuted atheism. This, of course, is both laughable and pathetic. Sure, Freud was an atheist, as was Marx, but they were not the seminal philosophers of atheism.

In contrast, Buckley seems aware of Charles Bradlaugh, and devotes much space to Baron d'Holbach, as well as to Denis Diderot, Feuerbach, Meslier, La Mettrie, Spinoza and Voltaire. Still he does not seem to know of the works of the freethought movement, although few were as early as the period he treats. Buckley, however, has an out. His book is not a *history of atheism*, or a study of modern atheism, but rather a study of the *origins* of modern atheism. This means that coverage ends in about 1800. Most of the effort is devoted to the early writers of the 1700s who were the first to openly call themselves atheists or to openly write about atheist ideas. It does seem strange, however, that Buckley is unwilling to attach these 200+ years-old writings to the threads that bring those ideas through to the present.

If you accept the limitations Buckley has imposed upon himself, Buckley has done a fine job. His theological prejudices do not often show, although occasionally one can catch a glimpse of them. We are often at a loss to separate his personal feelings from those he attributes to the thinkers he is studying. I'd prefer to give him the benefit of the doubt, however.

He is astute enough to credit Diderot with a large influence in the establishment of the legitimacy of atheism as a philosophical position. His analysis of the influence of d'Holbach seems to play down his importance, perhaps unfairly. Jean Meslier is given much credit for being the first public atheist of the period, but Buckley is incorrect when he says that d'Holbach himself put Meslier's name to Holbach's *Le*

*Bon Sens* in 1772. First, Meslier's name does not appear on this work until much later, and second d'Holbach had nothing to do with the placing of Meslier's name. That was probably done by an ill-informed publisher. The facts of this case are difficult to come by, but it certainly should have been easy enough for Buckley to look at a copy of the first edition of *Le Bon Sens* and see that Meslier's name does not appear in it as author.

It seems to me that the very weakest part of the book is again Buckley's failure to tie his extensive research to the modern day. We see various threads of early atheism, but it is not clear exactly what their influence was upon Freud, Marx, organized free-thought (Carlile, Watts, Holyoake, Bradlaugh, Besant, Ingersoll, etc.). Perhaps there was little effect. Maybe the intellectual precepts of atheism were worked out again *de novo* by these nineteenth century atheists. I think not, but Buckley never tells us. He has supplied a few more pieces of the puzzle, but there are still a number missing.

Gordon Stein, Ph.D.

Yale University Press, 1987, 445 page hardback, \$27.50. Available from Book Service AR, 2001 St. Clair Ave, St. Louis, MO 63144, for price plus \$1. handling.

## FIFTY MAJOR PHILOSOPHERS: A Reference Guide

by Diane Collinson

This is a somewhat unusual reference book. It is a series of short (about 3 pages) essays on the lives and thought of fifty people whom the author feels are the major philosophers. The essays themselves are adequate in most cases. There is some evaluation of the thought of each person, but there is often a slighting of the coverage of the person's views on religion or God. Perhaps this is really not so important to the author, but it would have been useful to rationalists to know where each philosopher stood on the God issue.

More perplexing and troublesome are some of the author's choices (and omissions) from the book. For example, Galileo is included as a major *philosopher*. There is no doubt that he was important and that his scientific ideas had a big effect on subsequent thought, but it is really stretching things to call him a philosopher. The inclusion of Joseph Butler is also questionable. Although his *Analogy of Religion* was often quoted by theologians of the time as the best defense of the design argument, today his work is not read and his thinking discarded. Surely *that* is adequate grounds for his omission from the book. The omission of Lucretius, Diogenes, and Protagoras is puzzling. The mere fact that some of their works are lost can be no excuse for their omission, as several other ancients whose *entire* works have been lost *are* included. There is also a useful glossary.

Readers will find many of their old friends here (Russell, Bentham, Mill, Nietzsche, Sartre, Schopenhauer, etc.), and their entries are unobjectionable. It's a good review of the thought of the fifty people included.

Gordon Stein, Ph.D.

Croom Helm, 1987, 170 page paperback, \$11.95. Available from Book Service AR, 2001 St. Clair Ave., St. Louis, MO 63144, for price plus \$1. handling.



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