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Religion and Free Thought

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Introduction by Editor of Special Issue on Religion and Freethought

Many radicals believed a hundred years ago that the rise of what we now call *critical thinking*—the powerful combination of science, reason, and emphasis on evidence—meant that religion would soon dwindle as a factor in society. The demolition of biblical authority by the “higher criticism” and of creationist concepts by those of Darwin provided some grounds for those expectations. The present resurgence of religion in many nations suggests that the facts are quite otherwise. This issue of *Nature, Society, and Thought* gathers some essays and reviews that deal with issues, ideas, and trends related to freethought and religion considered historically and in the present-day context.

My essay reviews some of the basic Marxist concepts of religion and assesses their relevance, calling for a new depth of analysis. Howard S. Miller explores in some detail the life and writing of Kate Austin, an “obscure” freethinker who lived in rural Missouri at the turn of the century. The expanses of the United States were peppered with such courageous “village atheists,” and Miller thoroughly documents the energy and purpose of one who was respected and esteemed by no less than Emma Goldman. In its golden age, from the Civil War until about 1910, the freethought movement had a striking if always minority existence, but no less real and pertinent for its small number of adherents. We do well to remember and reflect that in its best periods, the U.S. radical tradition had its representatives in the farms and the villages, as well as in the great cities.

In Austin’s time, everyone knew what a freethinker was; now, it is almost (if not quite) an archaic term. One has to distinguish freethinking carefully, for example, from cults like

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Scientology. This is not the place to unravel the disparate and somewhat contradictory strands of the freethought movement, but it is clear that any movement not incorporating its emphasis on critical thinking and taking a stand against illusion will probably turn out badly flawed and weakened. At this writing, the *New York Times* (5 April 1997) prints a report by Michael Specter about “medieval witch-hunts” in modern Russia; women are being accused as witches and murdered by villagers, and a police officer is quoted as saying, “We can’t just tell everyone in this town that magic is nonsense”—although, the reporter adds, “it is clear that he would like to.” Such are the consequences of ideological weakness and the inability to confront superstition.

B. Premanand, a contemporary skeptical activist in India, has long recognized the need to challenge ignorance and trickery. We include an interview with him by Shinnie Antony that introduces his remarkable book, *Science versus Miracles*. Premanand has personally exposed hundreds of “godmen” in India over the last fifty years, and in his lectures he balances such exposés with illustrations of the need for ethnic toleration and socialism.

On the more theoretical side, Finngeir Hiorth reviews important texts in the freethought tradition in Sweden. A strength of the freethought tradition, from the Enlightenment onward, has been its international aspect. Every nation has its activists and scholars in the cause of reason and justice. Norm R. Allen Jr. analyzes the role of religion in the work of “new Black intellectuals” like Cornel West, elucidating how religion may not only provide strengths, but weaknesses and compromises with Establishment culture.

Corinna Lotz and Gerry Gold contribute a review essay, “Matter, God and the New Physics,” reconsidering the relevance of Engels’s views on natural philosophy and science, and applying them to the work of cosmologist Paul Davies. Directing our attention back many centuries, Gerald M. Erickson reviews a recent history of paganism in ancient Europe.

It may be excessive to claim that the role of freethought in the Marxist and progressive traditions is now being fully restored, but we can say that we have made a start in that direction.

Fred Whitehead

The Challenge of Explanation

Fred Whitehead

One of the tests of science is whether a hypothesis or theory explains phenomena, either particular or universal. Newton's law of gravity was epochal because it revealed an operative principle affecting an extraordinary range of events, from planetary motion to the tides of the sea. Nowadays, biological and medical science is concentrating on what may seem minute in the genetic material, but in its broad sweep aims at developing genomes for entire species, and promises to unlock the causes of many diseases and hereditary syndromes. Conversely, if a hypothesis fails to explain the facts, it must be discarded.

It is curious, then, that we should seem to be in such difficulty with reference to a workable scientific theory of religion. At the turn of the twentieth century, revolutionaries even thought that religion had essentially been vanquished in the realm of argument, and that it might soon disappear altogether. In the USSR, a museum collected artifacts of faith as if they were relics. Yet churches are now experiencing a rebirth there, not only the Orthodox Church, which has reverted to its traditional support of a conservative state, but also the evangelical churches, especially those imported from the United States. The southern edge of the former Soviet Union is experiencing civil conflict that amounts to a holy war by Islamic fundamentalists. From the Balkans through the Middle East, to Africa, Afghanistan, and India, religious disputes are an important part of similar wars. What purposes are served by such horrors? What are the conditions that produce them? In the United States we have a powerful

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resurgence of the religious Right, with its attack on women, Darwinism, and multiculturalism, while an immensely popular new literature of “spirituality” appeals to millions. Although there have been some efforts in the popular press to provide explanations of religious beliefs and practices (Panati 1996), most people appear happy merely to assent to them. In contrast, the old Enlightenment skepticism, which had connections to Marxism, has been generally marginalized and even rendered impotent. In such circumstances, it may be worthwhile to review Marxist concepts of religion in the context of present-day theoretical debates, concentrating on the crucial issue of whether these concepts retain their validity and relevance.

The classical Marxist concepts of religion

Marx’s debt to Hegel is too well known to require lengthy discussion here. It is sufficient to note Hegel’s contribution in perceiving the importance of historical periods on a world scale, and his emphasis on dialectics during the changes those periods saw come to pass. In a famous comment, Marx said Hegel’s dialectic was “standing on its head” and that “it must be turned right side up again” (1996, 19), i.e., the long-standing idealist systems overturned and replaced with materialist concepts. However, we should not overlook the influence of the general freethought culture of Germany during Marx’s time, which included the heroic antiabsolutism of Schiller and other poets, the rise of modern biblical scholarship and criticism, and radical working-class democratic politics.

This is not the place for probing all the crosscurrents involved, but Feuerbach’s contribution must be acknowledged. “In the nineteenth century,” one historian recently commented, “he was recognized as Europe’s most famous and powerful atheist, the herald of a new anti-Christian and anti-idealist era” (Harvey 1996/7). This same scholar states that Feuerbach was “one of the profoundest critics of religion in the history of western thought . . . more profound than Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.” Feuerbach not only attended Hegel’s lectures; he emerged as one of his most trenchant materialist critics. Among his seminal contributions to the scientific understanding of

religion was the concept of projection, that instead of God making man, it was man who made God or gods (1967, 17). This was not a new concept, for some of the ancient Greeks also grasped it. Xenophanes said that “if oxen and horses or lions had hands, and could paint with their hands, and produce works of art as men do, horses would paint the forms of the gods like horses, and oxen like oxen, and make their bodies in the image of their several kinds” (Burnet 1957, 119). He noted as another instance, that “the Ethiopians make their gods black and snub nosed; the Thracians say theirs have blue eyes and red hair.” As a general principle, Xenophanes said “mortals deem that the gods are begotten as they are, and have clothes like theirs, and voice and form.” In addition to projection, Feuerbach suggested the importance of wish fulfillment in beliefs such as a peaceful Heaven, thus anticipating Freud.

Like Freud, Feuerbach emphasized anthropology, discussing practices like fetishism. Marx’s famous section in *Capital*, “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secrets Thereof,” probably owes an intellectual debt to Feuerbach. Seeing himself in dramatic terms, as a “herald” of freethought, Feuerbach declared that his purpose was “to transform theologians into anthropologists, lovers of God into lovers of man, candidates for the next world into students of this world, religious and political flunkies of heavenly and earthly monarchs and lords into free, self-reliant citizens of the earth” (1967, 23). The latter phrase echoes the old Enlightenment watchword that revolutionaries must become “citizens of the world.”

It was in response to Feuerbach that Marx wrote in 1845 his famous “Theses on Feuerbach” (Marx 1976), appended by Engels to his own retrospective *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* of 1886 (Engels 1990a). The theses contain the essence of Marx’s new contribution to social, political, economic, and philosophical theory. While agreeing with Feuerbach on much, Marx argues that he had no real explanation for why things were the way they were. “Feuerbach starts out,” he says, “from the fact of religious self-estrangement, of the duplication of the world into a religious, imaginary world and a real one. His work consists in resolving the religious world

into its secular basis. He overlooks the fact that after completing this work, the chief thing still remains to be done.” As an instance of work remaining, Marx notes that “once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be criticized in theory and transformed in practice.” Feuerbach, Marx continues, “does not see that the ‘religious sentiment’ is itself a *social product*, and that the abstract individual which he analyzes belongs in reality to a particular form of society” (1976, 7). In sum, Marx concludes, “social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice” (1976, 8). Thus, as he so often did, Marx took a liberal thinker who was notably “progressive” as we would say today and defined his own views in opposition to him.

An instance of how religion reflected social beliefs is found in the Olympic pantheon of Zeus, Hera, Ares, Hephaistos, etc. Hephaistos represented the metal workers, who actually had cults honoring their deity. While details of such cults are largely lost, we do know that they were elaborate, included parades and festivals on given dates, rather like the saint’s days still observed. When I was in Athens in 1983, I visited the Theseion, the ancient temple of Hephaistos near the Agora, and one of the best preserved in all of Greece. I was told that this section of the city is still a center for metalworking trades, and when I walked through the neighborhood, I found numerous small shops selling articles of brass, copper, iron, etc., both practical and ornamental. It was visual proof of what Feuerbach and Marx had said, that religious beliefs have visible connections to social life, through the passage of many centuries.

In addition to Feuerbach, whose influence was literary and impersonal, the poet Heinrich Heine was a close friend of Marx and his family. While Heine was no theoretician, we must note his importance as a satirical voice of skepticism and reason, and his respect for the ideological progress introduced into Europe during the French Revolution (Heine 1948). Heine’s wit enlivened conversation among the exiles in Paris. Later on, his songs were so well known and popular that even the Nazis could not

suppress them, though they were printed as if they were anonymous compositions.

While some have tried to soften Marx's views concerning religion, his texts are quite clear. In the Introduction to "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," he writes that "criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism." He goes on to state, "The basis of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion*, religion does not make man." Religion, he continues, "is the *fantastic realisation* of the human essence because the *human essence* has no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly a fight against *the world* of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*" (1975, 175).

Then follows the most famous passage in Marx's work concerning religion, his statement that it is the "*opium* of the people," i.e., that it is merely an illusory but comforting anesthetic. Less known, however, is the phrase that immediately precedes this text, that religion is "the heart of a heartless world," that it provides some mental respite for the poor, who need it so urgently. That is to say, Marx saw religion like everything else, in dialectical terms, with a regressive and a progressive side; indeed, Feuerbach himself had emphasized this same idea when he noted that religion has a negative aspect in its dependence and fear and a positive one in its longing for justice and peace.

Despite the fruitful suggestiveness of such passages, their fertility as points of departure, it must be said that Marx did not go on to elaborate his views on religion in any systematic way. His main focus was on political economy, though from time to time in books, polemics, and correspondence there are remarkable insights.

Bruno Bauer and other biblical scholars had their influence, especially on Engels, who took a particular interest in ancient history. Ferdinand Benary, for instance, believed that he had "decoded" 666, the enigmatic number of the Beast in the Book of Revelation, through assigning numerical values to letters of the Greek alphabet spelling "Nero Caesar"—an explanation that Engels cites and that still has currency among biblical scholars today (Engels 1990b, 465–6). And Engels has remarkably insightful passages about the historical nature of religious beliefs

and leaders of movements in his book on the Peasant War in Germany (Engels 1978, chap. 2).

Lenin's most extended discussion of religion came during 1908 and 1909, when he was combating the school of empirio-criticism, some advocates of which proposed to resuscitate religion via "God-Seeking" (1968). The writer Maxim Gorki fell under the influence of this group, and several probing letters and articles on the subject between Lenin and Gorki survive. In the aftermath of the defeat of the 1905 Revolution and the subsequent police repression, some radicals turned away from politics to seek solace in the "Eternal." The discussion has a distinctly contemporary ring to it: "A *host* of the most prominent present-day physicists," Lenin objected, "*on the occasion* of the 'wonder' of radium, electrons, etc., are smuggling in the *God business*—both the crudest and the most subtle—in the shape of philosophical idealism" (1973, 84). The close alliance between the Czarist aristocracy and the Orthodox Church no doubt sharpened Lenin's antagonism to religion. In assessing Tolstoy, Lenin noted the contradictory nature of his views: "The fight against the official church was combined with the preaching of a new, purified religion, that is to say, of a new, refined, subtle poison for the masses" (1974, 325). In particular, Lenin objected to Tolstoy's doctrine of nonresistance to evil, which he thought condemned the masses to perpetual submission to suffering and landlord rule.

Another concept that arose around this time was the Weber thesis linking Protestantism and the rise of capitalism (Weber 1958). There had been a few hints of this in Marx, but Weber elaborated it, and brought the connection forward in a highly influential form. The British historian R. H. Tawney further popularized and defended it (1952). I remember a discussion of this with the late African-American Communist writer Claude Lightfoot, who had written a penetrating book on the history of racism and antiracism in Germany (Lightfoot 1972). Lightfoot said he had always wondered why Luther emphasized the doctrine of justification by faith versus good works. Bad as medieval Catholicism was, said Lightfoot, it at least preserved some sense of obligation to others, but Luther ruthlessly severed all such

connections. Early in the sixteenth century, the individualistic basis of capitalism had been promulgated in the form of a religious doctrine. Other aspects of this concept we might note are the penny-pinching character of the Puritans, their endless and obsessive search of the self for lurking evil, their sexual repressions, and their obdurate hatred of aristocracy. In short, according to Weber and Tawney, we could not fully understand the nature of Protestantism without recognizing its intimate ties with its historical, social context. There have been objections to the Weber thesis, such as that capitalism also arose in Catholic nations, and so on, but the thesis remains a fruitful one.

In later Marxist historiography, George Thomson made important contributions with his studies of ancient Greek mythology and religion, demonstrating, for instance, how Hesiod's *Theogony* represented phases of historical change (1955). Similarly, Archibald Robertson explored the rise of Christianity and the decline of the Roman empire, emphasizing Christianity's adaptability (1962). The U.S. Marxist philosopher Barrows Dunham demolished various transcendental beliefs in books that reached a fair amount of popularity before the attacks of the McCarthy era, during which he was dismissed from his position as professor and chair of the Department of Philosophy at Temple University (Dunham 1947, 1953). A later work reviewed the entire history of Western political philosophy, including much suggestive analysis of religious disputes (1964). Dunham found a pattern of perpetual antagonism between the orthodox and the heretics; naturally he sided with the latter and chose as one of his conclusive examples the U.S. Socialist Party leader Eugene V. Debs.

More recently, Herbert Aptheker became interested in furthering a Marxist-Christian dialogue in the 1960s, motivated in part by his experience with witnessing marching African-American Christians in the civil rights movement. He edited one notable collection of essays on Marx and religion, both pro and con (1968), and authored a book of essays on various aspects of the relationship as well (1970).

Finally, we may note the work of Paul Siegel, which reviews the Enlightenment roots of Marxism, Marx's own views,

followed by surveys of major religions such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and so on (1986). Siegel points out that freedom of religion was guaranteed in the early days of the USSR under the authority of none other than Lenin himself, who, however, also insisted that the Party continue a determined campaign against religion. Siegel believes that Stalin corrupted Russia with his autocratic, dictatorial ways, but surely it is evident that Lenin's distinction could be blurred rather easily, i.e., if the state guaranteed freedom of religion, but the Party became dominant and sharply opposed religion, the difference would become merely academic. My point is not so much to apportion error here, as to observe that the revolution faced a dilemma: how to guarantee freedom of religion on the one hand and oppose religion as reactionary and counterrevolutionary on the other. In any case, such issues are not easily resolved.

This survey of basic concepts is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to give the main ideas of the Marxist-related philosophy of religion. Later, we shall see if they still retain their power to explain historical developments today.

Two recent theories of religion

Within the last four years, two scholars have proposed theories of religion, making passing reference to Marx, but proceeding in what they claim are new directions. Stewart Elliott Guthrie, an anthropologist at Fordham University, published *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (1993), which takes its title from a passage in Hume, that people anthropomorphize nature, giving human forms to alien celestial orbs, the "man in the moon" concept. Guthrie acknowledges that the Greeks, especially Xenophanes, had already formulated this idea, but that until his work, it has never been developed in a systematic fashion. "Most people," he says, "see anthropomorphism as a superficial aspect of religion, not central to it." It consists "in their view of attributing humanity to gods. My view is roughly the opposite: that gods consist of attributing humanity to the world" (1993, 3–4).

Guthrie dismisses most believers' theories of religion as self-referential and provincial, i.e., they are self-contained or cannot

explain the general phenomena of religion with sufficient clarity. He then surveys humanist theories of religion and divides them into three categories: "The first, which may be called the wish-fulfillment group, holds that people create religion in order to alleviate unpleasant emotions." In this group he includes Marx, Spinoza, Hume, Feuerbach, and Freud. "The second, the social functionalist or social solidarity group, views religion as an attempt to sustain a social order." Here we find Polybius and Durkheim. "The third, or intellectualist group, to which my approach belongs, sees religion as an attempt to interpret and influence the world, a task it shares with science and common sense." In this group, aside from himself, we find Tylor, Lowie, and Otto (1993, 10–27).

There are some major problems with Guthrie's assessment of Marx. He mentions Marx more or less in passing and seems not to be familiar with his writings. For instance, he discusses Feuerbach without mentioning Marx's trenchant "Theses," which differ with Feuerbach so sharply. Furthermore, a good case can be made for also including Marx in the second group of theorists, those emphasizing social relations. Indeed, Marx's main objection to Feuerbach is this very point: that he could not grasp the social context in which religion functioned. Nor does Guthrie discuss how religion has been treated in the socialist experience, from either a theoretical or a practical aspect.

Within his limits, Guthrie is an intelligent and perceptive writer. His main purpose is to demonstrate how the tendency to anthropomorphize appears in a great range of societies—he believes, indeed, that it is universal. People want to feel at home in the world, in the universe, and create deities to make that possible. Guthrie draws not only on a wealth of anthropological material (this being his academic field), but he discusses the issue of anthropomorphizing in science, where we have radon "daughters," and "building blocks of the universe." Here, however, he again confronts a difficulty, because he himself cites numerous scientists such as Stephen J. Gould, who urge that we get past this importation of human needs or feelings into our understanding of nature. It could very well be argued that much of modern science has succeeded because it has achieved exactly

this—seeing nature on its own terms, rather than on ours. If anthropomorphizing is, as Guthrie argues, universal to the extent that modern science is successful, the tendency is not universal at all. Religious beliefs, he seems to say, are prerational and preobjective.

Another attractive and interesting feature of Guthrie's work is his gathering and analysis of a huge number of examples of anthropomorphization in art, religious objects, buildings, designs of psychological experiments, and so on. Many such images are found in mass media: "A summer squash wears a straw hat in a Japanese bank advertisement, and in a bar advertisement a squid pours sake for an octopus. A Chinese billboard for civic cleanliness gives a trash bin eyes, arms, legs and a mouth" (1993, 132). But here again he runs into analytic difficulties, because surely there is a large element of whimsy at work, which is different from a superstitious endowment of lightning with the authority of Zeus. It is a pity that Guthrie does not at this point take up Marx's seminal idea of the fetishism of commodities, with its ramification that religious ideation continues to find expression in modern "secular" society. Jim and Tammy Fay Baker's *Heritage U.S.A.* was the logical fulfillment of such a fantasy world, with its conflation of biblical themes and the crassest shopping-mall consumerism.

In short, while Guthrie's thesis is suggestive and important, he cannot adequately account for the facts of historical change, for how religion is used for purposes of control and diversion. Because he finds anthropomorphism to be pervasive, he fails to distinguish between its "believing" forms and those that are satirical or whimsical. And because Guthrie has not made such distinctions, toward the end of his book his analysis begins to break down in statements like "religious knowledge . . . does not seem very different from secular knowledge" (1993, 196); earlier he had argued that science and religion were conceptually opposed. He even waxes poetic: "Lacking a Hercules, we inhabit a world whose periphery is rankly overgrown. . . . Approaching that periphery, whose 'ultimacy' means its very resistance to analysis, we find our critical tools, such as science and philosophy, do not penetrate" (204). One senses at this point a slackness

of critical acuity. The main value of Guthrie's work is its wide range of examples of the anthropomorphizing type and its analysis of how they spring from the fundamental need to humanize the world, if only in an illusory way. The material about perception, especially in the summary of studies of cognition among infants, is quite well done.

Another ambitious effort to provide a new theory is John F. Schumaker's *The Corruption of Reality: A Unified Theory of Religion, Hypnosis, and Psychopathology* (1995). As the subtitle suggests, this aims at an overall view, similar to the effort, as yet unsuccessful, to produce a unified field theory in physics. Schumaker is a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Newcastle in Australia, and hence his approach arises from concepts in that field. A brief chapter surveys "the problem of reality"; Ernest Rossi, "an Ericksonian hypnotherapist, estimated that at least eighty percent of the information contained in the human mind is *false*" (1995, 21). Schumaker then takes up the concept of dissociation. This, he writes, "is the cognitive faculty that allows us to alternate in purposeful ways, and in varying degrees, between reality orientedness and a lack of reality orientation, while never actually abandoning an awareness of reality at the unconscious level" (52). Association, which combines sensations in a positive and productive way, is the opposite of dissociation, which by its nature involves mental instability. Schumaker, I hasten to add, means these terms in a descriptive, rather than a polemical way. He makes his own judgments clear, but the emphasis is on conceptual analysis. Schumaker then claims, rather tentatively, "now we have some initial evidence that religion, in all its varied forms, must also be understood as an expression of our dissociative faculty."

Closely related to, and dependent on, dissociation are the techniques of suggestion found in hypnosis and similar trance states. These, Schumaker argues, are frequently found in religious rituals and ceremonies, with their repetitive litanies, prayer formulas and credal recitations, and music. Recalling his own Catholic upbringing, Schumaker recalls how he emerged from a believing to a skeptical frame of mind, through comprehension of such psychological concepts: "I found myself growing

gradually more self-conscious and less self-confident about the religious things I was thinking and doing. Eventually, I gave up my religious obsessive-compulsive disorder” (1995, 149). He adds a curious story about a decisive moment in his evolution: “I recall quite clearly when, at one Sunday service following the changes in liturgy instituted by Vatican II, a polka band was substituted for the usual somnambulistic organ . . . the polka band music left me feeling completely cold from a ‘spiritual’ standpoint.” Whatever their value from a musical standpoint, this author’s evidence is that polka bands are conducive to the growth of skepticism—surely an original judgment.

Schumaker’s strength is like Guthrie’s, in that he draws on a great deal of interesting and pertinent anthropological material, including the experiences of such diverse groups as Shakers, Sufis, the Chumash people of California, etc. In many of these, the role of the group’s leader or leaders is clearly to induce a hypnotic state through chanting, dancing, etc. Along the way, Schumaker makes a number of intriguing suggestions; for instance, “I feel that the Roman Catholic church dealt a blow to people’s ability to enter trance when it switched languages from Latin to English” (1995, 97). The power of any broad thesis is its ability to explain diverse phenomena, and the author thus builds a strong if not entirely convincing case in this book for the centrality of dissociation.

He also discusses the converse: that churches not promoting dissociation are in danger of fading away, because their members “beg for dissociation” and must have it or they will go elsewhere (1995, 150). Here Schumaker draws on Rodney Stark’s view that “religions eventually disintegrate if they become ‘too wordly and too emptied of supernaturalism.’” Schumaker contends that from a scientific standpoint, religion by its nature is largely pathological, though some forms are more so than others, i.e., there are differences, from less to more rationalistic. While this book sometimes becomes turgid and jargonistic, generally its exposition is clear and well written.

There is one passing reference to Marx’s description of religion as the opium of the people, but otherwise Schumaker ignores Marx and the Marxist views on the subject. This is

unfortunate, because there are some interesting parallels between dissociation and what Marx called alienation, the subject of his 1844 notebooks. Schumaker almost contends that dissociation is the human condition; a few, perhaps, might grow out of it or become more healthy, but otherwise, no. The Marxist view, in contrast, is that alienation is the lot of those who are oppressed, that they are “distanced” from a positive concept of life through the exploitation of the ruling class. There is, therefore, a close parallel between the tensions and conflicts of the social relations, and the psychological manifestations that people find in their daily lives. Furthermore, Schumaker does not discuss how rationalism, humanism, and so on are purposely excluded from public life, in favor of all kinds of mysticism, diversion, and the like. In other words, such pathologies are enormously useful to the established order.

The curious thing about these two books is that they both claim to be producing theories of religion that have centralizing explanatory power, but they have no points of convergence. They feel different parts of the elephant and claim that what they feel is the whole. This is, of course, not uncommon in intellectual history and should serve as a cautionary tale for all who truly claim to be producing “unified” theories. That said, the parts that they do offer are highly suggestive and will be useful in proceeding further. Neither Guthrie nor Schumaker have adequate concepts of social change in their theories, nor any real concept of class struggle. If they do not quite satisfy, neither can these books be ignored in any comprehensive treatment of the subject.

Some applications

We are now in a position to discuss some historical problems in terms of both the classical Marxist concepts and these two recent non-Marxist theories. Some of these problems concern U.S. intellectual and social history, such as the nature of the Revolution itself and the early Republic. I have argued elsewhere that a good case could be made that the United States was founded as a nation on freethought principles (Whitehead 1993). Briefly, not only did our Revolution extinguish the authority and

power of aristocracy in our territory, it forced a change in the name of the Anglican Church in United States to the Episcopal Church, and the revision of article 37 of the 39 Articles of Religion to replace “King’s Majesty” as authoritative with the constitutionally acceptable “Civil Magistrate” (*Book of Common Prayer* 1977, 875–6). While religious doctrines by their nature strive for universal verity, this is one of many instances of specific historical events—in this case, our Revolution—forcing change in those doctrines. After the victory of the Revolution, we also proceeded to guarantee certain fundamental rights: to speech, press, assembly, and religion. Jefferson and Paine were deists, and openly anti-Christian. Jefferson in particular hoped that guaranteeing religion would mean that the different churches would damage each other through competition, but he soon recognized that they were using their freedom to “catechize us” ceaselessly (Ericson 1985, 113). Furthermore, Paine was fiercely denounced as an “infidel” and rabid Jacobin, and was not even allowed to vote after his return to the North America. Jefferson was vilified for his “unbelief” as well. He declined to issue Thanksgiving proclamations as president, as a sign of his disagreement with the evangelicals of his day.

Thus, from the earliest days of the Republic, there was a dramatic conflict between the promise of Enlightenment principles and the Religious Right of the period. Indeed, the present Religious Right owes much to its forbears of two centuries ago; Pat Robertson, the Christian political and media mogul, has drawn on antifreethought polemics of the 1790s, which repeat charges of conspiracies by the Illuminati (Davis 1971, 23–65).

No history of our intellectual life can be complete without taking the conflict between freethought and religion into account, though one recent study entitled *The Churching of America* makes no mention of it (Finke and Stark 1992). The paradox is that the types of people who in 1790 were the founders of the nation became by 1890, less than a hundred years later, fugitives, stigmatized as criminals and outcasts. Into the nineteenth century, local “infidels” faced continual struggles, over Sunday closings, the right to public education, and other social goals. It was a situation of “protracted war,” with actual injuries

inflicted on freethinkers; the pioneering woman journalist Anne Royall was kicked down steps in Vermont and severely injured by a devout storekeeper (Wallace 1980, 339–40). While some have shown the persistence of radical freethinking among workers (Wilentz 1984), others contend that there were devout Christians in the ranks of the workers as well (Sutton 1994). In any case, neither anthropomorphizing nor dissociation can go far in explaining the dialectics of this conflict. It is much more a matter of political and social authority, with ramifications in the psychological experience of the people.

We need a thoroughgoing reconsideration of Weber's thesis about Protestantism and capitalism as it took imperialist forms in the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. Recent studies have argued that extermination activities against the American Indian peoples were nothing short of genocidal in scope and intent (Stannard 1992). Religion played a significant role in those activities, from Methodist ministers like the Reverend Chivington, who commanded the Sand Creek Massacre, to the church schools receiving substantial government support while prohibiting Indian language, dress, and beliefs among the children who were their wards (Wood 1990). Veblen once compared the typical Sunday school's boosterism and campaigns for more members to vulgar sales promotions in the stores (1948, 499). With the present flourishing of "the market," it is not surprising that "spirituality" also has its price, not only in millions of copies of devotional literature, but in "seminars" by alleged shamans who continue the process of exploiting Native American beliefs even while they have been suppressed. Here Schumaker's concept of dissociation usefully comes into play, because the price of the market is a continual searching after more, after new fads, in the manner, indeed, of an addiction to fetishism more degraded than that of any "savage." It seems clear that the continual tension of a society predicated on buying and selling as the only values is going to produce psychological fragmentation and extreme alienation.

Such false prosperity demonstrates the utility of illusion. We might posit as a principle of capitalism the attempt to make sure that as many ideas as possible in the heads of the people are

going to be false ones. It now gives up the prospect of a fulfilling education for the masses of people to favor methods that provide this only for a select elite. No realm of life is safe from privatization. In such chaos and confusion and the absence of rationalist, human alternatives, is it surprising that “spirituality” enjoys a renewal? If the old hope of creating citizens of the world is given up, with resulting fragmentation and diversion, is it any wonder that ethnic identity again becomes paramount, not to mention the probability of ruthless competition and even war over scarce resources between groups who hitherto had lived as friends and neighbors?

It is not enough to dissect the negative features of the market concept of humanity’s being and destiny; we have to probe the failings of the Left in a fair but thoroughgoing manner, with a full understanding of why these occurred. It has often been noted, for instance, that the USSR, the first atheist state in the world, elaborated an intricate system of saints, holy days, ritual tombs, compulsory pageantry, sacred texts, hierarchies, and even, we might say, a doctrine of infallibility. Too often these observations were dismissed because they emanated from “anti-Soviet” sources. A deeper grasp of the historical dynamics is called for. Marx and others stated time and again that no society can create itself outside of the conditions of its existence; furthermore, even in the midst of epochal change, amounting to revolution of the most thorough kind, certain elements of the old order would persist.

In a long chapter of his history of torture, Malise Ruthven discusses “Stalin and the Russian Devils,” exploring the deep social roots of government inquisition and similar practices in Russian history (1978, 218–78). These roots involve superstitious beliefs of a strikingly atavistic kind, persisting past the Revolution of 1917. Ruthven reviews the findings of a Prague University anthropologist, P. Bogatuirev, who surveyed Subcarpathian Russia in 1923–1926 (then still under Czech rule). “Sorcery, formerly forbidden, was now openly practised. In all the villages studied, the sorcerer received up to twice as many visits per year as the local health officer. The sorcerers practised

conjunction, divination, and the invocation of all kinds of spirits” (259–60). Bogatuirev’s summary is worth quoting:

Not only are we in the presence of traditions; but we are seeing the creation of new rites and magical operations. . . . Contemporary superstitions are in the same relations with pagan myths and rites as modern poetic formulae are with those of the past: they provide the framework in which thought is conditioned and without which it could not exist.

Ruthven claims that a credulous populace is exactly the sort that could accommodate a hierarchical and authoritarian government, such as Stalin’s. “Popular beliefs,” he says, “are given coherence by a superstructure derived from current metaphysical doctrines. In the late Middle Ages the superstructure was created from the scholastic philosophy of the neo-Aristoteleans. In communist Russia, of course, it borrowed the vocabulary of Marxism” (1978, 261). We shall return to the issue of scholasticism later, but at this point it is sufficient to note how much of Soviet literature, whether political or cultural, consisted of repeating the “correct” formulas, without the intervention of what can honestly be called critical thinking. Concluding his discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of the use of terror in Russia, Ruthven penetratingly observes (note that the date of his writing is 1978):

To this day the triumph of Stalinism in Russia represents the dominance of a peasant psychology, formulated and fossilized into institutions, over the rationalist tradition of the Enlightenment as transmitted to the Russian intelligentsia through Marxism-Leninism. (1978, 265)

In other words, the Russian Revolution, like the American Revolution, failed to fulfill the hopes and promise of freethought and reverted to the hegemony of religious-style cognition and habits of life.

We might remark in passing on the tragic consequences of the Lysenko affair, in which not only was a charlatan advanced to a leading role in Soviet biological science, but honest scientists were imprisoned and killed because they tried to defend

genetics (Medvedev 1969). However we might understand the motives of those who desperately wanted to create the “new man” and to emphasize the role of environmental as against inherited factors, the results were negative in terms of science. The distance is indeed not great from peasant sorcerers to someone like Lysenko, with his penchant for intrigue, falsehood, and destroying his “enemies,” who were also “enemies of the people.”

This process is dramatically illustrated by the film *The Inner Circle*, which I have discussed at length elsewhere (Whitehead 1992). It is based on the true story of Stalin’s film projectionist, Ivan Ganshin, and was produced shortly after the collapse of the USSR, with a joint U.S. and Russian crew and actors. It was the first post-Soviet film to be shot inside the Kremlin itself, and thus not only lifts the veil, as it were, on well-known personalities like Stalin and Beria, but shows the very hallways they strode through on their daily rounds. The director also produced an illustrated book to supplement the film (Konchalovsky 1991). Stalin is always referred to reverentially, with awe and wonder, as “Father,” and “Master.” The story renames the projectionist Ivan Sanshin, and it follows his selection as a replacement after the previous one “fell ill,” i.e., was purged. The film’s action follows the process of arrests, sexual brutality by Beria, and the corruption of the Party elite. Even before the fall of the USSR, I felt that they would never make progress until they came to terms with this heritage. Stalin looms over the action, literally: balloons featuring his image float over Moscow, illuminated by spotlights. In one astonishing scene, Sanshin fantasizes that he encounters Stalin walking through the streets of the city at night, and when he tells the “Master” his troubles, he finds reassurance that all will be well, the sordid facts of the projectionist’s life notwithstanding.

The Inner Circle is pertinent to religious theory because it portrays the deification of a man and his political party, as they become surrounded by feelings of awe and fear that approximate those for God. Sanshin is just such an ordinary superstitious “believing” man who must have been common in Russia during that period. The extreme tensions and insecurity of people’s lives

produced epidemic dissociation. An old professor in the film denounces Stalin as “a devil in the Kremlin.” Religious attitudes thus persisted even though Soviet society aimed at creating the most progressive society in the history of the world. Some viewers found the film depressing, but for me it was the opposite. Here at last was a confrontation with the truth, in all its complexity and contradictions. Whether Russia can return to the Marxist path remains to be seen, but I am certain that without such a confrontation, it will never be possible.

In a searching essay entitled “The Proletarian Eucharist,” the U.S. writer Edward Dahlberg explored this same process working its way out in literature (1960, 72–5). “In the proletarian authors,” he declares, “the black yeast of guilt is mixed with the eucharistic body of the suffering masses.” Citing Jack London, Erskine Caldwell, and Frank Norris, Dahlberg denounced naturalism, a.k.a. socialist realism, as “one cankered, miserable skin. . . . The proletarian populace is the ritual bull that must be killed and eaten so that society, the corpse of the masses, can be reborn!” He then went on to judge that the strike, the typical denouement of the proletarian novel, “fails as tragic purification, as a psychic ablution; the strike is barter, a pragmatic expedient, not a way of seeing.” Paralleling Ruthven’s conclusions about the fate of the Enlightenment in Russia, Dahlberg summarizes his case thus: “When a race, or a people, cannot be transmuted into visionaries, seers, or strong iconoclastic spirits, they must then have their superstitions. Man cannot be denied the IMAGE.”

In fairness, we should note that Dahlberg’s literary examples are not Russians, but people living in the United States. “American History,” he cried, “has been one long pillage and destruction of ideals, culture, cities and hamlets” (1960, 84). When it aimed to be liberating, proletarian literature in fact too often became an intellectual straitjacket on a world scale. Dahlberg believed that this failure characterized modern “civilization” in general, and that it must be admitted that the human condition was wretched indeed in the twentieth century. As an alternative he felt that the old utopian experiments should be restudied for their emphasis on a beautiful, sustaining natural

environment. Education, while essential, would not be enough—we would have to create our lives anew, entirely, while retaining and respecting the best of our inherited culture. “Strong, iconoclastic spirits,” if sustained, might see us through to such a future.

One other point: the issue of scholasticism. I remember some years ago visiting the Communist poet Tom McGrath, at his home in Moorhead, Minnesota; he showed me a copy of a new issue of a journal, *Praxis*, and asked me to look it over and say what I thought. Previous issues had been, I thought, pretty good, but this one was filled with structuralism, phenomenology, and what was probably some form of deconstructionism. I frankly did not know what to make of all this, but Tom looked at it, and at me, and said, “This is Marxist scholasticism.” As I had read some medieval scholastic texts, I was instantly impressed with his pithy judgment. Not only were many of the writers and thinkers of “Stalinist” Russia scholastic in their style and approach to ideas—the abstract language, the doctrinal obsessions, the hair-splitting—but these “anti-Stalinist” professors in U.S. universities were doing exactly the same thing. Again, a religious concept was brought into play for a fruitful analysis, in one phrase from McGrath, illuminating decades of literary and philosophical practice. We need to reconsider the question of whether Marxism itself entered some form of decadent and sterile phase, quite distant from the drama and vigor of its nineteenth-century youth.

Conclusions

In spite of the present parlous condition of Marxism, it seems clear that most of its basic concepts remain useful and pertinent, not for their own sake as religionists contend for their ideas, but as explanatory tools that aid our understanding of humanity and the world. True, with the collapse of most of the socialist countries, and the rise of “the market” in several that still exist (China, and Vietnam, for instance), the promise of socialism has taken some terrible blows. A grasp of religious beliefs in an objective, rationalist way is needed, not only to understand how and why these beliefs continue today, often in negative and destructive forms. We can also use an understanding of religion

to perceive how its habits of belief survived in the government of the world's first atheist nation.

In addition, a fuller knowledge of the internal weaknesses of the Enlightenment will aid us too. Education alone is not sufficient for human progress, especially when the forces of ignorance and exploitation remain as powerful as they are today. We have to rethink connecting the tools of critical thinking with a practical improvement of people's daily lives. Ethics and aesthetics are too often dismissed as bourgeois, or relegated by default to the churches, which never neglect their appeal "in a heartless world." To the traditional Marxist tools of social, economic, and political concepts, we must now add those of modern anthropology and psychology. A renewed Left would be able to achieve this naturally, vigorously assimilating new concepts with the confidence that living political movements always possess.

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Religion and the New African American Intellectuals

Norm R. Allen Jr.

Today certain African American intellectuals are in great demand in academia and popular culture. Some have been featured on major radio and television talk shows and in major magazines. This article will focus on several of these religiously oriented African American intellectuals and examine how their religious beliefs have influenced their thinking—for better or worse.

Two of the most influential and well-known religiously oriented intellectuals are Cornel West and Bell Hooks. For many years they had a close friendship and personal relationship, although they have reportedly grown apart in recent years. West—a Christian—and Hooks—a Buddhist—are strongly motivated by deep religious feelings. They were both heavily influenced by Black Christian church services in their youth, and they believe that spirituality is inexplicably linked to the mental and emotional strength of the individual and his or her community. They have been deeply moved by Black religious music and view it as a vital force in strengthening the notion of community and the understanding of Black life, culture, and political experience.

West and Hooks are deeply immersed in the culture and political life of Blacks in America, and they have discoursed learnedly on such diverse topics as rap music, hip-hop culture, jazz, rhythm and blues, gospel, spirituals, popular films, white supremacy, capitalism, sexism, patriarchy, homophobia, Black

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intellectualism, history, Marxism, postmodernism, and numerous other subjects. Indeed, some commentators have opined that perhaps West is spreading himself thin by trying to cover so much material in so little time. Hooks and West do have, however, a deep and broad understanding of the complex and multidimensional Black experience.

In their collection of dialogues and conversations, *Breaking Bread*, West states, “Historically, academic intellectuals have been viewed, to varying degrees, as elitist, arrogant, and haughty” (Hooks and West 1991, 4). In contrast, West and Hooks transcend class divisions with the ability to relate to people from all classes—from the homeless to academics.

Hooks and West are enthusiastic advocates of what they call “Black critical thinking,” or an attempt to understand Black agency and experience from diverse viewpoints. West explains in *Breaking Bread*:

That our conversation has principally Black points of reference must be accented. We are looking at the predicament of Black people from the vantage point of all that Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Europe have to offer. We are rooted in the Black tradition and we are struggling with that Black predicament. This does not mean that we subscribe to an exclusive Afro-centricity, though we are centered on the African American situation. Nor does it mean that we valorize, that we promote a Euro-centric perspective, though we recognize that so much of the academy remains under the sway of a very narrow Euro-centrism. Instead we recognize Black humanity and attempt to promote the love, affirmation, and critique of Black humanity, and in that sense, we attempt to escape the prevailing mode of intellectual bondage that has held captive so many Black intellectuals of the past. (1991, 6)

Indeed, West is at his best when he painstakingly critiques ideas and strategies that have, ironically, exacerbated the plight of African Americans. In his collection of essays *Race Matters*, he applies Black critical thinking to many issues. In the introduction he writes:

What happened in Los Angeles in April of 1992 was neither a race riot nor a class rebellion. Rather, this monumental upheaval was a multiracial, trans-class, and largely male display of justified social rage. For all its ugly, xenophobic resentment, its air of adolescent carnival, and its downright barbaric behavior, it signified the sense of powerlessness in American society. Glib attempts to reduce its meaning to the pathologies of the black underclass, the criminal actions of hoodlums, or the political revolt of the oppressed urban masses miss the mark. (1993, 1)

West argues that many people lack the intellectual wherewithal and honesty to assess accurately current events as they relate to relations between Blacks and whites. West has no tolerance for hypocrisy, double standards, and sophistry used

in the narrow framework of the dominant liberal and conservative views of race in America, which with its worn-out vocabulary leaves us intellectually debilitated, morally disempowered, and personally depressed. (63)

Though West is equally critical of dogmatic Black nationalist ideologies, he realizes that they do not exist in a vacuum, but have come about as a reaction to white supremacy. Furthermore, he asserts that as long as whites continue to embrace white bigots while hypocritically condemning Black bigotry, Black nationalism will continue to grow in popularity.

Perhaps West's most brilliant and most important contribution to current discourses on race is his notion of "racial reasoning." In *Race Matters* he notes that many Blacks capitulated to the pervasive Black nationalist mind-set during the hearings involving Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill. Thomas shrewdly and successfully "played the race card" by claiming to be victimized by a "high-tech lynching." Furthermore, West profoundly observes how Minister Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam supported Thomas's Supreme Court nomination despite Farrakhan's vitriolic attacks against Republican Party politics. Often to their own detriment, Blacks support even those bourgeois Blacks who are working with powerful reactionary

whites to thwart Black progress. In the name of Black unity, even the most unsavory Black character can garner widespread support throughout the Black community. Thus, racial reasoning is not reasoning at all, but rather an appeal to raw emotion, and many Blacks place a desperate need for unity and a fear of white supremacy above high ethical principles and enlightened self-interest. In this way, when the Nation of Islam and other authoritarian thinkers rushed to the defense of Thomas, cultural conservatism and reactionary Black nationalism converged to the detriment of Black advancement. As West eloquently writes in *Race Matters*,

In black America, cultural conservatism takes the form of an inchoate xenophobia (e.g., against whites, Jews and Asians), systemic sexism, and homophobia. Like all conservatisms rooted in a quest for order, the pervasive disorder in white, and, especially, black America fans and fuels the channeling of rage toward the most vulnerable and degraded members of the community. For white America, this means primarily scapegoating black people, women, gay men, and lesbians. For black America, this means, principally attacking black women and black gay men and lesbians. In this way black nationalist and black male-centered claims to black authenticity reinforce black cultural conservatism. (1993, 27)

Rather than having a clear moral vision and a serious commitment to a single standard of social, political, and economic justice, those who indulge in racial reasoning exacerbate tensions that have long existed among various segments of the U.S. population. West, on the other hand, advocates ideals like those embraced by Myles Horton, Ella Baker, Emma Goldman, Wendell Phillips, Sojourner Truth, A. Philip Randolph, Martin Luther King Jr., “and many anonymous others who championed the struggle for freedom and justice in a prophetic framework of moral reasoning” (1993, 32).

West has attracted the interest of secular humanists as well as religionists because of his attempts to link what he considers to be the best of secular thought with the best of traditional

religious thought. At times West sounds remarkably profound. In the introduction to his 1988 book *Prophetic Fragments*, he writes:

It is no accident that the moralistic, anti-intellectualistic forms of American religion thoroughly trash modernity and secularity yet revel in the wonders of technology and the comfortable living of modern prosperity. This flagrant hypocrisy . . . is overcome only when one adopts a principled prophetism; that is, a prophetic religion that incorporates the best of modernity and secularity (tolerance, fallibilism, criticism), yet brings prophetic critique to bear upon the idols of modernity and secularity (science, technology, and wealth). (x)

Indeed, West has been strongly influenced by such secular thinkers and groups as Karl Marx, John Dewey, C. L. R. James, and the Black Panthers. Yet many are skeptical of attempts to mix secular thought with religion, contending that the two are diametrically opposed. Right-wing religionists—a frequent target of West and secularists—often make the charge that Dewey and other secularists were responsible for the deterioration of public schools. Moreover, many right-wing religionists blame all of society's ills on modernity and secularism. Conversely, many scientists and secular philosophers feel threatened by what they view as misogyny, intolerance, irrationality, and antiscientific bias emanating from many religionists who experience an existential vacuum as the rapid spread of information challenges, upsets, and contradicts their worldview.

As a result of trying to reconcile such conflicting viewpoints, West experiences much conceptual confusion and cognitive dissonance. While he sees much of value in modernity and secular thought, he writes disparagingly of “humanists” and “humanistic scholarship.” And in “The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual,” reprinted in *Breaking Bread*, he relates:

My own Christian skepticism regarding human totalistic schemes for change chasten my deep socialistic sentiments regarding radically democratic and libertarian

socio-economic and cultural arrangements. (Hooks and West 1991, 137)

This is quite a predicament in which the socialist-turned-social-democrat West finds himself. He seems to have forced himself into an intellectual cul-de-sac. Yet he writes in *Prophesy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, “I believe the alliance of prophetic Christianity and progressive Marxism provides a last humane hope for humankind” (1982, 95).

Although West, like many other Black progressive religious intellectuals, frequently uses biblical imagery and symbolism to make a point, he rarely quotes from the Bible. He wisely observes that spiritual rhetorical devices reach the masses more effectively than does the dry prose that is often found among the secular Left. West seems to be influenced not so much by “sacred” texts as by the Black prophetic tradition and its historical role in the quest for Black liberation. Black progressive religious intellectuals are not likely to be visibly disturbed by the numerous atrocities, absurdities, contradictions, and inconsistencies in their religious texts—if they acknowledge these problems at all. Nor are they likely to be bothered by biblical passages that run counter to their progressive worldview, e.g., Romans 13:1–2, which reads:

Let every person be in subjection to the authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

The progressive Black religious intellectual would probably respond to this passage with a contradictory passage that could be used to advance progressive notions—while ignoring the fact that a contradiction exists—or simply pretend that a disagreeable passage was merely ripped from its proper biblical and historical contexts. Thus the success and influence of progressive Black religious intellectuals depend ironically, to a very large extent, on the biblical illiteracy of those to whom their message is directed. The progressive Black religious intellectual delivers a

message of hope, liberation, and human redemption that is often at odds with many biblical passages, a fact that conservative religionists eagerly and inconveniently acknowledge.

The progressive approach to spirituality is aptly and succinctly expressed by the Reverend Cecil Williams, a beloved progressive clergyman from the Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco, during an interview with *Psychology Today*:

The important thing is that people wrote [great poetry in the Old Testament and the New Testament]. Those were inspirational stories and you[’ve] got to see them that way. If you don’t you’ll get in trouble. So I’m not going to spend time trying to find out whether or not Mary was a virgin. What do I care about Mary being a virgin? (1995, 28)

It is clear from this passage that Williams is now downplaying the importance of religious dogma in his progressive worldview. Indeed, not only is it unimportant to make a literal belief in religious miracles central to progressive politics, but the acceptance of such beliefs could be very problematic, perhaps even detrimental to progressive causes.

But despite the many theoretical problems one encounters with progressive religious Black intellectuals, they can point with pride to some successes that have come from the prophetic tradition. David Walker, Nat Turner, Ella Baker, Martin Luther King Jr., and many others were a part of this tradition, and many positive reforms have come about as a result of their ideas and activism. And it is likely that the prophetic tradition will be an integral part of the Black experience for years to come.

But there is much more to Black religious intellectual life than progressive theory and politics. Many religious Black intellectuals believe that God is conservative or moderate. Two of the leading Black conservative religious intellectuals are Glenn C. Loury, University Professor (a rank of distinction) and professor of economics at Boston University, and Stephen L. Carter, William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Law at Yale University.

Aside from a strong emphasis on spirituality, Black religious conservatives do not differ much from their secular counterparts.

Generally, Black conservatives favor self-help, school prayer, business development, high military spending, “traditional family values,” tuition tax credits for private schools, an end to race-based quotas and affirmative action, a limited (or abolished) role for government in the elimination of problems afflicting the poor, including “an end to welfare as we know it,” etc.

Though the Black religious intellectuals of both the Left and the Right are mostly Christians, their faith in the same omniscient, perfectly benevolent God has brought them neither unity nor unanimity in their endless quest for Black liberation. Most Black religious intellectuals of the Left strongly opposed Clarence Thomas’s nomination, appointment, and decisions as a Supreme Court justice. But not only has Thomas won the support of Black conservatives, he is convinced that he is on a mission for God. According to *Jet* magazine, Thomas told his close friend Armstrong Williams that “God’s law” led him to rule against affirmative action, asserting that affirmative action amounts to “hatred,” “racism,” and “revenge” against whites. He told Williams that “Jesus said ‘Sin no more!’ That is what I have to do” (1995, 8). Thomas gained support from Minister Farrakhan—whom, like Malcolm X, Thomas admires, as do most Black conservatives.

Conversely, most religious Blacks on the Left believe that Thomas represents ungodly interests, or at least interests that are not conducive to Black liberation. Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker, Reverend Al Sharpton, and other religious leaders held a prayer vigil on 12 September 1995 in front of Thomas’s home to protest Thomas’s opposition to affirmative action. Sharpton said that Thomas’s views were not consistent with Christ’s concern for the poor and downtrodden.

Black progressive religious intellectuals have strongly criticized Black conservatives. According to West, Black conservatives are driven largely by the desire to be accepted by their white middle-class peers. But ironically, West argues, affirmative action policies were put in place in response to the refusal of many white Americans to judge Blacks by the content of their character. West states that Black conservatives assume that many white Americans will deal with Blacks on the basis of merit, a view not shared by most Blacks. West writes:

The pertinent question is never “merit vs. race” regarding black employment but rather merit and race-bias against blacks OR merit and race-bias with consideration for blacks. Within the practical world of U.S. employment practices, the new black conservative rhetoric about race-free meritorious criteri[a] (usually coupled with a dismantling enforcement mechanism) does no more than justify actual practices of racial discrimination against blacks. And their claims about self-respect should not obscure this fact. Nor should such claims be separated from the normal self-doubts, insecurities, and anxieties of new arrivals in the American middle class. It is worth noting that most of the new black conservatives are first-generation middle-class persons—offering themselves as examples of how well the system works for those willing to sacrifice and work hard. Yet, in familiar American fashion, genuine white peer acceptance still seems to escape them. And their conservatism still fails to provide this human acceptance. In this way, white racism still operates against them. (1988, 57)

Indeed, Stephen Carter—an Episcopalian who identifies himself as a liberal—has written about his need for white approval in his *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* (1991), as has Black conservative Shelby Steele in his collection of essays titled *The Content of Our Character* (1990). But as West correctly points out, Black conservatives have yet to be accepted by their white counterparts, many of whom are staunch racists.

Religious conservative Dinesh D’Souza, a thirty-three-year old immigrant from India, is one of many non-Black conservatives who believe that most Blacks simply cannot compete effectively with whites and have not earned the right to be respected by whites. In an article in the *American Spectator* entitled “Black America’s Moment of Truth,” adapted from his controversial book titled *The End of Racism*, D’Souza writes about the rage felt by many middle-class Blacks who believe that they have not been judged by the content of their character:

This rage is not so difficult to comprehend. It represents post-affirmative action angst, the frustration of pursuing

unearned privileges and then bristling when they do not bring something that has to be earned—the respect of one’s peers. (38)

It is sad—indeed pathetic—that many Black conservatives crave acceptance from whites and other non-Blacks who apparently despise them. Many white conservatives have consistently and openly expressed the idea that Blacks are inherently inferior to whites. White conservatives Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray delivered the most provocative attack in the name of science with the publication of their book *The Bell Curve* (1994). Although most Black conservatives rejected the Herrnstein-Murray thesis, no righteous indignation was expressed by most Black conservatives, many of whom include Murray among their friends or associates. Although Black conservative Thomas Sowell took exception to the authors’ contention that whites are genetically superior to Blacks in intelligence, he defended much of the authors’ work in an *American Spectator* review, excoriating its “more shrill critics,” and arguing that *The Bell Curve* deserves critical attention, not public smearing” (1995a, 36).

Similarly, the publication of *The End of Racism* embarrassed many Black conservatives. According to a story by Gary Fields in *USA Today*:

The End of Racism maintains that slavery was not racist, segregation was designed to protect blacks, that the civil rights movement was not a triumph of justice and that many people are racist for good reason. (1975)

Black conservatives Robert Woodson and Glenn Loury—a Black religious conservative who disapproved of *The Bell Curve*—resigned from the American Enterprise Institute where D’Souza works as a resident scholar. Woodson declared in *Jet* magazine that “Dinesh D’Souza is the Mark Fuhrman of public policy” (1995, 15). And although Black religious conservative Armstrong Williams is quoted in the *USA Today* story as calling D’Souza “brilliant, earnest and sincere,” he was pained by D’Souza’s ideas, and said the book “didn’t end racism. . . . It’s going to inflame and give ammunition to racists” (Fields 1975). Thomas Sowell—a secular thinker—was one of the few Black

conservatives to publicly defend D'Souza.

Surprisingly, most Black religious intellectuals have not relied upon religious rhetoric to argue against the current stream of racist scholarship. One would expect Black religionists to promote the idea of a perfectly loving God in whose image all human beings were created, with divine favoritism shown toward no particular "race." But most Black religious intellectuals who combat today's racist scholarship do so with modern methods of argumentation, drawing upon the social sciences, biology, modern philosophy, and so forth. It seems that a theocentric perspective does not have much credibility with either opponents or proponents of racist theories advanced under the banner of science.

Conversely, bigotry in the name of religion has been repeatedly and effectively discredited by secular scientists, historians, philosophers, and others. While secular thinkers are not dependent upon religious beliefs, religious intellectuals are obviously dependent upon secular thought to combat racism in today's world.

Religious Black conservatives have been influenced by the much-ballyhooed Protestant work ethic and the white Religious Right to the extent that some of them practically deny the existence of white supremacy or downplay its impact on society. They are obsessed with eradicating Black pathologies and lay most of the blame for these problems at the feet of liberals and big government.

Many Black religious intellectuals of both the Left and the Right have something in common—an interest in furthering the legacy of Malcolm X and claiming him as one of their own. Malcolm's conservative admirers view him as a sort of Horatio Alger from the 'hood, who, through patience, dedication, hard work, self-control, self-reliance, good study habits, and piety, became one of the great success stories in African American history. He advocated the establishment and patronage of Black businesses; abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs; and sexual abstinence before marriage and marital fidelity afterward. And like Black conservatives, he was not reluctant to acknowledge that many Blacks contribute to their own

oppression and that they are often apathetic to their own plight. He advocated enlightened self-interest but also maintained that Black resistance to white supremacy was too weak.

To many Black religious progressives, Malcolm was the living embodiment of strong Black resistance to white supremacy. He was a fiery orator who learned to direct his well-focused rage at richly deserving targets (e.g. warmongers, white supremacists, U.S. imperialism, hypocritical politicians, corrupt police officials.) He came to realize that people were divided by class throughout the world, and he was very sympathetic to socialism, deploring the fact that much of the world's wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy elites. He began to support many class struggles throughout the world, transcending the very narrow Black nationalism he once advocated.

Michael Eric Dyson, Director of the Institute of African American Research and Professor of Communications Studies at the University of North Carolina, is another Black progressive redline intellectual who has much in common with Cornel West. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has called Dyson "one of America's leading public intellectuals." He, like West, has appeared on "Our Voices," a talk show on Black Entertainment Television hosted by Bev Smith. He has also appeared on a PBS presentation on Richard Wright. His writings have appeared in *Vibe*, *Emerge*, *the Nation*, and *Rolling Stone* magazines, as well as in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. His books include *Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism* (1993), *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X* (1995), and *Between God and Gangsta Rap* (1996). On the jacket of *Making Malcolm*, West calls the book "the most sophisticated and accessible analysis of Malcolm we have." Indeed, *Making Malcolm* is an excellent example of what West and Hooks call Black critical thinking.

Dyson, an ordained Baptist minister, demonstrates profoundly that Malcolm's worldview was complex and always changing, and that Malcolm cannot be pigeonholed easily or claimed exclusively by any one particular group. Though Malcolm has been claimed by Muslims, radicals, liberals,

humanists, socialists, Afrocentrists, progressives, Black conservatives, reactionary Black nationalists, and others, Dyson writes:

Malcolm was indeed improvising from the chords of an expanded black nationalist rhetoric and an embryonic socialist criticism of capitalist civilization. . . . Although Malcolm consistently denounced capitalism, he did not live long enough to embrace socialism. (1995, 71–2)

Unlike Malcolm's more obsequious admirers and followers, Dyson is not reluctant to identify Malcolm's weaknesses and blind spots, and is especially trenchant in his criticism of Malcolm's misogyny:

Unfortunately, as was the case with most of his black nationalist compatriots and civil rights advocates, Malcolm cast black liberation in terms of masculine self-realization. Malcolm's zealous trumpeting of the social costs of black male cultural emasculation went hand in hand with his often aggressive, occasionally vicious, put downs of black women. These slights of black women reflected the demonology of the Nation of Islam, which not only viewed racism as an ill from outside its group, but argued that women were a lethal source of deception and seduction from within. Hence, Nation of Islam women were virtually desexualized through "modest" dress, kept under the strict supervision of men, and relegated to the background while their men took center stage. Such beliefs reinforced the already inferior position of black women in black culture. These views, ironically, placed Malcolm and the Nation of Islam squarely within the misogynist traditions of white and black Christianity. It is this aspect, especially, of Malcolm's public ministry that has been adopted by contemporary black urban youth, including rappers and filmmakers. Although Malcolm would near the end of his life renounce his sometimes vitriolic denunciations of black women, his contemporary followers have not often followed suit. (1995, 10–1)

More importantly, Dyson acknowledges Malcolm's penchant

for self-criticism and his honest search for truth. In Malcolm's words:

Until our people are able to . . . analyze ourselves and discover our own liabilities as well as our assets, we never will be able to win any struggle that we become involved in. As long as the black community and the leaders of the black community are afraid of criticism and want to classify all criticism, collective criticism, as a stereotype, no one will ever be able to pull our coat. (1995, 36)

In his last days, Malcolm admitted that he and other Black nationalists were dogmatic in many ways, including their blanket condemnation and demonization of whites, and he apologized for his naïveté. Malcolm, who once paraphrased a passage from the Qur'an (Koran) when he stated that "the closest thing to a woman is a devil," later spoke in favor of equality for women (Dyson 1995, 97). He was willing to concede that good points were sometimes made by those with whom he disagreed, and he no longer made allegiance to his evolving Black nationalist worldview the major criterion for determining Black loyalty and authenticity. He advocated and consistently practiced critical thinking, deeming it essential in bringing about Black liberation.

But remarkably, Malcolm never lost his well-articulated rage or his ability to connect with the ghetto masses. In his last days, "he learned, finally, to make his rage work for the best interests of black folk" (Dyson 1995, 176). Most people, however, seem unable or unwilling to distinguish between justifiable rage and senseless hatemongering. As Dyson wisely observes:

Since Malcolm's death in 1965, black Americans have witnessed the arrival of pretenders and wannabes to his throne of rage. There have been many lesser incarnations of Malcolm's prophetic spirit and rhetorical passion, men and women who believed that all that was in Malcolm's bag of tricks was loud speech and hateful harangue. (Khal[il]id Abdul Muhammad's ad hominem attacks on black leaders and Jews is only the most recent example). (176)

It is this kind of “charismatic but corrupt leadership” that resonates so loudly among many Blacks today (176). While reactionary Black nationalists like those of the Nation of Islam have advocated self-help, Black pride, Black unity, personal responsibility, economic development, and abstinence from drugs, they have also fostered sexism, intolerance, pseudoscience, homophobia, xenophobia, irrationality, antiwhite and anti-Jewish bigotry, dogmatic historical revisionism, Black-on-Black violence (including the assassination of Malcolm X) and a host of other evils—all in the name of Black liberation, of course. Many Blacks, however, have become so cynical and disillusioned that they are easy marks for charismatic leaders who are full of hope, bluster, big promises, macho posturing, and hate disguised as courage and an undying love for Black people.

Ironically, despite the continuing quest for freedom, justice, and equality for Blacks, some major schools of Black activism and intellectualism have often blindly accepted reactionary elements without challenge. Examples include the Universal Negro Improvement Association under Marcus Garvey, Maulana Karenga’s United Slaves organization, and narrow forms of Afrocentrism. It seems to take an extraordinarily honest individual with remarkably keen critical thinking skills to become the kind of person Malcolm became in his last days. And such individual fire and brilliance have never been carried to the organizational level of any major Black movement.

Dyson has the usual progressive slant on the uglier aspects of Black popular culture, e.g., “gangsta rap.” While being mildly critical of the musical genre’s misogyny, homophobia, glorification of murder, etc., he saves his wrath for its harsher critics. While issuing the standard defense of gangsta rap’s harsh depictions of “reality” and emphasizing the importance of oral traditions in Black culture, Dyson strongly criticizes such gangsta rap critics as singer-“psychic” Dionne Warwick and C. Delores Tucker, about whom he understandably wonders:

Like most critics, Tucker and Warwick don’t mention the homophobia of gangsta rap; is it because like many mainstream critics, they are not disturbed by sentiments they hold in common with gangsta rappers? (1996, 94)

But Dyson is much more forceful in his denunciations of the negative depictions of Black males in the mainstream media and among the powerful:

From the plantation to the postindustrial city, black males have been seen as brutishly behaved, morally flawed, uniquely ugly, and fatally oversexed. The creation of negative black male images through the organs of popular culture—especially in theological tracts, novels, and more recently, film and television—simply reinforced stereotypes of black males as undisciplined social pariahs, citizens of a corrupt subculture of crime, or imbeciles. Add to that the influence of scholarly portrayals of black males, particularly those contained in ethnographic studies that have both aided and undermined the cultural status of black men, and one gets a hint of the forces challenging a balanced presentation of their condition. (1996, 168–9)

Ironically, the “easy target” of gangsta rap fits neatly within this historical framework. Indeed, the most degrading and dangerous Black stereotypes ever concocted are glamorized by gangsta rappers. Alcohol abuse, drunk driving, sexual irresponsibility, gang violence, murder, illicit drug use and sales, mistreatment and degradation of women, the willful adoption of the term “nigger” as an authentic Black identity, and so forth are all glorified in gangsta rap. Moreover, gangsta rap is probably far more influential among many youths than the negative images emanating from the white mainstream media.

Unlike liberals and progressives, Malcolm directed his rage at the Blacks he loved. He held his people to very high ethical and intellectual standards and did not excuse or rationalize their faults, although he understood the root causes of those faults. This is what progressive critiques of Malcolm’s thought usually—and conveniently—ignore. And this is one of the major reasons why many Black religious conservative intellectuals and reactionary Black nationalists find much of Malcolm’s message so attractive. The simplistic liberal-progressive dichotomy of victim versus victimizer is both false and unrealistic. Many Blacks, like many people from all other groups, often cause and

exacerbate their own problems, sometimes even becoming victimizers themselves (e.g., Black-on-Black crime.) The reluctance to acknowledge this fact and to demand individual accountability makes it more difficult to understand the complexity of problems afflicting people of African descent.

Indeed, increasing numbers of progressives have come to realize this unpopular truth. As West rightly notes:

The notion that racial discrimination is the sole cause of the prevailing predicament of the black working poor and underclass is specious. . . . White racism indeed is pernicious and potent—yet it cannot fully explain the socioeconomic position of the majority of Black Americans. (1988, 59)

Sociologist Orlando Patterson, Washington Congressional delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, sociologist William Julius Wilson, Manning Marable, and many others have expressed similar views. But they have been attacked by progressives for “blaming the victim.”

In part two of a brilliant article on Farrakhan in the *Nation*, Adolph Reed accused such thinkers of “spreading pathology among the poor” (1991, 90). And writer Joe Wood stated in the *Village Voice*, “The ‘responsibility’ rap pushes Black politics into a hopeless discussion about the morality of black people and dodge[s] real issues black folk want sorted out” (1994, 26).

Similarly, many of those rappers who have positive messages of self-help in their music have been attacked by progressives. For example, in the late 1980s when East Coast rappers released the hit “Self-destruction,” they were criticized by some progressives for having the audacity to demand that Blacks take it upon themselves to stop Black-on-Black violence. Moreover, they were accused of not being sufficiently critical of classism and the many factors circumscribing such behavior.

It is curious that progressives never suggest that Malcolm was ever guilty of blaming the victim, although he raised the same issues being raised by today’s alleged victim-blamers. This classic either-or logical fallacy that we are all either victims or victimizers must be combated by thinkers from all backgrounds. To suggest that Blacks are incapable of significantly improving

their plight is insulting and self-defeating. Simply because self-help messages mesh neatly with right-wing rhetoric does not mean that those messages are worthless, or that the messengers are attempting to scapegoat or demonize Black people. It is this kind of fear of self-examination and self-criticism that Malcolm spent so much time battling during his last days. Simply ignoring uncomfortable and inconvenient truths will not make them go away.

Like West, who believes that the Black church is the only organic institution in Black America and an extremely important vehicle for Black liberation, Dyson sees a need for spirituality and secular ideals in public life. He writes:

Black religionists (Christian and Muslim) are suspicious of secular ideologies that deny the validity of religious experience. Conversely, the strength of radical democratic philosophy and practice has been its unblinking description of the ills associated with forms of thought and political practice shaped by unjust forces, some of which were maintained by religious belief. (1995, 164–5)

This seems to be the greatest challenge confronting Black religious progressives—the merging of the spiritual with the secular. But the goal continues to be elusive, and its prospects are not bright.

Many Black conservatives are grappling with the same problem, as does Stephen Carter in his book *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (1993), which is a favorite among religious liberals and conservatives alike. Carter believes that religious belief and practice are unfairly excluded from public discourse, and that much of U.S. society is based on the assumption that religious devotion does not matter in determining how people should live. He argues that although religious believers constitute the vast majority of people in the United States, they are treated with contempt by the media. Religious individuals and organizations, Carter acknowledges, can be hostile, oppressive, intolerant, and tyrannical; religions as such, he maintains, particularly mainstream religions, are not so. He writes:

To do battle against the death sentence for Salman Rushdie—to battle against the Ayatollah—one should properly fight against official censorship and intimidation, not against religion. We err when we presume that religious motives are likely to be illiberal, and we compound the error when we insist that the devout should keep their religious ideas—whether good or bad—to themselves. (1993, 10)

Like most religious intellectuals, Carter conveniently denies the fact that “sacred” texts routinely condone ignorance, dogmatism, and intolerance. In his book *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, Ibn Warraq correctly notes that after Khomeini’s *Fatwa* against Rushdie, Western apologists for Islam wrote numerous books and articles demonstrating that the idea of punishing blasphemers is consistent with Qur’anic teachings (1995). Indeed, throughout history, countless millions of lives have been ruined by religious fanatics insistent upon forcing “God’s will” on others. Today religious fanatics in France, Egypt, Iran, Sudan, Bosnia, Algeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and numerous other nations are accurately quoting their sacred texts as they try to force their religious worldview on as many people as possible. While Carter does not want to separate apparently benevolent ideas of religious people from their religions, he *does* want to distance ugly and disturbing religious ideas from their ultimate sources, religious texts. In this way, religious intellectuals often render themselves incapable of fully understanding and combating the problems they seek to eliminate.

Carter shoots himself in the foot when trying to defend the putative moral right of Jehovah’s Witnesses to deny their children lifesaving treatment. The Witnesses believe, for example, that it is a violation of God’s law to accept a blood transfusion. But the state places the child’s physical welfare above the welfare of his or her supposed soul. Carter, however, makes a distinction between “factual knowledge” and “moral knowledge,” between “moral truth” and “empirical truth,” between statements of “fact” and statements of “value,” etc. He argues that although many religious claims cannot be tested

against hypotheses of the natural world, they may be testable in other ways. Not surprisingly, he does not reveal exactly how this testing might be done. Still, Carter resents the fact that the claim of the Witnesses is treated by the state as though it is simply false.

Like many religious intellectuals, Carter is unable and/or unwilling to deal with ethical dilemmas, real or apparent. When a Witness's child's life is on the line, he gives no compelling reasons why faith in an afterlife should have greater importance than saving and improving the individual's life on earth. Would not the parents of the child in a very real sense be "playing God" by withholding lifesaving medical treatment? And should not human beings take into consideration the probability and improbability of the truth of religious claims? Should the parents' freedom of religion mean the "freedom" to force religious views on their children that will harm or kill those children in this world? And most important, there is a real possibility that the children might grow up to leave their religion altogether, i.e., to convert, or, God forbid, embrace atheism. Should the state assume that such would not or could not be the case? Should the children be denied life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness because their parents deem it spiritually correct? Should there be any limits imposed by the state upon religious believers? For example, what if a new religion arises in which human sacrifices are required? And if it is wrong to sacrifice human beings, why is it not wrong for Jehovah's Witnesses to sacrifice their children by denying them lifesaving medical treatment? Should there be no limit to what the state allows in the name of God or gods?

Atheist writer Greg Erwin profoundly demonstrates the absurdity of state laws that allow parents to rely solely on "spiritual treatment" for their children:

If an atheist were to refuse to provide insulin for a diabetic child, it would be a crime. If a Christian Scientist does the same, it is an expression of faith. How can a failure to provide modern medical treatment for a sick child be anything but a failure to provide adequate care? (1995, 3)

Carter writes:

I strongly defend the separation of church and state, but insist that it is possible to maintain that crucial separation while treating religious beliefs with respect, and treating religious believers as something other than irrational. (1993, 16)

While this is certainly possible, polemical attacks against religion have, ironically, contributed greatly to freedom of religion and freedom from religion, at least since the eighteenth century. Moreover, many, if not most, religious beliefs are irrational. Why should one feel intellectually or ethically obligated to pretend otherwise?

Carter believes that religion should be a part of public discourse, whether it comes from the Left or the Right. But he writes:

The sense that the religiously devout hold principles that they will not surrender to societal demand is one reason that so many contemporary theorists of liberal democracy either omit religion from their theories or assign it a subsidiary role. Today's political philosophers see public dialogue as essentially secular, bounded by requirements of rationality and reason. It is not easy to fit religion into that universe, which is why some religiously devout people find themselves at war with the dominant trends in contemporary philosophy. (1993, 42)

This is the crux of Carter's thesis. If "rationality and reason" do not serve as the primary arbiters in public discourse, what will? What better way to test truth claims than through critical analysis? Moreover, many religious claims (such as faith healing) *can* be tested against hypotheses of the natural world. And those religious claims that cannot be tested in this manner might simply be anecdotes, subjective experiences, or unexplained mysteries. Why should they be given value equal to objective claims supported by strong evidence? As philosopher Paul Kurtz wisely observes, it is quite possible (although not necessarily easy) for people to go through life without religion, spirituality, superstition, paranormal beliefs, etc. But everyone needs to use reason

throughout life to solve problems and pursue happiness. What separates human beings from the lower animals is not a belief in God, or any other belief, but the level of development of the neocortex, which makes human reason possible.

Carter claims that in their zeal to forbid the endorsement of religion in the public sector, secularists have made it difficult, if not impossible, to teach about religion objectively in public schools, or even to mention it. He writes, "A number of studies have concluded that the public school curriculum is actually biased against religion" (1993, 206).

To his credit, Carter states that the negative side of religion should be taught as well. But he clearly does not mean that negative ideas from sacred texts should be discussed. While he discusses the putative necessity of learning about "Christianity, Judaism, and many of the nation's other religious traditions" (209), he certainly does not suggest that students also learn about the critiques of religion made by such historical figures as Thomas Paine, Robert G. Ingersoll, Clarence Darrow, Hubert H. Harrison, or Joel Augustus Rogers. Furthermore, he does not suggest that students learn about the large body of biblical scholarship that casts doubt on the historicity of the Old and New Testaments, i.e., knowledge that challenges comfortably held and deeply cherished religious assumptions.

Carter, however, does acknowledge the many problems that teaching about religion can present. He writes that Richard Baer of Cornell University "worries that a requirement of 'objectivity' would make it illegitimate for teachers to criticize any religions, including fanatical apocalypticism, or snake handling." Carter also notes that children ask tough questions:

Sooner or later, teachers using the new books and other programs will be asked questions like, "But is it true?" or "What happens when we die?" or "Who made God?" The only safe answers will be those that so frustrated school children searching for certainty: "Well, many people believe that . . . and on the other hand, many others think" Few teachers are likely to enjoy picking their way through this particular minefield. (1993, 209)

Carter, again, shoots himself in the foot here. The most he can say on these crucial points is that denying children a knowledge of their religious culture and past is dangerous. As usual, he offers no real solutions to the problems he acknowledges. It seems as if he expects, or simply hopes, that the problems will miraculously correct themselves.

Carter argues against sexism, but will not deal with its sanction in the Bible or other religious texts. He goes so far as to say that the Bible cannot be said to contain sexist teachings because the term “sexist” did not exist in biblical times—a retreat into cultural and historical relativism. Moreover, he writes, “I do not believe that the revealed word of God, Holy Scripture, creates any explicit ban [against the ordination of women]” (1993, 75). Carter happily disregards the numerous biblical passages (Genesis 3:16, for example) that denigrate women as inferior to men. He would rather argue that the “true battle” is not with the male chauvinist messages of the Bible, but with male chauvinist Christians inspired by those messages. Carter deals with slavery, anti-Semitism, and other “isms” condoned in the Bible in similar fashion.

The biggest difference between Black religious conservative intellectuals and their radical counterparts is that the latter advocate structural changes that increase the role of government in efforts to improve society. While Black religious conservatives focus mainly on values, individualism, individual behavior, and a reduction in government largesse to improve conditions afflicting the poor, Black religious radicals focus mainly on a major redistribution of wealth and increased government spending to cure societal ills. Black religious radicals assert that power and wealth are largely controlled by small numbers of wealthy capitalist white males. The presidency, the Congress, the world’s wealthiest banks and corporations, the legal system, the media, institutions of higher learning, the Federal Reserve System, etc. are controlled to a large degree by white males. Black religious radicals argue that this is not due to white genetic superiority, but to a patriarchal, heterosexist, white-supremacist power structure that dates back to the early days of Western colonialism. Moreover, they assert that human behavior is circumscribed by the

powerful institutions and influences that control people's lives, and that individual initiative, if it matters at all, can only take people so far.

Cornel West's "Christocentric perspective" has led him to incorporate Marxism, liberalism, pragmatism, and post-modernism into his prophetic vision for society. His concern is mainly with the poor and disfranchised. But although he advocates socialism and a salary cap for all citizens, he believes that people are greatly motivated by the desire for money and material objects, and that they should be able to make a great deal of money.

In an editorial in the October 1995 issue of *First Things*, West is taken to task for his supposed hypocrisy. Quoting from a scathing attack on West by Leon Wieseltier in the *New Republic*, the editorial relates:

Wieseltier notes that West complains that nine taxis refused to take him to East Harlem where he was to be photographed among the masses for the dust cover of his latest book. West is indignant at the Manhattan cabbies although he tells us, "I left my car—a rather elegant one—in a safe parking lot." Wieseltier observes "So the taxis would not take him where he would not take his car! This is not precisely what Gramsci had in mind." (82)

West is famous, owns expensive suits, an expensive car, and is paid extremely well within the capitalist system he spends so much time critiquing. For these reasons and others, West appears to many to be quite bourgeois.

West, Hooks, and Dyson advocate federally funded business development in U.S. cities, bemoaning the abandonment of the inner cities by businesses for suburban business development and relocation to and exploitation of foreign markets. The critiques by these intellectuals are devoid of the jingoism and xenophobia that often accompany conservative attacks on U.S. investment in foreign nations.

While many progressive religious intellectuals argue that rapidly improving technology and the information age have left many poor people and minorities jobless, they have not devised

strategies for providing good jobs for the masses. Today a college degree is often required to perform some of the easiest and most mundane tasks. But as long as the cost of higher education continues to soar, and government aid continues to dwindle, millions will be left uneducated, unemployed, and underemployed, especially those from among the poor and from the lower middle-class who have traditionally relied heavily upon industry for their livelihoods. If those who can get into college are to be the only ones with opportunities to live reasonably well, class and racial warfare will become a very real possibility.

Many religious progressive intellectuals and many of their conservative counterparts attended or supported the Million Man March in October 1995. Dyson, who was in attendance at the event, remarked:

Unless the laws of the land are reshaped to bolster political and public policy to attend to those economic and social practices that harm Black men, the inspiration to act better may evaporate under the thick pressure of political resistance. (Cottman 1995, 85)

But Dyson does not believe that human thought and human action will suffice in making Black people whole. He says:

It was important for us to atone and search ourselves in the presence of God during these difficult times of constant demands on Black men. Prayer is the only way to reclaim the vital center of our lives and our families. We need to pay more attention to the spiritual yearnings and urgings that animate human behavior, that give life to the most poignant moments and clearest meanings, and without prayer, that is impossible. Prayer gives us motivation to exercise those public principles we cherish dearly; prayer is the vital link between what we know we ought to do and we ultimately end up doing. Prayer not only gives us the ability to move mountains, but it changes our attitudes about the mountains we face. (Cottman, 1995, 46)

West, a major organizer and advocate of the march, has expressed similar views. On the other hand, Loury, a critic of

Farrakhan, the march's primary organizer, was more impressed by the marchers' emphasis on traditional family values. Unlike most religious progressive intellectuals, Loury does not believe that white racism is the most serious problem facing African Americans today. Though he found the conservative messages of the march attractive, Loury prefers the Promise Keepers movement, a predominantly white Christian moralistic movement sweeping North America that expresses the view that the human condition, and not the racial condition, should be the focus of attention. When asked for the solution to problems confronting African Americans, Loury says:

The solution is the Christian faith: I mean the church and the community of believers engaged with these problems, and bringing the moral teachings of the church and the salvation that's available through the faith to those who are in need. . . . I don't believe that tinkering with economic incentives can get us where we need to go. Indeed, I think that the larger society is in some difficulty and that there are various indicators that people are recognizing that the only way to respond effectively to that difficulty is through revival and evangelism in a large sense. (Cromartie 1996, 20)

Loury believes that Blacks might need to look for new allies in their efforts to improve their lot. He believes that the Christian Right would make great allies in this regard. In their defense he relates:

Class-wise, these people run the whole gamut in terms of education and income. There are going to be many of them who are going to be from their own kind of working-class or regional roots and sympathetic to the underdog. . . . I would much rather argue the poverty and welfare issues in spiritual terms than in terms of incentives and so forth. (Cromartie 1996, 20)

Advocating the "Christian faith" as the solution to problems afflicting Black people is fraught with problems. First, it implies that non-Christians have little or nothing to contribute in the way

of concrete solutions. Second, there is no monolithic Christian faith. Loury is a conservative Christian, yet most Blacks are very distrustful of the Religious Right, and view its adherents as frighteningly racist and reactionary. Third, giving such short shrift to structural problems will not solve them. Whether prayer and evangelism will make people more generous, hardworking, and conscientious is highly debatable. But they certainly will not suffice in redistributing wealth or empowering poor and working-class people.

Loury has caused much consternation among religious progressive intellectuals by challenging their conceptions of Christianity. For example, he tells of the time he saw Jerry Falwell and the head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Joseph Lowery, on the talk show "Crossfire":

Now the question of gays came up. Basically, Falwell turned around to Lowery, and he said "Come on now Joe. What do you preach in your pulpit on Sunday about homosexuality? Don't you preach what it says in Deuteronomy?" Joe fidgeted, grumbled, evaded and never answered the question. I thought, "Wow, that's pretty interesting. He's a liberal, and he has to keep to the political line on this issue, yet to do so he's denying what he teaches from the pulpit." (Cromartie 1996, 20)

Here is another example of the conceptual confusion and inevitable hypocrisy encountered by religious progressive intellectuals. They often come face-to-face with biblical teachings that blatantly contradict their worldview, and the cognitive dissonance they experience is often difficult for them to handle.

It is curious that West, Dyson, and other religious progressives joined with Farrakhan and the Reverend Ben Chavis in endorsing the Million Man March. Both Chavis and Farrakhan have thoroughly sexist views of women, and Farrakhan has promoted bigotry, intolerance, authoritarianism, and other antiprogressive views throughout his career. It is understandable that there are times when male-only gatherings are appropriate. But to support a call for a male-only march that was initiated by male chauvinists unwittingly lends credence to

reactionary leaders, ideologues, organizations, and ideas. Possibly due to feelings of desperation and hopelessness, many progressives apparently believe that a show of Black unity under charismatic reactionary leadership will present no serious threat to their progressive vision for society.

Moreover, Farrakhan's claim that his idea for the march was divinely inspired seemed to have gone totally unchallenged, most notably by progressive religious intellectuals. It should strike progressive intellectuals as odd that a call from God for atonement went out only to Black men, and not to all human beings. Indeed, one would have expected a divinely inspired call for all citizens from every country to come together for atonement (with at least a few religious miracles thrown in to persuade the skeptics).

The logical implication of Farrakhan's claim of divine inspiration for the march is that God is a reactionary, authoritarian, male chauvinist deity—at least sometimes. But this is the progressive religious intellectuals' greatest dilemma. They cannot sufficiently attack reactionary religious ideas, because to do so would eventually cause widespread doubts about religion in general.

It is likely that religious intellectuals will always have great influence in public life, particularly among Blacks. And many of the views of religious intellectuals will continue to be vague, muddled, contradictory, utterly baffling, and sometimes inhumane, as are the religions that give birth to them. It will therefore always be important for critical thinkers to step courageously to the forefront and boldly challenge all ideas that impede or threaten genuine human progress.

African Americans for Humanism
Buffalo, New York

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Kate Austin: A Feminist-Anarchist on the Farmer's Last Frontier

Howard S. Miller

The sexual question can no longer be passed over in silence. . . . Sexual liberty constitutes part of general liberty. . . . Liberty in all things, liberty to live and liberty to love—such must be the password of anarchists. . . . Marriage and slavery, the two are one. . . because men do not know how to separate the idea of possession from the idea of love. . . .

As long as the Church and the State continue to exercise control . . . upon the desires and passions resulting from the sexual appetite, for that long will their dominion last. Governments and churches are not ignorant of this. . . . Those who take to heart the love of liberty . . . [must] declare war . . . on this contemptible code of morality, born in the atrophied brains of religious fanatics. . . . A rational conception of sexual morality [will come] only by . . . study, then agitation and propaganda for the new idea. It is in debating questions, all questions, that man is led to think, to discuss, then to act.

Strident words, written in 1900 for delivery at an anarchist assembly in Paris. Dangerous words, calling for the overthrow of family, church, and state. Surprising words, too, coming as they did from a midwestern farmwife and mother of five, who wrote revolutionary propaganda at her kitchen table in the evenings after chores (K. Austin 1900i; Goldman 1900a; 1900b; 1931, 240–3; Falk et al. 1995, 44, 47–50).

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Kate Austin was as American as motherhood, Seneca Falls, and Haymarket Square. She lived and voiced a strain of grass-roots feminist anarchism far more widespread and potent in her day than later generations would suppose. Her example was a reminder that the “little house on the prairie” could as well be a nursery of rebellion as a cradle of traditional family values. Indeed, a whole population of aging Free-Soilers, homegrown socialists, assertive infidels, determined feminists, passionate free-lovers, and committed terrorists stalked the Middle Border in the Gilded Age. In this contentious cultural landscape, village atheism and underclass rebellion were the mirror-image twins of bourgeois piety and conventional deportment.¹

Kate Austin was a product of this contrary, rural America, where populist experience crossbred with left-wing European social theory. Like others of her persuasion, she had a problem with authority, especially the authority of church and state as it bore on the relations between men and women. She believed that personal autonomy was absolute, and hence applied equally to all. Her devotion to liberty made her an anarchist; her hostility to patriarchy made her a feminist. She was too much the former to join the organized women’s movements of her day, and too much the latter to ally with mainline political anarchists—most of them men—whose devotion to liberty often stopped short of women’s liberation.²

* * *

Kate Austin was born Catherine Cooper in Troy Grove, LaSalle County, Illinois, in 1864. The Coopers, like many of their neighbors, were transplanted New Yorkers who had settled the prairies north of the Illinois River when canal and railroad development set off a regional boom in the 1840s (Bogue 1963; Barkun 1986; Conzen and Carr 1988). They had come from Niagara County, a hot spot in the so-called “Burned Over District,” where reform enthusiasms had blazed for decades. The Coopers were a family of bookish farmers and schoolteachers, Universalists tending toward spiritualism and freethought in religion, liberal in outlook. The Cooper women’s evolving politics surfaced in their given names: One of Kate’s great-grandmothers

had borne the name Submit; her favorite aunt was named Reform (Wellman 1980; Hewitt 1986; Braude 1989).³

Other family influences also encouraged social protest. Prudence Crandall (now Prudence Philleo), the Connecticut abolitionist heroine of the 1830s, was a close collateral relative and lived nearby. Aged but still determined, Crandall continued to speak out in spite of her minister husband's objections (Nashold 1988; Davis 1980; Welch 1983).

The surrounding townships blazed with reform zeal. Advocates of free soil, abolition, and women's rights were numerous and vocal. In 1862 local farmers organized an Industrial League to protest the capitalist transformation of prairie agriculture. Their grassroots meetings launched the National Labor Union and the most militant proto-greenback movement in the Midwest (Montgomery 1981, 425–47).⁴

LaSalle County radicalism influenced Kate Austin through her parents and relatives—especially through her father, Albert, and through Aunt Reform Goddard. Kate was three or four when the Coopers and the Goddards removed to central Iowa. They maintained close ties with their Illinois kin, however, and Kate got another dose of her heritage during her impressionable teenage years.

She had just turned thirteen when her mother died in 1876. The eldest daughter of an only marginally successful, now short-handed and despondent farmer, Kate had little choice but to give up school and take on the adult responsibilities of housekeeper, farmhand, and stand-in mother for five younger brothers and sisters. Her father never remarried.

Four years later Kate returned to Troy Grove to live for a year with her populist relatives. She no doubt listened to her uncle denounce the “consuming classes” from the stump during the campaign of 1880. Perhaps she helped him erect the greenback labor liberty pole that stood in his front yard. During her year in Troy Grove, Kate went to country school with her Crandall cousins and foreshadowed her later journalistic career as coeditor of the handwritten country school newspaper, the *Troy Grove Trumpet*. Her souvenir autograph book from those years preserves tender notes from teenage girlfriends, true womanly

admonitions from their mothers, and greetings from well-wishers in the greenback cause (K. Austin 1880; Crandall 1880).

* * *

Kate Cooper came of age in Hamilton County, Iowa, about fifty miles north of Des Moines. Her intellectual horizons broadened. Wide reading gave her a sense of the power of language and a critical perspective on the events that touched her life. She grew up a freethinker and a sex-radical, married a supportive husband, bore children, and declared war on the institutions of family, church, and state.

Kate married Sam Austin in a civil ceremony in late summer, 1883. The Austins, also upstate New Yorkers, had settled a few miles away about the time the Coopers had arrived from Illinois. Sam's father, Charles Austin, was a dairy farmer and stockman, substantially better off than Al Cooper. At first Kate and Sam lived with the senior Austins in an expansive household that embraced assorted in-laws, orphaned children from neighboring farms, and hired hands as well as immediate family; then they moved to their own place nearby. Their first child arrived within the year. Four more followed at two-year intervals (J. Austin n.d.).⁵

Desire and necessity shaped a household of shared values and mutual aid. The sexual division of labor on family farms was complex and rarely rigid, especially if dairying was the principal source of income. Men's and women's conventional spheres often overlapped in the butterery. And at a time when capital-intensive commercial creameries were rapidly consolidating and masculinizing Hamilton County butter production, the Austins continued to churn at home (Schweider 1980; Jensen 1986, 79–91; Nunnally 1989; Turbin 1989; Marti 1991; Fink 1986 19–20; Osterud 1991, 20–1; Neth 1994).

However strong their mutual affection, Kate and Sam must have approached the institution of marriage with some trepidation. Charles Austin's four marriages had been racked by divorce, desertion, and bigamy. Al Cooper had reared his daughters to respect themselves, to affirm their affections, to doubt the

Bible, and to resist authority. Sam came around quickly to the Cooper way of thinking; most of the Austins converted in time.

For years Al Cooper had been a freethinker, an avid reader of Tom Paine, Robert G. Ingersoll, and other popular infidel authors. His long quest for religious certitude had led him, as it often led Universalists and spiritualists, from faith through skepticism to militant unbelief. Freethought was on the rise in the Gilded Age. It received an intellectual boost from Darwinism, and a publicity boost from spellbinding infidel orators and feminist Bible-bashers like Ingersoll, Victoria Woodhull, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Marty 1961; Braude 1989; Owen 1990; Whitehead and Muhrer 1992; Stanton 1981).

Freethought, like anarchism, fed on contention. Nevertheless, disbelievers of all persuasions agreed on a few fundamentals: that the individual mind was sovereign; that science, not faith, was the only sure path to knowledge; that the universe was rational, even friendly, though not by supernatural design; that human behavior was the foundation of morality and ethics; that the scene of human progress was the here and now, not the hereafter; and that church and state were tyrannical threats to liberty (Post 1943; Warren 1943; Marty 1961; Turner 1985). About the time Kate and Sam married, the Coopers began reading *Lucifer, The Light-Bearer*, a freethought and sex-radical newspaper published by Moses Harman. They were more attracted to Harman's sex-radicalism than they were to his particular brand of anarchism. Harman leaned "right" toward individualist anarchism, which would abolish all external authority to give the sovereign ego free reign. The Coopers leaned "left" toward "free communism," which would abolish all external authority to liberate the natural human impulses toward unfettered affection and mutual aid. Luciferian free lovers rejected conventional marriage sanctioned by church and state. Instead they proposed voluntary unions of co-equal individuals who agreed to maintain their economic autonomy and freedom of sexual choice. True love, Kate later argued, was no more exclusive than true friendship; any man or woman capable of real affection was "a varietist at heart" (K. Austin 1900k; Sears 1977; Seidman 1990; Brooks 1993, 57–9).

Lucifer championed freethought, free speech, radical alternatives to industrial capitalism, and especially self-ownership, which implied absolute sexual equality, freedom of sexual choice, and birth control as preconditions of woman's liberation. Ever since Seneca Falls, sex-radicals had been hammering away at the nexus between gender, money, and power; Harman broadcast their arguments in accessible, sexually explicit language (Harman 1881, 1901; Gordon 1976; Sears 1977; Leach 1980; Spurlock 1988; Blatt 1989).

Harman was a moralist, not a hedonist, but his own writings and anything-goes editorial policy kept *Lucifer* in perpetual trouble with the law. In 1886 Harman went to jail under the 1873 Comstock law for publishing a letter from a reader denouncing, in forbidden language, the forbidden subject of marital rape.

Every Comstock prosecution, however, gained *Lucifer* greater notoriety and gave greater credence to the view that the real targets of Comstockery were not dirty books, but uppity women trying to assert their right of self-determination.

Lucifer was only the most visible of the radical papers that functioned as a communications network and public forum for the legions of sexual discontent in the small towns and isolated farmsteads of late Victorian America. In addition to articles and editorials and ads for the latest radical literature, these papers printed columns of unedited letters from readers, usually signed and postmarked and astoundingly frank. Thousands of these personal statements, made political by public expression, documented the existence of a remarkably forthright women's underground (Malin 1964; Sears 1977)

* * *

During the seventies and eighties, times were hard and tempers short on the Middle Border. Costs went up as prices went down. The weather was bad, the grasshoppers worse. Desperate Hamilton County farmers rallied in mass meetings to denounce eastern capitalists, who were "fast riveting the chains of slavery upon the laboring and producing classes." In the midst of the Granger uproar, Iowa suffragists launched a parallel campaign to end the male monopoly over state politics. Woman suffrage got

nowhere in the legislature, but months of lobbying by local feminists and outside agitators broadened the suffrage issue to the larger woman question and insured that it would not go away (Lee 1912, 167–9; Noun 1969; Riley 1981; Pounds 1991).

The bomb blast in Haymarket Square on 4 May 1886 put the Iowa struggles in broader perspective. Kate and Sam concluded that the Chicago anarchists were not being prosecuted for their alleged actions, but for their admitted beliefs. The show trial deepened their moral revulsion, confirmed their anarchist politics, and hardened their resolve. They contributed what little cash they could spare to the Haymarket Martyrs' legal defense fund and circulated a copy of the courtroom speeches among their neighbors until the binding wore out. "The main reason that those speeches are best for propaganda," wrote Kate, "is that their last words are a plain, concise statement of the conditions of the American serf, . . . a masterly arraignment of the 'powers that be,' . . . a last appeal, in plain English, to the lower class." Kate and Sam hung a lithograph portrait of the Martyrs on the kitchen wall, a modest family shrine to the spirit of rebellion (K. Austin 1893a, 1895b, 1898c 1901d; Nold 1902a, 1902b, 1934a).

Family life and public affairs flowed easily into one another because experience and ideology taught the same lesson: the oppressed everywhere were comrades in a common struggle against authority and exploitation. A newsy 1888 letter to her more conservative brother-in-law revealed a great deal about Kate's situation and outlook:

We are enjoying good health. . . . Corn hasn't tasseled yet but looks splendid. . . . I suppose you will vote for Harrison, and Morton the banker. . . . Ah Jim, you want to change. 40 or 50 years from now you will have to tell your grand children that these days saw you . . . on the side of the aristocratic Rep[ublicans] against what is now called the mob from the slums and the Red handed anarchists. I see that both preachers that headed the dem[ocrat] and Rep. [ublican] conventions asked god to deliver this great government from anarchy. Oh Lord! What a mockery as if anarchy was the only thing that endangers us. . . . Well

I'll change the subject. Grass is splendid this year. . . . I lost all my hens but a dozen with cholera. . . . Roy and Mary are as mean as they can be. The only time they are good is when they are taking the harvester to pieces. . . . The Riv[er] Co[mpany] tried to put John Olison off again. A few of the Swedes and Austin went down and prevented it. Now there is some talk that the Sheriff is coming to arrest Sam and your father.

The riverlands had been seething for decades, ever since the federal government had granted vast tracts of the Des Moines River basin to a private development company in exchange for promised internal improvements. The River Company made only token improvements before unloading most of its holdings on eager speculators. Subsequent resales, lawsuits, and fraud had eventually clouded most of the land titles in central Iowa. In the confusion it was hard to tell a land shark from an honest settler, easy to be a squatter by accident or choice (Lee 1912, 249–59; Lokken 1942, 210–301; Bogue 1963, 47–66; Swierenga 1968).

Appealing to a deeply ingrained homestead ethic, riverlanders insisted that the claims of poor resident farmers should prevail over those by rich absentee speculators. They noted similar enclosures then underway from Ireland to California, and understood their struggle as part of a larger defense of yeoman independence against corporate encroachment. The riverlanders appealed to the law, hiring infidel GOP stalwart Robert G. Ingersoll and liberal land reformer George Julian to plead their cause in Washington. When lobbying failed, riverlanders organized a Settlers Union to fight the law in the name of justice.

The law won. Thousands of riverlanders lost their farms. A sympathetic national press told the story in banner headlines: “Turned Out of Home: Scenes of Woe and Sorrow—Evictions Ruthlessly and Heartlessly Carried Out: Pitiless Rigor of the Law.” “Sympathy with the Settlers, Law With the Capitalists, and the Blame Upon the General Government.” Even members of the eviction posses had second thoughts: “Darned if it don’t look hard to see a good man set out that way with his wife and little folks, especially in a big free country like this” (*New York*

Weekly Press 1888; Stevens 1888a, 1888b, 1888c; Harman 1887; Waisbrooker 1894; Brown 1977, 73–98; Brown 1991 87–127, 206–28).

The Austins' lives were in turmoil. Charles's title was shaky; Kate and Sam were squatters. She was pregnant, they were building a new house, and the crops looked good. But President Cleveland's latest veto had killed a riverlands indemnity bill, setting off a new round of evictions and skirmishes between Settlers' Union nightriders and the authorities. After someone shot the sheriff, rumors flew that conspiracy warrants were out on the ringleaders of the Settlers Union, Sam and his father among them.

The eviction posse rode out every week or so throughout the summer and fall of 1888. They got around to Kate and Sam in late November. When the sheriff served the warrant, Sam pulled a gun. After a few tense moments, Sam backed down; the deputies lowered their Winchesters and proceeded to turn out the Austins' stock and pile their belongings on the road (Stevens 1888a, 1888c; *New York Weekly Press* 1888). As often happened in the riverlands, neighbors helped Kate and Sam move back in the next day. But they knew now that Hamilton County was no safer from tyranny than Haymarket Square.

* * *

For the next two seasons the Cooper-Austin clan shuttled back and forth between homesteads, then packed up and scattered. Kate and Sam, their parents, and several neighboring families moved three hundred miles due south to Missouri, where Sam and his father split a parcel of land near the village of Caplinger Mill. The new farm was a step down in agriculture but a step up in autonomy. Cedar County land was rich enough to support a family but not rich enough to attract speculators.

Kate and Sam moved into a spacious old house that came with the place and started over raising cattle, dairying, and growing nursery stock. Kate deliberately streamlined the household to minimize housework. Instead of knickknacks there were shelves of books and stacks of papers. The household was alive with conversation and often filled with visitors. Kate's youngest

daughter later recalled her mother's response to a request for domestic amenities: "What? Buy carpets and cushions and coddle ourselves . . . when the same money would bring us Thoreau and Emerson or help the strikers in New Jersey?" (J. Austin n.d.; C. Austin 1982–83; Morton 1900; Goldman 1931).

Kate had published occasional pieces in an Iowa free-love newspaper during the riverland troubles. Now, after a year or so of settling in at Caplinger Mills, she began to write in earnest. Her initial, hesitant notes quickly evolved into self-assured essays as she found her public voice. Open letters, editorial essays, reviews, and running arguments with other anarchists eventually numbered in the hundreds. Kate also carried on a voluminous correspondence with like-minded women and men.⁶ Locally she passed out subversive literature and contraband contraceptives to birth-worn neighbor women. Sam shared her devotion to the cause, but remained a compelling talker rather than a writer (K. Austin 1895a, 1897a).

Kate Austin found her vocation in propaganda. Her writing was a product of natural talent, personal urge, and practical necessity, all rationalized by her theory of social change. Committed to family, farm, and children, she was in no position to travel the lecture circuit like an Emma Goldman. Citing Kate as an example, Goldman once pointed out that while many European anarchist women were young, itinerant speakers, most of their U.S. counterparts were older, more settled, and writers. "When a woman becomes an Anarchist comparatively late in life," explained Goldman, "she has already entered into economic conditions that hold her. She can do for the cause only what is consistent with the life she seems compelled to lead" (K. Austin 1900f, 1893a; Goldman 1906; McKinley 1982, 1990).

It was understandably difficult for a feminist-anarchist farmwife to square her life with her politics. Kate Austin was devoted to her family but despised conventional marriage. She was a friendly neighbor but championed terrorism. She aspired to revolutionize the world but never left the farm. Propaganda gave Kate an outlet for her ideas and a vehicle for resolving contradictions between theory and practice into an energizing counterpoint.

Like Emerson, Kate believed that knowledge and will were the springs of reform. But she preferred Michael Bakunin's more forceful phrasing of the same idea. "That which uplifts humanity," she wrote, quoting Bakunin's *God and the State*, "is the power to think and the desire to rebel." Rebellion began with an intelligent minority, whose propaganda taught the masses that "human rights are discovered and appropriated, never bestowed." Once people realized they were slaves to faith, law, property, and patriarchy, they would liberate themselves and "take forcible possession of the fields, the mines and the factories and refuse to longer pay tribute to the class of parasites who now hold possession" (K. Austin 1898b, 1900g, 1901a, 1902a).

During the late nineties, Kate's writings grew increasingly militant, and more often cast in the rhetoric of what she termed "revolutionary materialism." She continued to publish in *Lucifer*, but appeared more often in stridently anarcho-communist papers like *Discontent*, the *Firebrand*, and *Free Society*. She had long since given up on electoral politics, which only legitimated property and authority. Kate regarded political parties as tools of the rich, public office as a "private trust run in the interest of the gang in power." The real engine of progress was class war, which would continue until labor finally annihilated capital. "Let the workers retaliate, give blow for blow, take life for life." The final proletarian revolution would usher in a golden age of loving cooperation (K. Austin 1895b, 1899c, 1900l, 1901a, 1902d).

Kate defended political terrorism even after the assassination of President McKinley, when many of her fellow travelers recoiled. Assassins remained "the beacon stars of slaves that point the way to go, and nerve the arm to strike." Leon Czolgosz was neither evil nor deranged, but a hero who "incarnated the vital forces of our movement, . . . hatred of oppression and the courage to do" (K. Austin 1898b, 1902e). Kate's heroines were not Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, or even Victoria Woodhull. They were Louise Michel, the Parisian communard; Sophie Perovskaya, the narodnik assassin of the Czar; Lucy Parsons, the outspoken widow of a Haymarket martyr; and Emma Goldman (K. Austin 1896, 1898b, 1902e, 1899a).

Red Emma visited Kate and Sam in October 1897, and again

in September 1899. She came first out of curiosity, then returned to nurture a warm friendship. “Kate to me was not the Anarchist, the rebel, the thinker, the writer,” wrote Goldman; “she was a mother, a friend, one to whom I could go for rest and peace. . . . She was all to me.” Kate described Emma as “an armload of feminine sweetness,” and treasured a keepsake brooch with Emma’s picture.⁷ Goldman later combined her two visits into one fond remembrance in *Living My Life*, noting that Kate had been one of only two women who had ever come close enough to understand “the complexities of my being better than I did myself” (K. Austin 1897b, 1899a, 1899b; Goldman 1902, 1931; Falk et al. 1995, 41, 48).

Goldman in turn identified the central paradox of Kate Austin’s personality: that an individual so loving in person could be so bloodthirsty in print. Rhetorical excess was commonplace in the furious war of words between anarchists and their detractors, and Kate held to the propagandist’s principle that anything was justified that drew public attention, good or bad, to the cause (K. Austin 1900g; Dubois 1978, 240–8). But deeper needs may also have drawn her to the rhetoric of bloody apocalypse. Like Goldman, Kate seemed infatuated with violence. For both women the twin passions of free love and social revolution embraced in the romance of terrorism (Lloyd 1902; McKinley 1983; Falk 1984; Wexler 1984; Morgan 1989, 154–79, 180–216; Fox-Genovese 1991; Hong 1992).

* * *

Kate Austin’s thought built on her theory of patriarchy, then broadened to a searing critique of the economic, political, and social order. She argued that “maternity was the most powerful factor in the enslavement of women.” Primitive man had capitalized on his own brute strength and woman’s maternal instincts to reduce her to a “hewer of wood and a drawer of water, and a bearer of children.” Throughout the ages men and their creatures, the church and the state, had exploited these conditions of dominance and dependency. By and large, woman had acquiesced, internalizing notions of inferiority that reduced her to either “a

petted and pampered doll, or an over-worked, child-bearing drudge” (K. Austin 1898a).

Secure in their mastery, modern men had added patronizing insult to injury. “I was told the other day by an intelligent man,” wrote Kate in 1899, “that woman was ‘next door to an angel,’ that they were made to be taken care of, and that it would demoralize them to go to the polls and vote, also that men didn’t love independent women anyway.” Kate hardly tried to mask her scorn:

I’ve always noticed that the men who talk that way never feel hurt when the angel chops the wood, milks the cow, and builds the fire on a cold morning. He is not afraid of that sort of independence, but only of the kind that might question his authority. . . . Isn’t it queer that women can do the hardest kind of manual labor . . . and not a protest is heard. Should she take it in her head to study medicine, practice law, lecture or write on women’s rights . . . the whole masculine world . . . is convulsed, wise old fossils write . . . ponderous papers on the subject. The home is in danger, woman is unsexing herself, getting coarse and masculine, and if she keeps on the world will go to the dogs, and more rot to the same effect. (K. Austin n.d., 1898a, 1899a; Nold 1934b)

Patriarchy would prevail until women reclaimed their independence. The first principles of liberation were freethought and self-ownership. Freethought would banish superstition and find the truth. Self-ownership would emancipate women from slavery to bed and board, and men from slavery to the wage system and the “false dogmas of masculine egotism.” Together freethought and self-ownership would dissolve conventional marriage, topple church and state, and overturn the capitalist-imperialist order (K. Austin 1900j).

When Kate turned from first principles to the news of the day, she often focused her invective on national rulers and international jingoism. She denounced the royal families of Europe as bloated parasites. Queen Victoria was a “stupid, commonplace

woman who cumbered the earth for over eighty years and never earned a mouthful of the food she ate” (K. Austin 1901b). British imperial conquest had impoverished India, violated South Africa, and earned English working people only dead sons and mounting debt. The suppression of the Boxer Rebellion in China by “an invading horde of Christian brutes” proved the hypocrisy of religion and the duplicity of government (K. Austin 1900a, 1900e, 1901c).

Americans were no better. U.S. Grant was a “whiskey tub,” William McKinley an “oily knave,” Theodore Roosevelt a “bully,” William Jennings Bryan another crooked office-seeker, and Eugene Debs a good man corrupted by bad company (K. Austin 1902d, 1900h, 1900i). Kate applauded the Filipinos for their “defensive war” against Yankee imperialism, and denounced William Howard Taft’s Philippine Commission as an elaborate cover-up of U.S. military atrocities. In an oblique reference to Senator Albert J. Beveridge’s 1898 manifesto of Christian jingoism, “The March of the Flag,” Kate wrote that in such distressing times she was thankful to be an anarchist, “flagless as well as godless” (K. Austin 1900c, 1898d).

* * *

At the turn of the century, Kate Austin was just hitting her stride as a propagandist. She was widely read in radical circles, and gained added notoriety when federal authorities jailed the editors of *Firebrand* for publishing one of her more restrained letters on free love in “lewd, obscene, lascivious and indecent” violation of the Comstock Act (K. Austin 1897a; *U.S. v. Henry Addis et al.* 1897; Le Warne 1975, 168–226; Schwantes 1981; Burton 1993).

In 1901 Kate and Sam were among the honored guests at a freethinkers’ camp meeting in Kansas. Kate had the same magnetic effect on Etta Semple, the meeting’s organizer, that she had on Emma Goldman. “Kate Austin was here,” reported Semple, still awed. “We wish you could all see Kate. Homely as a full blown rose, sweet as a pink, and good–well, she is utterly too too. There is no Kate in the whole world but our Kate.” Kate and

Sam invited their comrades to a big gathering at the Austin farm in the summer of 1903 (Semple 1901).

Kate may have known then that it was all a forlorn hope. She had been coughing for months, though she kept up a good front for the sake of the children. But by the summer of 1902 she was writing at a furious pace, nearly a published piece a week, as if she feared her time was running out. Her sex-radical New York physician-by-correspondence, Edward Bliss Foote, diagnosed consumption and prescribed the standard cure: slow recuperation in the salubrious mountain air of southern Colorado. Anarchist friends Lizzie and William Holmes offered their place in La Veta, west of Pueblo (Nold 1902a, 1934a; Holmes 1902; Gordon 1976, 167–70).

Late in September 1902, Kate and Sam left the children at home with her sister Icie and aged Aunt Reform, who now lived with them, and set out for Colorado in a covered wagon. Early winter rain turned to snow as they trekked across Kansas. Kate weakened near Kingman, west of Wichita, and died on the 28th of October (Nold 1902a, 1934a; Holmes 1902).

Icie hurried to Kingman and brought Kate's body back home on the train. Sam followed alone with the team. A week later family and friends gathered at a hillside cemetery near the farm for a memorial service that featured poetry and a eulogy but no scripture. Sam later marked the grave with a simple granite shaft bearing Kate Austin's name, her dates, and the epitaph: "A Friend of Liberty to All Because True to Herself."⁸

Morro Bay, California

NOTES

1. The "New Rural History" has recently broadened the social scope and sharpened the analytic rigor of agricultural history. See especially Jensen 1981; Fairbanks and Sundberg 1983; Swierenga 1982; Faragher 1981; Faragher 1986; Jensen 1986; Hahn and Prude 1985; Neth 1994; Fink 1986; Fink 1992; Osterud 1991, 1993.

2. Historians of rural women have in general ignored feminist-anarchists as much as historians of women anarchists have ignored rural women (cf. Marsh 1981 and Riley 1988). The literature on U.S. anarchism is vast and uneven. Helpful studies include Schuster 1932; Martin 1970; Reichert 1976; De Leon

1978; Blatt 1989; Perry 1973; Avrich 1978; Avrich 1984; 1988; Nelson 1988; Roediger and Rosemont 1986; and Brooks 1993. The best biographical accounts of Kate Austin are the obituary memorials published in the 30 November 1902 issue of *Free Society*, sketches by Carl Nold (1902a, 1902b, 1934a), and her youngest daughter's unpublished reminiscence (J. Austin n.d.).

3. Cooper family history synthesized from Newfane Township, Niagara County, New York, and Troy Grove Township, La Salle County, Illinois, cemetery records, state and federal population and agricultural census schedules; tax lists, land records, court records, newspapers, and county histories.

4. See also "Founders of the First Women's Suffrage Society of Earlville Formed by Susan B. Anthony in the Home of Her Cousin, Susan Richardson," J. Ward Smith Collection, Illinois State Historical Library; *Ottawa Free Trader*, 15, 22, 29 Nov., 13 Dec. 1862; *Ottawa Weekly Republican*, 24 Jan. 1863; *The Revolution* 2 (27 Aug. 1868), 125, 3 (14 Jan. 1869), 1; *Earlville Gazette*, 16 Apr. 1869, 8 Apr. 1870; Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al, *History of Woman Suffrage* (6 vols., 1881–1922), vol. 3, 560–62.

5. Austin family history synthesized from Chemung County, New York, Steuben County, New York, and Hamilton County, Iowa cemetery records, state and federal population and agricultural census schedules, tax lists, court and deed records, newspapers; county histories; Civil War pension files; and taped interviews with Kate Austin descendents, 30 Oct. 1982, 2–4 Dec. 1983.

6. Nearly two hundred published pieces are known; evidence suggests that dozens more appeared in issues of radical papers that do not survive; still more are doubtless scattered in unknown sources. Apparently few of Kate Austin's personal papers or letters survive.

7. The degree of Goldman-Austin intimacy remains a matter of conjecture. None of their extensive correspondence surfaced during the preparation of the 69-reel microfilm edition of the Emma Goldman papers (Falk 1995). Goldman's most nearly contemporaneous published report of her visit dealt exclusively with politics (Goldman 1898). In a brief obituary note on Kate, Goldman wrote, "Human language is inadequate to express my sorrow over the loss of one who to me was, of all the women I have met in my public career, the most beloved friend" (1902). Eight years after Kate died, Goldman sent Sam a copy of her just-published *Anarchism and Other Essays* inscribed "Sam Austin—in memory of our beloved Kate who is ever before me" (Austin Family Papers).

8. Kate Austin is buried in Hackleman Cemetery, Caplinger Mills, Missouri. The graveside eulogy, published in *Free Society* 9, 30 Nov. 1902, was an abbreviated version of one originally written by Voltairine de Cleyre for her atheist friend Katharine Karg Harker, and first published in *Freethought Magazine*, 14 June 1896.

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REPLACES AD PAGE.

“Begone Godmen”: An Interview with B. Premanand

Shinie Antony

Editor’s note: The interview that follows is reprinted with permission from the book “Science versus Miracles” by B. Premanand (Padanur, Tamilnadu, India: Indian Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal [SICOP] 1994): xi–xv. The book “explains tricks behind 150 miracles,” including tongue piercing, skin burning, standing on swords, and changing water into wine. It is available for \$US 15 from the author, 11/7 Chettipalayam Road, Podanur 641 023, India.

The downtown North railway station yawns with studied boredom. The pearls-and-pumps travellers delicately dodge the poor-and-perspiring passengers. All are scurrying by, catching, leaving, or meeting trains that chug in and out of the station with routine indifference. But when a certain man walks—no, strides—into the platform, all eyes follow him. His beard is white and flowing, his voice, as he spots and greets me, is the confident kind, and he’s able to scale curious stares with ease. This tiny kurta-clad man settling comfortably onto a crumbling cement bench is committed to a certain cause—the cause of eradicating ignorance from the layman’s mind regarding his fixation with miracle-merchants and self-appointed godmen. The mercenary “messengers” and the religious message merge into one marathon messiah of materialistic manipulation. A crowd gradually gathers around him—the locals can’t help gawking over

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their inflatable pillows and the tourists stop sipping their mineral water—to which he is completely impervious. Born of theosophist parents in Calicut (1930), B. Premanand has had no formal education. He was dismissed from school in 1942 during the Student Freedom Movement. At home, so as to be able to debate with his father, Premanand immersed himself in the works of Madam Blavatsky and the main religious texts like Koran, the Gita and the Bible. “I cannot argue over something I’m ignorant about,” he points out. He then perfected the art of magic into a fine one and set out to haunt and harass the godmen minting money out of the poor public. His irreverence has often been deemed controversial. In an era of self-styled gurus who promise peace at a premium, this magician sticks out like a sore thumb with his brand of “nirvana” minus a price-tag. The man has a mission and that is to take science out of the school-rooms to the masses.

The Indian Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal came into existence in 1959 and Dr. Abraham T. Koor was the lone light in India around whom the rationalists gathered. With his “Begone Godmen” stance, Koor attracted quite a following. In 1976 Premanand took over from Koor as the latter was too old and sick to continue travelling to the villages of India explaining the tricks behind miracles and superstitious psychic phenomena. Premanand, who is the author of about 26 books, presides over the Vijnan Yatras arranged by state organisations which take him to more than seven thousand villages and cities in India, where he lectures to about two crores [twenty million] of people. He also conducts workshops where he choreographs about 150 miracles and spreads awareness about the history of gods, religion and miracles in each religion. Thus for the exploited, the dancing in the dark comes to an end.

While waiting for his train to Madras, Premanand answered whatever questions were put to him.

Q—Is your crusade against godmen rooted in atheism or a distrust of institutionalised religion?

A—Belief or nonbelief in a god is a matter of personal choice. It doesn’t harm anybody as long as there is no exploitation by

impersonal external forces. When there is nothing called God except as a concept, he can do no harm. All definitions about God are washed out today. How can he be the Creator when nothing can be created or destroyed? The need for a god doesn't exist for some people. The issue becomes irrelevant. There is no god protecting the Hindus and Muslims. It is they who are destroying each other to protect Him at Babri Masjid and Ramajanmabhoomi. This is the mischief of the agents who claim to be the prophets or avatars of gods. People go to them in despair, an emotional state which is easy to exploit. Religion is a part of our cultural ethos. Certain laws and philosophies prevailed and were carried over. God is necessary to those who need a crutch, to those who'll go mad without this crutch. But I'm concerned about those who believe more than they can handle and go mentally berserk. So instead of arguing over the existence of any nebulous entity, I try to arouse the curiosity and scientific temper of people. Once they start asking "why," there is no regression.

Q—What made you the natural successor of Dr. A. T. Kovoov?

A—At first I believed all that I read about gods and gurus. I wanted to possess all the siddhis available. At the age of 19, I set out to find myself a guru. I went to Aurobindo, and Tagore was father's friend. Like Swami Ramdas, who in his book *In Search of God* writes about his tour around India without money and claimed that God took care him, I set out on a trip around India penniless. But I didn't see any god helping me, only human beings. I met a lot of swamis who told me they'll teach me all this kundalini stuff. Kundalini, or sexual energy, is pushed up by creating a vacuum inside the body by yoga through sushumna nadi. Scientifically speaking, it is the semen that rises up, but where is this nadi? They say it's a mental nadi that can be perceived only in meditation, that is sheer imagination. Sexual energy cannot be transformed into mystical strength. Celibacy affects the prostate gland most painfully. I found all the yogis and rishis to be tricksters. Then I grew interested in the tricks. I can make a lot of money as a godman if I want. I know about

1500 miracles as opposed to 50/60 that an average godman knows. Dr. Kovoov used to come from Sri Lanka and hold miracle-exposure campaigns from 1969 onwards. I wrote a book called *Lure of Miracles* on Satya Sai Baba. Publishers refused to touch it, so I published it myself and Kovoov released it for me. I was with him in that tour, as he was ill and there were also a lot of people who wanted to kill him. I became a member of the Rationalists Association. We used to go to village interiors where first I used to burn my body to attract attention. Then we used to give our lectures.

Q—Are efforts to combat Sai Baba’s miracles with science always successful?

A—When you go to buy Sai Baba’s pictures from the samiti, they first make a pretence of wiping the frame. Actually they are anointing it with mercuric chloride solution. When the aluminum frame dabbed with this comes into contact with moisture, a grey powder mistaken for holy ash falls out. While Karanjia used to write pro-Sai Baba articles in his *Blitz*, I used to write anti ones in *Current*. And all the Karanjia write-ups were advertisements. They were sponsored articles.

Q—How can you discount palmistry and astrology when even educated people are turning to these for solace and information?

A—When you have a joint in your body there has to be some loose skin to support it. This loose skin will be creased naturally. If you take up a different kind of work you’ll find that the creases have changed direction. It all depends on how we use our hands. A person who writes will have more lines under his thumb. But what about handless people, what about their futures? People with stiff joints have no lines on their palms. I have a monkey at home which has foreign travel and immense wealth in the lines of his palms. Once when I went to Rome people flocked around me thinking I was an Indian spiritual person. I pretended to read their palms. They all thanked me and even offered me money! Take Nostradamus. His original predictions are vague. It is the interpreters who give it meaning. And it is only after something happens that the interpreters make a noise,

not before. Erica Chetham, the main interpreter, says Indira Gandhi’s death was predicted. If you read the original quatrains, you will see that only an assassination is foretold. It could be any one from Mahatma Gandhi to Indira Gandhi. Mrs. Gayatri Vasudev, who brings out an astrology magazine, had predicted that there will be political assassination during elections and that Rajiv’s era will dwindle down. But when has there ever been an election without a death? And what about the second part of her prediction? That she conveniently forgets.

Q—What is your opinion about the latest trend of mixing religion with politics?

A—It is the cocktail that sends the cash-registers and the ballot-boxes ringing. The BJP’s claim that the Indian religion is the Hindu religion is not true at all. There has never been any religion in India. Only philosophies. In the Vedas and the Upanishads there is no mention about god. Only debates and discussions. In the Rig Veda there is a chapter called Nasadiya Sutra where it is discussed whether God created us, and the conclusion is that we were created from heat and that God is a creation of the human mind. Even the Bhagavad Gita is originally an atheistic philosophy. Shankaracharya changed it into a theistic philosophy. The Dhyana Sloka says: “Dhyana varitita tathgatena manasa pashyantiyam”—you can perceive God only in the mind. It is true, he has only existed in imaginations. Religion is big business. The Gita was therefore given religious touches and transformed from its original impressions of the Bhuddist philosophy on work and materialism. In Nagpur once, while I was talking about “Om” being the “shrishti mantra” (symbol of creation) and therefore a sexual emblem, a mob of 200 RSS students rushed towards me in anger. I pacified them and was invited over for a debate on the issue. When I reached there, they began to hoot at me. I went towards the stage hooting and prancing madly like them. This made them silent. I then talked about “love.”

After the debate they agreed that, hitherto, “love” to them had been a selfish and possessive emotion and they became fans of the rationalist movement.

Q—What is the extent of your commitments today?

A—I bring out a magazine called *The Indian Skeptic*. Rahul Singh and Mrs. Margaret Bhatta are members of the editorial board. Once in two years I tour abroad. This month I'm going to Australia. I've done more than 70 TV shows abroad. Here not a single one. Maharashtra was our first base outside Kerala. There we have about 12 associations affiliated to us. NCSTC connected me to North India. National Council for Science & Technology Communication have also given me a Fellowship. The work includes the following:

1. Lecture-cum-training sessions for selected students and teachers to be used subsequently as resource persons.
2. Working with some film/TV producer(s) to create a library of tricks, miracles etc., with their detailed scientific explanations, including using animation, if necessary.
3. If possible, help with the above material in conceptualizing, planning and/or making a dramatized serial of video programmes.
4. Help put selections from this material into the form of publications to supplement (2) and (3).

It is a challenge to face fundamentalists. When they take off the taavezes and "sacred" threads from their bodies I know I've reached them. Religion thus encounters rationalism and not emotional forces.

Q—What about this dial-a-guru scheme?

A—You know Nirmala Devi Srivastava is the first godwoman to hold a dharma outside the PM's house asking for protection from us! We had sent her a notice under the Magical Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act and under the Medical Practitioner's Act which says no one can treat without a medical licence. And we exposed her. I had gone to meet one Prabhakar Yogi in Kottarakkara who claimed to be 800 years old, older even than Kerala! He refused to meet me. He had a photograph taken when he was youth! In 1980 one man calling himself

Jappanam Siddhan came from Sri Lanka and claimed it was God who helped him to break a hundred coconuts with his bare head. We watched him carefully and saw that he used only tender coconuts that even we could break. We exchanged one of his coconut bags for one filled with hard coconuts. In the temple he found he couldn't crack the nuts. He tried to save face by saying that he had seen a woman bathing in that morning and this had disturbed his concentration. But the people had already understood his trick. All these Muktanandas and Amritananda Mayis refuse to meet us in the open. In fact, they often go underground.

Q—How do you hope to accomplish your work?

A—My desire is to build a research centre where all the miracles and psychic phenomena will be exhibited and explained with a library on religious magic, science etc. But this costs money and I cannot conjure up money from thin air!

Bombay, India

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Criticism of Religion in Sweden

Finngeir Hiorth

Internationally, criticism of religion in Sweden remains fairly unknown. There are a number of reasons for this, one being the inaccessibility of the Swedish language. Still, Swedish criticism of religion is important even when seen in an international perspective. In this paper I intend to have a short look at this important aspect of Swedish culture.

I start with Ingemar Hedenius (1908–1982), who still is fairly unknown outside Scandinavia in spite of his important contribution to criticism of religion. Hedenius established his fame among the public in general in 1949 when he published his book *Tro och vetande* (Belief and Knowledge), a book containing devastating criticism of the Christian religion. Before long the book was known and commented upon throughout Scandinavia. Bishops and lesser clergy, as well as quite a number of ordinary Christians, felt offended and reacted critically. Freethinkers, on the other hand, were very enthusiastic about the book.

When Hedenius published this book, he was still rather unknown in Sweden. Almost two years earlier, in 1947, he had been appointed professor of philosophy—in particular, moral philosophy—at Uppsala. For a number of centuries Uppsala has been an important center of learning in Sweden. From about 1910 on Uppsala has been a center for renewal of Swedish philosophy, this renewal becoming known as “Uppsala philosophy.” The leading philosopher of this school was Axel Hägerström, whereas two other leading members of the school *Nature,*

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were Karl Hedvall and Adolf Phalén. All three were professors of philosophy at the University of Uppsala.

The main ideas of the Uppsala philosophy were formulated from 1905 on, but it was not until about 1910 that they became somewhat better known. Instrumental in this development was Hägerström's inaugural lecture, "On the truth of moral ideas" (1911). Later Hägerström's main ideas became known as "value nihilism," a term that suggests that there are no values at all, whereas Hägerström mainly wanted to stress that there are no objective values.

Value nihilism implies that value judgments (evaluations) do not express assumptions or assertions. It is meaningless to ask whether a value judgment is true or false. A value judgment only expresses the emotions of the person making the judgment. From this Hägerström drew the radical conclusion that there is no moral doctrine or normative ethics. This conclusion has been hotly disputed, whereas less controversial is the view that value judgments are not true or false.

Hedenius studied in Lund and Uppsala and had been strongly influenced by Uppsala philosophy. He examined the main ideas of Uppsala philosophy in his 1941 book, *Om rätt och moral* (On Right and Morality). Before that he had published books in English about the philosophers Berkeley and Hume and was acknowledged to be competent to teach philosophy at the University of Uppsala. In 1945 Hedenius published a very thorough book about the philosophy of Plato. These were his main publications before the appearance of *Tro och vetande*. Hedenius's books do not always make easy reading, although they are more readily accessible than the writings of Hägerström, who has a much more intricate style.

Tro och vetande is a most important book in the field of criticism of religion. But Hedenius is not, of course, the first critic of religion in Sweden. In fact, Sweden can take pride in a number of interesting critics of religion. Among them is Anton Nyström (1842–1931), Sweden's first known atheist. He was a versatile physician with social and organizational interests, and a prolific writer. He published more than fifty books or pamphlets, mostly in medical studies, but also in a number of other fields. After

1903 quite a number of Nyström's books were translated into German, French, English, Finnish, or Danish.

As early as 1873 Nyström published a critical book about Jesus and early Christianity. This first book of Nyström about the Christian religion was published anonymously. The name of the author only became public at the end of the 1890s. Nyström published several books about the Christian religion, a topic that interested him for several decades. One of these books was *Kristendomen och den fria tanken* (Christianity and Freethought, 1908, translated into German). In 1873 Nyström became familiar with the thought of the French philosopher Comte, and for the rest of his life, Nyström was deeply influenced by him. He was also influenced by Darwin, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Kant. As a result Nyström developed a well thought-out view of life.

Other interesting Swedish freethinkers have been Viktor Lennstrand (1861–1895), Knut Wicksell (1851–1926), and Bengt Lidforss (1868–1913). Lennstrand, who died very young, had a fascinating personality and from 1887 on he became a kind of atheistic missionary preaching “the bright, happy, vigorous, and liberating gospel of atheism.” Wicksell and Lidforss were not very refined in their criticism of religion, but their criticism of religion was hard-hitting enough. It may also be mentioned that Wicksell was an internationally recognized economist.

But let us return to Hedenius. He was not only a leading Swedish critic of religion, but his criticism of religion is sophisticated enough to rank him internationally with the best known critics of religion. I shall not go into details here with regard to other excellent critics of religion. They are discussed in greater detail in my book *Introduction to Atheism* (1995).

If we compare Hedenius with the critics of religion discussed in my *Introduction to Atheism*, it seems that of the critics mentioned in the book only Ronald W. Hepburn and George H. Smith have studied theology as thoroughly as Hedenius. Hepburn and Smith, of course, have not studied Swedish theology. But that was what Hedenius had done before writing *Tro och vetande*. And one of the reasons for the great interest in the book was Hedenius's knowledge of Swedish theology. He could meet the theologians in a territory that was familiar to them.

As a result, Hedenius also came to influence Swedish theology. This appears from two books that in recent years have been published in Sweden. The first of these is Hans Nystedt's *Uppgörelse med Hedenius* (Critique of Hedenius, 1992).

Hans Nystedt (b. 1916) wrote his doctoral dissertation in 1947 on the philosophy of religion of Max Scheler ("Max Schelers religionsfilosofi"). In 1952 he also published a book on the ethical views of the theologian Anders Nygren and in 1989 a book on Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman's relation to Christian belief (1989). Nystedt came to Uppsala in 1934 where he studied theology and philosophy of religion. He left Uppsala in 1952 and moved to the city of Visby on the island of Gotland, where he taught philosophy of religion. During his stay in Uppsala, Nystedt had many contacts with philosophers at the university there, including Hedenius. He developed a lifelong hate-love relationship with Hedenius and read most of his books. He never became an close friend of Hedenius and never corresponded with him, but he met him many times.

When Hedenius published his *Tro och vetande* in 1949, the intensity of the attack on Christianity came as a surprise to Nystedt. Neither Hedenius nor the other philosophers that Nystedt had met in Uppsala showed any hostility to his Christianity. Even though Nystedt liked to meet philosophers, he never thought of abandoning the faculty of theology and joining the philosophers. To some extent he considered himself a theological spy in an important position among the philosophers. Nystedt also viewed himself as a skeptic and pragmatist, and argues that his Christianity did not limit his intellectual or moral freedom.

In Nystedt's opinion Hedenius has had a healthy influence on Swedish theology. But he also finds many "faults" in Hedenius's philosophy. His view is that Hedenius had a narrow and too intellectualistic view of religion and an "arbitrary" conceptual apparatus. However, Nystedt does not show a deep understanding of Hedenius's philosophy or modern atheism. He has difficulty in distinguishing what is important from what is unimportant, and his attacks on Hedenius are not very convincing.

Another book trying to criticize Hedenius was written by Peder Thalén (1994) in partial fulfillment of a doctorate in theology at the University of Uppsala.

Summarizing the contents of this book, the author writes:

The aim of this study is to clarify the nature of the intellectual difficulties connected with religion. The traditional philosophical answer to this question, in this thesis exemplified by the writings of Ingemar Hedenius, is that these difficulties consist of the lack of evidence for central religious beliefs. The present thesis shows that this answer is conditioned by a philosophical picture of the intellectual dimension of religious faith as an unverifiable theory. The author confronts this picture with an example of Christian language from the writings of Martin Luther. This confrontation shows that the philosophical picture misrepresents the character of religious certainty. This means that the intellectual difficulties ascribed to religion by traditional philosophers of religion are a philosophical construction that results from trying to understand religious expressions in isolation from religious practice. It is emphasized that the same intellectual mechanism of separating religious expressions from their natural setting also can appear within religion, for instance, in theological reflection, and lead to a loss of meaning inside a religious tradition. The author claims that this loss of meaning constitutes the real intellectual problem of religion. The meaning of the concept of secularization and the possibility of a meaningful philosophical critique of religion is discussed.

Among the weaknesses of Thalén's book one may mention that the author has not much knowledge about the diversity of religious criticism in contemporary philosophy (cf. my *Introduction to Atheism*). It is, I think, a hopeless undertaking to try to convince atheists that they are wrong because they have not studied or understood Martin Luther's interpretation of Christianity. It is well known that this is only one of thousands of interpretations of Christianity. Atheists, of course, tend to dissociate

themselves from any kind of theism, and not only from Lutheranism.

The books of Nystedt and Thalén show that Hedenius has had quite an impact on Swedish theology. I cannot see that either Nystedt or Thalén has been able to reveal essential weaknesses in Hedenius's approach.

Was Hedenius a humanist? Hedenius never wrote much on humanism, but in 1961 he published an essay entitled "Humanism." This paper is the only one in which Hedenius deals specifically with humanism. Hedenius has not shown much, if any, interest in the developments of secular humanism in the Netherlands, the United States, or elsewhere. But his paper on humanism and other writings clearly show that he has been in essential agreement with such currents.

Hedenius published a total of about thirty books, most of these in Swedish. The books and essays that he published in English were directed at students and scholars abroad. The books and essays in Swedish were mostly directed at a general Swedish public, although some of his books also were read in Denmark, Finland, and Norway. Hedenius was a visiting professor at Wayne State University in Detroit, 1968–1969, and in Nairobi, 1979–1980, but apparently Hedenius did not reach a larger public on these occasions. A full bibliography of the writings of Hedenius has been compiled by Ann-Mari Henschen-Dahlquist (1993).

This essay is based on a much longer essay entitled "Secularism in Sweden" and is available from the author: Kirkehaugsveien 3, N-0283 Oslo, Norway; telephone: 22 50 81 34.

Oslo, Norway

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Book Reviews

Matter, God, and the New Physics: A Review Essay on the Popular Books of Cosmologist Paul Davies

Corinna Lotz and Gerry Gold

Introduction

Anglo-Australian scientist Paul Davies is a key figure in the current debate about the relationship between science and religion. He was born in England and emigrated to Australia during the Thatcher years. Davies first made his name as a scientist working on time asymmetry, but is now best known for championing the idea that the most effective road to religious belief is through science.

Born in 1946, Davies has written seventeen books in the last twenty-two years, and since the early 1980s has produced almost one book a year discussing the relationship between modern science—especially physics—and religion. In a recent offering, *About Time*, he discusses, among other things, what could have existed before the “big bang” that most cosmologists now believe gave rise to the universe we now inhabit (1995). In May 1995 Davies was awarded the million-dollar Templeton prize for “progress” in religion. This twenty-five-year-old award is bigger than the Nobel prize. Previous recipients include U.S. mass evangelist Billy Graham and Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

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The rise of Davies as the most prolific contemporary popularizer of the convergence view of religion and science is not merely a British phenomenon. He is a leading exponent of an outlook that is a major influence on young people in society today, especially in the United States, Britain, and Japan. They experience a powerful technology derived from complex scientific theories dominating the world, along with great uncertainty about individual survival, as well as life on the planet. Consumer society turns people into mere targets for selling products and services. Science and technology are made into scapegoats for capitalism's destructiveness.

It is against this background that Davies and others find a response to ideas that give "soul" to an apparently pointless existence, and that offer a rationalization for the idea that "life is a lottery."¹ And although many in the scientific community thoroughly oppose Davies's use of science to give a "modern" justification for religious interpretations of concepts such as "free will" and indeterminacy, the majority fall into the trap of a reductionist, mechanistic approach to science. In our view, it is only possible to come to grips with the often elusive and self-contradictory thrust of Davies's arguments by adopting the dialectical approach to scientific reality first championed in the last century by Frederick Engels.

Eugen Dühring (1833–1921), against whom Engels directed his polemical book, *Anti-Dühring* (1987a), was a philosopher, economist, and professor of mechanics, active in the German Social Democratic party. Unlike Davies, he was not religious. But he was attacked by Engels for his attempt to impose his particular "system" on science, a system that, whatever Dühring's intentions, led back to a subjective, idealist, and thus potentially religious concept of scientific reality. Engels's work on Dühring was not simply a negative critique; it was, as Engels himself said, an "exposition of the dialectical method and the communist world outlook" of both himself and Marx (8). As such it provides an invaluable framework within which to evaluate today's Dührings.

In the spirit of *Anti-Dühring*, our criticism of Davies is not so much to attack the idea of religion, but to examine his ideas

insofar as they reveal deeper currents within historical processes active in the ideological ferment of today's world. The mushrooming of popular and semitechnical books written by scientists about their own work is evidence of an internal need to theorize about it, to expand concepts, and to relate to the social world outside science, not forgetting the very lucrative side of publishing! That these books enjoy a considerable readership is testimony to the deep searching for "significant meaning" by many people as the end of the millenium approaches.

Davies's misuse of science is in many respects a revival of the nineteenth-century Roman Catholic doctrine of neo-Thomism, which recognizes God as the prime cause of being and the foundation of all philosophical categories. In this, he follows in the tradition of those scientists recruited in the 1830s to write the various Bridgewater Treatises with the aim of showing the hand of God in the newly emerging sciences such as geology and paleontology. Religious interpretation of contemporary natural scientific theories holds a central place in neo-Thomism (Hörz et al. 1980, 165–72).

After the Second Vatican Council of 1962–1965, certain propositions of contemporary philosophy were synthesized with the principles of the thirteenth-century Dominican scholar, St. Thomas of Aquinas. Davies takes this process further, but with one important difference. Instead of incorporating existentialism and notions current in the 1960s, he is eclectically selecting half-baked ideas from the science of the 1980s and 1990s. The essential conclusion, however, is the same. "The process of history depends on supernatural forces, which govern every individual's behavior. By this any possibility of man's active influence on world history is actually excluded" (Frolov 1984).

The current religious-mystical tendency, of which Davies is far from being the only exponent, includes the Reverend John Polkinghorne, John Gribbin, Sheldon Glashow, Russell Stannard, Marcello Gleiser, Karen Armstrong, and Frank Tipler. All are prominent in fields that include astronomy, physics, mathematics, biology, genetics, neuroscience, physical chemistry, and the history of science and religion. They find their opposite in a strong school of scientists who believe that science can penetrate

every unknown area and who firmly oppose the injection of God as a substitute for an explanation for things that are hard to grasp.

While some might object to the notion that there exists a consciously “materialist school of thought,” many British and U.S. scientists and a few philosophers, too, take materialist positions, though not necessarily dialectical ones. These include Peter Atkins, Richard Dawkins, Freeman Dyson, Susan Greenfield, Stephen Hawking, Carl Sagan, Stephen Weinberg, Lewis Wolpert, Roger Penrose, John Barrow, Gerald Edelman, Oliver Sacks, Francis Crick, and Daniel Dennett. Within this group there is a spectrum of tendencies, from strong atheists such as Peter Atkins, Lewis Wolpert, and Richard Dawkins to those who leave the question more open, tending to Laplace’s view that they “have no need for this hypothesis.”

In this situation, Engels’s writings, especially *Anti-Dühring*, can clarify the historical significance of today’s controversies within science and the questions of method that arise. To assess Davies and his opponents, the theoretical basis of materialist dialectics needs to be considered. In the form of a polemic against Dühring’s formal metaphysics, Engels sets out the essential principles of materialist dialectical logic. Underpinning his approach is the materialist outlook pioneered in his close collaboration with Marx in the *Holy Family* of 1845 and other writings of the 1840s and 1850s that culminated in Marx’s publication of *Capital*.

Anti-Dühring, which was written between 1876 and 1878, popularized many of the ideas contained in Marx’s *Capital* and in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels concludes for the first time that Marx’s discovery of the materialist view of history and the theory of surplus value make scientific socialism possible. He sums up the essential features of Marxist method, not simply in terms of political economy, but in relation to all scientific thought, demonstrating that “the unity of the world consists in its materiality.”

Engels’s great contribution to dialectics is his advancing of the intrinsically correct concepts of the ancient Greek philosophers about the nature of matter and motion. These are viewed as an indivisible unity and conflict of opposites. Motion is the mode

of existence of matter. Above all, Engels, in line with Heraclitus and Hegel, shows that motion is existent objective contradiction. Flowing from this is the understanding that all natural phenomena in their multiplicity are various forms of motion and the development of matter. Thus thought has come out of a long evolution of human beings, through history. The laws of dialectics, Engels writes, must be discovered in nature and abstracted from it.

Anti-Dühring explains the intrinsic contradiction within matter through its self-relationship with motion: “*Motion is the mode of existence of matter*” (1987b, 55). Engels stresses the unquiet, restless side of universal movement, in which equilibrium and stability are relative to constant change. Space and time are understood as fundamental forms of all being. Engels puts forward the fundamental dialectical laws as the unity and conflict of opposites, the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa, and the law of negation of negation. Essential categories in dialectical logic are contradiction and negation, including negation of negation as a law of development of nature, history, and thought.

These categories contain within themselves the self-related opposites of identity/difference, quantity/quality, necessity/chance, semblance/essence/appearance, freedom/necessity. Formal logic and dialectical logic are self-related opposites, expressing the movement of human cognition (including identity/difference). In writing *Dialectics of Nature*, which he began before *Anti-Dühring*, Engels elaborated the integration and unification of dialectical laws that govern the totality of processes.

In opening, he writes: “The general nature of dialectics [is] to be developed as the science of interconnections, in contrast to metaphysics” (1987b, 356). This assertion is followed by a second requirement: “It is, therefore, from the history of nature and human society that the laws of dialectics are abstracted.” This is a vital point, and one with which Davies profoundly disagrees. Writing in the popular science magazine *New Scientist* in an article designed to boost the sales of *About Time*, he says, approvingly: “In my experience, almost all physicists who work on fundamental problems accept that the laws of physics have

some kind of independent reality. With that view, it is possible to argue that the laws of physics are logically prior to the Universe they describe" (1996, 34).

For Marxists dialectical laws are to be discovered in and abstracted from all the unified processes in nature, society, and thought, not imposed upon them in the manner of Dühring's revival of an earlier idealist world schematism. Through the example of his own work, Engels shows the need for concrete knowledge of science. His contribution to the Marxist world outlook, and to the revolutionary politics in the First and Second Internationals, cannot be separated from his brilliant studies of natural sciences to demonstrate the operation of dialectics.

To emulate Engels today might seem an impossible proposition. The march of science might suggest that no single individual can have an integrated grasp of all scientific processes. The attempt may seem a kind of Hegelian fantasy or like the dream concept of the German mathematician David Hilbert. But if we work with Engels's concept that the dialectical laws are to be discovered from within nature, then nature can provide us with the answer to this problem. And it does, because contemporary science has seen not only great specialization, but also the rise of new interdisciplinary research especially in the 1980s and 1990s. Engels's definition of dialectics as the science of interconnections provides a conceptual framework for this multiplicity within unity and unity within multiplicity.

In the notes and fragments for *Dialectics of Nature* Engels writes: "Dialectics, so-called *objective* dialectics, prevails throughout nature, and so-called subjective dialectics, dialectical thought, is only the reflection of the motion through opposites that asserts itself everywhere in nature, and that by the continual conflict of opposites, and their final passage into one another, or into higher forms, determines the life of nature" (1987b, 492). A contemporary theory of materialist dialectics needs to elaborate a logic from the principles of Engels, not formally set out as a recipe, but rather spread through his writings. When Engels wrote *Anti-Dühring*, the chain of discoveries that led to the twentieth-century revolution in science was only just beginning.

The primacy of matter and the unity of nature, human society,

and thought are set out as the ground action of the laws of dialectics. Engels shows concretely through the different sciences the operation of the three general objective laws of dialectics. It is in the discoveries and progress of science that Marxists can expand their understanding of matter and its relation to mind and human practice. The key task is to go beyond the unscientific (in terms of history and philosophy) imposition of idealist ideology on science by people such as Paul Davies and actually discover which aspects of contemporary science must be integrated into an advanced dialectics of nature.

“The Matter Myth”

In *The Matter Myth* Davies and coauthor John Gribbin proclaim that quantum physics undermines materialism because it reveals that matter has far less “substance than we might believe.” Thus, because matter has been shown to be insubstantial, not lumpy, “the new physics has blown apart the central tenets of materialist doctrine” (1991, 7–9). (We have searched throughout Marx, Engels, Lenin and others but failed to find them asserting that matter has to be “lumpy” in the materialist view!) In his popularization of science, Davies implies that matter has somehow disappeared. Yet in his purely scientific writings, a totally different picture is painted. Physics, even the new physics, he has to admit, is about “the investigation of matter.”

In the opening section of *The New Physics*, Davies outlines the new theories and discoveries about black holes, subatomic particles, novel materials, and self-organizing chemical reactions. Despite his contempt for materialism and his self-appointed role as God’s spokesperson, when he deals with natural processes, matter comes back to haunt him. He describes the universe as a law-governed whole that can be understood by human thought.

“The physicist,” he writes, “believes that the laws of physics, plus a knowledge of the relevant boundary conditions, initial conditions and constraints, are sufficient to explain, in principle, every phenomenon in the universe. Thus the entire universe, from the smallest fragment of matter to the largest assemblage of galaxies, becomes the physicists’ domain—a vast natural laboratory for the interplay of lawful forces.” No materialist, it would seem,

could argue with this. It is hard to believe that Davies could come up with claims like “God is in the laws of physics” and that “these laws provide evidence of divine intelligence” (198, 1–6).

The “interplay of lawful forces” in this century’s science operates not in a linear fashion but through the movement of mutually exclusive opposites. Only this concept, which is the essence of dialectics, can explain the apparent paradox of quantum theory, in which light has both wave and particle properties, mutually exclusive in scientific observation and measurement.

“Lumpy” matter

The concepts of wave and particle themselves developed within the “Newtonian world view,” that causes Davies so much heartache and that he conflates with materialism as a whole. A particle was a “lump” of matter, which could be viewed at rest to observe its static properties and then propelled into motion. Matter and its motion could be separated. Classically, the trajectory of such a particle could be envisaged by considering a series of “instantaneous” properties: position, momentum, energy, which could be attached to the moving “lump,” which was reduced to a mathematical point. A wave was a periodic motion in some continuous medium necessary to support such independent motion, but left unaffected by its passage.

But the discoveries of quantum mechanics showed that such a restricted notion of the world is inadequate for dealing with subatomic particles. Instead, as foreseen in Engels’s dialectical-materialistic approach, matter and motion proved to be inseparable. According to Paul Dirac, whose *Principles of Quantum Mechanics* is a key book in setting out the form of the new physics, the quantum-mechanical “state” or “wave function” of no motion is the state of no particle. The wave-particle dual nature of matter flows from this; the particle is not a lump of matter isolated from motion, but the very medium essential to the existence of the wave motion.

No movement from nothing

Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle emerges out of the “wave equations” used to describe the quantum-mechanical particles. By

interconnecting position and momentum—"you cannot know the position and momentum of a particle exactly at one and the same time"—the uncertainty principle both demonstrates the limitations of applying "classical" concepts derived from Newtonian particles to the subatomic level, while showing that quantization defines minimum extensions to these wave-particle entities. The lumpy point-like particle may have disappeared, but more subtle properties of matter are revealed.

Along with quantum physics, cosmology is the arena in which Davies has chosen to "prove" the existence of God. He does this against the background of a huge extension of the scientific understanding of the universe. In the 1960s, observations made possible by modern instrumentation led to a range of discoveries about the large-scale structure of space-time, including the structure of black holes. This included the existence and structure of black holes as points in space-time where space-time curvature becomes infinite—defined as "singularities." By 1970, British mathematician Roger Penrose joined with Hawking to put forward the possibility of a big bang singularity. In 1979 Soviet astrophysicists Zelidovich and Novikov confirmed with computer calculations that primordial black holes are the size of subatomic particles. This, Hawking explains in *A Brief History of Time*, makes them subject to quantum effects. By 1988, Hawking concluded: "If the universe is really self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end. It would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?" (1988, 149)

It is in reply to Hawking and others, who find no need for God, and indeed start to draw the conclusion that there is no place left for God, that Davies spun his web of religious mysticism with his book *The Mind of God*, first published in 1991. On 5 May 1995, the day after he received his Templeton award, he wrote in the *London Guardian*: "Modern cosmology suggests that time itself came into existence with the big bang. There was simply "no before for a God, or anything else, to form in." This sums up Davies's "free lunch" pseudotheory of cosmology.

Many cosmologists and physicists such as Sagan, Weinberg, and Hawking (to name only a few) do not share this view. Hawking refers to the boundary conditions of space-time, which

“implicitly assume that the universe is partially infinite, or that there are infinitely many universes.” “At the beginning of time,” he says, “there would have been a point of infinite density and infinite curvature of space time” (1988, 140). Davies himself describes the black hole singularity as infinite gravitational force and density of material (1992, 49). Thus, quite opposite to there being “nothing,” there was an infinite amount of matter.

It is possible to fall into the trap of thinking that perhaps Davies is right about “creation from nothing,” because, he claims, “the quantum factor allows events to occur without causes in the subatomic world.” In the same breath Davies says: “Quantum gravity suggests we might get everything for nothing.” But this so-called “nothing” does after all contain “something”: an infinite amount of gravitational force! So why does Davies continually, in all of his many books, insist on “creation from nothing”? It seems he has allowed the views of St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 A.D.) to override the arguments of today’s physics at this point.

But we cannot dismiss the argument too lightly. The idea that there can be movement from nothing requires examination from a dialectical standpoint. The problem of being and nothing does present a paradox. It was not by accident that the concept of motion is at the heart of both *Anti-Dühring* and *Dialectics of Nature*. Contained within it is the problem of understanding the essence of any given movement.

The arising of any process or object, including the universe itself, is through its identity in the external world, which arises out of any given objective movement of contradiction. This identity of any given, randomly selected thing or event, reflects itself through sensation into the sentient subject. The identity contains in itself its own difference, its opposite in the world beyond thought. Thus, we have being *and* nothing. Relative to its negation into the subject through sensation, the original object ceases to exist, since that moment of time has disappeared. The transition from being to nothing is becoming, the first moment of coming into being, through external reflection into self.

The space-time singularity of the big bang is the initial moment of identity of the universe, described as infinite curvature

of space-time, when space and time, matter and antimatter are identical. But the equal amounts of “plus” and “minus” that add up to zero is not an “empty nothing.” The identity of the initial moment, the “before” of the big bang, contains its own difference within itself. This initially undetectable difference between the reactions of matter and antimatter is currently the subject of intense scrutiny in the KTeV experiment at Fermilab near Chicago.

The movement from identity to difference, like that of being and nothing, involves the unity, conflict, interpenetration, and transformation of opposites. It is law-governed. It is here that the asses’ ears of Davies’s metaphysics poke through. He can grasp all kinds of complex and paradoxical questions in physics, but the logical essence of movement entirely escapes him. Because he is opposed to contradiction as an objective logical category, Davies is forced to introduce a mystical fog at every point where the essence of movement appears.

Motion as contradiction

Engels’s dialectic, unlike the Kantian view, shows that what appears as a paradox is only an expression of the mind’s difficulty in apprehending movement. This is because: “Motion itself is a contradiction: even simple mechanical change of position can only come about through a body being at one and the same moment of time both in one place and in another place, being in one and the same place and also not in it. And the continuous origination and simultaneous solution of this contradiction is precisely what motion is” (1987b, 111).²

In Davies’s shotgun marriage of religion and science, the material relation of opposites in nature cannot be developed. He discusses categories such as possibility and reality, chance and necessity, causality and interaction, but makes them into fixed absolutes that arise as a result of differing objects or processes, instead of as a result of their own interaction—from internal self-relation. His matchmaking constantly leads him into self-contradiction. He has to recognize the real opposites in nature and their reflection in thought, but his trump card is always the mystification of the relation between the two. “It would be foolish,” he

admits somewhat sheepishly, “to deny that many of the traditional religious ideas about God, man, and the nature of the universe have been swept away by the new physics.”

The investigation of the world of microparticles and the exploration of outer space continuously reveal that the quantum laws of the microworld also operate in the infinitely vast expanses of the universe. Having confirmed that physics—even the “new” physics—is about “the investigation of matter,” Davies then suggests that there are “three ultimate frontiers of physics: the very small, the very large, and the very complex” (1989, 4). By marking out these areas, Davies unwittingly suggests a basis for the dialectical law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa. In the relationship between the very small and the very large, cosmology is today used as a giant laboratory for high-energy particle physics.

Davies recognizes the discovery that the laws of the microworld hold true for the macroworld is one of the most pleasing confluences of science: “it marries the very small with the very large.” The investigation of the world of microparticles, which has taken place alongside exploration of outer space, has revealed that the quantum laws of the microworld operate in the infinitely vast expanses of the universe. Astronomers today use quantum theory in the study of the origins and structure of the universe. Conversely, in the world of nuclear and plasma physics and optics, knowledge of the quantum-mechanical laws is necessary for research into the properties of matter.

What Davies describes as a “pleasing confluence” is in terms of dialectics a totally unconscious recognition of the essential unity of all matter in motion, and that the objective dialectical laws can be discovered at all levels of organization. This is in fact verified by the third division Davies suggests—the complex, the ability of matter to self-organize.

Astrophysicists look through the telescope at events millions of years in the past, connected by the light and radiation emanating through the light-years between them and a distant star. In the same way all reception and processing of information by human beings, and all practical activity, take place in the present as part

of a space-time continuum. And, as David Finley of the U.S. National Radio Astronomy Laboratory has noted, “We are physically connected to stars because we contain the same elements—we are made of star stuff.”

Realization of that fact led maverick astronomer Fred Hoyle to postulate a special state of the nucleus of the carbon atom in order to overcome the difficulty of its being formed by requiring three helium nuclei to combine simultaneously. Hoyle’s method was an object lesson in dialectical thinking, in approaching the past from the standpoint of understanding the requirements of the present. Hoyle reasoned that the existence of carbon-based life-forms capable of thinking about life meant that it must be possible to form carbon by nuclear synthesis within the center of stars. The only way he could see this happening was if the carbon nucleus has a special state or “resonance” that enables it to soak up the extra energy that three, rather than just two, colliding helium nuclei would have at the temperatures that prevail deep in stellar interiors. Discovery of Hoyle’s carbon resonance won U.S. physicist William Fowler and his team the Nobel prize.

The Jupiter mission

Closer to home, in December 1995 the Galileo spacecraft arrived at Jupiter, receiving information from a probe launched into the dense Jovian atmosphere. Although studying the giant planet as it exists today, space scientists involved in the project were particularly excited that they would also be examining material left over from the primordial nebula out of which the whole solar system formed some 4.6 billion years ago.

One crucial question in this instance is the potential existence of a layer of water-ice clouds beneath the normally visible layers of Jupiter—water being vital to the evolution of life on Earth, and—potentially elsewhere. According to some planetary scientists, Jupiter holds the key to this question. It is supposed to have played the role of a great provider, throwing water in the form of comets into the path of the infant Earth after it had lost most of its original complement. (Today, Jupiter plays a much more protective role, minimizing the likelihood of life-threatening impacts

between Earth and space debris.) The results of the Galileo probe's descent into Jovian hell have turned out to be ambiguous, but results from the main spacecraft should soon provide answers to just how the conditions for the development of the solar system and the life it supports were established.

These two examples illustrate the way in which knowledge advances through understanding naturally dialectical processes in a dialectical way, which enables the inner laws and processes to be revealed. In contrast, Davies adopts a teleological approach to such questions. Why is it that we can discover laws in nature? Because they were written into the universe by some agency. Why does mathematics prove such a powerful tool, at least in the physical sciences? Because this agency has written the laws mathematically. And why can we understand nature in terms of mathematically describable laws? Because the said agency has designed an entire universe so that we humans might evolve mathematical brains and discover it through its laws. And for want of a better word for this agency, *God* will do.

Self-organization of matter

The discovery that chaos and chance are as inherent in nature as order and necessity furthers the understanding of the essential unity and interconnectedness of all matter as self-related opposites with moments of discontinuity and leaps. Davies, who calls this "the liberation of matter," claims that it destroys materialist philosophy, which he associates with "lumpy" matter (Davies and Gribbon 1991, 9).

But in reality the objective existence of chance and indeterminism have been discovered by scientists as an extension of earlier discoveries of the laws of thermodynamics. The study of the propensity of matter and energy to self-organize in nonlinear systems has expanded into a new branch of physics, called the study of "systems far from equilibrium." This science makes concrete the dialectical concept of self-movement through "the division of a unity into mutually exclusive opposites and their reciprocal relations" (Lenin 1972, 360). The origin of organic movement—life—is not through some external source, but through the internal contradictions within inorganic matter, whereby

matter begins to self-reproduce as in the formation of proteins. What it reveals is that the older concepts of organic and inorganic have become outdated, not because they were wrong, but because further study has revealed them to be not fixtures, but mutually transformable opposites.

The dialectical concept of negation provides an accurate description of this process: the “structure of the higher” contains in a new form, the properties of the lower (Ignatiev 1988). The innate ability of matter to organize also helps to explain the formation of the first life on the planet, the transition of the inorganic to the organic. The dialectical movement of negation, whereby the new simultaneously cancels out and preserves the old, reveals that the structure of the higher and more complex contains (in a negated form) the properties of the lower.

From the standpoint of scientific method, we should note that the objective nature of chance and indeterminism and its relation to its opposite were discovered by scientists such as Ilya Prigogine as an extension of earlier discoveries of the laws of thermodynamics. This apparently contradicts the earlier understanding of laws of thermodynamics that produced the view that the universe is running down amid spiraling entropy.³ But the emergence of “order out of chaos” arises because self-organizing systems are parts within a whole, predicated on an environment that is outside them. Thus the “excess entropy” can be exported through the principle that energy is not destroyed, but transferred into another form.

What Prigogine demonstrated is the objective nature of chance and indeterminism as a necessary consequence of the laws of thermodynamics and a logically determined extension of those laws. This is despite the fact that self-organization appears to contradict the earlier interpretation of these laws.

Necessity and chance

Edward N. Lorenz first demonstrated in 1961 that a system can be both deterministic and yet unpredictable, due to that system’s extreme sensitivity to initial conditions. While the interaction of chance and necessity in complex systems is different from quantum uncertainty, as a principle of movement and

change through the unity and conflict of opposites it reveals the changes of different forms of matter through dialectically structured self-movement. Not only does this prove the objective existence of “necessity and chance” as objectively existing contradictions in nature, but recent science has shown how the interaction of the opposites of chance and necessity is at work both deep within the structure of matter in the microworld as well as in the formation of the universe.

Such problems are being studied in physical chemistry. It remains for Marxists to integrate them into a flexible concept of social and political processes, for example, the break-down of social formations such as the USSR. Does this mean that all the previous history suddenly vanishes, as some crude impressionists have suggested? Surely it shows the need for a more complex and dynamic understanding of the process of historical negation enriched by new concepts, such as Prigogine’s.

Consciousness studies

Davies hopes that there may yet be another outpost to refute his crude designation of materialism—the mysteries of the human mind. “The existence of mind,” he believes “as an abstract, holistic organizational pattern capable even of disembodiment, refutes the reductionist philosophy that we are all nothing but moving mounds of atoms” (Davies and Gribbon 1991,40). Here again, Davies tries to separate matter from its properties, in the neo-Thomist fashion. Perhaps unfortunately for Davies, a new science of consciousness studies is rapidly moving into an area previously considered thought to be the reserve of those who believe in UFOs, ESP, table-knocking and “mind over matter.” Rather than being the province of those seeking an afterlife, or the supernatural, it has become a research area for some of the most rigorous scientific minds of the 1990s.

Current research in neuroscience is aided by new instrumentation such as positron emission tomography (PET), nuclear magnetic resonance (MRI) and magneto-encephalography (MEG). Work by neurologists such as Susan Greenfield and Gerald Edelman now offers an astonishingly rich picture of the human

brain. It is now generally agreed that there is no single area in the brain that gives rise to individual consciousness. Neurologist Oliver Sacks, who has learned much from Soviet psychologists Vygotsky and Luria, has proposed a theory of mind that is both materialist and dialectical. "It will have to be grounded in biological reality, in the anatomical and developmental and functional details of the nervous system; and also in the inner life or mental life of the living creature, the play of its sensations and feelings and drives and intentions, its perception of objects and people and situations, and, in higher creatures, at least, the ability to think abstractly and share through language and culture the consciousness of others" (Cornwell 1995, (102))

This is a beautiful concretization of the dialectical concept of how the universal finds its expression within the individual. Within the development of each individual mind is expressed not an abstract universal, but "a universal which comprises in itself the wealth of the particular, the individual, the single" (Lenin 1972, 99). Advances in knowledge of brain structure, however, have not simply produced a new theory of mind functioning. Sacks talks of a crisis in scientific understanding, arising from an "acute incompatibility between observations and existing theories" (Cornwell 1975, 112)

Gerald Edelman, who shared the Nobel prize in 1972 for his discovery of a selectional mechanism in the body's immune system, began, after 1987, to put forward the Theory of Neural Group Selection (TNGS), which can account for the rapid emergence of higher order consciousness in an astonishingly short space of time. Instead of the many millions of years usually needed for evolutionary change, brain development evolved over only tens or hundreds of thousands of years.

This develops concretely Engels's observation about the exponential growth of science and human knowledge. But more than that, the selection process suggested by Edelman involves the activity of perhaps one hundred million primary neuronal units in the brain, each of which containing about fifty to ten thousand neurones, or nerve cells. The properties of the neural microworld have shown an extraordinary capacity for adaptation in the human brain. The development of conscious thought involves

“populations of nerve cells” whose special property of flexibility appears to be their nonspecialization. As Oxford neurologist Susan Greenfield explained: “There is no magic ingredient for consciousness. It is not a particular quality but the quantity, and the structuring of the neural units which is crucial.” The consideration of how millions of undifferentiated units act in concert needs to be considered in relation to the movement of social classes, in particular the working class.

Experience in the TNGS theory, Sacks rightly says, “is not passive, a matter of ‘impressions’ or ‘sense data’ but active, and constructed by the organism from the start. Active experience ‘selects’ or ‘carves out’ a new, more complexly connected pattern of neuronal groups, a neuronal reflection of the individual experience of the child.”

Computing and telecommunications

A hundred years after the death of Frederick Engels, the necessity for “dialectics as the science of universal interconnection” has begun to be realized on a world scale, most obviously in the technological realm, in the explosive growth of the Internet. In his outline of the general plan for *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels sets out the main laws of dialectics: “Transformation of quantity and quality—mutual penetration of polar opposites and transformation into each other when carried to extremes—development through contradiction or negation of negation—spiral form of development” (1987b, 313). In studying the development of the technologies that have made the Internet possible we enter theoretical and practical territory unavailable to Marx and Engels.

In seeking to overcome limitations in the deployment of computing and telecommunications, specialists in information sciences (a subdivision of the science of cognition) are obliged to take advantage of advances in all of the specialist branches of the natural sciences (of which information science is a servant). They study the nature of processes and objects in the most general terms, and, in particular, develop an understanding of the subject-object relation—the essential contradiction in the dialectics of cognition.

The “philosophy” or “paradigm” of “object-orientation” (OO) is sweeping through all parts of the industry, superseding all earlier technical approaches. Bill Gates’s entry into the Internet market through Windows 95 is founded upon this highest form of software development. At the heart of OO (originally formulated in the 1950s in the SIMULA language) are included: the process of abstraction, the identification of an object through the properties that differentiate it from all others, the reciprocal relations of this object with itself and with all others, the events in the life of the object that change its state (cause-effect).

The development of computing and telecommunications technologies in a haphazard, chaotic, anarchistic fashion became a problem for a capitalism driven by company mergers and take-overs. The use of different and incompatible hardware architecture, computer languages, database management systems, communications protocols, but above all different but frequently undefined systems of concepts meant that data could not easily—or even at all—be transferred between hitherto stand-alone systems. This limited the potential to overcome the reduction of surplus value arising from the introduction of machinery (which increases the ratio of constant to variable capital) through greater socialization of production.

The era of the mainframe stand-alone computer was ending as the proliferation of stand-alone PCs was beginning. By the mid-1980s major corporations had begun to attempt to build networks linking all the computers operated by a single company. In the 1990s the more advanced thinkers began to see the benefits of linking together their suppliers and customers. The Internet originally developed as part of the U.S. military and security communication system. Then it became a way of linking, predominantly, computer science departments in universities, mostly in the United States.

Just as the development of imperialism created the demand for new technologies and for more advanced forms of transportation and communication, so today the globalization of the economy demands full exploitation of the communication media revolution. Global communication establishes a technologically mediated collective practice of cognition that reveals the need for

global standards establishing the scientific laws governing cognition as a social process. But the necessity for international standardization offers two paths: cooperation, collaboration, and collective action among all parties realizable in a socialist society or, in a continuing profit-driven capitalist society, subjugation to competition between companies, with Microsoft the front runner, and its owner already richer than most of the world's countries.

In attempting to overcome the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, capitalism has had to encourage the scientific study of the process of cognition as the basis for a new division of labor and a reduction in the amount of labor power necessary for the production of commodities. A new industrial revolution in the means of production affecting mental labor demands an objective analysis of its processes analogous to that of physical labor (work-study, Taylorism) necessary for the initial introduction of machinery into capitalist production. This analysis is well advanced in universities and a myriad of small companies working on the exploitation of these maturing technologies.

Quanta and mind

Approaching the science of consciousness from another angle is mathematician Roger Penrose. He is concerned, like Sacks, with the development of theoretical frameworks that advance human understanding of the world. As a mathematician who made a major contribution to cosmological theory, he is looking for a way to integrate the theory of quantum mechanics and the classical Newtonian laws that explain cause and effect in the observable world. Penrose is trying to resolve the contradiction between these two law-governed systems through his deeper research into the functioning of the mind. He believes that microtubules within the brain may be an interface between the quantum and classical worlds.

In his view, the integration of the quantum-mechanical worldview with classical physics will give rise to another revolution in human perception of the physical world. This would truly involve a negation process, whereby the older concepts are not mechanically separated from the newer quantum mechanics, but rather preserved and sublated. Penrose's theoretical challenge

is a brilliant posing of the problem of scientific method, especially for Marxists, since the laws of materialist dialectics hold true, as we have seen, for both the Newtonian world of classical physics and for quantum physics. The science of the future requires theories in which dialectics, instead of being revealed by the spontaneous process of scientific discovery, becomes a conscious instrument. Realizing such a possibility requires a quantum leap for Marxists.

Conclusions

Engels wrote in *Dialectics of Nature*: “The development of the sciences proceeded with giant strides, and it might be said, gained force in proportion to the square of the distance (in time) from its point of departure. It was as if the world were to be shown that henceforth, for the highest product of organic matter, the human mind, the law of motion holds good that is the reverse of that for inorganic matter” (1978b, 320).

Human development in the twentieth century has verified this observation to such an extent that it requires a qualitative leap in the science of dialectical logic. Genuine scientific discovery itself is politically neutral. Scientists have little control over the social application of what they do. As Hawking has noted, criticizing Wittgenstein, twentieth-century philosophers have failed to keep up with the advance of scientific theories. In the spirit of Engels, dialectical logic has to incorporate, for example, the laws of quantum mechanics and their proof that the subject changes the object under consideration. The significance for Marxism here is that the activity of the subject under certain conditions is decisive.

A key issue for Marxists is the development of consciousness in the working-class movement. It is all too easy to fall prey to impressions of passivity, indifference, and apparent acceptance of bourgeois propaganda. Concepts emerging from the study of far-from-equilibrium systems can help us to understand how class society can undergo sudden changes, whereby stability gives way to “chaos.” Recent events in France are a good example.

Paul Davies’s resurrects the fundamentalist absolutes of religion by dressing them up in scientific clothing. Postmodernism

and the convergence view are polarities expressing the crisis within philosophy. For Marx and Engels, the progress of science was a constant source of revolutionary optimism. We cannot apprehend the complexity and speed of movement of modern capitalist society without negating from science concepts that enable logic to represent the new world disorder.

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NOTES

1. From the London University student newspaper: "Science is heading towards the necessity for people to believe. Faith is belief unaffected by evidence. 'Theories of everything' are akin to this idea because they too need belief, as they can no longer be verified by observation. . . . It is claimed that science is the new religion" (*London Student*, December 1995, 26–31).

2. See also Lenin's study (1972b, 140–1, 252–63) of Hegel's comment: "Something moves, not because it is here at one point of time and there at another, but because at one and the same point of time it is here and not here, and in this here both is and is not." Both Hegel and Engels rephrase Heraclitus's famous fragment: "We step into the same stream and yet we do not; we are and we are not." [For a recent discussion about Engels treatment of spatial motion see *Nature, Society, and Thought* 8, no. 2:155–65.—Ed.]

3. The second law of thermodynamics states that heat cannot be transferred from a colder to a hotter body within a system without net changes occurring within other bodies within that system.

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A History of Pagan Europe. By Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick. London: Routledge, 1995. 262 pages, cloth \$25.00; paper \$16.95.

An initial encounter with this book raises high expectations, as the book jacket informs the prospective reader:

A History of Pagan Europe is the first comprehensive study of its kind, and establishes paganism as a persistent force in European history with a profound influence on modern thinking. From the serpent goddesses of ancient Crete to modern nature-worship and the restoration of the indigenous religions of Eastern Europe, this wide-ranging book offers a rewarding—often provocative—new perspective of European history.

Certainly much needs further investigation and dissemination in this area. The violence and coercion that were part of the actual process of the conversion of Europe to Christianity are usually glossed over or soft-pedaled. Traditional texts present the reader with a conventional stereotype: paganism is associated with barbarity while the advent of Christianity represents enlightenment eagerly accepted by a grateful populace. A penetrating analysis of the factors that impelled this process would be exhilarating and rewarding. Yet despite the inclusion of some interesting and not generally accessible material, this book is disappointing as history.

To be more than annals and a collection of anecdotes, historical writing must attempt to answer three basic questions: *What? How? Why?* Establishing with some degree of certitude *what*, *when*, and *how* events occurred is difficult even under the most favorable of circumstances. Consider the assassination of John F. Kennedy: hundreds of witnesses, moving and still photography, and even sound recording—all followed by national attention and investigations aided by advanced technology. Yet, the most essential facts are still hotly contested. Consider how much more difficult the task is for the historian attempting to reconstruct the events of the past where attestation of past events depends on the

chance preservation of documents with little opportunity for obtaining corroborating evidence. Determining the *what* and the *how*, difficult as it may be, only lays the groundwork for true history. The *why* is not only most important consideration but gives meaning and significance to history. Here the historian must identify the engines of economic and social change by viewing the interrelations and interactions of as many aspects of society as possible. Ultimately, some conceptual framework must enable the historian to make viable assessments of the *whys* of history.

Paganism is used by the authors as an inclusive term to include all pre-Christian religions of Europe and their subsequent survivals. The term *paganism* reveals something of its historical nature. Since it is generally believed among scholars concerned with Christian origins that Christianity was initially an urban phenomenon, the *pagus* (countryside) would be subject to conversion later than the cities. In addition the *pagani* tended to be more resistant to the new religion than urban folk. Since the fertility of the soil and animals, upon which the very existence of farmers depended, was inextricably bound to existing religion, the reluctance to abandon what was considered to be essential for survival is understandable.

The book is attractively printed and bound; the breadth of the subjects covered as well as the authors' knowledge of source materials are truly impressive; the writing reflects a high level of care and literacy; many of the observations made are from interesting and not generally accessible sources. The citations are, however, made without assessment of their credibility; rather they are piled one on another so that the book often becomes a veritable melange of facts, factoids, assertions, speculations, and conjectures. Religious phenomena are treated as if they occurred almost completely divorced from the material existence of the people and political, social, and economic factors and conditions.

In addition, serious problems in historical interpretation are glossed over. To cite but a few examples: The authors accept natural disasters—earthquakes and volcanic eruption—as the reason for the collapse of the Minoan civilization of Crete. A specific disaster may be acknowledged to have occurred; but it does not

necessarily follow that this disaster was the primary cause of a historical development. Many other civilizations have received comparable blows to that undergone by Crete and survived or emerged even stronger. The authors' interpretation reflects the bourgeois propensity for explaining social and economic change as caused by some external factor rather than considering the operation of processes internal to the society. Similarly, the Dorian invasion is assumed to be the cause of the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization in ancient Greece, although much evidence points to internal factors. Clearly distinct periods are also often conflated without distinction, e.g., the three stages of belief in the afterlife that can be observed in the Aegean region.

The use of sources is uneven, some important ones are used, while others that would be expected are neglected: although two chapters are devoted to Germanic paganism, one of the most valuable sources for this topic, Saxo Grammaticus, is virtually omitted. Important current scholarship is also frequently neglected: the work of Georges Dumézil, whose treatment of the Indo-European origin of European pre-Christian religion must be considered in any history of those religions, is scarcely mentioned.

Despite the frustration occasioned by receiving so much information devoid of analysis there are rewards and a few instances that suggest new insights or topics for further investigation. The authors mention, for instance, the period when all of England was excommunicated from the Roman Church, a time of "vibrant pluralism of lifestyles" and "remarkable prosperity and vitality" (162).

Although the authors are somewhat elusive about the specific brand of paganism that they advocate, the book is essentially an apologia for a paganism that is less patriarchal, less dogmatic, less restrictive, less intolerant, and more in tune with nature and its rhythms than traditional Christianity. They make the point that the pagan religions have as much claim to fealty and credence as Christianity. Who can dispute that?

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ABSTRACTS

Fred Whitehead, “The Challenge of Explanation”—In the context of widespread contemporary religious wars and civil conflicts, the major Marxist concepts of religion are reviewed, including the contributions of scholars working in that tradition. Two recent theories of religion that concentrate on anthropomorphization and dissociation are discussed, evaluated and applied to the general outlines of U.S. intellectual history, to the persistence of market economics, and to problems of the USSR. A synthesis of Marxist and more recent psychological theories is called for to meet the challenges of present-day conflicts.

Norm R. Allen Jr., “Religion and the New African American Intellectuals”—Contemporary African American intellectuals are taking a prominent place in debates on a range of social and moral issues. Cornel West attempts a fusion of progressive politics with Christian values, while Stephen Carter links these values with more middle-of-the-road views. But critical thinking makes for an unstable fusion with religious beliefs, and hence the present situation for African American intellectuals is fraught with tensions and contradictory cross currents, at the same time as they support progressive politics in general.

Howard S. Miller, “Kate Austin: A Feminist-Anarchist on the Farmer’s Last Frontier”—Kate Austin (1864–1902) was a feminist-anarchist Midwestern farmwife who voiced a strain of grassroots radicalism far more widespread and potent than would be supposed in the late twentieth-century United States. Reared in the traditions of ante-bellum social reform and radicalized by the Haymarket Massacre, Austin fused elements of popular free-thought, greenback-laborite economics, free-love feminism, populist outrage, and European anarcho-communism into a trenchant social and political critique. In the 1890s her essays attracted international attention. Austin’s private life and public

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career are compelling reminders that in the late Victorian United States, village atheism and underclass rebellion were the mirror-image twins of bourgeois piety and deportment.

Shinie Antony, “‘Begone Godmen’: An Interview with B. Premanand”—Journalist Shinie Antony interviews a well-known Indian skeptic who is actively involved in exposing alleged miracles performed by various types of tricksters in India.

Finngeir Hiorth, “Criticism of Religion in Sweden”—The author reviews the work of leading Swedish freethinkers, especially highlighting the role of the philosopher Ingemar Hedenius and the principal critics of his views.

Corinna Lotz and Gerry Gold, “Matter, God, and the New Physics: A Review Essay on the Popular Books of Cosmologist Paul Davies”—The authors discuss critically the assertions of Paul Davies that the recent developments in the physical sciences provide scientific affirmation for the existence of God. Lotz and Gold follow Davies’s arguments allegedly based on discoveries in particle physics, cosmology, space exploration, etc. to show that his philosophical idealism does not displace the dialectical-materialist interpretations of these discoveries.

ABREGES

Fred Whitehead, «Le défi de l’explication»—Dans le contexte des guerres religieuses et des conflits civils répandus de nos jours, les concepts principaux marxistes sur la religion sont révisés, y compris les contributions des savants qui travaillent dans cette tradition. Deux théories récentes de la religion qui se concentrent sur l’anthropomorphisation et la dissociation, sont discutées, évaluées, et appliquées aux grandes lignes de l’histoire intellectuelle des Etats-Unis, à la persistance des économies de marché, et aux problèmes de l’union soviétique. L’auteur souligne la nécessité de formuler une synthèse des théories marxistes et des théories psychologiques plus récentes afin de faire face aux défis actuels.

Norm R. Allen Jr. «**La religion et les nouveaux intellectuels afro-américains**»—Les intellectuels afro-américains contemporains occupent une position importante dans les débats sur toute la portée des questions sociales et morales. Cornel West essaie de fusionner la politique progressive et les valeurs chrétiennes, tandis que Stephen Carter relie ces valeurs à des vues plus modérées. Mais une fusion de la pensée critique avec des croyances religieuses est instable. Tout en soutenant la politique progressive en général, les intellectuels afro-américains actuels se trouvent donc confrontés à une situation pleine de tensions et de contrecourants contradictoires.

Howard S. Miller, «**Kate Austin: une féministe-anarchiste à la dernière frontière du fermier**»—Kate Austin (1864–1902) était une fermière féministe-anarchiste du Midwest qui exprima une tendance du radicalisme populaire de loin plus répandue et puissante qu'on ne la croirait aux Etats-Unis de la fin du vingtième siècle. Elevée dans les traditions de la réforme sociale d'avant la guerre civile et radicalisée par le massacre de Haymarket, Austin tissait ensemble des éléments de la libre pensée, de l'économie ouvrière du «billet vert», du féminisme amour-libre, de la colère populaire, et de l'anarcho-communisme européen, pour ainsi formuler une critique sociale et politique incisive. Dans les années 1890, ses essais attirèrent l'attention internationale. La vie privée et la carrière publique d'Austin nous rappellent irrésistiblement qu'aux Etats-Unis à la fin de l'époque victorienne, l'athéisme de village et la rébellion des classes inférieures formaient l'image invertie de la piété et du comportement bourgeois.

Finngeir Hiorth, «**Critique de la religion en Suède**»—L'auteur passe en revue les oeuvres des principaux libre-penseurs suédois, mettant surtout en lumière le rôle du philosophe Ingemar Hedenius et les principales critiques de ses vues.

Shinie Antony, «**'Allez-vous-en, Hommes de Dieu': une interview avec B. Premanand**»—Le journaliste Shinie Antony interviewe un indien sceptique bien connu qui s'engage activement à exposer les miracles allégués joués par divers filous en Inde.

Corinna Lotz et Gerry Gold, «La matière, Dieu et la physique nouvelle: une revue des livres populaires du cosmologiste Paul Davies»—Les auteurs discutent et critiquent les constatations de Paul Davies lesquels les développements récents des sciences physiques fournissent une affirmation scientifique de l'existence de Dieu. Lotz et Gold suivent les arguments qui sont, selon les allégations de Davies, basés sur les découvertes en physique des particules, cosmologie, exploration spatiale etc., pour démontrer que son idéalisme philosophique ne déplace pas les interprétations dialectiques-matérialistes de ces découvertes.