Chapter III

Aldous Huxley's Agnosticism: Early Rationalistic Phase

Though most of the nineteenth-century intellectuals had turned agnostics under the impact of Darwinism, yet they continued to visit the church, and accepted Christian morality. The classic example is of T.H. Huxley, the arch-agnostic, who compromised his agnostic scruples, when, on the insistence of his wife, he consented, that his son, Leonard, be christened. Despite his avowed agnosticism, Huxley felt it "only fair to a child to give it a connection with the official spiritual organisation of its country."¹ The Victorians still retained some kind of faith, and hoped with their poet, Tennyson, that "somehow good will be the final goal of ill." But the early years of the present century saw the collapse of European religious and moral standards. The traumatic events of the first Great War accelerated the process of decay of values, which had started in the middle of the nineteenth century. If Faith, as Jacques Maritain defines it, "is the adherence of the intellect to truths and realities which are above the range of reason,"² then the faith in Faith was completely lost.

The hiatus between faith and reason, which had persisted in Western thought since the middle ages, had grown so wide in the first two decades of this century, that no reconciliation seemed to be possible between the two
opposing tendencies. H.J. Paton rightly observes: "The predicament caused by the gulf between faith and knowledge is acute in the modern world, but it is also very old." The earlier ages, however, took the existence of God for granted. Doubts were raised not about the existence of God, but about the possibility of a knowledge of Him. The post-war Western intellectual found it hard to believe in the existence of God. How could one revive faith in a God, who had failed to check a procession of events, which had expressed what was most ugly and bestial in man? W.B. Yeats expresses his apprehension of loss of values, when he says: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." Aubrey, a character in the play of George Bernard Shaw's old age, complains that he has "no Bible, no creed: the war has shot both out of my hands." The post-war thinker could no longer look for spiritual sustenance toward Christianity, for it failed to offer any solution to his moral and spiritual predicament. A.C. Ward observes that it would not be extravagant to suggest that "at no time since Constantine made it an official religion has Christianity been so seriously shaken as in the years since the War."

The loss of faith, therefore, resulted in agnosticism in matters of belief, and in indifference in regard to value. In the absence of any generally accepted
view of life and the universe, the artist and the intellectual were obliged to accept an attitude of indifference towards spiritual and moral values. "The Zeitgeist," writes Huxley, "is a most tyrannous spirit; to evade its imperatives seems, for a sensitive artist, to be all our impossible." An avant garde, who best expresses the spirit of his age was, in the twenties, according to David Daiches, "agnostic and Left-wing." Huxley found it hard to escape the agnosticism of his age. Though an avant garde, Huxley was a traditionalist at heart. The young poet Huxley started his literary career as a poet was shocked and shaken to find himself in a spiritually barren and devaluated world. There was that strong Arnoldian streak in his temperament, which expressed itself as a strong yearning to believe in something, that could provide a satisfying framework to look at men and events. It was this passionate yearning for values, which earned Huxley, Grant Overton's remark that Huxley was "the child of the nineteenth century far more than of the twentieth, or the seventeenth, or even the first." Huxley confessed to Mrs. Sybille Bedford, that he was troubled by the spiritual predicament, caused by the conflict of faith and reason, in the present age. He complains, that he was "born wandering between two worlds, one dead,
the other powerless to be born, and have made, in a curious way, the worst of both.\textsuperscript{10} There is an early poem "Mediterranean," which shares strong resemblances with Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach". In this poem, Huxley the poet, expresses a passionate yearning to call "Back the tide that ran so strong and deep, / Call back the shining jewel of the sea."\textsuperscript{11} Since the tide of faith has receded, the poet is left with nothing but agnosticism. The poetic sensibility is obscurely sensitive to the existence of a spiritual world, of which it becomes vaguely aware, under certain emotional moods, but finding no satisfactory frame of reference, it fails to assert itself. It shirks from making any positive assertions, and expresses its restlessness, in the words of C.E.M. Joad, "in the wistful agnosticism which has been characteristic of the last two generations."\textsuperscript{12} Huxley's romantic sensibility is in desperate search for an ideal which may provide him release from "bondage to brute things."\textsuperscript{13}

Huxley feels, that his "poor, bleared, mind" can never receive an answer to life's "haunting whys."\textsuperscript{14} The agnostic fails "to see why God the Topiarist/Should train and carve and twist/Men's bodies into such fantastic shapes,"\textsuperscript{15} and, therefore, can never believe in the existence of any loving, benevolent Deity. Huxley feels that "God's in His Heaven: He never issues/ (Wise Man!) to visit this world of ours."\textsuperscript{16} The agnostic
can "only do my best to laugh," or else he can "only sip my misery dram by dram." There is no certitude for the agnostic, and even the Arnoldian conception of love, as a substitute for the loss of faith, can never deliver the goods. "I have no faith, and even in love remain/Agnostic," writes Huxley, in his poem "Soles Occidere Et Redire Possunt."

The hermaphrodite hero of the novella, "Farcical History Of Richard Greenow" saturates himself in the verses of Victor Hugo, and comes to believe, that the words Dieu, infinité, éternité, with which Hugo's works are so profusely sprinkled actually possess some meaning. But "what that meaning was he could not, even in his most romantic transports, discover." The faint adumbrations of that idealism, which fully manifests itself in his later novels, are perceptible in early fiction. The ideal of mysticism is either ignored, or else, it becomes an object of ridicule for the jeering and fleering agnostic. Guy Lambourne, the central character of the story"Happily Ever After," claims that he does not "look forward to golden harps or anything of that sort," and does not cherish belief in any posthumous existence. But he realizes that, in his mind, the deep urge to feel and experience spiritual reality, is at war with his Voltairian rationalism. If born in an age of belief, perhaps, Guy would have been another Bunyan on his way to the city of God. But living in an age of negation and disbelief, he
cannot do anything else but remain agnostic. The review which he makes of his own life is interesting, for it also throws light on the mental attitude of his author. Guy says:

Born in another age, he would, he supposed, have been religious. He had got over religion early, like the measles—at nine a Low Churchman, at twelve a Broad Churchman, and at fourteen an Agnostic—but he still retained the temperament of a religious man. Intellectually he was a Voltairian, emotionally a Bunyanite.21

II

Bunyan and Voltaire, faith and knowledge, are irreconcilable at ordinary, unregenerate level, and the synthesis can be achieved in an integral vision of life. The intellectual unable to transcend his rationalism, is bound to end as an agnostic, in his quest of reality. Joseph Wood Krutch sums up the predicament of the modern intellectual in most apt words:

Try as he may, the two halves of his soul can hardly be made to coalesce, and he cannot either feel as his intelligence tells him that he should feel, or think as his emotions would have him think, and thus he is reduced to mocking his torn and divided soul.22

It is this schism between passion and reason, which forms the keynote of Huxley's early fiction. Miles
Fanning, the novelist in the story "After The Fireworks," complains that "the division, the splitness, has been worked right into my bones." In a shattered and fragmented world, when the eternal verities of religion have lost all support, the artist becomes a faithful historian, who gives expression to the agony and frustration of the torn and divided soul. Since he fails to create a vision of life, in an atmosphere of withered values, he abnegates all sense of responsibility, and pursues knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Huxley confesses in a letter to Miss Hepworth and Mr. Green, that as a young man, he "cared supremely for knowledge for its own sake, for the play of ideas, for the arts of literature, painting and music." His amoeboid mind would not allow him to stick to any specific philosophical framework. The best way for the agnostic was to cultivate aestheticism, and to maintain the Pyrrhonian indifference towards transcendental questions.

It is this non-committal attitude which characterizes Huxley's first novel, Crome Yellow. George Woodcock calls this novel an "essentially agnostic book," for the author does not provide any positive recommendations about life. Denis Stone, the central character of this Peacockian novel, finds it difficult to have any spontaneous response towards any emotional situation in life. Burdened by "twenty tons of ratiocination," he
finds it impossible to have any satisfactory emotional relationship with other human beings. Ratiocination brings unhappiness so long as it remains alienated from the passional side of human nature. The intellectual agnostic is bound to remain on his tenterhooks, because his diffuse knowledge does not merge into a synthesis, but remains scattered and disjoined. Denis, like Huxley, has an encyclopaedic range of mind. He has gathered immense erudition, to realize, that knowledge alone is inadequate to integrate passion and reason in man. Denis has read "great thick books about the universe and the mind and ethics," but his knowledge has not brought him any vision of the ultimate reality. The agnostic feels at home in the world of ideas, but fails to face reality. Denis complains:

One entered the world, Denis pursued, having ready-made ideas about everything. One had a philosophy and tried to make life fit into it. One should have lived first and then made one's philosophy to fit life....Life, facts, things were horribly complicated; ideas, even the most difficult of them, deceptively simple. In the world of ideas everything was clear; in life all was obscure, embroiled. Was it surprising that one was miserable, horribly unhappy? 27

Scogan rightly observes that Denis has "none of the characteristics required in a Man of Faith." 28 Faith alone, would urge the spiritualist, can bring
certitude to the restless soul. Mrs. Wimbush, though a sham spiritualist, who dallies with New Thought and the Occult, tells Denis about the importance of faith in life.

"Such a pity you don't believe in these things, Denis, such a pity," said Mrs. Wimbush.

"I can't say I feel it so."

"Ah, that's because you don't know what it's like to have faith. You've no idea how amusing and exciting life becomes when you do believe. All that happens means something; nothing you do is ever insignificant."29

Knowledge, as opposed to faith, brings doubt and dissatisfaction. "Of knowledge and experience," writes Huxley, "the fruit is generally doubt."30 Doubt grows profounder as knowledge increases. Knowledge, theoretical and empirical, destroys, instead of creating, value, and therefore, results in doubt and agnostic uncertainty. In the absence of any satisfying religious framework, the agnostic thinks that he is justified to mock at the religious certainties of his age. Scogan is a gritty rationalist, who debunks the foggy ideal of mysticism, as Huxley did in his early writings.31 To Scogan all religions and philosophies are nothing but the "spiritual Tubes bored through the universe."32 He has read the works of the mystics, but they seemed to him nothing but the most deplorable claptrap.33 He has an unappeased desire to go on talking about the universe, but his endless talking is nothing more than the idle musings of an agnostic, and shows the
essential fluidity of his mind. He is a mere vox
et praetera null, and his talking, therefore,
remains without substance. During his conversation
with Denis, Scogan tells him that life and universe
are without any apparent meaning. He expresses his
agnostic approach towards the universe, when he tells
Denis, not to worry about the universe.

"Worried about the cosmos, eh?"
Mr. Scogan patted him on the arm.
"I know the feeling," he said.
"It's a most distressing symptom.
'What's the point of it all? All
is vanity. What's the good of
continuing to function if one's
doomed to be snuffed out at last
along with everything else?' Yes,
Yes. I know exactly how you feel.
't's most distressing if one allows
oneself to be distressed. But then
why allow oneself to be distressed?
After all, we all know that there's
no ultimate point."34

It is precisely the attempt to know whether
there is any "ultimate point," that forms the theme
of the opening chapter of Antic Hay. While listening to
the sermon of the Reverend Pelvey, in the school Chapel,
Theodore Gumbril speculates "in his rapid and rambling
way about the existence and the nature of God."35 As
an agnostic, Gumbril finds it difficult to accept the
theistic assertions, which the priest makes before his
congregation. He wonders at the enviable certainty,
with which the priest claims his faith in the existence
of God. Gumbril is a rational agnostic, who finds it
difficult to give his intellectual consent to the sermon
of the priest, from the Sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, that the "Lord our God is one Lord: and "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thine soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5). God as a feeling about the soul is all right, but how can one intellectually justify the existence of God? Emotion and reason seem to contradict each other, and the agnostic has to face this typical dilemma, which to him seems insoluble. Gumbril says:

No, but seriously, Gumbril reminded himself, the problem was very troublesome indeed. God as a sense of warmth about the heart, God as exultation, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought — that was all right. But God as truth, God as $2 + 2 = 4$ — that wasn't so clearly all right. Was there any chance of their being the same? Were there bridges to join the two worlds?

To the agnostic it seems well-nigh impossible to find a bridge which can join the worlds of passion and reason, for he does not believe in an intuitive apprehension of reality, when emotion, reason and will coalesce, and result in triune peace. The rational agnostic fails to seek an answer to the question: How can one integrate the different explanations given to the same thing? A thing can be explained in terms of physiology, religion, psychology, or in terms of art and music. Since the rational agnostic does not believe that the direct, intuitive insight can vouchsafe any integrating principle, he thinks he can have the most
malicious laugh by juxtaposing different explanations of the same thing. Huxley says: "Juxtapose, for example, physiology and mysticism (Mme Guyon's ecstasies were most frequent and most spiritually significant in the fourth month of her pregnancies)... So seen reality looks exceedingly queer. Which is how the ironist and the perplexed questioner desires it to look." The perplexed questioner fails to seek any answer to the riddle of the universe. "There will always be mysteries," writes Huxley, "because there will always be unknown and unknowable things." Commenting on Michael Faraday's attitude towards God, Huxley says that the scientist was "equally fortunate in his relations to the unknowable. The problems of life, as they are called, never troubled him." The remark seems to imply that Huxley was certainly vexed by the "inexpressible question for which there is no possible answer." As a self-conscious, intelligent, individual, Huxley was troubled by the metaphysical questions concerning the nature of reality, and man's ultimate destiny.

The agnostic's urge to know about the nature of reality assumes greater interest in Those Barren Leaves. David Daiches' observation, that the typical Huxleyan hero, in this novel, is split into two characters, Calamy and Chelifer, seems, to some extent justified. While Calamy, like his predecessor Gumbril,
shows his interest and inclination towards mysticism, Chelifer remains an impenent agnostic. Calamy and Chelfier seem to represent the two tendencies in Huxley's thought - the mystical and the agnostic, which seem to vie with each other, to claim an ascendency over his mind. In this context, Jerome Meckier rightly observes that Huxley's treatment of Gumbril and Calamy makes him an agnostic with decisive mystic leanings. George Woodcock finds significant resemblances between Chelifer and Huxley. Joceyn Brooke also observes that Chelifer has more than a little in common with Mr. Huxley himself. It becomes quite evident that Chelifer, in his approach towaras metaphysical questions, expresses Huxley's early agnosticism. Chelifer regretfully recalls an incident from his boyhood days, how his father, an ardent Wordsworthian quoted an epiphanic utterance of Wordsworth, while he came face to face, with an overwhelming sight of natural beauty, on the top of Snowdon. But after Chetifer has outgrown the Wordsworthian influence of his early days, he speaks in an ironic tone about nature mysticism. Agnostic as he is, to Chelifer the far more deeply interfused business seems all nonsense.

'A sense of something far-more deeply interfused.' Ever since that day those words, pronounced in my father's cavernous voice, have rumbled through my mind. It took me a long time to discover that they were as meaningless as so many hiccoughs. Such is the nefarious influence of early training.
Perhaps the most avowed agnostic in this novel is Mr. Cardan. Born in the mid-century of the Victorian era, "almost a twin to The Origin Of Species," and "brought up in the simple faith of nineteenth-century materialism," Mr. Cardan carries over the Victorian debate between body and mind, matter and spirit to the twentieth century. Like his predecessor Scogan, Cardan does not believe in the reality of the spirit. When Calamy tries to defend the assertions of mystics about the existence of a super-empirical reality, which according to the mystics, is also immanent in man, Cardan opposes Calamy with all the rational arguments, an intellectual agnostic can command, to show, that there is no such thing as spirit or soul. Mr. Cardan does not believe in spirit; to him body is the only reality. He says:

But the greatest tragedy of the spirit is that sooner or later it succumbs to the flesh. Sooner or later every soul is stifled by the sick body; sooner or later there are no more thoughts, but only pain and vomiting and stupor.... the spirit itself is only an accidental exuberance, the products of spare vital energy, like the feathers on the head of a hoopoo or the innumerable populations of useless and foredoomed spermatozoa. The spirit has no significance; there is only the body.47

Cardan debunks mysticism, and does not believe in any salvation. To him the navel-gazing asceticism of the Hindu Yogis, or the fasts and flagellations of Christian saints, seem pointless. Philosophical
conceptions like God and salvation are the by-products of belief in the reality of the spirit. But if body is the only reality, the spirit a mere illusion, then God and salvation lose significance for the agnostic. Cardan says:

'And as the flesh sickens the spirit sickens, manifestly. Finally the flesh dies and putrefies; and the spirit presumably putrefies too. And there's an end of your omphaloskepsis, with all its by-products, God and justice and salvation and all the rest of them.'

Calamy raises the most fundamental philosophical query, whether mind can be explained in terms of matter. Cardan observes that our minds do "fall under the dominion of certain bits of this matter, known as our bodies, changing as they change and keeping pace with their decay." Mr. Cardan seems to refer to T.H. Huxley's "epiphenomenon" theory of the mind, to which the arch-agnostic often referred, to denounce the idealistic conception of mind, advocated by his orthodox adversaries. Cardan's scientific materialism, in a way, points out, that Huxley viewed reality from the stand point of philosophical materialism. Margaret Church aptly observes that Huxley's early philosophical position was "close to the materialistic empiricism of his grandfather, T.H. Huxley."

Those Barren Leaves ends on an assurance of faith in the existence of divine reality. It certainly
points out, that Huxley was inclined towards mysticism in thirties. This conviction was, however, shaken by his visit to India. The Jestings Pilate went around the world in quest of truth, and came back with the most disappointing conviction that spirituality was "the primal curse of India." Huxley suggested that the remedy was more materialism, not spirituality, as had been suggested by Oriental mystics, whom he called the "false prophets from the East." Huxley condemns the preoccupation of the Indians with the Other World - the world of metaphysics and religion, which, according to Huxley, is "an invention of the human fancy," and hence not worth cultivating. Agnosticism re-asserts itself as a negative reaction against mysticism. Mysticism figures as an important aspect of Huxley's thought, for he has been interested in it since his undergraduate days at Oxford, but the Perennial Philosophy as he would name it later, is debunked and derided. The narrator of the novella "Uncle Spencer" voices Huxley's reaction towards mysticism. The narrator says, that he was "never infected by his uncle's mystical enthusiasms," and that, strong in materialistic philosophy, he found his uncle's "mystical and religious preoccupations marvellously ludicrous." In his essay on "Varieties Of Intelligence," Huxley confesses that temperamentally
he is a materialist. He says: "Some souls are naturaliter Christianae; others are congenitally materialistic. Mine belongs to the latter category." 55

"Congenitally an intellectual," as he himself admits, Huxley adopts an attitude of agnosticism towards the imponderables of religion. As an agnostic, he can accept a proposition only if it can appeal to his intellect, and can be rationally justified. Huxley concedes:

Intellectually I am able to understand the doctrine, for example, of Platonic ideas; but I am unable to discover in myself any intimate reason for believing it. That the Absolute exists is not one of the major premisses I should spontaneously have thought of. 57

If the Absolute is beyond the power of human knowledge, the mind, too, can never be known. In his essay on "Education", Huxley says: "We do not and we cannot know what mind really is. We do not and cannot know, for that matter, what anything really is." 58 We cannot know what things actually are; we only know them as they affect our consciousness. We can never know the essence of a thing. In his excellent essay on "The Essence Of Religion," Huxley contests Dean Inge's claim that the essence of religion can be known. Huxley criticizes the Dean's assertion, on the ground, that the human mind, by its very nature
can never grasp the essence of a thing, for it
has no such faculty as can directly apprehend the
real nature of things. Huxley says the Dean must
be congratulated if he "knows something which nobody
on this earth ever has known or ever will know, until
humanity learns...to understand with some other
instrument than the human mind." Huxley, at this
stage, remains an intellectual agnostic, who does not
seem to recognize the intuitive way of knowing reality.
Scientific knowledge, though not absolute but relative,
is acceptable to Huxley, for this kind of knowledge
has its origin in sense perceptions, and can be
empirically verified. Huxley says:

Our existing scientific theories
may not be absolutely true...
But they do mean roughly the same
to all human beings, because all
human beings have roughly the same
sensations. Any one who has normal
sense organs and who knows the rules
of the logical game can test, not
the absolute, but the relative,
temporary human truth of any
scientific theory.

Huxley admits that while refuting the
Dean's assertion about a knowledge of essences, he
has treated the Dean with certain "pawky playfulness," which certainly indicates his mocking attitude towards
religion. If, as Huxley writes in the essay "A Note On
Dogma," "No conception of the nature of God can be
true," and we can leave "absolute truth out of
account as unattainable," then the agnostic can have
his hearty laugh at the ceremonial and ritualistic aspects of religion. To the agnostic, there is no point in the universe, and life has no pre-ordained, pre-destined goal. Huxley suggests that there is "little reason why we should be here, eating, drinking, sleeping, and in the intervals reading metaphysics, saying prayers, or collecting dung." The Indian view of existence propounds that life has a definite goal, which is to realize the divine in man. But such an ideal end of existence, the agnostic can never accept, for he is never convinced of the divine in man.

It is this religious approach of the Indians, which is not favourably spoken of by Philip Quarles, the central character in Point Counter Point. Juliette Huxley calls this novel "a roman-à-clef par excellence, where Aldous, in the persons of Philip Quarles and Walter Bidlake, reveals some facets of his own character." Philip Quarles' reactions towards Indian spirituality are similar to Huxley's negative approach towards Indian religions, which he recorded in Jesting Pilate, after his return from India. Philip Quarles shares Huxley's agnosticism, and, on his return from India, regrets that he was once interested in mysticism. Philip Quarles regrets that "there was a time when I read books about yoga and did breathing exercises and tried to persuade myself that I didn't really exist! What a fool!" Philip Quarles is an agnostic who has
adopted a "kind of Pyrrhonian indifference" as his attitude towards life and religion. Like Huxley, Philip is an excellent novelist of ideas, whose chief problem is that of identity. He fails to commit himself to any definite view of existence, and thinks that Pyrrhonian suspense of judgment is the most suitable attitude for an intellectual novelist of ideas. Philip ponders over his problem:

But this question of identity was precisely one of Philip's chronic problems. It was so easy for him to be almost anybody, theoretically and with his intelligence. He had such a power of assimilation, that he was often in danger of being unable to distinguish the assimilator from the assimilated, of not knowing among the multiplicity of his roles who was the actor....At different times in his life and even at the same moment he had filled the most various moulds. He had been a cynic and also a mystic, a humanitarian and also a contemptuous misanthrope; he had tried to live the life of detached and stoical reason and another time he had aspired to the unreasonableness of natural and uncivilized existence. The choice of moulds depended at any given moment on the books he was reading, the people he was associating with...

The moulds were emptied as easily as they had been filled, the obstacles were passed by. But the essential liquidness that flowed where it would, the cool indifferent flux of intellectual curiosity - that persisted and to that his loyalty was due. If there was any single way of life he
could lastingly believe in, it was that mixture of pyrrhonism and stoicism which had struck him, an enquiring schoolboy among the philosophers, as the height of human wisdom and into whose mould of sceptical indifference he had poured his unimpassioned adolescence. Against the pyrrhonian suspense of judgment and the stoical imperturbability he had often rebelled. But had the rebellion ever been really serious?68

Philip Quarles tells his wife Elinor that as a Pyrrhonian agnostic, he has found a new way of looking at things. He tells her that "the essence of the new way of looking is multiplicity. Multiplicity of eyes and multiplicity of aspects seen."69 Writing in his diary, Phillip Quarles elaborates this new way of thinking as the choice to "consider the events of the story in their various aspects - emotional, scientific, economic, religious, metaphysical, etc."70 This reminds us of Huxley's essay "Justifications," where he suggests that the ironist can have the most hearty laugh by juxtaposing the different explanations of the same thing. Marjorie's pregnancy is juxtaposed with religion, and the result is a laugh at the sanctities of religion.

A cell had multiplied itself and become a worm, the worm had become a fish, the fish was turning into the foetus of a mammal. Marjorie felt sick and tired. Fifteen years hence, a boy would be confirmed. Enormous in his robes, like a full-rigged ship, the Bishop would say: 'Do ye here in the presence of God, and of this congregation, review the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your Baptism?' And the ex-fish would answer with passionate conviction: 'I do.' 71
The agnostic, grown under the shadow of Darwinism, cannot help having a laugh at the orthodox religion, which still insists on formal observances. Alexander Henderson's comments on the above cited passage are noteworthy. He says:

We laugh at the ex-fish saying 'I do', because we are still living in the shadow of the conflict between science and religion which Darwin started. Let us suppose, for the moment, that we all are practising agnostics - we bear our lives on lack of faith and the assumption that the scientific view of the world is correct - nevertheless, the religion which was important to our grandfathers still casts its shadow over us, and we are so conditioned that attacks on sacrosanct faith still cause an emotional terror, a shock, which usually expresses itself, owing to our agnosticism, as a laugh.

The agnostic laughs at God, for to him, as Huxley would say, "the Absolute has all too human parents," and the noumenal world is the result of man's mere wishful thinking. It is the individual who distorts events.

Philip Quarles says: "We can see individuals, but we can't see providence; we have to postulate it. Isn't it best, if we can do without it, to omit the superfluous postulate?" Philip's wife Elinor shares her husband's agnosticism. To her, religion with all its transcendental morality, and metaphysical speculation, seems "nonsensical," for the simple reason that epistemologically speaking, there is "no getting behind the immediate experience." If we only know objects as they affect us, and cannot
go behind our immediate experience, the nature of things remains for ever inscrutable. But the desire to know God by rational means persists in the agnostic. Lord Gattenden's claim that he has discovered a most extraordinary mathematical proof of the existence of God, indicates the futility of the attempts of the rational agnostic to probe the mystery through rational method. Lord Gattenden is as much an object of satire and ridicule as any fool in search of a non-existent thing could ever be. In his telephonic conversation with Lord Edward Tantamount, Lord Gattenden says:

'Such a really remarkable discovery. I wanted your opinion on it. About God. You know the formula, \( \frac{m}{n} = \infty \), \( m \) being any positive number? Well, why not reduce the equation to a simpler form by multiplying both sides by nought? In which case you have \( m \) equals infinity times nought. That is to say that a positive number is the product of zero and infinity. Doesn't that demonstrate the creation of the universe by an infinite power out of nothing? Doesn't it?'...All his life the fifth marquess had been looking for the absolute. It was the only sort of hunting possible to a cripple. For fifty years he had trundled in his wheeled chair at the heels of the elusive quarry. Could it be that he had now caught it, so easily, and in such an unlikely place as an elementary school-book on the theory of limits?  

Mysticism, in this novel, is allied with weak and abnormal people. Lord Gattenden is a cripple who can afford his reflections on God, for he cannot do anything else. Spandrell, the diabolist, tries to seek God by denying Him. He deliberately wallows in
evil and sin. Mysticism has been associated with Marjorie's maudlin sentimentality, and Mrs. Bidlake's indifference towards the problems of her family. Philip Quarles thinks that God is the preoccupation of the old people. He says: "What is there left for the poor old wretches to talk about? Nothing—only God". The agnostic may brand religion as a preoccupation of the idle, old people, and may not claim any positive belief in the existence of a super-sensuous reality, but there are moments in his life, when he becomes aware of certain states of consciousness, which Wordsworth calls, "the unknown modes of being." The agnostic may not be able to realize the significance of such moments, but the fact remains that the experience exists. He knows that music can introduce us to a world of wonder and beauty, but Huxley seems to say, we do not know whether this world of heavenly beauty is a reality or an illusion.

It is a beauty, a goodness, a unity that no intellectual research can discover, that analysis dispels, but of whose reality the spirit is from time to time suddenly and overwhelmingly convinced. A girl singing to herself under the clouds suffices to create the certitude. Even a fine morning is enough. Is it illusion or the revelation of profoundest truth? Who knows? 78

Since the experience is rationally inexplicable, its significance cannot be realized as long as the agnostic does not have his own first-hand experience.
Walter Bidlake recalls Philip Quarles' remark:
"If you've never had a religious experience, it's folly to believe in God." Huxley had, at this stage, no intimate conviction about God, for he had not yet undergone intellectual conversion. Huxley accepts that "music is the equivalent of some of man's most significant and most inexpressible experiences." Spandrell comes to acquire a conviction of the existence of God by listening to Beethoven's music. He tells the Rampions that Beethoven's Lydian melody from Das heilige Dankgesang "proves all kinds of things - God, the soul, goodness - unescapably," and he invites the Rampions to listen to this music. The music plays on, and then "suddenly there was no more music; only the scratching of the needle on the revolving disc." Which is truth? The music that makes us aware of another order of reality, or the scratching of the needle on the revolving disc of the gramophone? To Spandrell there is no doubt that both heaven and gramophone needle exist, but Huxley does not choose an absolute. To Spandrell his heaven and God, to Huxley his agnosticism.

Point Counter Point delayed Huxley's conversion to mysticism, and the agnostic, in his quest of a synthetic philosophy, seeks a nexus in some philosophy, other than mysticism. Talking to Elinor, about the impact of their visit to India or her husband, Everard Webley says: "Seeing blackmoors walking about without
trousers must have made him still more sceptical about the eternal verities than he was. The remark is no less true of Huxley. *Jesting Pilate* testifies the cynical reaction Huxley had, about the Indian spirituality, during his visit to India. Another influence that brought a considerable shift from his emerging mysticism to a still more negative agnosticism was that of D.H. Lawrence. Huxley, under the Laurencian spell, came to believe, that perhaps vitalism could bring integration to the modern split-man.

In *Do What You Will*, which was written mainly under the Laurencian impact, and which advocates the lifeworship cult, Huxley gives expression to his agnosticism towards eternal verities. "Officially an agnostic," as he himself states his philosophical position, Huxley asserts that the only facts of which we have direct knowledge are psychological facts. In spite of the fact that one psychological fact is as good as another, Huxley says, "men still continue to promote their fancies to the rank of universal and absolute Truths, still imagine that they know something about the thing in itself." But, "the thing in itself is unknowable," and therefore, any conception of it is not rationally justifiable. In the essay "One And Many," Huxley says: "The final mystery is unknowable." Men's confused perceptions of it are diverse and contradictory, and therefore, God is "different for
different men, and for the same man on different occasions." In his essay "Spinoza's Worm," Huxley asserts that all philosophical and theological conceptions concerning the Absolute are nothing but "convenient and consoling substitutes for the welter of immediate experience." "To pursue the absolute," he says in his essay on "Baudelaire," "is as demonstrably a waste of time as to speculate on the topography of the invisible portions of the moon." There is no final answer to the riddle of the universe. Man knows the 'how' of phenomena, but as regards the 'why', it is not given to man to know. Various metaphysical explanations are mere hypotheses, and since "all of them postulate a knowledge of the unknowable Absolute, they are all equally ill-founded."

It seems, as an agnostic, Huxley does not recognize any absolute values in the universe. Truth, Goodness, and Beauty are just rationalizations of one's moods, and have no absolute existence. Huxley accepts the life-worshipper's ideal that "life on this planet is valuable in itself without any reference to hypothetical higher worlds, eternities, future existences." No divine goal is envisaged, no belief in any posthumous existence is retained, for the agnostic does not believe in the existence of soul. Body is the only reality to him, and it is the body which is glorified by Huxley in Do What You Will. Huxley comments: "But the very
possession of a body is a cynical comment on the soul and all its ways. The life-worshipper need not believe in God and soul. He may remain a Pyrrhonian agnostic, for Pyrrhonism best suits him. Huxley says:

He [A life-Worshipper is at one moment a positivist and at another a mystic: now haunted by the thought of death...now a pessimist and now, with a change of lover or liver or even the weather, an exuberant believer that God's in his heaven and all's right with the world.

It is as a Pyrrhonist that Huxley looks at Brave New World. The novel illustrates the fundamental dichotomy between reason and faith, and the triumph of nineteenth-century materialism over religion. The Savage, who stands for the emotional and religious approach towards life, is pitted against the forces of reason, represented by the World Controller. Though Huxley does not take sides, it is evident that he looks askance at the religious values, which are so passionately advocated by the Savage, just as he debunks the denizens of this mechanomorphic society for their mania for mechanical gadgets. Mustapha Mond associates the belief in God with old age, sickness and unhappiness. God is a mere substitute for these depressing and painful facts of existence. He emphasises upon the Savage the fact that if there is no old age, no unhappiness caused by sickness, and the torments of a fearful, hell-ridden theology, God becomes a mere superfluity. Mustapha Mond accepts that life has a purpose
other than happiness, as the Sovereign Good, but such an ideal is incompatible with the society which Brave New World depicts. The Controller accepts that it is quite possibly true that the purpose of life is not the maintenance of well-being, but "some intensification and refining of consciousness, some enlargement of knowledge," but such an ideal is not admissible in a society, as has mechanical efficiency, as its ultimate end.

Huxley admits that as far as the ontological problems are concerned, "there is really no knowing." The disappearance of faith has led people towards agnosticism or dogmatism. Huxley admits this fact that "the number of people who either dogmatically believe in, or else agnostically or uncaringly, simply do not bother about immortality, is now considerable." He complains that the agnostic approach towards the hitherto accepted ideas has been forced upon us by the contemporary circumstances. Most of the ideas of the elder generation "postulated the existence of certain transcendental entities," and, "it is precisely about these transcendental entities that modern circumstances compel us to feel sceptical." If not thorough scepticism /For thorough scepticism is not possible, as David Hume would agree/, one can at least maintain an agnostic approach towards
ontological questions. In his foreword to 1946 edition of *Brave Men World*, Huxley admits, that his attitude at the time of writing the novel, was that of "the amused Pyrrhonic aesthete." It is as an amused aesthete that Huxley, the agnostic, surveys the human scene.
Notes


12 C.E.M. Joad, God And Evil (London: Faber And Faber Limited, Mcmxliii), p. 18.


14 "Valedictory," ibid., p. 12.

15 "Topiary," ibid., p. 16.

16 "Ninth Philosopher's Song," ibid., p. 59.

17 ibid., p. 60.


20 ibid., p. 162.

21 ibid., p. 172.


27 ibid., p.24.

28 ibid., p. 167.

29 ibid., p. 9.


31 In a letter (22.8. 1939) to Dilipkumar Roy, Pondicherry, Huxley wrote: "I have been interested in mysticism ever since I was an undergraduate. For some time the interest was predominantly negative; that is to say, I read a good deal of Western and Eastern writing, always with intense interest, but always with a wish to 'debunk' them."

32 Huxley, Crome, p. 170.
33 ibid., p. 184.
34 ibid., pp. 208-209.
36 ibid., p. 4.
39 Aldous Huxley, ibid., p. 221.
40 ibid., p. 222.
42 Woodcock, Dawn, p. 122.

ibid., p. 122. Like Francis Chelifer, Huxley also remained under the Wordsworthian influence. Huxley writes:

> with the disintegration of the solid orthodoxies, Wordsworth became for many intelligent, liberal-minded families the Bible of that sort of Pantheism, that dim faith in the existence of a spiritual world, which filled, somewhat inadequately, the place of the older dogmas. Brought up as children in the Wordsworthian tradition, we were taught to believe that a Sunday walk among the hills was somehow equivalent to church-going.


ibid., p. 35.

ibid., p. 334.

ibid., p. 366.

ibid., p. 368.


ibid., pp. 110 - 111.

54 ibid., p. 78.


56 ibid., 129.

57 ibid., p. 49.

58 ibid., pp. 91 - 92.

59 ibid., p. 172.

60 ibid., p. 201.

61 ibid., p. 175.

62 ibid., p. 203.

63 ibid., p. 204.

64 Huxley, *Jesting*, p. 69.


67 ibid., p. 106.

68 ibid., pp. 268 - 270.

69 ibid., p. 266.

70 ibid., p. 409.
71. ibid., p. 205.


74. Huxley, Point, p. 391.

75. ibid., p. 360.

76. ibid., p. 188.

77. ibid., p. 345.

78. ibid., pp. 32 - 33.

79. ibid., p. 18.


81. Huxley, Point., p. 591.

82. ibid., p. 599.

83. ibid., p. 382.


85. ibid., p. 3.

86. ibid., p. 38.

87. ibid., p. 69.

88. ibid., p. 171.

90. ibid., p. 276.
91. Huxley, Point, p. 576.