

secularism

refinement of liberal secularism, and not some spurious "deseccularization" of Western democracy which sanctions "believers' exemptions from certain civil laws" and the "proposed admission of Muslim schools into the state-subsidized voluntary-aided sector in Britain".

The subtext running beneath Keane's analysis of the supposed evils of secularism is, of course, very much bound up with issues of power and *amour propre* in the modern world as mediated by culture and religion. It is perhaps inevitable that intolerance is a function of perceived weakness or insecurity, as tolerance is of an essential strength and self-confidence. Keane refers to the tolerance of the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire towards religious minorities, without recognizing that for many centuries the Turks rivalled Europe as a great power both militarily and culturally; indeed, until the end of the seventeenth century, Europe was almost constantly in fear of being overrun by her powerful neighbour. The Turks had no such reciprocal fear; Christian or "secular" intolerance towards Islam, and Turkish tolerance or indifference towards Christianity, become more comprehensible in the light of this historical background. Of course, in the modern world the situation is very different; militant Islamic fundamentalism has an irrefutable relation to the perceived threat of Western military, political, economic and cultural hegemony over the Islamic world, and is rendered keener by the latter's awareness that such hegemony was largely gained, as John Keane rightly points out, by means of the cultural repression and economic exploitation of non-European (and therefore non-Christian) peoples over many centuries. Given the present geopolitical balance of power, the Islamic world's intolerance towards the concept of liberal-democratic secularism, if not to be excused on these grounds, is perhaps only to be expected.

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which explains how decisions can be actions themselves. Then (b) it tries to explain the role of free decisions in free agency in a way that defuses regress threats. And (c) at the same time it seeks to provide a new theory of the relation between the rationality of deciding to do A and the rationality of doing A – an account that preserves intuitive connections between the two, while remaining consistent with the idea that decisions are actions.

Timothy O'Connor only reports – fairly sketchily – some of what I say in relation to (b). He ignores my discussion of (a) and (c) entirely. He reportedly found the book's repetition of its central themes tedious. Given his review's blank omission of most of the book's central themes, and the consequent misrepresentation of the book as a rather thin contribution to the metaphysics of free will, there clearly wasn't repetition enough.

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More joys of Pi

Sir, – "The English cryptographer John Wallis discovered a remarkable equation", Alexander Masters writes in his review of *The Joy of Pi* by David Blatner (December 12):

$$\frac{\pi}{2} = \frac{2 \times 2 \times 4 \times 4 \times 6 \times 6 \times 8 \times 8 \times 10 \times 10 \times \dots}{3 \times 3 \times 5 \times 5 \times 7 \times 7 \times 9 \times 9 \times 11 \times 11 \times \dots}$$

Remarkable indeed, since a moment's thought reveals it cannot possibly be correct. $\pi/2$ is greater than one. However, $2/3$ is less than one, as are $4/5$, $6/7$, etc, and since the product of positive numbers less than one is also less than one, the equation has to be wrong. A few moments with the sort of spreadsheet program provided on most desktop computers shows, for fairly obvious reasons, that the series doesn't even converge – as more terms are added so the solution rapidly gets smaller, the right-hand side asymptotically becoming zero. The correct formula, which I hesitate to let anywhere near your typesetters and proof-readers, is:

$$\frac{\pi}{4} = \frac{2 \times 4 \times 6 \times 8 \times 10 \times 12 \dots}{3 \times 5 \times 7 \times 9 \times 11 \times 13 \dots}$$

Here alternate values are greater and less than one ($2/3$ and $4/3$; $4/5$ and $6/5$, etc) and the series converges to a solution which should now be less than one. Convergence is, however, very slow, requiring thirty-five terms to be stable to one decimal place, nearly 1,000 to be stable to two, about 4,000 to be stable to three, and over 400,000 to be stable to four. Not a practical method, however beautiful. Working scientists are used to scientific howlers being commonplace in any quality newspaper or non-scientific weekly, despite problems such as this one being amenable to elementary mathematics requiring no more than addition, multiplication and division. Perhaps it is not surprising that the Sokal hoax was so readily perpetrated.

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Elegy for William Peter

Sir, – Brian Vickers reports (Letters, January 2) that Donald Foster, in his *Elegy by W. S.*, does not "bother to discuss" John Ford's *Fames Memoriall*. However, Foster does mention this poem, and suggests that one of the commendatory verses attached to the volume in which it appears may be by Thomas Petre, who was William Peter's second cousin. This would seem to be useful evidence for Professor Vickers, who wishes to forward the claims of Ford as the author of the *Elegy for Peter*.

One of the chief problems in identifying Ford as the author of the *elegy for William Peter* is that Ford's initials are not W. S., the initials of the author given quite clearly on the title-page. If Foster's account of the printing is correct, the *elegy* was privately printed by George Eld, and apparently paid for by the author. In this case, Thomas Thorpe acted more as broker or literary agent than as publisher. One would think that Thorpe would insist that Eld print the correct initials on the title-page, especially if the author were footing the bill. There is, as far as I know, no evidence that the title-page was cancelled or that the initials were corrected by pen.

Katherine Duncan-Jones identifies William Sclater as the putative author in her essay (*Shakespeare Studies*, XXV). She claims to have got this idea while looking through the "Bodleian Library's pre-1920 catalogue on CD-ROM". She does not seem to realize that Foster himself lists Sclater's works in an appendix of authors whose credentials seem too weak for extended consideration. Apparently, on this point, Foster and Vickers agree. To conclude, I would like to praise Harry Hill's dramatic reading of this *elegy*, a recording that changed my impression of the poem's quality. Unfortunately, this impression may tell us more about the actor than the poem.

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