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## ON THE DIVERSITY OF MORALS and REASON AND UNREASON IN SOCIETY

**Morris Ginsberg**

*Heinemann, 2 vols. 21s. and 25s'*

THE centre piece of Heinemann's new Library of Sociology is the two-volume collection of the work of Professor Morris Ginsberg. These books have certain obvious demerits which may be dealt with at once. They consist of essays written at various times since 1932 and now compiled in a more or less arbitrary manner. The dust cover speaks of Professor Ginsberg's "unique and continuing contribution to social philosophy"; but a collection of this type gives us no opportunity to judge the achievement involved just because there is no need or demand for a continuous and sustained argument. The reiteration of the same general moral propositions is in a range of relatively dissimilar contexts does not prove points as large as those Professor Ginsberg wants to make; an approach is suggested, criteria are outlined, ideals elaborated, and each time we are left breathless, suspended, floundering.

However brilliant, however penetrating and suggestive each essay may be individually, the over-all impression is unsatisfactory; the moving appeal for a rational social ethic finds no complement in the investigation of the grounds of knowledge, the sources of obligation and the character of social life itself. It is difficult to decide finally whether these books are provocative or merely provoking.

John Locke used to explain his habitual bad temper before criticism on the ground that all the critics could do was ask questions when what was needed was answers. Professor Ginsberg belongs, at least in his intellectual affinities, to the period in the history of sociology when the asking of pertinent questions was in itself a sufficient achievement—a period of cultural optimism in which liberal values had moved triumphantly towards universal acceptance. It follows that Professor Ginsberg's work, revolutionary as it once was, is, in terms of the general character of contemporary sociology, seriously out of date. Characteristic of this shift is the failure to grapple with the complexities of the social action which creates and moulds relationships, or with the problem of sub-divisions within societies; we are struck too by the relative crudity of his theory of the formation and diffusion of values, the half-hearted exploration of the idea of function or of the intricate mediations between basic needs and moral ideals. And it is difficult to imagine a satisfactory social philosophy today which could be content with but one mention of Marx, and that only in a general list of 'historicist' thinkers. Other issues apart, the notion of alienation (Entfremdung) worked out by Marx is, implicitly, one

fundamental to almost all contemporary sociology.

To take the institutions of society at their face value and consequently to think of human development in terms of a movement of principles, as Professor Ginsberg tends to do, is thus to lose sight of the human content of social processes. Hence in the essay on Social Institutions society is characterized as a product of interactions of two basic "impulses"—self-assertion and sociability. It is no accident that Professor Ginsberg has such marked admiration for L. T. Hobhouse and for Freud; behind the familiar psychology we can almost feel the caress of the familiar invisible hand.

Professor Ginsberg's liberalism is in fact the value of these books and in a sense it makes the previous criticism unfair. The major advances of the last generation have not been in the discovery of new definitions of moral values but in the technique of relating inherited definitions to reality. By now however, these advances are themselves coming to point the necessity of an entire reformulation and re-arrangement of our moral postulates. Incomplete as our present knowledge is we can already see why the very approach of Professor Ginsberg to the problem of a social ethic prevents his doing more than raise the relevant theoretical questions. Just as Marx fails to elaborate the moral philosophy implicit in his sociology, so Professor Ginsberg fails to involve his ethical norms in the processes and relationships of life. Graham Wallas' "pungent sense of effective reality" is not to be found here.

Yet these two volumes should not be dismissed simply as the store of deep, unprofitable wisdom they might at first appear to be. At a moment when the philosopher is typically defined as a thinker with nothing to say to or about society, it is both valuable and stimulating to discover an attempt of this seriousness and stature to establish a social morality susceptible to "justification" by empirical reasoning.

To Socialists the demonstration of its failure is as important as the attempt itself. All the vague aspirations and stereotypes, the liberal values that have served the Labour Movement in lieu of theory, are here mustered to meet the assault of ethical relativism and arrayed behind a compelling appeal for humanity in human relations. That they cannot contribute to or illumine the process of change which they demand is surely the implicit moral of Professor Ginsberg's work, and a moral of some relevance to any task of 're-thinking' which Labour theorists and politicians might undertake.

For there is little in the discomfiture of liberal values as such to provide

reassurance for Socialists. The long term moral aspirations of Marx, of Professor Ginsberg, of Hobhouse, and one might add, of Adam Smith, all fall within approximately the same range; a social science making possible the rational control of the environment is a moral demand central to them all; all too share the emphasis on individual responsibility and development, the "leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom", which is designated by Professor Ginsberg in the idea of "self-direction". Over the whole range of moral concepts grounds for the 'unity of mankind' which is so stressed in these essays may be easily deduced. Similarity in defining aspirations however, tells us little

enough. It is the social reference of moral ideals which gives them political significance.

The deficiency of such human *points d'appui* in the sociological approach of contemporary liberalism constantly frustrates the realisation of liberal values. Liberal society indeed has itself proved the graveyard of liberal values. Despite himself, Professor Ginsberg underlines their peripheral role by the very urgency of his efforts to make them apply. Like the sad procession of Kings in Macbeth they pass before us as vague emanences existing only on the surface of the main action, each one less real, more accusing, than the last.

PHILIP ABRAMS.

#### AUTOMATION AND SOCIAL PROGRESS—S. Lilley

Lawrence and Wishart 21s

A REVOLUTION in technique such as is implied by automation—the mechanization of control in production—must have a revolutionary impact on society. The old divisions of labour, the class divisions derived from them, the relations between these classes, lose their relevance in the new technological environment. A new social pattern is required to handle the new techniques.

Although the literature on automation is already voluminous, socialists will find little in it to enlighten them on these fundamental issues. Descriptions of technical problems in plenty; discussions of one or another aspect of its introduction, yes. But more than that is not, in general, to be found.

S. Lilley's book is a partial exception. This is the first substantial work written for socialists to be published in this country.

Besides giving a first-rate introduction to the techniques involved (and he is almost unique in including Russian research and practice) Lilley's canvas is sufficiently broad to depict automation as a social and political problem. Monopolies, unemployment, working conditions, government financial policy, armaments, trade-union structure and much else fall within his purview. On reading the book, socialists will have no difficulty in recognizing the world they live in; they will be able to identify the conflicts and forces affecting their activities and yet so conspicuously absent from most current writing on the subject.

However, description is not all. A socialist analysis will be examined critically for an explanation of the basic problems of our time; has automation increased the instability of capitalism? will it do so in the future? what of automation and the post-war boom?

Lilley's answers are unsatisfactory, "The boom-and-slump cycle", he writes,

"the periodic saturation of markets, is inherent in the economic system. But automation, because of the more rapid productivity increase it implies, speeds up the process and worsens the consequences." (p. 128). He is not content with mere deduction; like many economists who derive their analysis from wish fulfilment or Moscow he transforms potentiality into currency too readily. The slump is upon us, says Lilley: "On a world scale the exceptional circumstances of the years 1939-55 were coming to an end, and the familiar phenomenon of a capitalist economy discovering that it does not distribute enough purchasing power to buy the goods it produces was reappearing." (p. 124). The trend he professes to see clearly has suffered amendment after amendment so often since the war that we might be excused the desire for a more sophisticated analysis.

Lilley might have shown that capitalism's commitment to a permanent one of war economy, however frightening in terms of the future, has brought it the stability of an under-producing economy, that this scarcity economy forced the pace of technological progress both during and after the war and thus eased, indeed depended upon, the introduction of automation. He might have shown that rapid technological advance feeding on the war economy might necessitate, eventually, such an enormous arms budget as a stabilizer that it would become politically impossible to sustain. Alternatively, he might have pointed out—and who could have done so better than Lilley who has his ear close to the ground of Russian technological and economic achievement?—that growing Russian competition in world markets might well demand, eventually, a greater rate of investment and increase in productivity in western capitalist countries than is consistent with their bloated arms budgets, and that competitive disarmament between the U.S. and Russia (on

the British-German model)—and consequent overproduction—might well ensue.

Lilley might have his slump, but not just yet. To predict it constantly, to claim it as an inevitable accompaniment of automation is not only wrong thinking but dangerous in that it could colour the orientation of the Labour Movement and its immediate policy. After all, if the slump is around the corner waiting to accompany the next batch of transfer machines, war a *l'outrance* should be waged against them; if not—hard bargaining on the American pattern would be the more rewarding tactic.

Luckily, Lilley's views on the nature of contemporary capitalism are not sufficiently woven into the pattern of his work as to prevent him outlining an effective policy on automation for the Labour Movement. It is to his credit that he suffers from no inhibitions in presenting—without amendment—a policy formulated on the shop floor by the workers, especially in the motor-car industry, who have experienced automation in the flesh.

These demands turn on questions of safety, prior consultation on all new installation and industrial practice, reduction in the work-week, rejection of redundancy unless, if it cannot be resisted, accompanied by substantial compensation, retraining schemes operated at the employers' expense and so on. He points out—and this is important—that the introduction of automation is so sporadic and unplanned as to require the greatest bargaining initiative on the part of the workers *at all levels* (including shop level), and that the indirect effects might be so great as to call for industry-wide national agreements between (industrial) unions and employers.

These are matters of the greatest importance and trace the probable outlines of the class struggle in industry over the next few years. Unfortunately, Lilley does not go far enough. There is no merging of the industrial program with an explicitly-formulated political one. What about workers' control of speeds, of shift-working and overtime, of hours and factory conditions, new job classifications—in short, of all aspects of automation as preliminary skirmishes in the battle of workers' control of production?

These remain untouched. But probably this is too much to ask from a writer who, although versed in the subject under review, finds the millennium already installed in Russia and who therefore is hardly interested in the details of the transition to socialism. For him the struggles are already over or, at least, will be taken care of; for socialists they have hardly begun. Automation might very well precipitate them.

MICHAEL KIDRON.

## La Tragedie Hongroise

Editions du Seuil 1,200 frs. and 600 frs.

/CENTRAL and Eastern Europe continues to be one of the pivotal points on which the peace of the world depends. The fate of this region, which seemed to be definitely settled by its incorporation in the Soviet orbit after 1948, is once more an open question. But the question has been re-opened not by any fiat or arrangement of the Great Powers, but in a very real sense by the efforts and struggles of the peoples themselves. For this reason Eastern Europe is not only a contour in the strategic maps of the power blocs, not simply a cordon sanitaire or a bridgehead, but it is also a field of new social forces who may be able to bring an original contribution in thought and practice to the structure of human society.

The fact, that this development has taken most people by surprise, is significant of the times. When we try to reconstruct the history of the last 12 years, we find our vision clouded by a veil of cold war propaganda behind which the real developments appear as the enactments of abstract categories, like the masked figures of a morality play. It is therefore a tribute to M. Francois Fejto that he was able in the year 1952, when the cold-war was at its height, to write so objective and penetrating an account of the history of these years as is his "Histoire des Democraties Populaires". The events of the last five years have not made any of M. Fejto's analyses superfluous, and his book is as essential now for the understanding of the period as it was then.

It was written at the very moment when the Soviet take-over of Eastern Europe had just been completed, when the hold of the Soviet Union was at its strongest, and when the forces of opposition were at their lowest ebb. The pre-war ruling classes had been routed, and an organized popular opposition was not yet in sight. The next year, however, saw the death of Stalin, the fall of Beria, the Berlin riots and the inauguration of the "Malenkov experiment", the first chinks in the monolithic wall which opened the way for a new development.

It was tempting in those days to see the history of Eastern Europe as the fulfilment of a preconceived plan—a plan either of diabolical practitioners of Realpolitik or of the vanguard of the working class, depending on one's point of view. M. Fejto, however, pushes aside the propaganda models to uncover the sequence of events in all its contingency.

- The rise to power of the Communist parties in Eastern Europe has been presented either as the imposition of a regime by armed conquest, or as a revolution of the masses. But it was in reality neither, purely or simply. The "Red Army's role was of crucial import-

ance in Poland and Rumania, was less important, but still perhaps ultimately decisive in Hungary, while in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia it played no role at all. In Bulgaria its part was important, but it was seconded by a very powerful local communist movement. And yet the Communist parties had been a negligible force before the war in all these countries with the exception of Czechoslovakia. The spectacular rise of party membership after the war cannot be explained purely in terms of external pressure. For instance in 1947, i.e., before the "coup of Prague", C.P. membership in Czechoslovakia was at over a million, and in the same year it stood in Hungary at some 700,000, this before the Communists had taken the reins of power entirely into their own hands.

The unmistakable growth in the influence of Communism after the war arises from a number of causes. As one of the major forces in the Resistance in many countries, it emerged from the war greatly strengthened by its victorious struggle. After the years of Nazi domination, the Russophilism of the Communist Party struck in addition a nationalist chord in a number of Slav countries—Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, a feeling which was the stronger for the prevalent hostility to the West, particularly in Czechoslovakia, which had not forgotten Munich. But the Communists scored successes even in the countries traditionally hostile to Russia—Poland, Hungary, Rumania—because they represented for many, a radical break with the pre-war ruling classes while the Western Powers continued in some cases to flirt with the idea of a "Restoration". Each side, enacted the role that has since become its classical role vis-a-vis underdeveloped countries with retrograde ruling classes. The Western Powers tended to unhold the status-quo, while the Soviet Union sained the support of those forces which were pressing for social revolution and for a rapid economic development and industrialization, a process which had been held up by the semi-feudal military oligarchies of pre-war days.

The progressive shift of the political balance however, benefited not only the Communist Party, but also—and often to a greater degree—the other parties of the left, the Social Democrats and the Agrarians. The rise of the latter parties is not surprising in largely agricultural countries like Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, and to a lesser degree Hungary. It is of course significant that it was in the countries with strong Agrarian Parties, that the Red Army played the greatest role in bringing the Communist governments to power, but there was another factor of major importance; in the struggle of the years 1945-47. This

was that the Communists everywhere took the initiative and kept it. It was they who took the first step towards the land reforms, so ardently desired by the mass of the peasantry, it was they who put forward the first economic plans. Everywhere they kept their opponents guessing as to their intentions, stole their programmes, denounced their leaders as enemy agents. Intimidated by the presence of the Red Army even where it was not called upon to act, having no constructive alternative programme, lacking the organization and the energy of the Communists, the other parties allowed themselves to be first divided, then dismembered, then swallowed up, so that shadow remnants of them remained in the fictional "National Front" Governments that were the obligatory form for the new-style "People's Democracy".

This initiative was held by the Communist parties right through the cold-war and they used it to mount by terror, myth and frenetic enthusiasm, their gigantic offensive to transform their countries overnight into advanced industrial nations. But the colossal cost of this operation and the enforced subjugation to a hierarchy whose centre lay in Moscow, brought them to the limits of their power. The plans started to go awry and terror began to produce not redoubled effort, but simply paralysis. The beginning of the "Malenkov experiment" is decisive in the history of Eastern Europe because it marks the point where the Communist parties lost the initiative for the first time since 1945. The groundwork was laid for a popular opposition built not on a formal organization, impossible in a police state, but on the tacit understanding on certain unanimous demands, and on the realization that the regime could not extricate itself from its difficulties without the help of the masses. The futile individual protests expressed in, e.g., frequent changing of jobs, were no longer the only possible forms of opposition. From this point the initiative shifts more and more away from the party and state apparatus and is taken up first, by the intellectuals and students and then by the workers. The XXth Congress precipitates the movement and the apparatus becomes more and more isolated.

This awakening of protest and opposition is admirably described by M. Fejto in his *La Tragedie Hongroise*. The intellectuals first confused, drawn by the humanitarian appeal of Communism, but forbidden by the regime to fulfill their vocation as they saw it, were alone in face of the party apparatus, and alienated. The sense of a corporate vocation to speak the truth arose through the courageous stand of some individuals who refused to be reduced to silence. Once the Petofi circle was formed, however, it won the support of the mass of the workers, and it was no longer possible to return to the unquestioned domination of the Communist Party bureaucracy which was isolated in face of a hostile population.

The outcome of the tragedy is known, but the new social forces which have grown out of the opposition to Stalinist rule have not been broken by the suppression. The battle has reached a stalemate. The peoples of Eastern Europe will not be free to evolve their own social structure until an end is put to the division of Europe into "camps"—a

development which M. Fejto saw in 1952 as possible only with a reunited and neutral Germany, and with an evacuation of Soviet and American troops from the other countries of Europe. The importance and urgency of this programme has hardly decreased in the last five years.

CHARLES TAYLOR.

*FABIAN INTERNATIONAL ESSAYS* Ed. T. McKitterick and K. Younger

*Hogarth Press 18s.*

IF the reader thinks that a tired little preface of thirteen lines deserves the dignity of being splashed across the jacket as "A foreword by Hugn Gait-skell", then he may be in a sufficiently gullible state of mind to accept me claim that these essays "provide much new thinking and will stimulate even more". Even the most cynical reader must want to weep on finding that Mr. Gartsken regards these essays as "an excellent stimulant to thought and discussion on these matters within the Labour Movement", when the object of most of the authors is to avoid thought on such an awkward matter as a socialist foreign policy and to anaesthetize discussion of the international role of the British Labour Movement.

Kichard Lowenthal contributes the first essay under the title: "Co-existence with Soviet Communism." In fact his analysis consists of the weary old clichés of cold-war journalism strung together with so little conviction that one wonders whether Mr. Lowenthal himself really believes them any more. The responsibility for international tension since the Second World War is attributed solely to the Soviet Union. But is it really possible that no part of the responsibility belongs to the United States? Has Russia never been given any grounds for tearing that she was likely to be attacked by the western powers? But Mr. Lowenthal is not concerned to ask such questions because it is not his purpose to seek means of ending the division of the world into armed alliances engaged in an insane armaments race. Thus the calculated confusion of his title: his object is not "co-existence with Soviet communism" at all: his purpose is twofold: firstly, opposition to communism, and secondly, co-existence with Russia. Mr. Lowenthal considers that co-existence with communism is impossible, but that co-existence with Russia is unavoidable, because the alternative is annihilation; although neither he nor any other contributor to this volume has much to say about how that is to be achieved in practice. What Mr. Lowenthal is anxious to prove is that not merely considerations of defence against Russian aggression require the preservation of the alliance between Britain and the United States, but that in being opposed to Soviet communism the Labour Party must be committed to a close association with American capitalism. Thus he has to show that the often brutal and frequently stupid actions

of Russia sprang directly from the communist ideology and are not in any way the consequences of the equally brutal and stupid actions of the American and western governments. Mr. Lowenthal does not want to face the question of how far the degenerations of Soviet communism has been due to the problems of Russia as a world power and the pressures of intense external hostility. Nor does he want to face the allied question of how far the weaknesses of British socialism have been due to the Labour leaders' fears of Russian attack. Fortunately this last question is faced by Thomas Balogh in an essay on "The Political Economy of the Cold War", which is the best in the book and stands alone in its powers of analysis and freshness of thought.

Mr. Balogh demonstrates that in falling into dependence on the American alliance the Labour government brought to a halt the construction of socialism in Britain, and could do no more than build up defences against the increase in social inequalities with which the policies of the United States have continuously threatened the western world. Mr. Balogh thus poses the question whether socialism can be achieved in Britain within the framework of the American alliance. Mr. Lowenthal is concerned to confuse this problem. He argues that "the advanced capitalist countries are evolving . . . along the road of democratic socialist transformation". Thus Britain and the United States are marching hand in hand towards socialism. According to this extraordinary argument the Atlantic Alliance is not just a military expedient for resisting Russian aggression but the framework within which democratic socialism can develop in security against communist attack. Mr. Lowenthal should hardly need telling that, whatever may happen in the future, the United States is not at present engaged in building socialism but in constructing an immensely powerful capitalist state, and in making the world safe for American business. Mr. Lowenthal clearly needs reminding that it is not the object of the Labour Party to assist in this task but to oppose it, and to seek by democratic means the overthrow of capitalism. Ideologically there can no more be co-existence between British socialism and American capitalism than there can be between British Socialism and Soviet communism.

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## To Labour Party members

If you want a Socialist policy for the Party you ought to join Victory for Socialism

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Recent activities of VFS include publication of the pamphlets *Tho' Cowards Flinch* and *In Pursuit of Peace*, joint sponsorship with the Movement for Colonial Freedom of the Suez Emergency Committee, and a weekend school on public ownership with Ralph Milliband, Bob Edwards, M.P., and Clive Jenkins. VFS is currently preparing a restatement of the Socialist case in terms of 1957 Britain.

It has been active in popularising Harold Davies' *H Bomb* pamphlet. Minimum annual subscriptions of six shillings should be sent to VFS Secretary, Walter Wolfgang, 45 Lichfield Court, Richmond, Surrey

Mr. Lowenthal supports his idea of the Atlantic Community, as a democratic socialist commonwealth by denying that capitalism and imperialism any longer represent threats to the peace of the world and the welfare of the masses, and by playing down the conflicts with the western alliance. But in his essay on the Middle-East T. E. M. McKitterick shows that the instability of this area arises from the rivalry of imperialist powers and the competition of business interests. Since Mr. Lowenthal wrote his essay it has been amply demonstrated by events that the declining colonial powers are aggressive and that the western alliance is continuously threatened with disintegration by the rivalry between the capitalist states of which it is composed. The unreality of Mr. Lowenthal's world comes out in his proposal that the Atlantic Community of the United States, Canada, Britain and the states of western Europe should form a confederacy by creating "permanent common political and economic organs of government delegates, tied to the unanimity rule but under strong pressure of public opinion to achieve agreement, and empowered to bind their governments once they do agree". What public opinion? Public opinion in these countries would almost certainly be hostile, and at best indifferent, to such an organisation.

Mr. Lowenthal agrees that co-existence with Soviet communism is in fact a competitive co-existence. Mr. Balogh shows that this has ceased to be a question of nuclear weapons and conventional arma-

ments but has become a matter of economics. American capitalism is competitive with Soviet communism, but Britain tied to American capitalism is not. For so long as this prevents the construction of a socialist society in Britain this country is doomed to the continuation of the present economic stagnation, and a steadily weakening position as regards both Russia and the United States. Only by a policy of socialist ownership and planning of industry can Britain resume a progressive role and achieve a position genuinely competitive with Soviet communism and American capitalism. Opposition to Soviet communism does not require a close association with American capitalism but the reverse. It requires that Britain should be economically strong enough to meet the growing economic competition of Russia. It demands that the Labour Party should demonstrate that democratic socialism represents a distinct alternative to exploitation by either American capitalism or Soviet communism. It is no more possible for the Labour Party to exploit American capitalism in order to finance the socialist transformation of Britain and the backward areas of the world, than it is for the Conservative Party to persuade the United States to defend the British Empire.

Independence is not a question of Britain possessing hydrogen bombs, as John Strachey argues in his essay on "British Defence Policy." This is a myth designed to conceal from the people the decline of Britain's power and her dependence on the United States. India

remains genuinely independent without bombs or military alliances: an independence guaranteed by the nuclear stalemate. This stalemate is unaffected by Britain's possession or non-possession of hydrogen bombs. Behind this situation lies the fact that the west is steadily losing the competition with communism. An independent socialist Britain in alliance with the uncommitted nations of Asia and Africa would be a powerful force for peace and better placed to meet the challenge of Soviet communism than a second-rate power with two hydrogen bombs tied to alliance with American capitalism.

Kenneth Younger's essay on the Far-East is one of the better efforts in the book. He retains something of that vigour of radical idealism and a belief that socialism has something to do with the welfare and progress of mankind, notably lacking in most of the other contributions. It is to be hoped that the next Labour government will understand the situation in this area as well as he does. In dealing with the Middle-East Mr. McKitterick makes some mildly effective criticisms of the policies of Labour and Conservative governments and of the Baghdad Pact; he fails, however, to analyse the problems of the area very deeply. P. C. Gordon Walker's essay called "Policy for the Commonwealth" is devoid of ideas and even the author seems apologetic for its inclusion in this volume. Denis Healey's confused and confusing contribution entitled "Beyond Power Politics" is out of this world.

BRIAN MANNING.

### ROOM AT THE TOP—John Braine

*Eyre and Spottiswoode, 18s.*

He has not insulated himself from the world of action by making himself the hero of a Picaresque novel, to whom all events are equally food for the eternal jest; nor has he sealed himself away as proprietor of an unlikely sweet-shop. This is not to sneer at either *Lucky Jim* or *Look Back in Anger*. Both, I believe, are more successful than *Room At The Top*. I am arguing merely that John Braine's novel is, in intention, a more ambitious work.

This young hero has more in common with the ethos and personality deducible from George Scott's *Autobiography*. True, Joe Lampton is not ex-University, red-brick or true-blue. His University is the war, where, it is implied, he has mastered the arts of sexual manipulation and of closing his eyes to the necessity for moral responsibility. But his predicament of opportunity derives, nevertheless, from his consciousness that he is no longer tied to the working class. Wartime experience has freed him from the narrow horizons of Dufton, the Northern industrial town, sordid and dirty, where the only success is to become a "zombie"—Joe's typification of the councillors and chief officials and successful business-men of "Dead

## Dissent

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A NOVEL, so bombarded by publicity, serialized in a popular daily paper, seriously put up for comparison with *he Rouge et Le Noir*, runs the risk either of frenzied overpraise or contemptuous dismissal. But to account for its best-seller success does demand a critical effort; and this effort, though its direction may be sociological rather than literary, in the end involves critical discriminations wholly literary. The impact of this first novel is in some ways analogous to that of *Lucky Jim*; it is felt to be an exploration of the dilemmas of our age in contemporary terms. Hence its "power"; hence its visible blossoming in tube and foyer.

And of course it does "fit". *Room At The Top* explores in the same direction as *Lucky Jim*, *Look Back in Anger*, and, on the factual level, George Scott's *Autobiography*, *Time and Place*. Its ambitiousness and novelty lie in trying to dramatise explicitly the implied social predicament which underlies, to varying extents, those typical figures of Fifties literature, the "Angry Young Men", who do have some existence outside the imaginations of the Press.

But the young hero of *Room At The Top* is not *Lucky Jim* or *Jimmy Porter*.

Dufton". Moreover, Joe's parents were both killed in an air-raid. He is thus doubly a child of war; he is of the harvest, sown in the whirl-wind of the forties, and reaped in the fifties.

This novel is a study of desperate and successful careerism. It claims also to be a critique of that careerism. The means by which Joe Lampton scrambles to the top are condemned—explicitly on the second page. Joe has arrived at Warley. Warley is everything that Dufton isn't—wholesome, comfortable, essentially middle-class, grading itself from the station to the wealthy quarter, known symbolically as T'Top. This is Joe negatively defined, on his first arrival:

. . . my face is, not innocent exactly, but *unused*. I mean unused by sex, by money, by making friends and influencing people, hardly touched by any of the muck one's forced to wade through to get what one wants.

The novel is to be an exploration of that "muck".

To be great, a novel, analytic in the way *Room At The Top* sets out to be, would have to wade and yet never be sucked in. John Braine stands, one feels, shoulder-deep. His head is clear and he can survey the levels. But his *feeling* parts are in love with the mud. He can never wholly disengage himself. He can never wholly dramatise his vision.

As in so much contemporary literature, there is a double moral focus. The really felt part of the novel concerns itself often with the sensations of envy

and the enjoyments of possession and position. Joe Lampton, the virile conqueror who claims his niche among the inheritors of conquest, is set in motion with an enjoyed gusto. But the commentary, the super-ego of the novel, knows that the enjoyment is wrong and morally dangerous. Enactment and intention are often at odds; hence embarrassments of style and embarrassments of presentation. There is no unifying scheme of judgment and without such a scheme compassion is a mere device.

The moral conflict within Joe is dramatised, not entirely convincingly, through his relationship with two women. Alice is ten years older than Joe—she can have no meaning in career terms—but she represents the real thing. Significantly, their love reaches completion only in an isolated and snatched three days in a sea-side cottage. For once we see Joe as something like a complete human being in whom the spiritual and physical fulfil rather than exploit each other. Susan is a familiar figure in fifties literature: the rich man's daughter with the Mediterranean sun-tan whose seduction levers Joe to the top. Here commentary and feeling interchange their rôles. Sue, in a tragic scheme, ought to be sufficiently embodied to polarise the significance of Alice. Represented, she is wholly silly and ineffectual. Hence, Joe's capitulation has nothing of the tragic. It is more merely selfish than the author cares to admit. Alice is driven to suicide; and Joe's abdication and the

society that demands it, is branded, truly, as murderous.

After Alice's death, Joe records: "I was the better looking corpse; they wouldn't need to bury me for a long time yet." Yet if a corpse knows it's a corpse, then it isn't one. If Joe Lampton's consciousness so survived the mire it waded through that it could retrospectively condemn itself, then Joe's future was an impossibility. The indication is, that the author wanted Joe's future *and* Joe's consciousness, at the same time. The first person narrative is not innocent; it amounts to moral temerity and aesthetic failure.

Joe is of the working-class, and his declassed predicament is well shown; after Alice's death, revolted by the middle-class world which has murdered her, he drinks himself back into a working-class district of Warley. For a while he finds shelter from his new, middle-class self there. A mill girl allows him to take her. But he can return only as an alien and a conqueror. The girl's lover tries to beat him up. Here too Joe is doomed to conquest. His only road is to the top.

Riding back to his executive position in a taxi, his middle-class friends comfort him: " 'Nobody blames you' . . . 'Oh my God,' I said, 'that's the trouble'." When Mr. Braine accepts the responsibility of blaming he will begin to add creatively to our literature.

GABRIEL PEARSON.

#### IRVING HOWE: Politics and the Novel

Horizon Press \$3

hard and perhaps insoluble pellets of modern ideology". The novelist, he says, "must drive the politics of or behind his novel into a complex relation with the kinds of experience that resists reduction to formula".

The first—the fullest and most rewarding—section consists of detailed studies of Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Conrad, Turgenyev and James. The second is a long chapter on the Nineteenth Century American novel—"The Politics of Isolation"—including Hawthorne, Henry Adams, and an excellent piece on James's *Bostonians*. The third section deals with some modern novels in which ideology has invaded and captured the literary imagination—the work of Malraux, Silone, Koestler and Orwell. Howe begins with a sharp characterisation of the novelist and his milieu, and he refines this by means of insights into particular novels. He considers the novels as dramatic wholes, isolating, for particular treatment, their 'political' aspects. His primary concern is with theme, and with the moral and political status of character in relation to theme. His attention to the text is not so close as, say, Leavis's in *The Great Tradition*, but he uses the short quotation frequently to **clinch his points**.

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On Stendhal, Howe is extraordinarily suggestive. Stendhal stands quite clearly in the backwash of the French revolutionary movement: his cult of energy, his "politics of survival" are fashioned in this context. Howe shows how oversimplified it is to consider Stendhal's attitudes "machievellian". For Stendhal, "life becomes an experiment in strategy, an adventure in plan, ruse and combat; the hero is *riot merely ambitious but sensitive to the point of paranoia, discovering and imagining a constant assault upon his dignity*". (My italics.) This insight explains Sorel—the ambitious hero of *Red and Black*, who is broken on the wheel of his own sensitivity—particularly his final outburst in court. The injured, aggressive, explicitly political note of his defence is in sharp contrast with the partly "suppressed politics" of the novel itself. It is clear that Sorel is bitter well beyond the means of the simple "napoleonic". Howe lays his finger here on the particular complexity, the central ambiguity of Stendhal's heroes. Through Sorel, Stendhal focusses the "memory of the revolution"—but not revolution itself. Sorel is condemned to being both "rebel and bon vivant". His very success as an 'homme du monde' is a form of suppressed revolt. The degree to which, all along, Sorel considers himself "under assault" is suggested only at the end, when his political attitudes surface, and corrode his language.

In the Chapter on Dostoevsky—"The Politics of Salvation"—Howe spends most of his time on *The Possessed*. He points up the conflict between Shatov and Kirilov—"the split halves of an hypothetical self—Shatov's compulsive despair over his distance from God, Kirilov's "lapsing . . . indifference". The passage as a whole (p. 65) is perhaps too cleanly dialectical: but it relates, as Howe shows, to the deep split, which few would deny, in Dostoevsky himself, between "excess of self" and "ideas that destroy the self".

Howe is particularly incisive, for example, on the aspects of classical liberalism which Dostoevsky parodies in the figure Stepan Trofimovitch—his

dependence upon his patron, his un-directed displays of affection, his letter of self-defence carefully concealed, his nihilism. Nevertheless he recognizes that Stepan "is a sentient human being whom one grows to love and long for, so that the actual man seems more important than anything that may be said about him". At almost every point, Howe saves—for himself and for the reader—his sense of the complexity of the created character.

There is more to quarrel about in his treatment of Conrad and James. His analysis of the 'politics' of *Nostramo* is brilliant—by far the most penetrating of its kind. He points to the "carefully tended austerity" in Conrad, "the style of baroque wariness", his "need to maintain a safe distance, through narrator and manner, from his own work". It is true that the narrator in *Under Western Eyes* represents an attempt on Conrad's part "to disassociate himself from his own imagination". Nevertheless, this does not throw the second half completely out of focus, as is suggested. Successful though Conrad is in placing the 'types' of Nineteenth Century anarchism, his theme remains "the moral isolation" of Razumov—as Leavis observes—and his politics are a scaffold for this theme. It is true that Conrad weakens the dramatic integrity of the book, by pitting Razumov against such political pigmies as the emigre peacock Peter Ivanovitch: but the weakness of Ivanovitch makes way for the barbarism of the revolutionary agent, Nikita. In this context, it would be, I think, a mistake to consider Conrad's conclusion—"senseless desperation provoked by senseless tyranny", or "his passionate outcry against the hardening and narrowing of character that is enforced by political life", his sense of "the diseases of dogma, the corruptions of power, the impoverishment of fanaticism"—as wholly without political point.

James is, in a sense, the real test for Howe, and he passes it without faltering. He places the critical detachment which marks James's achievement in *The Bostonians*: the way in which the declin-

ing New England culture is focussed, and recreated through the deranged human and sexual relationships in the novel. He is less successful with *The Princess Casamassima*. Howe says that James tries to make or favour "cultural judgments of politics": in fact, James is dramatising the predicament of the hero whose cultural disposition is in conflict with his political convictions. The novel is not, of course, wholly satisfactory: but Hyacinths suicide suggests that, within the novel at least, James sees the conflict as irreconcilable. The end seems sufficiently motivated.

The section on the Twentieth Century novel is the least satisfactory. Howe is faced here with novelists whose imaginations are almost wholly subservient to the dictates of ideology, who are *themselves* exposed to the historical movements which they dramatise. But the novels are simply not equal in stature to those which receive fuller treatment here. Howe is excellent, however, on Malraux—particularly on the 'play' in his work between the themes of heroism and defeat—and, I think, wrong on Orwell, whose strength is as an essayist rather than as a novelist, and whose *1984* Howe seriously overvalues.

*The Politics of The Novel* is not a 'big' book—as, say, Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* is. But it is an extraordinarily sensitive and suggestive book, within the same critical tradition. To this tradition belongs the major work of Matthiessen himself, of Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling, Philip Rhay, Richard Chase—perhaps, indirectly, R. P. Blackmur. These critics combine, with their social interests, the close attention to the text, and the feel for moral values, which distinguishes the work of Leavis on the novel. But except for him, that tradition is almost exclusively an American affair. Mr. Howe's book is, at the moment, only available direct from the United States: but any publisher on this side with a sense for the significance of his theme and the success of his treatment, would seize it at once.

STUART HALL.

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