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Douglas and the British Tradition

by RUSSELL BROWNING

Douglas is dead, but his work lives on. The language of the community bears the impress of Social Credit, and many of his fundamental ideas, most strenuously contested in the past, are now no longer matters of dispute. As the years roll by, the stature of Douglas increases, and aspects of his greatness, not fully apprehended in the heat of conflict engendered by his unusual proposals, now begin to emerge. To most persons, his name is associated with certain economic and financial theories, but posterity is much more likely to venerate him for his contributions to political philosophy.

The originality of Douglas tends to obscure the fact that he is part and parcel of a great tradition. He is the end of a long line of great prophets; a dome resting upon and unifying what previously were but the unrelated columns of British Political Philosophy. He is British through and through. Rooted and grounded in the European and British tradition, he owes nothing to modern Continental thought. He is equally unaffected by the dialectics of Hegel and Marx or the nebulosity of Rousseau. Though conversant with these theorists, their concepts are excrescent to his thought. To appreciate him fully, he must be viewed in the light of the tradition in which he was reared.

British tradition dates from Anglo-Saxon times, when the continental hordes brought with them their semi-tribal organisation, and government was more by village council than by central authority. The Norman Conquest established kingly power throughout the whole country, but local authorities do not seem to have completely disappeared. As William conquered England with a group of nobles amongst whom he ranked rather as a peer amongst equals, he had to deal leniently with baronial independence which later was classified as treason. Only slowly did kingly power increase, and the Great Charter and the Lesser Charters prevented the emergence of autocracy till Tudor times. Even then, owing to the conditions under which the Tudors came to power, and the general climate of opinion, the Tudors were never able to establish an absolutism similar to that of Louis the Fourteenth of France.

Owing to its insular position, English political thought has always been a couple of steps ahead of European thought, and though the break-up of the Middle Ages had its repercussions on British tradition, English history had no small influence on European thought and history. Nevertheless, British political philosophy can be better interpreted when considered in relation to the rest of Europe than when studied in a vacuum.

BREAK-UP OF EUROPEAN UNITY

When the semblance of European unity expressed in the theory of Papal Supremacy in matters ecclesiastical and in the political supremacy of the Holy Roman Empire was destroyed by the forces which produced the Renaissance and the Reformation, Europe entered an era of international anarchy from which it has not yet escaped. The old basis of authority was destroyed, and new ones had to be established. The problem of political authority had to be faced, and modern political philosophy was born.

In the Middle Ages it had always been accepted that there was a body of law which all peoples must obey, and that the Pope and the Emperor were its exponents. Though often rendered but lip-service, the law of nature, or the law of nations was acknowledged as the final authority, just as laws and economics were accepted as subject to moral law. With the break-up of the Middle Ages, the law of nature and of nations was discarded. Political morality became subservient to convenience, and law the handmaiden of expediency. The Kings and National States which arose out of the wreckage acknowledged no authority but their own. The sword and the cannon—not moral law—became the arbiters of authority, and the conflicting interests of rulers involved most of Europe in the Thirty Years War in which a large part of the population was destroyed, the countryside left uncultivated, and towns reduced to mere villages.

The corrosive criticism which had undermined Papal and political authority in the Middle Ages was of no value when men were confronted with the necessity of replacing a new unity in place of the old. The disintegration increased, and the anarchy increased until people were glad to accept any kind of king or government so long as it guaranteed at least a semblance of security and protection. Even so, the new rulers could never escape from the difficulty that, as the new era had been ushered in by a challenge to authority itself, and not simply Papal authority, their position was no more morally secure than that of the Roman Emperor. Appeals to the Bible rather added confusion to uncertainty than certainty to confusion, and in the end, philosophical justification had to be founded on the unsatisfactory basis of expediency.

SOVEREIGNTY

It is the honour or dishonour of Jean Bodin (1530-1596) that he endeavoured, in his "Republic" to supply this need. In his theory of Sovereignty, he contended that in every State there must be an ultimate, supreme, sovereign authority, whose power can neither be divided nor alienated. That it must be above law because it makes law, and that

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From Week to Week

"*In vodka veritas*" remarks *The Tablet* of M. Krushchev's statements "History is on our side," and "We will bury you" but comments merely that the idea that history is with you is a dangerous one, because it prevents you from seeing what you are really doing.

We think M. Krushchev's ebullience much more dangerous than that. The U.S.S.R. is not, in the usual sense, an aggressive power; it is a *subversive* power, and the technique is to use the Red Army to support revolution wherever it occurs. M. Krushchev is obviously pleased with the way the situation is developing. We can only pray that our Intelligence knows why. We do.

The tedious reading of clap-trap, which we do in the hope of rescuing an occasional pearl from the swine, brings home the perspicacity of the Protocol which remarks that the *goyim* have no understanding of the 'political'—i.e., of the meaning of policy. The edifice of Socialism—the incarnation of the parable of the Tower of Babel—rests on the confusion between administration and policy.

That is not to say that we, the *goyim* have no inherent capacity to make the distinction: it is merely an acknowledgment of the success of the educational policy laid down by the *Protocols*. We see many cultivated pearls of logical reasoning; but they all proceed from the false assumption disseminated by "our political agents."

Arthur Bryant's sweet little teen-age piece in the *Illustrated London News* in praise of his teacher 'Lord' Montgomery's science-fiction thriller (Lecture to the Royal United Service Institution: October 10, 1956) makes us wonder if, at last, Douglas could have been wrong. We loved the idea of International Policemen assisting International Nursemaids across the International traffic; but in 'Lord' Montgomery's fantasy, there doesn't seem to be any International traffic left to cross. Only "Hundreds of committees in peace-time and even more in war receive millions of reports and issue thousands of instructions every day. No communication system will ever carry the load. Anybody who thinks the present system will work after thousands of nuclear weapons have been exchanged is mad." Quite: peace or war or nationalisation—"We welcome it." But who is "we"?

Don't you think you're a little gullible, Bryant, Old Man? (Sshh!)

Man and Work

It was not without a certain amount of conjecture that we read the following short essay by Geoffrey Thomas, emphasised in italics and made prominent in a decorated box, in the Saturday book review page of The Sydney Morning Herald, November 17, 1956:

Unemployment is the natural state of man and it will not, I trust, be regarded as a contemptuous dismissal of economic processes and services to society, if I state that doing nothing is the highest of all possible occupations. It is also the noblest, for it is only from infinite leisure, patience and contemplation that great achievement can come.

I am aware that this notion of things is not commonly accepted, and the consequence is that there is more cant and hypocrisy talked about work and production and duty to the community and so forth than about any other subject on earth.

We base our economy on the ridiculous assumption that there is precisely enough work in the world to provide "jobs" for every man and for most women, for 40 hours a week for 50 years of their lives, when everyone knows perfectly well that if man's inventiveness were honestly engaged—even if only up to one tenth of its present capacity—none of us would need to "serve the community" for more than two years of our lives.

The trouble is, of course, that we don't really want our freedom, for we haven't the faintest idea what to do with it. But that is no reason why we should persist in all this moralising about duties and the dignity of labour.

For most of us a substantial and regular income is imperative because our house is mortgaged, our wife is extravagant, and we are in process of acquiring (on certain terms) an infinite variety of mechanisms that are commonly supposed to represent a high standard of living. To keep sane in this business we seek relief and forgetfulness in gambling, beer drinking and cinema-going. In this process we have now become so dehumanised that few people pause to reflect their pursuits are paltry, their professions torpid and their day-to-day activities no longer connected with life.

Still, it is no one's business but our own. If only we can recognise that, it will be something. Despite all the systems on earth life remains what we make of it, and it is quite useless to suppose that any change for the better in our personal condition can be brought about by change of government or by our joining some odd-fellow society or band of hope.

Not till we truly understand that war is life, and life is war, shall we dare to throw away our guns. Not till men are ready to live solely by their own consciences, and prepared to take the consequences, will they discover that there is still enough adventure to be found in living to satisfy the most resolute and audacious man or woman.

"Whose Service is Perfect Freedom"

by

C. H. Douglas.

Foreword by Tudor Jones.

5/- Post Free.

"History is Bunk"

... M. Guimard found this tendentiousness increasing as revolutionary times approach. The church school history book (written by a priest) teaches its pupils that Louis XVI was a good but weak king, who wanted only his people's well-being and who died as a Christian martyr. The lay history book (written by a State inspector of primary education) declares that Louis XVI betrayed the French people, that he helped the enemies of France, and that that was why Parisians put him into prison, and the members of the convention later condemned him to death.

The two books differ even in their pictorial treatment. Thus the church school book shows a picture of the Chouans, or Royalist insurgents of the Vendée under the First Republic, attending a secret Mass, the very image of piety and excellence; the lay history book depicts the Chouans as desperate and pirate-like figures in the act of cutting to pieces a small boy. The pictures of the fall of the Bastille show, on the one hand, a number of intoxicated brutes walking about with heads on the ends of poles; and, on the other, the stormers of the Bastille seem to be taking part in some sort of jolly carnival—the book explains that the Marquis de Launay, the governor of the prison, who was in fact massacred, "was taken prisoner."

The conclusion that M. Guimard reaches is that this sort of teaching is a "vast attempt at corruption of young people" and a deliberate effort to prepare further generations for mutual enmity.

—From an account in *The Times*, September 26, 1956, of an article in *Art* of the same week.

DOUGLAS AND THE BRITISH TRADITION—

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when disobedience to such law ceases, the State must dissolve in anarchy. As Bodin stated it, the theory has been one of the most disruptive forces in modern society, but when associated with a correct understanding of the problem of rights and duties, it has an important place in political philosophy.

From Bodin's angle, the ultimate solution of international problems is the conquest by one power of all other nations and their subordination to a World State over which they have no control. Correctly conceived it leads to a council of nations working within a frame of national rights and duties accepted voluntarily by them all. Internally it provides for the creation of subsidiary organisations each with control over its own affairs, but without any right to interfere in the affairs of other organisations, and personally to the sovereign right of each person to live his life and to enjoy his rights provided only that he honours the obligations attaching to them and the similar rights of other persons. Incorrectly stated, the theory of sovereignty is simply the assertion of the moral right of any government to impose its will on its own citizens with or without their consent, and to force its will on any other governments, limited only by the extent to which they can resist its aggression. Naturally enough, Bodin's theory ultimately blossomed into the theory of the Divine Right of Kings, which, far from providing that security and prosperity which

it was supposed to supply, ended in still further conflict and confusion.

Political philosophy has always been an expression of two opposed theories: one based on the concept of authority, and the other on the concept of liberty. These two theories in turn have always been associated with two forms of social organisation: centralised organisation using force and fear as its chief instruments of government, and decentralised organisation in which policy is determined by members of the organisation and participation in the organisation is secured by inducement and voluntary co-operation. The theory of sovereignty was interpreted from these two angles.

As Ramsay Muir wrote "It was not easy for man to rest content with these conclusions (of Bodin), or to believe that the law of the jungle was the only law for states and their masters. In this age, when the absolute sovereignty of the state was being asserted, and when it was expressing itself in constant warfare, an opposite view began to gain prevalence—the idea that there ought to be a body of international law binding on all states, and that there ought to be some sort of authority to enforce it." The name of Grotius is always associated with this idea, but it was a common belief long before his time. The League of Nations and the United Nations are attempts to implement these ideas in modern times, but they are unsatisfactory because their supporters fail to understand the real nature of another cardinal theory of political philosophy: the theory of Rights. Most writers who object to the international anarchy produced by the gospel of sovereignty, wish simply to substitute for the "sovereign" national states, a "sovereign" international government, which, like Bodin's state, would be above law—an international authoritarianism.

RIGHTS

The theory of rights has adherents by the millions. The number that understand the theory is few. As with the theory of sovereignty, it is assumed that rights are absolute; that any limitation of a right detracts from its excellence. This is a complete misunderstanding of the question of rights, and is the primary reason for the confusion regarding the inter-related problem of freedom and liberty. There is no such thing as an unqualified right. A right implies a duty, and liberty is the freedom to exercise a right. A person loses his freedom as soon as other persons fail to fulfil the obligations which are the obverse side of a right. If a person claims the right to freedom of speech, for instance, he can exercise that freedom only so long as other persons fulfil their obligation to allow him freely to say what he wishes. But he can claim the right to freedom of speech only so long as he is willing to fulfil his obligation to allow others to express themselves freely in their speech. Rights and obligations are the obverse side of each other, just as liberty and obligations are the reverse sides of each other. To claim a right for oneself and to be unwilling to fulfil the obligations and duties attaching to the similar rights of others is, strictly speaking, not to claim a right at all, but a privilege, the essence of privilege being that there is no compensating legal obligation attaching to a privilege. If a person refuses the obligations attaching to his rights, he should lose his rights. For this reason, communists and fascists are not entitled to such rights as freedom of speech, as it is their declared intention to take

such freedom away from others and to impose a censorship of thought and expression as soon as they are in the position so to do.

Rights and liberty are social concepts. They have no relevance to such a person as Robinson Crusoe so long as he was alone on his lonely island. He could be described as a free man insofar as he was not subjected to any *artificial* restrictions on his conduct, his natural environment alone limiting his conduct and desires. But the moment man Friday arrived on the island, the question of liberty arose. If both were to co-operate voluntarily in any project, and neither was to be subject to the will of the other, both would enjoy legal liberty. But so soon as Friday became subject to the will and direction of Crusoe, Friday lost his rights and liberty, while Crusoe morally lost his rights, as he accepted privileges.

Had the question of rights been properly understood, much confusion in political philosophy would have been averted. But rights have been interpreted from an authoritarian angle, and therefore completely misinterpreted.

CONTRACT THEORY

The Divine Right of Kings (it should have been called the Divine Privilege of Kings) in England received its death blow with the Revolution of 1688. From that date Constitutional Monarchy was the accepted institution, and government by consent the accepted political philosophy. This theory found its theoretical justification in the doctrine of contract, in which it was asserted that all government arose out of a contract in which people agreed to forego their freedom to live life in their own ways in favour of a government which would give them protection and stability. As in the theory of sovereignty, so in the theory of contract. Hobbes interpreted the theory as a justification for absolute power, while Locke used it as a justification for government by consent. Hobbes believed that people were basically evil and that only the strong arm of authoritarian law could prevent the reign of anarchy. According to Hobbes the original contract was one in which the people, tired of anarchy and violence, agreed to the appointment of a king, freed from constitutional limits who, by the exercise of his sovereign power, could execute such laws as he felt fit for the control of the people.

Locke believed in the basic decency of people. To him, the contract was an agreement between equals, and like business contracts, was entered into for mutual aid and benefit. In his theory of contract, people decided to establish government so that the rights of each and all would be maintained through government action.

The teachings of Locke had small influence in England, but, in the hands of Rousseau, became the instrument of Revolution in France, and the chief support of the Revolution in the American Colonies.

UTILITARIANISM

As an historical fact, the contract had no validity. As an explanation of existing political arrangements, it was completely useless. Hume had little difficulty in disposing of the theory on both counts. People, he argued, submit to government as they find it because of habit. Though the theory may have been useful as a justification for the

Revolution of 1688 and as a support for the early post-Revolutionary governments, it had little value to the successful middle class manufacturers and landlords into whose hands the affairs of the English nation had fallen. Their chief objective was to make money, and if they felt any necessity to support such conduct by a political philosophy, the easiest way was to elevate the principles of trade into a philosophy of government. Theory was attendant on fact, and for two hundred years the descendants of the successful revolutionaries governed the country in the interests of trade and commerce. During that period, the country underwent a fundamental transformation. The application of steam to machinery ushered in the Industrial Revolution in which a predominantly rural country was transformed into an industrial nation. The last remnants of the yeomanry were rapidly transformed into the ranks of daily workers possessing neither land on which to live nor tools of trade with which to earn a livelihood. Expanding trade and an ever increasing export market made life delightful for the successful and damnable for the great bulk of the nation.

The theory of utilitarianism had also suffered a transformation. The first germs of the theory as sown by Hume gradually sprouted into a vigorous tree when tendered by the hands of the Utilitarians. Beginning with Jeremy Bentham, the theory underwent a considerable modification, a widening of outlook, a toning down of dogmatism, and an adjustment to new situations. But though its first exponent was born in 1748 and its last grand advocate died in 1873, a common spirit animates the works of its expounders, and a common set of principles are generally acknowledged. In the words of W. L. Davidson, utilitarianism "represents interest in the welfare of mankind, wedded to practical efforts to ameliorate the conditions of human life on rational principles, and to raise the masses through effective State legislation." The objective was summed up in the expression "the greatest happiness for the greatest number," and the Utilitarians undoubtedly did excellent service in bettering the lot of many of the people of England. But practical political reform was futile in the face of the avalanche of disaster which confronted the country from the economic and financial quarters. By and large, the Utilitarians took the economic relations of the people for granted. On matters of money they were completely ignorant. Their aim was to make minor changes in political matters while leaving the policy of government completely under the control of economic interests. Their preoccupation with "Political Economy" indicates their obsession with economics.

But the theory of the greatest happiness for the greatest number became ironic when the greatest number had become daily workers continually suffering from trade depressions and financial breakdowns, when even hourly work was impossible, and every town and village had its Poor House crammed to overflowing. The Utilitarians advocated universal suffrage, but it was becoming increasingly evident that political democracy presupposed the political equality of voters, and such presupposed equality could never prevail so long as economic relations were on such an unequal basis.

(To be concluded.)