

'Toward Managed Peace'

Sir, — In his review of my book, *Toward Managed Peace* (September 3), Michael Howard dismisses its thesis as irrelevant because the international system of the last 200 years has ceased to exist. "We are faced in fact with an entirely new kind of 'international anarchy'", he writes, "to which traditional concepts such as 'balance of power', and traditional military methods of enforcing them, no longer appear to have any relevance." For a generation one of the most persuasive high priests of realism, admirer of Thucydides, Clausewitz, Hinsley and Martin Wight, Sir Michael is one of the last scholars in the world I should have expected to proclaim the end of history and the dawn of a new world order without war. In *Toward Managed Peace*, I quoted a long passage from his *War and the Liberal Conscience* which, I thought, summed up his views as nearly identical with my own. Either I was wrong then, or Sir Michael's change of vantage point is truly a conversion. I look forward to reading his new book, and devoutly hope it justifies the breathtaking assertion in his review.

All I can say about Professor Howard's claim now, alas, is that his optimism is not consistent with the news of the day; the all-too-evident prospects for tomorrow; the cables of the foreign ministries; and the import of his own published work. I agree, of course, that great changes are occurring and will continue to occur in the structure and dynamics of the state system, and that some of those changes — notably the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction — imply far-reaching change in the degree of "sovereignty" of certain states, perhaps of all states. But for nearly fifty years, the states

have found it possible to wage limited conventional war even in the shadow of the nuclear weapon. Prudent policy must assume that their ingenuity in this respect will continue to prevail.

Professor Howard also reproaches me for not having explored the causes of the Cold War and reviewed "the historical debate between revisionists and post-revisionists". My views on these matters are so predictable, Sir Michael says, "that there is little point in taking issue with them".

This is a curious comment for him to make. I did review the literature of revisionism and the causes of the Cold War at length in *Peace in the Balance* (1972), a book derived from my own diplomatic experience, from a course of lectures I gave at Oxford during a sabbatical there in 1970-71, and from a seminar Howard and I gave together at All Souls. *Peace in the Balance* made no visible impact on the revisionist literature, except for Carl Oglesby, who corresponded with me seriously for several years. I therefore decided to confine *Toward Managed Peace* to an affirmative exposition of my own policy recommendations, rather than repeat what I had tried to do in the earlier book.

What makes Professor Howard's remark so difficult for me to understand is that I can recall no article or book of his in which he subjects the debate between revisionists and post-revisionists to serious analysis. Almost all his work, like the present review, deals with the phenomenon of the Cold War *de haut en bas*, with a brief ritual obeisance to the *idées fixes* of the Oxbridge (and American) Common Room Left: that the Cold War was brought about and prolonged by the folly and ineptness of American foreign policy, and its failure to explore the possibility of reaching an

understanding with the Soviet Union, and that Soviet military power and expansionism were the figments of feverish imaginations. I can remember no discussion on Howard's part of events like the Soviet rejection of the Baruch Plan and the Marshall Plan in the 1940s; the Soviet incitement of the Six-Day War in 1967; or Gorbachev's repeated invocation of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the Rapallo understanding of 1922.

On several occasions, Sir Michael has chided me for my role in the work of the Committee on the Present Danger, which he derided as grossly excessive in its estimates of Soviet military capacity. These estimates were based on the exemplary research of Colonel William T. Lee of the United States Defense Intelligence Agency. The most authoritative epitaph I know for the controversy over Soviet military spending appears in an interview in the Russian journal *Segodnya* for June 18, 1993. The interviewer was Pavel Felgenhauer, a well-known Russian journalist specializing in military affairs, and the interviewee, Colonel V. Petrov, a former Soviet intelligence officer of great experience and seniority. Both agreed that Colonel Lee and Igor Birman were the only Western Sovietologists who came close to the truth about Soviet military expenditures, but that even they underestimated "the monstrous degree of militarization of the Soviet economy". Their judgment is documented and confirmed in a long report published in the *New York Times* on September 26, 1993.

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priorities are explained and tested. The Preface also makes it plain that the editors do not regard texts in the same way as the hermeneutical perspectives taken up on them, and that these theories should not provide their results independently of practice on individual texts, yet this is taken to be an "adroit" formula and really cloaks our underlying menace. Only one volume provides any illustrative material (all for D. S., and out of these three instances (as from closing comments), two seriously misrepresent the essays from which they are chosen.

I do concede that one of the leading ideas of the series involves the examination and explanation of approach before its application, and that this isn't quite what D. S. imagines University English to be about, but it should also be regarded as a basic courtesy to the reader, and presents a viable image of how we actually read texts (*faute de mieux*, if you like). Well, I have an offer to make: I will list the best texts I have read (in order) with sections where I quote their own most beautiful passages and why they possess a single factor for me (note though, I don't intend to interpret them). I then offer to write a letter to the Minister of Education with an impassioned plea for just these texts to be included in the National Curriculum. In return, I would really like to receive an account from D. S. of just how we can arrive at Right Interpretations of literary texts and (given the chosen Theory) why other approaches are Wrong, these ideas then to be illustrated and perhaps extended with reference to a particular literary text — in short, a Theory of Practice essay. We will both feel what it's like to adopt the other's approach to criticism, and I presumably will be put right and convinced that the column's approach has not been one of blinkered condensation.

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The Beta Israel

Sir, — The tendentious heading ("The Falasha fallacy") which was placed over Christopher Clapham's review (September 10) of two books about the Falashas prejudices the issue.

It shows a curious sense of proportion on the part of your reviewer to describe these people, today few in numbers as a consequence of accumulated misfortune, as of "such historical insignificance". A people who have survived for 2,000 years, stubbornly adhering to their faith in Old Testament Judaism, isolated and disadvantaged, deserve better than this from a professor of politics and international relations. If nothing else — and there is much else — their very existence provides a striking example of the interplay of Jewish-Christian relations which demands intelligent study rather than facile scorn.

Professor Clapham has swallowed hook, line and sinker the arguments posted by Steven Kaplan (in *The Beta Israel in Ethiopia*) and James Quirin (in *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews*) that the Falashas (or Beta Israel as they prefer to be called) are the descendants of an Ethiopian Christian schismatic movement dating to the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, composed of converts to Judaism who became the forebears of the present Falasha community. Far-fetched as this theory is, it raises more questions than it answers. It claims that a gap existed in the continuity of Judaism in Ethiopia from the time of its acknowledged presence in the Axumite kingdom, before the adoption of Christianity in the mid-fourth century, until the appearance of this pro-Jewish schism in the Church. No one has yet explained how or why Christian proselytes should have taken such an eccentric step unless there was an existing community — which local tradition believes — to which they could belong and from which they could imitate their religious inspiration. There is, so far as I am aware, no legend or record to support the notion of this historic gap.

Kaplan and Quirin, supported by your reviewer, have assumed that certain practices (for example, synagogue design and music) have been acquired from the Christian Church without asking whence they originally came. The question which requires examination is who influenced

whom. Both sides gained in some degree from one another.

The Judaic customs in Ethiopian Christian culture, such as the dietary laws, sabbath observance and circumcision, were introduced as a result of the Jewish foundation on which Christianity was built. Even monasticism, on which the authors place great stress, had a pre-Christian Jewish tradition. It is sad to find that your reviewer should reach the "conclusion that the Beta Israel *allyah* of 1985-91 was derived from assumptions that historical research has now shown to be mistaken". It is more probable that the historical research, far from being conclusive, was seriously flawed.

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'Lenin's Brain'

Sir, — With reference to Philip Brady's review of my novel *Lenin's Brain* (September 24), I feel bound to come to the defence of my translator Shaun Whiteside who has been blamed for the "cutting out of vital parts" of my text. Delighted though I was to notice how meticulously Mr Brady compared the English and German versions, the textual butchery was mine. Since I felt the relevant passages were self-explanatory elsewhere in the novel, and had posed particular problems in many of the other translations of the book, I chose to omit them in English. Philip Brady could not, of course, have known this, and I appreciate that my own skills in neurosurgery are limited. But I must stress that Shaun Whiteside took no forays into that field and I stand by his translation.

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The US and German POWs

Sir, — In his letter printed on August 20, James Bacque accuses me of not knowing what I think

from day to day. He quotes from a letter I wrote to him when he first showed me some of his material for his book, *Other Losses*, which charges Eisenhower with deliberately starving one million German prisoners to death. In the letter, I said that he had made an important discovery, and added, "You have the quotes from those who were present and saw with their own eyes".

Bacque neglects to add that when I learned that he had made up the quotations he used, I denounced his book. He also neglects to say that I told him in the letter he quotes that, although there was evidence of mistreatment of German POWs on an alarming scale, there was no evidence whatsoever to support his accusation of a million men killed.

The man is a genius at getting his name in the paper. But as John Keegan rightly points out (Letters, August 27), no one believes the absurd charge. The truth is that James Bacque has managed, knowingly or unknowingly, to perpetrate a gigantic hoax that has done far too much mischief.

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'Theory in Practice'

Sir, — I'm glad that when D. S., in the NB column for July 23, actually managed to read some of the "Theory in Practice" essays in the inaugural volumes of the series, he found the experience "unexpectedly entertaining", and even at one point caught one of the contributors espousing sentiments that he had thought the series rubric had proscribed. He really should not be surprised. So sedulous is he to get the series to fit the niche he did expect, its apparent attack on the "independent right to life" of literary texts, that the article is not above quoting scripture to suit its purpose.

No mention is made either of the editor's introduction, which for each text attempts to provide relevant biographical and bibliographical information, or of the passages of close attention to the text in each essay where the opening theoretical

'Black Riders'

Sir, — How much one agrees with Donald Davie's claim (in his review of Jerome McGann's *Black Riders*, September 17) that "poetry's business is telling the truth". But of course he knows what that means. An inevitability of language, and every really good poem possesses such an inevitability, always tells the truth. That, more or less, seems to be the point that his quotation from McGann is rather pretentiously making. It is the point Wordsworth made about poetry that is "not inevitable enough", and Coleridge when he spoke of "the best words" (that is the only words for a given poetic context) "in the best order". Terry Eagleton's claim that "we have begun to register the fact that if literature is concerned with anything, it is not truth or morality but fantasy and desire" is an instance of the "no-one-seems-to-have-noticed-before" syndrome in Lit Crit, intended merely to stimulate a wide audience into thinking that they live in stirring times.

Everyone knows about the role of fantasy and desire in poetry and literature, and how they lead us to Davie's business of "telling the truth". For example, Larkin's ship that is seeking us, the "black-sailed unfamiliar", is death in a great poem, and thus inevitable in terms of that poem. Death's real inevitability, and the random process of its coming about, is something different, as the poet knew quite well; but his poem can none the less lead us, via the security of language, to the true emptiness of the fact. Otherwise we might, as Robert Graves put it, "go mad no doubt, and die that way". Housman's "nature", or his "tears of morning", suggest truth in a similar way. But of course, truth in poetry can be arrived at in many ways.

All this is obvious, as Donald Davie well knows, and maybe implies. I agree with him that "It seems incredible that this should need to be said; and that professors of literature should earn their salaries by denying it".

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