

This book represents an attempt to put forward, in popular style and language, a theory of politics which is based on the idea of human rights. The author asks himself the obvious, but seldom answered question: what is government *for*? – and his reply is that it is for the maintenance and promotion of human rights, and nothing else. The point of saying this is that, in the late twentieth century, the implications of this thesis are not those of bourgeois liberalism in the fashion of Tom Paine, but rather of a radical reappraisal which goes beyond any of the current available ideologies.

The concept of human rights has to be taken seriously: and this means, among other things, that a government's responsibility goes beyond its own immediate territory. The British government, for example, is committed (not only by this theory, but also by its already existing legal and moral commitments in international and national legislation) to more than the promotion of *British* rights: it has to look to its responsibility for *human* rights as such. And the same goes for any other national government. Similarly, human rights don't stop at the present electorate: the rights of future generations, for example to a healthy and life-sustaining environment, are the responsibility of present governments, and require that governments take a long view of their task. Again, human rights are not just those which our own prevailing ideology likes to talk about – that is, civil and political liberties. They also include – as the Universal Declaration makes clear – the rights which the Eastern bloc's ideology emphasises: to work, food and economic and social rights generally.

It is an obvious and commonly expressed objection to human rights theorising, that many of the rights already enshrined in our major international documents, let alone those which some people would like to add to the list, are mutually incompatible. You can't have them all, because they contradict each other: hence, it is said, they can't really be rights; so we must

postpone the implementation of some in order to give concrete expression to others. But Stan Windass has an answer to this objection, and it goes to the heart of the matter. It is no good looking on the existing body of human rights 'legislation' as a set of separate items, to be dealt with in a positivistic manner. It is only the tip of a much larger iceberg – or rather of a living and developing body. The human rights 'movement' is seen, in this book, in something like a 'development of doctrine' sense as understood by Newman. First of all, the whole edifice of human rights is built on faith, or what Windass calls an 'option'; that is in a sense of essential rightness which is beyond rational proof, but which does not require such 'proof' in order to be valid. Thus the equality of all human beings as defined by the American Declaration of Independence ('All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights') is a truth that cannot be proved, because it is a basic premiss. The important thing is that today nobody seriously challenges it: people simply accept it by various kinds of self-deception. The fact that everybody *pretends* to accept it is very significant: it is a piece of historical progress, a kind of beachhead, from which further progress can be made to come, if enough people want it to. So what may look like contradictions today may, with time and 'development of doctrine', melt away or be re-defined into compatibilities. The whole theory is thoroughly imbued with a sense of the possibilities of such development within an evolving, living structure of commitments.

It is worth thinking about this idea in the context of the books section of international order and the rights of self-defence, especially at a moment when, in the Falkland Islands, some of the crucial ideas are being put to the test. On the question of deterrence strategy, for example, Windass does not merely condemn but rather tries to understand where the growth points for a morally tolerable form of defence might be, within the present context. He does not write off arms con-

troil, achievements including SALT for example, just because they have not yet produced any noticeable disarmament: for they nevertheless contain elements of *meaning* which may offer the chance for fruitful development. For deterrence is not only a network of hardware: it is also a network of meanings (for example, of concepts like 'defence' and 'aggression') and the meanings can sometimes be changed even while the hardware appears to remain the same. Confidence Building Measures, for instance, may have a value in terms of the way in which each side views the other, despite lack of change in weaponry.

Now it seems to me an essential bit of this whole thesis that, in facing any particular crisis, a government should look not only at its 'rights' in the sense of what it is strictly entitled to do in terms of its treaty commitments etc., but also at its responsibility to ensure that its actions are pushing in a fruitful, developmental direction for the world as a whole, and are not essentially atavistic in tendency. Thus, the British government may be right in the 'atavistic' sense, in their policy about the Falklands (I write in the wake of the South Georgia recapture, but before the awaited invasion of the Falklands by the task force): but are they right in the 'prophetic' sense? Are they doing anything to help or hinder what the Brandt Report called the indispensable new understanding of the very concepts of 'defence' and of 'security'? For in today's world, if Stan Windass is right, any government that is doing its fundamental job *must* see this as its most basic responsibility. Global and human rights considerations are not superfluous extras, or bonuses on top of national considerations of self-defence: they are the very heart of the matter. In the long run

(and the run may not be very long) security, justice, even survival depend upon enough governments taking this larger view of their task. This is the theme (to make another point) of nearly all the papal statements on security and peace in recent times: they put the priorities where they belong. What we have here then, and the Falkland Islands crisis is a test case of it, is a new 'development' in the concept of the Just War. There never has been just one 'just war' theory: like every bit of genuine wisdom, it has always been subject to 'development'. If this book is right, then, it seems very doubtful whether the Thatcher government is living up to its responsibilities over the Falklands. To consider just one point here: the Galtieri junta has made clear, by its whipping-up of nationalistic feeling in Argentina, that it cannot govern without the support of its own people. Intelligent democratic opponents of the junta in Argentina are beginning to see how this tacit admission of dependence on popular consent could be put to good use; by pushing for human rights in Argentina as the price for support over the Falklands. Even, then, the ugly and degrading spectacle of people in a frenzy of anti-British feeling in the streets of Buenos Aires has a positive aspect: it is a possible growth-point. The danger is that British military priorities may be such as to stifle that growth, even if in the short term they are defensible on the 'self-defence' theory. It is the merit of Stan Windass's book to stimulate the reader into thinking anew about a current preoccupation, and to see something positive where otherwise darkness would appear to prevail. It is a very valuable merit which not many books of political theory can claim for themselves.

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THE GREAT CODE: The Bible and Literature, by Northrop Frye.
Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1982. pp 233. £9.95.

I first learned of this book from reviews in *The New York Review of Books* and *The Times Literary Supplement*, one of them, if I remember rightly, by Anthony Burgess. It is not a theological book, and

they were not theological reviews: in fact Mr Burgess at times irritated by a tone of shallow secularism. But it was easy to conclude that it would probably be a book of great value to theological students of the