

quires it to be—an organisation that will ensure a minimum of civil order.

Talk of “mobilising the Guard” is as repellent to liberals as talk of “guaranteed jobs” is to conservatives. And I, for one, am not confident that a strong and well-trained Guard will prevent white vigilantism any more than I am confident that a modern Rooseveltian W.P.A. (modern in

the sense that it would be coupled with a serious vocational training programme) will prevent Negro rioting. The best that can be said for either proposal is that it will remove the excuse for vigilantism and rioting. And right now, that may be the best we can hope for.

James Q. Wilson

The Argument between Arabs and Jews

An Exchange between ARNOLD TOYNBEE & J. L. TALMON

London, 3 July, 1967

DEAR Professor Talmon,

I have just been staying with my son Philip and I have read your paper “For Total Peace in the Middle East” which Isaiah Berlin passed on to him. I believe, like you, that this is the moment for everyone of good will and good sense to make an all-out effort to get total, genuine, and lasting peace there. I believe there is a real opportunity for this, if we seize it now. I am just back from the United States, and, three weeks ago, I stuck my neck out by writing, for the United Press International, an article saying this, and making some concrete proposals for bringing it about. The United Press tell me that my article has been reproduced pretty widely in the U.S. press, so a copy of it may come into your hands some time, but, as there is no time to lose, I am writing to you now direct.

I feel a responsibility for doing anything I can to help towards getting a permanent peace now. I have a number of reasons. (1) I am British, so I have a share of responsibility for my country's past actions. (2) As a young man during the First World War, I was working as a “temporary Foreign Office clerk” on Middle Eastern affairs, particularly on British war-time commitments in the Middle East, so I know the history of these from the inside. (3) I am

known as a Western spokesman for the Arab cause, and it is therefore just possible that what I say in public now might have some influence in the Arab World, though it is perhaps more likely that the Arabs might write me off with the verdict that I am no friend of theirs after all. Anyway, I believe that the truest act of friendship that any friend of either the Arabs or the Israelis can do for them at this moment is to try to help them to see that the facts make genuine peace a prime interest for both parties. (4) Being now an old man, with grandchildren, I feel what Johnson and Kosygin seem to have felt when they met. One's grandchildren symbolise for me, in a concrete way, all the future generations of the human race—70 million unborn generations who might be deprived, by our generation, of their right to life if we, in our time, were to stumble into an atomic third world war. (5) Thinking also in terms of the present, I want to see something done now which, besides saving the world from an enormous catastrophe, will reduce present human suffering in the Middle East to a minimum. I should have been as much horrified at genocide of Jews in the Middle East as I was horrified at it in Europe. I also think it very wrong to treat any people, living or unborn, as political pawns, instead of treating them as suffering human beings whose alleviation ought to have priority over any political considerations. In discussing the Arab states' policy with my Arab friends, I have always pointed out to them that West Germany's post-war policy towards refugees from Eastern Germany and from east of the Oder-Neisse line has not only been humane, but has paid dividends to Western Germany, economically and therefore also politically. Israelis should look ahead for their grandchildren.

Now about the facts that each side has to face and about practical possibilities for a settlement.

PROFESSOR ARNOLD TOYNBEE, who refers to himself as “a Western spokesman for the Arab cause,” is the author of many studies of Islamic history, politics, and culture. J. L. TALMON is Professor of Modern History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and is the author of *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952), *Political Messianism* (1966), *The Unique and the Universal* (1965), and most recently *Romanticism and Revolt*.



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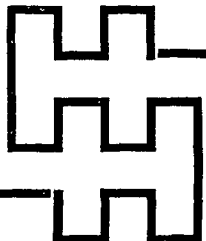
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IN YOUR PAPER, YOU, YOURSELF, have put your finger on the fact that Israel has to face. A series of more and more sensational victories in successive wars does not, in itself, give Israel the vital thing that she wants and needs: that is, real peace with her Arab neighbours. So long as Israel has not mutually agreed permanent frontiers, but only a military front, always smouldering and periodically flaring up into full-blown hostilities, Israel has to stay constantly on the alert and cannot concentrate her energies on her own internal development, which is, and always has been, her real objective. She has demonstrated now conclusively that, in war, she can always conquer more Arab territory without any foreign military aid; but, the more of this that she occupies, the more she will become militarily over-extended, and the larger the proportion of her limited and precious man-power she will have to keep unprofitably mobilised. The Arab World has the same passive military advantage as Russia and China have: there is virtually no end to it. So Israel's overriding interest is genuine peace; even the greatest military victories will be fruitless unless they can be converted into that.

The Arabs have to face the fact that Israel has come to stay; that a three-times repeated experience has shown that they cannot defeat her; that the Soviet Union is not going to go to war with the United States for the Arabs' sake; and that, in the unlikely event of the Arabs becoming, one day, able to destroy Israel, the United States would not let this happen.

I NEED NOT dwell on your psychological analysis of the present-day Arab state of mind. It is masterly; you have shown a power of sympathetic understanding by which you have entered into it imaginatively. This is very important and very encouraging, because Israel, as the present victor, holds the initiative. The party that has suffered injustice and has been humiliated is the one that is the more sensitive and that therefore needs the more delicate handling. The Palestinian Arabs have suffered injustice. To put it simply, they have been made to pay for the genocide of Jews in Europe which was committed by Germans, not by Arabs. The Arabs as a whole have been humiliated, because, in the establishment, first of the Jewish National Home and then of the State of Israel, the Arabs have, as you point out, never been consulted. It has all been done over their heads. They have been treated as "natives," with no more than sub-human rights. For a people with a great, but no longer actual, historic past, this is infuriating. The present Arab and present Chinese states of mind have the same explanation.

¹The repatriation of the 1967 refugees was taken for granted in this letter.—A.I.T.

So I would plead with Israel to make the first move towards achieving the total genuine and lasting peace which is the supreme common interest of Israel, the Palestinian Arab refugees, and the Arab states. For Israel publicly to make the first move would be magnanimous as well as far-sighted. I suggest that Israel should now propose that the two sides should make the following simultaneous declaration:

"The Arab states and the Palestinian Arab people pledge themselves to recognise, *bona fide*, the existence of Israel with the intention of making a permanent peace with her, and they also guarantee to negotiate permanent frontiers with Israel on approximately the 1948 armistice lines. Israel pledges herself to accept these agreed frontiers *bona fide*, with the intention, on her side, of making permanent peace, and she also undertakes to take the initiative in bringing about a satisfactory permanent settlement of the problem of the 1948 refugees."¹

If both sides would give these reciprocal pledges in a formal agreement of the kind that used to be called "preliminaries of peace," this would open the way for a negotiated treaty about details, and then things that have so far been impossible would become possible, e.g.:

1. In the conversion of the 1948 armistice lines into permanent frontiers, there could be minor rectifications, so long as these offset each other fairly on balance.

2. There could be a mutual opening up of communications that are vital to both parties. Israel could be assured of a right of way not only through the Straits of Tiran but through the Suez Canal too. Egypt could be assured of a right of way, across Israel, to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, thus removing the "Polish corridor" irritant of Israel's having split the Arab World in two by extending from the Mediterranean coast to the Gulf of Aqaba. Syria and Jordan could be given a free port at Haifa, with a right of way to it, and Jordan could be given a second one at Jaffa.

3. The 1948 Palestinian Arab refugees could (a) be given monetary compensation for the loss of their property situated in Israel; (b) be given an extra indemnity for having been forced, as innocent victims of the conflict between Israel and the Arab states, to spend twenty years as refugees; (c) be given the option of either returning to their former homes on condition of becoming loyal citizens of Israel (as the Galilaean Arabs have been during the present crisis) or else being settled on good land outside Israel; (d) a fund could be raised for the refugees' resettlement, whether inside Israel or outside it. I am sure the majority will opt for resettlement *outside* Israel; but for Israel to offer the choice of returning home (on condition of their becoming *bona fide* loyal Israeli citizens) is psychologically very important for producing a change of heart among the refugees. If Israel appealed to the world to help her raise a fund for these four purposes, money would pour in.

Jerusalem, 18 July 1967

4. Water for irrigation: in the London *Times* a few days ago, there was an important letter from Edmund de Rothschild about this, followed up next day by a long and constructive article by a desalination expert. They make the point that, even though desalination has not yet been made possible at an economic price, it would pay the world to subsidise it for the use of Israel and Jordan. This would (a) make it no longer necessary to pay a pittance to the refugees; (b) in combination with the Jordan water, it would supply abundant water for both Israel and Jordan, and would therefore make it unnecessary for them to contend with each other over their respective shares of Jordan water.

THE FUTURE OF THE Old City of Jerusalem is a question of special urgency and danger. It is of crucial importance that Israel should not take unilateral action for annexing it. This would not be valid in international law; it could not be accepted by the United Nations; it would make genuine peace between Israel and the Arabs impossible; and it would arouse the whole Muslim World, and probably a large part of the Christian World too, not only against Israel, but against the Jews in general. It might seriously prejudice the diaspora's position in many countries.

Moreover, possession of the Temple area (the Muslims' Haram ash-Sherif) would be an embarrassment for Israel. She would have either to refrain from rebuilding the Temple or else she would have to demolish the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aksa Mosque, which would really be unthinkable. Of course, Israelis and all other Jews must have free access to the Wailing Wall. I like the Pope's proposal for an international trusteeship for the holy places of all religions in Palestine. But any change of sovereignty here would be most provocative unless it were freely negotiated in exchange for some equivalent *quid pro quo*. For instance, Jordan might conceivably say to Israel: "Cede to us the fields, now in Israel, that belong to villages on the Jordan side of the frontier, and then we will cede to you the south-west corner of the Old City of Jerusalem, up to the western face of the Wailing Wall." A bargain on these lines would be all right, but unilateral action by Israel would be disastrous.

Well, I am writing this to you, and am sending copies to Isaiah Berlin and to a friend of mine in Baltimore, Maryland, Rabbi Agus.

I am now an old man, and most of my treasure is therefore in future generations. This is why I care so much, and why I am writing this letter to you.

Please make any use of my letter that you think useful. I am not marking it "confidential."

Yours sincerely,

Arnold Toynbee

DEAR Professor Toynbee,

I expressed to you by wire my first deeply felt reaction to your letter as soon as I finished reading it. I wish to apologise to you now for the ten days delay in sending you the detailed reply which I promised in my telegram. This was the last week of term at our University, teaching having been resumed at the end of June, after the interruption caused by mobilisation and war. I had also wished to show your letter to friends at the University and to a few persons in government circles for their comments. Finally, I needed time to ponder over what you say and sort out my own thoughts in the light of the feelings and ideas which animate the people of Israel at this moment.

May I say at the outset that I have reason to claim that I voice the sentiments of most Israelis in the appreciation of the moral fervour and sense of urgency which motivate your letter. I speak however only for myself when I deal with your concrete proposals and offer my own suggestions. All the same, I know for certain that a very strong volume of Israeli opinion shares my views on the practical prospects of an Arab-Israeli settlement; and I do not think I exaggerate if I add that, given the proper response from the other side, the suggestions voiced

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in the second part of this letter may easily become acceptable to the vast majority of the people of Israel, and—Israel being a genuine democracy—to its government.

You list a number of reasons for your feeling of “responsibility for doing anything [you] can to help towards getting a permanent peace now.” I would add one reason which you do not mention, but which to me outweighs perhaps all those enumerated by you, for in a sense it contains them all. I seemed to hear in your letter the voice of Arnold Toynbee who in the *Study of History* had been speaking to me not just as the architect of a colossal edifice, but, if I may say so, as a prophet who stands in awe before the mystery of Time and is engaged in a passionate quest for overriding purpose and redeeming significance in History. Some of us who are living in “permanent and anguished intimacy with the mystery of Jewish martyrdom and survival” could not help responding to these “Judaic” ingredients in your work, and therefore felt especially pained by what to us, Jews and Zionists, appeared as a failure to accord to Judaism and its contemporary mutation, Israel, their due place in your scheme of civilisations emerging and falling, vast spiritual forces shaping and dissolving them, all that supposedly leading to some salvationist denouement in the end, but now suddenly faced by the mortal danger of total and meaningless destruction.

I welcome, therefore, most heartily your letter as some kind of opening to a friendly and fruitful dialogue. And it is not in any spirit of polemic or out of a wish to put into your mouth things which you did not say in your letter, but out of deep respect and genuine inner need, that I feel compelled to make these few, general comments before I come to your suggestions.

ZIONISM DID NOT START with Hitler, and to us, therefore, the emergence of Israel could not be summed up in the statement that the Arabs “have been made to pay for the genocide of Jews in Europe which was committed by Germans, not by Arabs.”

Just as we would not base our right to exist as an independent state in the Middle East solely on our right of conquest and demand of the Arabs simply to bow to that fact of nature (or history), so we could not possibly subordinate the immemorial aspiration of the Jewish people, admittedly much quickened by the rise of nationalism in the world at large, and made unbearably urgent by murderous persecution, to the exclusive resolve of the Arabs. Whatever the degree of our imaginative understanding of the Arab resentment at not having been consulted on the Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate and for having had their objections

overridden by the UN and their armed resistance to partition (the solution contrived to meet a clash of rights) overpowered by the Jews in 1948; and whatever the measure of our embarrassed sympathy for the terrible plight of the Palestine refugees, we could not put into question the very basis of our existence.

It is probably too much to ask—in this fallen state of mankind—of a nationalist movement to see the point of the other side and to make concessions to it readily and altruistically. Many as may have been the Zionist sins of commission or omission in this respect, every one of their attempts at a compromise had all along been met by Arabs with the absolute and implacable refusal to recognise any Jewish claim. This was bound to lead to the half-despairing, half-defiant reaction that since nothing could be done with them, it had to be done in spite of and even against them. Arab intransigence has proved a disastrous policy to the Arab interests. Every crisis culminating in armed clash cost the Arabs more and more, and weakened their position still further, which again deepened Arab neurosis on the point of Israel.

Wounded pride of a race with glorious memories is not an ignoble feeling. But an obsessive sense of injury and self-pity are conducive to sterile self-centredness and stultifying misanthropy. Where would we Jews have been today, had we never ceased to remember all the scores and been reliving all the humiliations we had suffered at the hand of every possible nation with which we had come into contact throughout our long history? What would have happened to the persecuted and maltreated of our race, had we behaved like the Arab States towards the Arab refugees: “May they suffer and rot, for it is all the doing of the Jews, and we must not make it easier for the enemy, but should on the contrary keep that sore running.” Is there no hope of breaking this vicious circle—the source of so much misery to the peoples of the Middle East, and now threatening to engulf the whole world in an unspeakable catastrophe?

A man greatly revered by both of us, my late teacher R. H. Tawney, wrote:

It is the tragedy of a world where man must walk by sight that the discovery of the reconciling formula is always left to future generations, in which passion has cooled into curiosity, and the agonies of peoples have become the exercise in the schools. The devil who builds bridges does not span such chasms till much that is precious to mankind has vanished down them for ever.

Surely enough blood has flowed down the chasms for the reconciling formula to be evolved and accepted at last. It is infinitely sad that

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homo sapiens should be so slow-witted, and that his reason should be so dominated and twisted by irrational drives and intractable aversions that only an overwhelming shock and inexorable *faits accomplis* are able to make the sweet voice of reason heard.

I ENTIRELY AGREE with you that on the morrow of the third Arab-Israel war in twenty years, the most self-absorbed nationalists on both sides should be ripe for the acceptance of the fact that galling as it is not to be able to attain one's supreme goal in its undiminished totality, that is the way the jealous gods will it. It may be hard upon the Arabs impelled by a vision of a pan-Arab Empire from Iran to the Atlantic to find the Jews planted on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean. But the war to the bitter end advocated by the extremists, while most unlikely to wipe out Israel, is sure to bring, at once, the Arab States under Soviet domination, with Russian "advisers" and "technicians" in every office and regiment: a strange consummation of the dream of an Islamic renaissance. Even those no longer very numerous Jews who are still capable of becoming intoxicated with verses on the vastness of the Kingdom promised by the Almighty to His children have to wake up to the fact that God has played them an unfair trick in putting so many Arabs on the banks of the Jordan and scattering so many more in the countries around. The Israelis may defeat them again and again, but only to find the promised "rest and inheritance" removed further and further, and themselves condemned to live by the sword instead of walking by the spirit, to be a Sparta and not the combination of Jerusalem and Athens—the fondest dream of the noblest among the prophets of Zionism.

There is in fact no need to persuade Israel of the desirability and necessity of peace. All the effort is required on the other side. As to the actual terms envisaged by Israel, these would be a function of Arab readiness to recognise Israel and make a genuine peace with her. The graver our fears, the stiffer the guarantees we think necessary for our survival and security; the greater the confidence the Arabs are able to inspire, the more lenient are our terms likely to be.

YOU SINGLE OUT two items as all-important and indeed all-embracing: refugees and frontiers.

Only yesterday I was deeply impressed by a person whom I was always inclined to consider something of an extremist exclaiming with heat "But we should pawn all we have to the tenth generation to solve this terrible problem of Arab refugees!"

I feel sure that, on this, all but one of your

suggestions would be met: monetary compensation, extra-indemnity, participation in an international fund for resettlement. The difficulty would frankly be the suggestion of an Israeli offer to the Arab refugees of 1948 of the choice of returning home. You consider this as more important for its symbolic significance by expressing the certainty that the "majority will opt for resettlement outside Israel." As you know, we have made such an offer to the 1967 refugees who, seized by panic (out of implacable hostility to Israel or out of a desire to be with their own next of kin) crossed to the East Bank of the Jordan during and since the recent hostilities. We do not know yet how many will avail themselves of the offer to return to the West Bank. While I can see the human and symbolic significance, indeed the duty, of allowing such an option to the recent refugees, I doubt whether there is a case for doing the same in regard to the refugees of twenty years ago. It would not only create very grave problems for Israel. It would also impose upon the refugees, transplanted into realities quite different from those they knew a generation ago, strains and stresses which they would be spared if resettled in an Arab land or overseas. This does not mean that we shall not be prepared, as we have been in the past, to allow reunion of families or make special consideration where warranted.

This world should become one and a fit place for men and women of different races and religions to live together. Yet I cannot help remembering to what extent precisely régimes which claim to be inspired by a universal creed, which subordinates racial peculiarity and national self-assertion to proletarian solidarity and universal brotherhood, have found no other solution to their nationalities problem but in the expulsion of millions of women and children, and in the annexation of vast territories to which their historic claim bears no comparison at all to the strength of the Jewish claim to Palestine. Even in such advanced and rich countries like Belgium and Canada racial conflict is assuming a virulence which baffles all observers. Incidentally, in absorbing some hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants or refugees from the Arab countries, Israel has carried out something of an exchange of populations.

As to the territorial terms, again, I and many like me hold the realistic opinion that territory densely populated by Arabs is not only not an asset to Israel, but a liability which even from the strategic point of view outweighs the supposed strategic advantages of what is called "more defensible frontiers." But there are reservations. Israel is entitled to security, and while I do not wish to be an annexationist, I could not consider the 1949 (you say by mistake 1948) armistice

frontiers as sacrosanct, and would think rectifications for which you make an allowance in your letter to be justified and indeed indispensable on those trouble spots like the Syrian ridge, the Sinai border, the Straits of Tiran. But I hasten to add that if other effective guarantees for our security could be devised—by way of demilitarisation, international force (not one always exposed to be sent unilaterally packing), international government—I dare say there would not be any insistent pressure for far-reaching territorial changes. The Gaza strip cannot remain an Egyptian enclave.

Israel has repeatedly offered Jordan free access to Israeli ports on the Mediterranean, and although I cannot see the necessity for Syria, which has good ports of her own, of free access to Haifa, surely in an atmosphere of good neighbourly relations this request, like the question of a right of way for Egypt through Israeli Arab territory to the other Arab States, would not present an insurmountable obstacle. But for this, free passage for Israeli shipping through the Suez canal is a precondition.

THE QUESTION OF JERUSALEM is a point *sui generis*, and on this our opinions are likely to differ. Of one thing I can assure you: there is no person or group of persons, of any standing

in Israel, even among the ultra-orthodox, who would dream of rebuilding the Temple and destroying Muslim or other sanctuaries. The whole matter is not worth a moment of your anxiety. At the same time, public opinion in Israel is so unanimous and determined on the retention of Jerusalem that no government would survive a week if it showed signs of giving in on that. I invite the historian Arnold Toynbee to weigh the pros and cons of this issue in historical perspective and with the historian's detachment, difficult as it is to treat this loaded problem in that way.

If Israel is prepared, and indeed is most anxious, to submit all holy places to international administration and supervision exercised by the accredited representatives of the various religions, Christian and Muslim, with extra territoriality guaranteed, why should there be all that fuss about sovereignty over the areas which do not contain any holy places? In what way was the Hashemite dynasty of Jordan, whose rule over Jordan resulted from a pure post-World War I accident and indeed a British embarrassment, a more trustworthy guardian than an Israeli government, which (as you hint) has hostages in all the Christian nations? The Jordanians have not left a single synagogue standing in Old Jerusalem and paved the road with

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tombstones from the ancient cemetery on the Mount of Olives. Are we not faced here with a residue of that unhappy, age-long special attitude to the nation of deicides, whose inferiority to Christendom (and Islam) must be made especially manifest, and the members of which must never be allowed to rule or command the members of the true and triumphant faith? Internationalisation? I seem to detect signs that the Vatican has by no means made up its mind on the desirability of a Jerusalem run by the UN, in which pagan, communist-atheist and Muslim, not to speak of Protestant powers, constitute the vast majority. Finally, may I recall the tremendous agitation against the incorporation of Rome, the capital of Christendom, the seat of the Holy See, into the Kingdom of Italy in the 19th century. It requires an effort of imagination today to visualise a situation in which Rome is not the capital of Italy, but the free state of the Pope or an international city.

THIS BRINGS ME to my last and most immediately practical point: how to go about getting peace.

Like very many Israelis I fervently desire an early arrangement with King Hussein of Jordan. In order not to lose myself in too sanguine illusions I would say no more than that

this solution appears to me to be the least impossible of all solutions talked of. The Israelis have genuine respect and a sneaking affection for the brave little King, and one can hear expressions of almost sympathetic regret that he should have made the terrible blunder he did. Incidentally, the total absence in Israel of any hatred or contempt for the Arabs as such is best illustrated by the fact that the spate of songs and poems of war and victory has not produced a single hate hymn; and never has any note of abuse crept into radio or press. There have been only minor cases of plunder which received prompt punishment, although in the heat of firing and sniping there seems to have been some unnecessary destruction of houses. The people left homeless were soon provided with shelter. I believe it is our interest to come to terms with Jordan and that Hussein stands to gain no less than we from such a settlement which would return to him most of the West Bank, except Jerusalem, its immediate vicinity and a few strategic points elsewhere, while ensuring to Jordanians some form of free access to Jerusalem and the Holy places of Islam. I believe, like you, that the international community, especially the West, would be enthusiastically ready to offer very large sums and sponsor a joint international venture, with Israel and Jordan as partners,

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TRS/2, Shell Centre, London, S.E.1.



designed to resettle the refugees, execute those public works of irrigation and desalination you mention, solving thereby not only the refugee problem, but restoring Hussein to his former position. A common stake in joint prosperity would thus be created. Would Hussein dare to take such a step alone? Objectively speaking, Egypt and Syria can afford not to conclude any arrangement with Israel and play the part of the intransigent patriots; Jordan just cannot exist without it. Hussein had been for so long cruelly vilified and ill-used by the more powerful Arab States. In the war he and his army have acquitted themselves very honourably and the sacrifices made by them have been infinitely greater than those by other Arab States. So he has done more than his share to fight for Arab honour.

It is quite possible that once the shouting against Hussein for having come to terms with Israel had died down, the other Arab States would tire of their excitement and get down to their internal affairs and gradually slide into some *modus vivendi*, or even follow Hussein's example fairly soon.

NOW I AM GOING to stick out my neck with a good many Jews just as you in your words stuck out your neck with your Arabs. I dislike the

idea of a separate little autonomous Arab State on the West Bank of Jordan which would be a camouflaged Israeli protectorate. Not only because I doubt its economic viability, am apprehensive of the crushing financial and administrative burden it is sure to impose upon Israel, fear its irredentism, and the grave security problems arising out of it. I recoil from the idea of Jews lording it over others. It is at variance with the image of Judaism I cherish, and the example of other nations makes me fear the dangers to the moral fibre, the psychological balance, and spiritual values lying in wait for a master race.

I pray that we shall not be compelled to assume that role, which may happen if an arrangement with Jordan proves impossible and the other Arab States refuse to establish peace with Israel.

You speak movingly of your grandchildren. I understand you well. I am a younger man and I have two small children. When I look into their eyes, I think of the million Jewish children whom the Nazis separated from their parents, starved to death and killed in the gas chambers. At such moments my heart goes out to all the children of the world, Arab, Vietnamese and all others, and I feel like crying aloud: "Never, never again."

Yours sincerely,

J. L. Talmon

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HARRAP BOOKS

BOOKS & WRITERS

Kenneth Burke's Dangling Novel

By Denis Donoghue

KENNETH BURKE'S *Towards a Better Life*,¹ is one of the most engaging images of dangling man in modern literature, a book of notable salience in the dispute of Art and Life.

Burke wanted to write his book (first published in 1932) as a realistic, objective novel, lively in event and character, with a palpable background in Greenwich Village. But his first efforts in this standard direction were so dismal that he reviewed his terms of reference, and concluded that the form, excellent for others, was to him a nuisance; that is, it did not allow him to write as he wanted to write. It struck him, and the lineaments of his talent seemed to agree, that any plot would answer, so long as it allowed him to indulge his favourite modes of expression. These consisted of six pivotal procedures: lamentation, rejoicing, beseechment, admonition, sayings, and invective. So his second decision was to move in reverse: to begin with his favourite stylistic gestures and to deduce from these a "corresponding" assembly of characters and a sequence of events loosely designated as plot. As he said:

Facit indignatio versus, which I should at some risk translate: "An author may devote his entire energies to rage purely through a preference for long sentences."

He would let himself be guided by a sense of style to invent characters and events in which the style would be most becomingly disclosed. It would not be necessary to devise a style for his fiction: he had the style already, waiting for the fiction. In this preposterous decision he consoled himself with the thought that he would at least disown the current standardised prose which was apparently designed, like Kleenex, to be used once and thrown away. In his own "periwig" style the sentences themselves would be internally eventful, contrived with so much

stylistic scruple that the absence of newsworthy events would pass unnoticed. Hence Burke's prose is exciting as a good sonnet is exciting, by offering a proliferation of verbal events sufficient to engross the most demanding reader. Thus the author hopes to entrance a reader who would otherwise be satisfied only by pictures of war and mayhem, and to send him back to daily life with his lust for excitement somewhat stilled.

To begin with, it was essential to put the reader in a proper mood for the reception of the book: clearly a condition of critical alertness as if he were attending to a song-cycle by Bartok. So Burke makes his hero a thoroughly unpleasant character, a twisted creature, with whom the reader would not possibly identify himself. The hero's skill in articulation would help further to place his reader at a safe distance. Listening to John Neal, a self-declared Outsider, the reader would feel no desire to bring him in. So the character of John Neal was dictated by the decencies of the stylistic occasion. Burke invents an alienated hero by deciding that alienation, at least to begin with, is the appropriate situation of the reader vis-à-vis the book.

The genesis of the fiction is therefore in the strictest sense verbal and stylistic. But, once the technique is under way, the possibilities of invention are limitless, since there is no end to the resources of language. By trading on certain incongruities between style and action, Burke devises the most exquisitely comic incidents. In the second chapter, for instance, he describes John making an anguished telephone-call to his beloved Florence from a public booth:

...and while Florence listened to words as desolate as my talent and my predicament could make them, I was grinning into the mouthpiece that the man beyond the glass, waiting to speak here next, might not suspect my condition.

Again, at a theatrical party of extremely low voltage, John feels compelled to attack the lucky Anthony in a style of formal complaint:

¹ *Towards a Better Life*. By KENNETH BURKE (1932; 1966 ed., University of California Press; London, Cambridge University Press, 40s.).