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# LETTERS

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## Stove's Popper

SIR KARL POPPER has had a paradoxical success. He is widely considered, among an educated public, as the greatest living philosopher, though he is treated amongst professional philosophers with cool enthusiasm. While there are courses for students to learn the wildest sociological fantasies about scientific knowledge, there are none which teach the commonsense approach of Popper to science (least of all where you would expect to find it, in the department he founded, which has gone Lakatosian, as I can testify from personal experience).

But why? I believe, after reading D. C. Stove's recent article, I can understand the cause of Popper's unpopularity.

Only a few students have the articulate intelligence to even consider becoming philosophers. For such students to become philosophers involves an active choice not to use that intelligence in having a successful career outside philosophy. Philosophers are peculiar people in having decided the non-financial rewards of spending a life trying to answer abstract questions as to the nature of things outweigh the large financial rewards they could easily have earned in a career in the outside world. But what is this non-financial reward they find in philosophy?

Popper has noted a basic characteristic of the human mind. It does not like too much uncertainty. People are mentally unprepared for the changeability of the modern world, after being evolved to live in the unchanging closed world of the primitive tribe. As a consequence, in the modern world, they feel insecure. To find a new source of security, many turn to ideas. This offers them the hope they may alleviate their sense of insecurity by finding, in the intellectual world of ideas, something certain and unchanging. This hope, I suggest, is the non-financial reward which makes students decide to become philosophers.

As a consequence, the profession of philosophy is biased to view its activity as the finding of intellectual certainties. Of course, Popper's ideas are anathema to such people. He has revolutionised the way we understand the problems underlying intellectual activity, particularly in science, in showing them to be open, possessing no definite solutions. Any solution proposed is

uncertain, since tomorrow a better and previously unthought-of solution may come along and sweep our present ideas away.

Such an interpretation of the nature of intellectual activity denies certainty and so the non-financial reward which originally persuaded students to become philosophers. No wonder they are cool towards such views. And that occasionally, as in Stove's emotional *ad hominem* article, contempt is shown.

JOHN R. SKOYLES

London

WHAT AN extraordinary article in June's ENCOUNTER ("Karl Popper and the Jazz Age" by D. C. Stove) which contrived to simultaneously enrich the language of debate and impoverish its substance!

In seeing Popperism as a British fad of the 1930s the author seems to be blinding himself to a number of points:

(1) The wide currency among scientists of the theory of science expounded in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* can be ascribed to two factors. Firstly there is the success of the theory in distinguishing non-science from science and providing a sound framework for science. Secondly, there is the need (in 1985 as much as in 1935) felt by scientists for such a framework in view of uncertainty within science, especially theoretical physics since 1887, and threats from outside science exemplified by the pretension to scientific authority of Marxists, Freudians, and others.

(2) Whether the invention by Popper of his theory was sparked off by an aphorism of Nietzsche, a song by Cole Porter, or Samuel Butler's book has no bearing on the validity of the theory itself.

(3) Again, if a later generation of philosophers have borrowed some of the basic ideas of Popper's theory and got themselves into murky water, does this invalidate the theory?

(4) Surely no one will credit that such simple sloganising as equating "irrefutable" and "unfalsifiable" would bring success, particularly among scientists (who are notoriously insensitive to subtleties of language) to an otherwise empty theory. Indeed the author himself appears to be sloganising in claiming Popper taught that "we cannot learn anything about the actual universe even by experience" or in claiming that "Almost any drongo can do normal science."

It is my view that the gradual development of the scientific method is one of the great achievements of Western culture, and that Popper's encapsulation of it deserves still greater currency among scientists, technologists, economists, and especially

the intellectual slum-dwellers who stand to benefit most of all.

STEVEN R. WRAY

Loughborough

## Reply by D. C. Stove

MR JOHN R. SKOYLES sets out, at least, from some known facts: namely that Popper's philosophy is well-regarded by many non-philosophers, but by few philosophers. The former fact certainly calls for some special explanation, and my own attempts to explain it were given in my article. Mr Skoyles, however, thinks that the latter fact is even more in need of explanation, and he offers a theory of his own, about the psychology of philosophers, in order to explain it.

But this is carrying coals to Newcastle: there is no need whatever for Mr Skoyles's theory, or for any theory, on this matter. The poor opinion which many philosophers have of Karl Popper's philosophy is sufficiently explained by two facts which are notorious among professional philosophers.

The first fact is that Popper's philosophy entails that "*There are DNA molecules*" (and countless other scientific assertions of existence) is non-scientific; that "*The half-life of radium is 1600 years*" (and countless other scientific generalisations of a probabilistic kind) is non-scientific; that Newton's physics, Darwin's theory of evolution, and indeed any typical scientific theory, are non-scientific. Now could anyone devise, even if he set his mind deliberately to it, a conception of scientific statements which had consequences more ludicrously false than these?

The second fact is that Popper's philosophy entails that there can never be a good reason to believe any scientific theory whatever. Nor is this a conclusion which Popper arrives at with reluctance. On the contrary, he exults in it, and even dismisses, out of hand and quite generally, the very idea of rational belief. (See, for example, *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*, ed. Schilpp, p. 69, p. 1043.) Now, against the members of my profession, much may be said with plausibility, and almost as much with truth. But give philosophers their due, hardly any of them are outright lunatics. So if a person tells them (whether that person be Pyrrho, or Sextus Empiricus, or Hume, or Popper) that there is no good reason to believe that their blood circulates, no good reason to believe that nuclear explosions can damage your health, and so on—well then, philosophers very naturally and rationally treat the sayings of this person with diminishing respect.

As to the popularity of Popper's philosophy among scientists, Mr Steven R. Wray supposes this to be explained

in part by "the success of [Popper's] theory in distinguishing non-science from science." But there is no such success (see the last paragraph but one

above). So nothing can be explained by such "success."

D. C. STOVE

University of Sydney

## Churchill Gambit & the German Checkmate

*A Diplomat Looks Back—By SIR FRANK ROBERTS*



IN "Churchill's Last Gambit" [ENCOUNTER, April] Anthony Glees has made a stimulating and valuable contribution to the recent renewal, so far in rather muted tones, of discussion in Germany and elsewhere on the question of whether opportunities were missed in the early 1950s to promote the reunification of West and East Germany, before West Germany became integrated into the European Communities and NATO.

He is quite right in drawing attention and incidentally giving full weight to the misgivings which the Foreign Office felt about the substance and the timing of Churchill's enthusiasm for reopening the dialogue with the new leadership in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. I have no quarrel therefore with the general tenor of Anthony Glees' reconstruction of this chapter in the Churchill saga. But perhaps I may be allowed to add the following footnotes.

The general reader might be forgiven for supposing that in Anthony Glees' view it was only the officials in the Foreign Office who thought it their duty, like the Chiefs-of-Staff during the War, to prevent established and well-tried policies being swept away on yet another daring flight of Churchillian imagination. It is true that Churchill had temporarily taken charge of the Foreign Office; but we remained the servants of our only temporarily-incapacitated but highly-experienced Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, whose policies and caution we were reflecting with all the more conviction since his record in striving for good relations with the Soviet Union had been more consistent than that of Churchill and covered a longer period. We also had with us in the Foreign Office as Ministers over this period two of Eden's then closest friends and colleagues, Anthony Nutting and later Lord Salisbury, whom I accompanied to Washington in 1953 when he represented HMG after Churchill had joined Eden on the sick list.

On the timing of Churchill's proposed

initiative, our doubts related to the existence so soon after Stalin's death of any established new leadership with whom any useful deals could be struck.

The first candidate, Beria, was shot by his colleagues after and perhaps partly because his German policies were thought to have contributed to the riots in East Berlin and elsewhere in East Germany, news of which I took to Churchill.

The next, Malenkov, sat uneasily in the saddle until he was unseated by Khrushchev, who then had to defeat the old gang led by Molotov before at last achieving effective leadership himself many months and indeed years after Stalin's death. Meanwhile, throughout 1953 and at the Berlin Conference early in 1954 it was that old and "Stalinist" leader, Molotov, with whom we had to deal. Incidentally, the record suggests we should be very careful in dividing Soviet leaders into "moderates" and "hard liners." The previously tough Malenkov was regarded as a moderate when he became leader—to be ousted by a "tough" Khrushchev, who then became a "moderate"—a process repeated by Brezhnev.

SO IT WAS NOT ONLY traditional and no doubt sometimes excessive professional caution which led the Foreign Office to advise waiting for this power struggle to produce the real new leadership before embarking upon major new initiatives, more especially since the whole idea was strongly opposed by our major allies in Washington and Paris, as well as by Dr Adenauer in Bonn. After all, one of Eden's main qualities as a Foreign Minister was his sense of timing and he certainly had not felt that the timing was right immediately after Stalin's death. In the volume *Full Circle* of his memoirs, Eden writes that "although the death of Stalin brought some modification in the techniques of Moscow's foreign policy, its real character was unchanged. . . ." He also points out that the Soviet reply to Eisenhower's request for deeds in attestation of "the sincerity of peaceful purposes" yielded nothing.

On the substance, Mr Glees makes it quite clear that Churchill's gambit involved a complete reversal of the

policies then being pursued in common by the US, British, and French Governments, with the full agreement of the West German authorities, for restoring sovereignty to West Germany and integrating her into the political, economic and military structure of the Western democratic world. Great progress had been made since 1948, but final decisions had not been taken. For the French (and therefore in practice for all three Allies) West German membership of the proposed European Defence Community was a condition for the entry into force of the Bonn Agreements restoring West German sovereignty. The Soviet Government's main priority had been and remained to prevent this, just as in 1948 Stalin had instituted the Berlin blockade to frighten the Western allies (and also the Germans) away from setting up a separate West German state structure.

Already in 1952 Stalin himself had made proposals for German reunification, about which there was and still is some controversy. Some believe they were seriously meant and that an opportunity to achieve or at least move towards German reunification may have been lost. Others—and they included the three Western Governments and, of course, Adenauer and his colleagues—saw them as a tactical move with similar negative motivation to that behind Stalin's rougher actions in 1948.

Eden and his Foreign Office staff were, however, not opposed to German reunification. How could they be? Eden, when writing down what he described as "his own thoughts" on the German problem, set out as the most important Western requirement to reach agreement on the reunification of Germany as a free democratic state, while progress towards a German peace treaty was in his view the main positive Western objective. But such a reunited Germany could only safely be brought into existence by genuinely free elections (always refused, or evaded, by Molotov) and it should in his view have genuine freedom of choice in its policies. It was assumed that the choice would be for a Western orientation; but we, unlike the Russians, were prepared to leave this to the Germans. Eden also set down what he described as an important negative objective—that of frustrating Soviet delaying tactics which would have prevented the completion of the existing policies for West German independence accompanied by the establishment of the European Defence Community.

CHURCHILL'S PROPOSED INITIATIVE in 1953 would, at best, have put all this at risk and made an already delicate diplomatic exercise that much more

difficult. Or, at worst, it could have given the Russians the opportunity they were seeking to divide the Western Allies from the Germans and among themselves. Their aim was to evade free elections in Germany, as they had effectively got round them in Poland, and to concentrate discussion upon the setting up of a nominated all-German Government with no freedom to decide its own policies, and subjected to a régime of armed or disarmed neutrality. As Eden asked the House of Commons after the Berlin Conference of 1954,

“Was Germany to be neutral and disarmed? If so, who will keep Germany disarmed? Or is Germany to be neutral and armed? If so, who will keep Germany neutral?”

Anthony Gleeves concludes that Adenauer was the main winner in 1953-54, and he suggests at one point that Foreign Office officials may at that time have been “too” sympathetic to Adenauer. I think this charge, if such it is, needs to be put into the context of 1953-54 and indeed of the first post-War decade. On the personality issue it should not be forgotten that the post-War Labour Government from 1945-51, and in particular Ernest Bevin (under whom I served as closely as I did before and since under Eden and Churchill), would have preferred to see West Germany built up again under socialist leadership. But the difficult and uncooperative character of the SPD leader Kurt Schumacher, and his determination not to appear unduly influenced by the Occupation authorities, had contrasted unfavourably with Adenauer’s pragmatic common-sense approach. In any case, to quote a socialist, Paul-Henri Spaak, the only governments with which one could be officially concerned in our dealings were those in office, not “shadows in opposition.”

Nor should we forget that the West Germany of 1953 was a very much weaker and more vulnerable country, in a very much weaker Western Europe, than the economically powerful and politically stable Federal Republic of today within the European Community and NATO. As recently as 1950 the Korean War had faced the West with the possibility of a similar Communist push westwards against very little military resistance. The price not unnaturally demanded by the Americans for sending their troops back to Europe had been participation by the Germans in their own and the common defence, difficult though this was at that time for the French to accept. Neither West Germany alone nor a reunified Germany had the strength, economic, military or political, to be left safely on its own in the heart of Europe, to conduct a reliable policy of “neutrality”

between East and West. To all those then responsible for Western policies towards Germany, in Washington, Paris and in London, the risks in such a reversal of policies seemed—and I still think were—too great. This was also the view of Adenauer and his colleagues in Germany. One thing united East and West in their attitudes towards Germany at that time. For each side the bird-in-the-hand was much more important than two-in-the-bush.

Had Winston Churchill’s “last gambit” been adopted we might well have found that our bird had flown away without bringing us any closer to the two still in the bush.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND Mr Gleeves’ question why German leaders remain committed to the aim of a single German state seems valid.

The simple legal answer lies in the German “Basic Law”, which enjoins such a commitment upon them, and more generally in the very natural aspirations of the Germans in the Federal Republic for “national unity” in the sense that the Germans in the Democratic Republic should one day have the right and the opportunity to opt for reunification if that is their wish. As Chancellor Kohl has made clear in a recent statement in the *Bundestag*, this is not a demand for former (nor indeed for any specific) frontiers; and resort to force has been clearly and repeatedly renounced. Germany’s allies, who were once the Occupying powers, should not forget that they also are committed under the arrangements of 1954 to support this German aspiration for eventual reunification. I have not, however, met any German who thinks of such reunification in terms of the foreseeable future or indeed of any calculable time scale. But there has certainly been a revival of concern in Germany over “the German question” which was not evident during my time as British Ambassador in the mid-1960s, when indeed a song on German reunification in the Berlin political cabaret, *Die Stachelschweine*, ended with the refrain “In Bonn they are always talking about it, but never thinking about it. . . .”

ONE LAST FOOTNOTE on Churchill’s quoted remark about disclosing the facts of what happened at Yalta, and in particular his reference to President Roosevelt’s secret commitments at Yalta.

My recollection of Yalta, where I was handling the Polish and German questions, is that any secret commitments related mainly to the Far East. There was, at all events, no secret about Churchill’s views on the Polish

frontier, which is specifically mentioned by Mr Gleeves in this context. The British had since the Versailles settlement advocated the “Curzon line” for Poland’s eastern frontier and the Anglo-Polish Alliance of 1939 specifically did *not* cover Polish territorial integrity. Churchill had advocated compensation for a restored Poland at Germany’s expense in the west, but had wanted to leave open the future of Upper Silesia (the area between the Eastern and Western Neisse) and that of some districts around Stettin. But I cannot recall secret commitments to Stalin concerning Poland either by Churchill or Roosevelt.

FRANK ROBERTS

London

## Victorian Falklands

TODAY, ON THE anniversary of the start of the Falkland war, is a good occasion to tell you that I found Edward Pearce’s article on “The Far-Away Falklands” (ENCOUNTER, April) brilliant and to the point. It exposes the political-military folly of the Thatcher Government, without condoning in the least the irrational-emotional folly of the Galtieri Administration. Above all, it makes it clear how much an exercise in futility all this has been—and still is.

At the same time, I was amazed to see that there still exist views as condescending and Victorian as those expressed by Julian Amery. There is not much point in going into a detailed criticism of his thesis. Suffice it to say that if you start from the mistaken claim that “Britain is very much a South Atlantic power”, all other mistaken conclusions follow easily. Therefore, it is just as much a mistake to assume that Britain is the power called upon to guard the South Atlantic sea lanes, as it is a mistake to assume that the other South American nations welcome a British military presence in the Falklands. Above all, it is a colossal mistake to assume that, having an airfield and some port facilities in the Falklands in any way improves Britain’s claim, historically, economically or otherwise, on the Antarctic. That attitude, too, is Victorian. The game is no longer played that way.

PAUL HIRSCH

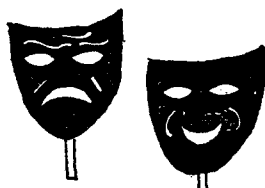
Buenos Aires

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
Thamesmouth Printing Group,  
Service House, Stock Road, Southend-on-Sea, Essex



# Life & Letters Today



*London*  
**"FRANGLAIS" (AGAIN):** *If the Royal Shakespeare Company are lost for words this morning, they probably feel it's a pity their mime artist was not similarly dumbstruck.*

Jean Louis Barrault's advertised programme of mime drew disbelief and heckles from a Barbican audience when he stopped miming to deliver an intolerably long speech in French without translation. A minor Gallic war broke out in the audience between the "au fait" faction and those who couldn't understand the language.

As cheers and jeers rang out, one satisfied customer yelled "Go and learn French!"

To the RSC's surprise not only did a sneak, from SW12, report them to the Advertising Standards Authority, but his complaint has been upheld.

"The advertisers stated that they had understood from the agent's information and Press notices of past performances that the appearance would be in the form of a mime performance. They were also expecting that it would be delivered in M. Barrault's 'inimitable Franglais', but this was changed at the last moment. . . ."

Clearly a case of words speaking louder than actions.

THE STANDARD

*London*  
**BATTY:** *Die Fledermaus* at the Royal Opera for Christmas and New Year is quickly becoming part of the annual ritual.

Seven years ago, when it was televised live around Europe and America, Gerhard Bronner's trendily polyglot reworking of the text seemed a clever idea. Even on Saturday, to judge from the number of expensive foreign accents in the stalls, the point of an EEC standardized version of the piece was not lost. But, to irredeemable Little Englanders like me, the experience of acres of dialogue lurching out of German into other languages in an English opera house with an almost entirely English-speaking cast was like, say, translating *The Mikado* into Japanese with flashes of Icelandic.

THE TIMES

*California*  
**VIVA INGLÉS!** *The citrus-growing town of Fillmore, California, has adopted a resolution stating that "the English language is the official language of the City of Fillmore," thus making it the first city in the United States to make such an endorsement of English.*

Five states—Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska and Virginia—have adopted similar resolutions, but their foreign-born or non-English-speaking populations are relatively small. Of Fillmore's 10,000 people, 51% are "Latinos", of Latin American origin.

The city council is dominated by "Anglos." Though the one-sentence resolution they passed has no provision for enforcement, City Councilmen said that people wanted to "vent their frustration about bilingual education."

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

*New York*  
**SPOCK-MARKED:** First published in 1945, Dr. Benjamin Spock's book "Baby and Child Care" remains the best-selling guide to child-rearing. But anxious parents thumbing through the 40th anniversary edition in the middle of the night for advice on colic or croup also get a disconcerting dose of politics.

The new text, written with a co-author, Michael B. Rothenberg, provides simple prescriptions on the subjects of diaper rash, chicken pox, and nuclear war. To allay childhood fears about the Arms Race, the pediatricians urge parents to support the Nuclear Freeze movement and candidates who endorse a Freeze.

NEW YORK TIMES

*London*  
**RELIGION FOR BEGINNERS:** *A fast-selling religious education textbook is to be toned down in its second edition after a Church of England canon complained that it encouraged 10- and 11-year-olds to dabble in the occult.*

"Beginning Religion", by Ray Bruce and Jane Warbank, is described by the publisher, Edward Arnold, as a "refreshing introduction to religious studies."

But Canon John Short, of Christ Church and St John's in New Malden, said yesterday that he was "appalled."

"Not only does it make no mention whatsoever of the existence of a revealed God, but it also alarmingly encourages children into the danger areas of the occult, voodoo and black magic."

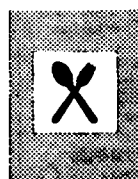
The book, which has sold 20,000 copies since it was published in 1982, concentrates on primitive and natural religion. It suggests as "things to do" for 10- and 11-year-olds:

- Finding out what happens in a seance;
- Making up "spells," recording them in "a spooky voice" and watching the effect of the recording on the rest of the class;
- Making a drawing of things used for predicting the future, and speculating on how they are used;
- Using a dictionary to find out what "voodoo" is;
- Thinking of reasons why "evil magic might work."

A companion volume deals with Christianity.

Mr Michael Soper, marketing director of Edward Arnold, said yesterday that another complaint received about "Beginning Religion" had come from the Inner London Education Authority, which was concerned about possible "racism" in the book—(black magic).

DAILY TELEGRAPH



*Amsterdam*  
**WORD PICTURES:** *Railway station indicators which convey messages by pictures rather than words are not clearly understood by many passengers. Dutch investigations have shown that about a third of the passengers did not readily understand the information intended.*

Of 12,000 passengers tested on 29 signs less than a third fully understood signs about Luggage and two-thirds were confused by the Buffet picture. Just under half the passengers did not recognise the Ticket Office sign and more than a third mislaid the Buses—represented by a picture of a bus.

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH