

they defeated the imperialist French, they have defeated imperialist America, against an unimaginably massive and concentrated expenditure of the sophisticated American luxury goods called military hardware. They have defeated America not only militarily but politically. Vietnam survives, wholesome though in pain, and North Vietnam and the NLF have won the concessions that the American state would never yield them. But America, with its trillion-dollar economy and no incursion of its sacred soil, is shaken and fragmented, threatened by a dictatorship of the military and Executive, closer to 1984 by its very unawareness of the closeness.

The middle-aged generals and the bright young advisers in the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations thought that the mechanical force required to defeat the Vietnamese could be calculated, as though spirit were a quantity or a thing. How characteristically American to write confident memos of Rolling Thunder and ratchet tactics—and how ignorant of the human spirit! The true reason for the American defeat in Indo-China is the despiritualization of Americans—especially of organization men like the Harvard intellectuals in government service, who are, as Mumford might say, only disguised as human beings. One could not expect those to understand spiritual resources.

If the Vietnamese are the vanguard of the human alliance against the American state and its popular majority, the American remnant are their less heroic associates, sharing with them one political purpose, one moral commitment, one theological end: to save mankind from America. Mankind will not be lost or denatured and God will not be dead while a communion of men resist the modern American state and ethos.

And perhaps the communion, continually increasing and vivifying a deathly society, may restore America to what it briefly promised to be—something godly in no sense that Richard Nixon or Billy Graham might understand, but as a political and social organism securing justice, freedom, and peace, and conserving life and humanity—‘the only true America’ that Thoreau imagined and that Jefferson may have conceived. That is the positive work of the American remnant.

Humanism and Ideology

Brian Wicker

I would like to regard this review of Professor James R. Flynn's book, *Humanism and Ideology*,¹ as a kind of appendix to Denys Turner's recent articles on 'Morality is Marxism'.² This is because of Flynn's

¹*Humanism and Ideology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Boston, 1973, 192 pp., £2.75.

²'Morality is Marxism', *New Blackfriars*, February and March, 1973.

thesis that we need to return to classical conceptions of morality if we are to be able to justify the social and political activities of those today who are agitating for social justice. Though it is far from being a Marxist book, Flynn's work is certainly in line with Turner's view of what Marxists ought to say about morality.

The first thing to say, quite simply, is that not only is Flynn's a good kind of book, but a good example of its kind. By a good kind of book—and I'm speaking of philosophical books primarily—I mean one which combines a passionate sense of its relevance to the urgent problems of life with scholarly fairness, precision of thought and a due recognition of the difficulties that stand in the way of proving its thesis. Flynn's book has these qualities. But it also has clarity, economy, and a sense of occasion. And it reads like the best kind of philosophical discussion—i.e. like a serious conversation with an opponent in the civilized atmosphere of a good pub.

The task to be undertaken is to show that a sound philosophical case can be made for adopting the ethic of a 'humane' humanism rather than any other. Professor Flynn sees the most obvious alternative to such humanism today in some variety of the Nietzschean ethic—that is to say, an ethic which values outstanding personal achievement, the thrill of power and competitive success. He wants to prove that, over against the Nietzschean ethic, a humane humanism can be shown to be best for all mankind and is thus worthy of regard not only by those who already espouse it but also by those who don't. For he holds not only that post-Kantian ethical scepticism is philosophically inadequate but that many of the best-intentioned people today are profoundly worried by the implications of the prevailing post-Kantian climate of relativism and subjectivism. 'Many of America's best young people, many of those agitating and fighting and dying in the struggle for social justice . . . feel terribly threatened by the thought of their humane ideals standing mute before a non-humane opponent' (p. 50). It is for this reason that it is important to be able to provide impregnable arguments in favour of humane ideals—arguments that should convince the honest waverer if not the hardened opponent.

A short review can hardly encompass all the arguments that Professor Flynn puts forward, or indicate the ingenuity he displays in countering objections. I can only report his conclusions and then suggest one further conclusion of my own. On page 117 the thesis of the whole book is summarized as follows:

- (1) *There is an optimum road of human development in eudemonic terms, a way of life that perfects man in terms of human fulfilment or happiness. . . .*
- (2) *Men possess a common human nature in potentia, that is, all men at birth are capable of being moulded by roughly the same spectrum of ways of life, which spectrum includes the perfecting life,*

- (3) *that properly developed men can have empathy with other men, sufficient empathy to know that the perfecting life is more fulfilling than other ways of life.*'

In other words, it is possible to show that a life dedicated to a humane love of others and to fulfilling work for oneself (the essentials of Flynn's humane humanism) is worthy of regard, not just by those who already accept it, but by anyone who is able honestly to confront the argument for it. Therefore an appeal to adopt such an ethic is not partisan in the way that all the various kinds of Nietzschean appeal are inevitably partisan. The humane humanist can therefore work in the confidence that his ethic is not just the product of his own taste, upbringing or environment but is truly good for mankind even though many, or most, people don't think so. The young agitator struggling for a humane kind of social justice need not be troubled by the thought that his ideals stand mute before his opponents.

The basis of the argument is Aristotelian. There is a state analogous to health which is good for all men, which affords a sense of psychic well-being (happiness). Not only do modern anthropology and post-Freudian psychology bear this out, they extend it from individuals to whole cultures. They also tend to show that nobody is so dominated by his genes or his environment that he *can't* accept the humane ideal (though it is possible that a man can become personally so fixed in his outlook that we can't, in practice, expect him to change his views). However, there is an important limitation to be noted in the Aristotelian argument. It is only possible to provide a non-partisan case for humane ideals in preference to non-humane ones as long as human perfection is seen in *eudemonic* terms. That is to say it is possible to justify the thesis that the adoption of humane ideals leads all men to *happiness*; but it is not possible to justify completely the pursuit of *moral*, as distinct from *eudemonic*, goodness. In other words, the ideals and behaviour of the pursuer of happiness can be given a non-partisan justification, but not (unfortunately) the ideals and behaviour of the 'moral hero'—that is, the man who sees it as his duty to sacrifice his own happiness for some greater good. Yet Professor Flynn admits that it is the moral hero who elicits our greatest admiration. (Gandhi is the obvious example that springs to his mind.) It would be nice, therefore, if one could provide a non-partisan justification for moral heroism as well as for the pursuit of happiness. Unfortunately, one can't and we have to put up with a 'half-solution' to the fundamental problem.

Now it is here that I feel the chief weakness of the book lies. For one thing, the young agitator for social justice himself needs a justification for moral heroism—since, in today's world, it is often heroism that is called for. I doubt if Professor Flynn's 'half-solution' will help him much when he is confronted by Powell's supporters in the street, though it would probably help him when he is arguing with Powell himself in the TV studio. After all, Powell is the sort of

man who respects (and likes) an argument. But Powell's supporters are a different matter: to continue to feel the necessary *esprit de corps* when being hounded by them, one would need to feel rationally justified that the sacrifice of one's own happiness was somehow good for mankind—not just for oneself. Now, admittedly, as Flynn says, a certain kind of justification is available even here. The self-sacrificial hero can feel a certain happiness himself in the fact that he is suffering for the sake of other people's happiness. But this does not really *justify* the sacrifice of his own fulfilment. Furthermore, one of the basic features of the Aristotelian ethic is that it is vulnerable to factual refutation. That is to say, the thesis that a humane way of life is good for mankind is a proposition that could, in theory, be proved wrong by anthropological, psychological or other evidence to the contrary. Of course the Aristotelian hero pins his faith on the evidence being on his side, and has good reason for this 'faith': but he nevertheless has to admit that it could be mistaken. And if he is mistaken, how then can moral heroism be justified? Yet we still tend to feel that self-sacrificial moral heroism is justified even when apparently faced by such alleged evidence.

Now it is at this point that another position of Flynn's seems to me very relevant. For while he accepts the humane theory of what is good for mankind, he rejects the (Aristotelian) metaphysical foundations of that theory, believing that other ways now exist of supporting it. Yet he also admits that at least one element in the argument would benefit from a metaphysical perspective. For it is essential to the whole thesis that *all* men are capable of benefiting more from adopting a humane ethic than from a Nietzschean one. Yet some men seem to be so fixed in their attitudes that it is very hard to see how *they* could be more fulfilled by becoming humane than by staying as they are. The 'Nietzschean of forty' who gets a great deal of fulfilment from his thrill of power or competitive success, and in whom the capacities for other kinds of fulfilment have atrophied, may well be so fixed in his ways that it is impossible to imagine him being better off, in eudemonic terms, through changing his outlook. It is at this juncture that a (Christian) metaphysical perspective would help, Flynn says, by showing that there is never any point at which a man is so fixed that he cannot benefit from being changed. For one thing, the benefits of changing are not to be judged solely in terms of benefits accruing to the man in this life—there is a life after death to be taken into account, and in that perspective it might be well the case that changing would be worthwhile even in purely eudemonic terms. For another, the grace of God is always capable of overcoming that fixity of spirit that naturally tends to overcome us as we grow older. Thus, in a Christian metaphysical perspective, there is a non-partisan case for humaneness even in the case of the 'Nietzschean of forty'.

This being so, it seems pertinent to ask why Professor Flynn rejects

such a perspective. His answer is surely unsatisfactory. He simply says that such a metaphysical perspective is no longer widely believed. But this is a poor answer for a thinker who has so rigorously faced all the other awkward consequences of his own position. For if it is possible that a Christian perspective might provide a justification for moral heroism, a justification which Flynn admits it would be preferable to be able to provide, then he ought seriously to discuss whether there is any possibility that such a perspective might be true. He offers no argument to show it *can't* be true, and his Aristotelianism can hardly be inconsistent with it *prima facie*, given the fact that one of the strongest traditions within the Christian perspective—that of Aquinas—is explicitly built on Aristotelian foundations. (Aquinas, incidentally, is never once alluded to throughout.)

There seem to me to be several ways (not necessarily alternatives) in which a Christian Aristotelianism might help to justify moral heroism in the way Professor Flynn thinks desirable. One is to say that since human fulfilment is ultimately a matter of reaching a heaven of perfect happiness, and avoiding the hellish punishment of losing it, the sacrifice of happiness here and now is justified in the long run even on eudemonic terms. Thus, if it is a fact that everyone is ultimately faced by such alternatives, then there is a non-partisan justification for heroic sacrifice of happiness in the here and now. But this argument is not quite good enough. For a self-sacrifice that is designed simply to enable me to reach heaven and avoid hell is not quite moral heroism in the required sense. It doesn't account for the praise we give to such figures as Charles Peguy, for example. Moral heroism involves the sacrifice of one's own happiness *for others*. Furthermore, its special awkwardness for Flynn arises from the fact that true moral heroism seems to imply that the heroic example of self-sacrifice is one we should all follow, and that it is only our own blindness or wickedness that prevents us from seeing this fact and acting on it. The moral hero's implicit claim is that it would be best for everyone if everyone became a moral hero. 'Take up your cross and follow me' is addressed to everybody, not just to some élite whose self-sacrifices are supposed to be seen as symbolic actions designed simply to remind the rest of us of ultimate alternatives that we are likely otherwise to forget. This is why the symbolic, pedagogic role of moral heroism is not an adequate answer to the problem. Nevertheless, there is a further possibility: namely that, as a matter of observable fact, there is a kind of obstacle lying in the way of everyone's ultimate happiness (the Christian word for it is sin) and that we need to sacrifice our immediate fulfilments in order to overcome this obstacle that lies in the way of our ultimate fulfilment. But such self-sacrifice is merely instrumental in that case: and it is hardly 'heroic' in the appropriate sense, even though it is the kind of behaviour that has often been referred to as 'heroic virtue'.

A Christian Aristotelianism which would give a non-partisan justification of moral heroism would, I think, have to contain elements of all these arguments. But it would have to say something more still. We all know, of course, that there is such a thing as apparent as distinct from true happiness, or eudemonic goodness. And there are forms of behaviour and ways of life which *appear* to conduce to such happiness but which in reality, when all things are taken into account, fail to do so. And similarly there is such a thing as *apparent* self-sacrifice which has to be distinguished from true or whole-hearted self-sacrifice. Now, it is of the utmost consequence both to the secular humanist and to the Christian to be able to distinguish between the false and the true; and of course (since this is a necessary condition for being able to do so) to be in a position to take *all* relevant things into account—which *may*, I would insist, include our happiness in a life that goes beyond life as we know it. However, when all this is said, there remains a difference between Flynn's Aristotelian humanism of the humane man and that of the Christian. This is that—as Flynn so painfully recognizes with regret—from the standpoint of a non-metaphysical Aristotelianism, even *genuine* fulfilment of self, or eudemonic goodness is still quite distinct from, indeed separated by a unbridgeable gulf from, *genuine* self-sacrificial moral heroism. There is a real conflict of ethical options here, such that we cannot suppose that a non-partisan justification of the one will even begin to tend to justify the other. But the point of the Christian perspective is that it asserts that the gulf has *in fact* been bridged already. In Christ perfect self-sacrifice and perfect self-fulfilment have, in fact, co-incided. Since humanly speaking this co-incidence was impossible (though not *logically* impossible of course) it had to be achieved by somebody who was more than human. And since a non-partisan justification that is worth anything has conceivably to be vulnerable to refutation by the facts, the act by which the co-incidence was achieved had to be an act which was somehow in the realm of *facts*. The self-sacrificial death and self-fulfilling resurrection of Christ was that act and that fact. And furthermore, it not only achieved the co-incidence on a single occasion, and for a single moment: it actually transformed the whole subsequent situation, so that, despite all appearances, there is now no longer for *us* any inevitable gulf between genuine self-fulfilling happiness, or eudemonic goodness and genuinely self-sacrificial moral heroism. Needless to say, outwardly speaking nothing appears to have changed: the dilemma of choosing between self-sacrifice and self-fulfilment seems just as problematic as ever. But, if Christianity is true, then this problem is no longer insoluble: it is only very very difficult. That is to say, it is now simply the problem of discovering what genuine, as distinct from spurious self-sacrifice, and what genuine as distinct from spurious self-fulfilment, means in practice. Once this discovery has been made, Christianity assures us—and the

task will no doubt take a lifetime—there is no longer any gulf remaining to be bridged: for Christ has already bridged it and, in doing so, has enabled us to walk across the bridge he has made.

It seems to me that by extending Flynn's Aristotelian thesis in this way it is possible to provide a non-partisan justification both for eudemonic and for moral goodness; that is both for the idea of a humane humanism and for the ideal of self-sacrifice. In short, Aquinas, building on Aristotle and on Christianity, is able to do something that Aristotle alone cannot do. And what such a Christianity has done is truly non-partisan in Flynn's sense (as long as it is not cut off, in the style of much modern Christian revisionism, from contact with the empirical). But even this is still not enough. What we continue to need is an empirical study of the state of modern society such that we can tell what kind of behaviour and what kind of society is required for the Christian bridge between self-fulfilment and self-sacrifice to be kept up and effectively used. And this is where Marx comes in, as Denys Turner rightly points out. (I should point out that Flynn does see that Marx is an Aristotelian kind of thinker, but he fails to follow up this insight.) For the Marxist analysis, at its best, tells us what kind of self-sacrifice is needed, and what—in outline at any rate—are the criteria we should use to distinguish true from spurious self-sacrifices. But it also tells us what kind of society we need in order to be able to enjoy genuine as distinct from spurious forms of happiness. Hence I conclude, contrary to what most people, whether Christians, Marxists or humane humanists, seem to think that the right answer to the problems posed by contemporary moral and political agonies is a proper blend of the best things in Aristotle, Aquinas and Marx. In short, not only is a Marxist, Thomist, Christian and humane humanism possible: it is altogether necessary.