

Correspondence

American Jews, Israel & Moral Discourse

Philadelphia, Pa.

Dear Sir: Balfour Brickner and David Little are both reasonable men, and therein lies the difficulty of their articles (Brickner's "American Jews, Israel and Public Policy," and Little's "Moral Discourse Under Fire: The Example of the Middle East," both in the January issue of *Worldview*). Brickner is reasonable, beginning with a sure grasp of the Law and history. Little is reasonable, displaying that rage for universal truths—good for all times and places—so characteristic of university graduates since the Enlightenment.

Among those who live in history, Rabbi Brickner would seem to have the better of the argument. American Jews *have been* in the forefront of the fight for equal justice for black citizens. Israel *has* risked much in opposing Rhodesian and South African apartheid. Muslim fanatics *are* responsible for the slaughter of over one-half million villagers in the southern Sudan, many of them Christians (a matter on which the church mission boards are curiously silent!). Scared Jews *have* backed Procaccino in New York and Yorty in Los Angeles, and—it might now be added—they elected Rizzo in Philadelphia. But his entire reasonable discourse, logical and accurate as it is, seems to me the statement of a decent man who finds the raw irrationality and lawlessness of politics simply incredible.

This quotation seems to me to epitomize the problem: "Twenty years after the nightmare of McCarthyism, is it possible that there are no politically bold forces in the Christian community or among secular humanists to resist effectively the slander of the dealers in hate and fear? If this is our situation, then far more than the security of

American Jews is in jeopardy. At stake may be the soul of America." The soul of America is at stake, and there is no effective resistance among the Christians or secular humanists. Agnew can help the fascist colonels of Greece shore up their precarious rule, ignoring the pleas of over 160 Greek democrats. Nixon's natural affinity for military jackboots can lead him to try to assist a ruthless dictator in Pakistan, sacrificing—if he could—Bangla Desh and—as he did—American honor and prestige in the Indian subcontinent. Senator Eastland can use his powerful chairmanship of the Senate Judiciary Committee to suppress evidence and put a man who is probably a fascist (not a conservative!) on the Supreme Court. In none of these matters, and many others, have the churches or academics shown themselves any better able to resist the slide toward a police state than their German equivalents in 1933-34.

Dr. Little's reasonableness is of another order, essentially speculative. The clue is his deference to Kant's "test of universalizability." I would be grateful for his explanation of how the event of God's gift of the Law on Mount Sinai, or His covenant with Abraham, or what the Christians claim to have happened on Golgotha, can be universalized in that sense! Dr. Little not only rejects Holy History: he rejects historical facts when they don't fit his speculations.

The Arabs were not forced out of the Holy Land. *Some of them* bet on the wrong side during the attack on Israel in 1948, and the settlement of their claims now awaits the willingness of the Arab League to sit down at the table and make peace. *Some of them* rejected the appeals of Cairo and Amman radios and

stayed, and they now enjoy the benefits of citizenship in a modern nation. As sympathetic as we may feel toward Palestinian refugees, and especially toward their children, we cannot help but contrast the vile politics the Arab governments have made of their lot with the West German resettlement and integration of 14,600,000 East Germans (most of them former Nazis) in the same period. Dr. Little's entire discussion ignores two basic facts: (a) "the Arabs" include some 400,000 Israeli citizens, to whose rights and conditions he is simply blind; (b) "the Arabs" suffer grievously outside Israel under bellicose and one-party dictatorships whose claim to speak for them is at least suspect.

Dr. Little's real direction comes at the end: "an Israel (though one reduced in size)." Israel accepted severe reduction in size in 1948 in what turned out to be a fruitless desire for peace with her neighbors. Today she has no intention of sacrificing her security to the idle speculations of world moralists: she doubtless remembers the fate of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Katanga, Biafra, and she certainly remembers the complicity of the "Christian" and Muslim worlds in the destruction of European Jewry.

Dr. Little's Procrustean bed won't fit this case. But that should not disturb him, since in a theoretical exercise one try is as good as another. While the big powers (Russia, the U.S.A., Britain and France) vie with each other to turn back the pages of history and achieve the role of privileged broker of Arab oil (not that the Arab peoples will get the benefits!), the academician can move over to another place and time where the test-case will perhaps work out better.

Franklin H. Littell
*President, Christians
Concerned for Israel*

David Little responds:

In responding to my essay, Professor Littell has put his finger on one critical issue, though not as usefully

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as he might. The issue concerns the status in moral discussion of "appeals of special privilege," whether these appeals are grounded in a religious belief in special revelation, or in an ideological belief in some form of "manifest destiny." Professor Littell accuses me of "rejecting Holy History" and of illicitly identifying what he apparently regards as a special set of prescriptions revealed by God on Mount Sinai, or revealed in the life and death of Jesus, with some "universal," rational morality. In doing that, I am, he believes, guilty of failing to give appeals of special privilege their due.

But what is their due? If there is a clear answer to that question, Professor Littell does not begin to supply it. I do not have a fixed position on this question—I believe it needs extensive scrutiny. But I do have a number of doubts about any position that suggests that policies based on appeals of special privilege ought to be considered morally binding by those not in the "privileged" position. It is not hard to think of historical examples of such appeals which most people, including, I imagine, Professor Littell, would find at least morally questionable; for instance, Cromwell's Irish campaign, or United States policies based on a vision of "the white man's burden," and the like.

Now the question is, are *some*, though not necessarily all, of the Zionist arguments in favor of a Jewish state in Israel based on similar appeals of special privilege, as I have specified the term? I believe the answer is yes, and the first quotation from former Prime Minister Ben-Gurion (p. 35) would count, I believe, as a rather clear example. I see no reason to regard Ben-Gurion's assertion as any less morally dubious than, say, justifications by American leaders of the late nineteenth century for a policy of American expansionism. (In order that I may not be

accused of applying to others standards I refuse to apply to my own tradition, I emphasize that many of these leaders were Protestant Christians who employed specifically Christian appeals to justify "the right" of American expansion.)

However, as I point out in the article, Zionists have not rested their case exclusively on appeals to special privilege. They have argued "from need," and thus have invoked the facts of Jewish persecution. But this argument is an appeal to "universal" moral standards, in the sense that it is an appeal to the "basic justification of *all human demands . . .*," as Jabotinsky so eloquently puts it (p. 35). During World War II and immediately thereafter, it was *this* appeal that made moral sense to people and provided widespread justification for the development of Israel. Whether this argument from need suffices to outweigh Arab claims or not requires careful consideration. (For some peculiar reason, the editors excised my discussion of this crucial matter, and I cannot go into it now.) But the main point is that a discussion of these arguments properly goes on in terms of what is justifiable from the point of view of "all human demands," rather than from the point of view of claims of special privilege, such as I mentioned. In short, this aspect of the discussion properly involves something approaching "universal" moral standards. Accordingly, it conforms to my specification of the word "moral."

As a matter of fact, Professor Littell himself presupposes my specifications of "moral" when he goes on to claim that the Arabs "were not forced out of the Holy Land." The factual assumption is that, for one reason or another, many Arabs *consented* to leave, while the rest happily stayed on. Consequently, according to Littell's implied argument, the Israelis cannot be held morally blameworthy, as they did not in fact disregard the rights of the Arabs. I wish to emphasize that the debate between Professor Littell and me at this point is *not* over the legitimacy of universal standards of morality; Professor Littell has apparently al-

ready assumed something akin to them in his comments. The debate at this point is over the empirical question as to whether the facts about the Arab exodus and the present treatment of the Arabs is as Professor Littell states. On complex empirical matters, such as the recent history of the Middle East, one needs always to be open to new evidence. But surely Professor Littell is aware that, by now, allegations regarding a voluntary Arab exodus are extremely controversial. In the light of rather carefully documented studies like Erskine Childers' "The Other Exodus," we will now need arguments and not assertions.

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THIS SPACE CONTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLISHER

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY.



If something's going wrong,
it'll tell you.

1. Change in bowel or bladder habits.
2. A sore that does not heal.
3. Unusual bleeding or discharge.
4. Thickening or lump in breast or elsewhere.
5. Indigestion or difficulty in swallowing.
6. Obvious change in wart or mole.
7. Nagging cough or hoarseness.

If you have a warning signal,
see your doctor. If it's a
false alarm, he'll tell you.
If it isn't, you can give him
time to help. Don't be afraid.
It's what you don't know
that can hurt you.

✱ American Cancer Society

Military Honor

Brooklyn, N.Y.

Dear Sir: Wilson Carey McWilliams and Henry Plotkin are no doubt right in saying that, so long as a nation has a military, some notion of honor must be cultivated ("Military Honor After Mylai," January, 1972). Their notion of honor, however, seems peculiarly tied to questions of expediency rather than of truth. It may be that for every Calley convicted there must be a hero rewarded. But how does it follow that "for those of us who have acted dishonorably—the draft dodger and the deserter—there must be penalties and opprobrium, not laudatory amnesty?"

Those of us who work in the reform wing of the Democratic Party are eager to raise the issue of amnesty in the 1972 campaign; we do not care particularly if the amnesty be "laudatory," just so long as it is unconditional and effective. Honor, contrary to McWilliams and Plotkin, is not some socially contrived expediency but emerges from objective truth. If indeed the objective truth is that the war in Indochina was at least a tragic error, if not an outrage of morality, honor should be accorded those who perceived this truth, even if somewhat prematurely.

McWilliams and Plotkin, like too many people in our society, seem to attach honor to a combination of suffering and *machismo*. Those who have borne the burden are to be honored, they argue, as are those who demonstrated courage. As for suffering, have not thousands of young men "risked injury" by being exiled for long periods of time from family, friends, country and career? As for *machismo*, is not this a rather dated (to say nothing of male chauvinistic) notion of what comprises manhood?

Finally, however, neither the degree of suffering nor of *machismo* is the measure of honor. The question is one of truth and faithfulness to its perception. The truth is, it seems to me and many others, that thousands of young men acted upon their judgment before that judgment was fashionable, and were in a position

where their protest could not be easily expressed by writing an article or attending a few peace rallies. They have paid and are paying the price for their convictions. It is time for us to welcome them back with gratitude for their witness; yes, with honor.

Steve Price

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The Authors respond:

Machismo is Mr. Price's word, not ours; it is, as we read his letter, also his problem. But a more serious problem is the fact that Mr. Price wants to have it too many ways.

He tells us that he and his fellows "do not particularly care if the amnesty be 'laudatory,' just so long as it is unconditional and effective." Suppose the amnesty, unconditionally and effectively, forgave those who, from youth and inexperience, acted in an immoral way? Would he find that acceptable? How would that square with his desire to receive the draft dodgers and deserters "with gratitude for their witness, yes, with honor"?

He finds it troubling that we regard suffering for one's beliefs as a mark of honor, yet he hastens to assure us that the persons in question did suffer and that they did so before it was "fashionable" to do so.

He also asserts that honor consists in "truth and faithfulness to its perception." If those he lauds were, in fact, right in their perception and conduct, in what sense did they act "prematurely" except in acting before Mr. Price decided that they were correct?

But the more basic problem is that honor is a matter of *conduct*, not of perception. Many Germans, after all, saw correctly and acted basely. Consequently, the "tragic error" or "outrage to morality" in Vietnam will not cover every sin. There were many possible responses to that perception: to resist violently or non-violently within the United States, to join the

N.L.F. or the armed forces of North Vietnam, to shelter under a legal exemption or—when called—to beat it for the border. Are all of these actions equally honorable? Does the good end, for Mr. Price, hallow every means?

Mr. Price defines honor in terms of the relationship between an individual and what he is pleased to call "the objective truth." Fidelity enters only in relation to this individual perception. And that is a fair definition of *machismo*. Keeping faith with one's "family, friends, country" (let us leave "career" aside) is also a part of honor, because the fidelity of honor acknowledges, as part of the "objective truth," the debt one owes and one's dependence on one's kinsmen, brothers and fellow citizens. The intent of those who sought exile has been noble; their conduct was indistinguishable from that of cravens. (Or does Mr. Price contend that *all* those who dodged the draft were moved by moral outrage at the war?) As such, it failed, as the witness of a David Harris did not, to disturb the moral certainty of Americans at large. As a citizen, one has obligations to teach one's fellows to do right as one sees it—and certainly performing that function is a condition of honor.

Honor is a matter of social expediency, though it is also much more. It involves what we as a people wish to praise and encourage, and what we wish to discourage and blame. It is, of course, the easy—and fashionable—course to forgive our deserters and voluntary exiles. To do otherwise would require us to have convictions, about our own duties and dependences as well as those of others, and liberalism finds forgiveness easier than faith. Small wonder that Nietzsche toyed with the notion that if God is dead, it is because modern philosophy smothered Him with His compassion. Perhaps the only true utterance of Roscoe Conkling was his remark, which we commend to Mr. Price, that when Dr. Johnson called patriotism the "last refuge of a scoundrel," he was unaware of the possibilities inherent in the term "reform."