
PRESS & TELEVISION

News Tonight," the authors found that "Vremia" devoted a much larger percentage of its stories to international coverage than did its American counterpart. In particular, "Vremia" focused "on the adversary": 17.6 percent of "Vremia" stories involved the U.S. and its NATO allies, whereas only 5.1 percent of ABC "World News Tonight" stories covered the USSR and Warsaw Pact countries.

The "mission" of Soviet television as an "overt and centrally directed socializer" shapes not only the agenda of news, but also the way in which it is presented. In coverage of student demonstrations in South Korea, analyzed in an intensive one-week study, for example, "Vremia" showed film of melees and tear gas, emphasizing the U.S. role as "puppet master" behind the "South Korean dictatorship." Coverage of terrorist bombings in Paris also depicted scenes of the chaos, while offering no possible explanation for the incidents.

"Vremia" stresses "insecurity in the West and [Western] fear of terrorism as an excuse to bolster repressive tendencies." And it is no different from other Soviet mass media, which use, among other things, "non-Soviet sources to legitimate Soviet positions."

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Doubts About Skeptics

"The Doubting of Skepticism" by George Watson, in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* (Autumn 1987), One West Range, Charlottesville, Va. 22903.

Skepticism, argues Watson, a fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, is the received wisdom of our time. From the clergyman who considers differences between right and wrong merely a matter of personal choice, to the feminists who condemn "male-dominated" science, the notion that it is impossible to objectively observe or judge life, Watson contends, is "the prevailing orthodoxy of the West."

Yet these skeptics, whose only firm opinion is that all values must be doubted, have forgotten a lesson taught by Scottish philosopher David Hume over two centuries ago. A true skeptic, Hume wrote in his *Treatise on Human Nature* (1739-40), "will be diffident of his philosophical doubts as well as of his philosophical convictions."

Unquestioning skepticism, Watson believes, leads its proponents to reduce philosophical opponents to having beliefs "conditioned" by their gender, race, or religion. But classifying something—calling Felix Mendelssohn's music "Jewish," say, or Victorian fiction "bourgeois"—is not the same as determining whether that object is good or bad. Moreover, nearly all advocates of "conditioning" assume that they are exempt from processes they assign to others. No Marxist argues that Marx was "conditioned" into writing *Das Kapital* (1867).

Since the 1960s, most skeptics know that there are limits to their skepticism. While some anthropologists, for example, still maintain that it is impossible to judge the actions of other civilizations or other ethical

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systems, no one argues that condemnation of Soviet or Nazi concentration camps is simply a matter of "conditioning." Watson contends that objectivity does not mean that answers to questions are known, but rather that the tools which answer unanswered questions are sound. Before Neptune was discovered, astronomers did not *know* that a new planet existed, but made an objective judgment that a new planet could well exist. Similarly, critics prepared to make objective judgments do not *know* what these judgments will be in advance, but are certain the logical tools used to conduct their inquiries are reliable.

Philosophers have begun to question skepticism in recent years, with such works as Sir Peter Strawson's *Skepticism and Naturalism* (1985). Watson hopes the doubting of skepticism continues. "Such matters," he stresses, "need to be reopened."

Liberalism's End?

"The Liberal Ethic and the Spirit of Protestantism" by Richard Fox, in *The Center Magazine*, (Sept.-Oct. 1987), P.O. Box 4068, Santa Barbara, Calif. 93140.

American liberalism, argues Fox, a historian at Reed College, has traditionally found allies among such "celebrated religious spokesmen" as Martin Luther King, Jr. But in the 1980s, while leaders in other professions (actors, psychologists, and even astronomers) support the liberal agenda, there is no theologian "to link liberal politics to spiritual meaning or transcendent purpose."

Why did liberal theology decline? Fox traces the seeds of decay to the teachings of Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971).

In *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), Niebuhr maintained that the progressive liberal theology of his time was naively utopian. Communal striving toward the New Jerusalem was not possible, because the fragmentation of America into special interest groups meant that a national consensus (or, perhaps, a moral consensus) could not be achieved. Christians, Niebuhr taught, should try to improve the world by somehow "inject[ing] a tension into secular society," urging secular men to look beyond amoral efficiency toward the transcendence of God and the manifest need for social justice.

Niebuhr did not explicitly state how his goals were to be achieved. Moreover, Fox argues, by belittling "the quest for communal fellowship," Niebuhr underestimated the ability of ordinary people to determine the nature and purpose of a virtuous life. Because of these flaws, Niebuhr's "Christian realism," while a major influence on such 1950s liberals as Adlai Stevenson and Hubert Humphrey, faded after Niebuhr's retirement into the secular *Realpolitik* of the Kennedy administration.

Two recent books attempt to continue Niebuhr's search for a "public theology." In *The Naked Public Square* (1984), Richard Neuhaus argues that a moral consensus can be achieved if Americans ignore the views of elites and return to Biblical virtues. In *Habits of the Heart* (1985), Robert Bellah urges Americans to return to the republican vision of working with others in common tasks.