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says, would be a "theo-democracy." God's word is law and therefore the only legitimate basis for state action. But the correct interpretation of God's law is determined through consultation (*shura*) and consensus (*ijma*) among Islamic scholars. Knowledge of the Koran is the only requirement for a believer to participate in an Islamic government. *Shura* does not bar direct and indirect elections for the head of state and legislative assembly. The authority of the state, however, lies in the community of Muslim faithful; the Islamic faith thereby rejects the establishment of an elite ruling class or a dictatorship.

Because Muslims are combating the erosion of their faith, the *jihād* (holy war) is considered defensive in nature. Thus the *mujahideen* (warriors in the way of God) in Afghanistan, while they may take the offensive against Soviet forces, have been "involved in a wholly defensive war."

The primary goal of today's Muslim leaders is to cleanse their society of foreign influence and help Muslims "rediscover and re-embrace their Islamic faith." Far from being reactionary, says Saikal, this resurgence offers a God-centered alternative to both Western liberal democracy and Marxism-Leninism.

An End to 'Progress'?

"The Columbus Argument" by David Stove, in *Commentary* (Dec. 1987), 165 East 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

In his book *On Liberty* (1859), English philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) defended innovation with the following argument. Pioneers, Mill taught, have always been denounced for their new ideas. But what progress humanity has made has come from individuals who have created new principles of belief or behavior. Therefore innovators should not only be tolerated, they should be welcomed.

Since Mill's day, says Stove, a philosopher at the University of Sydney, Australia, this anticonservative thesis (which he calls the "They All Laughed at Christopher Columbus Argument") has become one of the commonplaces of our time, routinely cited by revolutionaries seeking to overturn the existing social or political order. Stove contends that the natural consequence of "the Columbus argument" is to believe that *all* new ideas *must* be tolerated, which "has brought us to the uncontrollable violence and irrationality of life" in contemporary Western societies.

The Columbus argument fails, the author maintains, because it rests on what Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) called "a one-sided diet of examples." Not every advance is good; evil dictators and butchers (Lenin, Pol Pot, Robespierre) have been as innovative in their crimes as Copernicus or Galileo were beneficial in their science.

Moreover, Stove argues, "innovators-for-the-worse" *must* always outnumber those who better society. Consider a television set, with thousands of intricate parts. Most people, lacking the knowledge needed to make repairs, would worsen rather than strengthen the quality of the set if they attempted to change it. Human societies "are incomparably more complex" than television sets—so intricate that "no one understands them

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well enough to repair or improve them.” Because a culture is so fragile, Stove believes, the odds against would-be “society repairmen” improving life are “billions-to-one.”

Mill’s pro-innovation argument is so bad that “it could hardly have deceived a child of ten.” Yet Mill’s flawed idea swept the world, and has done more “than anything else to bring about the present internal dissolution” of the West. The history of the Columbus argument, the author concludes, refutes the notion that “philosophers, and cheap tricks of argument, do not matter.”

The Blame Game

“The Flight From Blame” by Mary Midgley, in *Philosophy* (July 1987), Cambridge Univ. Press, 32 East 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

English philosopher G. E. Moore (1873–1958) was acclaimed by most British intellectuals when his major work, *Principia Ethica*, was published in 1903. But the Fabian socialist Beatrice Webb was an exception. The book, she wrote in a letter, was “a metaphysical justification for doing what you like and what other people disapprove of.” Its effect on young men was “to disintegrate their intellects and characters.”

Midgley, a philosopher formerly with the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in England, believes Moore’s legacy to be darker than even Webb predicted. Moore’s influence, she contends, led to the notion that people



Psychologist B. F. Skinner, shown here in a 1933 photograph. In such works as Beyond Freedom and Dignity (1971) and the novel Walden Two (1948), Skinner tried to uncover scientific laws that could predict human behavior and conduct.