

Ethics in our movement?



March 5
Ronald:

Do you think there is an opening-- via the world-wide communications network-- to begin a conversation about a new ethics, that includes (of course) ethics of economics, which could lead to the foundation we need upon which to build a new economics and therefore politics... etc. etc.

Robin

March 5
Robin,

I don't know if there is an opening to begin a conversation such as you describe, but I am very much for starting such a conversation, and in explicitly ethical/moral terms. I see it as building and improving upon existing Judeo-Christian ethics, among other things, making ethics fully applicable in the here and now and not just in the after-life. Thus, if we believe that all people are of equal worth (equal in the eyes of God), then that means it is wrong/evil for the disparities in wealth, access to resources, opportunities, inequities in terms of power, etc., that we see today to continue to exist. This is why, although I am an atheist, I feel a great deal of sympathy for, and in many ways identify with, "Christian socialists" and (such as Dorothy Day) "Christian anarchists." I believe libertarian

socialists/anarchists ought to be explicit about the ethical/moral basis of their views and to stop hiding behind and seeking ontological justification in such absurdities as "scientific socialism" and the "inexorable laws of history."

Ron



March 8
Robin, and everyone,

I found this speech (attachment) stirring. It was originally circulated by a faculty colleague without identifying the speaker, event, etc.; another colleague's identification of the speaker as Valarie Kaur and the minister as Rev. William Barber enabled me to find this story including a second version of the video without captions (link below). The event was held at Metropolitan African Methodist Church in Washington, Dec. 31, 2016.

Aside from its interest as such, I offer it as an addition to Ron's comments on the centrality of ethics in our outlook, whether originating in secular faith or in religious faith, as in this event.

Chris

<http://www.commondreams.org/further/2017/01/27/we-must-breathe-and-then-push>

March 8
All,

Thanks Chris. She was awesome! I've followed the Rev. Barber's work in North Carolina. He's tireless and has been in the leadership fighting against the right wing there. Good guy

Roni

March 8
Everybody,

I want to thank Chris for posting that wonderful speech/oration/sermon. I personally found it very deep and extremely moving.

I feel strongly that we need to identify with and place ourselves within the (non-sectarian, faith-based) movement that the speech and its venue embody and not counterpose ourselves to it. At bottom, our critique of capitalism is based in and on moral/ethical values. (We believe that the system, for all its technical achievements, is corrupt, brutal, and unjust, immoral, evil.) While most of us (I suspect) see our personal set(s) of morality/ethics as secular (that is, non-religious), we need to recognize that the roots of that secular morality lie in religion, specifically, the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is an unfortunate aspect of the history of the social/anarchist movement that the vast majority, though not all, of its major theoreticians and popularizers were atheists who saw the propagation of atheism as an intrinsic task of the movement. While this was understandable, given the role of the established churches as guardians and defenders of the oppressive societies of which they were a part, it has led to some very unfortunate consequences, not least of which has been the alienation of the socialist and anarchist movements from huge numbers of ordinary people. Although these socialists and anarchists saw themselves as intellectually superior to the people they purported to lead, they themselves were in fact deluded: they completely failed to recognize the (religious) roots of their own ideas. For not only is our critique of capitalism based on the morality/ethics elaborated in the Mosaic religions, so too is our vision of the society we wish put in its place, and so too is our strategy of how to achieve it, the socialist revolution. What else is that but a modern, secular version of the

Apocalypse, the coming of the Messiah (Yoshua, Joshua, Jesus), which will bring peace, justice, and harmony to the world (indeed, the entire cosmos), with the Proletariat (or the People) replacing the Messiah and liberation being a process of self-emancipation rather than something delivered to us from on high. This should be so obvious it would seem to be ridiculously superfluous to state it, yet for most of its history (and except for a few individuals and tendencies), the socialist/anarchist movement has not only not seen it but has militantly denied it. (And when it has gotten into power, it has utilized the authority and power of virtually omnipotent states to impose its self-delusion.)



The existence of God cannot be proven. Nor can it be disproven. Contrary to some claims, science does not disprove the existence of God. It simply excludes, methodologically, all non-natural/non-testable explanations. As a result, it excludes (but does not disprove) religious explanations of natural phenomenon. In fact, some of the greatest scientists in history have been religious, e.g., Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Lemaitre, Einstein, whose religious views played significant roles in their scientific discoveries. To put this perhaps somewhat simplistically, they were all searching for the rules, the regularities, the "laws" underlying the Cosmos, God's magnificent creation.) We all choose to believe what we believe, whether those beliefs are explicitly religious or not. All these choices involve an epistemological (and a personal) jump, what the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, called a "leap," which expression has (somewhat inaccurately) come down to us as a "leap of faith." It is not just religious beliefs that involve such a leap/choice. So, too, does atheism; like religious individuals,

atheists ultimately choose to believe what they believe, in this case, that God does not exist. In this sense, atheism and explicitly religious beliefs are epistemologically equivalent. Atheism is not demonstrably true in contrast to religion. It is merely what some of us choose to believe. Those atheists who seek to propagate their views are the epistemological equivalent of proselytizers of specific religious beliefs; like such groups, militant atheists are, in fact, a proselytizing sect.

It is time for the left, or at least the libertarian left, to get off its high horse, its claim to intellectual superiority, its claim that they are possessors of The Truth. If we are to have any chance of winning people to our views and our visions (and such efforts are emphatically not a question of "raising consciousness" -- the elitism of that expression should be obvious), we need to bury, once and for all, the official atheism that has characterized our movement for so long and that has done so much harm to our cause.

Ron



March 8
Everyone,

I agree with Ron's points and only want to add a couple more:

(1) As a correction, in my original post I should have said Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. (I left off "Episcopal.")

(2) In agreement with Ron: The video I sent is an example of the way many people base social justice on religious belief. Valarie Kaur, from what I can gather, doesn't present as a faith-based activist (though she's not shy about invoking religion), but clearly many of those in attendance at this interfaith-nonfaith meeting are faith-based, including Rev. Barber and the rabbi whom Kaur gestures to on her left, who isn't identified. Metropolitan AME Church itself has been a fulcrum for justice activities for over 120 years, at least since Frederick Douglass and Ida Wells convened a mass antilynching meeting there in February 1893 and I'm sure longer. Very clearly, religiously derived social justice will be a major part of the new movement that we hope is developing.

(3) Also in agreement with Ron: When people base justice beliefs on religion they are not necessarily doing anything less intellectually valid than those who base them on secular ethics, as long as people (in both groups) recognize their belief as a faith held amidst doubt. I've written about this issue in an earlier book on African American prophetic tradition, "The Mount of Vision" (2012) and current work on James Baldwin. I have profound intellectual respect for the 19th-early 20th century people in the earlier book who used their ideas of Christian belief to see a path from an unequal society to a future equal one that might exist someday. Baldwin, as an adult not a believer in any ordinary sense, still derived his whole way of thinking from his early Bible and church experience. I've argued that his double intellectual identity--at home in the secular literary left and in biblical prophetic and apocalyptic traditions--gave him the ability to see the present world both from the "inside" and the "outside" (or what his religious tradition would call being "in the world but not of it")--to understand that present reality is not permanent and can be changed into a new reality. In sum, there are multiple ways of getting to the idea of a new world, and one should respect other people's ways even if not one's own, as long as ethically we are in the same place.

Chris

March 9

All,

I have been reading up on Paul Robeson (I had intended to write an essay for African-American History month, but didn't). The son of a

minister and the brother of a minister (whose church he was close to), he was famous for reviving the performance of spirituals. No doubt he was an atheist, as he identified as a Marxist (a Stalinist who admired Stalin), but was correctly seen as rooted in his people's religious culture. Regardless of his political failings, he was a great man and artist. (If we can admire his contemporary Jackie Robinson, a Republican, then we can admire Robeson.)

Wayne
