

may set himself loose on the veld of the democratic imagination. He expounds theories that appear as the great answer to the "racial problem". In the latter the theorist wants to point out the impracticability of achieving equilibrium in a non-racial South Africa that has so small a White minority, which is the dominant sector.

Both lines of approach have one thing in common. Both are of an abstracted form; merely conceptual. Nothing beyond the existence of the concept.

"There is no reason why they (the churches) should not invest some money in the workers' controlled enterprises in the homelands or in the urban areas". Typical of practical realism – inverted. The worker must only "control" (page 72) and not own these factories. Some outside investment in them will also to a large degree determine policy making. Investment coming from without. The same thing is happening to the former colonial countries, most of them. The investors have a strong say in the policy matters of these countries. Neo-colonialism. Turner's variation is the domestic one. Where will the Black "middle class" be? . What of its negative wealth? Should that "middle class" invest in these so called workers' enterprises will there be no clash between it and the White churches? .

The inter-play of tendencies in the local spectrum wherever workers' control could be allowed to exist will obviate an open clash between the workers and the often so cosmopolitan "middle class". And middle class concepts, once they weaken, easily regress into fascism.

An interpretation of the author's thought suggests that the Black "middle class" may be overstepped or by-passed, with the outside investors dealing with the workers, in a homeland under whose political control? . Let us take Local Authority. Is the control of Local Authorities really, ever, sanctioned by the people involved: the workers (some of them bound to be migratory labour; or those mothers whose sons are in the towns (earning a low wage); or the religious leaders (whose spiritual folks have to endure the material debasements of labour regulations)? . What we find instead is a coercion implemented by the White ruling sector or – at times – manipulation by the Black "middle class". The author is dribbling the basic issue: self-determination.

How can anyone draw an objective assessment on the South African situation without going into the dialectics of self-determination? . The conspicuous disregard of

such factor in Turner's thesis has thus placed "Eye of the Needle" into and under the category of Thessianism, that ever inverted bowl in the cabinet of radical politics.

How do the White investors by-pass or overstep the Black "middle class" and get into a deal with worker controlled enterprises? . This is not only a remote possibility. It is a possibility that can only come through violent revolution within the homeland itself. Such upheaval would definitely upset the White sector. Even its own "stan"

Turner's choice of examples on communal development suggests that there is no monolithic solution to social problems, irrespective of common ideology. Which is quite true, somewhat. But going into the realities of the thesis does this conclusion not defeat the ends of man – ever seeking definite solution to his problems? . Contexts vary. So do the solutions.

But Turner goes on to say that those who do not really understand the socialist alternative base their "argument" on "the mistake" they make about "the nature of capitalist society and the mistake they make about the nature of power and constraint" (page 45) He goes on to call these mistakes illusions!

Power and the interests that are centred round it are a REALITY; and never an illusion. "Destroying these illusions will help us better to understand the politics of participatory democracy" (page 45). Context lost again.

And the underlying thought in Turner's thesis becomes clear. The White culturally, technologically and economically superior. But (according to Turner) the White's political outlook is outmoded; blunted by materialist greed. And therefore dangerous to his very survival. Why is he fearing the Black politically and making himself insecure when what he should do is to seek a better form of manipulation – even if that means socialist organisation of South African society? . Hence the varied socialist alternatives (page 37-40).

A "live on hay and you'll get pie in the sky" attitude is a thing the Black will no longer afford. As can be seen clearly in "Eye of the Needle". On the other hand it can be pointed out that for those who care to worry about immediate priorities, "Eye of the Needle" is a dangerously posed book. The ambiguous pose is typical of our very much ambiguous social structure. And of the ambiguous position many a person with radical inclination in political thinking has come to find himself in. □

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## IMAGINING A FUTURE

by Colin Gardner

The first and most important thing to be said about *The Eye of the Needle* is that it is certainly one of the most creative and fascinating books on South African society – and indeed on society in general – to have been published in this country in the last few years.

The book's primary aim is to provoke thought, or rather to provoke what is probably for many people a new mode of thinking:

"To understand a society, to understand what it is, where it is going, and where it could go, we cannot just

describe it. We need also to theorise about it. We need continually to refer back and forth between what we see in the society and what is essential to any society. When we look at a car we can distinguish easily between the chrome frills and that in the car which is essential to its functioning. This is an example of simple theorising, and we need to be able to do the same thing about society. Theory itself is not difficult. What is often difficult is *to shift oneself into a theoretical attitude* – that is, to realise what things in one's experience cannot be taken for granted. In the case of cars the problem is simplified by more or less annual changes in shape and in finish. It is easy to notice that they all have wheels, but don't all have fins. In the case of society it is much more difficult. Firstly, most people only experience one society in depth. Secondly, a society changes relatively slowly. The present nearly always at least seems to be fairly permanent. In order to theorise about society perhaps the first step (psychologically) we have to make is *to grasp the present as history*. History is not something that has just come to an end, and certainly not something that came to an end 50 years ago. Societies, including our own society, have been changing in many ways, great and small, throughout time, and there is no reason to believe that they have stopped now. . . ." (p. 7)

Pursuing this line of argument, Dr. Turner allows himself to move beyond the realm of the immediately real and the and the immediately realisable and to voyage into what he *unashamedly calls "utopian thinking"*. But there is nothing arbitrary about the utopia that he constructs: it begins to take shape in the course of a penetrating and devastating analysis of some of the effects upon human beings of the capitalist system, and it is further elaborated as Dr. Turner explores some of the implications of Christian and humane social ideas.

The utopia, the ideal and yet (he insists) not impossible state of society that Dr. Turner invites us to contemplate, is participatory democracy. In this form of society the means of production are communally owned and are controlled by all those who work at them; many of the processes of government are decentralised so that everyone is able to participate to some extent in the conduct of the affairs of the state; all executive positions can be held for fairly brief periods only, so that there is little danger that new oligarchies or elites will come into existence; and all public institutions – the economy, education, etc. – are subject to a rational communal control which will prevent exploitation and gross inequality but promote true individuality and creativity.

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Thus briefly summarised it may all seem far too good to be true – or (some might say) too true to be good. But Dr. Turner argues his case with intelligence and in considerable detail. He means to be taken seriously, and it is impossible for a serious reader not to take him seriously. In some respects his book is reminiscent of Thomas More's original *Utopia*. **The mere process of following Dr. Turner's argument (which incidentally is managed with great lucidity) and of confronting his vision of a properly human state of society provides an experience which no thinking South African should deprive himself of.**

Most black readers will find Dr. Turner's utopia exciting but sadly distant from the present state-of-affairs in this country. Most white readers (since in their irrational

way they associate white power and privilege with white survival) will find the vision appalling but *happily* distant. Liberals and even radicals – particularly if they are white – may find themselves questioning many of their "liberal" presuppositions. In what ways can *real* freedom of opportunity for all be achieved? What, in our heart of hearts, is our attitude towards wealth and its redistribution? ("It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." And what in the end *is* freedom? Here is a perceptive statement on that subject by Dr. Turner:

"In any society I have to adjust what I am doing to fit in with what other people are doing, and vice versa. To call a society in which I am told what to do, indirectly and invisibly, a 'free society', whilst calling a society in which the limitations operate directly an 'unfree society', is just nonsense." (p. 48)

*The Eye of the Needle* is indeed a remarkable little book. Within its 85 pages, it has an immense scope: Dr. Turner's challenging theme leads him through the overlapping fields of politics, economics, sociology, psychology, religion, history. And at very many points he offers us new or comparatively new insights or perspectives.

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This then is the main thing to be said about the book: it richly deserves to be read. But when it has been read and pondered – when the vision has been viewed and the impact has been taken – what is one's considered response? What are one's second and third thoughts about *The Eye of the Needle*?

Speaking for myself, I find it difficult to say: I have a large variety of thoughts, many of them tentative, some of them hardly more than the beginnings of thoughts. I don't find it at all easy to envisage a future ideal state of society or to imagine how human beings might act in circumstances very different from those that most of us have known. I am not saying this in order to subject Dr. Turner to a subtle form of one-upmanship; my comment is a sincere one. To show that I have (as far as I am aware) no unkind or destructive intentions, let me say at once that my second, third and fourth rethinkings bring me back to the view that *The Eye of the Needle* is a very valuable work.

But as my thoughts and further reactions are various and often tentative, I shall express myself in a series of loosely-connected observations.

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And to begin with the question of tentativeness. Dr. Turner's style is, on the whole, the reverse of tentative. Nothing but a direct, confident, incisive manner of expression could have carried him so interestingly through so much material in less than a hundred pages. Often the bluntness of Dr. Turner's formulations is wholly admirable: one has a sense that a great deal of thought, knowledge, experience and moral awareness has been crystallised into a crisp statement of conviction. At other times, however, one feels that complex questions, questions that have bothered some of the world's best minds, are being handled rather brusquely – for example:

"But what, it is asked, happens to motivation under such a system? Isn't private ownership the main factor which motivates people to work? Isn't unequal

reward necessary in order to release initiative, to stimulate people to work harder in order to benefit from the inequalities? This sort of argument as a defence of capitalism is based on three misunderstandings . . . ." (p. 57)

At this point in his argument — as indeed at very many points in his argument — I largely agree with what Dr. Turner goes on to say; but I can't help being aware that simplification and a certain downrightness are the other side of the coin of brevity and incisiveness.

Occasionally Dr. Turner's simplifying and clarifying tendency carries him in the direction even of caricature — as for example in his suggestion that capitalism blights *all* human relationships:

"Relations with other people are not sought as ends in themselves, but as means to other ends. People use other people, rather than love other people. Each tries to manipulate the other, using force or Dale Carnegie. Instead of communicating, of sharing experiences with the other, each individual either buys the other, or sells him/herself to the other. The commercial practice influences the private practice." (p. 16)

Again, I do not deny the validity of this analysis: I merely deny that it is applicable to all human beings in a particular condition of society. As many great novelists have shown, a wide variety of moral stances are likely to be found at any given moment, whatever the state of the society that is being pictured. And in fact as I was reading some of Dr. Turner's categorical statements I found myself remembering F.R. Leavis's classic formulation of one of the uses of literature:

"Without the sensitizing familiarity with the subtleties of language, and the insight into the relations between abstract or generalizing thought and the concrete of human experience, that the trained frequentation of literature alone can bring, the thinking that attends social and political studies will not have the edge and force it should." (*The Common Pursuit*, p. 194).

**For all this, however, Dr. Turner usually manages to make something of a virtue out of what is sometimes partly a vice: when they are provocative his direct statements seldom fail to be provocative of thought.**

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It is an easy jump from a glance at Dr. Turner's picture of human beings under capitalism to a consideration of his view of human nature in general.

I couldn't help being aware as I read the book that Dr. Turner is a student and follower of Sartre: he seems to believe profoundly in man's ability to exercise his freedom upon himself, to control his choices and his energies, but this belief appears to go hand-in-hand — paradoxically perhaps — with the notion that "human nature" is almost infinitely malleable and that people may be almost wholly conditioned by the structure of the society in which they find themselves. Thus he stresses (as we have seen) that in a bad state of society people are likely to act badly whereas in a good state of society people tend to behave well. A corollary of this is that perhaps "human nature", as a set of limitations upon human possibility, can be said hardly to exist at all.

Now is this implicit assumption of Dr. Turner's correct? I find it difficult to answer the question with perfect confidence; but I think I must say that the assumption

seems to me not wholly justified. It is clearly true that a radical change in the structure of a society must radically change the actions and the relationships of all people within that society. On the other hand our knowledge of people, of history, of literature, strongly suggest that there do exist certain constant human tendencies, certain irreducible and partly irrational elements in the human personality, that may indeed constitute something of a "nature". If human beings in the future — in *any* future — are likely to be in certain respects similar to the people we see around us (and in the looking-glass) in a corrupt capitalist society, then of course a utopia will be considerably less easy to come by, and even if it does in some sense arrive it will be less exciting, less of a millennium, than we might otherwise have hoped.

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To say all this, however, is not to invalidate Dr. Turner's speculations; it is simply to view them in a more realistic light. But at this point I must convict myself of the crime of simplifying: it would be quite wrong for me to convey the impression that Dr. Turner's sketch of participatory democracy is totally lacking in realism and human complexity.

**If a tendency towards optimism is the shortcoming of Dr. Turner's view of human beings, it is also its greatest virtue. The whole book is propelled forward by a bracing, animating certainty that if people will but shed their fatalistic passivity they can and must shape their own destinies:**

"There is an intimate relationship between change in consciousness and organisation. Consciousness develops along with organisation. To be effective, organisation must be related to the way in which people see the world, and must help them to see the world in a new way. There are three essential elements in this new way of seeing the world. I must come to see the world as able to be changed. I must come to see myself as having the capacity to play a part in changing it. And I must see that my capacity to do this can only be realised in co-operation with other people. To grasp these three facts involves a fundamental shift in psychological attitude towards the world, rather than a simple change of intellectual awareness. Such a shift only occurs once I find myself involved in action." (p. 74)

**One might summarise by saying that it is Dr. Turner's strength that he is able to offer us a utopian conception and his weakness that he puts a little too much trust in it. Utopianism has its uses and its abuses: it can inspire and it can break the heart. But it certainly has its point.**

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The book is so full of interest that one finds oneself "in dialogue" with it at almost every page. Here are a few of the jottings from the margins of my copy:

(i) Much that is valuable and practical is said on the subject of workers' control and participatory government; and the experience of Yugoslavia, China, Russia and Tanzania is discussed in a discriminating way. But there is rather too much stress upon the factory as a typical place of work and the village as a typical place of habitation. Many people live in environments that are more complex than villages are, and a good deal of the world's work is more complex than what is done in a factory.



(ii) The chapter on education, which seems greatly influenced by the work of Ivan Illich, is somewhat marred by an over-simple view of what conventional education entails (schoolchildren, apparently, "have learnt only two categories for teachers: efficient disciplinarians and inefficient disciplinarians" (p. 61)) and a perhaps over-confident assumption that all children, left largely to themselves, will pick up as much knowledge and skill as they will need in their adult lives. But the chapter is full of fertilizing hints and suggestions nevertheless.

(iii) Predictably perhaps, Dr. Turner lacks what might be called tragic awareness — a sense not only that some tasks may never be completed but also that one good quality may force out another. He quotes with approval Nyerere's comment on colonial education:

"Inevitably, too, it was based on the assumptions of a colonialist capitalist society. It emphasised and encouraged the individualistic instincts of manking, instead of his co-operative instincts. It led to the possession of individual material wealth being the major criterion of social merit and worth." (p. 66)

Now I agree with Nyerere and Dr. Turner that it is important to stress the co-operative instincts; but I cannot condemn all individualistic instincts, and I certainly cannot agree with the implication that individualism is simply a facet of the ethos of capitalism. But maybe the educationalists have to choose? Could it be that the full man — perfectly and uniquely himself and perfectly a part of his society — can never be aimed at by any educational system?

(iv) The whole book tingles with commitment and sincerity. A minor concrete instance of this is the way in which Dr. Turner insists, even at the expense of stylistic elegance, upon the equality of the sexes:

"Thus the social system required for the satisfaction of human needs must be one which (a) enables the individual to have the maximum control over her/his social and material environment, and (b) encourages her/him to interact creatively with other people" (p. 32)

But, one finds oneself asking, is this insistence really necessary? Perhaps it is.

(v) We read:

"It is relatively easy to sketch out the above picture of an ideal possible society in South Africa. It is, I must stress, a possible society, in that there are neither imperatives of organisation nor imperatives of human nature which would prevent such a society from operating once it came into existence. Moreover, it is the only form of society which would be compatible with the Christian human model, in which human beings would be free both in themselves and for other people, in which love and real communication would not be made impossible by prejudice, by hierarchies of authority and habits of obedience, or by relations of exploitation." (p. 73)

As I hope I have by now made clear, I feel a great deal of sympathy for the spirit that animates this statement. I would have preferred a more modest wording of the second sentence. The third sentence raises a query in my mind.

Obviously love and real communication are made impossible by prejudice and by exploitation; but is it true that "hierarchies of authority" are *inevitably* barriers to love? Are we to rule out every instance of "authority" gently and open-mindedly exercised?

(vi) Some of Dr. Turner's suggestions about the possible uses of the South African "homelands" are excellent:

"The forthcoming independence of the 'homelands' will of itself bring about no meaningful change in South Africa's power imbalance. Black workers will continue to create wealth in white-controlled areas for whites. Both their problems and the financial means for solving these problems will be in the white-controlled areas, beyond the jurisdiction of the 'homeland' governments. But there is one creative role the 'homelands' could play. By developing examples of communal work, through worker-controlled agricultural co-operatives, through credit unions and through communal education schemes, they could show the continuing possibility of work as 'men-in-community', develop communal solidarity and encourage the growth of organisational skills . . ." (p. 76)

(vii) The book is by no means wholly utopian in its thrust: it contains some important remarks upon the ways in which the South African status quo is even now beginning, just beginning, to crumble.

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I am conscious that Dr. Turner's criticism of my review might perhaps run something like this: "A typical 'liberal' response — a partial acceptance, but a watering-down, a coating of the stern facts with the sugar of comfortable complexity." But I am bound to say what I think and feel.

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The final point that I wish to make — a point that I have deliberately held back, partly because Dr. Turner himself holds it back — is that the book's value doesn't depend upon our unqualified belief in the utopia that it depicts. Above all *The Eye of the Needle* expresses and arouses a radical discontent. It indicates a direction. It is to Dr. Turner's credit that for all his creative insistence on the need for a fresh manner of thinking about society, he doesn't scorn those small steps by which in practice society normally progresses.

**Whether or not one is prepared to attempt or to accept a detailed sketch of the way things will go or the way things ought ultimately to be, there can be no doubt at all that South African society — all human societies — must move, in every respect in which movement is possible, along the road towards the possible end of which Dr. Turner so firmly points. What is more, those who see it as their task to make society move probably need to have some paradigm, some ideal such as the one Dr. Turner offers, in the backs of their minds.□**