

# Buckley - the blundering crusader of C

by Jens Andersen

(continued from last Tuesday)

Buckley's conservatism and Catholicism manifest themselves in other ways. In *God and Man at Yale* he puts forth the argument that since the people who run Yale, especially the alumni and trustees, are Christians, they have the right to hire, and should hire, only such faculty as will teach students the superiority of "individualist" and Christian values over "collectivist" and atheist ones.

Furthermore:  
*Freedom is in no way violated by an educational overseers' insistence that the teacher he employs hold a given set of values.*

Buckley's supporting arguments are dazzling and masterful, but unfortunately, he is hampered by the fact that his proposal is idiotic. If, as he argues, the alumni and trustees of Yale are simply purchasing a teacher's services, and, like any other buyer in a free market they are entitled to demand that their purchase meet certain specifications, then they would also be entitled to demand, if they so wished, that Yale only hire instructors who professed the flat-earth theory, Swedenborgianism, astrology or cannibalism.

Such manipulation may be lawful and perhaps even inevitable in our democracy, but it would be hard to argue that it is desirable.

Buckley attempts to get around such unpleasant possibilities by putting implicit trust in the wisdom of the trustees and alumni. This argument is particularly hilarious because Buckley, prior to putting his faith in these men, spent a good portion of his book demonstrating - quite convincingly, I think - that these modern Solomons have no strong or clear opinions on religion or politics, and simply act as weathervanes, blowing in the prevailing intellectual breeze.

Even funnier than this, however, is the prospect of Yale fortifying its milquetoast advocacy of Christian platitudes like "love your neighbour" with some undiluted-old-time religion. Consider for

instance, a teacher in introductory political science dutifully telling his students that the U.S. in its relations with Russia, or a worker fighting a closed shop union, should adhere strictly to the values put forth in Matthew 5:38-42, to wit, that "one who is evil" should not be resisted, but that the victim should turn the other cheek.

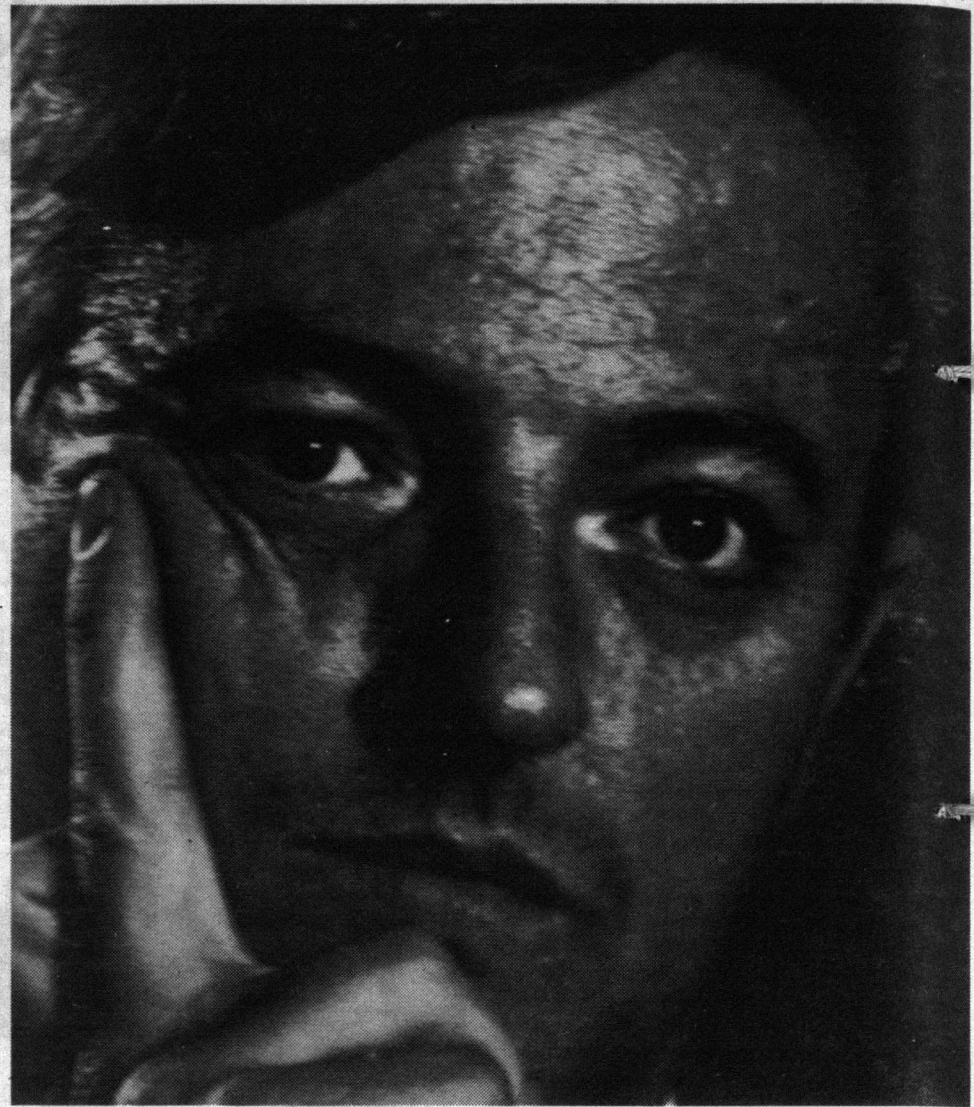
If this happened, one imagines that Buckley, Catholicism suddenly forgotten, would be on his feet, crying "appeasement" and "defeatism" at the top of his lungs.

Buckley simply has no respect for the complexity of human beliefs. One can't just put people into two boxes, marked "atheist" and "Christian" or "collectivist" and "individualist". Whoever tried to set the criteria for such oversimplified dichotomies would suffer a nervous breakdown, as would the person who tried to judge people by them.

Consider, for instance, the not-improbable case of an agnostic who grants a good deal of wisdom to Christian ethics, but disagrees with Jesus' command in Luke 12: 29-33 that one should sell ones' worldly possessions and give no thought for tomorrow; and who believed in leaving the marketplace subject to only a few basic regulations like pasteurization of milk, honest weights and measures, and laws against misleading advertising. Clearly, if such a man applied to be a teacher at Yale, he could easily be accepted or rejected on the basis of factors as trivial as whether the hiring officer is Methodist or Episcopalian, or believes strongly or weakly in the maxim, *caveat emptor*.

Put into practical terms, the proposal is simply absurd. All it would do is create an unwieldy heresy-hunting apparatus at Yale, whose nuisance potential would be virtually infinite.

Especially if it was manned by people whose judgment of humans was as poor as William F. Buckley's. In his time, he has championed not only such vermin as McCarthy, Nixon and Spiro Agnew, but seems incapable of judging anyone by any standard except the crude ones of conservatism vs. collectivism and Christianity vs. atheism. To be sure, this standard has often proved more or less satisfactory, as when



Buckley addresses the liberals in sign language.

he praised Tom Wolfe and G.B. Trudeau, or when he blasted Chou-En-Lai, but even here he misses many aspects of the men due to his narrow focus.

In the case of Lenny Bruce, Buckley simply makes a fool of himself. His essay "Lenny" contains not even the slightest hint that religious criticism was central to the comedian's humour, or even that such criticism was put forth:  
*I noticed that priests had the same*

*attitude toward their lessers as do most successful businessmen: they treated them like illiterate children, not by kissing them and giving them ice cream, but rather by giving them the kind of treatment which makes the receiver feel as though he had graduated from third grade only with the help of political influence.*

Lenny Bruce  
*How To Talk Dirty  
and Influence People*



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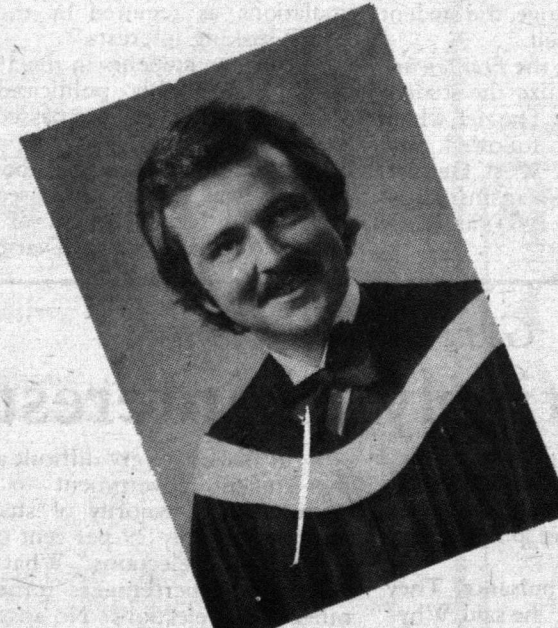
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