
Ideology & Realism

Irving Kristol: *Reflections of a Neoconservative*; Basic Books; New York.

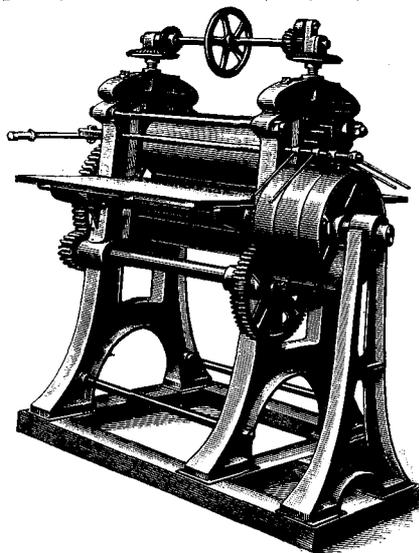
by William R. Hawkins

The term *neoconservative* is more often used by those who oppose the movement than by those who are included within its ranks. Criticism from the left has been particularly vicious because neoconservatives are reformed liberals who are consequently viewed as traitors by their former associates. On the right, the response has been marked by caution. Some neocons—Roger Starr, Norman Podhoretz, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Michael Novak, and James Q. Wilson—have found ready acceptance. Others, such as Nathan Glazer, Daniel Bell, and Seymour Martin Lipset have been met with skepticism because they have failed to break firmly with liberalism. Still, the advent of the neoconservatives provided a powerful reinforcement to the right. Their work through the *Public Interest*, *Commentary*, and the American Enterprise Institute brought forward a new wave of nonliberal thought when it was most needed in the wake of the Goldwater defeat, the Great Society, and the New Left. Foremost among the neocons is Irving Kristol, a man who fully accepts both the term and the movement to the right.

Kristol sees the pattern of past American politics as a conflict between the moderate left (liberalism) and the radical left (socialism), with only an occasional "interregnum of conservative government whose function it is to consolidate and ratify liberal reforms" (as Eisenhower did for the New Deal and Nixon did for the Great Society). In the late 1960's, the moderate left collapsed

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under the pressures from the counterculture and the New Left. In order to stop the radicals, Kristol and others turned to a revitalized right. Kristol sees fatal flaws in the old conservatism that require correction if a lasting defense against the radicals is to be erected, thus the *neo* movement. The problem with the right is that it has no ideology, by which Kristol means a vision of the future toward which conservative policy will move the country. Without



such a vision, the right has nothing positive with which to sway the public. The right can only criticize the leftist vision or its mode of implementation. The right can win power occasionally as a backlash, but cannot maintain itself in power or win broad, dedicated support without a positive program.

What has passed for conservative ideology is simply the "free market" of classical economics. Kristol points out that this is inadequate. An economic theory cannot substitute for a comprehensive view of man and society. Economics is a part, not a whole. Of course, most conservatives do have a concept of the good society which

reaches beyond materialism, but the centerplace given to economics eclipses it. Worse, the attempt to defend "the market" in its purest form has led conservatives to defer to the libertarians. Milton Friedman advocates the legalization of hard drugs on the grounds of libertarian consistency. Try convincing any parent with teen-aged children that either conservatism or capitalism has the answers when that is part of the platform!

Kristol respects the work of F. A. Hayek and Russell Kirk concerning the importance of a moral order which has evolved over time, but feels that their perspective is too nostalgic. It looks backward to a simpler time when virtue, honor, and duty were enthroned in the popular mind and supported by institutions of authority in the family, church, and state. In today's world, constant change and the "open society" present conservatives with the difficult problems of restoring values, controlling change, and rebuilding institutions. In other words, effecting a counterrevolution. A laissez-faire attitude is insufficient to accomplish this task. The self-denial of government power or other sources of authority in behalf of conservatism is to practice unilateral disarmament in the midst of a war.

Kristol feels that the classical liberal view of man which spawned the cult of individualism is behind most of today's problems. It has motivated the counterculture's assault on Western civilization; paralyzed the right's response to this threat; contributed to the left's preoccupation with questions of equality; and provided socialism with an issue of mass appeal. Kristol wishes to escape this crisis by drawing neoconservative strength from premodern philosophy in the manner of Leo Strauss. Classical political thought established that the proper end of politics was a good society. In this framework, society is the

central concern. The basis of the larger society called "the nation" is the smaller society of the family. The strength of society is its anchor of stability in a sea of

to defend private property from socialism) and abandoned this issue. Conservatism has been in decline ever since.

Kristol rejects the egalitarian aspect

would also provide old-age and medical insurance. Such programs would be financed as much as possible like real insurance programs. This differs from the redistributive state in important ways. Its aim is to alleviate temporary distress, not build up a permanent underclass of dependents. Likewise, its aim is protection, not revolution. It does not seek to promote income equality or to punish the successful. It does not seek to undermine capitalism or remold society to conform to utopian ideals. Instead, as Kristol argues, the paternalism involved should be used to foster traditional values of work and family rather than to undermine these values, as do current programs.

There are obvious political advan-

Kristol is as nasty as ever to . . . members of *The Nation* family. He is lovably true to the persona we have enjoyed hating over the decades.

Robert Lekachman
The Nation

change. Individuals draw sustenance and meaning from this system of mutual support. Of course, libertarians have branded any collectivist criterion as socialist and many conservatives have been foolish enough to believe them. However, Kristol draws a vital distinction.

Socialism has had two bases of appeal. To the intellectuals it has presented the utopian ideal of equality. But equality has not been the primary concern of the masses. The real mass appeal of socialism has been the offer of protection against the storm of anarchy perceived to accompany economic laissez-faire. While capitalism does work, most people are not in a position strong enough to weather the occasional bouts of unemployment, business failure, illness, or bad luck which befalls them (or which threatens to befall them). In the preindustrial society, there were traditional fallback positions available: the extended family, community solidarity, subsistence farming. But in our mobile, interdependent economy, the individual is on his own and this loneliness scares him.

The division of labor requires that everyone be plugged into the system to obtain a livelihood. Once the individual is out of the system or if the system fails, he is in trouble. Conservatives of the early days of the industrial revolution worried about this, alternately complaining about the harshness of an impersonal market and proposing state intervention to compensate for the loss of traditional social arrangements. However, conservatives eventually fell prey to classical economics (the better

of socialism and opposes income equality. However, he wants to restore the idea of social responsibility to the right. He thus draws a distinction between the "social insurance" state and the "redistributive" state. The former would provide relief for temporary problems, like unemployment that results from the dynamics of the market economy. It

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture*:

Decadence

The seeming anomaly of the persistent, ever-growing appeal of supernatural terror tales in a secular age rests on the assumption that psychological secularization is a phenomenon that is uniform and unidirectional, leading inexorably into an era of profane consciousness, a totally "disenchanted" world. The reality, however, is more complex. In the modern world, no single system of meaning has replaced the weakened sacred cosmos of the past. Nor does any seem likely to, given the jolts encountered by the dogmas of rationalism, scientism, and Marxism. The modern condition is one of partial or "arrested" secularization in which . . . public norms of functionality fail to satisfy the desires of many people who, in turn, construct their own eclectic, provisional systems of "ultimate" meaning.

—from "Horrors in the Age of Disbelief"
by Robert F. Geary

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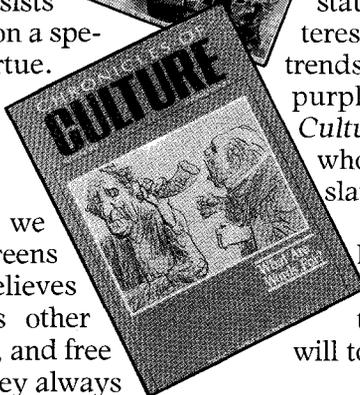
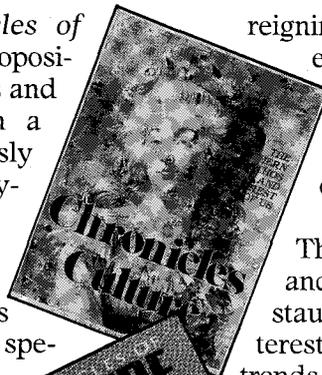
Even today—in spite of all we witness in print and on the screens—*Chronicles of Culture* believes that literature, art, various other modes of cultural expression, and free intellectual inquiry are, as they always have been, the best guardians of humane values. And that they must be defended, with substance and intensity, from the

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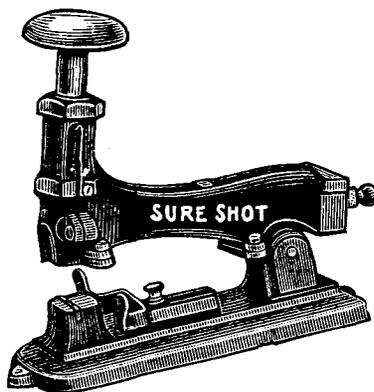
tages to such a program. Conservatives have been notoriously unsuccessful in trying to convince the public that unemployment compensation or social security programs are threats to freedom. Apparent indifference to mass unemployment during the Great Depression sent the right into eclipse for half a century. There is a large number of hard-working, patriotic citizens with conservative social values who are politically alienated from the right purely on this issue of economic insecurity and instability. They do not consider themselves part of the perennial welfare class and probably resent the existence of such a class as much as anyone. But they also realize that they are vulnerable to the workings of economic forces over which they have no control. They are not going to elect as guardians of society leaders who claim that society needs no guardians. Kristol hopes to win these people away from the liberal coalition with a conservative social program aimed at the working class. President Reagan's "safety net" is potentially in this framework, though it needs to be oriented more towards blue-collar and working-poor families than towards the underclass which will always vote with the left.

The desire for stability is also reflected in Kristol's approach to the corporation. He states that:

the majority of those who work for a living, of whatever class, have learned to prefer the security, the finely calibrated opportunities for advancement, the fringe benefits, and the paternalism of the large corporation to the presumed advantages of employment in smaller firms.

Most people don't like risks. Although Kristol rejects the view of J. K. Galbraith that large firms control their markets and have eliminated competition, he notes that large corporations do exhibit smaller fluctuations in prices and output and greater survivability than do small businesses. Corporations are attacked

from all sides, however, and their leaders do not know how to fight back or even take the time to think about fighting back. Populists fear the concentration of economic power; socialists see the corporation as the final monopolist stage of capitalism whose oppression will trigger the revolution; and libertarians complain that corporate managers deviate from the "free market" ideal of classical theory. Kristol dismisses these criticisms as dangerous misunderstandings about how the world works. Corporate capitalism not only provides material abundance, but can behave as a conservative institution. Rightist intellectuals need to provide a basis for legitimacy for the corporation within society.



On this point Kristol seems to echo points raised much earlier by Peter F. Drucker and most fully put into effect by the Japanese. Japan has managed to build a highly efficient economy that still includes traditional values and stability. The corporation with its employment security and social benefit programs plays an important part in this synthesis, and relieves much of the pressure which would otherwise exist for expanding public welfare programs.

To add further strength to the conservative cause, Kristol calls for a heightened sense of integral nationalism. "Nationalism in our time is probably the most powerful of political emotions." While patriotism is closely

associated with the right, Kristol feels that, again, economic issues have hogged center stage, preventing conservatives from taking full advantage of wider opportunities. Nationalism fits the neoconservative/traditionalist view of society as a vertically structured, "organic" system embodied with moral and cultural values. It is the antithesis of the Marxist view of materialistically defined horizontal classes constantly at war with one another. It is also opposed to the atomistic individualism of the classical liberals. Kristol believes that nationalistic feelings have been weakened in the U.S. by appeals to supposedly supranational ideals. Woodrow Wilson's "war to end all wars" to "make the world safe for democracy" led Americans to "disregard the obvious for the sake of a quixotic pursuit of impossible ideals." This liberal approach could provide no counter to the antinationalistic stand of the New Left which supported foreign ideological movements against its own country.

Nationalism is an ideology. It should lead American policymakers beyond the minimal concerns of national security. It should provide a vision of what a future world should look like and inspire a coherent strategy to move the world in the chosen direction. The U.S. is a Great Power and its people should embrace this as their destiny. Crusades for democracy and human rights are unrealistic. A pride in the achievement of American-Western Civilization and a desire to attain new peaks will provide the justification for policy. While the U.S. should not seek out unnecessary confrontations, it must realize that it has implacable enemies in the Soviet bloc and Third World which diplomacy cannot appease. When an "us" versus "them" confrontation occurs, nationalism should produce such a ground swell of support for "us" that those on the left who favor "them" will be isolated and powerless. Unfortunately, Kristol merely expresses this as a hope without presenting a plan by which this happy state could be brought about. □

Doing Less with More

Barbara Matusow: *The Evening Stars: The Making of the Network News Anchor*; Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

by Gordon M. Pradl

Turning on the tube at seven o'clock each weekday evening may be the most massive act of collective delusion ever practiced by a culture. Lusting after this goddess of immediacy, aptly called the news, viewers sit glazed and numbed each and every night before their screens. The networks are aware of this situation, so they increasingly program up-to-the-minute on-the-spot newsbreaking reporting. And with cable television, one at last can never *not* be without the soothing libations of interpreted events. Naturally, we want to find out what's going on around us. There is, perhaps, an inborn curiosity related directly to our earliest strategies for survival. Events out in the world affect ourselves and others make up the fabric of our lives. But we have no experience until we actively participate in the telling of these events, put them into our own words, commit acts of interpretation. As long as we maintain primary control over these speech acts, are responsible for their style and integrity, our daily decisions foster freedom. But not surprisingly, forces "wiser" than ourselves prefer to make these decisions for us, prefer not to have to deal with the complexities and contradictions and common sense that might arise were we left alone to act for ourselves. And so the flood of predigested news swells ever more menacingly.

Although people want to assert their independence by establishing unique interpretations of events, they also desire to share in the powerful repetitions of the

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group, to acquiesce in world-building not their own. They want, in other words, to be assertive and docile at the same time. Newsgatherers, have pounced on this conflict and offer up an illusion that appears to fulfill both needs simultaneously. This is the fiction of mass "participation" in the evening news. There are no individual interpretations, just a predigested menu offered by the networks. As this is not easily discerned, the locus of our society's interpretive control moves from the inner resources of its citizens to the outer manipulations of lib culture.

The history of this trend is both long and varied; it effectively began when the programs established to report the news inverted their original purpose, that of being a conduit. The night watchman, the press, the radio, television, all were mediums designed to make events available to the public. Although these sources contained their biases, the event remained to be interpreted in black and white. But the situation changed, and the conduit function shifted to one of consumption. Subsequently, every event becomes news and since the thirst of the media can never be fully quenched, events are generated just in order that there be something to convey to a demanding public. Once this occurs, whatever distinction existed between news and entertainment (and the distinction remains dubious in the first place) ceases to exist.

And now Barbara Matusow appears with yet more "news"—in fact, the inside scoop by an honest-to-goodness insider—about the news. In *The Evening Stars: The Making of the Network News Anchor* she traces the evolution of television news since World War II. Not only does she explain, for instance, how Edward R. Murrow created a tradition of integrity within the fourth estate, but also how he signaled its eventual demise by "ushering in a peculiarly American part of the

protagonist." Once begun, this trend inevitably leads to a "news" establishment whose first concern is gaining an audience; trying to deliver the news takes second place. This isn't a particularly shocking sense of priorities: Dan Rather's audience lead over his competitors means that a 30-second spot can be sold for \$44,000, as compared to \$35,000 for the team in third place. Such an advantage could add up to over \$10,000,000 a year—no small sum when all you are doing is serving up the news to an adoring public.

Ms. Matusow feigns alarm at such "business" figures and the slide toward overt entertainment that continues to mark the national network news broadcasts, but because her way of viewing the world is so constrained by her own news-gathering affiliations, she fails to see the larger dimensions of the problem. Assorted homilies about the potential abuses of power are her idea of a thoughtful analysis of the absorption of news by entertainment. But such criticism belies her real purpose in writing the book: to serve as gossip columnist for the network news stars. Simply *everyone* is there—from John Cameron Swayse, Howard K. Smith, John Daly, Peter Jennings, Tom Brokaw, and Ted Koppel. Scurrying both in front of and in back of the camera's eye, Ms. Matusow tells us why Tom Snyder failed to make the number-one seat in New York City; how Roger Mudd, during the final competition for the top spot at CBS, stayed above the fray, assuming the network owed him the job; how Barbara Walters was quietly sabotaged by Harry Reasoner, who, before going on the air, liked to hang around bars with his old cronies. And she reassuringly divulges the facts that Dan Rather, despite his aggressive qualities, is really a top-flight newswoman and that although he has a \$10,000,000 salary, he lives a very unpretentious life-