



Correspondence



To the Editor:

I've just finished reading Mr. Taggart's article in your December issue. If your magazine served no other useful purpose than to provide a forum for the development of Tom Taggart's wit, insight, and erudition helps make weathering the current conservative malaise bearable. Keep on discovering Taggerts and we'll be in good shape when our time comes.

Name Withheld
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

To the Editor:

William Schneider's analysis of the SALT agreement and the current balance of nuclear weapons was a valuable collection of facts and figures. However, like virtually all reviews of SALT, the data was presented in a political vacuum.

The problem with most articles in the current defense debate is that they all start from the standard American view of war, i.e., total, righteous, global, and nuclear. Envisioned is a war of massive first- and second-strikes, obliterating entire societies and killing hundreds of millions of citizens. The capability to launch such a war exists, but there is no political, economic, or ideological reason why such a war should ever be fought. War is a political act, as Clausewitz noted long ago, initiated for conquest or advantage rather than for death and destruction...

The Soviet Union and Communist China undoubtedly still pursue expansionist policies and hope for eventual world domination along the lines of Communist prophecy. But to assume their plans include a global-nuclear war, is to assume their leaders are fools. When the number of nuclear warheads available to each Superpower approaches 10,000, as in Mr. Schneider's figures; even a 95 percent effective first-strike will not save the aggressor's homeland from decimation.

The road to world empire, for the Communist powers, leads through a pattern of regional domination, slowly progressing across the globe.... Nuclear weapons are less than useless in this type of warfare, even if the US were emotionally geared to use them. Economic and military aid, backed by a large reserve of streamlined conventional forces are the keys to regional defense.

The SALT talks are a result of this condition. In a period of rising military costs and multiple commitments (not the least of which are domestic), both the US and the USSR need to reorder their military priorities away from strategic weapons

with their limited political utility and towards those forces best suited to "limited" war. Last year the Soviets cut their ICBM construction by 90 percent and invested the money in fielding four new combat divisions, increasing tactical aircraft production and new warships.

By limiting our ABM sites to two, as agreed to in SALT, and by slowing our B-1 and ULBMS programs, an additional \$5 billion can be diverted into other, more useful military programs. In conventional forces, this could mean five to six new ground combat divisions on three new aircraft carriers complete with aircraft and escort ships or twenty-seven extra tactical-fighter squadrons....

In conclusion, since all modern weapon systems have a high price tag, once a basic level of nuclear deterrence has been achieved (as has been the American case for many years), additional resources should be invested in those military forces that provide the greatest flexibility and political utility. The SALT negotiations provide an extra safeguard, in the form of agreed nuclear force levels, that can allow us to further reorient our defense programs to meet the real threats to our security interests without being constantly diverted by costly and unrewarding nuclear arms races.

Best regards,
William R. Hawkins
Kankakee, Illinois

To the Editor:

Although Ronald Docksai shows the potential for writing a good review (re: **The Impudent Snobs** — December), it is apparent and perhaps all of what Mr. Docksai writes is for appearances) that he has some way to go. In cataloguing the opposition to Agnew, Mr. Docksai includes a mysterious group he calls "Randists," suggesting that anyone who adheres to a coherent, consistent philosophy is a personality cultist, whereas the Vice President, who takes one step back politically for every two steps forward—and keeps himself in tune with the validating "mood" of the Silent Majority — is proof against the hero worship that leads to cults...

Also of extreme interest was the review (**Eliot and His Age**) by W. Wesley MacDonald. It was of interest because it contained an inflated wealth of meaning. If the intellectual opponents of T.S. Eliot were enemies of the "permanent things," then Mr. MacDonald is an enemy of the "things that make sense." As a matter of fact, he demonstrates a spiritual kinship to Eliot in that his writings suggest a dry brain in a dry season confronted with a waste land. If, as Eliot suggests, history is an experience of many generations, a Burkian contract between the living and

the dead, then it is not too difficult to see that Mr. MacDonald's efforts at reviewing represent a collusion between living intellects and those dead out of their mind...

MacDonald mentions, with a great thrift of description, a figure named Coriolan — one of the many things Mr. Eliot saw fit to condemn (But after all, if Eliot is good enough to look down on Churchill, then he is good enough to look down on most anything. Right? No?). I am interested in finding out more about this esoteric character. I'll make a deal with him. If he tells me where I can find "Coriolan," then I'll tell him where he can find the Temple of Nike Apteros...

Haven B. Gow's article "In Defense of Freedom" was more tolerable than the rest, but revealed a deficiency in that it tried to combine "freedom" as a political concept with "free will," a metaphysical-psychological concept. Since the two are not necessarily related, nor was there an attempt by Gow to show how they can relate, his efforts to convey a useful idea were largely wasted. In his discussion of free will, Gow suggests that the doctrine of determinism must be rejected on the strength of no better argument than that evil consequences will occur as a result of its acceptance. . . . A superior argument, brought forward by Nathaniel Branden, is that determinism is inherently unknowable and therefore absurd. Suppose men investigating determinism were determined by something other than themselves. No matter what conclusion they came to, they are precluded from certainty by the knowledge that they were forced to their conclusion. Since a forced perception cannot be tested (a key identifying feature of free will), statements bearing truth are accidental. Ergo, determinism is unprovable. Q.E.D...

Yours truly
Dan Bennett
North Little Rock, Arkansas

To the Editor:

May good Aeolis waft those soporific winds hither!

"Problems" and "crises," it seems, are all in the eye of the beholder. I am refreshed to learn that — in the days of a miniscule GNP, of incorrigible male chauvinism, of unabashed social, economic, and political inequality — great leaders seldom used the words.

In the thirties, we had a president who shamelessly indulged in twelve hours of sleep daily. In the sixties, our president took amphetamines so he could average four.

Ah! It's a sign of the times.

Larry Oates
Los Gatos, California

and corrupting political styles of John F. Kennedy and the men whom he appointed to high office and whom Lyndon Johnson later inherited.

They were men of immense energy and ambition who were bent not merely on maintaining and improving the nation, but on mobilizing its powers and the sentiments of its people in behalf of strenuous new objectives. They had an overweening sense of their own capacities to shape and control events in the manner of their liking, or in conformity to their particular, expedient requirements, and they placed great stock in the methods of rational analysis and the

techniques of social science; what is more, they were arrogant and contemptuous toward those who suggested their data might be inadequate or their conclusions open to doubt. According to Halberstam, whose instinct is to personalize history, the tragic flaw in these men was their personal hubris, their corresponding ignorance of the world, and their unthinking allegiance to the empty notions and slogans of the Cold War; according to Halberstam, the truth is that they were neither the best (who were really the Stevensonian liberals) nor the brightest, and the nation soon lived to pay the consequences. According to Fairlie, the

flaw was not merely in the character of these men but also, and more importantly, in the political method which they used to win the 1960 election and to conduct the affairs of state — a method involving the use of crises as occasions for the mobilization of national sentiment in behalf of transcendent goals as a means of ennobling and empowering themselves. But both view the Kennedy Administration as dangerous in principle and as destructive in fact, and both sound again and again — Fairlie by making frequent references to Caesar and to the Byzantine Empire, Halberstam by emphasizing over and over the personal defects of these men —

the theme that the Kennedy legend is not merely exaggerated, but at bottom a total fraud and a source of authentic and continuing danger for the nation as a whole.

The other observation I would offer is that these two books form an unwitting case study in the effects of the 1960s and of the Kennedy political ethos upon American public discourse. Fairlie, an Englishman, was not personally involved in or altered by the Kennedy-Johnson years; Halberstam, of course, was one of the journalists who were most intensely and frequently in the thick of events, influencing them and being influenced by them in turn. Fairlie is something like a model political journalist: he is calm and deliberate, quick to understand, scrupulous about facts and about the limitations of his evidence, attentive to institutions and doctrines as well as to personalities, aware of the nonjournalistic literature on politics yet unwilling to pose as an academic "expert" or to pretend that his knowledge is more comprehensive than it can legitimately claim to be, and concerned above all not so much to move his readers to action as to inform them and to move them to thought. Halberstam, by contrast, though he writes a good enough story, reveals a series of journalistic vices which almost precisely parallel the vices he identifies in the Kennedy men: he is arrogant toward his subject matter, tending to argue against those with whose judgments he disagrees simply by belittling them and by making them seem contemptible; he assumes a pose of omniscience, reporting as fact things he cannot possibly know to be fact and revealing not the slightest doubt about his evidence or his subject matter, not even the merest uncertainty about the character of the men or the exact identity and sequence of the events he

describes at such tedious lengths; for him as for the Kennedy men, style and personality is all there is in politics, institutions and "objective conditions" don't exist; and perhaps most importantly, for him the evident object of writing is to tell a "good story," i.e., one that will mobilize people in behalf of his position and against opposing positions, that will help him and his friends and harm his enemies. This is not to say that Halberstam is a liar or a fraud — clearly he is neither. But my reaction to his work is rather like his and Fairlie's reaction to the Kennedy Administration; one does not trust it to be honest, to be reliable, to have been guided at all times by the aims that are appropriate to the activity he is engaged in, to maintain a clear distinction in his own mind between the world of affairs on the one hand, and the world of wishes, dreams, and illusions on the other.

In the end, however, the fate of the Kennedy legend and of the spirit of the 1960s rests less with these books than it does with the impact of the *Times*' expose's innuendo, and less with all of these than it does with us. Books can sometimes educate or crystallize opinion; exposes can create doubts or stimulate revulsion. But events in the public discourse are no more than signs of future possibilities, and whether these come to pass depends, in the last analysis, upon us. Eleanor Roosevelt once said of John Kennedy that she wished he would show a little less profile and a little more courage. Unless you are quite certain that, deep down, we all share her preference, don't be too sure that the Kennedy mystique is in fact dead, and don't be too surprised if, in 1980, when you look back, you decide that the seventies weren't so very different from the sixties after all. □

Wheelis tells us, "is a Promethean leap in pride." This "leap in pride," he continues, is made manifest by the belief that reason, unaided by faith and unchecked by moral authority can resolve the riddles of the universe. According to the Modern Age, all that reason requires is the proper path to knowledge and truth — and that avenue is the method of positive science. The result, says Wheelis, is the belief that "it is possible not only to know the world, but to test that knowledge, to verify it, to prove it beyond any doubt...."

Science, therefore, claims the Modern Age, achieves knowledge of great certitude, while the faiths of man, acting through tradition, "no longer seem deserving of the status of knowledge. Their dearth of certitude relegates them to an inferior realm, arbitrary, passionate, irrational, stained by time and place, incapable of mathematical expression."

But in this divinization of science one embarrassing truth is neglected: Man does not (and cannot) live by the bread of scientific method alone. He must deal with love and hate, life and death in his everyday experience; he must make conjectures of great importance which might or might not be true and which do not lend themselves to experiments in the laboratory: Man possesses freedom and dignity; we should love our neighbors as ourselves; there is a God and He loves us; we are morally accountable for our deeds. Such propositions cannot be avoided; we need to ascertain if they are true, whether to believe, and whether to act upon them. And, as Wheelis correctly observes, the "scientific method is no help, for by their nature these matters lie forever beyond the realm of science." Indeed, one crucial conjecture that we must face concerns science itself: "The long range influence of science will be good for mankind. This is not a scientific hypothesis the credibility of which can be established by certain crucial experiments. It is a hope, a wish, a statement of faith; it may or may not be true."

To be sure, the credibility of such a hypothesis cannot be ascertained by "giant computers" or in "gleaming laboratories." Indeed, as Wheelis trenchantly observes, "All the great and fundamental questions are answered, if at all, only by leap of heart, by deepest feeling, by faith." What is life all about? Is it worth living? What is the good life for man? Who is my neighbor, and should I love him and be concerned with his suffering? Can science adequately deal, if at all, with these questions? Unfortunately, when we ask these questions we find, Wheelis tells us, that "The computers are silent, the test tubes do not react to these queries, and he who concerns himself with them might do better in church than in a laboratory, and the church might better be a forest glade, if any such are left, than the temple of a third sect."

Like *The End of the Modern Age*, Isidor Chein's work attacks the presumption of those intellectuals who identify reason with science. In fact, claims Chein, in his own field of psychology those who assume that the method

Book Review

Beyond Science and Behaviorism

The End of the Modern Age

by Allen Wheelis

Basic Books, \$5.95

The Science of Behavior and the Image of Man

by Isidor Chein

Basic Books, \$12.50

It is ironic that at the same time that science has made such startling advances, there exists so much eloquent and outraged protest against the scientific world view which furnishes the theoretical basis for the scientific enterprise. Peter Berger, for example, devoted much of his work, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, to a blistering attack on this world view. "Since," he wrote, "science is an almost sacred entity among Americans in general and American academicians in particular, the desire to emulate the procedures of the older natural sciences is very strong among the newcomers in the marketplace of erudition. Giving into this desire, the experimental psychologists, for instance, have succeeded to such an extent that their studies have commonly

nothing more to do with anything human beings are or do."

Other works as critical of scientism have appeared in recent years and the list continues to grow. Theodore Roszak, for example, documents in *The Making of a Counterculture* the alienation that results when a society begins viewing everything — including man — "scientifically." Peter Berger came out with yet another book — this one, *A Rumor of Angels* — in which he argued for a resuscitation of religious rather than "scientific" explanations for things that we think, feel, and do. And with the publication of Allen Wheelis' latest work, we now can add *The End of the Modern Age* to his impressive list.

"The vision of the Modern Age,"