

BOOK REVIEW

iViva Vivas!

Edited by Henry Regnery / Liberty Press / \$7.95

A. James McAdams

Eliseo Vivas, educator, philosopher, and literary critic, is celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday this year. His has been, without a doubt, a distinguished career. As one of America's leading conservative intellectuals, Vivas has taught at some of the finest colleges in the country, including the University of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin. He has been remarkably prolific, publishing widely on such diverse topics as ethics, literature, and the philosophy of aesthetics, and has received well-deserved acclaim for his seminal works, *The Moral Life and the Ethical Life*, *D.H. Lawrence: The Failure and Triumph of Art*, and *Contra Marcuse*. Above all, he has been a staunch and defiant defender of traditionalist values and standards of judgment, and a consistent and capable opponent of the liberal reformist and quasi-Marxist world views which currently infest the American landscape. In light of Vivas' great accomplishment, therefore, it is fitting that Henry Regnery and a host of well-known scholars, including Erich Heller, William Couch, Hugh Kenner, and

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Murray Krieger, have compiled the *Festschrift, iViva Vivas!*

iViva Vivas! is a difficult book to describe, because much like the works of the man it honors, it covers a vast array of subjects, the virtual gamut of the scholarly enterprise. On the one hand the reader encounters personal impressions of Vivas, on the other an assortment of learned essays—a discourse on Schopenhauer, a critique of Kantian aesthetics, a Joycean analysis of language. Yet there is a strain of thought common to the essays in this collection, and that is their celebration of Vivas' insatiable "quest for certainty" and his uncompromising disdain for epistemological relativism. Against the social theories of those *grands simplificateurs* who would champion science and psychology over culture and morality, Vivas has tendered the pursuit of the "sustaining intellectual and moral structures of civilization." Unlike other theorists, he has sought not to change the world, but rather to understand it. And his philosophical tool in this quest has been that of ontological realism, that position which maintains that "values are real or antecedent to our discovery of them." Values are peculiar kinds of facts which undergird the civilized

society, and all of our acts, whether cultural, political, or artistic, are perforce subject to such standards. For Vivas, and for most of the contributors to this *Festschrift*, our only alternative to this outlook would be a blind and impotent positivism which would negate the very ethical purpose of the business of philosophy.

Whether ontological realism is a philosophically sound position is a matter of debate. There are those—including this reviewer—who are inclined to think that its shortcomings are manifold. But even withstanding philosophical controversy, one cannot deny the enormous contributions which Vivas has made. He has taken values and modern culture seriously and, in doing so, has lived up to his own description of the truly humanist teacher, he who conceives "the fundamental problem today, yesterday and always to stave off the snarling beasts of barbarism that are always and everywhere on the alert to get out of their inward cages into which culture drives them." To the extent that Vivas has succeeded in hindering the onslaught of today's barbarians, our debt to him is immense. *iViva Vivas!* □

BOOK REVIEW

The Case Against the Reckless Congress

Edited by Congresswoman Marjorie Holt / Green Hill / \$1.95

Baron Von Kannon

In the first of the three scheduled debates with Jimmy Carter, President Ford displayed a new eagerness to attack the Democratic Congress. In response to a question concerning the anti-Washington mood of the country, Ford insisted that the Democrats in Congress are Washington's major problem and he urged his own reelection in order to "check their excesses with my vetoes."

If Mr. Ford plans to continue his attack on Congress, he would do well to read *The Case Against the Reckless Congress*, a book of essays by nineteen conservative Republican Congressmen, covering a wide range of public policy questions. It is filled with statistics, shocking examples of fla-

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grant waste, cute examples of frivolous waste, voting records, and a set of what Republicans like to call "constructive alternatives" to the Democrats' proposals. It is, in short, a book of useful campaign rhetoric.

Mr. Ford is not the only person who would benefit from this book. It is a useful source of information for political activists and others who want to understand a responsible conservative perspective on major political questions.

Now this does not mean that the book deals with *all* of the issues. Neglected are those topics which seem to fascinate the intellectualoids. It includes nothing about Daniel Schorr, for example, or the CIA, or the pardon of the Incumbent's Hated Predecessor. But it does treat serious issues which concern most people: taxes, energy, inflation, foreign policy, govern-

ment regulation, education, welfare, the environment, and so on.

The book argues that many of America's problems were caused by reckless and foolish action (and occasional inaction) on the part of Congress. If we are to solve these problems, Congress must act to balance the budget, get the regulators off the backs of business, maintain a strong defense posture, allow the free market to operate, and—perhaps most important—allow citizens to make more decisions for themselves.

While most of the essays are useful, three stand above the rest. Congressman Jack Kemp's ideas on tax reform are imaginative and, as the *Wall Street Journal* has noted recently, deserve consideration. He analyzes the defects of our current tax policy, and discusses his proposed Jobs Creation Act which is aimed

at decreasing unemployment, increasing capital formation, and stabilizing prices.

Congressman Philip Crane's views on health care are especially timely. In the face of proposals for national health insurance, he praises our present system for its success in keeping America healthy at a relatively low cost, and urges Americans to examine the deterioration of health care in Great Britain since that country adopted its National Health Service.

Congressman Floyd Spence's concluding essay on defense is an exceptionally

good summary of the pro-defense point of view. "Today the deterrence of war is as important a function of military strength as the capacity to fight wars and win them," Spence writes. "Thus, the most highly visible components of a nation's military strength may never be used, and may thus come ultimately to be taken for granted."

The book's weaknesses are those common to most collections of essays. There is some repetition. The writing is a bit uneven. And issues of varying importance are treated equally: questions of energy policy and civil service reform, for exam-

ple, are each given one chapter.

This book of essays contains an additional weakness: it is written by politicians, who by nature tend to strut. Some of the chapters are marred by the constant use of the first person singular, and one Congressman-essayist got so carried away that he labeled some banal and wordy paragraph "Steiger's Law."

But enough criticism. The book is a useful tool for both junior and senior politicoes and it deserves wide readership. □

THE WONDERBOY AT MIDPASSAGE

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goody-goody, and speed reading. LBJ was a cauldron of passions, Henry Kissinger breaks from diplomacy to visit the *Jeu de Paume*, even the hellish Nixon battered Chopin on his piano. Notifications that Jimmy immerses himself in Niebuhr, Wagner, and Dylan Thomas are so much claptrap. He has no more capacity for the higher intellection than for baking soufflés. The essential Jimmy is the automaton who criss-crosses America serving up his laodicean banalities in a set discourse that is unique to all American political rhetoric. Though hailed as the political marvel of the hour, not one pol has aped his appallingly insipid sermon, and my guess is that not

one will. Even an American politician has his limits.

That this philistine is the candidate espoused by the *New York Review of Books* and promoted by all the modern sophisticates is the most amusing spectacle since the Catholics discovered JFK's randiness. But the spectacle of it also illuminates the barrenness of our era. Think of it! The morality-and-enlightenment claqué, the fastidious moralists who banished Nixon, have taken as their own a second-generation Babbitt, dismissing from their formidable consciences the blatancy of his fibs and the tedious philistinism of his hollow character. If ever one needed evidence that mere power is the moderns' only serious value, their endorsement of the Wonderboy provides

evidence in profusion. Power to gratify a ravenous and ridiculous ego is the moderns' most holy sacrament, indeed their only one. So they will hold their noses and spout for Jimmy. He is the Democrats' Nixon, a ruthless, relentless pursuer of power; and that is the whole of him. Agreed, it is revolting to listen to that limp, desiccated rhetoric and to witness his bald position-taking, but it is amusing to observe such moderns as Norman Mailer as they fabricate from mere nothingness an *interesting, decent, pleasant* man, a Protestant JFK. As I see it, they are attempting to turn swine flu into an aphrodisiac. Our Jimmy is a case to be inoculated against. □

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There is

Opportunity

in America!

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