

cal. The first recommendation is essentially how a health maintenance organization (H.M.O.) operates. The second plan is similar to how most obstetricians charge for their services. A flat fee is charged for delivery, unless there are complications, for which the woman is entitled to come to the office as often as necessary during her pregnancy.

Califano also recommends that hospitals begin to move toward a fee-for-illness system, a plan which would approximate the new diagnostic related system (D.R.G.) adopted and presently being implemented by Medicare. The D.R.G. system sets a flat fee for which Medicare will reimburse a hospital for a given diagnosis. If the patient leaves early, the hospital profits. If the patient lingers in the hospital, the hospital loses money. This system is supposed to encourage hospitals to be more efficient with their resources and reduce any monetary incentive to retain a patient.

If this country is to have a health care revolution along these lines, says Califano, American business must lead the way. "Aroused American businessmen are the critical catalysts we need to provide a variety of effective answers to the problem of escalating health care costs." The reason is simple. Business, especially big business, has the manpower and the financial leverage to initiate new forms for providing health care.

Califano does not break completely away from his liberal background. In some respects, he prefers an expanded role for government: he wants it to require employers to assure their employees' health care and would provide government medical insurance not just for the elderly and the poor but the unemployed also. In his reasoning, an aggressive corporate America will bring the cost of health care down, thereby making it much more affordable for the government to protect the needy.

But increasing the role of government in health care might easily offset any gains made by business. Even Califano admits that as a health care provider, government has a dismal record when it comes to cost efficiency. But this call by Califano for

more government is quite trivial in relation to the rest of the proposals in his book. When a confirmed liberal calls for market-oriented health care policies, it gives one reason to hope that perhaps a new consensus is beginning to emerge. 

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## A Dream Denied

**Conservatism: Dream and Reality**  
by Robert A. Nisbet (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, \$25)

Reviewed by Paul Gottfried

**C**onservatism: *Dream and Reality* is the latest book in a string of distinguished works by Robert Nisbet, going back to *The Quest for Community* (1952) and *The Sociological Tradition* (1967). Although Nisbet's post-1960 books have been generally leaner than his voluminous early studies of social theory and social crisis, certain *leitmotifs* run through almost all his writings.

One is an often mordantly expressed concern about social leveling, which Nisbet sees as furthered through plodding bureaucracies as much as through acts of revolutionary violence.

Bureaucrats rule by obliterating inherited social distinctions and any institutional arrangements that stand between themselves and uniform control over others. Managerial government is not a value-free force.

As Nisbet observes when he describes Jeremy Bentham, the utilitarian thinker:

The endeavor to create a professional civil service to do what 'the great unpaid' had done for so long and so inefficiently, it could well be argued, is respectable. But what was not respectable, what is horrifying in the judgment of conservatives, was the nightmarish world of cold reason,

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bureaucracy, permanent reform, bloodless charity, and total absence of emotion and feeling that Bentham foretold.

Nisbet couples his distaste for bureaucratic mechanisms with a strong belief in the value of intermediate institutions such as the family, church, and trade associations. He views such institutions as lines of defense for the individual and the family against bureaucrats and reformers intent upon human reconstruction. Tracing such notions to the French Enlightenment's hope of remolding human nature according to a rational uniform blueprint, Nisbet notes that political rationalists subvert individual and corporate freedoms while claiming to free people from the dead hand of the past.

Intermediate institutions, particularly the family, not only pose an obstacle to the further spread of political rationalism and bureaucratic control; they also correspond, as Nisbet sees it, to man's moral and educational needs. Like Edmund Burke, whom he praises lavishly, Nisbet believes that people become ethically responsible through a civilizing process begun in the family. Duty, obligation, and civility are formed through early, steady contact with parents and other transmitters of an inherited culture that contains metaphysical and moral values. Rarely, if ever, do people become good from learning and reflection.

Nisbet's writings all include statements of what can be described as classical European conservatism. He exalts hierarchy, defends the need for ascribed relationships in a well-ordered society, and assumes the naturalness of politically recognized gender distinctions.

For Nisbet, the term "medieval" has a thoroughly positive association. He reminds us that the Middle Ages emphasized the social bond, and as he states in *Conservatism: Dream and Reality*, had been rich in "semi-public autonomous bodies . . . freed of direct responsibility to legislature or the people." His ideal society, if one might use a concept that he would deplore, would be largely agrarian, founded upon custom and received authority, and be

disposed to “feudalize and decentralize everything political,” in a phrase from the French anti-liberal novelist, Paul Bourget.

Nisbet even has misgivings about “the equality of all citizens before a single law.” Interpreting this concept historically as a slippery slope leading to further bureaucratic encroachments upon traditional communities, he quotes Elie Halevy, the French historian, that laws that consider all individuals equal end up trying “to equalize the condition of all individuals.” Nisbet observes, “Law is more often the destroyer of custom than it is the creator.”

Nisbet does have kind words for established churches, which he considers useful for teaching civil virtue. The word ‘useful’ brings one to the heart of Nisbet’s thinking, for his defense of religious establishment, like his remarks on monarchy and aristocracy, stems from a dispassionate view of the social good.

Unlike his contemporary and fellow traditionalist, Russell Kirk, Nisbet does not approach politics as an affair of the heart. Nor does he philosophize, like the rhapsodic Alcibiades in Plato’s *Symposium*, as someone “smitten and stung” by the search for wisdom. Nisbet invariably shows a certain detachment—apparent in his elegant, restrained prose—even when he discusses the problem of social disintegration. He calmly lets us know that neither communal stability nor cultural continuity is possible in a world in which secularism and feminism have triumphed. These trendy ideologies are incompatible with the cultural foundations of any flourishing past society; and it is utopian to believe that the forces that have made for social cohesion up to this point can be suspended to accommodate modern fantasies.

Nisbet despises religious enthusiasm almost as thoroughly as ideological zeal. He never misses an opportunity in *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* to underscore a psychological or historical connection between the two. He draws parallels between the religious passions of John Wesley and his disciples and, even more importantly, modern American fundamentalists and the mentality of political radicals.

Nisbet draws such connections without hiding his strong feelings: it is obvious that he wants to keep some distance between himself and the religious fervor that he finds on the American right.

There have been cool though proper relations between him and many of the old conservatives of the 1950s and 1960s. Nisbet viewed with some distaste the religious wars that shook *National Review* in the 1960s, particularly the clash between Catholic Frank Meyer and the militant atheist but firm anti-Communist, Max Eastman, over the role of religious morality in American conservatism.

The old right has as many reservations about Nisbet as he has about it. Like David Hume, whom Dr. Johnson called a “Tory by accident,” Nisbet has no doubt seemed an odd kind of conservative. His thinking does not fit any of the dominant postwar American conservative models. Unlike Whittaker Chambers, he does not present his thought in an earnestly religious and confessional tone or concern himself mainly with the confrontation between Christian civilization and godless Communism. Nor does he resemble Russell Kirk, who invokes historical Providence and pays tribute to the Western religious heritage. Nisbet does not even have (from the American conservative standpoint) the one overriding merit found in the theologically skeptical Friedrich von Hayek, who writes in firm support of capitalism and the industrial revolution. Nisbet sees in both the germs of destructive modernity.

Nisbet’s combination of religious skepticism and pre-modern social views have counterparts in European thought in the works of Montesquieu, David Hume, and Michael Oakeshott. In America, however, Nisbet has stood defiantly outside the conservative mainstream. Neither his learned, detached prose nor his utilitarian defense of European counterrevolutionaries has provided much inspiration to movement conservatives.

His critical and analytic stance has made it difficult for him to classify modern political personalities. In *Conservatism: Dream and Reality*,

Nisbet refers to Lincoln, Churchill, and Ronald Reagan all as conservatives. He also writes of finding conservative tendencies in the ideas of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Bell. Although it is certainly possible to find traits in all these figures that would distinguish them from what currently passes for liberalism, can one really link them to a school of thought that rejected the French Revolution? This question is relevant, for hardly anyone today—save for a few Southern agrarians and avowed Burkeans—would fit the conceptual frame of reference in Nisbet’s discussion of conservatism.

Nisbet brings to bear an invaluable perspective in examining the drift of Western civilization. But his unshakably conservative standard of judgment is inapplicable to today’s battles between welfare state democrats and pro-Marxist socialists. In such battles, Nisbet has no trouble picking sides, but the side he inevitably takes has no demonstrable connection to the world of Burke and other opponents of the French Revolution. The old, perhaps truer, terms of debate have lost historical resonance.

This can be seen particularly in the final chapter of *Conservatism: Dream and Reality*, in which Nisbet picks his way fastidiously through the current American right. Obviously, those markings provided by the religious right and the anti-Communist, moderate welfare statist are not to his liking, but Nisbet explores the landscape with dignity, if not pleasure. He also seems to make a choice among lesser evils, expressing more sympathy (or less distaste) for neoconservatives than the religious right. In any case, Nisbet is convinced that the welfare state and its bureaucratic rule are irreversible. He reluctantly considers the argument that defending the present instruments of material redistribution and social leveling against the introduction of more radical ones is, in some sense, a conservative enterprise. This concession is the closest that Nisbet comes to accepting any part of neoconservative thought. It may also be the farthest that an 18th-century gentleman will go toward accepting America in the 1980s. 

## LETTERS

Michael Altfeld, Representative Jim Courter,  
Lieutenant General Daniel Graham, Walter Block,  
Thomas Ireland, Raul Rabe, Lev Navrozov, Brent  
Baker, Sally Reed, and others.

### Strategic Defense

Dear Sir:

The problem with Clarence Robinson's article ("Is Strategic Defense Criticism Obsolete? Rapid Technological Advances Have Changed the Entire Debate," Summer 1986) is that he speaks as if we could go into engineering development on all the systems which he discusses immediately. This is simply not the case. SDI is structured to allow a decision on defenses in the early 1990s. Since engineering development takes about 10 years, the defenses being researched by that program will likely not be in place until well after 2000. However, if Mr. Robinson is right about Soviet plans and programs (as I believe he is), this is far too late.

The solution to this problem would appear to be to actually deploy some type of limited defense while working on the more exotic and complete system conceived by SDI. The low altitude defense system for example, could be deployed very rapidly to protect the silo-based Peacekeeper. And while it is nuclear armed, it would use a warhead of very low yield to destroy one much larger. In addition, systems such as the Swarmjet concept (which is non-nuclear and may not even be an anti-

ballistic missile—ABM—by treaty definition) could also be deployed relatively rapidly for point defense. If necessary, such point defense systems could be given a high altitude overlay using an SA-12 equivalent and/or the 100 ABMs permitted by treaty. Active defense of the silos might also make it easier politically to deploy additional Peacekeepers, thus further enhancing deterrence during the lengthy period of testing and development scheduled for SDI systems.

This approach is criticized by Mr. Robinson on the grounds that it defends "only" military targets and that it could be overwhelmed by an attacker. Yet it would seem clear that launching strikes against the cities of a nuclear-armed opponent before one has crippled his capacity to retaliate makes very little strategic sense. As a result, protecting our strategic forces does protect our population, albeit indirectly. Furthermore, by the time the Soviets could proliferate enough warheads to overwhelm the defense, some of the more exotic systems might be ready. Finally, it should be noted that no defense short of perfection can preclude a determined opponent from launching a counter-population strike.

Even a defense effectiveness of 90 percent would require the attacker to expend only 8,800 warheads in order to place two on each of 200 cities with at least 90 percent confidence. This number is well within Soviet capability today. Thus, it would appear that the only way to defend cities is through the defense of those military assets which would have to be eliminated before direct attacks on cities could be contemplated safely by an adversary. Though point defenses would be only the first step in the construction of such a defense, they appear to be essential in order to purchase the time necessary to develop and deploy any of the more exotic concepts of which Mr. Robinson is so enamored.

Michael A. Altfeld, Ph.D.  
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Dear Sir:

Clarence A. Robinson's article represents an extremely valuable contribution to the reasoned debate over the desirability and feasibility of strategic defensive systems. Mr. Robinson's clear explanation of the technical advances and challenges of the SDI program should be indispensable to the inquisitive layman