

tion whether the community would really be served by it."

Well, a man's got to earn a living somehow. If there isn't a lot of style in this book, there is a wry sense of humor

at work. Readers should also turn the other cheek when the general admits to having been a Mondale supporter and a fan of affirmative action. No record is spotless. □

WATCH ON THE RIGHT:
CONSERVATIVE INTELLECTUALS
IN THE REAGAN ERA

J. David Hoeveler, Jr./University of Wisconsin Press/333 pp. \$24.95

D. G. Myers

Lionel Trilling's remark in *The Liberal Imagination* (1950) that there were no conservative ideas in circulation has become an article of faith on the left, even if the passing decades have made Trilling himself look almost conservative. Today, among those university professors who are in a hurry to abandon the human heritage, the only opposition acknowledged is that of "the Killer Bs": Allan Bloom and William J. Bennett, Jr. Equally alliterative conservative thinkers—Irving Babbitt, Jacques Barzun, Julien Benda, Peter L. Berger, M. E. Bradford, William F. Buckley, Jr., Jakob Burckhardt, Edmund Burke—are ignored, if not unknown. Just recently, an esteemed professor of English at Duke University said that, while both the left and the right have offered critiques of American education, the difference between them "is one of sophistication and complexity." The right presents its case in a vulgar "flag-waving mode," while the left urges its reforms "in the context of a full-fledged epistemological argument, complete with a theory of the self, an analysis of the emergence and ontology of institutions," and buzz buzz buzz.

J. David Hoeveler's latest book makes any such self-congratulatory dismissal of conservative thought impossible to sustain. In the eighties, Hoeveler points out, conservative ideas "achieved an ascendancy marked by conservative triumphs in the presidential elections of 1980, 1984, and 1988." The sniggering on the left at the mental capacities of Ronald Reagan and Dan Quayle cannot distract attention from the fact that behind the success of conservative politicians there stands a movement of conservative ideas that has gained wider approval from the American people than any recent movement on the left. Hoeveler even calls this movement a "renaissance," and in

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Watch on the Right he examines it in detail, while placing it in the larger context of conservative thinking since Burke.

Hoeveler's thesis is that so-called neo-conservatives, who believe themselves merely to be flinching at the radicalization of liberalism and who are looked upon with suspicion by the Old Right, have more in common than either side may realize with the "principles and prejudices that have marked conservative thought over two centuries." He selects for close study eight contemporary figures: four neoconservatives (Irving Kristol, Hilton Kramer, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Michael Novak) and four intellectuals affiliated with an older, more "European," strain of conservatism (William F. Buckley, Jr., George Will, Robert Nisbet, and R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.).

In criticizing an essay on Will by the late Henry Fairlie, Hoeveler complains that Fairlie "threw together a potpourri of scattered reflections by Will but disdained to see any thematic core in them." *Watch on the Right* is no such disdainful potpourri. Hoeveler believes that each writer's body of work amounts to a philosophy—at least to a characteristic way of squinting at the world. He isn't especially interested in biographies of his eight thinkers, and his book is a little thin on such basic information as which books were written in what order.

Conservatives may be almost anything else in addition to conservatives. They may be historians or economists or literary critics or political theorists, though at least six of the eight intellectuals in Hoeveler's book can be described as some variety of journalist—as F. Scott Fitzgerald puts it, "that most limited of all specialists, the 'well-rounded man.'" Since none of his subjects wrote philosophy per se, Hoeveler's method is not capable of showing how each one's thinking was given shape by the particular mode in which he did write, because modern conservatism, unlike Marxism for instance, is not in itself a mode of thought. What,

then, makes someone a conservative?

Hoeveler tries to explain American conservatism in the idiom of general ideas. In his view, its rebirth was attended by four main principles. These were: (1) anti-utopianism, an animosity toward any abstract scheme for the perfection of society; (2) democratism, a trust in the habit and memory, the fundamental wisdom, of the people at large; (3) liberalism (in its classical sense), putting freedom before liberation, and therefore responsibility before grievance; and (4) the bourgeois ethic, "the source of the self-discipline that makes intelligence and its application possible."

These principles exhibit both the continuity and the newness of contemporary conservatism. Although recent anti-utopianism is inspired by disdain for the vague mysticism of sixties counterculture and the bold plans of the New Left, this feature of conservatism is as old as anti-Jacobinism. "Conservatives from Burke to Robert Nisbet have identified [the French Revolution] as a revolution by intellectuals," Hoeveler says, "one in which abstract theory envisioned a new order for human society." But more recent misgivings about intellectuals have assumed the form of philippics against a "new class" of professionals in law, government, the press, and the university—an "elite corps of impudent snobs," in Spiro T. Agnew's less sparing phrase. This anti-elitism is nicely balanced by a confidence in the sentiments and opinions of the common folk on such matters as crime, obscenity, racial justice, the rewarding of merit, and the threat of Communism. It is this confidence in the common man, for instance, that distinguishes a writer like Tyrrell from his master, H. L. Mencken.

Hoeveler is superb at drawing connections and parallels, at tacking recent writers onto the map of historical conservatism. This is as it should be, since the 49-year-old Hoeveler teaches intellectual history at the Milwaukee campus of the University of Wisconsin. He skillfully braids Kristol's supply-side economics, Kramer's modernist aesthetics, and even Novak's passion for sports into a coherent humanism. If he seems to place Irving Babbitt at the center of American conservatism, it's no surprise, for Hoeveler is best known for his definitive and tightly written account of Babbitt's *New Humanism*, published in 1977. Each chapter of *Watch on the Right* makes for interesting reading, particularly the one on Novak, perhaps because his intellectual progress has been the most tortuous.

As a whole, though, the book is curiously unfocused (to use Hoeveler's own phrase), partly because the writers it covers do not really constitute a cohesive movement. Considered as a set of general ideas and principles, conservatism flashes with brilliance, but as a distinctive genus of thought, it seems occasional, unpremeditated, ad hoc. Hoeveler observes that recent conservative writers have "failed to define a conservative philosophy of knowledge." This may explain much about the intellectual history of recent conservatism, from the left's intolerance of it to Buckley's failure to deliver his long-promised book on the movement. It may also suggest that what conservatism requires at present is not intellectual history, no matter how informative and interesting, but a searching philosophy of itself, an account of what (if anything) it means to think conservatively. As intellectual history, though, *Watch on the Right* is about as good as can be. □



THE PRIZE:
THE EPIC QUEST FOR OIL, MONEY AND POWER
Daniel Yergin/Simon and Schuster/876 pp. \$24.95

Edward Norden

Not love but decayed plankton makes the world go round—that's the burden of Daniel Yergin's great slab of a nonfiction bestseller, which he worked on for seven years and had the luck to see published a few weeks before Operation Desert Storm. He ends his account by repeating his thesis: "Petroleum remains the motive force of industrial society and the lifeblood of the civilization that it helped to create." Well, if what Yergin means is that petroleum products warm us, cool us, move us, and keep us comfortable while we make wealth and consume it, this is an obvious truth worthy of constant repetition. He means something more than that, though.

As the desire for spices and gold underlay the politics of the sixteenth century, so the desire and need for oil, and the fight over the power which possession of oil confers, supposedly explains not only the world politics but the world wars of our own century. This is a large claim, which Yergin may have felt he had to include in order to justify the book's length. In any case, he fails to prove it. Yes, Hitler made a stab for Baku, but possession of the Baku fields wasn't the reason he went to war with Russia. The Japanese needed Indonesian oil. But that wasn't the only reason they bombed Pearl Harbor.

The Prize, even if it doesn't live up to its portentous thesis, is nonetheless worth buying and having. It should be kept on the shelf next to Anthony Sampson's more stylish *The Seven Sisters* of a few years back, which chronicled the origins and tallied the fortunes of the majors. Yergin, an "energy consultant" who operates out of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and wrote a book during the Vietnam war placing 51 percent of the blame for the Cold War on American shoulders, read everything before writing *The Prize* and spoke with everyone alive, excluding only Kissinger, Sheikh Yamani, and Saddam Hussein. His book is accordingly long on anecdotes and cameos, ranging over a huge canvas of places and characters, from Pit-hole concessions in Pennsylvania in the 1860s to T. Boone Pickens.

Yergin also retells the stories of Stan-

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dard Oil, Shell, Gulf, Royal Dutch, and so on, but he doesn't stint on the wildcatters and independents, who have always been terrifically colorful and occasionally have changed the face of the industry, if not of history. We meet, among many others, William F. Buckley, Sr., who had his business nationalized (his children would say stolen) by Lazaro Cardenas; and Armand Hammer, who made a deal with the young Col. Qaddafi in 1970 which Yergin rightly describes as revolutionary, a deal that set the stage for the emergence of OPEC as a fearsome adversary.

Some of the stories are stale, some of the grammar faulty, some of the portraits boilerplate—we learn, for example that Churchill, who as First Lord of the Admiralty switched the Royal Navy to oil in 1911, was the "son of the brilliant but erratic Lord Randolph Churchill and his beautiful American wife, Jennie Jerome." Like most Americans today, Yergin doesn't know the difference between "compare to" and "compare with." On the other hand, his sketch of concession agent Calouste Gulbenkian, "Mr. Five Percent," is fun.

And he does have some lyric moments. Here's his précis of a chapter on the years between the end of World War II and the Yom Kippur War:

Whatever the twists and turns in global politics, whatever the ebb of imperial power and the flow of national pride, one trend in the decades following World War II progressed in a straight and rapidly ascending line—the consumption of oil. If it can be said, in the abstract, that the sun energized the planet, it was oil that now powered its human population, both in its familiar forms as fuel and in the proliferation of new petrochemical products. Oil emerged triumphant, the undisputed King, a monarch garbed in a dazzling array of plastics. He was generous to his loyal subjects, sharing his wealth to, and even beyond, the point of waste. His reign was a time of confidence, of growth, of expansion, of astonishing economic performance. His largesse transformed his kingdom, ushering in a new drive-in civilization. It was the Age of Hydrocarbon Man.

On the whole, Yergin's is more a celebratory book than an explanatory one. If the prime motive of the early American oilmen was greed, their "merciless methods and unbridled lust" nevertheless "turned an agrarian repub-

lic . . . into the world's greatest industrial power," self-evidently a good thing. And he continues to give the oil companies, in concert with Washington, a B-plus for riding out the bumps of post-colonialism and managing, most of the time, to supply the First World with enough crude at more or less affordable prices—if bestsellers get to heaven, Scoop Jackson didn't enjoy *The Prize*. And, as well as admiring the resource and industry he's writing about, Yergin is fair about the motives, interests, rights, and pride of the Latin Americans, Arabs, and Persians who have had the questionable luck of sitting on most of the oil and who have long been wrestling with Europeans and Americans for control of it.

A geopolitical mishap tucked most of the oil under the sands and waters of the Third World. The amoral deals that American and European companies and governments have struck all along with the locals don't shock Yergin, considering how important oil is, nor is he shocked when treachery and violence are used against those who won't play ball, as in Iran to bring Mossadegh down, or in Kuwait to get Saddam out. Yergin's realism makes explicit that not only the West and Japan, but also the wretched of the earth, could never have afforded to trust Saddam with the mother of all petroleum lodes.

Simon Schama dubs oil "black gold," in a blurb for his friend Yergin's book, and one is reminded that Breughel pictured gold as a form of useless dung. Yergin finds petroleum more attractive than not, in any case uncontested so far as a source of power, profit, prosperity, and—indirectly—the pleasures of peaceful civilization. Yet what of the trouble and pain for birds, fish, and humans bound up in maintaining economies, societies, civilizations on this filthy stuff, hidden away in the earth's most godforsaken corners? Oil stinks, and not only literally. "The excrement of the devil," the Venezuelan Pérez Alfonzo called it, and as a co-founder of OPEC he was in a position to know. "The whole place smells like a corps of soldiers when they have the diarrhea," Yergin quotes a visitor to Pit-hole.

And now, greasy snow in Kashmir, burning wells in Kuwait, and thousands of Iraqis dead, all because Saddam made a wrong move in a region of the planet which, if there were no oil there, CNN would ignore. Who can guarantee that this will have been the last war for "black gold"? Certainly not Yergin, who writes:

As we look forward toward the twenty-first century, it is clear that mastery will certainly come as much from a computer chip as from a barrel of oil. Yet . . . until some alternative source of energy is found, oil will still have far-reaching effects.

Actually, alternatives have been found that are infinite, clean, and ubiquitous. There is nuclear power, of course, but it is controversial. It thus only remains for our politicians, inventors, and investors to make solar energy efficient enough and cheap enough to send bloody King Oil into exile. □

CORRESPONDENCE
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who, whipped into a frenzy by their clerics, stormed out of the mosques on the Temple Mount and loosed a barrage of rocks, bricks, and Molotov cocktails on the worshipping Jews beneath them. These worshippers, a crowd of approximately 20,000, had assembled for prayer at the Western Wall, the holiest place in the Jewish religion.

Also, the "Israeli security forces" were simply police, routinely stationed at the Temple Mount. When attacked by the mob, they responded first with tear gas and then with rubber bullets. When those ran out and when the police post had been burned down and when the forty police involved were at the point of being lynched, they opened fire with live ammunition.

I think it is important that this matter be clarified in your pages. I believe that the casual reference to this incident could create a quite wrong impression on those who are not informed about this matter.

—Gerardo Joffe
San Francisco, California

Polish Progress

I've got Your Magazine subscribed for me by a conservative friend from the distant, yet great, state of Montana, Mrs. Fern Flanagan. It's a pleasure for me to read all these openly anti-Communist articles in your paper. That's something I was deprived of all my life. However strong the anti-Communist movement in Poland may seem to be on the surface, it's very weak deep inside people's hearts. That's why your stories are so important to me. They are healthy in essence, they have this precious, and forgotten here, quality of the healthy way of looking at things. You don't hide behind clichés and you openly think of Communists as a synonym of all that's wrong, sick, and unnatural. Very rightly so! . . .

In general, thanks to my visits to the states, to personal contacts with Americans and finally to your magazine, I've found out that conservatism is not what Communist propaganda told me it was. It's not bad, it's not dirty, it's not CIA, it's not everything that Communism is! I only wish that this kind of thinking were more popular in my native country. . . .

—Kamil Turowski
Lodz, Poland