

CONSERVATISM ON THE RUN

RALPH RAICO

One sign of the increasing visibility and importance of the libertarian movement is that we are coming under increasing attack from our enemies. Last spring, for instance, we were attacked editorially in the left-liberal Catholic magazine, *Commonweal*; and *The Nation* magazine, another left-wing publication, devoted a two-part article criticizing the growing influence of libertarian ideas, in particular as presented in *Inquiry* magazine.

But the most concerted assault to date has come not from the left, but from the right. The October 27 issue of *Human Events* had an attack by Joseph L. Gentili which relied heavily on *National Review*'s June 8 issue. In that issue, *National Review* dedicated not one but *two* cover articles to an attempt to demolish the Cato Institute, *Inquiry* magazine, and *Libertarian Review*. One was by Ernest van den Haag—a Manhattan lay-analyst; the other was by a certain Lawrence V. Cott. In the issue of August 3 there was a follow-up from many of our friends, and a response from van den Haag. I would like to use this particular conservative attack on us as an illuminating example of what is wrong with conservatism.

First of all, as to what motivated the attack. It's obvious, of course, that it was the result of a top-level strategic decision at *National Review*. To my mind, it's equally clear—and not a little gratifying—that that means they're scared. As van den Haag says, "the libertarian ideology, [which] was once regarded as a crank nostrum is becoming a fad." He also complains,

significantly, that "some conservatives feel that libertarianism deserves support." What evidently worries him and other conservatives is that our philosophy is beginning to exert a strong attraction both on business people and on students and young people who may start out as conservatives.

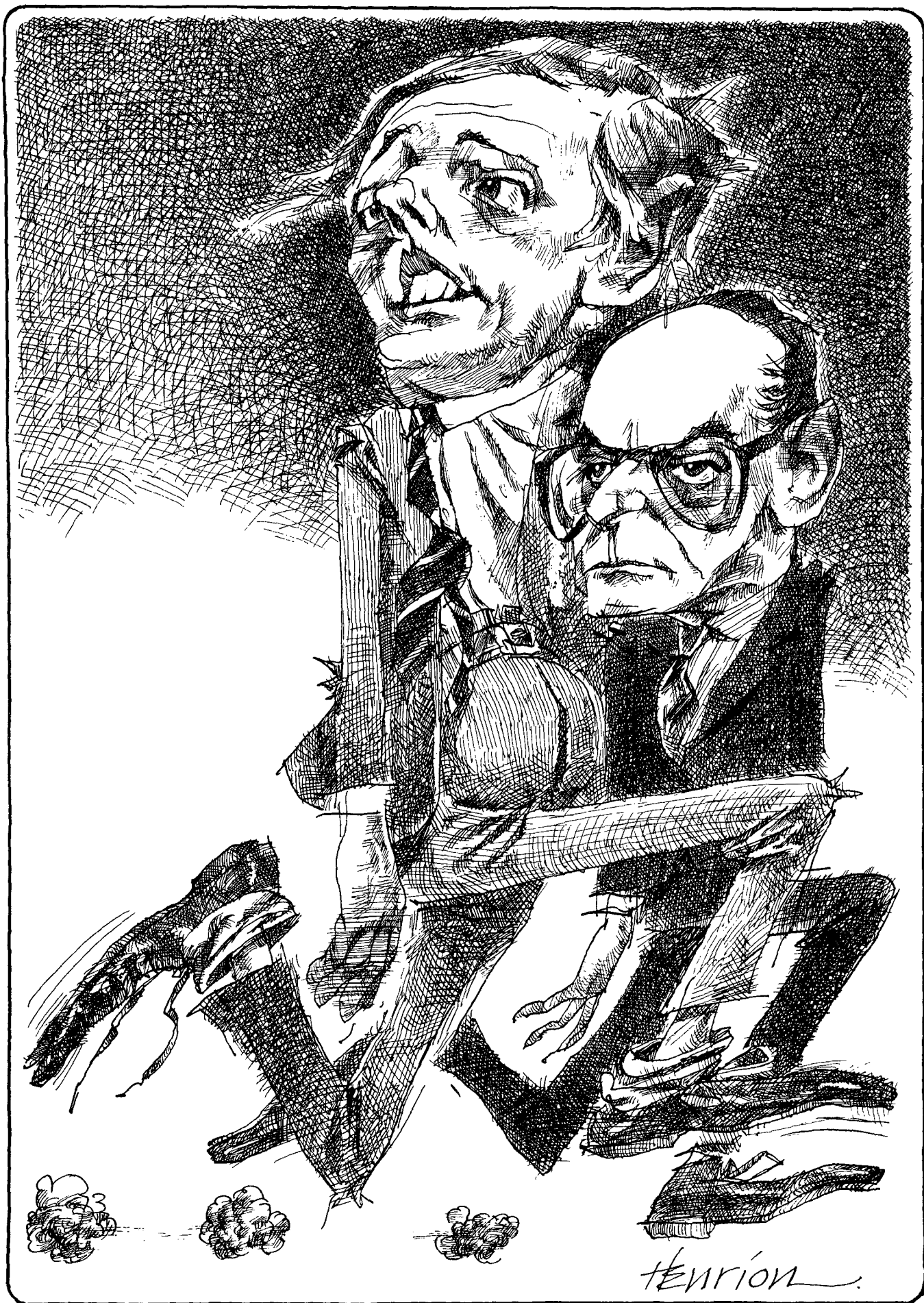
As for the business people—many of them are of course believers in the free market and private property. On the other hand, they don't have much use for the "philosophical" rigamarole that the conservative intellectuals try to superadd to those ideas. The ISI Summer Seminars are a good example of what I'm talking about: they'll have, say, Yale Brozen talking about the free market, and then they'll have Gerhart Niemayer talking about Communism as a gnostic heresy traceable to Joachim of Flora. Well, it's clear that a constituency exists among American business people for the first set of ideas. The job of the conservative managers is to convince them that free market ideas are somehow linked to a quite separate philosophical and cultural critique—one that is rather foreign to the American tradition.

Similarly with college students. By now it must be painfully apparent to the conservative leaders that libertarianism, because of its intellectual consistency and vigor, exerts a natural and very powerful attraction on the more intelligent among the students. But a movement which, like conservatism, is more and more left with only the dregs of the college-age generation is a movement that is headed for oblivion. And for myself, I can only wish them godspeed.

There is another motivation for the attack which should be mentioned. The conservatives are experiencing a kind of annoyed envy. What has produced this envy is the fact that the personal financial generosity of one of our most prominent libertarians now permits us a much, much greater diffusion of our ideas than was ever before possible. The cover of the issue of *National Review* which contains the attack on us has as its headline: "STRANGE ALLIANCE. Anarchists, backed by corporate big money, infiltrate the freedom movement." ("Freedom movement," by the way, is the name they give to their collection of Pentagon-worshippers and friends of the Chilean junta.) In his man-in-the-street envy, Lawrence V. Cott goes so far as to complain about the Cato Institute's "plush suite in a modern office building at the base of San Francisco's picturesque Telegraph Hill."

As Helmut Schoeck showed in his brilliant book on the subject, *envy* is one of the commonest of human emotions, and its role should never be underestimated. It is this present conjunction within the libertarian movement, of powerful ideas and generous funding for those ideas, that sticks in the throats of the conservatives and our other enemies.

Now, for the critique in *National Review*. Sometimes the statements are based simply on ignorance. Thus, van den Haag asserts that "libertarians have turned away from their anarchist ancestors toward a free market ... old-style



One of the most prominent publicists of the Old Right, author and journalist John T. Flynn opposed American participation in World War II and Korea and argued tirelessly against the development of an American welfare-warfare state with an imperialist foreign policy. He was unwelcome in *National Review* because he “did not understand the nature of the Soviet Military threat.” (Ronald Radosh, “Preface,” *As We Go Marching* by John T. Flynn, Free Life Editions, 1973.)



THE BETTMAN ARCHIVE

anarchists were opposed to private property and capitalism.” Here van den Haag just shows that he’s unaware of the existence of 19th century *individualist* anarchists like Lysander Spooner and Benjamin Tucker, and doesn’t even know much about a proto-anarchist like Henry David Thoreau. Van den Haag also appears to think that Hayek is a member of the Chicago school of economists, on the basis of the fact that Hayek taught at the University of Chicago. He doesn’t realize that Hayek never taught in the economics department, but was on the Committee on Social Thought; and that his methodology is radically different from the methodology of Stigler, Friedman, and their various followers.

There is an interminable discussion of some of Murray Rothbard’s ideas on criminal justice, as if these were absolutely crucial to the libertarian position. And van den Haag also holds up to ridicule some of Rothbard’s strategic ideas. He quotes with implied horror Rothbard’s statement, that “what is desperately needed . . . is the development of a strong cadre of ‘professional’ libertarians.” Here I’m at a loss as to what the point is—I would have thought that the formation of *conservatives* cadres is precisely the reason for being of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute and Young Americans for Freedom, organizations which are staffed by professional conservatives.

Probably the oddest claim of the conservatives is that libertarians are soft on Communism—and not simply on the question of who started the Cold War, and whether the Soviet Union has a particularly expansionist foreign policy. According to van den Haag, “on major political issues [including] the domestic nature of the Soviet Union, the libertarian movement has consistently taken extremist leftist positions” (emphasis added). Now, this is a truly startling claim. What evidence does van den Haag produce for it?

The evidence consists of two items. There is first of all Rothbard’s statement in *LR*, “a democratic and relatively far freer United States has been more aggressive and imperialistic in foreign affairs than a relatively totalitarian Russia or China.” Van den Haag comments: “To write of a ‘relatively totalitarian Russia or China’ is as helpful as writing, ‘Hell is relatively hotter than heaven.’ Only a person who believes the difference is unimportant would write in this manner.” Since Rothbard referred to the United States as “democratic and relatively far freer,” van den Haag’s point strikes me as idiotically picayune.

The second, and last, piece of evidence for the claim that libertarians have taken an extremist leftist position on the domestic nature of the Soviet regime is the writings of Thomas Szasz.

What is it that proves to van den Haag that Tom Szasz has the same views on the Soviet Union that a Communist has?

Well, it was a series of articles in *Inquiry* magazine, where Tom said: “For the past decade the Western press has been waxing indignant over what it calls the political misuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union. This is a case of selective indignation with a vengeance . . . The actual figure [of the number of dissidents committed to mental hospitals in Russia] is still a small fraction of the hundreds of thousands of persons who are compulsorily hospitalized in the West—not since 1962, but annually—for their ‘beliefs.’”

Van den Haag’s comment: “The United States Government does not use psychiatric confinement selectively to imprison its critics; the Soviet government does. Dr. Szasz either willfully ignores this difference (in which case he writes in bad faith), or does not understand it (in which case he is incompetent). There is a third possibility which he would but which I cannot rule out: an unmanageable obsession has taken possession of him.”

Now, that last remark is rather piggish, I would say, and it gives us the measure of the respect conservatives really have for *civility*. But the fact is that Szasz’s major concern for a number of years now has been the vast, tax-fed apparatus for the systematic degradation of human beings called institutional psychiatry. This has been an “unmanageable obsession” for him in the same sense that hatred of the political power of the Catholic Church was an “unmanageable obsession” for Voltaire. Unlike conservatives, who tend to be comfortable with the status quo, classical liberals and libertarians have usually shown a deadly serious concern with *injustice*. A long time ago, Szasz—poor, deranged fellow that he is—was made *angry* at the life-destroying injustice he found in his own field—at psychiatrists who performed aversion-therapy on homosexuals at Atascadero and Vacaville in California, or who performed psychosurgery on rambunctious black kids at the University of Mississippi hospital in Jackson. The point Szasz was making in his *Inquiry* articles—a very valid one—is that there is something hypocritical and cheap about Western psychiatrists protesting *Soviet* psychiatric abuses, practiced against Russian dissident *intellectuals*—people with whom the Western psychiatrists can identify—while remaining completely silent on the injustices committed against *ordinary*, non-intellectual people by psychiatrists in our own society every day. It’s not that Szasz is unaware of the political uses of psychiatry in Russia. But his view, in my opinion, is a deeper, more comprehensive, and more *compassionate* one than the conventional one and goes beyond the easy, self-righteous denunciations of the hour.

The claim that libertarians are soft on the nature of the *internal* Communist regime is one I personally would find offensive, if I didn’t find it so ridiculous. I am now and have always been an anti-Communist; some time ago, for



Felix Morley, who worked on the *Baltimore Sun* under H.L. Mencken, edited the *Washington Post* during the 1930s, and founded *Human Events* in 1945, also found himself out of favor on the Right by the early 1950s because of his opposition to the Cold War and his belief that the United States should “avoid entangling alliances” in its foreign policy and refrain from minding other countries’ business for them.

instance, I contributed a long review to *LR* on the new biography of Leon Trotsky by Irving Howe, where I was rather critical of Communism. You’ll find that the review not only cites the fairly obvious facts of Bolshevik repression, killings, and mass famine, but it also shows the connection between these atrocities and the Marxist ideal of the abolition of the market and the price system; and it also brings out the connections of Bolshevism to the positivist program for the future society.

In this sense, all libertarians are anti-Communists, since libertarianism is the *antithesis* of Communism.

A more conventional and predictable criticism that the writers for *National Review* make is that we misapprehend the nature, not of the internal Communist regime, but of Communist foreign policy, particularly of Russian imperialism. Lawrence V. Cott says, simply, that “Rothbard is an apologist for Stalin”; and van den Haag asserts of libertarians that “they went to Stalin’s school.”

Yet—what is it that’s supposed to demonstrate our “pro-Communism” and “pro-Stalinism”? Purely and simply that we favor a non-interventionist foreign policy—including the withdrawal of American forces from foreign countries, a suggestion that causes van den Haag to blanch with horror—and that libertarian scholars tend to be revisionist on the origins of the Cold War. On such questions, van den Haag states, “the libertarian position is indistinguishable from the Communist position.”

This type of mindless smear of anyone who takes exception to the globalist policies of those who direct our foreign affairs is not new. It is precisely analogous to the charge brought against the non-interventionists in 1940 and 1941—people like John T. Flynn, Frank Chodorov, Albert Jay Nock, and Felix Morley. Those men held—as I do—that the origins of the European conflict could be found in the unjust and vindictive peace treaty forced on Germany at Versailles. They also recommended that the United States stay clear of foreign entanglements, which were sure to lead to a state of perpetual war and preparation for war, and thus erode our American system. It happened that their historical analysis and their policy recommendations overlapped to an extent with those of the Nazis, who also thought the Treaty of Versailles was unjust, and who also wanted to see America stay out of the war. Because of this, the old non-interventionists were accused of “parroting the Goebbels line,” and at a press conference once, Roosevelt gave one of them—John O’Donnell of the *New York Daily News*—an Iron Cross for meritorious service to the Reich. The conservative smear of Rothbard and other libertarians as “apologists for Stalin” is just as contemptible as the liberals’ smear of the old isolationists.

A final aspect of van den Haag’s attack deserves extended comment. It is an old conservative swindle, going back to

Edmund Burke. It has been customary for conservatives to lay claim to our whole social inheritance of traditions, meanwhile asserting that libertarians—or classical liberals, or French *philosophes*—are aiming at the total destruction of all tradition. In that time-honored spirit, van den Haag states: “Libertarians are antinomians, i.e., opposed to law and traditional institutions . . . Libertarianism is opposed to *all* conservative traditions, to *tradition itself*” (emphasis added).

Now, I must confess that when I read this, I was filled with astonishment. Can this really be true? Are we really such barbarians? After all, there are many different sorts of traditions; many of them obviously desirable. Can libertarians actually want to destroy *all* of them? Are libertarians looking forward, for instance, to the day when the tradition of cello-playing finally dies out? When literary critics no longer give a damn for the life of the English language? When friends no longer help each other out in trouble, or celebrate a marriage or the birth of a child? Are we all gleefully anticipating the moment when the last practitioner of French cuisine expires in bitterness and despair? (As far as that last one goes, I have to say, No way! I happen to know all of the top libertarians, and I’ve never met a group more sincerely appreciative of good food, and especially of French cuisine.) All of these represent traditions; and the cello-haters have yet to emerge as an important faction within the movement. So, when van den Haag says that we oppose “tradition itself,” what can he mean?

It soon becomes clear what it is that troubles van den Haag, as it troubles other conservatives. Under libertarianism, he complains, “*Society* is denied the ability to *impose* or even *publicly cultivate* norms and bonds. *Only* individuals and private groupings can do so” (emphasis added). For conservatives, on the other hand, he says, “institutions form a social order, ultimately articulated and defended in essential respects by the state, through the monopoly of legitimate coercive power exercised by its government.”

Well, as you can see—things are becoming a little clearer. It isn’t after all “tradition itself” that van den Haag is defending against the Visigothic hordes of the libertarian movement. Nor does he really believe that we want to deny the right of non-governmental groups *publicly* to cultivate social norms—no libertarian would use force, for instance, to prevent Jehovah’s Witnesses from renting Yankee Stadium. What worries van den Haag is that, with the growing influence of our movement, *coerced*, state-enforced traditions are now threatened and may not survive.

How far does van den Haag carry the state’s right to enforce traditions? He doesn’t tell us in the *National Review* article. There he’s anxious to give the impression that he,

William F. Buckley, Jr., founder and editor of *National Review*, and principal architect of the transformation of the Right during the early 1950s: his influence helped to make blind nationalism, military adventurism and moral Puritanism synonymous with the Conservative cause—and to give Conservatives their richly deserved reputation for racial bigotry and intolerance of cultural diversity.



like other conservatives, responsibly favors limited government, while libertarians are all irresponsible anarchists. But he's expressed his views on this question elsewhere. In the December 1, 1964 issue of *National Review*, he offered a pretentious rationalization for racial segregation in the public schools. That was at a time when he, and *National Review*, thought they could still get away with it.

Also in 1964, there took place the notorious "obscenity" trial of Lenny Bruce in New York City. Lenny Bruce was a night-club comedian, who based his routines on social criticism. He often attacked politicians and organized religion, especially the Catholic Church. In the course of these routines, which were performed in private clubs, he was in the habit of using dirty words. The police departments in various cities, including Chicago, vowed to get him, and they started arresting him. Lenny Bruce was a fragile man, and he broke under the pressure. Without any chance to work anymore, with enormous legal bills and other debts, he finally died of a drug overdose. The culmination of the persecution was the New York City trial.

Afterwards, one of the district attorneys involved, Vincent Cuccia, said of the trial: "We drove him into poverty and bankruptcy and then murdered him. I watched him fall apart . . . We all knew what we were doing. We used the law to kill him."

In that final trial, the defense brought many expert witnesses—distinguished literary critics and others—who testified to the value of Bruce's routines as social commentary, and just plain humor. The state's witnesses were not a very distinguished lot, as you can imagine. The most prominent of the state's expert witnesses against Lenny Bruce, there, among all the cops—I almost said, there among all the other cops—was Ernest van den Haag.

Finally, on November 21, 1976, the *New York Times* published a debate between van den Haag and Gay Talese, on the issue of pornography. In the course of vindicating "society's" right to censor whatever it considers pornographic, van den Haag stated: "Every community has a right to protect what it regards as its important shared values. In India, I would vote for the prohibition against slaughtering cows. In Israel, I would vote for the prohibition against raising pigs for slaughter. In the United States, where a certain amount of sexual reticence has been a central value of our traditional culture, I would vote for the rights of communities to protect their sexual reticence."

Now, there's an obvious question that occurs to anyone who understands the meaning of his words. It's this: Is there any limit to the extent to which the community may oppress the individual in the exercise of its "right to protect what it regards as its important shared values"? The purpose of the Spanish Inquisition was to defend Catholicism—surely an

important shared value of Spanish society. Does van den Haag believe the Inquisition was justified? Suttee was a central part of Hindu culture, as clitoridectomy was of Kikuyu culture, as ritual killings were of Aztec culture, and as racial segregation was of the culture of the American South a few years ago. What van den Haag should answer is this: Does he defend these traditions? If he does *not*, then he has immediately violated the principle of community-right in some very obvious cases, and he has exposed himself as a mere babbler. If he *does* defend these institutions, then what decent person would want to have anything to do with such a pervert?

The fact is that van den Haag is the most fanatical society-worshipper among today's conservatives. By his own statement, he stands ready to endorse whatever traditional degradation of the individual a given society—except a Communist one—might view as necessary for the greater glory of its "shared values." In *National Review*, he complains that "libertarians are firmly committed to natural rights, which they find all over the place [where else would they be?] . . . [they] think they can solve a problem by prating about natural rights." Well, van den Haag certainly can't be accused of over-emphasizing natural rights. He doesn't believe in *any* rights—of individuals, that is. But while, according to him, *individuals* have no rights, societies oddly enough *do*. Which makes him all the more shameless a hypocrite when he cites, as a guiding principle of his own philosophy, Immanuel Kant's famous dictum: A person must never be treated only as a means, but always also as an end in himself. That is, indeed, a great expression of humanism, and I believe in it. But considering that van den Haag places no limit whatsoever on how "society" may use—indeed, immolate—the individual for its own higher ends, his citing of it is a much better example of "obscenity" than the ones he usually gives us.

Libertarians are not "against" tradition. But we make certain elementary distinctions. It is time conservatives like van den Haag began doing likewise—starting with the distinction between the traditions that mankind has *voluntarily* generated and preserved, and those stemming from coercion, violence, and force. And it is time they stopped talking as if all the good and great traditions that are our rightful inheritance were somehow to be credited to the state, and to themselves as the state's apologists, rather than to their true source—the women and men who, with what freedom they had, created, sifted, refined, and transmitted those traditions through the generations.

What else is missing from this conservative critique? Well, the usual things that conservatives never talk about. They attack us for favoring nuclear disarmament. But they never concede that mankind faces any kind of danger from the existence of incredibly deadly nuclear weapons. They aren't



Ernest van den Haag, apologist for segregated schools, state's witness against Lenny Bruce, advocate of censorship—and intellectual hit man for those in the dying Conservative movement who see Libertarianism as an assault by Visigothic hordes on tradition of any kind. Van den Haag “stands ready to endorse whatever traditional degeneration a given society—except a Communist one—might view as necessary for the greater glory of its ‘shared values.’”

worried by the fact that each and every Trident-type submarine is capable of completely destroying any nation in the world.

They attack us for favoring the dismantling of the secret intelligence agencies, like the FBI and CIA. But they never acknowledge what everyone who reads the newspapers now knows—that for years these agencies were engaged in systematically breaking the law, in the FBI's COINTELPRO program, for instance, and in the CIA's programs of domestic spying. The conservatives continue to live in a world where the existence of nuclear weapons is something we can take in stride, and where FBI agents all resemble Jimmy Stewart. For them, the only thing wrong with the Indochina War was that we didn't have “the will to win.” They resolutely refuse to acknowledge the existence of certain big facts about reality. It's no wonder that hardly anyone really takes them seriously.

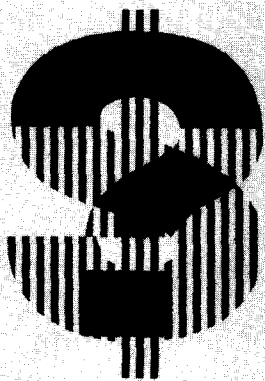
It's an unfortunate fact that we Libertarians are still sometimes viewed by the press and the public as a

“right-wing” party. The *Washington Post*, for instance, recently referred to us as an “extreme right-wing” organization. This is a pity, and it can do us nothing but harm. Among perceptive people, conservatives are known for their blind nationalism, their readiness to engage in military adventure throughout the world, their envious Puritanism. This is why I have said that one of our most pressing tasks is to draw the line between us and the conservatives, and to etch that line into the public's consciousness. One good way to do this would be to emphasize our principled concern for the people the conservatives habitually treat with neglect or with contempt: women, blacks and other racial minorities, gay people. The conservative movement is intellectually bankrupt and morally moribund. Any identification with it would be the kiss of death. □

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BOOKS AND THE ARTS

Degeneration revisited

JEFF RIGGENBACH

The Culture of Narcissism, by Christopher Lasch, Norton, 268 pp., \$11.95; Warner, 447 pp., \$2.75.

IT WOULD SEEM fabulous if it were not in evidence all around us: it has been more than a year since the original publication of Christopher Lasch's celebrated *The Culture of Narcissism*; the hardcover edition has given way to the inevitable paperback; yet still the talk goes on. Steadily, unaccountably, the book goes on stirring up controversy and interest. Hardly a month goes by before one or another national periodical brings the question before us

(or before some celebrity interviewee) once again: is Christopher Lasch right? Is our culture suffering, dying, from pathological narcissism? Is there hope? What lies ahead?

Like most such vogues, that of Lasch and his jeremiad on "American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations" tells us more about the reading public than about the feted author or work. Just as the little flurry of self-serving critical puffery which greeted the publication a few months ago of R. Emmet Tyrrell, Jr.'s *Public Nuisances* cast less light on either Tyrrell or his collected essays than on the extent to which H. L. Mencken (to whom Tyrrell was frequently and—without so much as a hint of irony—favorably compared, both as stylist and as ideologue) is no longer read; so the more enduring flurry which has set up around *The Culture of Narcissism* casts less light on either Christopher Lasch or his book than on the extent to which Max Nordau is no longer read.

Max Nordau (1849-1923) was a Jewish-Hungarian physician, author and Zionist. He grew up in Budapest, attended college and medical school there, and practiced medicine and journalism there for a few years, before moving on to Paris, where he devoted several years to postgraduate study in medicine, engaged

in further periodical writing, and eventually resumed his medical practice.

It was during his Paris years (he spent most of his last years in a kind of self-imposed exile in Madrid) that he achieved international notoriety through his books. (He eventually became famous enough that in 1903 he was called upon to survive an assassination attempt spurred by his Zionist activities.) His first important books began appearing during the 1880s: *Conventional Lies of Our Civilization* in 1883, *Paradoxes* in 1885 and *The Sickness of the Century* in 1887. By 1892, when his magnum opus, *Degeneration*, was published, he had become well enough established that his books were routinely brought out in both French and English as well as in their original German.

Degeneration made an enormous splash. One might say that it was *The Culture of Narcissism* of its time. It was easily the most influential of the many extended essays in social and cultural criticism which were being published during the last years of the last century—and they were being published literally everywhere: in London, in New York, in Chicago, even in the Baptist-infested wilds of Waco, Texas, where William Cowper Brann was casting curses and imprecations on the age in a one-man newsletter he published and called (with no trace of irony) *The Iconoclast*. *Degeneration* even occasioned the first appearance in American print of George Bernard Shaw, who replied to it at length in an essay called "The Sanity of Art" in the July 27, 1895 issue of Benjamin R. Tucker's *Liberty*.

But *Degeneration* is famous no longer. In one of the few references to it in any contemporary piece of writing, Richard Gilman dismisses it out of hand as "a

shabby, disreputable, but well-known 1898 tome," thus tacitly calling into question his own assertion of its great fame by not even getting its publication date right. In some ways, as we shall see, Nordau's oblivion is well deserved. Yet if he were more widely known among contemporary readers, those readers might not now be showering encomia upon such a book as Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*—a book which is remarkable chiefly for its highly unimaginative (if entirely unintended) echoing of *Degeneration*. Indeed, so obvious is this echoing to anyone familiar with Nordau's work that the failure of any of the dozens of journalists and critics and publicists who have discussed *The Culture of Narcissism* in the past year to even mention its striking similarity to the earlier book must, as I have said, be taken in itself as evidence of the extent to which Nordau has been forgotten. Consider the facts:

Nordau was a student of Cesare Lombroso, the Italian psychiatrist who "discovered" not only that antisemitism was a mental illness, but also that criminals were genetic "degenerates" who could be identified by certain physical and mental "stigmata" of "atavism." Lasch is a student of Lombroso's frankly admiring contemporary, Sigmund Freud, the Viennese psychiatrist who "discovered" that, as Vladimir Nabokov has neatly summed it up, "all mental woes can be cured by a daily application of old Greek myths to [the] private parts."

Nordau announces at the beginning of *Degeneration* that "the disposition of the times is curiously confused, a compound of feverish restlessness and blunted discouragement, of fearful presage and hang-dog renunciation. The prevalent feeling is that of imminent perdition and extinction.