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thousand years and by the joy he feels in recalling that at last they have returned to their original soil.

These decades that Kazin chronicles in his book were ones of great events—not only World War II (it is clearly the Holocaust which has left the most searing impression on Kazin's consciousness), but the Cold War and McCarthyism; the Vietnamese War and all the dislocation it caused, especially on the college campuses; the establishment of the state of Israel; the growing decay of urban societies; the increasing vulgarization of culture, and so forth. Kazin again sacrifices the scholar's analysis for the individual observer's impressions. Instead of weighty dissection, we have thoughtful reactions. And yet, Kazin's observations are pungent and sometimes more valuable than the pedant's inconclusive divagations. I have read few accounts of the divisiveness which split our college campuses in the 1960's that are marked by the admirable fusion of sense and sensibility that characterizes Kazin's recollections of that now seemingly distant era. His own son, Tim, was one of the student rebels—and yet Kazin gives us a picture of the issues and people involved which recognizes that the student rebels had a cause but were hardly above reproach, and those who denounced the student rebels had sufficient reason to do so, but they too were not always the guardians of unblemished virtue.

It is when Kazin leaves the scenes of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* and tries to reveal personal intimacies that the book sustains some embarrassing moments. Certainly, his portraits of his immigrant parents remain among the most touching and effective parts of the entire book. It is when he attempts to sort out the difficulties of his love life and his three unsuccessful marriages that Kazin stumbles. His lengthy descriptions of his erotic liaison with somebody called Mary Ellen are neither illuminating nor titillating—just embarrassing. He tries—rather desperately—to apotheosize both the sex acts and his sex partner, whose facile promiscuity and intellectual pretensions seem to be her chief claim for inclusion here. We wonder whether he is being Whitmanesque or Voltairian when he writes,

“And a priestess she was, the priestess who brought so many of us to the mystery of the bed. She made the delights of sex seem the well-practiced gestures of a temple ceremony.” To me it all seems like a feeble attempt to disguise a liberated lechery.

But the marital and extra-marital exposures should not be allowed to obscure the total effect of the book. It still remains a fine contribution to the intellectual, moral, and artistic history of our times.

Reviewed by MILTON BIRNBAUM

Reforming Conservatism

The (Guilty) Conscience of a Conservative, by Craig Schiller, *New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1978. 174 pp. \$8.95.*

OF LATE, various spokesmen of the traditionalist and libertarian schools of right-wing American thought have espoused the view that the majority of the people of the United States are actually “conservative” in their sympathies. Kevin Phillips immediately comes to mind as one of the most prominent exponents of this thesis. Generally, what these people have apparently done is to combine the anti-New Deal segment of American society with the more moderate element among those who supported the New Deal, by which they include those who still believe in religious and moral standards while retaining a feeling of loyalty to their country. By downplaying the more controversial doctrines associated with American right-wing thought and by drawing their nets broadly enough to take in people generally classified as moderately liberal in their sympathies, the exponents of the New Majority have come up with some very hopeful prognostications for the future.

If they are right, one cannot help wondering why candidates for public office who have gen-

erally been labeled conservative have not been more generally successful. Craig Schiller, a rabbi of the Hasidic branch of Orthodox Judaism, examines this whole question in his entertainingly written book, *The (Guilty) Conscience of a Conservative*. His purposes are to uncover the essence of conservatism and to enunciate a program for greater conservative success in the practical world of affairs.

Schiller seeks the essence by uncovering what he believes to be common to the various forms of conservatism. Since what he takes to be conservatism is actually a telescoping into one of strands of both classical liberal and traditional conservative thought, the result is a definition which is very vague and negative in emphasis. He tells us that the essential nature of conservatism amounts to a rejection of amoralism and ideology together with belief in the existence of a "transrational" source of unchanging values. Amoralism is rejected because it amounts to a denial of the existence of valid moral standards of value; ideology, because Schiller evidently equates it with the advocacy of a planned society, and he has too much consciousness of the weaknesses of human nature ever to accept this. He neglects to penetrate further to find out why in so many instances people who believe in a valid standard of moral values should also be inclined to be skeptical of human nature; nor does he tell us what would constitute a valid standard of values.¹

The definition of conservatism has thus been made broad enough to embrace a wide variety of viewpoints so that, not surprisingly, Schiller finds the majority of Americans to be conservative in viewpoint. To accomplish this, Schiller has evidently chosen to downplay the momentous issues which have constituted the primary lines of division between conservatives and the adherents of other social philosophies. In other words, the definition is neither clear enough nor controversial enough to be practically meaningful. In addition, to anyone familiar with conservative literature, the claim made on the front flap of the book that this is the first serious attempt to find the common denominator of conservatism must be especially irritating because it is so patently in error.²

From the various public opinion surveys which have been conducted in past few decades, a fairly clear picture of American public opinion has emerged. The typical American is thus seen to favor social security and many other forms of welfarism combined with reduced taxes, greater democracy in government, law and order, plus a political allegiance which is more likely to be democratic than republican. He has also been much more responsive to the egalitarian rhetoric of the Left than the aristocratic rhetoric of the traditional conservative Right. There are some conservative strands in the thinking of Mr. Average American, but they are mingled with strands more reminiscent of the social democratic liberal or even radical strands of thought. The egalitarianism, and environmentalism, which permeates American thinking also permeates thinking in the Marxist world although the latter are far more extreme in their position on these issues. In general, there is certainly some conservative potential in the American population, but people like Craig Schiller and Kevin Phillips are mistaken if they really believe Americans at the present time to be predominantly conservative.

Schiller is at his best when he attempts to uncover the reasons for the failure of conservative candidates to elicit more support from the American people. In the opinion of this reviewer, chapter four is the most valuable part of the book, containing much valuable advice that conservatives should heed when engaging in political combat on the hustings. The trouble with Schiller's formula for success is that any literal compliance with the suggestions made would have the likely effect of making conservatism a mere shadow opponent of social democratic liberalism. Schiller's advice is good only when selectively applied.

Specifically, Schiller recommends that conservatives in public life shown more compassion for the common man while repudiating those views which have elicited negative reactions from the voters like militancy in foreign policy and *laissez faire* in economic policy. In chapter four of his book, Schiller analyzes four recent presidential campaigns ranging in dates from 1936 to 1976 to show why "conservative"

candidates were defeated. This marks what is probably the high point of his entire book, for right-wing candidates have often been needlessly abrasive when confronting the voters and the author has performed a public service by reminding us of the need for more smoothness and polish on the part of conservative and libertarian candidates for public office. Yet, if we follow the advice proffered in this book too far we run the risk of eliminating any reason for the existence of a separate right-wing in American politics; for the features that Schiller regards as essential to conservatism, while they may seem controversial to intellectuals, are about as controversial to the masses as motherhood and are perfectly acceptable to most moderate liberals.

It would have been better if the author had separated the libertarian from the traditional conservative wing of right-wing thought instead of telescoping the two viewpoints together. Although, in the United States, the two are frequently and somewhat incongruously combined, some of the generalizations he makes apply much more to one wing than another. The most controversial issues separating the Right as a whole from the Left today probably pertain to the topics of social welfarism and American foreign policy. In addition, libertarians also diverge most strongly from the Left in their emphasis on *laissez faire* economics while traditional conservatives seem to arouse the most controversy when they advocate the inculcation of an aristocratic sense of selective excellence in the conduct of political, cultural, and educational activities. On certain issues, like *laissez faire* economics and the conduct of foreign policy, Schiller would downplay the differences. Concerning welfarism, he tells us that conservatives should stand "four-square against the abuses of the welfare state and four-square in favor of its legitimate practices." This is so vague as to be acceptable even to radicals. As for the aristocratic ethic, Schiller scarcely exhibits any awareness of its existence. The most salient differences between the Right and the other wings of American political thought are either soft-pedalled or ignored altogether. In the practical world of politics, it is often necessary to compromise

between principle and expediency in order to win. It seems to this reviewer that, if Schiller's proposals were to be adopted, expediency would prevail so strongly as to put into question the reasons for the existence of conservatism itself.

Reviewed by NORMAN R. PHILLIPS

¹See my new book, *The Quest for Excellence* (New York: Philosophical Library), chapters one, two, and six for the metaphysical foundations needed to explain the linkages between conservative traits and for the development of a conservative standard of values.

²See, for example, Philip C. Chapman, "The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism versus Political Philosophy," *Political Science Quarterly* 76 (March, 1960), 17-34, for a discussion of several such attempts.

Aesthetic Hooliganism

The Arts Betrayed, by John Smith, *New York: Universe Books, 1978. 256 pp.*

IN THE EARLY 1970's Duncan Williams published a lively if alarming little book, *Trousered Apes*, which J. M. Lalley reviewed at length in these pages. Williams argued that the *Zeitgeist* can reflect the literature of the time (it is usually thought to be the other way around), and that, as Mr. Lalley puts it, "our society, or certain elements of it, is now engaged in actualizing the neurotic fantasies of novelists and dramatists in a psychological climate that the deicidal clerics and relativistic moralists have done much to create." Williams exhibited many loathsome examples from contemporary literature of human bestiality and degradation, predictably excoriated romanticism as the source of this pestilence, but offered little consolation save that we can at least try to understand our cultural crisis and immunize ourselves from the hideous themes of modern art.

John Smith's new book traces more subtly the decline of all the major arts from the decadent-romantic geniuses of the 1890's