

[H]e regarded his behaviour as a set of signals to establish a certain identity for himself. The motive for his correctness was a desire to get from others the deference normally granted to a gentleman . . . As he found it pleasant to move among gentlemen, he tried to do whatever would make him acceptable. The refinement of his manners and tastes, like his observation of promises, was a performance by an actor who knows what lines he has to speak in order to stay in the show. He is a pure example of someone for whom being a gentleman consists in conforming to a "code," and he is therefore not a gentleman, but a cad.

Whereas most lexicographers dwell on the distinction between a gentleman and a nobleman, Dr. Letwin notes that Trollope ignores it, placing some of his gentlemen in the highest ranks of the aristocracy and others in the more obscure reaches of the middle classes. Trollope's ladies and gentlemen talk a great deal about ancestry, but "as the stories unfold they seem to show that 'blood' does not count." What Trollope does seem to communicate is a respect for social distinction without reverence for "blood." Deference for families of distinguished ancestry "keeps people from forgetting that whatever virtues may be possessed by their contemporaries . . . there are also distinctions of another kind. And for those who are not strong or perceptive enough to rely on their own judgement, a social hierarchy provides a rough guide to whom they will find compatible. It is one of the ways of marking paths through the wilderness of mortal life."

Hereditry, then, matters to the gentleman, but it is no essential part of him as is, according to Trollope, and to Dr. Letwin, his integrity and his conduct or his "way of moving about in the world," and what is perhaps not less important, his way of perceiving the world and himself. There is thus much to be learned from Trollope's so-called "political novels," which are not novels about parliamentary adventures, as are those, for example, of Disraeli, but novels about the experiences of gentlemen in politics. Here we find Trollope anticipating, without formulating, a conception of politics close to that of Professor Michael Oakeshott, where politics is seen as an activity without any goal beyond that of keeping things quiet and orderly so as to enable everyone to go about his business in his own way without fear of losing his life, liberty, or property. "The grandeur of politics," as Dr. Letwin puts it, "comes from the importance and not the amount of what is done by a government—more

than any other activity, politics is essential to the security of private life."

Hence political life as seen by Trollope is not what Bagehot, for example, spoke of when he described Parliament as a "machine" where conflicting interests intermeshed. Trollope depicts parliamentary life as a sort of game: "There are adversaries, prizes to be won and defeats to be endured, and everyone takes sides. But the participants . . . are not bent on achieving victory by any stratagems at hand; they are out to win by conducting themselves in accordance with certain rules." The great difference between politics and an actual game is that politics is concerned with the real world, and the settling of questions that are of paramount concern to everyone. Politics, as an activity pursued by gentlemen, is a clean game, precisely because the players *are* gentlemen.

I have said that Dr. Letwin's book is not a work of literary criticism, but of moral philosophy. Readers of an earlier book of hers, *The Pursuit of Certainty*, will recall the good opinion she there expressed of David Hume, and Hume's refusal to see man's moral experience as a conflict between reason and passion, in which virtue was supposed to depend on the triumph of man's own passion. In her present book, she goes even further than Hume in the same direction. She rejects the whole Western traditional image of the human being as a compound of reason and passion, of a higher and lower self, the two parts each at odds with the other. It is an image of man which dates back at least as far as Plato; and it has dominated Western moral philosophy as much in its secular rationalistic as in its Christian phases. Indeed, as Dr. Letwin herself points out, it has "shaped our civilisation."

Dr. Letwin squarely rejects this bifurcation of the human person, and she therefore has to develop her moral theory in language which does not assume the reality of what she calls the "self-divided man." It is not easily done. She certainly cannot adopt Hume's alternative to the conception of passion at war with reason, namely, a conception of calm passions prevailing over violent passions to secure the triumph of good over evil, for that leaves the bifurcation of man intact. Nor can she be satisfied with Hume's cheerful skepticism or his bland reliance on habit and custom; she has too scrupulous an *esprit de systeme*—and too little sympathy for what has become customary in the twentieth century for her to adopt or to feel safe

in recommending such a posture.

Inevitably the question will be asked of Dr. Letwin: Is not moral philosophy concerned with the search for the universal, and is not the gentleman as we meet him in Trollope's novels a creature limited by time and space, a player in the drama of Victorian England on which the curtain has fallen? As Dr. Letwin herself takes care to remind us, however, she has not written this book to recommend the gentleman as a uniquely admirable archetype but to give us fresh thought about what morality might be. And in this

essentially philosophical exercise she has achieved a marked success. It would be hard to think of any other recent contribution to moral speculation bolder and more unexpected, more distinctive and compelling than hers. Critics have for generations been complaining about the habit philosophers have of illustrating ethics with problems of moral choice constructed *in abstracto*. Dr. Letwin follows Hume at least in turning away from theory, with a sigh, to return to the world of experience even if it is only the world of experience the art of a novelist has made intelligible. □

AT DAWN WE SLEPT:
THE UNTOLD STORY OF PEARL HARBOR
Gordon W. Prange / McGraw-Hill / \$22.95

INFAMY: PEARL HARBOR AND ITS AFTERMATH
John Toland / Doubleday / \$17.95

THE AMERICAN MAGIC:
CIPHERS, CODES AND THE DEFEAT OF JAPAN
Ronald Lewin / Farrar, Straus and Giroux / \$14.95

Eliot A. Cohen

Gordon Prange devoted his life to the study of Pearl Harbor. For him, as for many others, the effort to understand the debacle that began America's active role in World War II became an obsession. *At Dawn We Slept*, prepared by two of Prange's students, is an edited version of Prange's 3,500-page manuscript. This massive tome is without doubt the most thorough study of Pearl Harbor ever produced by a single author.

Prange began his work immediately after the war as an official historian in Japan. He sifted the official documents (of which there are literally tons) and interviewed hundreds of Japanese and American military men and civilians. It is not surprising that the resulting book is excessively long and detailed. Like too many popular, narrative military histories (including the following one by John Toland) it buries interesting historical debates in a heap of anecdotes and contrived descriptions. The aim, one supposes, is to give the reader a sense of immediacy, but the effect is to bewilder him with a hail of dates, personages, and facts. Good history—and good military history as much as any other type—requires that the author be willing to raise large questions and argue them out.

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Nonetheless, if one is willing to skim, the book is worth the effort.

A great merit of the work is Prange's depiction of events on the Japanese side. He patiently pieces together the story of the planning and training that went into the attack on Pearl Harbor. He sketches (but should have devoted more attention to) the strategic argument for the attack, and describes in detail the conduct and consequences of it.

It was an operation so difficult and daring that most of the Japanese high command, including the task-force commander, Admiral Nagumo, opposed it. Whether, as most historians claim (and Americans like to think), it was an act of madness is quite another matter. As Prange suggests, war between the United States and Japan was a question of time—the American oil embargo, our support of China with materiel and men, and our opposition to Japanese expansion in Southeast Asia saw to that. True, the attack on Pearl Harbor mobilized American will in a peculiarly violent and concentrated way, but the United States had mobilized just as effectively in 1917 without the benefit of such a surprise attack. The Japanese would have had to attack American bases no matter what. Their expansion in Southeast Asia (aimed at securing Indonesian oil, Malayan rubber, cutting the overland routes to China, and establishing the East Asian co-prosperity sphere) would have necessitated an attack on the

Philippines, because the United States was turning that island chain into a fortified land, air, and naval base. We certainly, and the Japanese probably, expected the new B-17 Flying Fortresses and American submarines based there to cut the supply lines of the Japanese forces advancing on British, French, and Dutch colonies, and even put to torch Japan's wooden cities. An attack on the Philippines would have been, and was, considered an attack on the United States.

Thus, unless Japan repudiated her dreams of Empire and her hold on China, war between the United States and Japan would be inevitable. Before we lightly say that Japan's statesmen should have seen this and renounced her brutal ambitions, let us note that numerous voices warn us today that we must accept, or at least tolerate, the equally barbaric and unreasonable pretensions of the Soviet imperium. Nations, well-armed warrior nations in particular, do not easily make calculations that seem "rational" to liberal statesmen.

Moreover, in the fall of 1941 there was little reason to think that the United States could fight a successful two-front war. It did not appear that the Soviet Union would survive Hitler's onslaught. A German victory in Europe would have freed up Japanese resources on the Russian border, and diverted the Anglo-Americans to the preservation of their position on the periphery of Eurasia and the Mediterranean. The war was going well for the Axis in 1941, a consideration that weighed heavily with the Japanese.

The difficulty then, from the Japanese point of view, was to seize an Empire that the U.S. would either be unable to recover or find too costly to attack at the risk of hundreds of thousands of American lives. The Japanese had no visions of occupying California, and they understood full well the industrial might of the United States. Contrary to myth, they had a healthy respect for the American Navy, and they feared it would strike into the flanks of their complicated, simultaneous attacks on European and American possessions in East Asia. One solution, embodied in Japanese strategy until less than a year before Pearl Harbor, was to harass an advancing American fleet with submarines and then crush it in a decisive naval battle after it had crossed the Pacific.

This plan had its risks: The effectiveness of Japanese submarines was unknown, and the American fleet (in particular its battleships) was among the best in the world. (Unfortunately, Frange does not discuss the

American naval building program which would soon—within a year or two of Pearl Harbor—produce an even larger fleet and hence a greater threat.) The Japanese high command, despite its many trepidations, therefore accepted the proposal of relatively junior officers for using an unprecedented massed fleet of six aircraft carriers to smash the American fleet in harbor. This done,

Japanese forces could occupy Southeast Asia, reduce the Philippines, and concentrate on their next objectives: the slicing of communications between Australia and America, the occupation of a far-flung island perimeter, and a final battle with the remnants of the American battle fleet. (The first objective was to be frustrated by the battle in the Coral Sea [May 1942] and the third by the

brilliant American victory at Midway [June 1942]. The Japanese would, however, achieve their second goal, and force upon the Americans the exceedingly bloody and difficult task of wresting coral atolls from an army of soldiers who—unlike any before or since—were prepared, to the last man, to die rather than surrender.)

The Pearl Harbor operation required the solution of a number of

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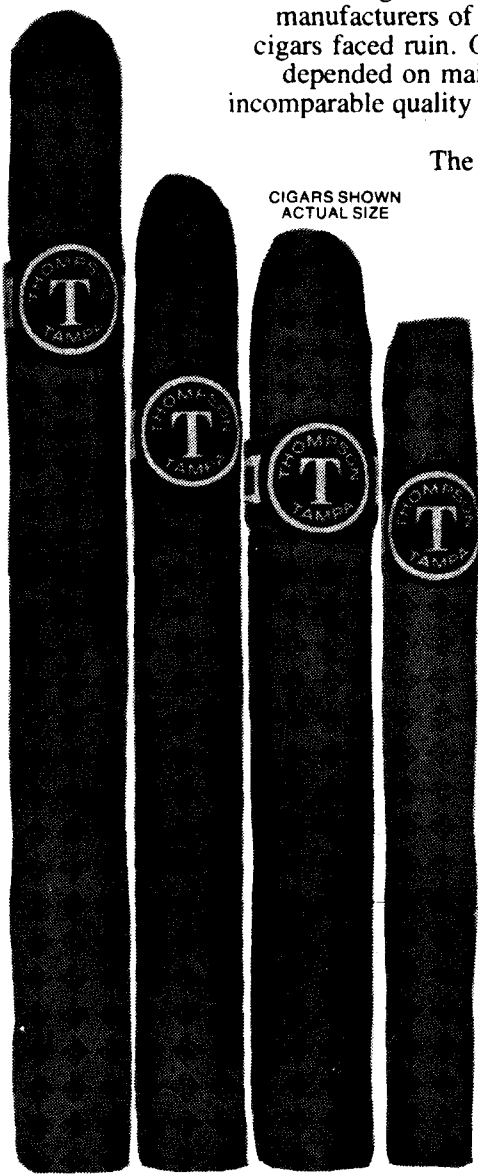
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ticklish technical problems, many not overcome until a few weeks before the attack. Among these were the development of torpedoes that could be dropped by plane into shallow water, and practice in refueling on heavy seas. Prange describes in detail the Japanese commanders' intelligent and persevering efforts to train their men and ready their equipment for this audacious operation.

As we all know, the surprise was complete. Success, however, was not. The American Navy's precious three aircraft carriers *Saratoga*, *Lexington*, and *Yorktown* were at sea and hence escaped attack: These ships would be vital to America's counterattacks in 1942. Admiral Nagumo refused to launch a second attack to destroy American oil tank farms and repair facilities. Had he done so, most American admirals agreed, the remnants of the fleet would have had to flee to the West Coast. Nor were the eight smitten battleships lost for good: Before war's end five were salvaged, repaired, and returned to war. As Prange puts it, "Far more quickly and thoroughly than the Americans could have done themselves, the Japanese had kicked the U.S. Navy upstairs into a swift, modern force with the carrier at its heart."

The attack, however, had killed 2,500 men and wounded over a thousand others. Eighteen vessels had either been sunk or badly damaged, and over two hundred airplanes had been hurt or destroyed. The Japanese had caught Pearl Harbor completely unawares. The psychological blow to American pride hurt more badly than the physical ruin inflicted by Japanese airmen. Small wonder that since then Americans, from congressmen to editorial writers, have sought for explanations, refusing to ascribe catastrophe to bad luck, poor judgment, and sheer incompetence.

A depressingly common version of events is that Roosevelt and his top advisers knew about the attack but withheld information about it in order to get America wholeheartedly into the war. John Toland, a popular historian, repeats this accusation in *Infamy*. It is a book which, unlike Prange's, concentrates its attention exclusively on the investigations that followed Pearl Harbor. Virtually all of Toland's evidence is familiar, culled from selective bits of documents. He makes great play of the views of military and naval men bitter about the humiliation of their services at Pearl Harbor, and the maltreatment of the two hapless commanders,

Admiral Husband E. Kimmel (Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet) and Lieutenant General Walter C. Short (Commanding General, Hawaiian department). Like most books advancing conspiracy theories, it will enjoy unmerited attention and respect.

As common sense and Prange's book show, Toland's explanation is nonsense. The notion that a vast conspiracy (including among its members such paragons of integrity as George C. Marshall) could have been maintained over the years defies a reader's intelligence. As other studies (including Roberta Wohlstetter's brilliant *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, which Toland never discusses) have argued at length, the pieces of evidence pointing to Pearl Harbor were buried in a mass of contradictory or seemingly more important signals. The fact of the matter is this: The United States in 1941, like Israel in 1973, was surprised because no one would credit its opponent with extraordinary audacity and competence. Indeed, in 1941 the Japanese themselves knew that they were pushing their capacities to the limits.

The American failure at Pearl Harbor was a failure at many levels. Admiral Kimmel failed to send out patrol planes along the northern approaches to the island (the most likely and, indeed, the actual route the enemy would take); General Short failed to prepare the embryonic radar screen and alert system. The American bureaucracy and its members were, as Ronald Lewin wisely points out in *The American Magic*, unready for war:

December 7, 1941 was for the Americans the equivalent of September 3, 1939 for the British. Up to each of those dates, neither country had faced the stern necessities of war: like all armed services in peacetime, theirs had not yet got into gear.

Kimmel and Short were indeed training their men for war (the Navy to fight its way across the Pacific, the Army to repel an amphibious assault on Oahu), but somehow the grim urgency of wartime necessity had not made itself felt, and the possibility of a carrier assault was not taken seriously. We see this unreadiness even at the lowest level. The awnings were on the antiaircraft guns, ammunition box locks had to be hacked off, crews (with the exception of one ship, the *Indianapolis*) stood to half-strength peacetime watches. On November 27 a war warning had gone out to Hawaii, but, as always, it would take the bitter taste of real war before

men would prepare thoroughly to wage it.

Thus, America's extraordinary cryptographic breakthroughs could not rescue America from its opening humiliation. *The American Magic* describes these achievements and their consequences in some detail. Lewin, an extremely able British military historian, has done for the Pacific war what he did for the European war in his excellent *Ultra Goes to War*. Lewin also floods his reader with details which unfortunately will make sense only to those familiar with the course of the war and American military and naval organization. His book will repay a reading, however, for it is the product of a sober and experienced student of military history.

As Lewin points out, "Magic" (the name for our decryptions of the Japanese ciphers) helped enormously throughout the war, particularly in the Solomons, our submarine campaigns, the epic aerial assassination of Japan's best sailor, Admiral Yamamoto, and above all at the battle of Midway, but it was not a military panacea. The "noise" phenomenon (the difficulty of selecting out important from trivial messages) we have seen in connection with Pearl Harbor. Other problems included the "perishability" of information—decrypted messages which could not be taken advantage of—and the problem of discovering the intentions of an enemy maintaining radio silence (e.g., the task force on its approach to Pearl Harbor) or using fake radio nets to deceive or mislead.

Furthermore, Lewin observes that "Magic" had nothing to say about some crucial questions of military intelligence, such as the strength and dispositions of the defenders of the Pacific atolls.

For all that, two points should be made here. First, signal intelligence was of more value to the United States in the Pacific war than human intelligence, a fact which should sober some of the critics of America's current intelligence establishment. Second—and more important—"Magic," like "Ultra," could help commanders and fighting men, but could not make their task an easy one. In the Pacific, as in Europe, the Allies faced a cunning, resourceful, and determined foe, who had to be outfought. To be sure, "Magic" helped American commanders know when they could safely bypass enemy fortresses such as Rabaul (a stragem which, according to Lewin, MacArthur initially *opposed*). But sooner or later the war came down—as it had to—to slugging matches like Guadalcanal, Midway, and Okinawa. At these points courage, ability, and teamwork alone could bring victory. The Japanese were stopped by these factors, not simply by the superior weaponry of a larger industrial power. At Midway, the turning point in the Pacific war, the American fleet was smaller, its airplanes fewer in number and mechanically inferior to those of the enemy. Superior signal intelligence gave Admirals Nimitz and Spruance their chance, but bravery and skill alone gave them victory. □

THE PORTABLE CONSERVATIVE READER

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T. John Jamieson

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