

of Maryland Professor Mancur Olson. In it, Olson addresses a key riddle of modern macro-economic study: Why and how do nations grow? Why, furthermore, does one nation outstrip another or grow faster in one age than in another? Olson puts forth what is essentially a more pessimistic economic restatement of Madison's famous tenth *Federalist* essay. In modern democratic industrialized societies, special-interest organizations—in Madison's phrase, factions—naturally arise. These interest groups—labor unions, professional societies, manufacturing lobbies and cartels—have goals that are largely inconsistent with sound, healthy economic expansion. Each group can protect the gains it has won for its members only by restricting the entry of domestic and foreign competitors and by inhibiting those upsetting factors that make an economy flexible, dynamic, and resourceful. In Olson's words, "institutional sclerosis" sets in, and the country stagnates.

Olson is careful to say that he is not putting forward a "monocausal" explanation for why economies wax and wane. He also gives generous credit to the catch-up model, in which a country with large potential for growth—South Korea or the defeated Axis powers—will generally grow faster than those which have already industrialized—Great Britain or the United States. Perhaps the most startling corollary of Olson's thesis is that extended political stability and liberalism are precisely the correct ingredients for creating a social atmosphere in which sclerosis-inducing groups can flourish. Great Britain has been largely hurt by the solidity of its institutions and the generally temperate and evolutionary nature of its politics. Olson bravely confronts this implication of his idea:

The contradiction is between

the desire for stability and peace and the desire to realize our full economic potential. For those, like this writer, who are so devoted to democratic freedoms and peace that they would retain them at the cost of all further growth, this is a disturbing finding. To some degree, the contradiction is inescapable in that there is no way to avoid it entirely.

The remainder of the book consists of essays by other economists who evaluate Olson's theory and apply it to the experience of England, France, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. Ironically, the most impressive of these essays is by Moses Abramovitz, who casts serious doubts on some of the central tenets of Olson's thesis. Abramovitz rejects Olson's contention that long eras of political stability necessarily strengthen special-interest organizations and questions the converse assumption that political revolutions, like Roosevelt's New Deal or the fall of Vichy France, inevitably weaken such groups.

Some of the contributors get into regression analysis and questions of "statistical significance" that are rather abstruse. The case studies generally wind down to conclusions that "more research is needed." Two Marxist-oriented essays condemning the whole premise of Olson's essay act as comic relief. One is frustratingly reminded at times of Harry Truman's complaint that if you lined up all the economists end to end, they would still all point in different directions. Still, the attempt is provocative. Olson's essay and a summarizing piece by editor Dennis C. Mueller show that economists can be sensitive to how messy real life is and remain economists. Following in James Madison's footsteps, even 200 years late, is a notable and impressive intellectual accomplishment. □

Will Without a Way

George F. Will: *Statecraft as Soulcraft: What Government Does*; Simon & Schuster, New York.

Like a medical expert who is popular among tobacco lobbyists, a conservative pundit lionized by liberals seems suspect. George Will is such an enigma: the author of a recent cover feature defending the welfare state for *The New Republic*, Will is the Eastern Establishment's favorite conservative, the token Tory invited to fashionable salons and editorial offices. Nonetheless, the trenchant criticism Will levels at liberalism in *Statecraft as Soulcraft* should allay any fears that he has defected to the other side. Like other conservatives, Will blames the amoral egalitarianism of "equal rights grounded in . . . common passions" preached by liberal modernity for "the collapse of standards" in contemporary society. Unfortunately, for all his professed concern for "moral community," Will disdains the company of other conservatives, at least living American ones, adopting a supercilious more-conservative-than-thou tone as



he expounds his "European" conservatism" drawn largely from Burke. This haughty dismissal of the American right is doubtless one reason for his popularity among liberals. After he informs

his liberal readers in the first chapter that "there are almost no conservatives, properly understood," they can only be amused when he announces in the third chapter a "conservative counter-attack" aimed at reorienting government: an army consisting of one arrogant general may be entertainment, but it's no serious threat. Even if Will could muster some troops liberals would have little to fear, for his battle plan is so hopelessly vague as to leave wholly clouded in doubt where the columns should be deployed and how they should advance. Thus he upbraids conservatism for its alleged failure "to engage itself with the way we live now," and yet he refuses to dirty *his* hands by leaving a "high level of generality" which says little about what is needed in America today.

On the one point that Will is very clear, that the government is the key to American well-being, he again strikes a chord sure to evoke sympathy among liberals, since they dominate that institution and ever seek its enlargement. He justifiably excoriates liberals, though, for failing to apply government to "moral husbandry" or "soulcraft," a task Will believes "politics should share . . . with religion." Surely, government can and should "legislate morality," as Will posits, but it can do so effectively only by reinforcing perceptions already developed by religion. However, Will does not understand religion in America, either past or present. He thus unfairly truncates the thought of the Founding Fathers, largely ignoring their deep and public commitment to God as he indicts them for our present moral crises because they stooped "to the language of 'interest'" in framing the Constitution. Apparently believing that it somehow illuminates our present circumstances

and confirms his thesis, Will cites Crèvecoeur's view that America cools the religious zeal of European immigrants. Had Will condescended actually to mingle with American conservatives, he would have discovered that Western religious fervor survives *only* in America. Will believes that a "conservative welfare state" could strengthen churches and families, dismissing the antigovernment rhetoric of the right as mere libertarianism. But why is American religion still vibrant while the state churches of Europe (including Burke's Anglicanism) are corpse-cold? Precisely because the Founding Fathers presciently understood that to be strong, religion (like families) must be independent. Hence, rather than joining Will in heaping opprobrium on the Founders, millions of conservatives whom he pretends do not exist recognize that the real destroyers of public virtue are the irreligious utopians of this century who have hellishly perverted our society by rendering to Caesar faith that belongs only to God. (BC) □

Aesthetics in the Abyss

Joachim Maass: *Kleist*; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

"The estimation of the value of art," wrote Leo Tolstoy, "... depends on men's perception of the meaning of life, depends on what they consider to be the good and the evil of life. And what is good and what is evil is defined by what are termed religions." In the light of Tolstoy's observation, it is hardly surprising that the favorable reevaluation now in progress of German dramatist, essayist, and short-story writer Heinrich von Kleist should be explicable only in terms of shift-

ing religious attitudes. The importance and magnitude of Kleist's talent has been certified by such eminent German artists as Rilke, Wagner, Brahms, and Mann, but during his own lifetime Kleist received only limited acclaim, Goethe responding to his works with "horror and revulsion." To a large extent, the reason for this neglect was that his imaginative predilections for bizarre eroticism, unsettling doubt, and baffling absurdity were not congenial to the Judeo-Christian heritage still pervasive, though fading, in early 19th-century Germany. And when Kleist simultaneously violated two of the most sacred prohibitions of Christendom by first shooting another man's terminally ill wife (albeit at her request) then killing himself, even his appreciative friend and supporter Adam Müller labeled it "sacrilege."

According to another modern dramatist of stature, William Butler Yeats:

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

Kleist would appear to illustrate Yeats's view perfectly; however, contemporary writers and scholars are determined to canonize both Kleist's work *and* his life. It is tempting to account for this simply by pointing to an apparent lack of something mentioned in Yeats's first line. But more important than mindlessness to the rising reverence for Kleist is faithlessness. Indeed, because the dilemma posed by Yeats presupposes a potentially skeptical premise, it must be resolved to the cultural disadvantage of religion. That is, if society is already certain that only those who turn away from heavenly mansions can produce art worthy of being

considered "perfect," it cannot long prevent atheism and gloom from displacing faith and hope as the accepted standards against which both art and artists are to be measured. Consequently, the "imperfection" of a despairing and self-destructive life must necessarily metamorphose into saintliness for those whose high culture is exclusively shaped by men "raging in the dark." Hence, Joachim Maass's worshipful biography of Kleist, the first full study of his life to be translated into English.

When explaining his subject, Maass frankly concedes that "at



the bottom of his heart he was a nihilist," that "the destructive drive was strong in him," and that his actions were characterized by "madness" and "a secret sadism," but his adoration for the man seems all the more unrestrained for these very reasons. His eyes must have been wet with tears of devotion when writing about his idol's murder-suicide: "Did ever an artist's action prove the truth of his work more strikingly?" For Maass, "this death had meaning," and Kleist's letters announcing it are "the most splendid ever written by anyone in the face of death." Perhaps such pronouncements will pass for truth among the congregations who meet in fashionable New York salons. But many readers will remember a far more splendid letter written by the

Apostle Paul when his "time of departure" was also at hand: he wrote sublimely of a good fight fought, a courageous course finished, a profound faith kept, and of a Galilean whose death was far more pregnant with meaning than his own or than that of a histrionic suicide. (BC) □

Perceptibles

Will Morrissey: *Reflections on De Gaulle: Political Founding in Modernity*; University Press of America; Washington, D.C.

Just as a nickel can hide the sun if held close enough to the eye, the exclusive contemplation of France's current 5¢ helmsman can obscure the greatness of many of its past leaders. In his *Reflections on De Gaulle* Will Morrissey enhances our sense of perspective by reminding us that 20th-century France previously followed a far superior statesman. One need not wholly admire de Gaulle's haughty personality nor agree with all of his public actions to perceive his remarkable talents as a politician and his philosophical acuity as a historian and writer. For the nation he deeply loved, he repeatedly wrought miracles. His chief failure, as Mr. Morrissey points out, was his inability to train a new elite who could transcend the inadequacies of purely modern thought as he did and a new citizenry who would follow them. Hence, M. Mitterrand.

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John W. Whitehead: *The Stealing of America*; Crossway Books; Westchester, IL.

As a committed Christian, John Whitehead is an opponent of the Devil. As he makes clear in *The Stealing of America*, he is deeply