

## *The Inspired Amateur*

**Life Without Prejudice and Other Essays**, by Richard Weaver; introduction by Eliseo Vivas, *Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965. 167 pp. \$4.50.*

WHOEVER VENTURES out with ideas into the dark night of modernism had better go well-armed if he expects to escape being ideologically beaten up or rubbed out. That is, unless his ideas immediately and obviously project the radar-pattern of the Establishment—the one we hear about so often.

The ideas of the late Richard Weaver were never those of the Establishment—or of any establishment. And from the beginning he was well-armed, properly armed, as only a master dialectician who is likewise a master rhetorician can be. We began to sense that as early as 1948, with the publication of his first book, *Ideas Have Consequences*. Anguished outcries from certain quarters, to say nothing of groans and ominous rumblings *sub terram*, told us that Weaver was squarely on the intended target with plenty of firepower and very few misses.

The same can be said, still more emphatically, of the new selection from Weaver's miscellaneous writings, *Life Without Prejudice and Other Essays*. True, the book is for Weaver's friends and followers a sad reminder of how great our loss is in having the mortal man no more with us. But Weaver's winged words—the Homeric epithet seems to belong—are still here. They are more alive than ever, and they will stay alive. In the eight essays brought together in this book they go straight to the mark as of old, and there are no misses.

At first, it may seem a little parsimonious to select out of all Weaver's articles, lectures, and reviews only the eight pieces here presented. Doubt vanishes as one reviews the memorable contents of this book. The title essay, "Life Without Prejudice," leads off here as it led off in the first issue of *Modern Age*, in the summer of 1957. In a dozen succinct pages Weaver lays hold upon, captures, and spikes one of the biggest guns of militant modernism: the polemical use, or rather abuse of the term *prejudice*. In the next to the last place in the book appears "Up from Liberalism," Weaver's own story, well supplied with commentary, of how as an innocent undergraduate he was shanghaied into socialism by his teachers at a state university, a Southern one, but staffed mostly, he says, by "ear-

nest souls from the Middle Western universities, many of them. . . with or without knowing it, social democrats"; and then, of course, how he finally broke free. His self-liberation went through several stages. At one period of his change he spent three years studying "the history and literature of the Civil War, with special attention to that of the losing side." Out of that came his first published article, "The Older Religiousness in the South." By the time of World War II, the break was accomplished. "I recall," he writes, "sitting in my office in Ingleside Hall at the University of Chicago one fall morning in 1945 and wondering whether it would not be possible to deduce, from fundamental causes, the fallacies of modern life and thinking that had produced this holocaust and would insure others. In about twenty minutes I had jotted down a series of chapter headings, and this was the inception of a book called *Ideas Have Consequences*."

Bracketed between these two notable discourses come four other closely related pieces: "The Importance of Cultural Freedom," a major essay in which, among other things, Weaver accents the danger of "politicalizing" culture under the modern power state; "Education and the Individual," a really fresh examination of some of the terms and supposed purposes of education, done with the deceptive simplicity of a Socrates; "Two Types of American Individualism," a comparison of Randolph of Roanoke with Thoreau; "Reflections of Modernity," a lecture to the students of Brigham Young University; and "The Best of Everything," which has the sparkle of one of Weaver's best vintage years, 1958. At the end, almost like an appendix, is "Conservatism and Libertarianism; the Common Ground," not so sparkling as the others, perhaps, but extremely useful for the arduous purposes of definition.

We owe no ordinary expression of thanks to publisher and editor for retrieving these notable essays from periodicals and other sources and making them again current; and to Eliseo Vivas for his illuminating and very moving introduction, which being memoir as well as introduction, fulfills perfectly one of the most difficult of all literary undertakings. It is a small, compact book of the kind, I think, that Richard Weaver would have preferred. Perhaps some may ask why, for completeness, one or more of the earlier essays were not included—for example, "Aspects of the Southern Philosophy" (*Hopkins Review*, Summer, 1952), which has a quite specific relationship to "Life Without Prejudice" and "Up from Liberalism." But completeness is not the purpose of this

collection, which evidently intends to present only a closely unified group of Weaver's best essays, with "the plight of modern man" as the central theme. Without question the result is a book of great distinction to which conservatives, young and old, will turn again and again to reinforce their principles and to lift up their hearts. It is no less a book for readers of good faith and serious mind, whatever their affiliation.

To recognize the distinction of the book is one thing. It is quite another to put a name to Weaver's distinctive quality. Shall one say he is something less than a regular philosopher—though he is well practiced in philosophical method—and something much more than an "intellectual"? A skillful rhetorician, yes. Why not add "inspired" with a prophet's vision and ardor? In his admirable introduction Mr. Vivas owns himself a little discontented with other terms that suggest themselves. Weaver was "a provincial by reasoned choice." But "provincial" carries with it "a denigrating penumbra of meaning." Might not "regionalist" serve better? It is a cloudy term. It condescends. The opposition uses it to damn with faint praise. And what about the seeming contradictions in Weaver's personality? Reserved and quiet he was, a good listener, not a big talker: "a man of strong opinions, but too reflective to be opinionated." He "distrusted *a priori*s, abstractions, fiercely held principles, which in his view were often cover for intellectual emptiness and unreasonable passion." Yet Weaver was (and in the writings that survive him still is) "a bold man, capable of audacity behind or above the deliberate reflective thinker."

These are virtues, not faults. They give proof of strength, not weakness. A highly articulate professor of English, as Weaver was, who is also a master rhetorician and, in an unusually fine and noble sense, a dialectician, is just the kind of man we most urgently need in our time of crisis. What other kind of man could examine the pretensions of the social sciences, as Weaver did in *The Ethics of Rhetoric* and in various passages of the present book, and by study of their vocabulary (their "god-words" and "devil words") disclose the sources of error and abuse that often render dangerous their now commanding influence? How do we resist the "politicalizing" of our entire culture if we permit this or that minority group to "politicalize" in their behalf "prejudice" or "education" or "democracy" or the like, while sociologists, psychologists, political scientists lie low and say nothing or else ride the wave? Even if they were in the true sense "objective," the sum of the knowledge of all the specialists of every

sort would not in itself provide wisdom in public affairs, good health for society and individual. We need "professional" men (not just professors of English, of course, but professors of anything or non-professors) who will step outside their "fields" onto the public terrain. We need "professionals" who are willing to become "amateurs" as Richard Weaver was.

"Amateur"—that once noble word only recently debased—if redefined and restored to its proper high meaning, would be the right word for Richard Weaver. His audacity was, after all, the mark of a wisdom too rarely attained. His boldness was the higher sort of prudence, willing to risk failure at minor points in order to win victory at the really critical point. Reading Weaver, we are at all times in a world that is metaphysically and pragmatically real, close to us, indeed pressing upon us, not to be shut out. We are put in a mood not to wish it to be shut out. Here is none of the studied nonchalance and *taedium vitae* that mark contributors to *The New Yorker*—like Edmund Wilson, for example, in his recent collection of essays, *The Bit Between My Teeth*—and none of the moroseness and ponderosity of various others who nominate themselves to do our worrying for us. It is as if the sun of Plato is shining in Richard Weaver's discourses. His book is the right one to take with you into the great modern dark.

Reviewed by DONALD DAVIDSON

## *Christ, Calvin, and Caesar*

**Independence and Involvement: A Christian Reorientation of Political Science**, by René de Visme Williamson, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University press, 1964. xii+269 pp. \$7.50.

AT A TIME when behavioralism seems to be the predominant approach to the study of politics, Professor Williamson's book comes as a refreshing breeze into an atmosphere full of statistics, behavioral models, and game theory. The aim of the book is rather lofty and general—a Christian reorientation of political science. The aim most certainly has not been achieved, but some tentative first steps in this direction have been made.

The author is eminently qualified to make these first steps. Not only has his work in political philosophy been most stimulating, he has also been