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THE VITAL CENTER. By Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949.

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of most men. And so glorification of 'the state' turns out to be, in fact, glorification of a governing minority. No democrat can tolerate such a fundamentally unjust theory."

Neither does he accept the view of those philosophers who contend that survival is in itself the supreme end. Survival, he says, "is a necessary condition for everything else, but it is only a *condition* of what has value, and may have no value on its own account. Survival, in the world that modern science and technique have produced, demands a great deal of government. But what is to give value to survival must come mainly from sources that lie outside government. The reconciling of these two opposite requisites has been our problem in these discussions."

The conflict between those who put more stress upon social cohesion and those who emphasize the factor of individual initiative, has been going on ever since men began to argue about the relation between the state and the individual. In Russell's opinion there can be no clear-cut solution to such a problem, but at best some sort of compromise.

Russell anticipates the attenuation of the evils caused by the two baleful aspects of individualism—the greed for possession and the love of power. The former, in his opinion, "will grow less when there is no fear of destitution." The power urge, on the other hand, "can be satisfied in many ways that involve no injury to others: by the power over nature that results from discovery and invention, by the production of admired books or works of art, and successful persuasion. Energy and the wish to be effective are beneficent if they can find the right outlet, and harmful if not—like steam which can either drive the train or burst the boiler."

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THE VITAL CENTER. By Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949. Pp. 274. \$3.00.

KNOWLEDGE of the roots and the formative years of society, historians argue, is an absolute prerequisite to the analysis of modern problems. Having thus asserted the value of their field, they are too often satisfied to relax into a careful contemplation of a past era and leave the present to its own resources. Few are willing to grapple with the uncertainty, the elusiveness and the confusion of a modern dilemma. It is reassuring, therefore, to find such a competent and respected young historian as Harvard's junior Schlesinger venturing to assume the formidable task of defining modern liberalism.

So broad a creed as liberalism cannot be easily agreed upon. Limitation

to the American theatre of thought is hardly a limitation at all, for philosophical and political debate respects no national boundaries. But no matter how great the difficulty, a careful statement of the liberal platform—intellectually sound and morally satisfying—is a worthy task for any American scholar. Many have taken it upon themselves to tell us of Americanism, to prescribe panaceas for all our ills, and to identify enemies against whom we must charge. There is a constant cry for a disciplined definition of democracy and an interpretation of foreign and domestic issues in terms of American traditions. From the start, it should be noted that no one book could accomplish this. The finest results that could be achieved by Schlesinger's small volume would be an epidemic of new aspirants with variations, qualifications and challenges to offer to his thesis. Liberal philosophy is elusive partially because it is complex. More important, its chief characteristic is a sensitivity to changing circumstances which makes the formulation of a catechism exceedingly difficult. Even in these anxious times, there is a tradition of prestige associated with the term "liberal" which makes it liable to claim by strange and diverse groups. Those who claim authoritative knowledge on what is democracy or Americanism add a much stranger and more diverse element to the congregation.

The major tenets of Schlesinger's liberalism are neither gauche nor novel. Basic to Anglo-American traditions are such features as political privileges, civil liberties and an abiding belief in the importance of the individual. In contrast with the various forms of modern statism, this common liberal ground is easily identified, although those who are content to take a brave stand for the reforms of the nineteenth century will perhaps flinch at the addition of "security against the ravages of hunger, sickness and want" as a social responsibility.

Schlesinger sees the "rise of the social-welfare state" as an expression of that responsibility. This concern of society for the individual, he holds, must be accompanied by a counter-devotion for the state on the part of the individual. Several convincing passages stress the need for a closer bond between men in the democratic state and decry the tendency of the older individualism to isolate man to a degree harmful to himself and to society.

There is nothing here that is new, but that is not a criticism. There is too little that is specific and, even in a short book which proposes to define a sane central position, this is a serious offense. The democratic program is necessarily neglected for, of the 256 pages which make up the main body of the text, 156 pages are devoted to a denunciation of Communism and Soviet Russia. Communists have contradicted themselves; they are not to be trusted; you can't work with Communists; they have no real love for truth, beauty, mankind or science. Communists (save on racial equality) are no better than Fascists; they have indeed worked hand in glove with Fascists whenever practical politics so demanded. Russia is *not* the white hope of the twentieth cen-

tury as so many goodhearted but muddleheaded Americans over thirty-five have believed. All of this is stated and reiterated, documented and verified with elaborate quotations from the writings of Russian, French, English and American Communists. None of it can be refuted, but is it three-fifths of the brave creed, the positive dogma, the "fighting faith" of the American liberal?

A psychoanalytical twist early in the discussion dismisses the reasoning capacities of the Communist convert. "The fear of isolation, the flight from anxiety lie at the bottom of the totalitarian appeal—especially when the fear and anxiety are converted into frenzy, into 'an absolute black vacuity,' by conditions of economic and moral hopelessness few Americans can imagine." This, then, can not be an effort to win back the American heretics. Schlesinger estimates American party membership at "slightly under 70,000"; he does not consider them a serious threat to the United States except insofar as they divide and neutralize American liberals, presumably on such questions as the loyalty test. But he does not devote nearly so much attention to this very pertinent problem as he does—for example—to the treachery of Lenin, who has a space allotment of startling proportions in a book subtitled *The Politics of Freedom*. Not only is he described, analyzed and quoted but in one dramatic three-page crescendo he is given an imaginative role in a dramatic dialogue with Abraham Lincoln! More accurately, it should be called a soliloquy, for through it all Lincoln remains "brooding, silent, impenetrable," and Lenin is permitted to deliver a long proclamation of victory without challenge. A poor role for Lincoln, it belies his abounding faith in constitutional government if not his talents as a debater.

Having scourged his demon, Schlesinger is free in the short space that is left to present an able defense of the Truman foreign policy and the Fair Deal. Effective containment of Russia, he argues, will result from supporting non-Communist democratic governments. Assistance in abolishing that "absolute black vacuity" is an essential counterpart of military aid. So wholehearted an acceptance of this doctrine might have led the author into an examination of the extent to which it has been consistently applied; but except for a brief chastisement on Chiang, Greece and the German cartels, he is satisfied to concede to the State Department a full vote of confidence. It is reasonable to concede that any government will be guilty of some inconsistencies, and some errors; but he who expounds a liberal program should scrutinize them for the reason—or at least for the lesson—they offer. Neither the intellectual nor the politician can afford to gloss over the crucial field of foreign relations.

Noting the effectiveness of our policies in Europe, Schlesinger points to an interesting relationship between the democratic containment of Russia and recent Soviet domestic policy. Deprived of a unity which might have derived from

expansion, Russia has been forced "to discipline intellectuals, to purge the national Communist parties" and to face the "heresy of Tito."

Other problems are treated nebulously in a manner reminiscent of Mr. Dooley's famous comment on the trusts. "On wan hand I would stamp thim undher fut: on th' other hand not so fast." Big business is necessary. So also is caution. We must provide real security for our citizens, but beware of stagnation. The "clear and present danger doctrine" is a good one, but free society must draw the line. All of these are two-edged swords which cannot be presented in a fashion pleasing to everyone, but if the writer chooses to present a "Vital Center" he must locate it and then defend it. All arguments on all questions cannot be included under a single cover unless it is to be a mere catalog of issues.

One cannot question Schlesinger's scholarship, nor his ability. He is capable of offering real intellectual leadership. Perhaps one day he will write a book which will state a liberal political platform. It would be best not to try to build one around his most recent series of articles for Life Magazine.

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