

Truth

(A Political Analysis)

by *Richard Moore*

“What’s truth?” asked Pontius Pilate,
ever prepared to revile it,
“What’s truth, you tramps and hags?”

“I know!”
said the wino,
hung with wretched rags.
“Truth is many-gowned.
She dresses for our sakes . . .
but it’s booze what makes
the world go ’round.
Just look—look hard if you dare.
Continents here and there
soaking and eroding,
volcanoes belching, exploding . . .
but mostly it’s under covers—
oceans like gushy lovers—
mostly the earth’s *all wet*.
What’s it want then? *To forget!*
Iss’ jus’ like me an’ Vivian.
All we want’s oblivion.”

But here, rolling eyes aloft,
one stood, politely coughed—
so elegant, so correct!—
and thus, commanding respect
and silence from every man
and woman there, began:

“I report to you, friends, that we—
that is, my colleagues and me . . .”

The crowd heard Pilate cry,
“You mean, *my colleagues and I!*
If you’re going to whine and yammer,
do it with decent grammar!”

“My friends, my true *associates*,
allied to me in their fates . . .”

“They lied to you?” Pilate inquired,
“Those friends you probably hired—
what kind of friends were those?
You talk too fancy. Speak prose!”

“My colleagues formed a committee
of the best minds in the City,
experts, fortunec-gainers,
nationwide entertainers—
all those by whom truths are uttered.”

“Boobs, jackals,” Pilate muttered.

“After meetings around the Nation,
ten years’ deliberation

at many a posh resort,
though official neglect . . .”

cried Pilate. “Make it short!”

“Well, then—raising
no questions about the phrasing
and creating the false impression
of a shallow, debate-free session
we all in due course agreed
that *Truth is much in need*.”

“That all?” Pilate asked, “—in ten years?”

“O no! We resolved amid cheers—
ecstatic that, cleverly gleaning
our dictum’s ulterior meaning—
that the duty should fall on us—
resolved—such claps—thunderous!—
that *Truth needs a father-confessor
to toilet-train and dress her*.”

A mechanic stood up in rage.
“This jerk thinks he’s a sage.
Ban him from the City!
He’s telling us Truth is sh---y.”

Pilate breathed, “How I love these greasies!
Give them a whiff of feces,
and they’ll outshout any crowd.”

“My friend,” he said aloud,
“thanks for your thoughtful words,
that lay bare these, these . . .”
“T---s!”

“. . . let’s call them *stagnant pools*
in the *morass* of our schools.
But we’ll keep them among us, I think—
so we won’t forget how they *stink*.”

“And so *you’ll* smell nice by comparison
and stay in control of the garrison,”
shouted the happy mechanic—
who’d become, Pilate saw, too manic.
So the police appeared,
and as the crowd had feared,
doctors put him in chains
(and, a month later, beat out his brains).
And the crowd, with his strangled curse
in their ears, began to disperse,
and Pilate, too, strode from the scene.

The drunks remained on the green.

Once More Beyond the Pale

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

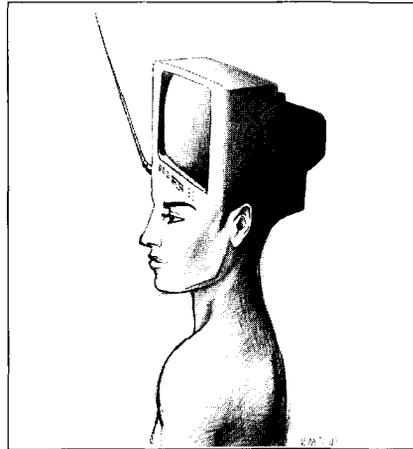
“A thousand years scarce serve to form a state; An hour may lay it in the dust.”
—Lord Byron

**The End of the Twentieth Century
and the End of the Modern Age**

by John Lukacs
New York: Ticknor & Fields;
291 pp., \$21.95

**Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal
and Political Philosophy**

by George F. Kennan
New York: W.W. Norton;
272 pp., \$22.95



Krystyna Jachmiec

Few antiliberal writers are disliked and distrusted so much by mainstream “conservatives” as John Lukacs and George Kennan. Like most movements that achieve a degree of success, intellectual “conservatism” in America has petrified into an establishment far more concerned with maintaining proximity to power than with preserving its own integrity of mind, which in any case was compromised from the start by an unwillingness to risk a commitment to circumscribed interests by examining too critically the structure and function of postwar American society. Since World War II, “conservatives” in this country have mainly been corporate capitalists and anticommunists whose hatred of the left is far greater than their love of the truth, which they are willing to fudge rather than concur with the leftist critique on any point whatever. Compounding this commitment to power and interest is a prep-school code of ethics by which people who refuse to be team players are judged unreliable eccentrics at best, dangerous scoundrels at worst.

Since American “conservatism” for the past 40 years has been little more than an apology for corporate capitalism and modern technomaterialism, it is naturally suspicious of traditionalists

who believe that the time has come to reappraise the modernist idea of “progress” and who are not reluctant to say that the environmental crisis is no bogey of the left but a crucial—perhaps the most crucial—issue of the age, or that “national security” and messianic democratism are not adequate justification for the imperial state. In his review of Mr. Kennan’s latest book in the *New York Times*, George Will called the author’s brand of conservatism “anachronistic” and observed that “his thinking is, strictly speaking, un-American. . . .” The answer to this is that Kennan’s thinking is congruent with the majoritarian thought of many generations of Americans, and that it is Mr. Will’s neo-Kristolian conservatism that is likely to become an anachronism, sooner perhaps than later.

Formally speaking, *The End of the Twentieth Century* and *Around the Cragged Hill* are very different works, Lukacs’ being an historical meditation while Kennan’s, as the title suggests, is a personal and political testament, meant to aid scholars attempting to discern a coherent philosophy from his earlier books. They have in common, though, besides an episodic structure and an impressionistic and subjective technique, a shared view of civilization—meaning es-

entially a preference for the high-bourgeois epoch that Lukacs calls the culmination of the Modern Age—that critics will find easy to dismiss as representing simply the prejudices of age, as indeed George Will came close to doing. (Who says conservatives can’t learn new tricks?) Yet, Kennan’s opinions aside, no reader not already familiar with the man would guess that this vigorously written volume was the work of an octo-, about to become a nona-, genarian.

Kennan contemplates with dismay the United States at the close of the 20th century. “If I were to be asked by a foreigner what strikes me most about my own people, two points . . . would come most readily to mind: first, that we are a nation of bad social habits; and, second, that there are far too many of us.” He deplores the American “addiction” to the automobile and to television; the resolute advancement of mental unreality by advertising and popular politics; the trend from constitutional republicanism toward plebiscitary democracy exemplified by the acceptance of the results of public-opinion polls as *vox populi* and by a growing reliance on ballot propositions and constitutional amendments to circumvent representative government; the destruction of rural life and of the land itself by population growth and spreading suburbanization; the destructive and counterproductive social and environmental effects of technology; uncontrolled immigration; and the advanced centralization of American government that has so far failed to live up to its billing as the solution for the country’s most fundamental problems, which are by now approaching critical mass. As a step toward coping with these, Kennan recommends the creation of a Council of State from among the most intelligent, knowledgeable, experienced, and disin-

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