

tionships. Somehow he has managed to find new combinations of language to describe bubbles of feelings, inarticulate longings, unconscious habits of rumination, and the subtle interaction of humors. He so successfully persuades us that we are every bit as complicated as we always knew we were that when Anya finally comes to the realization of "how their lives had merged, in an ordinary, lumpish way, from a sharp physical attraction—but no sharper than a lot of others, surely—to this weight of knowing him," we can fully understand how Mac and Anya have progressed beyond romance to something more enduring. ●

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The Good Life According to Kristol

Two Cheers for Capitalism

by Irving Kristol
Basic Books, 260 pp., \$10

Reviewed by Webster Schott

READING IRVING KRISTOL in *The Wall Street Journal*, I've sometimes thought he should be moved bodily to the U.S. Bureau of Standards. Sitting there in a moderately comfortable armchair—everything about Kristol calls for moderation—he would receive social and economic ideas wafted over from the floors of Congress or the groves of academe and filter them for reasonableness. He might fulminate now and then, and some of his responses would drift into opacity. But overall, the intellectual processes directing change in our society would tilt away from impossible dreams and toward practical solutions.

Irving Kristol is a kind of Paul Goodman of the center. He is articulate, intelligent, politically astute, and socially oriented. He comes from the same semi-apostate New York Jewish literary intellectual establishment as Goodman, but via one of the better neighborhoods. With Stephen Spender he founded the *British Encounter*. Lately, Kristol has been Henry R. Luce Professor of Urban Values at New York University. Unlike the Utopian Good-

man, Kristol wants to lay fresh mortar into our eroded institutions rather than to tear them down and build new ones. "I regard the exaggerated hopes we attach to politics as the curse of our age, just as I regard moderation as one of our vanishing virtues," he said in the introduction to his *On the Democratic Idea in America* (1972).

Kristol likes labels about as much as he likes Karl Marx. He considers himself nonideological and strictly rational. He is nevertheless a registered Democrat. He served on a Nixon task force and was a principal of *Encounter* when it received laundered CIA money. For purposes of identification, Kristol would have to travel as a neoconservative with such figures as his friend Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer, his coeditor at *The Public Interest*, a scholarly magazine devoted to political and economic debate, which Kristol founded with Daniel Bell, in 1965.

Aside from the density and weight of his usual subject matter, one of the problems in reading Irving Kristol derives from his position as a naysayer. The man who wants to put on the brakes instead of stepping on the gas usually has fewer ideas about where to go. With this book, we now get a clearer image of what Kristol and perhaps the neoconservatives are for and with how much passion. *Two Cheers for Capitalism*—Kristol's collection of essays on corporate capitalism, democratic values, social justice, and misdirected idealism—signals his preference with a title borrowed from E. M. Forster. As with Forster, Kristol's choice carries a modified conviction: "Socialism, communism, and fascism have all turned out to be either Utopian illusions or sordid frauds." Capitalism, on the other hand, "represents a sum of human choices about the good life and the good society." Unfortunately, says Kristol, "these choices... have had their associated costs, and after two hundred years the conviction seems to be spreading that the costs have got out of line." The job he sees ahead of us is "to take the liberal or radical impulse, which is always with us, and slowly to translate that impulse into enduring institutions which engender larger loyalties."

Kristol has some concrete ideas about how to do this, but he makes his proposals only after much regret over our present confusion. So before considering them, it's necessary to describe Kristol's analysis of the economic psyche in the United States.

First of all, he says we need help because we've forgotten or, worse, re-

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jected where we came from: "The Founding Fathers *intended* this nation to be capitalist and regarded it as the *only* set of economic arrangements consistent with the liberal democracy they had established." (An intriguing interpolation of the Bill of Rights into the history of economics, I think.) However, the private enterprises and small family businesses that Kristol believes the authors of the Constitution imagined switched personae. They were superceded early in the twentieth century by publicly owned corporations. It was a radical shift from Adam Smith's "system of natural liberty" to a corporate capitalism featuring giant institutions that strove for immortality, sought heavy returns on investment, and were governed by an anonymous oligarchy.

Americans didn't like it. Because we didn't understand the principles governing these institutions, we began to distrust them and the system that bred them. The earliest anticapitalism was born out of what Kristol calls the populist mood, "the constant fear and suspicion that power and/or authority, whether in government or out, is being used to frustrate 'the will of the people.'"

Lately, hostility toward capitalism has assumed the aura of ethos and the zeal of ideology. Since so many of Kristol's concerns revolve around this gnawing new anticapitalism, one wishes he were more precise in identifying its roots and constituency. He

does relate it distantly to the tradition of progressive reform, and he identifies John Kenneth Galbraith as one of its villains. He brands its members variously as upper-middle-class elitists, antiliberal leftists, socialists, and a "new class" who believe—as the Left has always believed—it is government's responsibility to cure all the ills of the human condition." Utopian remedies that would deny freedom in the marketplace are crawling out everywhere from under the "protective shell of reformist-liberal rhetoric." Proposals for national economic planning; the desirability of "'public'—i.e., political—appointees to the boards of the largest corporations"; the "utter 'reasonableness,' in principle, of price and wage controls"—all are part of the tradition of the Left and are being passed off as progressive reform while "the structure of American society is being radically, if discreetly, altered."

At this point, Kristol develops a backfire theory of disaffection with capitalism. He says it worked too well. Capitalism promised us everything: continued improvement in our living conditions, freedom to think and do just about whatever we wanted, opportunity to cross cultures and to leap over social class. Most important, capitalism implied nourishment for our souls as well as for our bodies—a crucial line of thought in *Two Cheers for Capitalism*. "It held out the promise that, amidst this prosperity and liberty, the individual could satisfy his instinct for self-perfec-

tion—for leading a virtuous life that satisfied the demands of his spirit (or, as one used to say, his soul)—and that the free exercise of such individual virtue would aggregate into a just society."

We have gotten the good life all right, but we have turned decadent in our affluence, reducing the pursuit of happiness to a "ludicrous parody of capitalism in which we consume all possible brands of pie in the sky." We spend our freedom on sex, drugs, and Gucci loafers. The class we want to join is supposed to improve our tennis backhand or expand our consciousness.

Along the road to the new split-level ranch house surrounded by crabgrass we abandoned religion. Education showed it up as obsolescent. Simultaneously, we transferred to capitalist institutions the injunctions we once attributed to religion. "It is the death of God, not the emergence of any new social or economic trends, that haunts bourgeois society," Kristol says. Our philosophers warned us from the start: "The 'middling' nature of a bourgeois society falls short of corresponding adequately to the full range of man's spiritual nature, which makes more than middling demands upon the universe, and demands more than middling answers."

Kristol extends this proposition into the argument that we're unconsciously biting the hand that feeds us. Our thwarted aspirations toward spiritual fulfillment have turned on the system. Our religious drive now expresses itself in demands for greater equality of income and privilege, in the growth of fervor over the environment, in the multiplication of government agencies regulating the behavior of capitalist enterprises, in the social programs of a naïve Johnson administration that believed we could buy our way out of poverty. All restrict freedom in the marketplace in the name of values once associated only with religion. What God has never been able to do for us, even at the height of our devotion, we now propose to exact from corporate capitalism.

Reformation, not reversal, is what Kristol foresees: "There is no more chance today of returning to a society of 'free enterprise' and enfeebled government than there was in the sixteenth century of returning to a Rome-centered Christendom. The world and the people in it have changed." But corporate capitalism and the welfare state must also change because they cannot survive as they are: "The welfare state of today has been constructed in such a



"Luke, there's an artist feller here wants to wrap the barn in polystyrene. What do you say?"

heedless, often mindless, way that, like so many hasty reformations [of nineteenth-century capitalist societies], it creates as many problems as it solves." Corporate capitalism must change because "in its heedless emphasis on economic growth and ever-increasing prosperity, [it] incites ever more unreasonable expectations, in comparison with which the actuality of the real world appears ever more drab and disconcerting."

If *Two Cheers for Capitalism* sounds gloomy, opinionated, and stubborn, then I've conveyed its mood. But it also echoes voices we are hearing elsewhere. Kristol wants us to think smaller and simpler. We should get our social conscience back to basics. We need a comprehensive national health program and should enact one. We need a means of assuring ourselves dignity in old age. He tells us to address directly the problem of the maldistribution of wealth. Enact a tax code that prevents anyone from inheriting more than one million dollars during his lifetime (it's an idea Jefferson and Montesquieu would like). Learn from Europe by instituting children's allowances to sanitize our welfare programs but avoid demeaning and socially divisive qualifying tests. Kristol says our successful social reforms—social security, Medicare, public education—have been "universal." Kristol makes sense about corporate responsibility: Business must learn to explain its behavior to the public, democratize its relations with shareholders, and regulate its profits. Everything is more complicated than it seems, even to Kristol. Technology has altered our lives. Political and economic systems survive at the mercy of their physical environments.

While Kristol's essays merit quiet celebration, they leave much unsaid. Our capitalistic success rose from our treasure of natural resources and a growing population. Now, U.S. capitalism is devouring our own and the world's resources. In another decade, 8 of the 10 minerals necessary to an industrial society will probably be depleted in this country. Corporate capitalism could consume itself to death. Our excessive combustion of fossil fuels is turning our rain to acid—10 to 100 times more acidic than a decade ago. Acid rain is rendering our freshwater fish sterile and stunting the growth of our trees and our plant food supply. Kristol's attack on environmentalists diminishes him. He calls the Environmental Protection Agency "a major obstacle to the redevelopment of the inner city" and the environmentalist movement "an exer-

cise in ideological fanaticism."

Kristol masters in economics, history, and polemics, but he misses in science and technology. He fingers policy, not structure. Yet structure breeds policy. Still, I like these essays because Irving Kristol knows a great deal. He makes us think about questions that won't go away: What is a good life? What is the compact between each of us and the rest of society? ●

Webster Schott is a corporate executive and literary journalist.

Critic, Friend, and Teacher

The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews

by Eudora Welty

Random House, 320 pp., \$10

Reviewed by Carole Cook

WITHOUT ITS STORYTELLERS, any nation would be reduced to the moral equivalent of a trading post, and after two generations of spinning the tales that have literally created the Delta country and the Natchez Trace (but not Yoknapatawpha County, which is another world also unto itself) for us outsiders—shy for one reason or another of Mississippi—it is sensible and honorable to regard Eudora Welty as a great national resource.

An ordinate amount of claptrap has been written about Eudora Welty. Critics and reviewers have picked over her work with a fussiness or, perhaps even worse, a glib glossiness. As for the burgeoning field of Welty scholars, her response has been to reiterate quietly that while she respects the difficulty of the work of the analyst, she cannot corroborate his schematic and symbolic interpretations of her stories—which are just that: stories.

But don't think for a minute that this is typical artistic disingenuousness on Welty's part. Nothing, let us hasten to say, is typical about Eudora Welty, even if she has sometimes found it convenient to make it seem that way. The introduction to her snapshot album of depression-era Mississippi, *One Time, One Place*, helps explain why her home state has been her locale. No professional photographer, no outsider, could ever have captured the naturalness of her subjects, but she was "part of it, born into it, taken for granted." From this unique vantage point, unseen as the fly upon the wall, Welty has

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