

CHAPTER III

THE VITAL CENTER

“In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action.”
-Dag Hammarskold¹

As an undergraduate at Harvard, Schlesinger had heard Reinhold Niebuhr lecture, and had not been particularly impressed.² Put years later, Niebuhr would become the most important Intellectual influence on Schlesinger. Schlesinger wrote:

I met him, I think, before I read much of him. I saw something of him when the ADA was founded in the winter 1946-47. I was greatly impressed and charmed by his, and I then began reading his books. I suppose that *The Nature and Destiny of Man* had more influence on me (and my attitude toward history) than any other single book. Niebuhr's rendition of the Christian interpretation of human nature, his sense of the frailty of human striving along with the duty nonetheless to strive, his sense of the tension between history and the absolute—all these things gave form to my own gropings about human nature and history and showed me how skepticism about man, far from leading to a rejection of democracy, established democracy on its firmest possible, intellectual basis. *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* was also vital in this connection. Niebuhr also articulated and confirmed my sense that irony was the best human and historical stance—an irony which does not sever the nerve of action. The line leads straight from Niebuhr to the Kennedys. Also, through the years, Niebuhr more than anyone else I have known has served as the model of really great man.³

Schlesinger eulogized Niebuhr as “a man who, as much as any human can, embodied the transcendent qualities of wisdom, grace, and love.”⁴ Niebuhr had been a Marxist and a pacifist, but had abandoned both philosophies during the second half of Franklin Roosevelt's tenure.

Niebuhr saw a mixed world, one in which “Man's capacity for just makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.”⁵ As Schlesinger explained, the great thing “Niebuhr did was that democracy (and) liberalism had been based essentially on an optimism about man—the perfectibility of man—and what Niebuhr did was to show that liberalism and democracy had a much stronger basis in the sense of human tragedy, not perfectibility.”⁶

In *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Niebuhr detailed man's paradoxical character, neither wholly good nor depraved. The biological, rational, and spiritual elements of man

¹ quoted in Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 43.

² Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “Prophet for a Secular Age,” *The New Leader* (Jan. 24, 1972), 12.

³ Letter to Cunliffe.

⁴ *New Leader*, “Prophet for a Secular Age,” 14.

⁵ From *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, quoted in *ibid*, 12.

⁶ Interview, 1/14/82.

continually interacted, and no one dominated.⁷ A limited creature, man made the repeated mistake of overestimating his freedom, power, and morality.⁸ Although man fooled himself by blaming his evil on outside sources, such, as social organization, his evil was innate; there was no “sinless natural man.”⁹ But one feature that did distinguish man from the rest of the Earth’s creatures was his capacity for self-transcendence and self-knowledge, and his true individuality.¹⁰

Because of man’s limitations, and his inherent selfishness, he could never be sure he had found the truth. Niebuhr used Freud to show how each individual interpreted reality to fit his own interests. “All human knowledge is tainted with an ‘ideological’ taint. It pretends to be more than it really is. It is finite knowledge gained from a particular perspective,” argued Niebuhr.¹¹

Of all man’s sins, refusal to acknowledge his limitations was the greatest. Claiming that his evil resulted from society’s organization, the form of government, or his separation from nature, man deceived himself to avoid admitting his own evil.¹² Niebuhr had little patience for “the intolerable pretension of saints who have forgotten they are sinners.”¹³ An extension of that pretension was claiming to have the absolute truth. Those who thought they had all the truth might believe they could construct a perfect society, but were doomed to fail: “It is a very good thing to seek the Kingdom of God, but it is very dubious to claim to have found it.”¹⁴ “The sin of self-righteousness is not only the final in the subjective sense, but also in the objective sense. It involves us in the greatest quilt. It is responsible for our most serious cruelties, injustices, and defamations against cut fellowmen.”¹⁵ And Niebuhr understood that any political viewpoint could produce misguided self-righteousness: “Stalin can be as explicit in making unconditional claims as the Pope; and a French revolutionist of the 18th century can be as cruel in his religious fervor as the ‘God-ordained’ feudal system which he seeks to destroy.”¹⁶

Given the limitations of human nature, and the impossibility of building the Kingdom of God on Earth, what was man’s duty? To strive anyway, for “There is, therefore, no historic structure of justice which can either fulfill the law of love or rest content in its inability to do so.”¹⁷ The way to check the tendency towards self-righteousness in one’s own political views would be to apply the “the test of tolerance,” to aim to “hold vital convictions which lead to action; (and also)... to preserve the spirit of forgiveness towards those who offend us by holding to convictions which seem untrue

⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York, 1941). The book is split into two parts: *The Nature of Man* and *The Destiny of Man*. This footnote refers to *Nature*, 43.

⁸ *ibid*, 68.

⁹ *ibid*, 103; *Destiny*, 81.

¹⁰ *Nature*, 55. Although Niebuhr believed that the commercial, industrial Protestant society that had emerged from the Renaissance was destroying individuality. *ibid*, 66.

¹¹ *Nature*, 194.

¹² *ibid*, 96, 103, 107, 121

¹³ *Destiny*, 126.

¹⁴ *ibid*, 178-180.

¹⁵ *Nature*, 200.

¹⁶ *Destiny*, 202-203.

¹⁷ *Nature*, 296.

to us.”¹⁸ Niebuhr was, then, a man with a pessimistic assessment of human nature, who nevertheless held liberal beliefs. For Schlesinger, “Niebuhr provided the means of accepting the Herderson-Lowell antiliberal critique and incorporating it into a darker and wiser liberal philosophy.”¹⁹ Niebuhr’s philosophy would help Schlesinger ignore the theoretical contradictions in his own worldview, and instead concentrate on practical action.

As America passed from the Second World War into the Cold war, literalism drifted without the leadership of Franklin Roosevelt. it was, Schlesinger would recollect, “a time when the liberal community was engaged in the double task of redefining its attitude toward the phenomenon of Communism, and partly in consequence, of reconstructing the bases of liberal political philosophy.”²⁰ The Cold War with Russia and the existence of the atomic bomb frustrated idealists who had fought another war to end all wars. Some intellectuals hoped to cope with the problems of cold war and atom bombs through world government; some Stalinist intellectuals blamed the whole problem on the “capitalist imperialist” American government; Trotskyites and other anti-Stalin Communists blamed the United States and the Soviet Union equally for the tension, while progressives, notably those associated with former Vice-President Henry Wallace and *The Nation* did not espouse Communism, but put much of the blame on President Truman’s hostility to the Soviet Union. All of the intellectuals mentioned above in some way saw a possible resolution of the post-war world’s tension.

But other intellectuals, especially the ex-Communists associated with the very influential *Partisan Review*, argued that America was engaged in a long, noble struggle for the freedom of humanity against an evil, imperialist power.²¹ Arthur Schlesinger Jr. agreed with the vigorous anti-Communists, and through his book *The Vital Center* and other works, popularized Niebuhr’s view of man and the new, liberal anti-Communism. Or as he said at the time, “I felt more and more that a new book should be written setting forth the new phase liberalism was entering, and when I saw no-one else doing it, I decided to write it myself.”²²

Schlesinger’s new liberalism was defined by “the hope of the New Deal, the failure of the Soviet Union,...(and) the deepening knowledge of man.”²³ In other words, Schlesinger examined the success of pragmatic moderate reform, the failure of a more ambitious alternative, and analyzed that failure based on newfound (at least for liberals) awareness of man’s fallibility. The vital center stood between Communism and “doughface progressivism” on one side, and Fascism and the business community on the other.

Although the main focus of Schlesinger’s attack was on what was considered currently to be the greater threat to freedom, the extreme left, Schlesinger did make sure to include an even-handed attack on the Right. America’s business leaders were a

¹⁸ *Destiny*, 219.

¹⁹ Letter to Cunliffe.

²⁰ Mitchell Ross, *The Literary Politicians*, 70. (Garden City, 1978)

²¹ Charles Kadushin, *The American Intellectual Elite* (Boston, 1974), 76, 98-101.

²² “Talk with Mr. Schlesinger,” *New York Times*, (Jan.19, 1949), *Review of Books*, 19.

²³ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston, 1962), xxiii. The original edition was published in 1949.

cowardly lot, appeasers in foreign policy, Neanderthally selfish in domestic affairs; they had lost even the driving energy for business expansion.²⁴ One businessman in particular epitomized business's stupidity.

Even in America, the capitalist fatherland, the death wish of the business community appears to go beyond the normal limits of political incompetence... The foreign policy of the business community is characteristically one of cowardice rationalized in terms of high morality. The great refusal to take on the Russians today is perfectly typical. That *doyen* of American capitalists, Joseph P. Kennedy, recently argued that the United States should not seek to resist the spread of Communism.²⁵

Schlesinger accepted Schumpeter's thesis that American business has entered its senescence, with control of industry passing from entrepreneurs to cautious executives. Although Schlesinger did not fear the business Right as totalitarian, he did worry that its incompetence might deliver America to the totalitarian Left.²⁶ He amplified the distinction between an aristocracy aware of social responsibilities, and America's plutocracy, barely able to look out for itself. In fact, for all of Schlesinger's populist rhetoric, he saw little wrong with the right kind of aristocracy. Teddy Roosevelt, a vigorous aristocrat leading a strenuous life, rated near the top of Schlesinger's Presidential pantheon.²⁷

Although Schlesinger's contempt for the business community was profound, it was the Left that bore the brunt of *The Vital Center's* criticism. Schlesinger began with an exposition of the failure of the Soviet Union. The "worker's paradise" has become a paranoid company town where the idea of free will was so threatening that even indeterminate partial physics was suppressed.²⁸ The dynamics of the totalitarian state would force the Russian rulers to maintain a permanent state of crisis; in the absence of an external threat, Stalin would manufacture an internal one.²⁹ While Schlesinger's analysis of the Soviet Union was far more realistic than the analyses made by what he termed the "doughface Progressives" about their utopia, (and made today by their intellectual descendants today about China, North Korea, and Vietnam) Schlesinger did sometimes get a little shrill, both in *The Vital Center* and elsewhere. Seeing the world through World II glasses, Schlesinger warned that Russian anti-Semitism evidenced Stalin's intent to build a master race.³⁰ Part of the reason that Schlesinger and other liberals were so strident in their condemnation of Russia was a fear that, unless stopped, Stalinism might be the wave of the future.

And it Communism were the wave of the future, the future would be horrible. Schlesinger believed the philosophy of Lenin and his followers was that men mere weak

²⁴ *ibid*, 13, 26.

²⁵ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "The Future of Socialism," *Partisan Review*, (May-June 1947), 233-234.

²⁶ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, xxiv.

²⁷ *ibid*, 21.

²⁸ *ibid*, 82.

²⁹ *ibid*, 77.

³⁰ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., speech at Harvard, quoted in *New York Times* (June 23, 1950).

and only a few leaders were capable of freedom.³¹ Seeking refuge from the impersonal insecurity of industrial society, the weak that Communism attracted worshipped the deified party, and surrendered their autonomy to the security of totalitarianism, much as doctrinaire Catholics in the West found their own security in unthinking obedience and submission.³²

The failure of the Soviet Union, Schlesinger believed, was based on a fundamental mistake about man's nature: the source of man's egoism lay far deeper than in materialism, for we all had a Hitler or a Stalin within.³³ Those who believed otherwise had become, like Stalin, "disastrous idealists."³⁴ Like Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, their assurance of their own goodness led them into the cruelest sins.³⁵

What of the Left in the West? "Soviet Russia has become the opiate of the progressives," Schlesinger observed.³⁶ The popular front, the progressive ideal of a democratic socialist alliance with the Communists, Schlesinger labeled the "psychosis of the New York intellectual."³⁷ The "doughface progressives" of the West clung to antiquated notions of man's perfectibility. Instead of making the world better, the utopians criticized the world from the safety of the weekly magazines. Schlesinger wished that utopians would devote less effort to passing brave resolutions about Peron, and more to studying fiscal policy.³⁸

What would be a more realistic view of man on which to base a more practical policy? "Man is a creature capable of reason and purpose, of great loyalty and great virtue, yet he is also vulnerable to material power and spiritual pride."³⁹ Schlesinger's "New Radicalism" proposed acceptance of "the integrity of the individual," the limited state, due process, gradualism, empiricism, and a realistic view of human nature.⁴⁰ In short, "We must grow up now and forsake the millennial dream... Given human imperfection, society will continue imperfect... Problems will always torment us because all important problems are insoluble: that is why they are important. The good comes from the continuing struggle to try and solve them, not from the vain hope of their solution."⁴¹

³¹ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 91.

³² *ibid*, 54, 69.

³³ *ibid*, 45, 250.

³⁴ *New York Times*, "Talk with Mr. Schlesinger," 19.

³⁵ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 88.

³⁶ *ibid*, 49.

³⁷ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "Whittaker Chambers and his Witness." *The Saturday Review* (May 24, 1952), reprinted in Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Politics of Hope* (Poston, 1963), 191.

³⁸ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "Political Culture in the United States," *The Nation* (Mar. 13, 1948), 308. When *The Nation* refused to budge from their illusory view of beneficent Communism, he lashed out at "week after week, their wretched apologetics for Soviet despotism." from *The New Leader* (Apr. 30, 1951), quoted in Alonzo Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American liberalism* (New York, 1973), 473. Schlesinger's criticism did no good; twenty-one years later *The Nation* is still finding excuses for the terrors of Communism.

³⁹ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 170.

⁴⁰ Schlesinger's "new radicals" do not seem very different from his ideal "intelligent opposition": this no doubt made it easier for them to meet in the vital center.

⁴¹ *ibid*, 254.

In policy terms, what would the application of the New Radicalism mean? In foreign affairs, America should adopt George Kennan's containment policy, and wait for the Soviet Union to fall of its own internal contradictions.⁴² Putting faith in world government, in the "pot of legalisms at the end of the rainbow," Schlesinger considered naive.⁴³ Rather, he argued, "The only way free nations can unite to avert war is to build up their military strength as well as their economic, moral, and political strength. In the ADA we know that we are no longer living in a utopia. We are living in a jungle and we must do something about it."⁴⁴ A strong foreign policy would include not only military right, but offering the people of the world a pragmatic chance to improve their lives. "The Tennessee Valley Authority is a weapon which, if properly employed, might outbid all the social ruthlessness of the Communists for the support of the people of Asia."⁴⁵

If Schlesinger's vision of a TVA on the Mekong was disastrously idealistic, some of his other observations about Asia were quite perspicacious. He warned that helping reactionary forces, as the Dutch did in Indonesia, would prove counterproductive.⁴⁶ In addition, he predicted that in time, Mao Tse-Tung, like Tito, would deviate from the Moscow Road.⁴⁷

Despite the preachy tone of much of Schlesinger's writing from the post-war era, much of his advice was indeed pragmatic and realistic; a foreign policy based on Schlesinger's ideas would have kept America out of much trouble. His anti-Sovietism did not blind him to the fact that the United States "has inherited not only the British use of balance of power as the end of diplomacy, but also the British faith in hypocrisy as the means." He argued that America's policy should be less moralistic; like Britain, which withdrew from the Holy Alliance, America should ally itself with the "new progressive forces of nationalism and moralistic."⁴⁸

The challenge of the twentieth century, then, would be to "restore community to the industrial order."⁴⁹ Liberals would have to abandon utopianism, and face the reality of a struggle without end.

Schlesinger's generation had matured, and realized the naivete of a war to end all wars. Echoing the conclusion to *The Age of Jackson*, he called once more for strength: "If democracy cannot produce the large resolute breed of men capable of the climactic effort, it will founder. Out of the effort, cut of the struggle alone, can come the high courage and faith which will preserve freedom."⁵⁰

By making explicit the link between a realistic view of human nature and faith in democratic liberalism, Schlesinger facilitated repair of liberalism's sagging intellectual respectability. Clarifying the distinction between liberal democratic socialism and

⁴² *ibid*, 239.

⁴³ *ibid*, 241.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, Sept. 16, 1951), Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal*.

⁴⁵ Schlesinger, *ibid*, 233.

⁴⁶ *ibid* 231.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, 238.

⁴⁸ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "Guideposts for Peace," *Mercury* (Nov. 1946), 629-633. Schlesinger uses "moralistic" to mean "dogmatically conservative and traditional."

⁴⁹ Schlesinger, *ibid*, 247.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, 256.

communism, Schlesinger helped to save liberalism from the opprobrium that would destroy American Communism.⁵¹

Schlesinger's emphasis on pragmatic reform aided the cause of the Democratic liberals. *The Age of Jackson* added respectability to the New Deal by linking it with the rest of the American tradition of reform. And by underlining the importance of reform *here and now*. Schlesinger helped the intellectual left come to an understanding with Truman. If Truman was no Roosevelt or Jackson, he was at least a Polk--a man with his heart in the right place, and the interests of the people foremost.⁵² Schlesinger tried to make the liberals realize that the Jacksons and Roosevelts were few and far between. In the meantime, Schlesinger argued, domestic reformers should stop mourning Roosevelt and accept Truman.

Arthur Schlesinger's popularization of certain ideas did much to help his political causes. But Schlesinger's polemical, active temperament could not be satisfied with merely writing about the reform process. From the very beginning of his career as a public figure, he took an active role in the everyday world of politics. The crucial event for Schlesinger's political life in the late 1940's was the founding of the Americans for Democratic Action. In the winter of 1946-47, Schlesinger, along with Reinhold Niebuhr, John Kenneth Galbraith, Eleanor Roosevelt, Joseph Rauh, and other members of the Union for Democratic Action formed a new organization, based on liberalism and anti-Communism.⁵³ To many, the ADA and its first Vice-Chairman, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., were synonymous.⁵⁴

One of the ADA's major problems was its inability to expand beyond a few liberal industrial states. In particular, the issue of race prevented the building of a liberal coalition with the South. According to Alonzo Hamby in *Beyond the New Deal*, Schlesinger, after meeting with leaders of the Chattanooga ADA in 1950, suggested that Southern ADA's focus on political and economic issues, and de-emphasize racial ones.⁵⁵ But Schlesinger does not remember making any such suggestion, "I certainly don't remember that as the strategy. And I don't believe Joe Rauh, who was the founding figure, and our leading civil rights lawyer would have permitted it as the strategy. I question that, although I think the Hamby book in general is pretty good."⁵⁶

Although the ADA was never more than a minor wing of the Democratic party, Schlesinger believed it to be quite influential. One year when the ADA refused to categorically endorse the entire Democratic slate, Schlesinger warned that Democrats could no longer take the ADA for granted.⁵⁷ But given that Schlesinger had already

⁵¹ Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal*, 278-281.

⁵² Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Richard Rovere *The General and the President* (Boston, 1951). *The General and the President* was a collaboration of the liberal Schlesinger and the conservative Rovere aimed at discrediting the cult of personality around General MacArthur, and MacArthur's ideas about unilateral American military action in China.

⁵³ One of the reasons for the founding of the group was to counter the conservative effort to link liberalism and communism. While in Washington D.C. that winter, Schlesinger met newly-elected Congressman John F. Kennedy. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*.

⁵⁴ Back in Massachusetts, his father presided over the state chapter. Schlesinger Sr., *In Retrospect*, 148.

⁵⁵ Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal*, 291.

⁵⁶ Interview 1/14/82.

⁵⁷ *New York Post* (Apr. 9, 1950), quoted in Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal*, 287.

And Schlesinger did distinguish spying from dissent. The harmless Socialist Workers' Party had no business being on the Attorney General's subversive activities list, he declared, for criticism of capitalism was not disloyalty.⁶³ Because the Truman loyalty program covered many non-sensitive positions, and because any Communist spy would not hesitate to take a false oath, Schlesinger found the program misguided. He defended Robert Oppenheimer vigorously, and bemoaned the damage done to national security by persecuting a brilliant scientist for dissenting beliefs.⁶⁴ Schlesinger also spoke out for Dirk Struik, an MIT professor accused of disloyalty.⁶⁵ But he did not always defend the accused; he had little doubt that Alger Hiss was guilty.

During his "crusading anti-Communist" years, Schlesinger sometimes took reactionary positions. On the subject of Hollywood Communist writers, he observed how many writers, after selling out and writing what they admitted to be commercial junk, assuaged their guilt by blaming capitalism and joining the Communist party. While Congressional Committees asking writers if they are Communists might not be wholly proper, Schlesinger added that no-one would raise a fuss if the writers were Klan members instead of Communists.⁶⁶

But more often, Schlesinger's ideas about internal security made common sense. Schlesinger argued against those civil libertarians who pretended that spies did not exist in the real world, and against vigilantes whose hysteria excited them to paranoia; for both extremes endangered national Security.⁶⁷

Although Schlesinger's failure to wholeheartedly defend the rights of Communists angered the Left, nothing outraged them as much as that they considered to be collaboration between Schlesinger-style liberals and the "imperialistic" American government. One episode of collaboration seemed to epitomize "the betrayal of the intellectual."

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. was not the only American who thought that aiding the non-Communist Left would be a good way to stop Communism; strategists at the CIA thought so too. While McCarthyism was purging the State Department of independent thinkers, CIA Director Allen Dulles made his agency a refuge for intelligent, flexible anti-Communists. In 1950, anti-Communist liberals and conservatives from the United States and Western Europe met in Berlin to form the Committee for Cultural Freedom. Schlesinger attended the meeting, and when he returned to the United States joined the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, which included intellectuals ranging from John Dos Passos and Norman Thomas to Whittaker Chambers and Ralph de Toledano.⁶⁸ Schlesinger attended another CCF meeting in Milan in 1954.

And in 1953, under the auspices of the CCF, *Encounter* magazine was founded. The voice of European and American anti-Communism, it vigorously supported

⁶³ *ibid*, 122.

⁶⁴ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "The Oppenheimer Case," *Atlantic Monthly* (Oct. 1954), reprinted in *Politics of Hope*, 208-215. *New York Times* (Jan. 2 1947).

⁶⁵ Ralph de Toledano, "Junior's Misses," *American Mercury* (Nov. 1953).

⁶⁶ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 125.

⁶⁷ *Guide to Politics 1954*, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., ed., 3-8 (New York, 1954).

⁶⁸ de Toledano wrote for the right-wing *American Mercury*, and penned one article labeling Schlesinger a fellow-traveler. "Junior's Misses" (Nov. 1953).

intellectual involvement in the battle with the Soviet Union. One contributor wrote that, “*Encounter* has been the organ of protest against the *Trahison des Clercs*.”⁶⁹

The CIA covertly funded both the CCF and *Encounter*, and one CIA agent even served as an associate editor. When the CIA funding was revealed in 1966, the Left cited it as an example of the imperialist American government buying off intellectuals. Assessing the situation, Schlesinger wrote:

Organizations of the right in most countries get financial support from the local business communities and oligarchies; organizations of the anti-Democratic Left get it from the Russians or the Chinese; but organizations of the democratic Left have to obvious and reliable sources of support. That is the gap the CIA sought in its way to fill. Perhaps the attempt was a mistake, but the problem still exists.

My own feeling is that the CIA expenditures were wholly justified at the time when they began. During the last days of Stalinism, before the Marshall Plan had restored the economic energy and moral confidence of Western Europe, the non-Communist trade unions movements and the non-Communist intellectuals were under the most severe, unscrupulous, and unrelenting pressure. For the United States government to have stood aside self-righteously at this point would have seemed far more shameful than to do what, in fact, it did--which was through intermediaries to provide some of these groups with subsidies to help them do better what they were doing anyway. The mistake lay in the continuation of this system of subsidy beyond the time of need.⁷⁰

Recently Schlesinger was less apologetic:

I think of the various ways in which the CIA spends money that was rather harmless. I mean I don't think anyone was corrupted by it; no one knew.... to spend money to help cultural publications, meetings and so on is a rather innocuous use of CIA funds.⁷¹

Others disagreed. The *London Sunday Times* asked, “What should a free thinker do when he finds out that his free thought has been subsidized by a ruthlessly aggressive intelligence agency as part of the international cold war?” Christopher Lasch contended that Schlesinger and company were dupes of American imperialism, and went on to argue that by supporting socialist anti-Communists and Fascist anti-Communists, the CIA fostered an illusory dissent.

While covert funding for any intellectual thought contradicts the premises of the market-place of ideas, the *Times* and Lasch overreacted. Considering that Stalin probably killed more people than Hitler, collaborating with the CIA against the Soviet Union hardly seems the worst corruption an intellectual could sink to. Whether the New Left will ever admit it, the American government, in addition to its despicable acts such as the

⁶⁹ Julien Benda's book arguing that intellectuals should serve truth instead of power. Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York, 1969), 72-73.

⁷⁰ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “Liberal Anti-Communism Revisited,” *Commentary* (Sept. 1967), 70-71.

⁷¹ Interview 3/29/82.

overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1954, also committed some noble acts in the name of anti-Communism. Covertly funding a magazine that aired almost every political opinion except Fascism and Stalinism, and often vigorously disagreed with American foreign policy, hardly seems to be worthy of such self-righteous condemnation. While the utopian Left spent their careers fulminating against ruthless American aggression, Schlesinger and the pragmatic liberal community tried to effect some practical improvements.

This is a chapter from David B. Kopel, *The Highbrow in American Politics: Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and the Role of the Intellectual in Politics*. Honors Thesis in History, Brown University, May 1982. Awarded Highest Honors, and the National Geographic Society Prize for best History thesis. Other chapters are available on-line at <http://www.davekopel.org/schlesinger/main.htm>.