but he does not sufficiently dwell on it. Here we would do well to recall that another historian made it his life’s work to identify the antique North African and Byzantine strains in the mind and disposition of “the West” in its formative medieval period—and further, to see how these extra-European influences reacted to and persisted among the admittedly ruder traits native to Europe. That historian was Christopher Dawson, and it is uncanny how often, when large questions about Western culture and the legacy of Europe are asked, the draw of Dawson is felt.

Dawson was supremely interested in the Christian civilization of the West, but there certainly were non-Christian elements in the purview of “Western Civ.,” and Davies as usual has interesting and productive things to say regarding them. Reading “The Jewish Strand in European History” in Europe East and West makes one wonder what fools they must have been who impeached Davies for his rendering of Polish-Jewish history back at Stanford two decades ago. As for “The Islamic Strand in European History,” another essay in this volume, Davies cries out for “European history” to realize that the southeastern marches of Europe have for centuries been the primary place of residence for thousands of Muslims. He also gives us many delectable tidbits. Italian cuisine’s marsala sauce and wine? From the Arabic Marsa-Allah, or port of Allah.

If there is a weakness to Europe East and West, and to the Davies oeuvre overall, it is that Davies has but an amateur’s understanding of economic history. If that one weakness is the price of being un-dismal, let it be overlooked. Perhaps some readers will be dismayed by other things, however, such as a rather strident tone against things American and Israeli. Davies is so pro-European, and so profoundly respectful of the variety of inhabitants the region has housed, that he seems unable to forgo irrelevant remarks about American foreign policy.

In the Introduction to Europe East and West, Davies writes: “Going through my files, I [find] that many more such essays and lectures [as those in this volume] are waiting to be published. Should the first selection meet with the general approval of all concerned, especially of readers, I shall be delighted in due course to serve up further helpings.” Readers, take note, and demand more. Stanford, stand in line with the rest of us: if by now you have wised up.


Never A Man for Causes
Walter M. Hudson

George Kennan: A Study in Character

For a few years, from 1946 to 1949, George Frost Kennan was at the center of world events. He also lived long and wrote much, and he remains a puzzle to many. Liberals have admired his public dissent over the militarization of his containment ideas (he would have been loath to have called them a “doctrine”). Yet Kennan was skeptical about liberalism’s reliance on governmental solutions. As he said in his fascinating

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“personal philosophy,” *Around the Cragged Hill*, government “always implies and involves power.” Quoting Henry Adams, he further noted that a friend in power is a friend lost.

While we wait for Kennan’s official biography from prominent Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis, John Lukacs has now given us the short, penetrating *George Kennan: A Study in Character*. Lukacs and Kennan were correspondents and friends: the former, Hungarian émigré and professing Catholic; the latter, Midwesterner of Scottish stock, professing his own Emersonian heresy. Both, however, with intellectual elective affinities, and Kennan meeting Lukacs’ requirement of a reactionary: one whose character preceded and transcended his politics. Devotees of Lukacs and Kennan will receive this book with enthusiasm and read it with reward.

Lukacs focuses on Kennan the writer, on Kennan the memoirist, on Kennan’s quest for clarification and self-awareness, and his refusal to be ensnared by political ideas and ideologies. As Kennan wrote in his memoirs, he had little patience for the grand overarching “objectives” of politics: they were “normally vainglorious, unreal, extravagant, even pathetic...I was never a man for causes.” Rather than conceptualizing the world around him, Kennan allowed the world outside him to shape his ideas, with those ideas always presupposed by principles. Kennan was, in Lukacs’ words, “intellectual, without being an Intellectual.”

Kennan’s own memoirs barely discuss his childhood: he recognizes that those years are inherently strange and inaccessible to the adult mind. Lukacs touches upon them, but his focus during Kennan’s early life is on his intellectual formation. A middling, introverted student at Princeton, Kennan found his place in the world after entering the Foreign Service, and more specifically, after taking the generous opportunity while in that service to study Russian language and society. His three years of graduate work were the furthest thing from the ticket punching of a fast moving public servant. Those years of study were, in Lukacs’ words, the “consequences of the inspirations of his mind, rather than aspirations for his career.”

More significantly, Lukacs shows us the sheer importance of self-knowledge and self-expression to Kennan. Writing literally helped him to live; it deepened his understanding and awareness of the world. He wrote not to win fame and adulation, but as Lukacs tells us, to clarify his own thoughts, to sharpen his own perceptions, and to work out subtle details in the landscape where others saw only hazy horizons. Kennan’s *entre deux guerres* recollections of European life indeed have a generosity of detail as well as a lack of sentimentality and pretension that show them to be of very high literary order. Lukacs goes out on a limb, but not very far, in declaring them better than anything written by an American about Europe of that day (“including Hemingway”).

Lukacs notes Kennan’s studies of Chekhov—he had planned at one point to write Chekhov’s biography. In particular, Chekhov’s stories and dramas of ordinary men and women gave Kennan a grounding in Russian life, a feeling and perceptiveness that policy study could not (the name of the “X Article,” after all, was “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”). Lukacs clarifies how Kennan’s inner experiences became very public ideas—how his literary talent; immersion in Russian language, literature, and history (not Sovietology—Kennan studied little of that); and his own idiosyncratic but principled character shaped the course of world history.

Of course, Lukacs recognizes that the crucial years of Kennan’s public life were from 1946 to 1950, the years of the Long Telegram, the “X Article,” the Marshall Plan.
and the beginnings of the Cold War. Kennan is usually thought an architect of Cold War strategy. “Containment” came to define American foreign policy (one of Gaddis’ books on Cold War history is, in fact, called Strategies of Containment). Yet, Kennan’s containment was subtler than most understood. Lukacs sums up its origins in a single sentence Kennan wrote in 1940: “No people is great enough to establish world hegemony.” Not Hitler’s supermen, not the new men of the Soviet Union—and not even the citizens of the American republic.

Containment was a political expression of the metaphysical acknowledgement of the limits of human ability and possibility. It argued two things at once. First, that Soviet Marxism was inherently self-defeating and could therefore be contained. Second, that the United States could contain (using a variety of political and economic, and less so, military, means), but could not destroy, Soviet, much less worldwide, communism. Kennan was by no means a Cold War “revisionist”: he recognized the Soviet system for what it was—cruel, wasteful, and foolish. But as Lukacs writes, Kennan “did not believe that the United States was a Chosen Nation of God, that its people were a Chosen People, or even the Last Best Hope of Mankind.”

To Kennan, America’s self-proclaimed role in the Cold War arose from this very univeralist impulse. Grandiose, self-important proclamations poured forth. Hence the Truman Doctrine that, instead of carefully distinguishing Greece from Turkey, instantly shifted into triumphalist high gear and cast its rhetoric out to all “free peoples” around the globe. Hence the hollow (as Hungary proved) “liberation” speeches of John Foster Dulles. Hence the “massive retaliation” talk of Dulles and others that, in Kennan’s words, they “had no intention on inflicting on anybody.”

The history of the Cold War became a regretful one for Kennan. After conceiving the European Recovery Plan under Marshall—something, he stressed, limited in application only to Europe itself—his public career became unimportant. (It is interesting that Kennan had a much more appreciative and astute superior in the army general than in Acheson the career diplomat.) His appointment as ambassador to the Soviet Union in the spring of 1952 actually furthered his marginalization. By then Kennan was not much listened to in the circles of power in Washington—and he was in Moscow for barely a few months anyway, becoming persona non grata after making impolitic remarks comparing his sequestered life there to his years of internment in Nazi Germany. He was not cut out to be a great diplomat.

Indeed, he became, in the opinion of certain Wise Men such as Acheson, very dangerous. Kennan regretted calling for the creation of the CIA. He argued against the expansion of NATO. He recognized that there were Communist agents in the United States government and that their influence was not inconsiderable. He nonetheless detested McCarthyism and the craven obeisance to it by both political parties. He loathed the policy underpinnings of nuclear strategy, finding it deeply unchristian that it contemplated the destruction of millions of innocent human beings—his last essay on the subject, as Lukacs points out, was titled “A Christian’s View of the Arms Race.”

Yet Kennan’s later years did not devolve into bitterness and waste. Lukacs spends as much time on Kennan the historian and elder statesmen during this (very) long autumn of his life and career as he does on Kennan the public servant. It was during these years that Kennan did what most men, in the end, do not do: live a fuller, more meaningful and developed inner life. Kennan studied, thought, wrote, and articulated his convictions to a sometimes grateful, sometimes puzzled world. His books on American diplomacy, his stud-
ies of Russian history, and of course his own personal writings, most famously his two volumes of memoirs, garnered acclaim for their literary excellence. No public servant of the last century save Churchill has written in English with the skill and lucidity of Kennan.

And his mind remained remarkably adept, even towards the end of his life. Even approaching ninety, Kennan could write something as unique and principled as *Around the Cragged Hill*. Lukacs dislikes the book, but whatever its flaws, it is nonetheless remarkable. Who else but Kennan could so powerfully and elegantly make the argument that the United States is, simply, too big, that it would be better broken up into a “dozen constituent republics, absorbing not only the powers of the existing states, but a considerable part of the present federal establishment...”? A utopian plea for a non-utopia? Who but Kennan could have articulated it?

It is true that Kennan was not always wise. Or as Lukacs points out, he could be a “wise man too soon.” For all of Kennan’s famed realism, there was a streak of naiveté in some of his views, a curious, not always consistent quest for purity by state actors that smacked of a political Donatism. He argued against participating at Yalta or Potsdam, saying that to discuss blithely the democratic future of peoples that Roosevelt and others full well knew would be under Communist rule was doubletalk and deceit. He thought that the allowance of Soviet judges, themselves presiders over mass murder, turned Nuremberg into an unprincipled sham. Certainly of his ideas to “Finlandize” the Cold War in Europe got nowhere and strike us today as slightly credulous: will not state power abhor a vacuum; would the Soviets have allowed its satrapies to have slipped so readily from their sphere of influence?

Ultimately, though, Lukacs convinces us that Kennan’s life is one of triumph, or better said, after a tragic era, a comedy. In physical terms he defeated the terrible twentieth century by outliving it. He died not merely an honored man, but a justified one. His insight—that Soviet communism carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction—was vindicated. We would be right therefore to heed Kennan, a man whom Lukacs deemed a conscience of America. Kennan came to this public role, however, through developing an inner life of both mind and conscience. Together, they formed his character. As Lukacs has written in his own superb memoir, *Confessions of an Original Sinner*, what makes us so different from the rest of nature is that “God allows us to live and to know that we live while we live.” God allows us to seek to know ourselves. Kennan pursued this quest, and as Lukacs reveals to us, in so doing, brought honor to his nation and bettered the world.

Wagner’s Ambiguities

R. J. Stove


A century and a quarter after Richard Wagner’s death, the observation of Wagner scholar Bryan Magee remains pertinent: “there are two Wagners in our culture, almost unrecognizably different from one another: the Wagner possessed by those who know his work, and the Wagner imagined by those who know him only by name.

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