

Continued from page 24

to find himself treated like a right-wing "troglodyte." One student at the nation's leading school of journalism even wanted to know why he thought it was so bad that Nicaragua's Sandinista government had shut down the nation's leading newspaper, *La Prensa!*

It is only somewhat reassuring that Krauss admits that "10 years ago I might have been one of them myself." Yet how a self-described "left-liberal" journalist went to Central America "to help stop the next Vietnam" and came home a skeptical centrist is an interesting tale. Actually, says Krauss, his is the story of a whole "Vietnam generation" of foreign correspondents in Central America.

During the first few years of Sandinista rule in Nicaragua, when he worked for United Press International, Krauss concedes, "I reported what I wanted to see and discounted the repression." He says that he was right to stress that Nicaragua was not becoming a Stalinist state, but he missed "the most fundamental event of the

1979-81 period: the consolidation of a Leninist political and military machine."

Krauss says that his ideological blinders began to come off during three weeks he spent with leftist guerrillas in El Salvador in 1982. His hosts refused to dispute the Communist Party line that the Solidarity movement in Poland was merely a tool of American imperialists; in an otherwise pleasant Salvadoran village run according to the principles of agrarian socialism, he was disturbed to see a "personality cult" organized around a guerrilla leader. But the real turning point for his generation, Krauss says, was the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983. He was surprised to find himself unwilling to condemn it automatically, and was "happy to see the downfall of the Stalinists around Bernard Coard."

Now that his generation has left Central America, Krauss says, it will be "interesting" to see what the next crop of "idealistic" youngsters has to say—and, one might add, how many years it takes them to complete their own on-the-job education.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy for Consenting Adults

"Private Irony and Public Decency: Richard Rorty's New Pragmatism" by Thomas McCarthy, in *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1990), Univ. of Chicago, 202 Wieboldt Hall, 1050 E. 59th St., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

"Philosophy should be kept as separate from politics as should religion," the philosopher Richard Rorty declared in 1985. That would have been an unremarkable statement had it been made by one of the analytic thinkers who have dominated Anglo-American philosophy since World War II. But Rorty, who teaches at the University of Virginia, is perhaps the foremost critic of that highly esoteric school of thought, a self-proclaimed "neo-pragmatist," and the pre-eminent heir to the politically engaged pragmatic philosophers William James and John Dewey. And like them, he writes with enough panache to make his case in popular magazines. In short, says McCarthy, a philosopher at Northwestern, Rorty has "all the makings

of a new American philosopher-hero." Why he has not become one is McCarthy's subject.

Until the late 1970s, Rorty was a highly respected member of the philosophy establishment. But then he published *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), attacking analytic philosophy's pursuit of rarefied "logical analysis of language" and its excessive reliance on models of knowledge borrowed from the sciences. Rorty favors, in McCarthy's words, "a turn to social practice to bring us . . . back to earth—that is back to the concrete forms of life in which our working notions of 'reason,' 'truth,' 'objectivity,' 'knowledge,' and the like are embodied." Rorty also joins with Jacques Derrida, Michel Fou-

cault, and other Continental thinkers who reject the Enlightenment belief that it is possible to make universal statements about these things. Truth and knowledge are not timeless; they are determined by culture.

But Rorty rejects the radical social and political conclusions—a wholesale rejection of the liberal, bourgeois order—that the Continental thinkers draw from these views. Instead, he argues that just as the creation of democracy required that religion be treated as “irrelevant to social order, but relevant to, and possibly essential for individual perfection,” so the survival of democracy requires the “privatization” of philosophy. In other words, McCarthy caustically explains, “Philosopher-poets are permitted to indulge in a radical and total critique of the Enlightenment concept of reason and of the humanistic ideals rooted in it, but only in private.”

There are, McCarthy observes, more than a few ironies in all of this. Rorty’s revolt against the analytic school’s aloofness from the “real world” has led him to insist, paradoxically, on an absolute division be-

The Beginning of the End

In a tribute to the French sociologist Raymond Aron in *The New York Times Book Review* (Feb. 18, 1990), Harvard’s Daniel Bell traces the scandalous genealogy of an idea that is much in fashion today.

The men Aron most admired in the 1930s were Alexandre Kojève, Alexandre Koyré, and Eric Weil, three superior intellects “against whom I did not dare measure myself.” Kojève, the most brilliant and most mysterious, gave a famous seminar on Hegel’s Phenomenology with a group of auditors that included Raymond Queneau, Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and occasionally Aron. His esoteric interpretation of the “end of history”—history had ended, he thought, with the universalism proclaimed by the French Revolution, but having failed to be realized in practice by Napoleon, it would now be realized by Stalin!—has repeated itself twice: once in the tragedy of French intellectuals such as Merleau-Ponty who supported the terror of Stalin as “historical necessity,” the second time as farce, in the recent essay by the former State Department official Francis Fukuyama.

tween philosophy and politics. And his whole argument—because it is based on claims of universal truth—constitutes just the kind of philosophy he rejects. McCarthy shares Rorty’s desire for a philosophy more solidly rooted in experience. But he believes that it must begin with the recognition that while universal truths cannot be asserted with the boldness of old, they are still indispensable “pragmatic presuppositions.”

A Jewish Revival?

“What Future for American Jews?” by Arthur Hertzberg, in *The New York Review of Books* (Nov. 23, 1989), 250 W. 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10107.

When the first Jews arrived in New Amsterdam in 1654, Baruch de Spinoza was at home in Amsterdam, insisting that the Jews had only two choices: assimilate or re-establish their own national state.

That prophecy seemed to be forgotten by the 1970s and ’80s. Jews were one of the most affluent groups in America; anti-Semitism had virtually disappeared, at least among whites; and the loyalty Jews felt toward Israel came to be accepted as no more unusual than what the Italians

felt for the “old country.” But today, contends Hertzberg, a professor of religion at Dartmouth, “after nearly four centuries, the momentum of Jewish experience in America is essentially spent.”

America’s 5.8 million Jews have not been unaware of their predicament. During the 1970s, interest in the Holocaust was revived, and the threat of anti-Semitism in America invoked; Jews were urged to rally behind Israel and behind Jewish groups and rituals. Jewishness, says