

won't mean much unless you also buy and read *Consilience*.) Berry's accusations boil down to these: First, Wilson would make science the new religion; second, contemporary science is guilty of hubris; third, Wilson would reduce all life to gears and whorls, eliminating wonder.

"This religification and evangelizing of science," Berry writes, "is now commonplace and widely accepted," as scientists rush in to fill the we-have-all-the-answers role once performed by priests. Berry believes this leads directly to the excessive materialism of our age, since, after all, science teaches that the material is all there is.

Life Is a Miracle takes strong exception to Wilson's boast concerning the celestial: "We can be proud as a species because, having discovered that we are alone, we owe the gods very little." I cheered along with Berry as he blasted the rivets off that sentence. The scientist's claim that we know we are alone is as dogmatic as the cleric's claim that there must be a God: It is far too early in the human quest for knowledge to be sure of either point. When scientists treat this matter as already settled, they betray a closed-mindedness that is supposedly the bane of the scientific method. As for our existence, we surely ought to take the humble position of admitting that we owe something to some office somewhere. Either the divine created us or nature created us; in either case, gratitude and humility are called for.

Perhaps the most telling section in *Life Is a Miracle* is where Berry objects to Wilson's use of the machine as a metaphor for life. Like many works of modern biology and materialist thought, *Consilience* stresses that life is a mechanism, just an organic machine. Wilson seems to want to persuade us that we are not miracles, merely the deterministic results of amino acids and heat exchange.

At the first level, the metaphor seems superfluous—who doesn't think that *Homo sapiens* is made up of lots of complicated parts with complicated functions? But at the second level, the one that concerns Berry, the metaphor is disturbing. If we are just machines, what is the worth of our lives? Why care about individual uniqueness? (All the cars in the parking lot are different, but hey, they're just machines.) And how will we preserve the status, to say nothing of the existence, of biological life if scientists devise electronic awareness and then teach the new life form that, in the end, people and com-

puters are interchangeable, all just machines? Berry probes these questions in depth in this beautifully humanistic book.

—Gregg Easterbrook

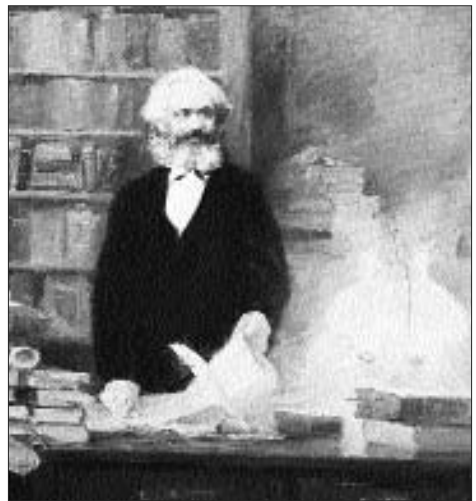
KARL MARX:

A Life.

By Francis Wheen. Norton. 431 pp.
\$27.95

There are good reasons for not reading this biography. First, although Marx was German, his mode of thought was German, and he wrote mainly in the German language, the author's reach does not extend beyond English-language sources. Second, Wheen, a columnist for the *Guardian* in London, sometimes writes in an infuriatingly chatty style, as if sitting in a pub describing an irksome colleague. When Marx embraced a bizarre theory that soil triggers evolutionary changes, for instance, we learn that his lifelong friend and patron Friedrich Engels "thought the old boy had gone barmy." A third possible complaint is that the book offers little that is new. The author simply read 10 or 20 books and wrote one more.

If these objections turn away the potential reader, though, it would be a pity, for this is a good read and something more besides. Having earlier published a study on the 1960s and a history of television, Wheen rolls out his tale at a brisk clip. He spares us the turgid details of how Marx the intellectual gymnast stood Hegel on his head. And, unlike most biographers of this prickly and often savage polemicist, Wheen actually seems to like Marx, or at least the Marx he conjures up for his 21st-century readers.



Karl Marx in His Study, by Zhang Wun

Wheen's Karl Marx is neither the laboring man's messiah who founded the revolutionary workers' movement nor the satanic force who unleashed the horrors of Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. Having been stripped of this baggage by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of all but a few die-hard communist parties, Marx is now neither prophet nor threat. What is left? A peculiar, frustrated, and generally unhappy 19th-century intellectual, whose outer world was that of a stolid Victorian bourgeois and whose inner world was defined by "paradox, irony, and contradiction."

Later Marxists loved to speak of the "objective" forces that moved history, generally in the direction they wished. It is all the more surprising, therefore, to see the extent to which Marx's own life and thought were dominated by a veritable army of highly subjective prejudices, many of them quite nasty. The French were deceitful, the British obtuse and incapable of rigorous thought, and the Russians primitive and hell-bent on conquest. When provoked, he

could drop anti-Semitic or racist slurs as capably as any good 19th-century European burgher.

And that's just the point. As Marxism recedes into the past, the man who created it stands forth ever more clearly as an emanation of his era. His intellectual concerns, his hopes and fears, and even his private life (which Wheen, without resorting to Freud, describes with considerable sensitivity and skill), were all very much the product of his class, gender, and historical epoch.

Is there anything surprising in that? Certainly not. Nor is Wheen the first to make the observation. But, coming on the heels of the great communist crackup, this biography has a poignancy that earlier works lacked. As we part company with Marxism-Leninism, we also bid farewell to its chief architect, with all his will to power, apocalyptic dreams, petty squabbles, ritual humiliations of opponents, and wretched private life.

—S. Frederick Starr

Contemporary Affairs

THE JEWISH STATE: The Struggle for Israel's Soul.

By Yoram Hazony. Basic. 433 pp. \$28

For decades, the conflict between Israel and the Arabs—both the Arab states outside its borders and the Palestinians within—dominated the daily lives and consciousness of Israelis. "The Siege" is the label Conor Cruise O'Brien once gave the struggle and the mentality it produced among Israelis. It dictated everything from political discourse to ideology to which brand of car they could buy (for years, Subaru was the only Japanese brand available; other automakers scrupulously honored the Arab League embargo). But now the Siege is lifting, and Israelis find themselves facing turbulent internal issues they have long put off: church versus state, majority rule versus minority rights, and, broadly, what it means to live in a Jewish state.

The last question is at the heart of this book. In Hazony's view, the very concept of a Jewish state is under systematic and relentless assault from the country's own cultural and intellectual establishment. Virtually everywhere he looks—in the classrooms, books, museums, movie theaters, courtrooms, even in the bar-

racks of the country's proud citizen army—he sees materialism, deception, despair, and a loss of Zionist fervor. And he considers the Oslo accord with the Palestinians yet another betrayal of the dream of a Jewish state.

Although Hazony—who heads a Jerusalem think tank and has been an adviser to hard-line former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—holds strong, nationalistic views, he has written not a screed but a thoughtful and provocative historical analysis and critique. The book traces the development of the idea of the state from Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) to his ideological heir, David Ben Gurion (1886–1973), and chronicles their political and ideological battles with other Jewish leaders.

Hazony contends that a small faction of German Jewish intellectuals, led by the philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965), mounted a rear-guard action against classic Labor Zionism from their redoubt at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The intellectuals favored a binational state in which Jewish identity would take a back seat to secular citizenship. Although Buber and his followers were discredited and vanquished by Ben Gurion,