common traditions, common purposes, and practical alliances. These efforts were not easy. Conservatives tend to be stubbornly faithful to their own minds. ("Open" is often used to describe the liberal mind: the conservative, Nash shows, is "open" too, but less so to the comings and goings of new conventions, more so to the persistent hard questions of skeptical intelligence. The conservative seems to be more willing to say "no" and is harder to organize.)

In his last three chapters—the prose moving more swiftly, less certainly now—Nash tries to bring the mushrooming debates, tendencies, and growing numbers of personalities into the confusions of the present. He notes that the Left is now, where not in disarray, in a conservative phase and that conservatives are making the news. Nash does emphasize that the radical "movement" of the Sixties had an ambivalent effect upon liberalism. In part the radical critique adopted many of the criticisms of "corporate liberalism" well known to conservatives makes the news. Nash does emphasize that the radical "movement" of the Sixties had an ambivalent effect upon liberalism. In part the radical critique adopted many of the criticisms of "corporate liberalism" well known to the conservative critics of the mass society. In part the radicals moved in an increasingly illiberal direction, especially on matters of race and the "Third World." Thus, classical liberals were forced to abandon their narrow "end-of-ideology" phase and to differentiate genuine liberalism from the radical impulses of the Sixties. In this sense many "neo-liberals" are making at least partial alliance with conservatives and have thus been dubbed "neo-conservatives." This last designation more nearly fits some writers like Irving Kristol, but far less well classical liberals like Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Some who are called "neo-conservatives"—like Edward Banfield and Robert Nisbet—have always been conservatives. Others are, have been, and remain social democrats. On these matters Nash is less successful than on those dealing with conservatives proper.

In sum this is a useful book. It is too bad that many in the literary-intellectual world have paid much less attention than they ought to the work Nash here reports on. It may shed more light on the near future—and lend itself to discriminating liberal uses—than some of the tired strains of statism.

Ralph Crunden's collection of essays, The Superfluous Men, fills in the period from 1900-1945, the period just before Nash's book begins. It consists of classic texts from the conservative critics of American culture, whether in individual essays or in chapters from books. In all, there are twenty-eight selections, five from George Santayana, three from Albert Jay Nock (from whom comes the collection's title), five from Henry Louis Mencken, and others from Ralph Adams Cram, Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, John Crowe Ransom, Walter Lippmann, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, and Frank L. Owsley. "The most important single doctrine in the conservative frame of reference," writes editor Crunden, "is that the best things in life are not political and cannot be obtained by political means." This is a penetrating way of understanding the issue between conservatives and liberals. It helps to explain how conservatives might think the whole nation has gone liberal, while liberals tend to think of the bulk of the population as conservative—each offers a quite different sort of leadership. It helps to explain why conservatives have so often been innovative in poetry, the arts, architecture, fiction, and other energies of culture. Americans, says Louis Hartz, are inherently "liberal" in their hopes and believe in progress from their first breath. "Part of the reason conservatives felt so out of place in modern America was that so many half-articulate assumptions seemed to be both universally held and demonstrably untrue," writes Crunden.

It is quite striking to read critiques of American society coming from the right, which might have been written today (in less masterful prose) by writers on the left. Yet one must always ask the purpose of a critique of America. What is the writer up to? It may be too simple to suggest that liberals desire political change, conservatives cultural change. In an odd way writers of both tendencies appeal to the deepest values of the Judeo-Christian tradition. But each thinks the other has misunderstood—and, most probably, serves nefarious interests.

Personal Destinies: A Philosophy of Ethical Individualism by David Norton (Princeton; 398 pp.; $22.50/4.95)

Stanley Hauerwas

In making the "individual" the basic unit of the social and political order, liberalism has found it quite difficult to account for social cooperation. Robert Nozick's resort to "invisible hand" explanations is an indication of how difficult it is for a consistent liberalism to justify even minimal forms of societal cooperation. John Rawls appears to be an exception to this, but as David Norton points out, he is able to secure cooperation only by stripping the "individual" of all characteristics that make it worthwhile to be an individual in the first place. Ironically, liberal ethical and political theory has had to generate a theory of nonpersons—in the name of the freedom and autonomy of the individual. In the interest of securing a basis for cooperation, then, philosophers invent individuals who are devoid of particularity and history.

In this important book Norton argues that liberalism's inability to account for social cooperation has been due to an insufficient understanding of the individual. The liberal understanding of the individual (i.e., the rational calculator of satisfactions and/or an instance of disinterested rationality) is a corrupt form of a richer understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition. But each thinks the other has misunderstood—and, most probably, serves nefarious interests.
ists had the virtue of reaffirming the truth that individuation is an arduous moral task. Their metaphysical commitments, however, resulted in the distinctiveness of the individual being lost in common humanity. Even though Kierkegaard saw that becoming an individual was a person’s highest task, such individuation is made unintelligible by his assumption that God is the ultimate principle of individuation. Nietzsche prepared the roots for the Sartrean doctrine that each individual creates himself or herself, but Sartre’s ontological nihilism blunted his own insight—man being reduced to a “useless passion.”

Norton, in contrast, develops a metaphysics of individualism as a means to secure the reality of the plentitude of possibilities represented by each individual. Norton’s technical argument involves an attempt to defend Leibnitz’s principle of incompossibility—that is, that nonexisting possible worlds are as fully real as our existing world. Norton’s core insight, however, is intelligible apart from his metaphysical claims. It is his primary contention that “humanity can no longer afford the parochialism of claims to exclusive truth. It has become imperative that each person, each morality, each culture, each state, learn to affirm the equal truth of alternative systems—whether actual or merely possible—and to envisage its own consummation as the consummation of an ultimate individual that is complemented by other and qualitatively different individuals. It may well be that the very meaning of ‘community,’ ‘nation,’ or ‘epoch’ requires that all activities be ordered by a single set of ultimate presuppositions. But such a commonality requires knowledge of itself for what it is, namely, a choice among equally valid alternatives.”

From this perspective Norton argues that each person represents the sum of possibilities in generic humanity—that in truth “the common humanity of each individual comprises the totality of human possibilities.” Thus we do not so much create ourselves as actualize or discover what we already are. Each of us represents countless potentials that we cannot fulfill because of the singular nature of our respective destinies. Accordingly, it is each person’s primary responsibility to discover a “daimon” among those potentials and live in accordance with it. Our differences become our common bond, since the difference of others is necessary for me to be able to appreciate what it means for me to be what I am.

Thus there is nothing about individuation, properly understood, that would encourage a dichotomy between self-interest and other-regardedness. Rather, we must understand that the condition for the acknowledgment of the worth of others is a confident sense of our own worth. The latter is dependent upon being able to gain the integrity that is correlative of living one’s own truth. The great enemy of integrity is not falsehood as such, but the attractiveness of foreign truths—truths that
belong to others. The man with integrity recognizes that there is a complementarity of excellences, and thus encourages others to live lives different from his own. Indeed one of the worst things we can do is try to help another at the cost of our own integrity, for such "help" is a tragic contradiction. The only help that can be truly helpful is that which is grounded in the integrity and moral responsibility of the one helping—thus those who help remain true to themselves.

The kind of individualism Norton is defending is perhaps best understood in terms of his use of "wholeheartedness" as a metaphor for the kind of self worth having. Only the "wholehearted" individual has the capacity to make a choice that is a choice, for such a person is able completely to identify with his choice—that is, he would not have it other than as it is. In contrast, the "dysdaimonic" person is perpetually distracted as he tries to live in such manner that his choices will not limit his "options." As a result, he is never able fully to be "present" in any activity and thus cannot be said to act at all. In contrast, the "wholehearted" person is characterized by fidelity, because his choice "of his ultimate possibility establishes a principle of entailment whereby his future and his past are implicit in his present, and thereby are within his present act."

Norton obviously has a stake in rejecting all deterministic or behavioristic accounts of the self. He rather cavalierly lumps all such positions under the name of "environmentalism," and then argues that they all have an unwarranted commitment to a dualistic account of the self. He does not, however, mean his critique of "environmentalism" to imply that we are not socially constituted before being individuals. But there are two broad kinds of sociality—antecedent and consequent—which are radically different because of the intervening attainment of individuality. As Norton states it: "The first is a received sociality to which the person (as child and adolescent) is responsible, the second is a constituted sociality for which he shares responsibility. The sociality that follows from the choice of oneself in no way compromises this choice but extends and fulfills it." The normative principles of sociality (individuality) pertain exclusively, of course, to consequent sociality. Even though Norton's distinction between antecedent and consequent sociality may involve more problems than it clears up, it is to his credit that it at least opens the way for him to take seriously moral development through the stages of life—childhood, adolescence, maturity, and old age. He is certainly correct that analysis of the importance of the stages of life for morality is largely ignored by contemporary ethicists because of the assumption that the life of the individual should be subject to a single set of commensurate normative principles. It is Norton's contention, however, that each stage has moral demands peculiar to it and that unity of the self can be secured only by living truthfully in each stage. Norton bases this claim on the important but frequently denied insight that self-discovery is necessarily a posteriori. Thus, even though maturity is the primary stage at which we are capable of self-truth, it is dependent on what we have learned in childhood and adolescence—just as old age is dependent on maturity.

Norton feels that a threat to normative individualism more significant than environmentalism is posed by those who argue that the distribution of innate potentialities for excellence must be ignored or qualified in the interest of justice. He argues that all egalitarian conceptions of justice deny the basis of justice itself—the entitlements each person can claim by virtue of his worth. Contrary to Rawls, Norton denies that justice is fundamentally a social category. He sees it as denoting what we deserve correlative to our excellences and achievements. The crucial question is not how goods are distributed, but what kind of goods we have a claim to in view of our destiny. A professor of philosophy can thus lay claim to resources necessary to buy books, but not a Ferrari—no matter how much he may desire the latter. By trying to honor all claims, the egalitarian fails to see that justice depends not on people having needs, but on each person engaging in self-training to have the right needs.

Norton argues that Rawls's most basic mistake is to assume that you can construct a theory of justice prior to a conception of the good, or at least prior to a conception of the good individual. By trying to squeeze justice out of ignorance, Rawls necessarily institutionalizes a social system, the assumption being that the only thing we share as individuals is infinite desires. In the name of securing justice, such a system necessarily breeds injustice, since it trains us to assume that whatever we desire is just. We are, therefore, not trained to disavow certain goods as being incommensurate with our destinies. Scarcity then becomes the permanent condition of the social order, and justice becomes merely the means of allocating scarcity. In contrast, normative individualism would require that the consumption-oriented economy be replaced by a production-oriented one.

Norton's position, like that of C.B. MacPherson and Roberto Unger, stands as an important challenge to the liberal paradigm that dominates contemporary ethical and political theory. They have developed similar critiques of liberalism, for they argue that the most disastrous consequence of the liberal tradition is the dissolution of the self and the subsequent inability to articulate and experience true community. However, the question is not whether they are right about the diagnosis, but whether they really offer us an alternative.

In spite of Norton's penetrating suggestions about the nature of the true individual, one wonders if he is not still fundamentally a liberal. Because he is unwilling to specify the content of the "daimon," his appeal to the individual has the same formal character as liberalism. In that respect it is not clear how his position differs from that of Rawls, since the kind of society Rawls wants is clearly very similar to Norton's society of self-actualized individuals. The issue between them may actually be centered in the extent of minimal guarantees required to insure the material basis for self-actualization.

Moreover, neither Rawls nor Norton provides us with adequate ways to account for the necessity of the use of force by the political order as the means to its ends. They both continue the liberal assumption that conflict can be eradicated from political life if people are simply allowed to flourish as individuals. Thus, Norton argues that conflict is only a sign that we have imperfectly apprehended our destiny. In a world of actualized individuals, harmony must reign. Even if he is right theoretically, the practical institutional correlates of such a view are utopian.

Finally, Norton's position continues to manifest the a-historical character of
On Moral Fiction
by John Gardner
(Basic Books; 214 pp.; $8.95)

Mark Taylor

On Moral Fiction comes out strongly for moral fiction, a position that has the great virtue of assuring the author of the good will of most readers. I am not altogether sure whether Mr. Gardner considers bad art and false art, of which he speaks a good deal, to be nonetheless a species of genuine art. I am not sure, that is, whether the word "art" is used eulogistically or neutrally. Gardner unequivocally values art that is "primarily moral—that is, life-giving—moral in its process of creation and moral in what it says." An artistic medium, even television, "is good (as opposed to pernicious or vacuous) only when it has a clear positive moral effect, presenting valid models for imitation, eternal verities worth keeping in mind, and a benevolent vision of the possible which can inspire and incite human beings toward virtue, toward life affirmation as opposed to destruction or indifference."

Again, "True art...clarifies life, establishes models of human action, casts nets toward the future, carefully judges our right and wrong directions, celebrates and mourns...It designs visions worth trying to make fact."

Statements like these earn our good will because we hope that they are true and, consequently, that the author is right. If we are not certain that they are true, we nevertheless recognize that Mr. Gardner must be a very kind man to wish this way. If we agree that they are true, then we surely want to be counted on the author's side.

True art, Mr. Gardner argues, somehow makes us better, puts us on the side of life and the living, and so does the criticism that treasures and encourages this art. The admiration of mistaken critics for the honesty of Sylvia Plath's art, life, and finally death "is perhaps one of the reasons Anne Sexton is now dead." If young men all over Europe really did commit suicide after reading the Sorrows of Young Werther, "then either Goethe's book was false art or his readers misunderstood." I wish Mr. Gardner had said which of these seems to him the case: if the former, whether Goethe knew what he was doing and could have done otherwise; if the latter, how misunderstanding is to be prevented.

Let me put the question a little more sharply with an illustration of my own. We have Cervantes's word for it that Don Quixote becomes a knight errant, centuries after the time for such figures has passed, because of the influence of the many chivalric romances he has read, principally Amadis of Gaul. Are we to conclude that the Don simply misunderstands what the lessons of a novel are, the way literature is supposed to enter into human experience, and that no moral judgment with respect to the Amadis is called for? Or are we to conclude, since the Don's motives are high-minded and generous in the extreme, that the Amadis is therefore true art, a good book for anyone to read? Or, finally, are we to conclude, since the Don's nobility of purpose often ends in his own broken bones and increased misery for those whom he would help, that the Amadis is false art, an immoral and even a dangerous book? These three possible conclusions all represent serious critical positions that are, or have been, held about Don Quixote; all can be cogently argued, and in some para-

...doxical way each is probably part of the truth. But to each this objection can be made: Why should Amadis of Gaul be judged according to its influence on Don Quixote, of all people, since he is mad? (The premise of madness, incidentally, is not one that all readers would grant.) To this one replies in turn: Maybe so, but then who is to judge? Whose behavior is to be taken into account? Whom do we believe? Not Thackeray on Gulliver's Travels, not the United States Customs authorities or, for that matter, Virginia Woolf on Ulysses.

Mr. Gardner's stance is not, of course, new. The related notions that writers can be moral or immoral forces, that books can be good or bad, and that it matters what we choose to read have been around at least since Plato and in one way or another have exercised (among many others) Aristotle, Sidney, Shelley, Arnold, Simone Weil, and T.S. Eliot. The last, in the essay "Religion and Literature," wrote: "The fiction that we read affects our behavior towards our fellow men, affects our patterns of ourselves." Well, I hope that is true; I believe it is; I should despair of living in a world in which the very idea that a good book is ennobling of its reader must be dismissed as sentimental slop. At the same time, I know that it is a premise very hard to prove in theory and harder still to legislate in practice. And so, beyond noting that Mr. Gardner's book is a thoughtful contribution to a timeless cultural debate, I shall pursue the matter no further. Instead, it might be interesting to consider why Mr. Gardner offers his apologia for moral fiction at this particular moment.

It is his conviction that the literature of our time—in fact, all the arts—and the criticism that both feeds on and nourishes it are in a bad way. There are numerous reasons for this unhappy state. One is the "post-modernist" insistence on superficiality, on texture, on surfaces for their own sake, whether or not there be anything beneath. A second is an academic, critical, and thus novelistic valuing of opacity or unintelligibility—again, for its own sake. "The hardest [writers] to read," Mr. Gardner says, "are the easiest to teach." That is true enough with brilliant graduate students but doubtful otherwise. A third reason, according to Gardner, is an arrogant devaluation of matters, like good