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WQ

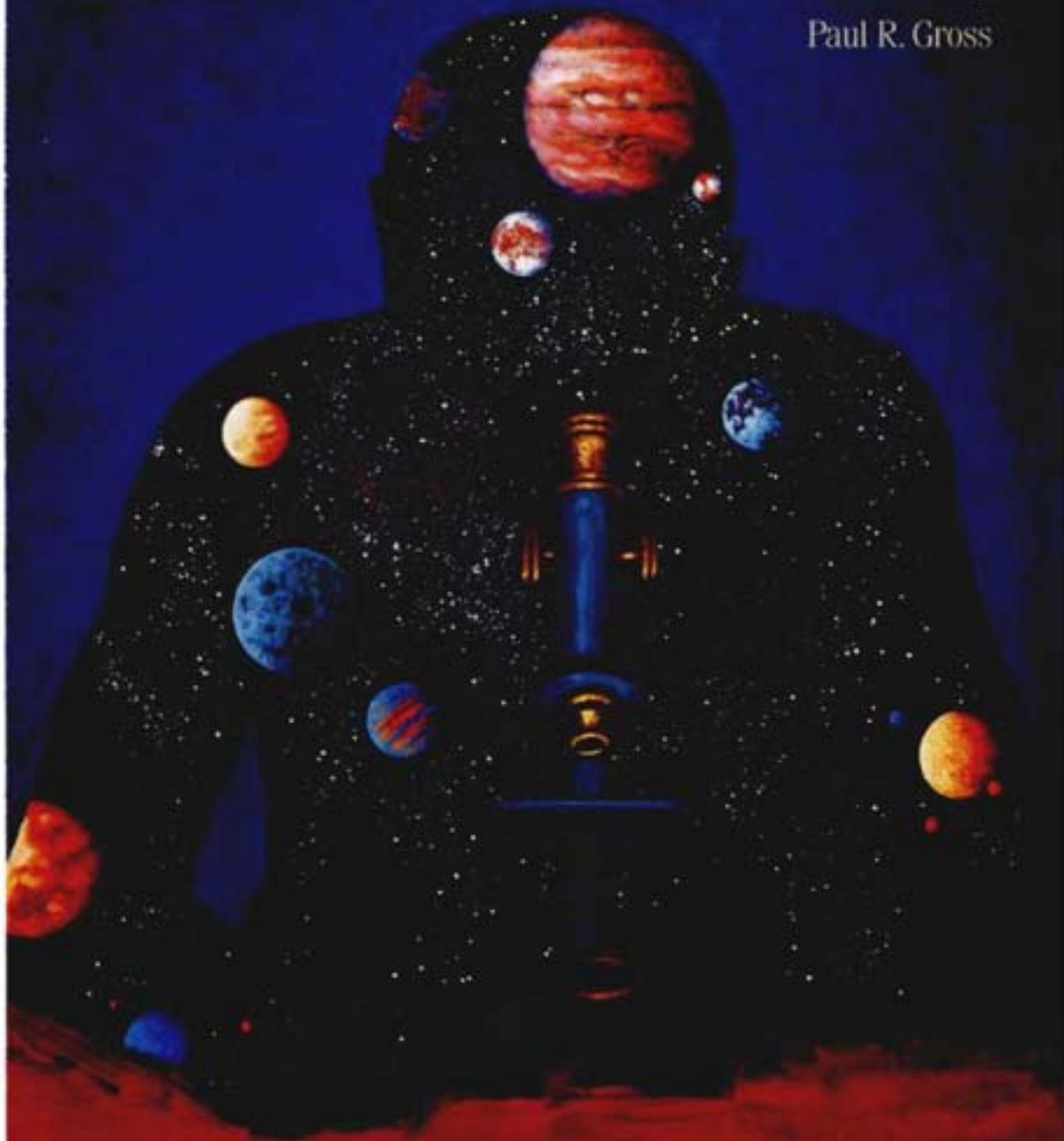
THE WILSON QUARTERLY
SURVEYING THE WORLD OF IDEAS

**IS EVERYTHING
RELATIVE?**
A Debate on the
Unity of Knowledge

E. O. Wilson

Richard Rorty

Paul R. Gross



AMERICA THE GATED? • The Death of David Crockett • Inside the Islamic Reformation

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EDITOR'S COMMENT

Most controversies in public life spring from the clash of principles or interests, but in the United States the landscape itself seems to produce a surprising number. For the better part of three centuries, the thick forests and vast open spaces of the frontier confronted Americans with hard questions about justice, wealth, community, and governance. Early in the 19th century, debates about the building of roads, canals, and other “internal improvements” on the land helped define the role of the federal government in American life. And built things have greatly preoccupied us in more recent times: the interstates, the cities and suburbs, the shopping malls.

Each of these features of the landscape has acquired a kind of totemic significance, serving as a symbolic reference point for the discussion of larger issues. Think of the small town or, more recently, Disney World, now the subject of a flourishing school of scholarship that finds in the theme park ominous portents of one possible American future.

The newest addition to the roster of Debated Places is the gated community. These controversial enclaves, already numbering perhaps 20,000, are often held up as examples of “privatization” run amuck. Andrew Stark writes in this issue that they are only one of several new kinds of places where Americans, in their dissatisfaction with disorder and incivility in the public realm, are welcoming the resurgence of private efforts and institutions. In many cities, for example, privately backed “business improvement districts” are working to revive tattered downtown areas, while city residents battling crime and traffic are winning the right to restrict access to public streets. These unusual efforts raise fundamental questions about what is public and what is private, and about freedom and equality, that cut across many established political lines and promise to play a defining role in our national life.

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THE WILSON QUARTERLY

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A Debate on the Unity of Knowledge

Edward O. Wilson • Richard Rorty • Paul R. Gross

The natural sciences yield countless benefits, but can they provide the basis for a common knowledge? A philosopher and a biologist take opposing views of Edward O. Wilson's controversial proposal.

58 **AMERICA, THE GATED?**

by Andrew Stark

As some scholars see it, the United States is being transformed into a nation of walled-off residential enclaves. Change is afoot, our author says, but gates are only one way Americans are redefining the border between public and private.

50 **HOW DAVID CROCKETT DIED**

by Michael Lind

Did the famed Tennessean fall in combat at the Alamo, or did he surrender and die at the hands of Santa Anna? The author recounts a nasty little skirmish in the culture wars.

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Obscured by the media preoccupation with fanaticism and fundamentalism, a religious reformation not unlike that of the 16th century is sweeping the Muslim world.

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Something from Sleep III (1988–89), by David Wojnarowicz, courtesy of P.P.O.W., Inc., New York, and the Estate of David Wojnarowicz. Design by Adrienne Onderdonk Dudden.



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Private Property, Public Purpose

In surveying major events that influenced the rise of the corporation during the 19th and 20th centuries ["Living with the Corporation," WQ, Autumn '97], Morton Keller effectively demonstrates the central role of law. His incisive historical review, however, stops short of analyzing recent developments in constitutional law. The corporation's acquisition of First Amendment speech rights in the 1970s coincided not only with the emergence of concerted political activities by Fortune 500 CEOs, but with widespread advocacy of the modern ideological doctrine of free trade. Not coincidentally, an unprecedented liberalization of federal antitrust guidelines affecting mergers soon followed, thereby hastening the global spread of corporate enterprise.

J. Bradford De Long is right to note that "we lack a critique of the role of the contemporary corporation with anything like the comprehensive reach of the Progressive-New Deal tradition." This problem is daunting indeed. I would add that if it is to have any long-term impact, a critique of the corporation in the global era of corporate capitalism, unlike that of the Progressive era, will require democratic solutions based on an *internationalist* vision informed by a theory of *transnational* corporate power.

Scott R. Bowman
California State University
Los Angeles

Morton Keller notes that corporate shareholders today tend to think and act more as investors than as owners. As institutions have come to own over half of the equity of U.S. public companies, this has increasingly been true. There are some who argue that, in part because of this, America is full of short-term investors. This is simplistic, but what is true is that pension funds and other stock-owning institutions, for a variety of practical and legal reasons, do act more like arms-length investors than owners who actively try to influence the direction of their company. This suggests that boards of directors must do more to oversee the conduct and future of America's public companies.

As J. Bradford De Long points out, in the

United States it is common to speak of shareholders as the only important stakeholders of public companies. It is certainly true that the rhetoric of business, media, and academic leaders leaves the impression that the only concern of America's corporate leader is "shareholder value." Yet inside America's boardrooms and executive suites there is often a different, and more complex, view. The decision makers' problem is to determine, in the absence of clear signals from real owners, what performance outcome they should focus on and in what time frame. Thus, directors and chief executive officers often find themselves recognizing that what really matters is creating a healthy company and long-term shareholder value. It is impossible to create a healthy company without considering a wide spectrum of individuals and groups committed to the company—shareholders, of course, but also employees, creditors, customers, suppliers, even communities. That is how shareholder value is created for investors in the long term, and how others in our society benefit from corporate success.

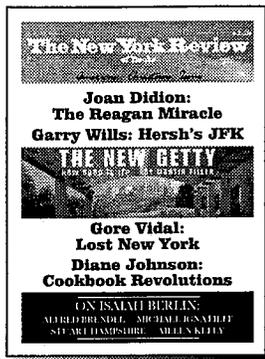
Jay Lorsch
Graduate School of Business
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

The essays by Morton Keller and J. Bradford De Long provide a coherent and concise account of the attempts to harness private property to public purpose. What deserves even greater emphasis, however, is how little has changed over time.

Business executives themselves, from the Medici to Ted Turner, have always been somewhat uncomfortable with the perception that unchecked selfishness alone is what guides their actions. A variety of alternatives have been advanced over the years. The loftiest, derived from Max Weber's discussion of the Protestant ethic, endows selfishness with divinity. For the more hardheaded, there is the science of selfishness growing out of classical economics, with its notion that corporations are largely powerless in the face of market forces. And then there is the idea of corporate social responsibility developed by 20th-century business barons

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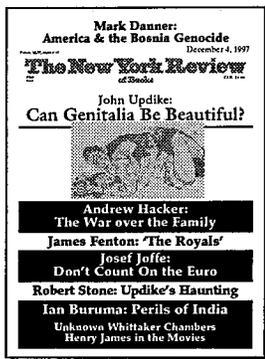
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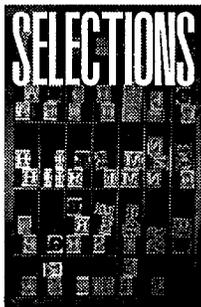
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and the related “stakeholder” model, both of which de-emphasize the role of selfishness.

De Long writes that “globalization [has] contributed to the new awareness of corporate fragility.” But the 20th century is going out as it came in, on a wave of mergers that are consolidating corporate power. It is not just that we need new ideas, as De Long suggests; we also need organizations to countervail corporate power, although corporations, alas, move much more easily in the global economy than do unions.

Neil J. Mitchell
*Chair, Dept. of Political Science
University of New Mexico*

The essays by Morton Keller and J. Bradford De Long frame the current debate over the role of the modern corporation. Should it seek profit only—or does the corporation have a larger responsibility in society? Should the model be the Dutch East India Company of 1602—a company organized solely to profit in trade—or, as in the view of former secretary of labor Robert Reich, should the corporation serve as a kind of branch office of the Department of Health and Human Services, performing the social role that the government can no longer afford?

Modern U.S. corporations can be described as organizations that, in a sense, create earnings for the support of retirees. That’s because retirees and those nearing retirement now own more than two-thirds of all listed stocks through pension funds (including 401[k] plan assets) and individual holdings. Successful corporations also recognize the need to perform well in society in order to earn from the public the “right to operate.” But imposed social programs, government trade sanctions, assaults by the trial lawyers, and other drains on earnings need to be examined carefully by the real owners to see if they’re worthwhile dilutions of their retirement security.

Richard J. Mahoney
Washington, D.C.

On Loyalty

Alan Wolfe [“On Loyalty,” *WQ*, Autumn ’97] overlooked America’s favorite loyalty oath, the Pledge of Allegiance, in describing the condition of loyalty in the United States. The pledge has been the center of many loyalty controversies. For example, in 1943 the Supreme Court ruled in *The West Virginia Department of Education v. Barnette* that students could not be expelled from school for refusing to recite

the pledge. Today, students who refuse to recite it often are made to stand during its recitation.

Francis Bellamy (1856–1931), a Christian Socialist, wrote the original pledge in 1892 for Columbus Day public school celebrations. Bellamy’s original version was: “I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” The wording has since been revised twice: the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution successfully lobbied in 1923 to add “to the flag of the United States of America,” and the American Legion and the Knights of Columbus in 1954 won inclusion of “under God.” Bellamy originally considered putting the word *equality* into his pledge—“with *equality*, liberty and justice for all”—but realized that would be taboo in a patriotic oath in 1892.

One can argue that the Pledge of Allegiance illustrates the average American’s commitment to a nation under law “with liberty and justice for all.” These words are a major component of the hierarchy of the average American’s loyalties. The absence of the word *equality* in the pledge also explains some of its success in the first half of this century.

John W. Baer
Annapolis, Md.

‘Tireless in Pursuit of Fact’

Your lean, rugged portrait of Peter Braestrup made the shock of the news of his death less brutal. Having worked beside him as a *Time* reporter in the Midwest, I would like to add a dimension you described but did not define. He was literally tireless in pursuit of fact.

I remember assigning him to cover the National Farmers Union with a touch of doubt as to whether this physicist’s son from Yale could relate to the NFU leaders in their grease caps and barnyard shoes. When Peter called back from Iowa three days later, he had not slept once but had guzzled beer with the right good ole boys and used the early hours to drive between their groups, talk with non-union farmers, and craft a clear and manly story on their strengths and foibles. The grit and sand that the NFU respected soon took him “under the wire” essential to excellence, but Peter also had the kind of patient energy that drove him to hammer at a keyboard year after year and work through each sentence after everybody else had gone to sleep. He gave intellectual journalism the concentration you see in a fine athlete or musician.

That’s why, I suppose, he could develop WQ

Continued on page 142

FINDINGS

The Demotion of Knowledge

The Pentagon has caused dismay among defense specialists with news that it may move its Office of Net Assessment to the National Defense University. The shift of the ingloriously titled office and its legendary director, Andrew Marshall, says Harvard University professor Stephen P. Rosen, would “bury” one of the few organs of the defense establishment that is detached from day-to-day concerns and devoted to creative long-range thinking about national security. Its studies of U.S. and Soviet defense spending during the 1970s “compelled the Carter administration to reverse the decline in American military spending,” says Rosen, and its analyses revealed that the Central Intelligence Agency consistently overestimated the strength of the Soviet economy. It was Marshall’s Office of Net Assessment that started the shift away from the nuclear strategy of massive retaliation and which during the 1980s recognized that “smart” weapons, advanced communications, and other innovations in information technology were creating what is now routinely called “the revolution in military affairs.” Now more than ever, says Rosen, the Pentagon needs to develop just such new ideas.

Speaking Truth to Power

Apparently, there were limits to paranoia even in the Nixon White House. In *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes*, edited by Stanley I. Kutler and recently published by the Free Press, there is this Oval Office exchange among President Richard M. Nixon and his aides on the afternoon of July 12, 1973.



KISSINGER: I, I just had a call from Dr. Norman Mailer, who is doing an article on Watergate.

PRESIDENT NIXON:

(Unintelligible)

KISSINGER: Well, he says . . . for the first time in his life, he’s beginning to like you. He says Mitchell [in his testimony] turned it around as far as he was concerned. . . .

KISSINGER: . . . [Mailer] said it’s serious, you know, he said, he thinks you’re going to come out of this eventually stronger. That the public is beginning to identify with you and somebody gets kicked so much and endures and overcomes it; that’s what a lot of people have experienced in their own lives. . . .

PRESIDENT NIXON: And Mitchell impressed him?

KISSINGER: Yeah, I found it fascinating. [I called] so that I could give him a few arguments and I find that I had to pull him off, you know. He wants to write that it’s all a CIA conspiracy against you because you were on détente. [*Short pause, then laughter from all.*]

HAIG: [*Laughing.*] *That’s a little weird.*

Where There’s Smoke

The campaign against smoking took a new turn last September when James Garbarino, director of Cornell University’s Family Life Development Center, described in a university press release as “an internationally recognized expert on child protection,” demanded that cigarette smoking be branded a form of child abuse. “More young children are killed by parental smoking than by all unintentional injuries combined,” he claimed. “Coercive intervention” should be used to “motivate parents to change.”

“The professional community” must be “forced to come out of the closet on this issue,” the press release con-

tinued. “It is not uncommon for child protection professionals and child advocates at professional meetings on child abuse to ‘light up’ during coffee breaks. Given what we now know about pediatric second-hand smoke, this is tantamount to reaching in one’s pocket to pull out some child pornography.”

Phallic Meaning

At *Newsweek*, a team of crack metaphysicians apparently labored far into the night on a cover story on new treatments for impotence. The pharmaceutical elixirs, the magazine gravely notes, raise all sorts of perplexing ethical issues. What, it asks, “is the meaning of an erection if it is chemically enhanced?”

Beats us. What is its “meaning” if it isn’t?

The Joy of Boondocking

In the northern reaches of the Americas, a wandering “road community” of nomadic elderly folk have cast off the sedentary way of life typical of their kind and embraced instead an ethos of “Zen affluence.” These “indigenous American gypsies” often gather for ritual Escapade and Samboree meetings; they are prone to bouts of “hitch-itch” and to a strange syndrome known as “down-aging.” And they are the subject of a study called *Over the Next Hill: An Ethnography of RVing Seniors in North America*, by Canadian anthropologists Dorothy and David Counts, published by Broadview Press. The Countses applied classic participant-observer research techniques to the culture of trailer parks. They passed out surveys in the Laundromats, line-danced with the locals, and boondocked in Slab City, California. (*Boondocking*, according to the book’s useful glossary, means parking a recreational vehicle without any hookups, usually without paying any fees. Synonym: “dry camping.”)



On the road with the Countses

The Countses discovered that the primary shared cultural value of the RV clan is freedom, expressed through mobility, nonconformity, and a minimalist approach to material possessions. (“Getting rid of ‘things’ becomes a rite of passage,” they observe.) Yet RVers, some two million of whom spend at least several months a year on the road, are still often perceived as “trailer trash.” The Countses see them much as they see themselves: “as adventurous, self-reliant, flexible, friendly, and ‘gutsy’” —and happy to be far from the senior citizen ghettos where all the talk is “organ music” about illness and disease.

Euphemism Watch

An official of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, disturbed by the recent decision of Montgomery County, Maryland, to shut down its model sewage sludge composting plant, protested that the plant is a “world-class facility.” It provides, he added, “for the beneficial reuse of a highly problematic input” — words that themselves have the odor of highly problematic output.

Bandwidth for What?

High-tech seer George Gilder recently rattled off a few factoids that may surprise some nondigerati. In three years, he noted in a talk in the *Cato Policy Report* (Sept.–Oct.1997), Internet traffic has increased 140-fold;

in 1996, personal computers outsold televisions.

To illustrate how he thinks things will go, Gilder cites the fable of the Chinese emperor who rewarded the inventor of the game of chess by granting him a wish. The man requests a grain of rice for the first square on the chess board, two for the second, and so on, doubling at each square. By the time the 64th square is reached, Gilder notes, the unsuspecting emperor owes 18 million trillion grains of rice. "By 1994," he says, "there had been exactly 32 doublings in computer power since the invention of the NEAC digital electronic computer after World War II." Only now are we getting to "the second half of the chessboard."

The next frontier, Gilder believes, is communications. While we bow to no one in our admiration for the nobler aspirations of the World Wide Web, we keep wondering how all this new technology will be used. According to the *Washington Post* (Oct. 26, 1997), for example, the top three search terms submitted to Seattle-based MetaCrawler, one of the most popular search engines on the Internet, are 1) free, 2) sex, and 3) nude. A rival search engine reports that the word *bestiality* appears twice in its top 15 search terms, once spelled correctly, once incorrectly.

The free availability of pornography, it turns out, may not pose the Web's biggest challenge to civilization. Our curiosity piqued, we set out to survey the literacy level of Web sites themselves. We stuck to high-toned subjects. Still, the results were depressing. Looking for facts on former Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev? Better subtract some consonants. We found 692 hits for him under the name *Krushchev* using the search engine AltaVista. Cold War

hot spots, in fact, are rife with illiteracy. How else to explain our 81 hits on *Balkins* or the wealth of data on the curiously titled Cuban *Missle* Crisis (224 hits)? The Communications Decency Act may be snagging all the headlines, but what about a Communications Literacy Act?

Two Cultures

C. P. Snow spoke of "the two cultures," one scientific and one humanistic, neither understanding the other, but he could just as easily have spoken of the academic and intellectual realms. Lately, for example, the popular art critic Robert Hughes, impresario of public television's *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* and the accompanying best-selling book, has been taking a lot of flak from academics for, well, for being the popular art critic Robert Hughes. The professors are aroused mainly by Hughes's failure to use footnotes in his highly opinionated book, which contributes, they say to the public's lack of appreciation for the hard work of scholars. The debate is related in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Oct. 17, 1997) by Peter Plagens, a former academic who is now working the other side of the street as *Newsweek's* art critic. Indispensable anchors in the work of scholars, footnotes are obstacles when addressing audiences of readers who may be interested in ideas but not necessarily their provenance. (Other obstacles are scholarly jargon and ritual forelock tugging, but we won't go into that.) Plagens points out, moreover, that the leading art history textbooks don't have footnotes either, though some have bibliographies. "Methinks there's not a little envy also at work in the protests," he writes.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

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AT ISSUE

The Many and the One

Fifty-eight tourists slain by religious fanatics in the ancient precincts of Egypt's Luxor: in face of such enormities, it may seem absurd to say that the world is besotted by relativism. Yet even the fanaticism that drives fundamentalists to kill and die for their one and only truth betrays an anguished awareness of the world's many and conflicting truths.

Our relativistic muddle has consequences for every aspect of daily life, from the political to the personal, but the problem is at bottom, and in origin, philosophical: what do we know, and how do we know it? To that question, one answer now commands widest assent: all knowledge is ultimately subjective, individually or socially constructed, an expression of power or will. This view—variously called subjectivism, relativism, perspectivism, or even postmodernism—has become the orthodoxy of the contemporary world, embraced by many and tacitly acknowledged by others, even by those who resist it.

Among the advance guard of that orthodoxy, it is now fashionable to say that even science is a subjective construct. Some scholars of a multiculturalist bent argue, for instance, that science is grounded in cultural and national particularities, so there can be “Indian” or “Chinese” sciences as well as “Western” or “European” science, each different in its procedures and emphases but all equally valid. Similarly, one school of hyper-feminists maintains that modern Western science is suffused with a patriarchal bias, evident in its sexist vocabulary and aggressive procedures. The antidote, according to these critics, is a kinder, gentler “feminized” science.

Some might say that science is only receiving its due. After all, it was science—with its elegant method and manifold technological offerings—that destroyed the traditional certitudes in the process of making the world modern. The skeptical stew in which we all steep is science's making. So why shouldn't

science be in it, too?

But such gloating does little to remedy an increasingly precarious condition, nowhere more evident than in our institutions of higher learning. Reports on the relativist muddle abound, but none capture the situation better than do two articles in a recent issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. One tells of a class of 20 students at a small West Coast college who were asked to read Shirley Jackson's short story “The Lottery.” After lengthy discussion, the instructor was shocked to learn that not a single student would “go out on a limb and condemn” the ritual human sacrifice depicted in the story. An exceptional case? Hardly. The other *Chronicle* account is even more unsettling. According to its author, a philosophy professor at a distinguished East Coast college, the students in his courses were “unable morally to condemn [the Holocaust], or indeed to make any moral judgment whatever.”

These two cases are not aberrations. They are symptomatic of a doctrinaire relativism that forecloses any serious discussion of absolutes or universals. This “absolutophobia,” as the author of the second article calls it, leads to a kind of moral idiocy, and as he rightly asks, “Isn't it our responsibility as teachers to show, by directly confronting the confusions underlying absolutophobia, that students need not be inflexible dogmatists in order to have a moral ground on which to stand?”

Yet, even if they wanted to, where might teachers turn to find such a ground? That is the philosophical conundrum. There are, of course, those truths derived from revealed religions, perhaps the soundest source of moral universals. But outside religious institutions and the various communities of believers, the appeal to such truths is problematic. Moreover, their grounding in particular traditions merely confirms the postmodern claim that such “universals” are *only* the relative goods of specific communities and worldviews.

Our contemporary skeptics have also de-

WQ

constructed the humanistic traditions, “exposing” them as products of specific cultures, peoples, and power configurations—and therefore, of course, lacking any claim to universal truth. By such reasoning, it follows that liberal ideals of human rights and justice neither can nor should be applied to the citizens of, say, Cambodia or Ghana or any other non-Western nation.

The late and greatly missed thinker Isaiah Berlin, Oxford’s sage of modern liberal thought, struggled heroically against such fatuous relativism. While deeply respectful of cultural and national differences, he insisted that beliefs and practices be evaluated across cultural divides according to universal logical and moral categories. Wily fox that he was, however, he was reluctant to name the source of such categories, for fear that he would become one of the totalizing system builders, or hedgehogs, whose ideas have had such devastating consequences in our century.

Berlin’s coyness on the source of universals is attractive to all who fear monolithic systems. It is also realistic in its recognition that certain moral goods, however universal we claim them to be, may sometimes come into conflict: equality and liberty, for example, frequently do.

Yet, for all its virtues, such coyness may now be too costly. Without any common ground from which to build and evaluate human institutions and cultures, the liberal project—in the oldest and broadest sense of the word—may be fated to triviality, its claim to universalism dismissed as a sham.

It is to the end of locating such a foundation that biologist E. O. Wilson has written *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, a work that seeks to show how our understanding of the world (including ourselves) is tied to our human nature, specifically as that nature has evolved through the interplay of genes and cultures.

This is a controversial idea (as the debate in this issue shows), but Wilson is no stranger to controversy. As one of the pioneers of sociobiology, he was viciously attacked for his innovative evolutionary approach to exploring the interactions between human biology and human cultures. Just as his sociobiology challenged the dominant tenor of postwar social science, which emphasized cultural relativism at the expense of biological universals, so Wilson’s notion of consilience—a “jumping together” of the knowl-

edges—will almost certainly upset epistemological relativists.

The charge of reductionism has frequently been leveled against Wilson, and it will be again. He accepts the label, even as he explains why consilience overcomes many of the flaws of earlier reductionist efforts. But his best arguments will not satisfy those who claim that he seeks to impose a biological monopoly on knowledge and truth.

The charge is overstated. Yet Wilson does leave himself vulnerable by suggesting that science is the royal road to truth. That use of “truth” is far too cavalier and, at the very least, obscures his more achievable goal: nothing more, and nothing less, than a common understanding, a shareable knowledge, derived from the natural and physical sciences but applicable to all forms of knowledge, including the arts and religion. Such a common understanding does not trump the truths embodied in works of art or eternalized in religious creeds. Nor does consilient knowledge propose moral ends or absolutes. But it can provide criteria for evaluating the behaviors that are produced by various political, cultural, and religious traditions.

Consider just one example. An evolutionary understanding of our genetic natures suggests a powerful innate disposition toward trust, mutuality, cooperation, altruism. Can we not judge different cultures by, among other things, how well or how poorly they cultivate such a disposition?

That, in any case, is Wilson’s faith. And if it is false, it is also the faith that this nation’s founders embraced. Despite their differences, religious and political, they cleaved to a common basis of understanding, derived from Enlightenment science and philosophy, and that foundation continues to underwrite our most enduring institutions and practices.

No one can deny that science has often misunderstood the limits of its explanatory power, succumbing to a hubristic claim to the Truth. But hubris can be corrected without destroying the underlying confidence in the possibility of a common knowledge—or at least so one hopes. For without a common understanding, a common knowledge, prospects for coexistence among the world’s many contending truths grow precariously faint.

—Jay Tolson

Is Everything Relative?

A DEBATE ON THE UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE

It's practically the refrain of modern life: "Everything's relative." The claim that nothing can be known for sure or in common—that truth is a construct or a fiction—is an idea that contributes to many of our contemporary discontents, from debates sparked by multiculturalism to disagreements over the state of the environment. It's also the idea behind



School of Athens (1508), by Raphael

the postmodern doctrines that now hold sway in many parts of the intellectual and academic worlds. Might it also be wrong?

This special WQ symposium takes that question as its starting point. We begin with an essay by scientist Edward O. Wilson, the pioneer of sociobiology. Previewing the argument of his forthcoming book, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (to be published this spring by Alfred A. Knopf), he sets forth a bold alternative to our current intellectual relativism: a unifying knowledge that combines all disciplines in a biologically grounded understanding of ourselves and our world. Nature itself, says Wilson, has previously limited our ability to reach this understanding. But now, the new sciences of the mind are tearing down some of the most confounding obstacles.

Philosopher Richard Rorty, responding to Wilson's proposal, finds that the need for unified knowledge is unproved. Moreover, he argues that the current multiplicity of knowledges is a good thing. "As we pragmatists see it," he writes, "there can and should be thousands of ways of describing things and people."

Biologist Paul Gross concludes the symposium with a defense of Wilson's project. He sees consilience as crucial not only to the restoration of intellectual rigor in the academy but to such larger goals as social justice. Without the universals provided by good science, Gross insists, "we would have only the 'idiosyncrasies' of tribes, including those of whatever tribe you or I happen to belong to."

Resuming the Enlightenment Quest

by Edward O. Wilson

Consilience, a term introduced by the English theologian and polymath William Whewell in his 1840 masterwork *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences*, means the alignment (literally, the “jumping together”) of knowledge from different disciplines. Exotic as its origins sound, the idea is neither an abstruse philosophical concept nor a mere plaything of intellectuals. It is the mother’s milk of the natural sciences.

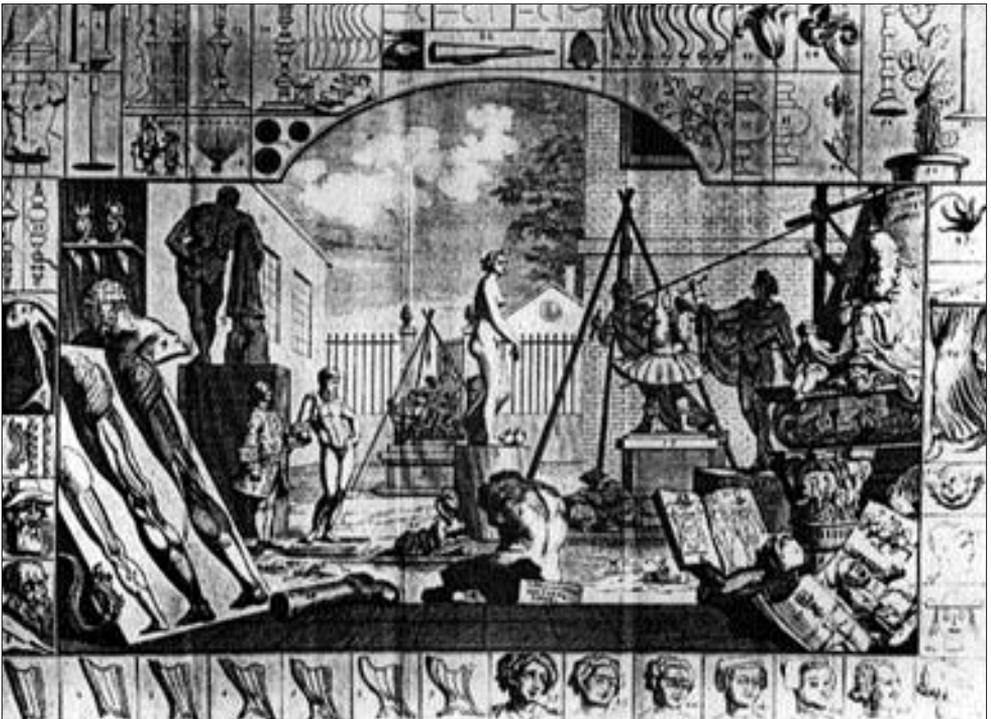
Since Whewell’s time, physics, chemistry, and biology have been connected by a web of causal explanation organized by induction-based theories that telescope into one another. The entire known universe, from the smallest subatomic particles to the reach of the farthest known galaxies, together spanning more than 40 orders of magnitude (a magnification of one followed by more than 40 zeros), is encompassed by consilient explanation. Thus, quantum theory underlies atomic physics, which is the foundation of reagent chemistry and its specialized offshoot biochemistry, which interlock with molecular biology—essentially, the chemistry of organic macromolecules—and thence, through successively higher levels of organization, cellular, organismic, and evolutionary biology. This sequence of causal explanation proceeds step by step from more general phenomena to the increasingly complex and specific phenomena arising from them. Such is the unifying and highly productive understanding of the world that has evolved in the natural sciences. Its success testifies to a fortunate combination of three circumstances: the surprising orderliness of the universe, the possible intrinsic consilience of all knowledge concerning it, and the ingenuity of the human mind in comprehending both.

On the horizon are the social sciences and the humanities. Ever since the decline of the Enlightenment in the late 18th century—and, with it, confidence in the unity of knowledge—it has been customary to

speak of these second and third great branches of learning as intellectually independent. They are separated, conventional wisdom has it, by an epistemological discontinuity, in particular by possession of different categories of truth, autonomous ways of knowing, and languages largely untranslatable into those of the natural sciences.

Now, however, the expansion of consilient cause-and-effect explanation outward from the natural sciences toward the social sciences and humanities is calling the traditional division of knowledge into question. What most of the academy still takes to be a discontinuity is starting to look like something entirely different, a broad and largely unexplored terrain of phenomena bound up with the material origins and functioning of the human brain. The study of this terrain, rooted in biology, appears increasingly available as a new foundational discipline of the social sciences and humanities. The discontinuity, it now seems, is neither an intrinsic barrier between the great branches of learning nor a Hadrian's Wall protecting humanistic studies and high culture from reductionistic barbarians, but rather a subject of extraordinary potential awaiting cooperative exploration from both sides.

At the heart of this borderland is the shifting concept of culture and its hitherto puzzling relation to human nature—and thence to the general inherited properties of individual behavior. In the spirit of the natural sciences, the matter can be expressed, I believe, as a problem to be solved. It is as follows: Compelling evidence shows that all culture is learned. But its invention and transmission are biased by innate properties of the sensory system and the brain. These developmental biases,



The Analysis of Beauty (1753), by William Hogarth



The Tower of Philosophy, from *Margarita Philosophica* (1508), by Gregor Reisch, depicts a premodern ideal of intellectual unity.

which we collectively call human nature, are themselves prescribed by genes that evolved or were sustained over hundreds of thousands of years in primarily cultural settings. Hence, genes and culture have coevolved; they are linked. What then, is the nature of gene-culture coevolution, and how has it affected the human condition today? That, in my opinion, is the central intellectual question of the social sciences and humanities. It is also one of the most important remaining problems of the natural sciences.

Confidence in the unity of knowledge—universal consilience—rests ultimately on the hypothesis that all mental activity is material in nature and occurs in a manner consistent with the causal explanations of the natural sciences. During the past several decades, that hypothesis has gained considerable support from four disciplines that succeed partially in connecting the great branches of learning. The first is cognitive neuroscience, also known as the brain sciences—the once but no longer “quiet” revolution of neuroscience—which is physically mapping the mental process. The second is human behavioral genetics, now in the early stages of teasing apart the hereditary basis of the process, including the biasing influence of the genes on mental development. The third bridging discipline is evolutionary biology (including human sociobiology, often referred to as evolutionary psychology), which attempts to reconstruct the evolution of brain and mind. The last is environmental science, which describes the physical environment to which humanity is genetically and culturally adapted.

The natural sciences are best understood as humanity’s way of correctly perceiving the real world, as opposed to the way the human brain

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perceives that same world unaided by instruments and verifiable fact and theory. The brain, it is becoming increasingly clear, evolved as an instrument of survival. It did not evolve as a device to understand itself, much less the underlying principles of physics, chemistry, and biology. Under the circumstances of physical environment and culture prevailing from one generation to the next during the long haul of prehistory, natural selection built a brain that conferred the highest rates of survival and reproduction. The jury-rigged quality of our perceptual and cognitive apparatus, the legacy of genetic evolution, is part of the reason social scientists have such a hard time grappling with human nature, why so much of the history of philosophy can be fairly said to consist of failed models of the brain, and why people generally understand automobiles better than their own minds.

Consider the matter of vision. What we intuitively believe to be the “real world” is what we see. But what we see is only an infinitesimal slice of the electromagnetic spectrum, comprising wavelengths of 400 to 700 billionths of a meter. With instrumentation, we are now able to observe the remainder of the spectrum that rains down on our bodies, from gamma waves trillions of times shorter than visible light to radio waves trillions of times longer. Many animals see a part of the spectrum outside our range. Insects, for example, depend heavily on ultraviolet light at wavelengths shorter than the human visible spectrum. Color in the visible spectrum also deceives us. We intuitively think that the rainbow is a natural phenomenon existing apart from the human mind, but it is not. Its palette is a product of the way the visual system and brain break the continuously varying wavelength of sunlight into the seemingly discrete segments we call colors. Such hereditary filtering and self-deception occur in all of the other senses. And some capabilities present in other organisms are totally absent from our uninstrumented minds. We have, for example, no organs to monitor the electric fields that some species of fish use to guide themselves through dark water, or the magnetic field by which migratory birds navigate across clouded night skies.

Why are human beings, supposedly the summum bonum of creation, so handicapped? The simplest and most thoroughly verifiable answer has been provided by the natural sciences, and most particularly the borderland disciplines of cognitive neuroscience and evolutionary biology. Outside our heads there is freestanding reality. Only lunatics and a sprinkling of constructivist philosophers doubt its existence. Inside our heads is a reconstruction of reality based on sensory input and the self-assembly of symbol-based concepts. Scenarios based on these concepts, rather than an independent executive entity in the brain—the “ghost in the machine,” in philosopher Gilbert Ryle’s famous derogation—appear to constitute the mind. The scenarios of conscious thought move constantly back and forth through time. As these configurations fly by, driven by stimuli and drawing upon memories of prior scenarios, they are weighted and guided by emotion, which is the modification of neural activity that animates and focuses mental activity.

Why are human beings, supposedly the summum bonum of creation, so handicapped?

Emotion, as now understood, is not something separate and distinct from thinking, as the Romantics fancied. Rather, it is an active partner of ratiocination and a crucial component of human thought. Emotion operates through physiological processes that select certain streams of information over others, shifting the body and mind to higher or lower degrees of activity, agitating the neural circuits that create scenarios, and selecting for ones that end in certain ways. The winning scenarios, those that match goals preprogrammed by instinct and the reinforcing satisfactions of prior experience, determine focus and decision.

In this view, which represents a consensus of many investigators in cognitive neuroscience, what we call *meaning* is the linkage among the neural networks created by the spreading excitation that enlarges imagery and engages emotion. The competitive selection among scenarios is what we call *decision making*. The outcome, in terms of the match of the winning scenarios to instinctive or learned favorable states, sets the kind and intensity of subsequent emotion. The *self*, by virtue of the physical location of the brain in the body and the programs of emotional response, is the necessary central player in the scenarios. The persistent form and intensity of emotions is called *mood*. The ability of the brain to generate novel scenarios and settle upon the most effective among them is called *creativity*. The persistent production of scenarios lacking reality and survival value is called *insanity*.

The alignment of outer existence with its inner representation has been distorted by the idiosyncrasies of human evolution, the hundred-millennium process directed primarily by the struggle to survive rather than the pursuit of self-understanding. The brain, although a magnificent instrument, is still rooted in the deep genetic history of the Paleolithic Age, when most or all of human evolution occurred. Introspection alone cannot disclose the sensory and psychophysiological distortions it creates, which are usually beneficent but sometimes catastrophic. To diagnose and correct the misalignment is the proper task of the natural sciences and—one can reasonably hope—the social sciences and humanities as well. To explore the borderland between the great branches of learning would seem to lead to a better understanding of the human condition than the various skeptical and relativistic accounts of “socially constructed” realities supplied by intellectuals who have lost faith in the original Enlightenment quest for unified knowledge.

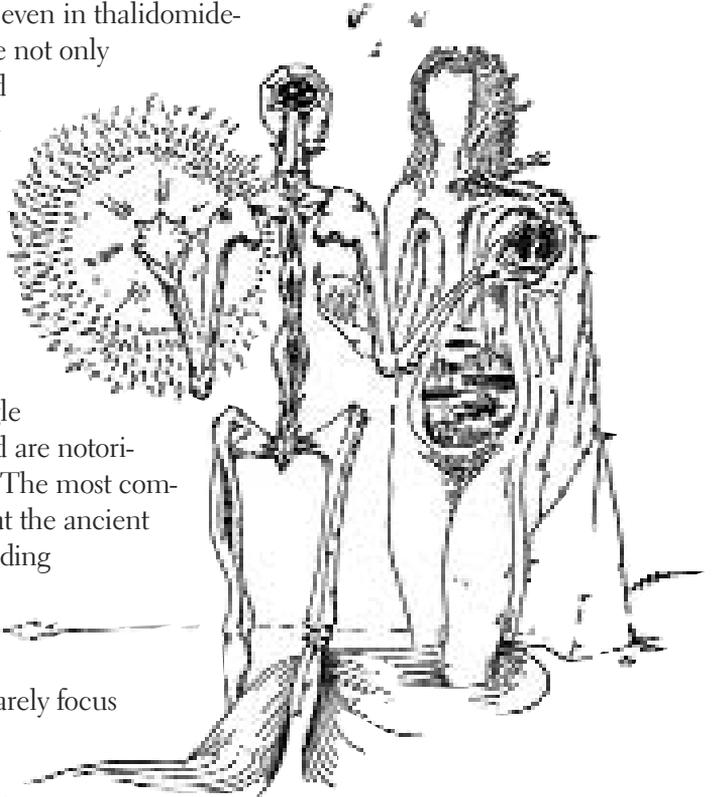
Much of the new understanding will hinge on an inquiry into the exact manner by which genetic evolution and cultural evolution have been joined to create the mind. The key to the linkage can be found in the properties of human nature. This diagnostic core of *Homo sapiens* is not the genes, which prescribe it, nor culture, which is its product. Human nature

is the ensemble of epigenetic rules of mental development, the hereditary regularities in the growth of individual minds and behavior. Following are some of the examples that researchers in the natural and social sciences have identified, proceeding from the relatively simple to the complex:

- The smile, which appears in infants from the ages of two to four months, invariably evokes affection from adults and reinforces bonding between caregiver and infant. In all cultures and throughout life, smiling is used to signal friendliness, approval, and a sense of pleasure.

Each culture molds its meaning into nuances determined by form and the context in which it is displayed. There is no doubt that smiling is hereditary. It appears on schedule in deaf-blind children and even in thalidomide-deformed children who are not only deaf and blind but crippled so badly they cannot touch their own faces.

- Phobias are aversions powerful enough to engage the autonomic nervous system. They can evoke panic, cold sweat, and nausea; are easily acquired, often from a single frightening experience; and are notoriously difficult to eradicate. The most common phobias are directed at the ancient perils of humankind, including snakes, spiders, dogs (thus, wolves), heights, closed spaces, crowds of strangers, and running water. They rarely focus on the far more dangerous objects of modern life, such as automobiles, electric



Being and Nothingness (1941), by André Masson

sockets, knives, and firearms. It is reasonable to suppose that such selective avoidance is an inherited predisposition that reflects the long history of natural selection during which the human brain formed. In other words, the ancient dangers are “remembered” in the epigenetic programs, while the modern ones have not existed long enough for aversions to them to be hereditarily installed in the same manner.

- Color vision, one of the important sensory determinants of culture, has been relatively well tracked all the way from genes to neurons. The chemistry of the three protein cone pigments of the retina, both the amino acids of which they are composed and the shapes into which the molecular chains are folded, is fully known. So is the sequence of base pairs in the genes on the X-chromosome that prescribe them, as well as the sequence of the mutations that cause color blindness, the triggering of the cone neurons by light-induced changes in the pigments, the coding used by the optic

nerve to distinguish wavelength, and the pathways leading from the optic nerve cells to the higher integrating centers of the visual cortex in the rear of the brain.

By inherited molecular processes, the human sensory and nervous systems break continuously varying wavelengths of light into colors. We perceive, in proceeding from the short-wavelength end to the long-wavelength end of the spectrum, first a broad band of blue, then green, then yellow, and finally red.

The array is arbitrary in an ultimately biological sense. That is, it is only one of many arrays that might have evolved over the past millions of years. But it is not arbitrary in a cultural sense. Having evolved genetically, it cannot be altered by learning or by conscious internal construction of new color codes.

All of culture involving color is derived ultimately from these molecular and cellular processes. Color terms independently invented by societies around the world are faithfully clustered in the least ambiguous wavelength zones of the four elementary colors. Cultures tend to avoid the ambiguous intermediate zones. Each society uses from two to 11 basic linguistic terms drawn from within the favored zones. The maximum 11 are black, white, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange, and gray. At one extreme, the Dani of New Guinea, for example, use only two of the terms, and at the other extreme, English speakers use all 11. From societies with simple classifications to those with complex classifications, the combinations of basic color terms generally grow in a hierarchical fashion, as follows:

Languages with two basic color terms distinguish black and white.

Languages with three terms have words for black, white, and red.

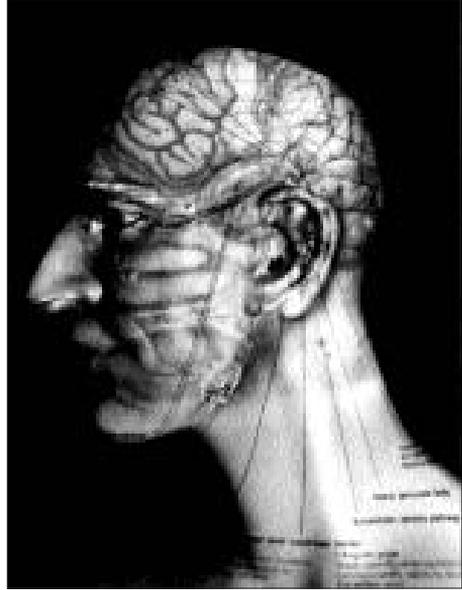
Languages with four terms have words for black, white, red, and either green or yellow.

Languages with five terms have words for black, white, red, green, and yellow.

Languages with six terms have words for black, white, red, green, yellow, and blue.

Languages with seven terms have words for black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, and brown.

No such precedence occurs among the remaining four basic colors, purple, pink, orange, and gray, when these have been added to the first seven.



“Brain/Dummy” (1995) from “Inside/Outside” series, by Katherine Du Tiel

If basic patterns were invented and combined at random from the 11 basic colors, the vocabularies of different societies would be drawn helter-skelter from among 2,036 mathematically possible combinations. The evidence indicates that, on the contrary, they are drawn primarily from only 22. This constraint can be reasonably interpreted as an epigenetic rule in addition to that of color vision itself. Unlike those of basic color vision, however, its genetic and neurobiological bases remain unknown.

- Incest avoidance, the focus of so many cultural conventions, also springs from a hereditary epigenetic rule. The rule is called the Westermarck effect, after the Finnish anthropologist Edward A. Westermarck, who first reported it in 1891. Recent anthropological research has refined it as follows: when a boy and girl are brought together before one or the other is 30 months of age, and then the pair are raised in proximity (they use the same potty, so to speak), they are later devoid of sexual interest in each other; indeed, the very thought of it arouses aversion. This emotional incapacity, fortified in many societies by a rational understanding of the consequence of inbreeding, has led to the cultural incest taboos—whose origins Sigmund Freud explained differently, and erroneously, as barriers against strong innate urges to commit incest. The Darwinian advantage of the epigenetic rule is overwhelming. The mortality rate among children born of incest—mating of full siblings or parents and offspring—is about twice that of outbred children, and among those who survive, genetic defects such as dwarfism, heart deformities, deaf-mutism, and severe mental retardation are 10 times more common.

Human incest avoidance is obedient to the following general rule in animals and plants: almost all species vulnerable to moderate or severe inbreeding depression use some biologically programmed method to avoid incest. *Homo sapiens* not only conforms to this rule but does so in the same manner as our closest evolutionary relatives. Among the apes, monkeys, and other nonhuman primates, resistance to incest consists of two barriers. In the first, young individuals of all 19 social species whose mating patterns have been studied practice the equivalent of human exogamy: before reaching full adult size, they leave the group in which they were born and join another. The second barrier is the Westermarck effect. In all species whose sexual development has been carefully studied, including marmosets and tamarins of South America, Asian macaques, baboons, and chimpanzees, adults avoid mating with individuals who were intimately known to them in early life. In as many as a third of human societies there exists in addition a third, cultural barrier: incest is proscribed due to the direct recognition that children with congenital disabilities are a frequent product of incestuous unions. Thus, the incest taboos and myths that pervade cultures everywhere appear likely to have arisen from the Westermarck effect, but also, in a minority of societies, from a direct perception of the destructive effects of inbreeding.

Epigenetic rules, the true combinatorial elements of human nature, evidently shape the development of mind and social interaction through most, if not all, categories of behavior. While the full causal sequences into which the rules fit, which run from genes to cells to sensory organs to behavior to

culture, are still poorly understood, they appear clearly to be the key link between the evolution of genes and the evolution of culture.

The process of gene-culture coevolution itself is also still in an early stage of research, but a broad outline of the process in theory is possible. I believe the following account represents a consensus of the small number of investigators working on the subject.

Culture is created by the communal mind, this view holds, and each mind in turn is the product of the genetically structured human sensory system and brain. Genes and culture are therefore inseparably linked. But the linkage is flexible, to a degree still mostly unmeasured. The linkage is also tortuous: genes prescribe epigenetic rules, which are the inherited neural pathways and regularities in cognitive development by which the mind assembles itself. The mind grows by learning those parts of the environment and surrounding culture available to it. Mental development is a selective absorption process, one that is unavoidably biased by the epigenetic rules.

As part of gene-culture coevolution, culture is reconstructed collectively in the minds of individuals each generation. When oral tradition is supplemented by writing and the arts, it can grow indefinitely large (example: five million patents to the present time in the United States alone), and it can even skip generations. But the biasing influence of the epigenetic rules, being genetic and ineradicable, remains the same across all societies and generations.

The epigenetic rules nevertheless vary genetically in degree among individuals within populations. Some individuals have always inherited epigenetic rules in different strengths from others, degrees of expression which, in past evolutionary time at least, enabled them to survive and reproduce better in the surrounding environment and culture. By this means, over many generations, the more successful epigenetic rules spread, along with the genes that prescribe them. As a consequence, the human species has evolved by natural selection in the developmental biases of mind and behavior, hence in human nature, just as it has in the anatomy and physiology of the body.

To outline the theory of the coevolution of genes and culture in this way is not to claim that particular forms of culture are genetically determined. Certain cultural norms can survive and reproduce better than others, even when guided by exactly the same epigenetic biases as competing norms, causing culture to evolve in a track parallel to and usually much faster than genetic evolution. The quicker the pace of cultural evolution, the weaker the connection between genes and culture, although the connection is never completely broken. Culture allows a rapid adjustment to changes in the environment by finely tuned adaptations invented and transmitted without correspondingly precise, matching genetic prescription. In this respect, human beings differ fundamentally from all other animal species. Particular cultures can also be maladaptive in the long term, causing the destruction of individuals and societies that contrived them. But the linkage between genes and culture is unbreakable; culture can never have a life entirely on its own. Nor, I believe, should we

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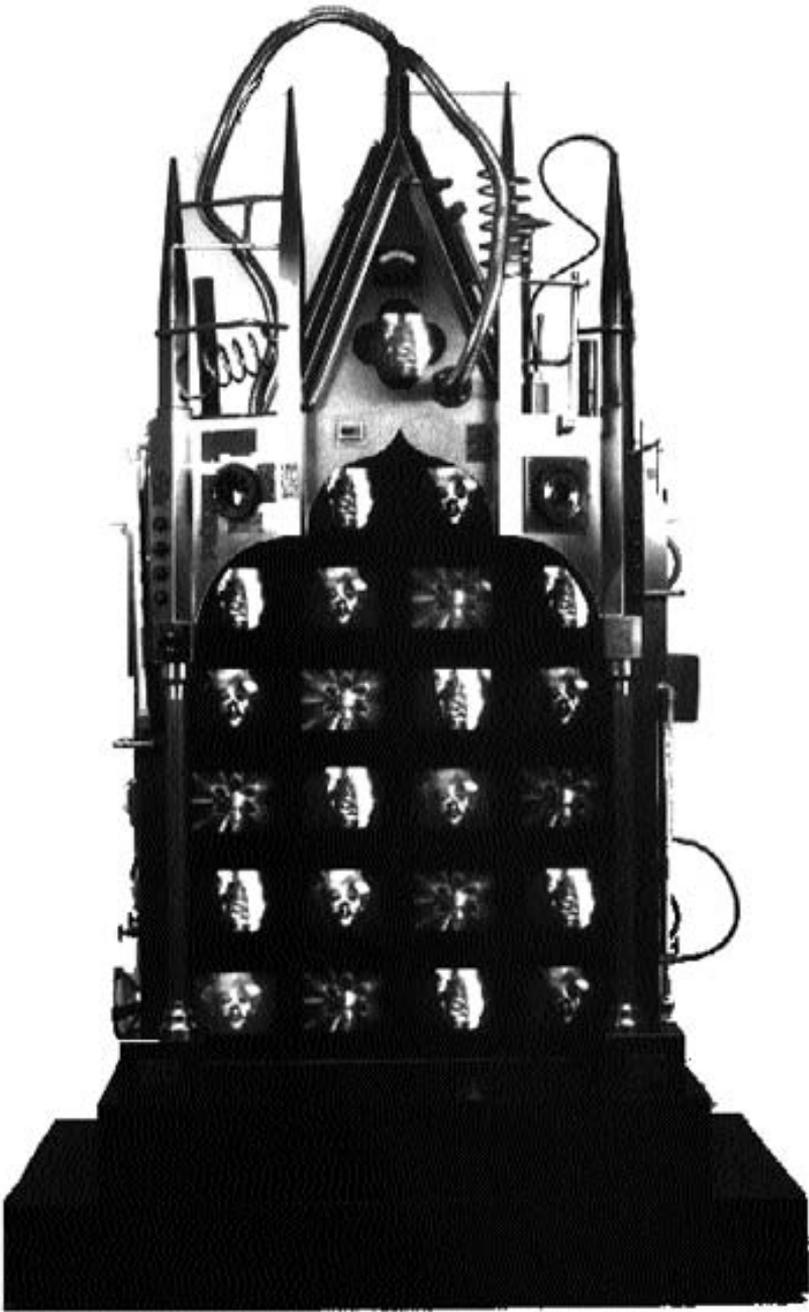
wish it otherwise. Human nature is what defines our species and binds it together.

The consilient view of the human condition that I have outlined only briefly here, and which I elaborate in *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, is predicated on the well-supported assumption that *Homo sapiens* is a biological species, having evolved for the most part in the same manner as the remainder of life, and conservatively enough that the humanity-defining traits of language and culture retain a residue of their deeper, genetic history. While still very sketchy in detail, the emerging factual picture of the epigenetic rules lends support to consilience and, for the time being at least, to the theory of gene-culture coevolution. It also suggests in broad outline an important part of the terrain between the great branches of learning that can be fruitfully explored.

Such an extension of consilient explanation from the natural sciences to the social sciences and humanities may be faulted as reductionistic, and for that reason unsuited to the hypercomplex realities of human social life. But reductionism is the driving wedge of the natural sciences, by which they have already broken apart many hypercomplex systems. Reductionistic analysis typically proceeds from more complex and specific phenomena and the disciplines addressing them to underlying phenomena that are less complex and specific. For example, the living cell has been opened to clear view by biochemistry and molecular biology, and mental processes are beginning to yield to cellular biology and neurophysiology. Both are among the hypercomplex phenomena that have so far proved congenial to consilient explanation, and both are directly relevant to human social behavior. There is no obvious reason why the social sciences and humanities, except by degree of their specificity and complexity (and, granted, these are important distinctions), should prove resistant to the same approach.

Moreover, the scientific method is equally concerned with synthesis, and thereby holism. The most successful research has always been cyclical. It begins with the description of a complex entity or process. It proceeds by reduction to the main components, then reassembly of the components *in vitro* or by abstract modeling to the original whole, followed by correction through testing, further reduction, and reassembly. And so on around, until understanding is considered satisfactory by even the most demanding critics.

It may be further argued that attempts at such an extension are merely a return to the failed program of logical positivism, a variation on general positivism that attempted to define the essence of scientific statements by means of rigorous logic and the analysis of language. But logical



Technology (1991), by Nam June Paik

positivism, whose influence peaked among philosophers from the 1920s to the early 1940s, lacked cognitive neuroscience, human genetics, evolutionary biology, and environmental science. None of these bridging disciplines were mature enough to shed light on the linkage between biology and culture. Logical positivism was also argued from the top down in a largely abstract framework. That is, its proponents set out to identify freestanding criteria against which scientific knowledge can be judged. Every symbol, they argued, should denote something real. It should be consistent with the total structure of established facts and theories, with no revelations or free-flight generalizing allowed. Theory must follow in lockstep with facts, during which process the informational content of language is carefully distin-

guished from its emotional content. Finally, verification, the logical positivists argued, is all-important; scientific statements should clearly imply the methods and reasoning used to verify the conclusions drawn. If these guidelines are progressively refined and followed, they concluded, we can hope to close in on objective truth.

The fatal flaw in logical positivism was in the semantic linchpin of the system: its creators and followers could not agree on the basic distinctions between fact and concept, between generalization and mathematical truth, or between theory and speculation. Stalled by the combination of these fog-shrouded dichotomies, they were unable to arrive at an invariant and fundamental difference between scientific and nonscientific statements.

The shortcoming of logical positivism was ignorance of how the brain works, and why. That, in my opinion, is the whole story. Neither philosophers nor scientists who attacked the problem could explain the physical acts of observation and reasoning in other than highly subjective terms. None could track material phenomena of the outer world through the labyrinth of causal processes in the inner mental world, and thus precisely map outer material phenomena onto the inner material phenomena of conscious activity. But there is every reason to suppose that such a feat can be accomplished. Such is the means by which symbols and concepts might in time be exactly defined, and objective truth more precisely triangulated.

In short, the canonical criterion of objective truth so ardently sought by the logical positivists is not a philosophical problem, and it cannot be attained, as many had expected, by logical and semantical analysis. It is an empirical problem solvable only by a continuing investigation of the physical basis of the mind itself. In time, like so many philosophical searches of the past, it will be transformed into the description of a material process.

Meanwhile, the search for universal consilience begun in the Enlightenment is gaining in factual substance. The borderland domain between the great branches of learning appears at last to be coming into focus. If successful, its exploration offers the prospect of a full disciplinary foundation of the social sciences, by extending analysis to the deeper levels of biological organization that underlie human behavior and the origins of culture. By this means, I believe, can the social sciences expect to create a true and more powerful body of theory. Through similar explanatory connections to the natural sciences, the exploration of aesthetics and the creative process offers a comparable foundation for interpretation of the arts. And not least, consilient explanation will shed much-needed new light on the material origins of ethical precepts and religious belief.

Against Unity

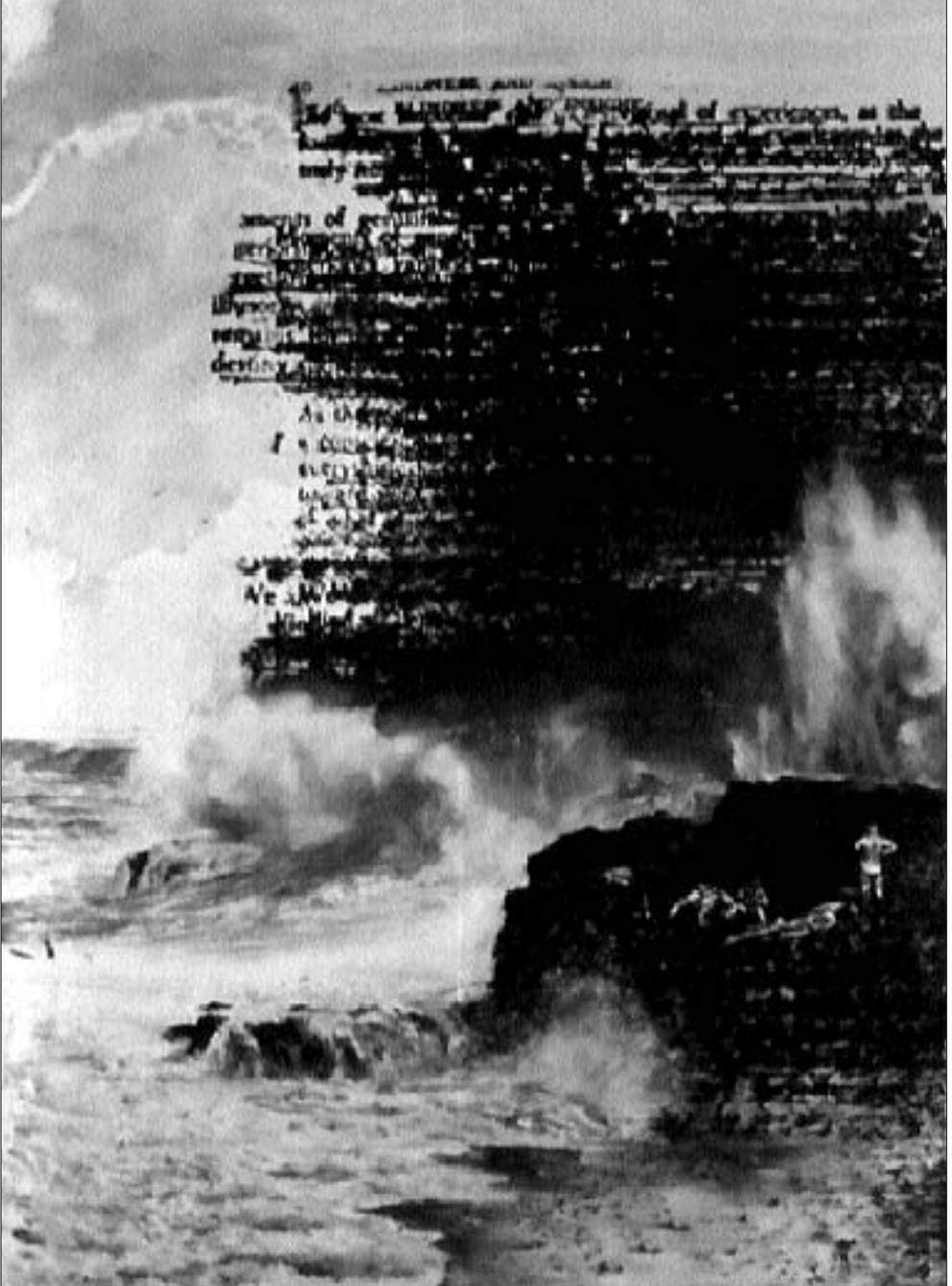
by *Richard Rorty*

Given that the human mind just *is* the human brain, why do most people resist the suggestion that their minds are best described in neurological terms? One of the more helpful explanations that philosophers have come up with lately is an analogy that Hilary Putnam draws between the brain-mind distinction and the hardware-software distinction.

In theory, Putnam says, you can explain your computer's behavior in hardware terms. You can predict what it will do next in the vocabulary of electrical circuitry. But we do not use this vocabulary if we can help it: it is much easier to predict and explain what the computer is going to do by reference to the program it is running. Some day (when we are able to tease brains apart neuron by neuron), it may be possible to use neurological expertise to predict my next utterance. But even then, surely, it will be much easier to predict it in more familiar ways. ("When the argument reaches that point, you can count on Rorty to interject, as he always does, . . .")

Putnam's analogy is reinforced by fellow philosopher Daniel Dennett's suggestion that we attribute minds to organisms or machines whenever we find it easier to predict what they will do by ascribing beliefs and desires to them. Dennett describes such ascription as "taking the intentional stance." We take this stance toward our computer whenever we say things like "The stupid program cannot distinguish between the data-entry X and the instruction Y" or "The computer seems to think that the year 2000 is the year 1900." We take this stance toward our pet when we say "Fido mistakenly inferred from the sounds at the front door that Sieglinde had returned."

From the Dennett-Putnam point of view (though not from that of the many philosophers who insist that mentality is a matter of consciousness, not just of beliefs and desires), there is simply no problem about the relation between the mind and the brain. The brain is the mind under a certain description, and conversely. Nor, seen in this light, is there any problem about whether computers "really" think or dogs "really" infer. Nor is there any problem about what human beings really are. Human beings, like computers, dogs, and works of art, can be described in lots of different ways, depending on what you want to do with them—take them apart for repairs, re-educate them, play with them, admire them, and so on for a long list of alternative purposes. None of these descriptions is closer to what human beings really are than any of the others. Descriptions are tools invented for particular purposes, not attempts to describe things as they are



Archive (1991) by Mark Tansey

in themselves, apart from any such purposes. Our various slowly evolved descriptive and explanatory vocabularies are like the beaver's slowly evolved teeth and tail: they are admirable devices for improving the position of our species. But the vocabularies of physics and of politics no more need to be integrated with one another than the beaver's tail needs to be integrated with its teeth.

For philosophers who adopt this pragmatic, biologicistic way of thinking about the relation of language to reality, there is no more of a problem about the unity of knowledge than about the unity of the human being. There is no more need to bridge gaps among the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts than to bridge gaps among atom-by-atom, molecule-by-mole-

cule, cell-by-cell, organ-by-organ, thought-by-thought, character-trait-by-character-trait, and developmental-stage-by-developmental-stage descriptions of an individual person. Each of the various academic disciplines does its respective job, just as each of these descriptions of the individual does its.

Statements using one sort of description usually cannot be paired off with statements using another descriptive vocabulary. That is what we mean when we say that vocabularies are irreducible to one another. There is no way to find a sentence in molecule-talk that is true just in case the statement “This cell is unusually large” is true. Nor can one find a sentence in neuron-talk that is true just in case “This person is unusual in her preference for Ravel over Brahms” is true. But such irreducibility does not pose philosophical problems. Nor does it fragment knowledge. As we pragmatists see it, there can and should be thousands of ways of describing things and people—as many as there are things we want to do with things and people—but this plurality is unproblematic.

E. O. Wilson sees these matters very differently, as he makes clear in his forthcoming book, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*. He thinks it is a mistake to think there are many kinds of “explanations appropriate to the perspectives of individual disciplines.” It is a mistake because, he asserts, “there is intrinsically only one class of explanation. It traverses the scales of space, time and complexity to unite the disparate facts of the disciplines by consilience, the perception of a seamless web of causes and effects.” But it is not clear why Wilson thinks that a seamless causal web should entail the possibility, or the desirability, of a seamless explanatory web. The various things people build and repair with tools are, to be sure, parts of a seamless causal web. But that seems no reason to impugn the plumber-carpenter or the carpenter-electrician distinction. The various vocabularies I use to describe and explain what is going on are all applied to the same seamless web, but why should I strive to bring them all together?

What strikes me as a reasonable and necessary division of cultural labor strikes Wilson as fragmentation. He tells us that “the greatest enterprise of the mind has always been and always will be the attempted linkage of the sciences and the humanities. The ongoing fragmentation of knowledge and resulting chaos in philosophy are therefore not reflections of the real world but artifacts of scholarship.”

But contemporary knowledge does not seem to me fragmented, any more than does the home repair industry. The academic disciplines are not, and are not supposed to be, “reflections of the real world.” They are supposed to provide ways of doing things in the real world, of reweaving the great seamless causal web so that various human

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Secret of the Sphinx (1984), by Mark Tansey

purposes might be accomplished. Reality is one, but descriptions of it are many. They *ought* to be many, for human beings have, and ought to have, many different purposes.

Again, philosophy does not strike me as more in chaos than it was in the days of Lucretius or those of Hegel. I have no clear idea why Wilson thinks better discipline among the philosophers, or better linkage among the disciplines, is so important. The history of attempts to produce such discipline and such linkage is not encouraging.

“The unity of science” was a battle cry of the logical positivists in the 1930s and ’40s. These philosophers were impressed by the fact that science had explained a good deal about how the atoms come together to make up molecules, molecules to make cells, cells to make organs, and so on. Like Wilson, they wanted to keep this process going until the relations of psychology and political science to biology became as perspicuous as those of chemistry to physics. They thought that science was coextensive with empirical knowledge, and that those parts of the academy that were not scientific—did not offer well-confirmed empirical generalizations—should hang their heads in shame. They believed that the philosophers who disagreed with them should be especially ashamed, for these philosophers were, they claimed, producing “cognitively meaningless utterances.” The positivists managed to make lot of people

feel guilty: mostly social scientists, but also a few philosophers and literary critics. This guilt caused these people to waste a lot of time trying to make their disciplines scientific.

During the ensuing 50 years, however, these feelings of guilt have gradually worn off. This slow relief was due in part to the work of Thomas Kuhn and other philosophers of science who had become dubious about the idea of a single “method” or “logic” that tied the “hard” sciences together and which ought to be used in the “soft” ones as well. Those philosophers helped us see that our sense of gratitude to “soft” books (books by, for example, Thorstein Veblen, Max Weber, Nietzsche, Freud, William James, Virginia Woolf, Ruth Benedict, and T. S. Eliot) should remain unaffected by their “unscientific” character—their lack of well-confirmed generalizations or well-designed experiments. For these books helped train us to use new descriptive and evaluative vocabularies: they gave us helpful new tools for reflection and deliberation. Bringing all these tools together in the way the positivists had hoped to bring them together, or refusing to use some of them because they could not exhibit proper credentials, came to seem pointless.

Most of us philosophy professors now look back on logical positivism with some embarrassment, as one looks back on one’s own loudness as a teenager. But this is not how Wilson sees the matter. He says that “logical positivism was the most valiant concerted effort ever mounted by modern philosophers. Its failure or, put more generously, its shortcoming was caused by ignorance of how the brain works. That in my opinion is the whole story.”

Whereas the logical positivists hoped to unify culture by replacing unscientific claims with scientific knowledge, and to do so by isolating a method used to produce such knowledge, Wilson hopes to promote the unity of knowledge by showing the importance for the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts of what he calls “epigenetic rules,” defined as “the inherited regularities of mental development that compose human nature,” rules hard-wired into our brain in the course of its evolution.

I have no doubt that there are such rules. It is possible that there are many more of them than we currently suspect, and also that when our knowledge of brain physiology improves we shall be able to do something like what the logical positivists failed to do. But this latter possibility seems to me rather faint. I was not persuaded by the rules Wilson cites: those which produce “the hallucinatory power of dreams, the mesmerizing fear of snakes, phoneme construction, elementary preferences in the sense of taste, details of mother-infant bonding,” and the like. Such examples are hardly enough to show that social scientists, humanists, and artists should hasten to improve their knowledge of evolutionary biology, nor that they should confidently expect help from future developments in that field.

Consider Wilson’s example of a “prototype for future research aimed at bridging sciences and humanities—the breaking of light into the colors of the rainbow.” He says that this rule “has been placed within a causal sequence running all the way from the

genes to the invention of vocabulary.” So it has, but it is not clear how an understanding of how genes help determine which color words we use will serve as a prototype for demonstrations of the relevance of genes to the books of the authors I listed earlier. Maybe better books on the same topics will someday be written by people better informed about genes and epigenetic rules, but Wilson leaves it very unclear how this might come to pass. When he says that “rational choice is the casting about among alternative mental scenarios to hit upon the ones which, in a given context, satisfy the strongest epigenetic rules,” Wilson suggests that these rules are so many and so various that I bump up against them everywhere, even when I am choosing books to read or candidates to vote for. Maybe they are, but Wilson does not offer sufficient evidence for this very far-reaching claim.

To be persuaded that epigenetic rules are as important as Wilson thinks them, I should need to be told why the genetic constraints on cultural development are likely to prove stronger than hardware constraints on software development. For the hardware-software analogy seems to me applicable not only to the relation between brain and

mind but to that between “hard” and “soft” areas of culture. When Wilson says that “what we call *meaning* is the linkage among the neural networks created by the spreading excitation that enlarges imagery and engages emotion,” this

strikes me as analogous to “What we call a *program* is a disposition on the part of millions of electrical circuits to switch states in certain sequences.” Both sentences are perfectly true, but neither tells you anything that might help you choose a meaning for your life, or a program for your computer.

When I find Wilson saying that every student and teacher should be able to answer the question, “What is the relation between the natural sciences and the humanities?” I have trouble seeing why he thinks this question so urgent. But I am quite willing to suggest an answer: the natural sciences tell us how things and people work, and thereby enable us to adapt things and people to our needs. The humanities do not tell us how anything works, but rather make suggestions about what to do with the things and people we already have, and what new sorts of things and people we should try to bring into being.

There is, to be sure, no nice clean cut between means and ends, any more than between fact and value, or hardware and software. Still, when we know what we want but don’t know how to get it, we look to the natural sciences for help. We look to the humanities and arts when

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we are not sure what we should want. This traditional division of labor has worked pretty well. So it is not clear why we need the further concision which is Wilson's goal.

The main trouble with the argument for concision is that we get no account of what the more integrated culture that its author envisages would look like, nor much reason to think that such a culture would be better than the one we have now. Wilson is convinced that the boundary between the humanities and the sciences needs to be blurred in somewhat the same manner as we blurred the boundary between chemistry and biology. But the reason for blurring the latter boundary is much clearer than the need to blur the former. Figuring out how simpler things work helped us figure out how bigger and more complicated things work. But when we turn to questions about what to do with the top-level things (the human brain and the human sexual organs, the rich nations and the poor nations, the research programs of the various academic disciplines), it is not clear that our answers to such moral or practical questions will be improved by better knowledge of how things work.

My positions on vexed intellectual questions (for example, the need for a more unified culture) or vexed political questions (for example, gay marriage) do not seem to rest on premises that natural scientists might someday correct. I have no idea how Wilson would go about tying in his own positions on these matters with his knowledge of cerebral or reproductive physiology. For it is with my brain as it is with my computer: my problem is what program to install in these things.

I pick a program in blissful ignorance of how my computer embodies and executes programs. Since the human brain seems as indifferent to cultural differences as the machine is to my choice of program, there seems no reason why we cannot argue out such differences in blissful ignorance of how the brain works. It may be, as Wilson suggests, that there are biological reasons why some cultures are easier to establish or to preserve than others, just as there are hardware reasons why some programs are easier to write or to install than others. But we need more of an argument than he gives us for the claim that our choice of the sort of society to create, or of the kind of person to be, will be insufficiently informed until we have learned more about our brains. Unlike Wilson, I do *not* "find it hard to believe that had Kant, Moore, and Rawls known modern biology and experimental psychology, they would have reasoned as they did." I wish he had specified more fully just *which* results of these disciplines would have led these philosophers to change their ways.

The idea that we should try to bring the social sciences together with the natural sciences sounds, at first blush, more promising than the idea of erasing the boundary between both and the humanities. But I think this is only because of an ambiguity in the term *social science*. Sometimes it means something like "behavioral science" and at other times something like "policy science." The books by social scientists that provide suggestions about what we should do, rather than predictions about what we will do, are closer to the border that separates their disciplines from the humanities and the arts than to the border that separates them from the natural sciences.

The main trouble with the argument for consilience is that we get no account of what the more integrated culture that its author envisages would look like.

If we think of social science as causal explanation of social behavior, it is reasonable to suggest that knowledge of how brains work might increase our knowledge of how people interact with each other in communities. For communities are made of people, just as organs are made of cells. So maybe knowing more about the most relevant organ people have—their brains—will someday lock in with what we know about how societies work. The analogy between the individual-society relation and the microstructure-macrostructure relation is tempting.

However, the attractions of the analogy are diminished when one starts asking oneself why psychology and sociology, despite all that grant money, have remained relatively barren. How many of us can cite a startling and useful result produced by either discipline (especially if one brushes Freudian psychology aside as “unscientific”)? Why do the behavioral sciences never seem to come up with either useful predictions or persuasive advice about what we should do? Wilson’s answer to this rhetorical question—that these disciplines have been waiting around for the study of the brain to come to maturity—may be prescient. But it is also possible that the sheer complexity of the criteria by which we ascribe beliefs and desires to individuals will forever prevent explanations by reference to such mental states from being subsumed under universal laws, and from locking in with explanations by reference to physiological states.*

If we turn from the behavioral science side to the policy science side of the social sciences—the side that offers advice about what kind of society to strive for, rather than about what common traits all societies exhibit—the relevance of brain physiology, or of knowledge of how our brains evolved, is even more obscure. To persuade us that better understanding of the brain is as important as he thinks, Wilson would have to convince us that such an understanding would demonstrate the limits of cultural malleability. He would have to show us, for example, that a certain social experiment we are tempted to carry out is probably doomed to fail.

I have trouble envisaging an argument that began with biological premises and came to that sort of conclusion—a conclusion relevant to policy deliberation. I find no such argument in Wilson’s book. The closest he comes to providing such an argument is a demonstration that

*This line of thought—recently restated by philosophers such as Dennett and Donald Davidson—needs more attention than Wilson gives it. Since he invidiously contrasts “folk psychology”—explanation of human behavior by reference to beliefs and desires—with “scientific psychology,” Wilson may regard problems about the ascription of beliefs and desires as beside the point. But we would need better examples than he gives us of the results of “scientific psychology” before he could convince us that these folksy mental states may someday be made obsolete by psychophysiology, just as homunculi were made obsolete by microscopy.

certain cultural universals are susceptible to biological explanation. But we developed the humanities and social sciences not so much to explain cultural universals as to explore cultural alternatives. We developed the arts not just to reiterate ancient archetypes and myths but to construct new worlds for ourselves and our descendants to inhabit.

If the last few hundred years of human history have taught us anything, it is that the imagination of our ancestors has usually been inadequate to the achievements of their descendants. We have come up with many things that once seemed unimaginable: the rule of laws rather than men, nation-states whose citizens belong to many different religions, women holding high public office. So we have come to distrust the people who tell us that “you cannot change human nature”—a slogan that was employed against the education of women, interracial marriage, and gay liberation. I doubt that we should put more faith in natural scientists wielding this slogan than in the theologians and philosophers who did so.

Of course, this point about the unimaginability of the future cuts both ways. Wilson could use it to argue that the unified culture of his dreams—a culture in which biology does for psychology, sociology, and political science what chemistry has done for biology—may well come into existence. Stranger things, to be sure, have happened. But Wilson’s dream is not made more plausible when he says that “belief in the intrinsic unity of knowledge . . . rides ultimately on the hypothesis that every mental process has a physical grounding and is consistent with the natural sciences.” I have no doubt that this hypothesis is true, but it simply does not follow that knowledge, or culture, should become more unified than it is. That is like inferring from the fact that every workable piece of software has a hardware realization to the conclusion that we should aim at One Big Unified Program.

 On one point, however, I quite agree with Wilson: there is no need to continue the tedious culture wars that C. P. Snow and Martin Heidegger, among others, have tried to incite. In *The Two Cultures* (1959), Snow claimed that scientists are naturally on the political Left, the side of human freedom, whereas *littérateurs* naturally sympathize with the authoritarian Right. This argument was absurd when Snow advanced it 40 years ago, and it sounds even sillier now. Heidegger’s neo-Nietzschean conviction that our Baconian, technological culture has reduced our stature—made us moral and spiritual pygmies—is equally implausible.

Wilson’s book, however, by making similarly implausible claims about the need to unify knowledge, and by suggesting that it is the humanists who are blocking progress toward such unification, seems likely to reignite conflict. Like Snow, Wilson finds it shocking that many humanities teachers know nothing about natural science. He suggests that to neglect science is to neglect the Enlightenment, which is, he rightly says, the origin of most of the good things that have happened in the last couple of hundred years.

But one can be utterly devoted to the Enlightenment’s project of a decent life for all the inhabitants of the planet, a life as free citizens of a



Utopic (1987), by Mark Tansey

cooperative commonwealth, while remaining in brutish ignorance of how computers, brains, or anything else works. I know quite a few people of this sort. I also know some who entirely share this devotion to Enlightenment ideals but, having no taste for philosophy, poetry, or cultural politics, remain largely ignorant of all three. There will be no conflict between these two groups of people unless somebody stirs it up. One way to stir it up is by telling them that their traditional division of labor is misguided.

My overall reaction to *Consilience* is that although advances in biology may someday have greater relevance to the behavioral sciences, and conceivably even to the policy sciences and the humanities, than they do now, we should nevertheless not get on the bandwagon Wilson is trying to set in motion. We should not beat our breasts about our sadly disunited culture. We should not take measures to increase awareness of recent advances in evolutionary biology among the academics, nor to break down barriers between disciplines. I doubt the existence of such barriers. Wilson's book did nothing to change my antecedent belief that any humanist, artist, or social scientist who comes up with a plausible idea about how to get biology into her act is in an excellent position to get a grant, and to make a name for herself.

It might be thought that my reaction to Wilson's project can be traced back to our disagreements on philosophical issues. He holds, and I reject,

the theory that truth consists in correspondence between beliefs and the way things are in themselves, that true beliefs are accurate representations of reality.* Furthermore, my views—especially my scorn for the correspondence theory of truth and for the claim that the natural scientist gets closer to the way things are in themselves than the carpenter, the moralist, or the literary critic—are sometimes described as “postmodernist.” Since Wilson is scathing about “the pathetic reverence given Gallic obscurantism by the American academy,” it may be tempting to see my reaction to his book as that of a Francophile who cannot take science seriously because he is unable to take truth seriously.

Wilson describes postmodernists as holding that, at least in literary criticism, “truth is relative and personal. Each person creates his own inner world by acceptance or rejection of endlessly shifting linguistic signs. There is no privileged point, no lode star to guide literary intelligence. And given that science is just another way of looking at the world, there is no scientifically constructible map of human nature from which the deep meaning of texts can be drawn.”

I do indeed think of science as just another way of looking at the world. It provides us with a spectacularly useful and astonishingly beautiful set of tools, but only one such set among many others. But whether this is the right way to think of science is a quite separate issue from that of the relevance of knowledge of how our brains work to problems about what we should do with ourselves.

Even the most impassioned defenders of the correspondence theory of truth (John Searle, for example) might share my doubts about whether we need, or should try for, a “map of human nature from which the deep meaning of texts can be drawn”—about whether literary criticism can be, as Wilson thinks, “reinvigorated by the knowledge of science and its proprietary sense of the future.” Even a philosopher who argues that natural science works so well because it is so good at capturing the way things really are (an explanation that strikes pragmatists such as myself as vacuous) might be disinclined to follow Wilson’s advice to “lift the anathema placed on reductionism.”

For such a person might agree with me that there are many things we need to do other than represent the way things really are. The analogy I have suggested between the humanities and software might be acceptable even to philosophers who think that the hardware descriptions offered by the natural sciences have a special, privileged relation to reality. Such philosophers may find Wilson’s ideal of unified knowledge dubious simply because they doubt that such privilege entails universal relevance. They may agree with me that Wilson’s claim of universal relevance for his own discipline is premature.

*He also agrees with David Chalmers and Colin McGinn, against Dennett, that there is an interesting philosophico-scientific problem about consciousness: that mentality is as much a matter of raw sensory feels (such as pain) as it is of beliefs and desires. I am on Dennett’s side of that argument, but my disagreement with Wilson on this point seems irrelevant to our larger disagreement about cultural politics.



Daedalus and Icarus, from a Roman stone relief

The Icarian Impulse

by Paul R. Gross

As the ancients tell it, Daedalus was no mere bench scientist. Yes, he invented tools, such as the ax, the hand drill, and the wedge, but he also made statues that moved as if alive. He was not a god. For example, he had a personality disorder. There being no psychotherapists to fix it, Daedalus, in a jealous rage, killed a nephew. Forced to flee Athens, he took his skills and his son, Icarus, to Crete, for whose monarch, Minos, he built a labyrinth to imprison the Minotaur. But that confinement allowed Minos's queen, Pasiphae, to satisfy her unnatural lust for the monster. Wherefore a vengeful Minos immured Daedalus and Icarus in

the maze. Ah, but such a prison is *horizontal*. A scientist can think vertically: so the old artificer made wings for himself and his son and attached them with wax. They took off and all might have gone well, but Icarus, ecstatic in flight, soared too close to the sun. The wax melted. He plunged to his death in the Aegean Sea.

Did anyone care? No. W. H. Auden, taking his cue from Pieter Brueghel, shows us our terrifying indifference,

how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster: the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

We fail to notice; or if notice is taken, we shrug. Sensible people, like pigs, do not fly, do not wing heedlessly upward in sunlight. There is a day's work to be got through. But the Icarian impulse lives in a few scholars, E. O. Wilson among them. Will they fly and land safely, or plunge with a forsaken cry into the green?

Yaneer Bar-Yam, who teaches courses on complexity theory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Boston University, has published an impressive book, *Dynamics of Complex Systems* (1997), one of the first textbook treatments of a young but important discipline, sometimes just now overly exalted and also, perhaps, unfairly dismissed. Near the start of the author's preface, he writes that "Science has begun to *try to understand* complexity in nature, a counterpoint to the traditional scientific objective of understanding the fundamental simplicity of laws of nature. It is *believed*, however, that even in the study of complexity there exist simple and therefore comprehensible laws. The field of study of complex systems *holds that* the dynamics of complex systems are founded on universal principles [emphases added]."

Note: to "try to understand" is to seek (simple) principles, to find the universals, among phenomena. That this is the best way to get at how nature works has been believed by some thinkers, not just since the Scientific Revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries, but since the Ionian, Thales of Miletus, pondered the world's composition 2,600 years ago. Survival of the method required sharp criticism of the intervening idealism of Plato and restatement of the Ionian principle of cognitive unity, by Epicurus, 300 years later. But survive it did. That way of "trying to understand" is what

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Fall of Icarus (c. 1560), by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

physicist-historian Gerald Holton, and E. O. Wilson (who borrows the phrase), call the Ionian Enchantment. By contrast with ordinary thought, this is a strange impulse. It is a reaching for, a delight in, the common features of all things, all humanity, all cultures, all knowledge, all reality—rather than for the local oracle’s incense and delirium.

Central to the Ionian Enchantment is a conviction reinforced by experience: that humanity is a part of nature; hence the universals of nature apply to us. That much is a faith, the truth of which cannot be proven. Not all the triumphs of natural science, taken together, are proof, although to “believe” *is* to hold something as true. Now it begins to appear that the belief will extend to complexity itself. Still, it remains a belief. Idealists, theists, epistemic relativists, different though their views may be, remind us of it constantly, and are just now having an exhilarating ride in the academies of the West. They are right to remind us, but not to forget conveniently that their arguments are old and weak.

The search for understanding, for explanations of how things are and why, has come down to us as to streams of thought, the central channels of which are separate but whose shallows, where the streams touch, have always been roiled, regions of eddies and suspended mud. The stream of simple universals is natural science. Its metaphysics is that Ionian Enchantment—naturalism, and with it commonly now, materialism (that is, the concept that the relevant universals have to do with matter). The other stream, measured by the number of its adherents, is immensely larger. It too is a faith, and its channel is dualism: the division of the world into matter and spirit, mind and

body. Dualism is the conviction that matter and spirit exist and are distinct, that whatever universals may apply to the behavior of matter or body do not, cannot, govern spirit, or mind, and vice versa.

Of course, naturalism and dualism have changed over time, especially since the Enlightenment, whose philosophical, but not practical, children have plunged again and again into the Romantic sea. In principle, the opposite of “dualism” (or pluralism) is not naturalism but “monism.” Metaphysical naturalists have often made concessions to spirit, and not just because it is always prudent—politically correct—to do so. Many leading dualists concede the truth (more recently, the “truth”) of mature natural science, denying truth only to those parts, such as evolutionary biology, that seem too clearly to exclude spirit, or that deal with qualities of matter that are “irreducible” because infused with spirit, or just too complex. But the naturalist stream, while by far the smaller, has floated many, perhaps most, of the new vessels of human thought these past

300 years. It has borne success, too much success, according to its enemies. As they see it, naturalism and materialism are responsible, via that feathers and wax contraption, technology, for the imminent collapse of Earth’s life-support systems. How odd it

is that modern dual-

ists, for *supporting* evidence of this threat, depend solely upon selected results of naturalist science; and how ironic that some of the most eloquent naturalists, including E. O. Wilson, are leading prophets of the collapse!

But this gets ahead of my story. I want to discuss the boldest prognosis yet for the future of the Ionian Enchantment, made by the Icarian, Wilson, a quintessential naturalist. (Granted: the Platonic echo in “quintessential” is inappropriate.) I can barely touch here upon the likely response to it from adherents of the current version of dualism, whose condition has been described, even by some of them, as “biophobic”—the claim that biology (body) has little or nothing to do with human behavior (mind), especially with social behavior. I will epitomize it brusquely (actually, it can be quite subtly argued): *biology explains nothing interesting about human behavior.*

The code phrase is “biological determinism.” To be sure, such dualism has more to do nowadays with culture, or nurture, as antitheses of nature or body or matter, than with spirit or deity. Nevertheless, it is



Twister (1996) by Jan Harrison

Is Consilience a paean to the god of Science? Wilson replies, ‘No—to human ingenuity.’

thoroughly dualistic and transcendentalist. The push for it now among Western intellectuals is more from politics (according to its defenders, from “the struggle for social justice”) than from religion. It is dualism nevertheless in its denial that laws of nature coming from science offer any true or useful explanation of human behavior and society, or provide us any guidance.

In *Consilience*, Wilson offers his latest and most mettlesome rejection of that dualistic denial. He asks, “Is this [his book] a paean to the god of Science?” And replies, “No—to human ingenuity, to the capacity in all of us, freed at last in the modern era. And to the fortunate comprehensibility of the universe.” *Consilience* is therefore visionary, but it is also detailed and documented for the remarkable range of knowledge discussed. It is—as I expect Wilson means it to be—a retrospective in maturity of his life as a working scientist and of ceaseless study and hope for the elucidation of human nature. It is worth noting in Wilson’s output of respected books such titles as *On Human Nature*, *Biophilia*, and *Promethean Fire* (the last with Charles J. Lumsden). For his newest title, he has chosen well in using the almost-forgotten word *consilience*.

Consilience of inductions was one of William Whewell’s criteria of inductive truth. Scientist, theologian, poet, translator, editor, administrator, Whewell (1794-1866) was for 24 years Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and called, deservedly, a polymath. He began, a Young Turk among equals, undergraduates of vast future accomplishment (Charles Babbage, John Herschel, George Peacock), with the modest project of revolutionizing mathematics at Cambridge University. They succeeded, not least in replacing Newton’s (England’s own!) dot notation in the differential calculus with the continental *d*. This illustrates, for those who know a little about calculus and Cambridge, the considerable ambitions of those clever undergraduates.

Whewell’s mature goal was nothing less than unification of the intellectual achievements of his time. At the center was his attempt to bring up to date, in that era of optimism and progress, Francis Bacon’s pleadings for scientific method: to create a self-consistent logic of induction. It is by induction (rather than deduction) that the raw materials of natural science—the facts—enter into knowledge creation. Two of Whewell’s monumental works, his *History of the Inductive Sciences* and *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences*, set forth the findings and arguments. The most important were meant to distinguish excellent science from anything less. For Whewell, excellent science means true hypotheses. True hypotheses can be identified. The most important qualities upon which the diagnosis is made are the consilience of inductions and progressive simplifica-

tion. “Consilience” is Whewell’s coinage: it means “jumping together.” It is that property of inductions (sets of facts brought under the purview of a proposition) by which different sets become, unexpectedly, related, that is, the property of *explanatory surprise*. Think of it this way: You propose that the facts a, b, c . . . have explanation X. You or some other honest investigator turns, in the fullness of time, to an independent set of facts m, n, o . . . , for which the going explanation is W. But voila! You, or that other investigator, or a third, notice, not only that X applies also to m, n, o . . . but that it explains them *better* than W, or than any other hypothesis you can think of. This is explanatory surprise: sets of inductions have jumped together under X. Under X they are *consilient*. The range of X-phenomena has been expanded. And, not only is X common to a, b, c . . . m, n, o . . . but it is simpler than X + W. For Whewell, X is then true, or an approach to truth.

He was a theologian, therefore not shy about truth, especially the truth of the dazzling achievements on which he built: universal gravitation and the undulatory nature (wave theory) of light. Relativity and quantum mechanics played havoc in the 20th century with 19th century philosophy of science, which had invested too heavily in such cases. And Whewell has been unfairly ignored in the resulting dustup. Yet his prescriptions, consilience and simplification, have had effect:

E. O. Wilson’s mature goal has been nothing less than unification of the intellectual achievements of our time.

on Charlel Darwin, on James Clerk Maxwell, on the standards by which science judged excellent or not, likely to be true or not, to this day. Whether not they have ever heard of Whewell or consilience (usually not), scientists today have Whewell’s standards in mind. Excellent inquiry about the physical world is consilient.

Now I repeat myself—almost: E. O. Wilson’s mature goal has been nothing less than unification of the intellectual achievements of our time. Given the growth of knowledge since Whewell’s day, this is an act of hubris even greater than Whewell’s. Nor is Wilson’s version of consilience exactiy Whewell’s. He has borrowed but also modified the idea. Whewell may have hoped for refinement of theology to bring it into line with science, but he would surely not have applauded a public project of explaining religion through science. Whewell’s consilience was of inductions within the best science, which was physical science. Wilson’s version is much more than explanatory surprise within one or between two adjacent fields (although he gives us some stunning examples). It is more daring than that. Whewell, and other metascientists before modern Darwinism, might well have imagined in privacy a role for natural science in the understanding of human nature. But Wilson, armed by the scietific explosion of the last half-century, has already tried on wings and

made some famous preliminary jumps. In *Consilience* he flies. Whether the wings stay on remains to be seen. Whether they do depends, oddly, upon how many others, similarly talented, care enough to join in the effort of flight. Wilson's consilience, a proposed standard of inquiry leading to truth, refers not only to propositions illuminating the facts within fields of inquiry and levels of organization, but across all the disciplines of knowledge, bottom-up and top-down—all of them.

Are there examples? Yes. Wilson's book is devoted to them. All it needed for such a book to be written was hubris, encyclopedic knowledge, a sweatshop work ethic, and literary gifts. It needed a Wilson to offer the obvious conclusion to the 20th century knowledge explosion, anticipating and ignoring the inevitable sneers of reductionism and crude scientism. It took, above all, mastery of modern-evolutionary-biology, available to a thinker who has himself helped to create the subject and followed out its implications (what Daniel Dennett called "Darwin's dangerous idea"), all the way from ions at bilayer membranes to neurons, to brains, to emotions, to societies, across the boundaries of discipline and organization. There are a few such thinkers at work nowadays, not just one, but E. O. Wilson, by age and achievements, is first among equals.

I leave for the reader's pleasure his book's case studies: physics to cell biology and neuroscience, neuroscience to mind. Genes to natural selection and evolution. Evolution to human nature. Human nature to culture. Culture to ethics. Ethics to religion. Instead, for variety and brevity, here is a case of my own, of consilience observed.

When I studied cell biology (then general physiology) in the 1950s, the senior faculty paid little attention to advances in physics and chemistry, or to biochemistry (it was still physiological chemistry). I needed special permission to take chemistry courses. Chemists needed the same for quantum mechanics in physics. Organic chemistry, the chemistry of life, was a hodgepodge of ad hoc mechanisms; organic chemists were clever but had no basic (that is, physical) idea of how reactions work. I—young, lazy, avoiding all memorization, and in love—did not, shall we say, distinguish myself in that subject. But my mentors in biology cared not; they knew all about, and had a name for, *the stuff of which living cells are made*: "protoplasm." They saw an unknown, possibly unknowable, quality of "the living state"—not something one should waste time investigating with chemistry, organic or otherwise, for to do chemistry one had to break up cells ("homogenize" them) so that chemical components could be identified. A minority, but then still influential, opinion was that a broken cell, hence a dead one, has not the living quality. Its chemistry would thus be irrelevant to understanding protoplasm. J. F. Danielli, for example, a distinguished general physiologist, issued a book advancing such an argument.

Believers in consilience ignored it. Using homogenates, they expanded the older physiological chemistry (whose laboratory practicum students called "Secretions and Excretions") to a serious biological chemistry. The recognized consilience of mathematics, physics, and chem-

istry (including organic) created what soon became molecular biology, and that style of investigation, venturing into the formalisms of genetics, became molecular genetics. And there emerged this truth about protoplasm: it is a structured soup of *perfectly ordinary molecules*, some of which are huge, of specific structure, and information-rich, but ordinary molecules nevertheless. Properly constituted extracts of broken (dead) cells proved capable of most of the transformations once thought to require “life.”

This was not a sequence: it happened pretty much all at once, over a decade or two. It included not only discovery of the structure and functions of DNA but the reduction of mutation to physicochemical and cytological detail, answering still-worrisome questions about rates and mechanisms of variation and evolution. Within a decade there was intellectual continuity, all the way from convergent physical theories of molecular structure (molecular orbitals and valence bond theory) to convergent theories of developmental information (how the fertilized egg knows what to do in starting to make a plant or animal). All this emboldened neuroscientists (then called electrophysiologists) to learn molecular and cell biology, and therefrom, the ontogeny of nervous systems, thence of brains, and their emergent properties.

Aside from fun for scientists, was that push for consilience useful for anything else, socially useful? I am continually astonished to discover, among intellectuals, some highly influential, that the answer can be given as “No” or “Not really.” But of course it *was* useful. In two ways. First, because what I have just described revolutionized medicine, among other applied sciences, as the sober history and the hard data since 1940 demonstrate. There were such sharply positive outcomes for the quality of human (and animal) life, at least in the fortunate West, that only a professional sourpuss, social or philosophical, would deny the utility, referring darkly to overpopulation, out-of-control healthcare costs, and “they never did win the war on cancer.” Such commentators on science have a restricted notion of social utility, centering on who gets elected to, or installed after the revolution in, public office. The second way I leave for the end of these remarks on Wilson’s proposals.

Here, however, a little more about Wilson’s consilience. He is advertising, after all, an unfamiliar notion. In a chapter of his book entitled “Ariadne’s Thread he takes Daedalus’s Cretan labyrinth for a “mythic image of the uncharted material world in which humanity was born and forever struggles to understand.” Ariadne, the daughter of Minos, loved Theseus. The clever girl gave her hero-lover a ball of thread, by the aid of which he found his way in the maze, killed the anthropophagous Minotaur, and returned to safety. The thread is Wilson’s metaphor of consilience. With it, although we can never chart fully the knowledge labyrinth of this world, we (Theseus) can at least move about in it with confidence.

But a less literary analogy may be, for all that, more instructive. Philosopher Susan Haack, author of *Evidence and Inquiry* (1993), has an

analogy for the relevance of experience (sense data plus introspective awareness of mental states) to the justification of belief. (Remember: to believe is to hold a proposition true). Her model is a crossword puzzle. I simplify it for the present purpose, acknowledging its origin in Haack's work, and that said work is detailed epistemology, while what I offer here is not. Still, it seems to preserve the good sense of the original, which Haack has herself applied, in the Romanell Phi Beta Kappa Lectures, to the unity of inquiry. The clues to the crossword are the available experiential evidence (including recorded results of other, trustworthy inquirers). The filled-in downs and acrosses are beliefs about the clues, or the reasons for such beliefs. The probability that any new entry fits correctly depends upon the quality of the clue, *the quality of entries already completed, and how much of the whole puzzle is complete*. The better the clues, the more efficient the choice of entries, the faster the cells fill up. The more filled in, the better later entry guesses will be.

Then, if we take the whole puzzle to refer to a body of knowledge—the past, present, and future of “human nature”—it is clearly prudent to include as many clues from science (such as evolutionary biology) as possible, alongside clues from other kinds of experience of “human nature.” Surely, the past and present of human nature are to some degree explained by science. And good fits becoming evident as we proceed, even in unlikely crossings (such as, perhaps, cephalization with cubism), *are consiliences*. They reassure us when we are on the right track. There is every reason to expect that such consiliences will illuminate human nature, however we defined it initially, including such features of it as the idea of justice, features that seem, with most cells in the puzzle still empty, remote from science.

Now, my distinguished colleague, philosopher Richard Rorty, who must here stand for other thinkers of like stature, is one of those who might well dismiss, not necessarily science in the practices of medicine and public health, or engineering, but its utility in the greater struggle—for social justice. “I do not have much use for notions like ‘objective value’ and ‘objective truth,’” he admits. “I think the so-called postmodernists are right in their criticisms of traditional philosophical talk about ‘reason.’” And he writes in the same place (“Trotsky and the Wild Orchids”) that “at 12 [years of age], I knew that the point of being human was to spend one’s life fighting social injustice.” Rorty likes being attacked from the left as well as the right, to position himself as the sort of thinker who can do without the (Platonic) absolutes of the Right and the political illusions of the extreme Left. But utopianism remains for him the proper activity of intellectuals who care about social justice, about the elimination of cruelty. And therein he sees no significant role for science. Of the sciences since the 18th century, he wrote in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, “they have nevertheless receded into the background of cultural life.... It is not something to be deplored, but rather something to be coped with. We can do so by switching attention to the areas which *are* at the forefront of culture, those which excite the imagination of the young,



Minotaure (1939) by Diego Rivera

namely art and utopian politics.” In “Trotsky. . .” he makes this point: “There is nothing sacred about universality which makes the shared automatically better than the unshared. There is no automatic privilege of what you can get everybody to agree on (the universal) over what you cannot (the idiosyncratic).”

But in science, the universal *is* better than the idiosyncratic. Wilson’s argument is that we must exploit the actual and potential consilience of natural science with the human sciences and the arts in order to get at the uniformities, the basics, of human nature; that knowledge of those basics is necessary for an adequate understanding of the human condition, which is a social condition. That without it social justice will remain—just—a utopianism. Rorty seems to me (with all due respect) to be wrong on a number of issues regarding science, but here, especially, on universals. For him universals and searching for them are Platonism, elitism, invidious comparisons. Universalism distains or suppresses “idiosyncrasy.” The odor of authority clings to it. Implicit is the humiliation of others, the work of bullies. But I see no justification thereof in history or in the outcomes of science. Rorty himself admits that since the 18th century the sciences “have...made possible the realization of political goals that could never have been realized without them.” How did they accomplish that? Why, by identifying true (or nearly true) universals, such as the common origins, physiologies, aspirations, and feelings of all humankind, *and refuting the false ones*, such as the divine right of kings, natural slavery, and the general inferiority of women. Yes, by some scientists, and at various times, science has offered false universals, but those have been overthrown *only by better science*. And without reaching for true, or better-approaching-true commonalities, we would have only the idiosyncrasies of tribes, including those of whatever tribe you or I happen to belong to.

Now, finally, I can touch the second utility in the consilience of world knowledge, in filling gaps between standing disciplines, not just among the natural sciences. The first, remember, was immediate utility: consilient science broadens knowl-

edge of human biology to the point that some troubles (for example, infection) can be fixed, and life made better, more secure. That, surely, is a kind of social justice, by any definition. But the definitions of social justice themselves are of interest. Whence come they? To what extent do they differ among human societies? To what extent do all of them, if there are uniformities (which seem to exist), differ from whatever social justice means to chimpanzees? Since there are social arrangements most of the way down the phylogenetic tree, what regularities have they? How are they related to the conditions of life—reproductive strategies, physiology, development, ecosystem organization? What delights us? What, if anything, delights *them*? How did the physics and chemistries of delight and avoidance become embedded in brains, in societies? Filling such gaps in the puzzle must have eventual utility in application, like, but *much broader than*, the utilities of consistent physiology, pharmacology, and biochemistry in healing. What we can learn about the biological correlates of poetry, music, mathematics, a sense of justice, the urge to give comfort, the impulses of religion, must help us to understand—that is, *to appreciate*—them better. And to appreciate the deep meanings of these things is surely to diminish cruelty, to foster a fundamental kind of justice based upon respect for life.

Wilson devotes his last chapter to utility. He identifies what he sees as the gravest problems facing all life on this planet, and attempts to show how important it is for us to recognize “a seamless web of cause and effect” in the operation of the world. Among such problems are the prospect of diverting evolution itself through molecular genetics (and genetic engineering), and of damaging the biosphere irreversibly by failing to check the human population explosion and our power to alter the landscape (both consequences of science). This is not the place to judge these. Wilson updates the advocacies of his earlier books. It is, as said, an irony that a pre-eminent metaphysical naturalist should see doom in successes of metaphysical naturalism. But I don’t deny the formal cogency of his arguments. While they have to be taken one at a time and examined, his larger point is unexceptionable. These gravest of human issues are not social problems, are not scientific problems, not matters of local politics, tastes, traditions, beliefs, idiosyncrasies. *They are all of those, together, at one and the same time.* That is the strongest argument for a scholarship of the gaps, that reports honestly and regularly to everyone, not just to allies and competitors in the business. The only question, for me, after long years among intellectuals, is this: are there *ever* going to be enough of them with the brains, skills in knowledge acquisition, honesty, self-confidence in humility, energy, and social support, to follow Ariadne’s thread through the labyrinth, to complete enough of the crossword puzzle, to make a difference—really to put an end to human (and animal) sacrifice?



Fall of the Alamo—Death of Crockett, *circa 1837*

The Death of David Crockett

*When the author wrote a modern epic poem
about the Alamo, he stumbled into one of the bloodier
skirmishes of the academic culture wars.*

by Michael Lind

Before sunrise on March 6, 1836, the most famous siege in American history came to an end. More than a thousand troops under the command of General Antonio López de Santa Anna, the military dictator of Mexico, stormed the Alamo fortress in San Antonio, where Texan rebels against Mexican authority—Anglo-American settlers, Tejano natives, and soldiers of fortune from the United States and Europe—

had been waiting for reinforcements that never came. All of the defenders—roughly 180 or more—were killed in battle or executed soon afterward.

News of the fall of the Alamo sent shock waves far beyond war-torn Texas, where secessionists had just declared the independence of their republic. Among the fallen defenders were two celebrities from the United States. The knifefighter James Bowie was one. But his renown was over-

shadowed by that of David Crockett, the “congressman from the canebrake” of Tennessee who had replaced Daniel Boone as a symbol of the American frontiersman. After being defeated in a race for Congress, Crockett—whom the Whig party had once considered as a possible presidential candidate—had made his way to insurgent Texas to make a fresh start. A fellow graduate of Tennessee politics, Sam Houston, commander of the weak and disorganized Texan army, had assigned Crockett to the garrison at San Antonio. There, with Bowie and less known figures such as the garrison’s young commander, William Barret Travis, Crockett met his death.

In the legend that grew up around Crockett, he died fighting in the last-ditch defense of the Alamo. Recent scholarship, however, has suggested another possibility: that Crockett was executed by Santa Anna along with several others *after* the battle was over. I discovered just how controversial this question remains when I published *The Alamo*, a narrative poem about the Texas Revolution. In my first draft, I followed some recent historical accounts of the Texas Revolution that treat Crockett’s execution at the hands of Santa Anna as an established fact. As I researched the subject further, however, I concluded that the story of Crockett’s execution, like the equally well-known story of the line Travis drew in the dust at the Alamo, was folklore. In the final version of the poem, Travis does not draw that line, and Crockett, a minor character in the story I tell, falls in battle. In a vituperative attack on *The Alamo* in the *New York Times*, the journalist Garry Wills accused me (along with Wills’s *bête noire*, the late John Wayne, in his movie *The Alamo*) of purveying patriotic “hokum” to the American public by showing Crockett being killed in battle. The ensuing debate has involved several exchanges in print between Wills and my fellow Texan, CBS news anchor Dan Rather.

What this unexpected controversy revealed is that the death of Colonel David

Crockett—or “Davy Crockett,” as he became known in 19th-century almanacs and 20th-century pop culture—is a contested front in the late-20th-century American culture war. To understand why, we have to go back to the 1950s, when Walt Disney’s TV series starring Fess Parker elevated “Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier” into *the* American hero. Crockett’s mythic status was enhanced even further when John Wayne portrayed him in *The Alamo* (1960).

Generational politics explains the controversy surrounding a purported 1836 memoir by a Mexican officer present at the battle, José Enrique de la Peña. (Because the memoir incorporates material that de la Peña could only have acquired later, it must have been completed after 1836.) In 1955 a Mexican antiquarian and book-seller named Jesús Sánchez Garza published *La Rebelión de Texas* in Mexico City. The manuscript was acquired by a Texas philanthropist, John Peace, for his John Peace Memorial Library, at the University of Texas at San Antonio. In 1974, Peace gave his permission for Carmen Perry to undertake a translation, which was published in 1975 by Texas A&M Press as *With Santa Anna in Texas: A Personal Narrative of the Revolution*. Here is the memoir’s account of Crockett’s death:

Some seven men had survived the general carnage and, under the protection of General Castrillon, they were brought before Santa Anna. Among them was one of great stature, well proportioned, with regular features, in whose face there was the imprint of adversity, but in whom one also noticed a degree of resignation and nobility that did him honor. He was the naturalist David Crockett, well known in North America for his unusual adventures, who had undertaken to explore the country and who, finding himself in Bejar at the very moment of surprise, had taken refuge in the Alamo, fearing that his status as a foreigner might not be respected. Santa Anna answered Castrillon’s intervention in Crockett’s behalf with a gesture of indignation and, addressing himself to the sappers, the troops closest to him,

ordered his execution. The commanders and officers were outraged at this action and did not support the order, hoping that once the fury of the moment had blown over these men would be spared; but several officers who were around the president and who, perhaps, had not been present during the moment of danger, became noteworthy by an infamous deed, surpassing the soldiers in cruelty. They thrust themselves forward, in order to flatter their commander, and with swords in hand, fell upon these unfortunate, defenseless men just as a tiger leaps upon his prey. Though tortured before they were killed, these unfortunates died without complaining and without humiliating themselves before their torturers. It was rumored that General Santa Anna was one of them; I will not bear witness to this, for, though present, I turned away horrified in order not to witness such a barbarous scene.

Appearing as it did immediately after the Vietnam War and Watergate, the translation of the de la Peña book was seized upon by certain scholars and some in the media who sought to prove that the childhood hero of coonskin cap-wearing baby boomers was a fraud. Others vilified anyone unpatriotic enough to question the traditional account of Crockett's heroic death. The emotions that the subject arouses clearly have had less to do with Crockett or the distant Texas Revolution than with attitudes toward American history, patriotism, and the military at the end of the 20th century.



The controversy over how David Crockett died raises a profound question: how can we be certain of anything in history? Where there is no corroborating physical evidence—as in the case of the suicide of Cleopatra—historians must rely on reports from the time. In two millennia, nobody has ever suggested that Cleopatra survived following her disastrous defeat at the Battle of Actium, or that anyone murdered her.

Similarly, no one disputes the fact that a handful of Texan prisoners were executed at Santa Anna's order after the fall of the Alamo. When it comes to the question of whether Crockett was one of them, however, there have always been conflicting accounts—something that is hardly surprising, in the case of a battle in a western frontier town in the early 19th century. The conflicting reports have been explained in two ways. The *corroboration theory* holds that all of the accounts of Crockett's execution reflect a real event; any differences among them can be attributed to confusion and the vagaries of memory. The fact that eyewitness accounts of a traffic accident differ in small details does not prove that the traffic accident never occurred. The *contamination theory* holds that the story of Crockett's execution was an erroneous rumor, which made its way into Texan and American newspapers and thence into memoirs written later by both North Americans and Mexicans. Like a modern computer virus, the apocryphal story of Crockett's execution infected an ever-growing number of documents over time.

Exhibit A for the corroboration theory, of course, is the de la Peña memoir. The matter is settled, once and for all, if the memoir is the work of de la Peña, *and* if de la Peña was telling the truth, *and* if he knew who David Crockett was. Skeptics have questioned all three of these assumptions. On the basis of internal inconsistencies and the lack of a chain of provenance, Bill Groneman, a lay historian and expert on the battle of the Alamo, has flatly claimed that the de la Peña memoir is a hoax. Such a claim is not as extreme as it may appear, given the number of forged documents from the Texas Revolution that have fetched high prices from Texas collectors (to say nothing of other celebrated forgeries, such as the Hitler diaries and the alleged Kennedy letters). But the case for the manuscript's authenticity arguably was strengthened by the 1994 discovery, by historian James E. Crisp of North Carolina

> MICHAEL LIND, a contributing editor of Harper's Magazine, is the author of *The Alamo: An Epic* (1997). Copyright © 1998 by Michael Lind.

State University, of a hitherto-unknown pamphlet by de la Peña, “A Victim of Despotism,” published in 1839, which mentions a “diary” on which he was working and contains language similar to the controversial memoir. The matter may not be settled until the Peace family, which still owns the memoir manuscript, permits scientific tests. (So far they have refused.)

Even if the de la Peña memoir manuscript is authentic, it does not follow that its account is entirely trustworthy. The manuscript is not simply a “diary,” but has been padded with material obtained after the war, including some items from English-language sources, such as Travis’s famous letter from the Alamo. De la Peña (who died in 1842) might have rewritten a diary or notes years after the events described. Lending credibility to this hypothesis is this reference to the execution in “A Victim of Despotism”:

If those in the cultured countries name us savages and assassins, none more than general [sic] Santa Anna has given an occasion to this. In the Alamo he ordered the murder of a few unfortunates who had survived the catastrophe, and whom general Castrillon presented imploring his mercy. Among those had been a man who pertained to the natural sciences, whose love of it had conducted him to Texas, and who locked himself up in the Alamo not believing it safe by his quality of foreigner, when general Santa Anna surprised Bejar.

If the “man who pertained to the natural sciences” was Crockett, then why didn’t de la Peña name him in this document, as he did in the memoir? Skeptics who agree that the longer manuscript is authentic have an explanation—the contamination thesis. De la Peña may have witnessed, or may have been told about, the executions after the battle, but neither he nor any of his comrades knew who the murdered prisoners were. When he sat down to write his memoir, however, de la Peña may have become aware of American newspaper accounts that Crockett had been among those executed.

Doubts about de la Peña’s ability to identify members of the Alamo garrison

can only be strengthened by examination of the rest of *With Santa Anna in Texas*. Consider de la Peña’s supposed eyewitness account of the death of Travis (a passage that debunkers hostile to military heroism never quote, for obvious reasons):

Travis was seen to hesitate, but not about the death that he would choose. He would take a few steps and stop, turning his proud face toward us to discharge his shots; he fought like a true soldier. Finally he died, but he died after having traded his life very dearly. None of his men died with greater heroism, and they all died. Travis behaved as a hero; one must do him justice, for with a handful of men without discipline, he resolved to face men used to war and much superior in numbers, without supplies, with scarce munitions, and against the will of his subordinates. He was a handsome blond, with a physique as robust as his spirit was strong.

According to the testimony of his slave Joe, who survived the battle, Travis was killed while defending the northern wall of the Alamo. If we are to believe the account in *With Santa Anna in Texas*, we must believe that either de la Peña himself, or an informant in the Mexican army, was able to distinguish Travis from the other Texans, while looking up from below the wall and being fired upon, in the darkness before daybreak. If de la Peña was the alleged eyewitness, then we must further believe that, after witnessing the death of Travis on the north wall, he providentially made his way to the other side of the fortress—just in time to see David Crockett executed by Santa Anna!

The credibility of de la Peña’s memoir, then, stands or falls on its descriptions of the deaths of both Crockett and Travis. Indeed, there is reason to be skeptical even about de la Peña’s 1839 account of the execution of the prisoners, in which he did not mention Crockett. Two years before de la Peña included that passage in “A Victim of Despotism,” another attack on the fallen dictator had been published in Mexico by Ramon Martinez Caro, who had been Santa Anna’s personal secretary during the war in Texas. According to Caro:

Among the 183 killed there were five who were discovered by General Castrillon hiding after the assault. He took them immediately to the presence of His Excellency who had come up by this time. When he presented the prisoners he was severely reprimanded for not having killed them on the spot, after which he turned his back upon Castrillon while the soldiers stepped out of their ranks and set upon the prisoners until they were all killed. . . . We all witnessed this outrage which humanity condemns but which was committed as described. This is a cruel truth, but I cannot omit it.

The 1837 Caro account is important for two reasons. First of all, it might have been a source for de la Peña's account in his 1839 pamphlet, as well as for the expanded version found in *With Santa Anna in Texas*. More important, Caro's eyewitness account, published only a year after the battle, does not identify any of the prisoners as Crockett. If Crockett had been one of the prisoners and his identity had been known to his Mexican captors, the fact should not have escaped the attention of Caro, who was standing at Santa Anna's side.

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Defenders of the theory that Crockett was among those executed argue that the existence of other accounts corroborates the claim. Are those stories corroborating evidence—or evidence of contamination by rumor?

In the weeks after the fall of the Alamo, conflicting and often imaginative accounts of Crockett's last moments filled letters and newspapers in Texas and the United States. Among the civilian survivors, Susannah Dickinson, the widow of one of the Alamo defenders, and Travis's slave Joe, both of whom were allowed to go to join Houston's rebel army, claim to have seen Crockett's body, presumably where he had fallen in combat. In the earliest letters mentioning the fall of the Alamo, written by Texans in March, two facts are repeated: first, that everyone, including Crockett, was killed in or after the battle; and second, that several of the defenders

(the number usually given is six or seven) surrendered and were executed after the battle at Santa Anna's order. None of the contemporaneous accounts identified Crockett as one of the executed prisoners. Indeed, the most common apocryphal stories among the Anglo-Americans had Travis, or Bowie, or both committing suicide once they saw the battle was lost.

As the weeks and months passed, however, the death of Crockett and the execution of the prisoners became conflated in newspaper stories and memoirs. One or more of the most famous members of the garrison—Crockett, Bowie, Travis, James Butler Bonham, or some combination—were now said to have been among the prisoners whom Santa Anna had executed. The earliest of these “celebrity prisoner” accounts is found in the *New Orleans True American* of March 29, 1836: “The Mexicans fought desperately until daylight, when seven only of the garrison were found alive. We regret to say that Col. David Crockett and his companion Mr. Benton, also the [sic] Col. Bonham of South Carolina, were of the number who cried for quarter but were told there was no mercy for them. They then continued fighting until the whole were butchered.” The newspaper, however, reprinted a letter of March 16 by Andrew Briscoe, a long-time Texas settler, who claimed, “Colonels James Bowie and Crockett were among the slain; the first was murdered in his bed in which he had been confined by sickness. The later [sic] fell fighting like a tiger.”

The first American newspaper account identifying Crockett as one of the executed prisoners appeared in a letter of July 19, 1836, written by a Texas army officer, George M. Dolson. Dolson claimed to have served the previous day, July 18, as an interpreter between Colonel James Morgan and Santa Anna's aide, Colonel Juan Almonte, one of the Mexican officers whom Morgan held prisoner on Galveston Island after the Texans routed the Mexican army and captured Santa Anna at San Jacinto. According to Dolson, “Colonel Crockett was in the rear, had his arms folded, and appeared bold as the lion as he passed my informant

[Almonte]. Santa Anna's interpreter knew Colonel Crockett, and said to my informant, 'the one behind is the famous Crockett.' When brought to the presence of Santa Anna, Castrillon said to him, 'Santa Anna, the august, I deliver up to you six brave prisoners of war.' Santa Anna replied, 'Who has given you orders to take prisoners, I do not want to see those men living—shoot them.'" While this would appear to be strong corroboration, skeptics point out that Almonte's diary, found after the Battle of San Jacinto, does not mention the alleged incident in its description of the sack of the Alamo.

However one weighs it, the Dolson letter, after the de la Peña memoir, is the strongest potential corroborating evidence for the execution theory. Other alleged corroborative accounts are either American newspaper articles, which adherents of the "contamination" thesis can dismiss as mere echoes of already published rumors, or second- and third-hand accounts in interviews and memoirs long after the fact. For example, in 1904 a veteran of the Texan army, William P. Zuber, described the story of Crockett's execution, which he attributed, via a Texas raconteur, to Santa Anna's son-in-law General Martin Perfecto Cos, as an example "of the myths related of the fall of the Alamo." In the same letter, Zuber explained how Texans pressured Mexican prisoners into confirming rumors that had been circulating on the Texan side: "After the battle of San Jacinto, some of our men repeated [the rumors] interrogatively to prisoners, inquiring if they were true, and many of them, to seem intelligent, confirmed them, answering in effect, 'Yes, that is true. I saw it.' These yarns spread from mouth to ear, as facts, among the prisoners, and even some of the generals utilized them in modified form in [an] effort to prove themselves innocent of the outrages perpetrated by their countrymen."

A dynamic like the one Zuber describes seems to have been at work in the case of

Francisco Becerra, an alleged veteran of the battle on the Mexican side who was eager to please Anglo-American writers in later decades by supplying them with information about the fall of the Alamo. Becerra, interviewed 39 years after the battle, claimed that Santa Anna had executed Crockett—and Travis, too! Generations

later, Zuber, who had passed on one of the Crockett execution stories



The execution version of Crockett's death circulated even during the 19th century. This woodcut appeared in an 1869 edition of Crockett's autobiography.

(which even he admitted was a "myth"), related how James Bowie had also survived the battle and had been thrown alive onto the funeral pyre of the other Texans. (Zuber was also the source of the story of Travis's line in the dust, another Alamo fable.)

The evidence, then, presents difficulties for those who argue that Crockett surrendered, only to be executed. The most plausible near-contemporary Mexican accounts,

those written by Caro in 1837 and de la Peña in 1839, agree that there were executions, but do not identify Crockett as one of those executed, while the purported Mexican accounts that identify Crockett as a prisoner are either obviously false like Becerra's or are attributed to Mexican officers in captivity by Anglo-American intermediaries such as Dolson, sometimes long after the alleged event. Proponents of the execution theory must accept accounts of Crockett's execution, while dismissing equally plausible (or equally dubious) stories that other well-known Alamo defenders such as Travis, Bowie and Bonham also survived the battle.



A final set of witnesses remains to be presented. All are from the Mexican side, so they cannot be accused of seeking to glorify Crockett by lying about his death in combat.

After the battle, Santa Anna asked the alcalde, or mayor, of San Antonio, Francisco Ruiz, who knew the leaders of the garrison, to identify their bodies. According to Ruiz, "Toward the west in a small fort opposite the city, we found the body of colonel Crockett." (The "small fort" may have been the southeastern courtyard between the palisade and the familiar chapel front.)

Ruiz made his statement years after the events. What may be the definitive account of Crockett's death was written shortly after it occurred by his supposed executioner, Santa Anna, in his 8 A.M. dispatch to Mexico City: "The fortress at last fell into our power with its artillery, ammunition, etc., and buried among the ditches and trenches are more than 600 [probably fewer than 200] bodies, all of them foreigners. . . . Among the dead were the first and second in command of the enemy, the so-called colonels Bowie and Travis, Crockett of equal rank and all the other leaders and officers." If, only minutes before, the most famous among those whom Santa Anna in the same letter called "collaborators who have come from the United States of the North" had been presented to Santa Anna as a prisoner, it seems odd that the Mexican dictator did not mention this in

his boastful report. Nor would he have been ashamed of ordering Crockett's execution; two weeks later, Santa Anna ordered the cold-blooded killing of 400 unarmed Texan prisoners of war at Goliad. One could argue that, while Santa Anna did not know who Crockett was, one or more of his aides recognized the celebrated Tennessean—but this seems a bit far-fetched. Santa Anna's dictated after-action report implies that Crockett died like the other leaders whose corpses in "the ditches and trenches" were identified at the general's request by San Antonio's mayor.

In favor of the theory that Crockett died in combat, then, are the accounts of Santa Anna and Ruiz, which can be added to the written statements of Caro in 1837 and of de la Peña in 1839—neither of whom identified Crockett as one of the prisoners Santa Anna had executed. The most powerful evidence for the execution theory is de la Peña's memoir, *With Santa Anna in Texas* (which evidence now strongly suggests he completed *after* his 1839 pamphlet), and certain letters and accounts in the Texas and U.S. press, particularly the letter of James Dolson, that appear to corroborate it.

To believe the "corroboration" theory, one must believe that Santa Anna executed the famous David Crockett, but neglected to mention the fact in his after-action report an hour or so later; that his personal secretary, describing and denouncing the execution of Texan prisoners in 1837, also failed to mention that fact; and that Enrique de la Peña himself neglected to mention it, in his account of the executions written in 1839. One must also believe reports in letters and in the Texas and U.S. press that Crockett was executed, while dismissing more-or-less identical stories about Travis and Bowie. The contamination thesis presents the historian with far less to explain. Shortly after the battle ended, Santa Anna inspected the fallen Alamo, and was presented with a handful of prisoners of war by General Castrillon. Santa Anna ordered their summary execution, an act witnessed (and later deplored) by his secretary, Ramon Martinez Caro, and others, possibly including José Enrique

de la Peña. Afterward (or perhaps earlier), Santa Anna ordered the San Antonio mayor, Francisco Ruiz, perhaps with the aid of Travis's slave Joe, to identify the leaders of the Alamo garrison among the dead. Ruiz found Crockett's body where the Tennessean had fallen during the battle, possibly between the palisade and the chapel front (the "small fort"). It was here that Susannah Dickinson, being led from the chapel after the battle, may have seen Crockett's remains.

Soon rumors among the Texan rebels and in the United States were placing Crockett and other well-known defenders such as Travis, Bowie, and Bonham among the prisoners executed at Santa Anna's command. These apocryphal stories followed the rules of popular historical fiction, in which the famous persons of a given era or place have chance encounters with one another. It was not enough that Santa Anna executed a handful of unknown southern or midwestern farm boys or European soldiers of fortune; no, the evil tyrant had to order the killing of the most famous defender, David Crockett, in cold blood. Assuming that de la Peña's memoir is authentic, the author may have identified the elderly man named in his earlier 1839 account as Crockett, *after* reading accounts in the North American or Mexican press in which Crockett, previously unknown in

Mexico, was given a prominent place.

The margin of error in this matter is so great that reasonable people, including eminent historians such as James Crisp and Dan Kilgore, can conclude that Crockett was indeed executed. Given the limited and conflicting evidence, there can be little chance of a consensus about what happened in the smoking ruins of the Alamo early one morning 162 years ago. About two questions, however, there can be no debate. Colonel David Crockett, along with almost 200 Texan defenders and hundreds of Mexican soldiers, died a painful death that morning in 1836—and he died bravely. Those who have seized upon the stories of Crockett's surrender as proof that an American hero was actually a coward appear to be unaware of the laws of war in the 19th century, which prescribed acceptance of surrender (the Texans themselves had paroled the Mexican army from which they had captured the Alamo a few months earlier). And those who use accounts of his execution to denigrate Crockett appear not to have read the testimony of their own star witnesses—first and foremost, José Enrique de la Peña in *With Santa Anna in Texas*: "Though tortured before they were killed, these unfortunates died without complaining and without humiliating themselves before their torturers."

Further Reading

Carmen Perry's translation of José Enrique de la Peña, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, was published by Texas A&M Press in 1975. The 1997 edition includes a discussion of the controversy over the manuscript's authenticity in the valuable new introduction by James E. Crisp of North Carolina State University, a leading proponent of the execution theory. See also James E. Crisp, "The Little Book That Wasn't There: The Myth and Mystery of the de la Peña Diary," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 98 (October 1994). Dan Kilgore also argues that Crockett was executed in *How Did Davy Die?* (Texas A&M Press, 1978) and "Take That, John Wayne," *Texas Monthly*, August 1978. Bill Groneman assembles the arguments against the execution thesis in *Defense of a Legend* (Wordware Publishing, 1994). Readers interested in a detailed debate between authorities on both sides, including Crisp, Groneman and Thomas Ricks Lindley, can consult back issues of *The Alamo Journal*, edited by William R. Chemerka, 7 Heritage Drive, East Hanover, N.J. 07936.

America, The Gated?

The rise of gated communities is only one product of seismic forces that are altering the U.S. political landscape. Americans are redefining the borders between public and private, in the places where they live as well as in Washington policy debates—on the public streets barricaded against criminals, in the downtowns revived by private business improvement districts. These experiments raise vital questions about our common life—and promise to rewrite the rules of American politics.

by Andrew Stark

The Los Angeles suburb of Hidden Hills, a handful of Mediterranean and ranch-style mansions scattered amid rolling, lightly wooded hills 15 miles inland from Malibu, boasts the highest per capita income of any community in California. It is the kind of place where live-in gardeners and six-car garages are taken for granted, and where bridle paths outnumber streets. The community is home to fabulously successful business executives and professionals as well as a few contemporary entertainers such as Sinbad and a curious collection of aging pop stars: Frankie Avalon, Neil Diamond, Tony Orlando, and John Davidson. It is also one of the nation's oldest gated communities, part of the vanguard of what has become a controversial national trend.

In 1961, however, 10 years into its existence as a private enclave, Hidden Hills took a step that moved it well in front of the vanguard. Even though, like other gated communities, it had a thriving, well-managed private homeowners' association that oversaw many of its affairs, Hidden Hills incorporated itself as a full-fledged city but left its gates and private homeowners' association in place. Ever since, Hidden Hills



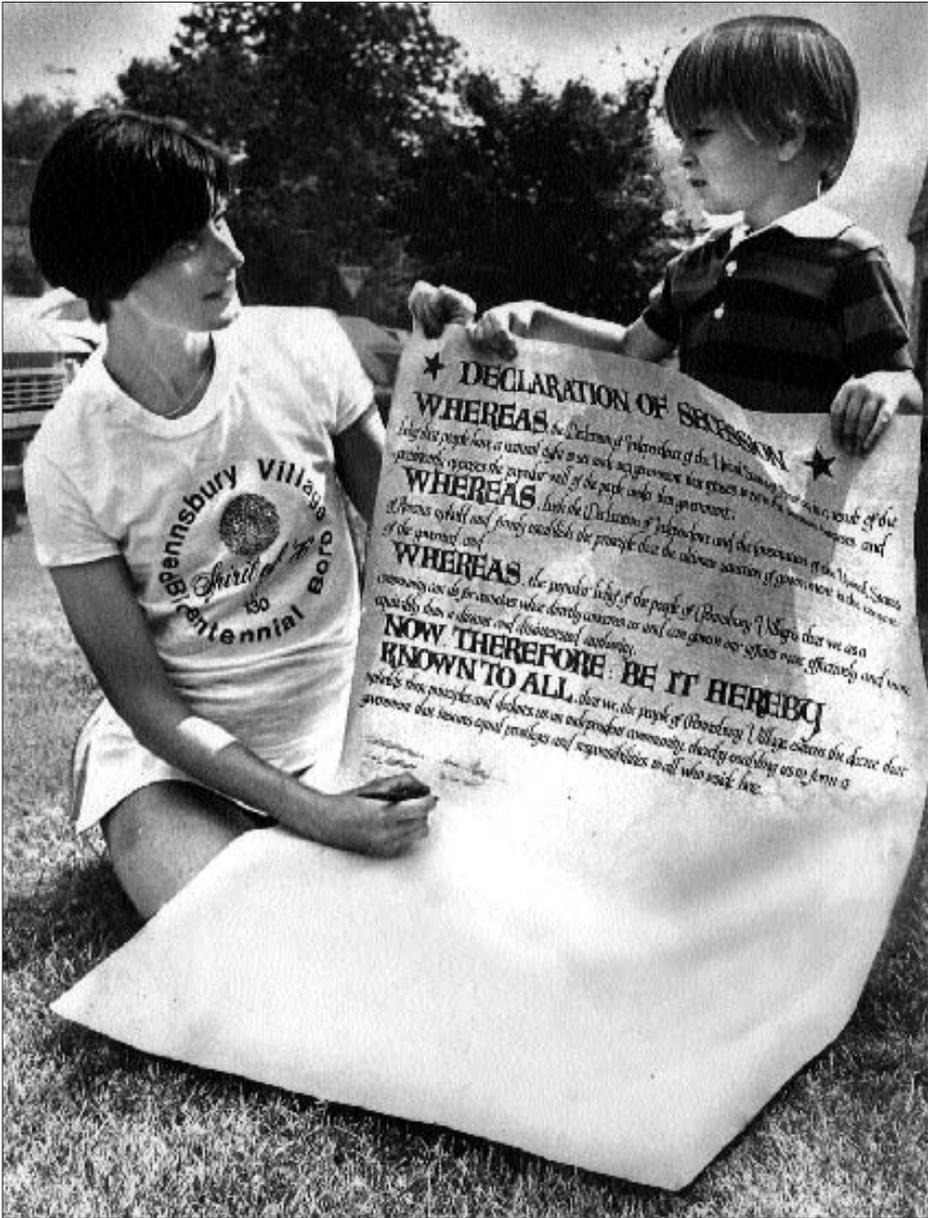
Welcome to Hidden Hills

has been a city with *two* governments, one private, one public. “It is odd,” says Fred Gaines, a lawyer from nearby Woodland Hills, “to have an entire city that’s gated.”

Odder still is the way in which the two governments have divided their powers. In Hidden Hills, the city government, the *public* entity, carries out building inspections, provides security, issues licenses, and sponsors some adult education programs; it also manages the local trash collection franchise. These are precisely the kinds of services that governments around the country, after decades of nagging by economists, are now rushing to fund through user fees or privatize entirely. But the Hidden Hills homeowners’ association is very busy with other matters. In Hidden Hills, the private government controls the community’s quintessentially public spaces and events—its parks, its roads and horse trails, even its annual Fourth of July parade.

There is one more oddity, perhaps the crowning one. After 34 years of sharing a sleek wood-and-glass low-rise on Long Valley Road in the center of town, the two governments have split up. In 1995, Hidden Hills’ public government moved to a renovated slate-roofed garage on Spring Valley Road, just 25 feet inside one of the community’s three gates. Then the homeowners’ association moved the gate. Today, the city hall of Hidden Hills stands 75 feet outside the town’s own gates.

There is method to Hidden Hills’ various madresses. Consider, first, the advantage the town derives by publicly providing an array of easily privatized services. Residents can claim their property tax payments as deductions on their federal and state income tax returns. If these services were funded out of private homeowner dues, however, they would



Celebrating secession at Pensbury Village

not get the same deductions. It is not only the rich who have discovered the benefits of this arrangement. The few private communities that have managed to replicate Hidden Hills' twin-governments trick have embraced the same financial logic. In suburban Pittsburgh, a 500-unit middle-class townhouse community called Pensbury Village became, in 1977, the only private condominium complex in the United States ever to form its own municipality. After the bitterly litigated separation agreement with the local township was signed, borough manager Irv

> ANDREW STARK, a former Wilson Center Fellow, is associate professor of strategic management at the University of Toronto. He has just completed a book called *Public Pastures, Private Arrangements: Conflict of Interest in American Public Life*. Copyright © 1998 by Andrew Stark.

Foreman recalls, “We sat down, the condo association and the municipality, to divvy up powers, and for tax reasons we gave everything we might otherwise have purchased privately, such as trash-collection, sewer, water, and animal control, to the municipality, to the public government.”

All this seems clear enough. But why, we might ask, has Hidden Hills placed its most public functions, including the Fourth of July parade, in the hands of its private government? Because if these things were furnished by the public government, paid for out of tax-deductible property taxes, they would have to remain open to all—they would have to be *public*. That would be anathema to the residents of this very exclusive private community.

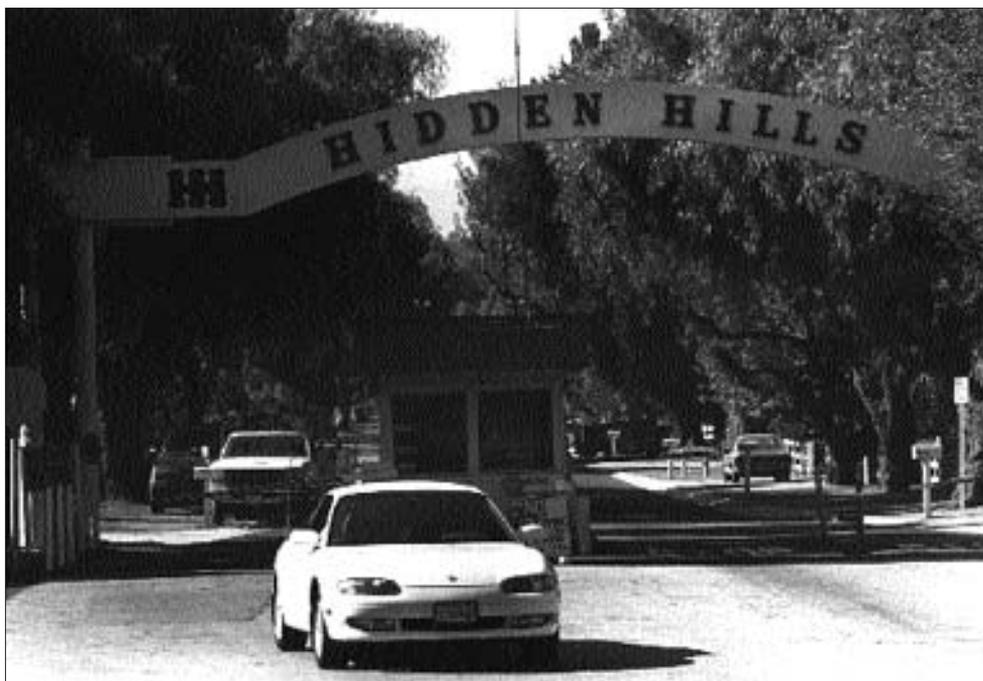
There is only one public space that Hidden Hills cannot privatize, cannot fund and operate through its private government: city hall, the seat of its public government, an ineradicably public place where anyone from anywhere can legally demand to go. That is why it had to be moved outside the city’s gates. “If people could get into town just by saying ‘we’re going to city hall,’” explains city attorney Amanda Susskind, “then the residents of Hidden Hills could have no security.”

Hidden Hills’ municipal building stands as an ironic counterpoint to a much better known town hall on the other side of the continent. There, in its model new town of Celebration, Florida, the Disney Corporation has erected a splendid Philip Johnson-designed town hall smack in the middle of the community. But Celebration is a private community, with no intention of incorporating as a municipality. Its impressive town hall, as critics have pointed out, is nothing more than an architectural bauble, totally without political function. Both cases suggest that public buildings will find a place in private communities only if no public business is conducted in them.

Curious as it is, Hidden Hills may be pointing the way to some of the more fundamental dilemmas and conflicts of the American future. Americans today are in the midst of a vast and largely unrecognized transformation: the radical redefinition at the grassroots level of the boundary between the public and the private realms. Gated communities are only the most obvious (and easily attacked) example of this change. Public-private boundaries are also being redrawn in tens of thousands of *ungated* communities—planned developments, condominiums, cooperatives—managed by various kinds of private govern-



The empty public square: Celebration's town hall



A day in the life of Hidden Hills: the main gate (above), a glimpse of the manor (upper right), tearing down the old guardhouse (below), and the new town hall (lower right), outside the town gates

ments grouped under the rubric “homeowners’ associations.” Ill-equipped to form their own public governments Hidden Hills-style, many of these communities have begun demanding tax-deductible status for their private homeowner dues. They argue that they are privately shouldering an array of traditionally public sanitation, security, transportation, and recreation responsibilities—assuming burdens that municipal governments bore before the age of retrenchment.

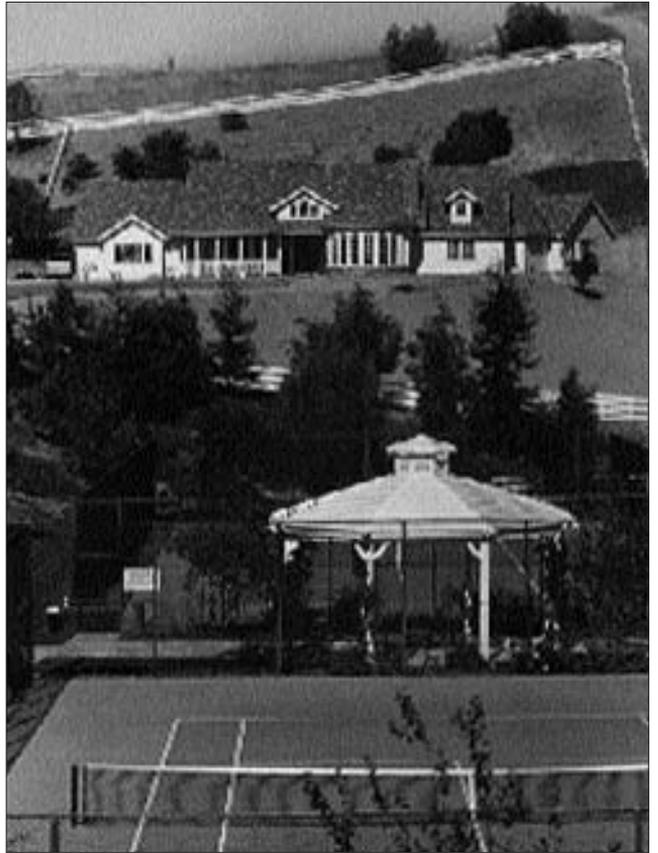
Public-private borders are also being shifted in hundreds of poor and middle-class city neighborhoods, where aroused residents fighting crime, traffic, and blight are demanding to have the public streets barricaded or gated against drug dealers and other outsiders. Unable to totally privatize their streets, as Hidden Hills has done, they seek barriers that would impede public access without wholly prohibiting it. These



efforts have provoked bitter debates. “Whose streets are these, anyway?” critics ask. And in more than a thousand American towns and cities, private downtown property owners have banded together to form business improvement districts (BIDs), providing street cleaning, landscaping, security, and other services that were once the exclusive province of municipal governments.

Each of these trends grows out of eminently defensible political concerns. But each also raises difficult practical and philosophical questions about the public-private border. BIDs, for example, are in many ways an impressive response to the failings and financial straits of municipal governments. Many BIDs have worked wonders, rescuing entire urban cores from decay and bringing public streets back to life. Unlike the residential neighborhoods that seek gates and barricades on public streets, BIDs welcome the public—paying customers—to their domain. And unlike private residential communities, from which they have learned a lesson, BIDs insist that municipalities continue to provide a full complement of services, supplementing them with their own efforts

rather than replacing them. But in preventing city governments from shifting scarce resources to needier neighborhoods, BIDs combine private advantage with their share of the public weal to make themselves privileged zones. Whether that status is justified is one of the



Today's border wars are blurring the lines between public and private, as Americans once again renegotiate the character of the lives they live together.

many practical issues that raise larger questions about the meaning of community and the public realm in contemporary America.

The resurgence of the private in the 1990s reverses a trend that began more than a hundred years ago. Starting in the middle of the 19th century, Americans witnessed a steady incursion of the public into realms previously private, nowhere more than at the local level. In U.S. cities, water, sewerage, street cleaning, policing, and fire protection were all provided privately, if at all. Boston's city government hired the city's first paid public police officers in 1838; New York followed in 1844, Philadelphia in 1850, and Baltimore in 1857. After the Civil War, local governments assumed responsibility for street cleaning; New York employed 5,000 street sweepers by 1900. These years also saw the rise of public schools and parks.

The pace of change varied, but the result was clear. By the end of the 19th century, the public realm had vastly expanded and the private had dramatically shrunk. Today, however, the borderlines are not so clearly marked. The private realm is not so much pushing back the public as overlaying it. Once something has existed in the public sphere for a hundred years—whether it is a service such as policing or snow plowing, or a space such as a street or a park—it acquires certain civic connotations and meanings that cannot easily be shaken off.

Today's border wars are thus confounding traditional political ideologies and coalitions. Among those leading the charge to allow private-community residents to write off their homeowners' association dues as income tax deductions, for example, are liberal Democrats, who see granting such tax breaks as a way of emphasizing that building parks and maintaining roads, two functions of the associations, are really public responsibilities. Among those most fiercely opposed to gating public streets are staunch libertarians, many of them local Republican politicians. They view public-street barriers as infringements on their personal freedom.

Until now, most media and scholarly attention has focused on the rise of gated communities, "privatopias" that are said to herald a future "fortress America" in which the private simply secedes from the public. But the reality being forged by ungated private communities seeking quasi-public status for their expenditures, by public neighborhoods seeking quasi-private status for their spaces, and by business improvement districts is far more complex. The people in these places do not wish to withdraw completely from the public sphere, yet they lack the where-

withal to follow in the footsteps of Hidden Hills and form their own public governments. Instead, they are opening a vast new territory between the two realms, where fragments of the private mix with shards of the public in novel configurations.

America's border wars are not sharpening the lines between public and private. They are blurring them, as Americans once again renegotiate the character of the lives they live together.

II

One of the bigger fields of conflict today is the seemingly mundane question of whether residents of private communities should be allowed to deduct their homeowners' association dues from their federal and state income taxes. More than 30 million Americans live in such communities, and their numbers are rapidly growing. (At least four million of these people live in gated communities.) Currently, residents are barred from deducting their association dues, as Yale University law professor Robert Ellickson explains, "because it is assumed that the value of the association services they receive equals the value of the assessments they pay." Tax deductions are usually available only in situations in which there is no necessary equality between what one pays and the benefit one personally receives. Deductible expenditures have a public purpose or a redistributionist or altruistic cast. And until recently, it has generally been assumed that there is nothing altruistic or public-spirited about paying for your own amenities through a private homeowners' association.

But private communities are challenging that view. Robert Figeira, executive director of Woodbridge Village, in Irvine, California, with 9,300 households the nation's second-largest private community, made the case for deductions in his testimony before a California State Assembly committee in 1990: "We have open space areas . . . parks, roads, bicycle trails, [and] recreation programs," Figeira told the committee. "We believe half of the people that enjoy [them] are from outside. . . . We maintain the lake and yet the people that live there get no credit for it. It's just, again, part of their association dues, yet it's all open to the public."

Assemblyman Gil Ferguson, a southern California Republican, drove home the point. "And you might explain to the committee that not one penny of that is deductible," he said.

"Not one penny, not one," Figeira agreed.

In its report, the committee endorsed the notion that residents of private communities—the majority of them ungated in California—are indeed "privately maintain[ing] a number of essentially public facilities." The legislature never acted. The argument, however, is certainly not implausible. Some observers think it could be a political lightning rod. "The politician who manages to capture this constituency, speak to

its needs, and offer it a voice will be amply rewarded,” says Robyn Boyer Stewart, president of Common Interest Advocates, the California lobbying group for private communities.

A self-described “Zen soldier” who carefully evokes her past association with progressive causes, Stewart offers a liberalism-tinged defense of tax-deductible homeowner dues. “By placing severe limits on government’s capacity to raise property taxes,” when it was passed in 1978, she says, California’s Proposition 13 “made it impossible for local governments to continue providing the basic kinds of public services they always had, and so they foisted the responsibility on new developments to privately maintain an array of new roads, parks, streetlights, medians, recreation facilities, all of which [where the community remains ungated] the general public uses.” Many private communities in fact “don’t want to be doing this,” Stewart adds, “but they have had to because government is now so constrained in its capacity to provide services that broadly benefit the public.”

What particularly galls liberals on Stewart’s side of the issue was the sight, all through the 1980s, of California’s municipal governments insisting that their revenue initiatives were less like taxes than private assessments. Proposition 13 contained a loophole (since closed by Proposition 218 in 1996) that allowed cities to raise money more easily if they could show that the levy was not a tax — defined as a revenue initiative devoted to broader public purposes — but a “benefit assessment,” designed specifically to improve the private-property values of those paying. But if California’s public governments are now protesting that their main purpose is to look after private interests, while its private homeowners’ associations are claiming to pursue the public interest, it is easy to see why Stewart and other liberals might find themselves on the private side of the divide.

The drive to make private homeowner dues deductible, though, begins to lose credibility when *gated* private communities try to join in. In a very few gated communities (and Hidden Hills happens to be one), private homeowner dues are apportioned on the basis of property values, much like deductible property taxes. In effect, this means that some kind of redistribution is going on *behind* the gates. Those with \$5 million estates, for example, are subsidizing the capacity of their poorer neighbors, those living in \$2 million homes, to enjoy the private equestrian trail. And this leads some gated-community residents, even in Hidden Hills, to claim that their homeowner dues ought to be deductible.

In the vast majority of gated communities, however, each property owner pays an equal amount to maintain the common spaces, and no internal redistribution takes place. Instead, to justify deductibility, residents of these communities must argue that their private expenditures somehow benefit the public beyond the gates. To see how they might do so, consider the dissenting opinion advanced by Judge Hiram Emery Widener, Jr., a conservative Nixon appointee, in a 1989 tax case involving Flat Top Lake Association, whose members live in a gated, lakeside,

white-collar community near Beckley, West Virginia.

The private dues paid by Flat Top's homeowners "do benefit the public," Judge Widener contended, because they protect "the public purse by performing activities which the taxpayer would otherwise have had to pay for." In other words, a single mother in nearby Beckley benefits from Flat Top's artificial lake, even though she can't swim in it, because had Flat Top not been a private, gated community—had it been a development reliant on public infrastructure—she and other taxpayers would have had to help pay for it! By Judge Widener's logic, the very fact that the park is private is a public benefit. Understandably, the rest of the court found this argument a bit too metaphysical for its taste.

Californians form the cutting edge of the movement to make the dues paid by private homeowners deductible. This is not surprising, since they have the most to gain. Homeowner dues are comparatively high in California, partly because the state is home to America's wealthiest homeowners' associations, but also because its private communities have all had to make up for the effects of Proposition 13. Elsewhere, though, private dues are lower and property taxes higher. In states such as New Jersey, Maryland, and Connecticut, private-community residents, instead of seeking deductions on their state and federal income taxes, are trying to win rebates of city or county property taxes.

Like the western case for tax deductions, the eastern brief for tax rebates displays a certain cogency within bounds—especially when the community seeking them is not gated. Consider the argument for rebates advanced by Benjamin Lambert, an attorney whose firm represents about 40 New Jersey private homeowners' associations: "Almost all municipal governments still tax local private-community residents for whatever public services the municipality provides, whether it be trash collection, snow removal, hydrant repair, sewer maintenance or street lighting. But many municipalities don't supply those services *to* private communities, because private communities, through their homeowner dues, already provide them for themselves." Hence, Lambert concludes, "private-community residents have been paying twice—through their dues and through their taxes—for services they get only once."

According to Doug Kleine, former head of the research arm of the Community Associations Institute (CAI), the national umbrella organization for private homeowners' associations, rebaters believe that "the purpose of government is to give you back everything in services that you give it in payments, not to take your money and use it for the benefit of others."

In the mid-1980s, Lambert and others began asking New Jersey municipalities to rebate some fraction of property taxes to dues-paying private-community homeowners. Things did not go well at first. The effort stirred opposition in a surprising quarter. Just as the cause of private communities found unexpected liberal support in California, so in New Jersey it stirred the opposition of conservatives. The voters of Mount Laurel, the town made famous by its 20-year fight against court orders requiring it to support low-income housing, rejected a mid-1980s referendum proposing rebates for the area's private communities. The

United Taxpayers of New Jersey, a leading organization in the tax revolt that eventually brought Governor Christie Whitman to power, also opposed rebates, which it saw as giveaways for the few instead of tax relief for the many.

Nevertheless, New Jersey's private homeowners' associations pressed on and in 1990 pushed the Municipal Services Act through the state legislature. Under its provisions, those who pay homeowners' association dues now get rebates on the property taxes they pay to support municipal trash collection, snow removal, and street lighting. In its first year, the act cost New Jersey's municipalities some \$62 million.

The rebate movement isn't stopping there. The next step, says David Ramsey, president of the New Jersey chapter of CAI, is for private communities to obtain rebates for the taxes they pay to maintain public roads, on the analogous grounds that they are already maintaining their own private roads. I asked Ramsey if there wasn't an important difference. After all, those who pay for their own trash removal don't use the public system, and so arguably should not have to pay for it. But those who pay for their own private residential roads still have to drive on public roads. Shouldn't they have to pay at least some property taxes for road maintenance?

"No," Ramsey said. "Private-community residents may use public roads, but remember too that the general public can use most private roads, any that remain ungated. And since the general public doesn't pay even a cent toward the maintenance of any of the private roads they are able to use, there's no reason why private-community residents should pay for the maintenance of the public roads they use." Rebates, Ramsey says, would simply "even the score."

Whether that is true depends on whether the public actually uses private-community roads as much as community residents use public roads. In some New Jersey locales where private-community residents make up close to half the population, Ramsey's argument begins to acquire a certain plausibility. Where the demand for rebates becomes distinctly less plausible, however, is precisely where the quest for tax deductions gets shaky: where gated private communities try to get in on the act.

Consider, for example, the argument Maryland attorney Steve Silverman advances in favor of granting residents of gated communities rebates on the taxes they pay to maintain public roads. True, acknowledges Silverman, who represents 170 homeowners' associations in the Washington, D.C., area, the general public cannot use gated private roads. But then again, residents of private communities actually never use most public roads, he claims, because the majority of these roads are not

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major thoroughfares but neighborhood crescents and cul-de-sacs.

“Most people tend to use the neighborhood streets where they live,” Silverman continues. “You’re not going to drive on someone else’s public street unless you’re going to visit them. In which case they’ve invited you, so they should pay for your use of the public road in front of their place, just as, when you invite someone to visit you in your gated community, you pay for whatever wear and tear they inflict on your road.”

Here is a truly intriguing suggestion. Though the gated-community resident may actually be the one driving along those public roads, Silverman in effect claims, it is really others—those whom that resident visits, buys from, works for—who are the beneficiaries, and they are the ones who should pay the freight. On this argument, a nation of citizens and publics becomes a nation of hosts and guests.

There is a striking resemblance between Silverman’s argument for rebates and Judge Widener’s case for deductions. In Silverman’s argument, a gated-community resident may not benefit from a public road even though he drives on it; in Widener’s argument, a member of the outside public somehow benefits from a gated private lake even though she cannot swim in it. Because each case for tax breaks so radically severs the notion of personal use from personal benefit, neither is likely to get very far. The arguments *ungated* private communities mount for deductions and rebates, however, are each at least plausible when taken separately. The problem with them is that each argument undermines the other.

In essence, the Californians are saying that their homeowner dues underwrite services that benefit many others beyond themselves. Hence the altruistic tenor of deduction talk: we are providing public services well in excess of our own personal benefit and thus deserve tax deductions. What the eastern-based rebate advocates find outrageous, by contrast, is precisely that their property taxes do underwrite services that benefit others. Rebate talk has a distinctly self-interested twang: residents should get back any amount that goes beyond what they receive.

The private-community movement is, to borrow Justice Sandra Day O’Connor’s famous description of *Roe v. Wade*, “on a collision course with itself.” Robyn Boyer Stewart views the eastern rebaters as dangerously “secessionist”; Jeff Olson, a California private-community manager and supporter of tax deductions, told me he doubts that the rebate drive can get off the ground. New Jersey rebater Ramsey takes the same view of the West Coast deduction forces. As they assemble their debating points, private-community leaders have yet to make up their minds about some of the most basic questions a community can ask itself: are the vital, commonplace acts of purchasing trash collection, parks, roads, and sewage services ones we undertake in our public or in our private roles? Do we perform them as citizens who have shouldered the broader public purposes of government, or as consumers who need look out only for ourselves? These are questions that people in private communities are raising, and that Americans everywhere will need to answer.

III

Gates are seen not only on the streets of exclusive private enclaves such as Hidden Hills. All over the country, local residents are seeking to gate the *public* streets they live on, hoping to keep out gangs, drug dealers, prostitutes, traffic, and litter. Nobody knows how many public streets have been restricted, but every year, residents on thousands of public streets reportedly seek restrictions.

There are important differences between barriers on public streets and those on private streets. Private gates enforce both inequality and exclusivity. They not only distinguish between insiders and outsiders but completely bar the outsiders. Barriers on public roads, by contrast, perform only one or the other function.

In one common model, a gate or guardhouse allows local residents to pass through unimpeded while requiring nonresidents to explain themselves to a guard, or else be photographed by a camera mounted on the gate. There is unequal treatment but no exclusivity. "In the final analysis," says Tom Benton, manager of Miami Shores Village, a mostly Anglo upper-middle-class community of 2,500 households on the northern edge of Miami, "gates and guards will slow you up, but if you want to proceed, no one can stop you from going on a public street."

The alternative to the gate is the barricade: a string of orange cans, a line of concrete cylinders, or a row of shrubs placed at the mouth of a public street, requiring the general public and residents alike to take a detour. This is the route favored by Miami Shores, where Spanish-style mansions on Biscayne Bay give way by degrees to less exalted dwellings. Feeling threatened by rising crime, the community bankrolled professionally designed landscape plantings to close off several streets connecting it to some poor neighborhoods to the west. Barricades are exclusive; they block entry. But they are also egalitarian, blind to the difference between residents and the public at large. Indeed, they often work their greatest hardship on residents. In Oak Forest, an affluent suburb north of Miami, a barricade separates William Matthews's front door and his garage, requiring the 84-year-old retired restaurateur to drive a half-mile to park his car after dropping off his groceries.

Each of these methods of limiting access to public streets thus manages to avoid one of the two most maligned features of private gates. Each offers a legally acceptable method of taking public streets some distance toward the private. Each has been popular in Dade County, Florida, where many of the 28 municipalities, including Miami, not only continue the upkeep of public streets that have been restricted but have actually helped finance the construction of gates and barricades. In Dade, the most powerful argument in favor of such public-street barriers has been a kind of egalitarian one. "Why should the protection that gates provide from crime and traffic be available only for those who can afford private communities?" asks Silvia Unzueta, a local pro-barrier leader.

Unzueta and others have been seeking barricades on the older, grid-pat-



A barricaded street in Miami Shores

terned streets in the poorer north end of Coral Gables, a town of 42,000 immediately west of Miami. They point out that residents in the newer and wealthier south end live largely on cul-de-sacs, which afford much the same kind of security as barricades. “Why should others be denied these basic public goods simply because of an inability to pay?” Unzueta asks. It is a theme that comes up repeatedly in pro-barrier arguments.

The notion that there are certain goods that government ought to provide more or less equally to all—health care, perhaps, or education, or police protection—grows a little forced when the list expands to include street barriers, the ultimate socially divisive mechanism. Many barrier opponents hold that barriers are less like education than they are like Cadillacs and caviar, market commodities that government has no obligation to provide. Monique Taylor, a property owner living just outside Miami Shores, represents a brand-new hybrid in local politics. She has absolutely no problem with private gated communities. “What people do with their own property is their own business,” she says. Yet Taylor is fiercely opposed to the gating and barricading of public streets, and for much the same reason: what people do with their property is their own business, and the public streets belong to everyone. “I have a right to drive my preferred route,” Taylor told me. “Barriers impinge on my freedom of travel, forcing me to go where I don’t want to go.”

Taylor’s argument is echoed by other barrier opponents. Mike van Dyk, a Dade County Republican activist, is head of a private-community homeowners’ rights group and a leading local opponent of public-street barriers. “I pay for those streets,” Van Dyk told me. “I don’t like someone telling me I can’t go on public property.”

Some barrier opponents, in a strange twist on a popular libertarian argument, have even spoken of public-street barricades as a kind of “taking,” in which the state—simply by allowing the barriers—unconstitutionally deprives citizens of their property rights, albeit their rights to public rather than private property.

Barrier advocates scoff at the idea that there are any great principles at stake. “What’s all the fuss? So you can’t always take your chosen route to get somewhere,” says Randall Atlas, a safety and security consultant who has studied the impact of barriers in some Dade municipalities and believes that they reduce crime. “You might, heaven forbid, have to go on a crowded street or around the block. . . . It’s about convenience, not freedom.”

Like many barrier advocates, Atlas depicts his opponents as efficiency-driven neurotics who would be better off if they occasionally stopped and smelled the roses. An interesting critique, since barrier advocates portray their foes in precisely the opposite terms: as aimless wanderers who have nothing better to do than drive through other people’s neigh-



William Matthews, of Oak Forest, Fla., stands where a new neighborhood security wall is being built between his garage and his house.

borhoods. “There are always oddball people coming in,” complains Carol Pelly, a barrier advocate in Thousand Oaks, California, “and they don’t have any purpose here.”

Ironically, the debate over public-street barriers inverts the terms of the older controversy over private gated communities. The older controversy typically pits egalitarian gate critics against freedom-loving gaters, who cite their rights to do whatever they want with their own private property. On the public streets, however, the egalitarians favor gates and the more libertarian-minded oppose them.

Indeed, the egalitarian argument used for gating on the most modest of public streets can be turned around and used to attack gates at the ritziest of private enclaves. Several communities in suburban Dallas—Addison, Plano, Richardson, and Southlake—have recently shown how. All four towns decided to ban barriers on public roads, believing that they project the image of a divided city. But the towns have gone fur-

The egalitarian argument used for gating on the most modest of public streets can be turned around and used to attack gates at the ritziest of private enclaves.

ther. They have also effectively banned or placed moratoriums on the construction of gated *private* communities. If residents on public roads are going to have to do without barriers, the towns concluded, it would be unfair to allow them in private communities. “I am offended,” Addison city manager Carmen Moran told me, “by the concept that some should take for themselves security that others don’t have.”

As the public-private border shifts, values that once unified people philosophically are now dividing them politically, often in paradoxical ways. To be an egalitarian might dispose you to insist on gates for public streets, as it does Silvia Unzueta. But it can just as easily impel you to attack the gates erected by private communities, as it does Carmen Moran. Libertarians will defend gates in private communities but revile them on public streets. In the fierce debate over gating, the combatants are discovering that their deepest political values can imply very different things on either side of the public-private border.

IV

In a recent essay on community spirit in America, *Time* editor Richard Stengel claimed that neither “gated suburbs [nor] business improvement districts” could be “considered salutary for the republic.” Both, Stengel noted, “represent the secession of a smaller, more privileged community from the larger one.” Each is “in some respects driven by fear.” Neither, he said, is all that different from the “recently-arrested Viper militia in Arizona.”

Three weeks later, *Time* published an angry response from Andrew Heiskell, the magazine’s former editor in chief and a former board member of New York’s Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, a BID. Heiskell did not take the Viper militia comparison particularly well. Noting that Bryant Park itself had been rescued from the reign of drug dealers and vagrants and restored to its long-forgotten status as a lively six-acre oasis in midtown Manhattan, he wrote that the “major BIDs in the New York area have vastly improved the quality of life there.” Indeed, BIDs around the country can boast an impressive record of achievement: crime down 53 percent in the area served by Central Houston, Inc., linear feet of graffiti down 82 percent in Philadelphia’s Center City District.

Some of the districts have been so successful that their managers suspect local politicians of BID envy. At a recent meeting of BID directors, recalls Terry Miller, former chief financial officer for the Association for Portland

Progress, in Oregon, “several of the most well-established and powerful directors acknowledged nascent tensions caused by mayors’ suspicions that they [the BID directors] somehow wanted to be mayor themselves.”

To hear some BID managers talk, Stengel missed the mark as badly in comparing BIDs to gated communities as he did in comparing them to the Viper militia. “I don’t like gated communities,” Philadelphia BID director Paul Levy told me. “Private gated communities want to keep people out; BIDs want to welcome them in,” he says. “Gated communities are devoted to private spaces; BIDs are dedicated to the improvement of public spaces.”

True enough. But there is another and more important difference. The great fear BID founders had, Levy says, is that once their new organizations started to provide their own private security, street cleaning, and trash

removal, municipal governments would begin withdrawing public services from the downtown, much as they have done in private residential communities. So nearly every BID in America negotiates a “baseline service” agreement with its city government, obliging the municipality to maintain the level of services it would have deployed regardless of how much extra the BID is able to provide privately. If the BID is paying for 10 private security agents, this is understood to be in addition to the 40 police officers the city would furnish anyway. Clearly this arrangement serves the interest of property owners, but it is also intended



Manhattan’s revived Bryant Park

to ensure that they retain a stake in the public system and have no incentive to agitate for tax rebates. After all, as Times Square BID director Gretchen Dykstra says, the districts “continue to get their money’s worth from the city.”

It is possible, BIDs seem to be saying, for a private government to lightly overlay an undiminished public sphere, a sphere of fully accessible public space and full-service public government, enhancing public life at no cost to the community. In this way, BIDs are different from restricted public

streets and private communities that seek tax rebates.

Or at least in theory. In the short life of BIDs, there already have been significant strains. In 1994, for example, John Dyson, then New York's deputy mayor for finance and economic development, called on the City Council to rebate a portion of property taxes to dues-paying BID businesses. Dyson's proposal didn't go anywhere. It would have cost the city \$7.5 million annually, which even Dyson acknowledged it could ill afford. But the very fact that he could have made such a suggestion (and that some BID managers nodded in agreement when he did, as one told me) suggests that the baseline principle might not hold. For if a BID is sweeping its own sidewalks every two hours, what is really left for the city to do? If it fills its own potholes, scrubs its own graffiti, or reduces its own crime, what added value do the city department of public works and other municipal service agencies provide? And after a while, won't hard-pressed cities feel an irresistible urge to reduce services in areas where BIDs are flourishing? "I don't buy the baseline," New York city councilman Andrew Eristoff told me. "BID businesses are going to start asking 'What are we paying our taxes for?'" "The baseline," says Dave Fogarty, coordinator of a proposed BID in Berkeley, California, is a "myth."

But if the baseline is a myth, it is a double-jointed one. While cities might sometimes trim services or fail to provide value for tax dollars within BID perimeters, they can also wind up putting even *more* resources into a BID than the area would have received had the district never been formed. Center City District, Philadelphia's BID, provides any municipal constable patrolling the area with free use of a radio, TV camera, pager, and other amenities. It also built a storefront police substation, on the principle of "If you build it, they will come." And they did: the Philadelphia Police Department now deploys 30 officers over and above what the Center City baseline requires.

There are other examples. Instead of paying for its own private graffiti removal, a prototype BID in San Francisco established a "graffiti hotline," which regularly contacts the public graffiti removal service to get freshly spray-painted scrawls and screeds removed. Public service to the area has "improved immensely," says a pleased Jim Flood, a local property owner and BID activist, because "nobody else is calling" the removal service. BIDs were meant to use their wealth to supplement city services, but many are actually using it to become more adroit consumers of those services.

"In my mind," says Randall Gregson, director of the New Orleans Downtown Development District, "I am always trying to draw the line between what the BID should do and what the city should do."

And understandably so, for if the BID experience offers one clear lesson thus far it is that the notion that these private governments can lightly overlay the city's public government, each abiding peacefully by the baseline, is something of a chimera. Private government has a tendency either to repel or attract public government. It is not neutral. Either the businesspeople who belong to the BID will begin agitating for rebates, because they are getting a lower level of public services than they

should, or critics outside the BID will start attacking it, because it is enjoying a *higher* level of public services than it should.

BIDs also go beyond bringing a measure of instability to the relation-

ship between private government and public government. They might actually lead the two to change places entirely.

For more than a century, judges have prohibited municipal governments from taxing or otherwise assessing federal government properties—such as federal courthouses, post offices, and passport bureaus—on the grounds that federal revenues must not be “siphoned off” to public purposes set by other levels of government. But what if the municipal services are provided by a BID?*

David Barram, administrator of the U.S. General Services Administration, the agency that manages all federal nonmilitary property, declared in early 1996 that the federal government would not pay anything to BIDs. By September of that year, however, after some vigorous internal debate (which revealed that federal managers in some cities were already contributing to BIDs), Barram reversed himself, announcing that the federal government would begin negotiating payment schedules.

That decision, despite its virtues, won't resolve some of the underlying public-private tensions. Bob Jones, a member of the federal Empowerment Zone Task Force involved in helping to launch the District of Columbia's first BID, expects that some group might well claim that federal payments to BIDs “quack like a local prop-



In Philadelphia's much-admired Center City business improvement district, teams of private employees sweep the streets, erase graffiti, and help keep the peace.



*BIDs raise similar questions for nonprofit organizations. Though they generally pay no municipal taxes, many hospitals and churches have begun making voluntary contributions to local BIDs. And when they don't, says BID consultant Larry Houston, the BID in certain cases should consider “taking them to court to challenge their nonprofit status.” Thus BIDs, business-controlled enterprises that enjoy nonprofit status, may find themselves in court energetically trying to depict other nonprofits as businesses.

Government's payments to the BIDs are like a vibrating cord alternating faster than the eye can see between public and private, never firmly fixed in one realm or the other.

erty tax" and ought to be prohibited. Jones, though, has a reply. Federal payments to BIDs are less akin to taxes than they are to user fees for services. And, Jones says, government properties "pay private firms to fix our sidewalks or pick up our trash all the time."

But if the BID is a private business taking fees for services rendered, don't federal regulations require the government go through a process of competitive bidding? This problem initially caused concern for federal officials. What resolved it was the recognition that BIDs have no private competitors. Municipal governments, in effect, grant BIDs local monopolies to

provide certain kinds of services. Furthermore, BIDs do not generally charge property owners fee-like amounts commensurate with the services they render. Instead, they assess properties on the basis of their size or value. But doesn't that take us right back to square one, where BIDs once again look more like tax-levying public governments than fee-collecting businesses?

The ambiguities seem endless. Business improvement districts, born with the promise of fostering perhaps the easiest coexistence of



the public and private, in some ways create the most problematic relationship. Government's payments to the BIDs are like a vibrating cord alternating faster than the eye can see between public and private, never firmly fixed in one realm or the other.

V

Decades ago, Hidden Hills achieved for itself the best of both worlds by securing tax support for whatever it chose to fund through its public government and total exclusivity for whatever it assigned to its private government. That tidy division is impossible for the vast majority of private communities, which provide their own municipal services but cannot form their own public governments. Nor is it a possibility for the vast majority of public neighborhoods that would like to exclude outsiders but cannot completely privatize their streets. And such a tidy division is not even a desire of BIDs, which say they want to carve out a role for private government in the midst of a vibrant public sphere, neither supplanting the existing public government nor excluding the public.

As Americans involved in each of these movements grope toward the promised land represented by Hidden Hills, trying after their own fashion to wring the best from both private and public, they find themselves having to navigate an unprecedented set of private-public contradictions and conundrums. As private homeowners' associations assume more public responsibilities, critics are insisting that they abandon their practice of allowing only property-owners to vote and extend the franchise to all residents. There is also increasing pressure to require majority support from "all those affected," including outsiders, before restricting access to public streets. And BIDs are now under assault by critics who want to subject them to greater internal democracy—allowing renters and street vendors a vote in BID affairs—and to greater control by public authorities. These are issues that will help define local political conflict over the coming decades.

Hidden Hills was spared such conundrums because its political arrangements, self-serving though they may seem, still respect one of the fundamental traditional distinctions between public and private: if a facility is going to be subsidized through the public tax system, then the public must, at least in some fashion, be able to enjoy its benefits. It must serve some public purpose. Conversely, if something is going to remain wholly private or exclusive, then no public tax support should be available to it, or even be sought. There is no question that some of the more private communities that now pursue tax deductions and rebates, or the public neighborhoods that now seek to shore up their privacy, often test, tweak, or even blur this public-private distinction. But to their credit, none have flouted it utterly.

Yet even this last firewall is showing signs of strain. In 1996, the Panther Valley Property Association, a gated private community near Hackettstown, New Jersey, transferred responsibility for its road maintenance to its own newly created special taxing district. Such districts are not full-fledged municipalities, but they are public entities nonetheless, with the right to tax residential properties for particular services, such as water, sewer, or, in this case, roads. Panther Valley homeowners now

deduct what they spend for local road maintenance from their federal and state income tax returns. But those roads remain wholly closed to the general public. Any outsider seeking to drive on Panther Valley's public roads will be turned away.

Panther Valley, in effect, has moved beyond Hidden Hills. David Ramsey, the attorney who represented the Panther Valley homeowners, describes their agreement with the local township as a "unique settlement, the first of its kind." That's almost exactly the same language that Peter Pimentel, executive director of the Northern Palm Beach County Improvement District, uses to characterize several nearly identical arrangements recently concluded in Florida. "It's pathbreaking," Pimentel says, although he adds that "no one wants to take this to the IRS, because they're afraid of what they might say."

Pimentel defends the practice of using the tax system to support roads that aren't open to all. After all, he says, municipal parking lots and toll highways are public facilities, but you cannot just waltz onto them as you please; you have to pay. The analogy, though, is misconceived. As long as you *are* willing and able to pay, public governments cannot bar you from such facilities just because you are not a local resident. Nor, for that matter, as long as you *are* a local resident, can America's public governments bar you from voting simply because you are unwilling or unable to pay for a home or a piece of property. Private governments are now turning both of these established principles of American public life on their head. Until very recently, in the struggle over the border between public and private, some lines had yet to be crossed. Now they have been.

Inside the Islamic Reformation

For the Muslim world's one billion people, this may be a time of change as profound as the Protestant Reformation was for Christendom. Our author reports on the currents and counter-currents that are pulling the faithful in new directions.

by Dale F. Eickelman

Al-Hamra, a provincial capital in the northern Oman interior, was remote even by that country's standards when I first visited it in June 1978. Paved roads and electricity had not yet reached the oasis; only a few homes had generator-powered televisions, and the nearest telephone was almost an hour's drive away. It was much the same when I returned to the oasis a year later to conduct field research. On this second visit, I spent a day in formal discussions with local officials and tribal leaders, and then, having missed my bus, was obliged to spend the night. The *shaykh* (or tribal leader) of the `Abriyin graciously invited me to stay in his guest house, along with several men who were visiting from outlying villages.

Well before dawn, these other guests—observant Muslims to a man—rose for morning prayer, and one of them called to me to ask whether I intended to perform my ablutions. “Not yet,” I replied, and went back to sleep. Some minutes later, my host, Shaykh `Abdallah al-`Abri, gently prodded me with the muzzle of a machine pistol. In Oman, it is bad manners to touch a sleeping person with one's hands, and

Shaykh `Abdallah was a model of politeness.

“Are you sick?” he asked. “You're not getting ready to pray.”

Half asleep, I mumbled, “I'm Christian; we pray differently.”

Shaykh `Abdallah looked momentarily puzzled, then went away.

His puzzlement was no mystery. The *shaykh* had naturally assumed that a speaker of Arabic with a reasonable command of Omani etiquette would also rise to pray. In the late 1970s, he and the other inhabitants of the oasis had no pressing cause to think about any faith beyond Islam. Such terms as *Muslim* and *Christian* scarcely entered their minds. The British army officers and oil company officials who regularly passed through the region rarely stayed for long and, in any case, gave the inhabitants of al-Hamra little reason to think about other religions. The South Asian construction workers at the oasis were mostly Muslim, as were the schoolteachers from other Arab countries.

Yet al-Hamra (pop. 2,600), a compact town of mud-brick buildings on a rocky slope next to an underground irrigation canal (*falaj*), was changing—just how profoundly,



Campaign posters were not Iranians' only source of information about last May's presidential election, which a moderate cleric won in an unexpected landslide.

I did not then grasp. A decade earlier, the oasis's habitable limits, still defined by the watchtowers used to guard against rival tribes, had begun to push outward, as new diesel-driven pumps brought water from privately owned wells to agricultural lands far away from the head of the town's *falaj* (where, the water being purest, the tribal aristocracy lived). By the late '70s, schools and government offices were being built beyond the marketplace, once the far end of the town. By then, too, nearly all school-age children in al-Hamra attended elementary school, and government jobs and wage labor had supplanted date palms as the inhabitants' foremost source of income. The Beau

Geste profile of al-Hamra was fast being altered, and I had come—and would return again and again over the ensuing years—to study the transformation.

A few weeks after my overnight stay, I returned with my wife and daughter to spend a year in al-Hamra. Adjusting to a rhythm of life marked by the five daily prayers and, for men, the weekly congregational prayer, we soon learned to distinguish the voices of neighbors calling the faithful to mosques throughout the oasis. Islamic rituals were so thoroughly woven into the daily life of the community that everyone took them for granted.

That was why, on a return visit nearly a decade later, I was startled when a young relative of the tribal leader—a high school student when I'd first met him in 1979 but now a university-

trained police officer—announced to me that the people of al-Hamra, his own relatives included, were “ignorant” of Islam and therefore behaved “like animals”—that is, unthinkingly. “Sure,” he said, “they pray and fast, but they can't explain why. Muslims must explain their beliefs.”

His words came back to me last April, when I gave a public talk in Istanbul. I had been invited by an organization connected with the Refah (Welfare) Party, which has controlled Istanbul's municipal government since 1994. Although the Refah Party is routinely described as “fundamentalist,” the Turkish

panelists who commented on my talk were anything but provincials cut off from the outside world. They invoked such figures as the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and were at ease conversing in English and other foreign languages. These, and other religiously minded young Turks I met, were not the “fundamentalists” of stereotype. The reality they represented—like that of the young Omani policeman—was far more complex.

Years hence, if my suspicion is correct, we will look back on the latter half of the 20th century as a time of change as profound for the Muslim world as the Protestant Reformation was for Christendom. Like the printing press in the 16th century, the combination of mass education and mass communications is transforming this world, a broad geographical crescent stretching from North Africa through Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and across the Indonesian archipelago. In unprecedentedly large numbers, the faithful—whether in the vast cosmopolitan city of Istanbul or in Oman’s tiny, remote al-Hamra oasis—are examining and debating the fundamentals of Muslim belief and practice in ways that their less self-conscious predecessors would never have imagined. This highly deliberate examination of the faith is what constitutes the Islamic Reformation.

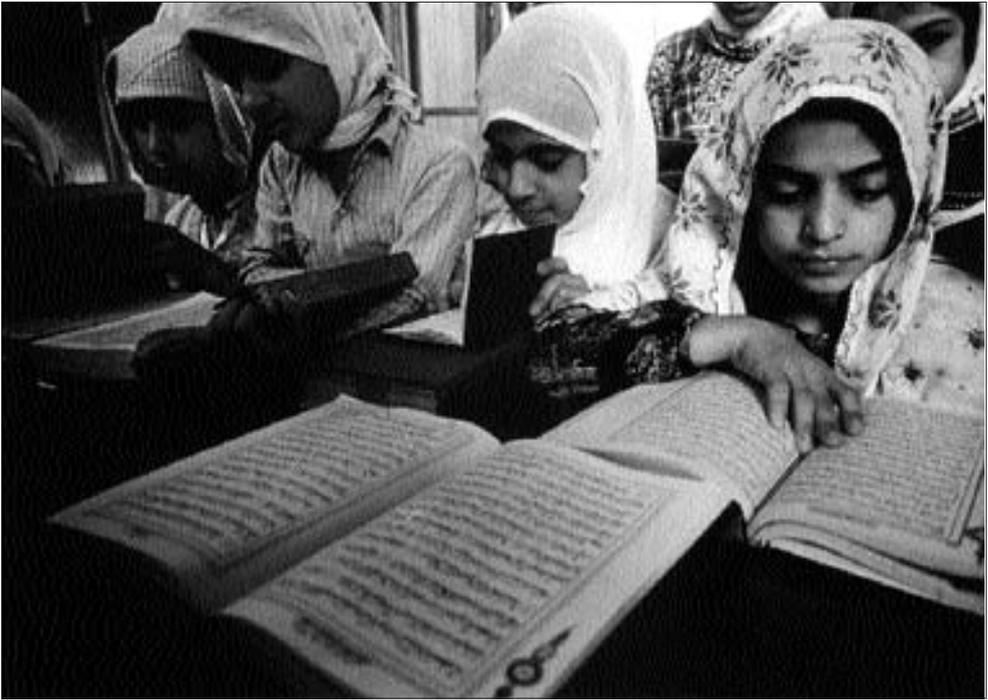
Unfortunately, buzzwords such as “fundamentalism,” and catchy phrases such as Samuel Huntington’s rhyming “West versus Rest” and Daniel Lerner’s alliterative “Mecca or mechanization,” are of little use in understanding this reformation. Indeed, they obscure or even distort the immense spiritual and intellectual ferment that is taking place today among the world’s nearly one billion Muslims, reducing it in most cases to a fanatical rejection of everything modern, liberal, or progressive. To be sure, such fanaticism plays a part in what is hap-

pening—dramatically and violently—but it is far from the whole story.

A far more important element of the Islamic Reformation is the unprecedented access that ordinary people now have to sources of information and knowledge about religion and other aspects of their society. Quite simply, in country after country, government officials, traditional religious scholars, and officially sanctioned preachers are finding it very hard to monopolize the tools of literate culture. For example, when I first ventured into the field as an anthropologist in 1968, I routinely saw people in southern Iraq gather around the literate members of the community, including shopkeepers, to have the newspapers read aloud to them; that same year, in rural Morocco, I was not infrequently asked to translate the formal Arabic of radio newscasts into colloquial Moroccan. By the mid-1970s, however, the need for such translation had dramatically decreased. And in 1992, during the Moroccan parliamentary election campaigns, I observed that young people, even in remote villages, were unafraid to ask the candidates probing questions, because they could now speak the public language of the educated. I also saw a *makhazni*, a low-ranking rural auxiliary policeman, politely but firmly refuse a questionable command from a local Ministry of the Interior official, pointing to written instructions he had received from provincial headquarters. Just a decade earlier, the policeman would have been illiterate and therefore unable to challenge such an order.

In al-Hamra, when I first came to know it, people received “news” from Shaykh `Abdallah. In 1980, when he started his generator to run the electric fans in his guest house, everyone in town knew that visitors with “news” had arrived and that soon the *shaykh* would be relaying it to them (or at least as much of it as he cared to tell). Two years later, when I was again in Oman, families in al-Hamra saw the same TV images of the massacres

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At a religious school in Djarbakir, in eastern Turkey, Muslim girls intently study the Qur'an.

in Beirut's Sabra and Shatila refugee camps that viewers in America did—thanks to a CBS news feed to Oman state television. Today, with paved roads, telephones, electricity, fax machines, and satellite television, al-Hamra is a changed place. “News” is no longer a monopoly of the few, and TV images bring people and places previously at the margin of awareness into the foreground. Among other consequences, this is helping to alter the way large numbers of Muslims, in al-Hamra and elsewhere, think about themselves, their religion, and their politics.

Mass education, the other major catalyst of change, has also gained momentum. In much of the Muslim world, it began to be introduced only after the 1950s, and in many countries considerably later. Morocco, for instance, committed itself to universal schooling after gaining independence from France in 1956. Though in 1957 only 13,000 secondary school diplomas were awarded, and university enrollments remained low, by 1965 there were more than 200,000 students in secondary schools, and some 20,000 in universities. By 1992, secondary school enrollment topped 1.5 million, and university students numbered 240,000. While

illiteracy rates in the general populace remain high—38 percent for men and 62 percent for women—there is now a critical mass of educated people who are able to read and think for themselves without relying on state and religious authorities.

The situation in Oman is more dramatic because the transformation has taken place in a much shorter period. In 1975–76, a mere 22 students graduated from secondary school. Little more than a decade later, in 1987–88, 13,500 did. In 1995, 60,000 graduated; more than 3,500 students were enrolled in postsecondary institutions, including the national university, which had opened in 1986.

Elsewhere the story is much the same, though the starting dates and levels of achievement differ. In Turkey, Indonesia, and Malaysia, mass education has reached every city, town, and village. In Turkey, for instance, adult illiteracy rates as of 1990 were 10 percent for males and 30 percent for females, down from 65 percent and 85 percent, respectively, four decades earlier. Secondary schools are now ubiquitous, and both private and public universities have proliferated. In Indonesia, university

enrollment, only 50,000 in 1960, reached 1.9 million in 1990. Iran also has seen a significant expansion in educational opportunities at all levels. In Egypt (as, for that matter, in Morocco), population growth has outpaced educational expansion; even so, the number of people able to converse intelligently with religious and political authorities, and not just listen to them, has increased dramatically.

So has the market for books, including books about religion and society. One text that has figured centrally in the Islamic Reformation is the ground-breaking *The Book and the Qur'an: A Contemporary Interpretation* (1990), written by Muhammad Shahrur, a Syrian civil engineer. To date, it has sold tens of thousands of copies. Even though circulation of the 800-page book has been banned or discouraged in many Arab countries, photocopy machines and pirate editions (printed in Egypt, among other places) have enabled it to travel across borders.

Shahrur, who was educated in Damascus, Moscow, and Dublin, draws an analogy between the Copernican revolution and Qur'anic interpretation, which for too long, he says, has been shackled by the conventions of medieval jurists: "People believed for a long time that the sun revolved around the moon, but they were unable to explain some phenomena derived from this assumption until one person, human like themselves, said, 'The opposite is true: The earth revolves around the sun.' . . . After a quarter of a century of study and reflection, it dawned on me that we Muslims are shackled by prejudices, some of which are completely opposite the correct perspective."

On issues ranging from the role of women in society to the need for a "creative interaction" with non-Muslim philosophies, Shahrur argues that Muslims should reinterpret sacred texts and apply them to contemporary social and moral issues. Islamic inheritance law, for instance, which provides women a smaller share of any legacy than men, may have been an advance for women in an earlier era, but, he contends, it is discriminatory in modern society. "If Islam is sound for all

times and places," Shahrur says, Muslims must not neglect historical developments and the interaction of different generations. Muslims must act as if "the Prophet just . . . informed us of this Book."

Shahrur's book may one day be seen as a Muslim equivalent of the 95 Theses that Martin Luther nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church in 1517. It took years before Luther's ideas took hold, but eventually even steadfast opponents had to take them into account and modify their ways of thinking and acting. The same may happen with Shahrur's ideas, though even more rapidly. Already, his views have been assailed in 14 books (some longer than his own) and countless magazine articles and sermons.

Shahrur is not alone in attacking conventional religious wisdom and the intolerant certitudes of religious radicals, or in calling for an ongoing interpretation of the application of sacred texts to social and political life. Another Syrian thinker, the secularist Sadiq Jalal al-'Azm, for instance, does the same. In May 1997, a debate between al-'Azm and Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a conservative religious intellectual, was broadcast on al-Jazira Satellite TV (Qatar), and for the first time in the memory of many viewers, the religious conservative came across as the weaker, more defensive voice. That program is unlikely to be rebroadcast on state-controlled television in most Arab nations, where programming on religious and political themes is generally cautious. Nevertheless, satellite technology and videotape render traditional censorship ineffective. Tapes of the debate circulate from hand to hand in Morocco, Oman, Syria, Egypt, and elsewhere.

Other voices also advocate reform. Turkey's Ali Bulaç, a university-based theologian, has captured the imagination of the educated young with his call for authenticity and a reinterpretation of the first years of the Prophet's rule, applying Muhammad's precepts and practices to current controversies about pluralism and civil society. Fethullah Güllen, Turkey's answer to media-savvy American evangelist Billy Graham, appeals to a mass audience. In televised chat shows, interviews, and

occasional sermons, Güllen speaks about Islam and science, democracy, modernity, religious and ideological tolerance, the importance of education, and current events. Because he regards Turkish nationalism as compatible with Islam, Güllen is said to have the ear of Turkey's senior military officers.

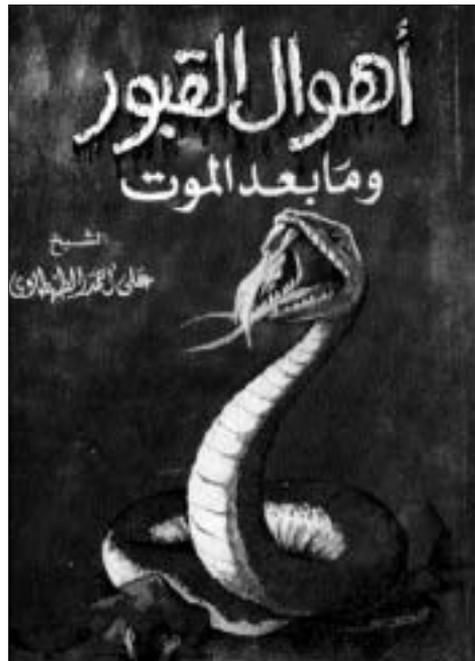
For a pan-Arab audience, Morocco's Sa'id Binsa'id argues that a proper understanding of Islam enjoins dialogue, a willingness to understand the opinions of others, adaptation, and a disposition toward good relations within a framework of civility. Indonesian and Malaysian moderates make very similar arguments. So does Iran's Abdokarim Soroush, who, to the annoyance of more conservative clerics and the government, has captured the religious imagination of Persian readers. His work, in translation, also reaches Turks and others in the Muslim world. In Pakistan, a recent book making an argument similar to Shahrur's, *Qur'anic and Non-Qur'anic Islam* (1997), by Nazir Ahmad, a retired military officer, quickly went into a second printing.

The books of the Islamic Reformation are not all aimed at high-brows. Mass schooling has created a wide audience of people who read but are not literary sophisticates, and there has been an explosive growth in what a French colleague of mine, Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, calls generic "Islamic books"—inexpensive, attractively printed texts intended for such readers. Many address practical questions of how to live as a Muslim in the modern world and the perils of neglecting Islamic obligations, and not all appeal to reason and moderation. Many of these books have bold, eye-catching covers and sensational titles such as *The Terrors of the Grave, or What Follows Death* (1987), while other, more subdued works offer advice to young women on how to live as Muslims today. Often based on the sermons of popular preachers, Islamic books are written in a breezy, colloquial style rather than in the cadences of traditional literary Arabic, and they are sold on sidewalks and outside mosques rather than in bookstores. While Egyptian Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz is considered suc-

cessful if he sells 5,000 copies of one of his novels in a year in his own country, Islamic books often have sales in six figures.

Increasingly in the Muslim world, religious beliefs are self-consciously held, explicitly expressed, and systematized. It is no longer sufficient simply to "be" Muslim and to follow Muslim practices. One must reflect upon Islam and defend one's views. In Oman, one of the few places where all three Muslim traditions—Sunni, Shi'a, and Ibadi—converge, the debates can be spirited indeed, as I learned from a young Omani, who recalled the late-night dormitory arguments he and other students had in secondary school.

Roughly 90 percent of the world's Muslims are Sunni or "orthodox" Muslim. Nine percent—mostly in Iran, but with significant minorities in southern Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and coastal Oman—are Shi'a, or "sectarian," and believe that legitimate religious leadership of the worldwide Muslim community should remain in the hands of descendants of the Prophet's grandson, 'Ali. The Ibadiyya, not as well



The cover of *The Terrors of the Grave, or What Follows Death* (1987) exemplifies the new look in popular religious literature.

known, believe that anyone can become head of the Muslim community, provided such a person possesses the necessary piety and moral qualities. The Ibadiyya are few in number and clustered mostly in northern Oman (where they constitute nearly half the country's population), East Africa, southern Algeria, and Libya.

When I visited al-Hamra in 1979, many Muslims could practice their faith without reducing it to formal principles or comparing it with "other" Muslim or non-Muslim doctrines. Now, however, most of the younger inhabitants of the oasis are aware of what it means to be an Ibadi Muslim and how Ibadi practices and doctrines—on such questions as whether or not believers see God on Judgment Day—differ from Sunni and Shi'i ones. In the early 1980s, when Ibadi university students went to study abroad in places such as Tucson, Arizona, they were shocked to find other Muslim students describing them as kaffirs, or unbelievers, and asked Oman's mufti, an Ibadi religious leader, how to respond. One result was videocassettes and pamphlets explaining Ibadi doctrine and faith and arguing that Ibadi principles agree in most respects with Sunni ones.

The rise of literacy and the spread of communications—with tapes of popular preachers being played incessantly in taxis and other settings, and banned literature being copied almost everywhere—have prompted more Muslims to interpret Islam's texts, classical or modern, and apply them to modern life. They offer advice in popular "how to" pamphlets: how to lead the life of a Muslim woman in a modern city, how to raise children the Islamic way, how to follow Islamic banking and business practices. In other pamphlets and cassettes, often clandestinely circulated, Muslims measure particular regimes by "Islamic" standards. Sometimes, as on the Arabian Peninsula, these standards are progressive, insisting upon governmental integrity and upholding human rights. Often they are reactionary, restricting women's public roles and

advocating religious censorship and control of schools.

In Muslim-majority countries, many regimes court popularity by emphasizing their Islamic credentials and spelling out, in state-approved schoolbooks, standards that governments must meet. In Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other countries, dissidents have succeeded at times in embarrassing the governments by pointing out performances that fall short of such proclaimed standards. Some regimes try by various means to restrict what is said in public. In Oman, for instance, a special government department churns out model sermons for the "guidance" of approved mosque preachers. In Morocco's large cities, mosques are kept locked, except during hours of formal prayer, to prevent their use by unauthorized "study groups." In most countries, the regime carefully regulates broadcast and print media. But through alternative media, including cassettes and photocopies, the voices of dissent and difference continue to be heard.

The particular situation in each country and region varies widely, but everywhere there is a collapse of earlier, hierarchical notions of religious authority based on a claimed mastery of fixed bodies of religious texts and recognition by a prior generation of scholars. In Central Asia in the early 1990s, a Tajik garage mechanic became the leader of the most popular Islamic movement in the region. Even where there are state-appointed religious authorities—as in Oman, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Malaysia, and some of the Central Asian republics—there no longer is any guarantee that their word will be heeded, or even that they themselves will follow the lead of the regime.

No Muslims—whether their outlook be deemed "fundamentalist," "traditionalist," or "modernist"—have been unaffected by the sweeping changes of recent decades. Islam has been democratized. Like Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms in 1521, more and more Muslims today claim attachment to God's unmediated word, as interpreted only by their conscience.

But that does not mean that Muslim tradition is simply being discarded. Rather, it



A wall mural in Lebanon expresses the view of the Shi'i movement *Harakat Amal* that the tree of martyrs is nourished by the blood-soaked "land of the south"—Israeli-occupied south Lebanon.

is being examined and discussed. As the Syrian reformer Muhammad Shahrur well knows, the forces supporting conventional interpretations of God's word remain strong. And many debates are in progress.

This was evident last summer in Damascus in what could be called the "duel of the wedding speeches" (subsequently available on videotape, of course). First, at the wedding of Muhammad Shahrur's daughter, some 600 guests—including many state and Ba'th party officials and one non-Syrian (me)—heard Jawdat Sa'id explain Islamic beliefs and their relation to current events. Then, two days later, at another Damascus wedding, Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, a popular Syrian television preacher who strongly opposes Shahrur's views, spoke in response. After referring to the talk given at the recent wedding of the daughter of "a certain well-known engineer," he declared: "Just as one goes to a medical doctor for illness and an architect to build a house, for Islam one should go only to specialists formally trained in the religious sciences."

The Islamic Reformation is a protean phenomenon, its ultimate outcome far from clear. Shahrur maintains that democ-

racy is a fundamental tenet of Islam, and his proposition seems to have growing appeal. But most Arab regimes remain authoritarian. In Algeria, where Islamist radicals employ terrorism against a brutally repressive military regime, and in certain other Muslim countries, the new Islamic self-consciousness and fervor may result in an even more severe authoritarianism, at least in the short run. Elsewhere—in Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other Arabian Peninsula states, Morocco, and Egypt—conservative or relatively liberal regimes have sought to accommodate (or at least to appear to accommodate) Islamist views. In still other countries, such as Jordan, regimes have tried to balance Islamist concerns with secular politics, and to incorporate religious politics into a parliamentary system.

Over the long term, rising literacy and education, together with the proliferation of new media, may well foster the growth of pluralism, tolerance, and civility. People learn from experience, at least sometimes. In the early 1980s, for example, I heard many people in the Gulf speak with admiration of the Islamic revolution in Iran. By the middle of that decade, the same people—committed Muslim activists who



Islamic tradition and modern technology come together in a television studio in Istanbul in 1996.

wanted to see Islamic values permeate political and social life—were decidedly cool to the revolution. In Iran today, there is much frustration with the dominant conservative and extremist mullahs. The clash of views was evident at the Islamic summit meeting in Tehran last December. Although Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, excoriated the United States and the West, Iranian President Muhammad Khatemi, elected in an unexpected landslide last May, spoke of Islam's "spirit of justice and tolerance," and urged learning from "the positive accomplishments of the Western civil society."

Meanwhile, both the Islamist extremism in Algeria and its state-sponsored counterpart there have dampened the appeal to Moroccans of a more "Islamic" government, and Taliban rule in Afghanistan serves as a negative example to all neighboring countries. In Jordan and Lebanon, where Islamists have been drawn into the electoral process, there has been a gradual shift away from radicalism, as Islamist parties seek to appeal to wider constituencies.

In Turkey, people's views have been evolving rapidly. In 1992, 1993, and 1994, rural and urban Turks were asked whether Turkey was "Muslim," "European," or "both." Some 20 percent consistently said "European." But the proportion that

answered "Muslim" shrank from 37 percent in 1992 to 25 percent in 1994, while the segment that responded "both" correspondingly grew—from 25 percent to 36. Although figures for later years are not available, it is likely that this trend toward embracing both European and Muslim identities has continued. Islamic activists outside the Refah Party are seeking to encourage the spread of Islamic values, including respect for the rights of non-Muslims and education for both women and men at all levels of Turkish society. Even the "fundamentalist" Refah Party is credited with drawing women into grassroots politics, though it resists giving them leadership roles.

The Muslim world has its share of militant fanatics, and they have been responsible for a great deal of death and destruction. Only last November, for instance, Islamic militants who have been seeking to destabilize the Egyptian government massacred 58 foreign tourists at a temple in Luxor. Just days before that, newspaper front pages told of the convictions of Muslim extremists in connection with the 1993 bombing of New York's World Trade Center, carried out to punish the United States for its support of Israel. But the Muslim world cer-

tainly has no monopoly on fanaticism or terrorism, as the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City attests.

It is dangerously misleading to view developments in the Muslim world in terms of a clash between Islamic “fundamentalists” and Western civilization. There is a “fundamentalist” crisis, Malaysia’s Muhammad Mahathir said recently, but it is not the one perceived by religious and political authorities in many Muslim-majority countries and by some Western commentators. The real crisis, he said—correctly, in my view—lies in the need to encourage more Muslims to shun the extremism of the few and to get back to the true fundamentals of their faith—including a commitment to tolerance and civility. Indeed, the Qur’an itself (Sura 5, Verse 48) appears to give a final answer concerning the role of the Muslim community in a multicomunity world: “To each among you, we have prescribed a law and a way for acting. If God had so willed, he might have made you a single community, but [he has not done so] that he may test you in what he has given you; so compete in goodness.”

Civility and tolerance will not prevail without struggle. The ideals of civil society, democracy, and open debate over basic values—ideals that are explicit in the works of Syria’s Muhammad Shahrur, Turkey’s Fethullah Güllen, and Iran’s Abdokarim Soroush—are up against strong vested interests. These ideals threaten the sinecures of many preachers, specialists in religious law, educators, and clerics. Not surprisingly, some efforts at reform have been met with threats of violence.

But what I call the Islamic Reformation is nevertheless in progress. Many Muslims, of course, would resist the analogy with the Protestant Reformation. Shortly before writing this essay, I visited Turkey’s Fethullah Güllen. At the end of a spirited discussion on how the shift from face-to-face meetings to television had influenced his message, I

told him of the title I had in mind for my essay: “Inside the Islamic Reformation.” With polite amusement, he replied, “It’s your title, not mine.” Güllen explained that he saw his work—which includes the idea that there is no contradiction between an Islamic worldview and a scientific one—as an effort to persuade people to understand and live by the basic teachings of Islam. I pointed out that Martin Luther had said something very similar. Luther saw his work as returning to the fundamentals of belief, not creating anything new. Only later did others see his ideas and actions as instigating the “Reformation.”

I must concede, however, that the analogy with the Protestant Reformation is imperfect. In the Muslim world today, there is no one central figure or hierarchy of authority against whom the people are rebelling. There are instead many authorities, and, despite numerous claims to the contrary, no movement or individual speaks for all Muslims. Many thinkers who write about Islam freely admit this. Muhammad Shahrur, for instance, acknowledges that his upbringing as an Arab nationalist has deeply influenced his thinking about Islam. Indonesia’s moderate Nurcholish Madjid likewise recognizes that his writings on the future of Islamic civil society appeal mostly to Indonesians. Shī’i thinkers such as the Iraqi *shaykh* al-Rikabi, now living in Damascus, admit that their primary audience is the Shī’a.

The recognition by these and other leading reformers in the Muslim world today that different religious beliefs and practices exist, and that they should be tolerated and debated, is one reason to be hopeful about the eventual outcome of the Islamic Reformation. Perhaps even Shahrur’s notion that democracy is a fundamental tenet of Islam will take root and flower. In any case, whatever the outcome, the Islamic Reformation is under way.

CURRENT BOOKS

The Real Charms of the Bourgeoisie

PLEASURE WARS:

The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud.

By Peter Gay. Norton. 301 pp. \$29.95

JOHANNES BRAHMS:

A Biography.

By Jan Swafford. Knopf. 679 pp. \$35

by S. Frederick Starr

Short of outright expletives, few words pack more reproach than *bourgeois*. Adjective or noun, this French import is conveniently at hand whenever you need to dismiss someone as materialistic, vulgar, preachy, egotistic, smug, conventional, repressive, predatory, or philistine. *Middle class* carries some of the same opprobrium, but in the 19th century it was widely used to connote such solid virtues as hard work, practicality, and sound judgment. To get around the ambiguity, the English-speaking world adopted *bourgeois*. The same problem exists in German, where a restaurant might proudly advertise its *bürgerlich* fare. Germans, too, filled the opprobrium deficit by picking up *bourgeois*. So did the Russians: by 1917 any Moscow worker knew that his real enemies were the rapacious and brutal *burzhui* and all the institutions they controlled.

Amazingly, this use of the term *bourgeois*, born in the “bourgeois” 19th century, survived most of the 20th century intact. To Marxists, the historic mission of the proletariat was to overthrow the bourgeoisie, while Lenin, himself a bourgeois whose forebears had been ennobled as a reward for hard work, hated his class so grandly that he was unwilling to await the natural death that Marx predicted for it and set out instead to kill it. Hitler, a petit bourgeois, had only contempt for German *Bürgertum*. Modernists and members of the artistic avant-garde in both Europe and America, no friends of Nazism and for the most part too anarchistic to embrace true Leninism, also despised the bourgeoisie. Somehow all this fed directly into the lexicon of American academia, so that several

generations of presumably baffled middle-class American students learned that it was people just like themselves who oppressed the poor, subjugated women, and imposed imperialism abroad.

Until now. Beginning in the 1970s and with increasing momentum in the '80s and '90s, scholars in Europe and America have looked with fresh eyes at the class their predecessors loved to hate. The recent scholarship seeks not to deny the sins committed by the bourgeoisie—but to understand the dilemmas faced by the men and women of the new capitalist and managerial class and to appreciate their undeniable achievements in the realms of art and culture. Thus, Stefan Collini rehabilitated Britain’s “public moralists” (1991), Thomas Walter Lacquer ruminated on middle-class views on religion (1976), James J. Sheehan wrote appreciatively on 19th-century German liberalism (1978), Thomas C. Owen painted a respectful group portrait of Russia’s merchant princes (1981), and Adeline Daumard comprehensively reassessed the French bourgeoisie who gave rise to all the fuss in the first place (1978).

Many factors today are swelling this stream to flood stage. First, the culture wars of the 1960s have by now largely played out. The partisans have aged and often prospered, causing them to appear to a younger generation more like the bourgeoisie they attack than the cultural radicals they profess to idolize. The natural dialectic between generations has been intensified by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of the old bour-

geoisie-baiting parties elsewhere. Neoconservative trends, with their hostility to the state, have also fueled the change, as have neoliberal interests in civil society and the role of voluntary associations. There may as yet be no bourgeois studies departments, but the scholarly materials for such a program are rapidly accumulating.

None in Europe or America is closer to the heart of this rediscovery than historian Peter Gay of Yale University. Beginning with his volume *The Education of the Senses* (1984), followed by *The Tender Passion* (1986), *The Cultivation of Hatred* (1993), and *The Naked Heart* (1995), he has truly chronicled *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*. Now, in the masterly final volume of the series, he deals with the 19th century's great struggles over art in all its dimensions.

Pleasure Wars offers engrossing chapters on the economics of the arts, the strange passion of collecting, and the rise of "critics" as go-betweens linking artist and public. The Freudian analysis of earlier volumes in the series, for which he was both praised and damned, is muted here. Instead, he gives a wonderfully nuanced account of the life of the arts in northern and central Europe, Britain, and the United States, in the age when most of the cultural institutions that surround us today were founded. In passages that read like the histories of many American cities, he recounts the cultural crusades of self-confident Manchester businessmen and those of their less confident peers on the

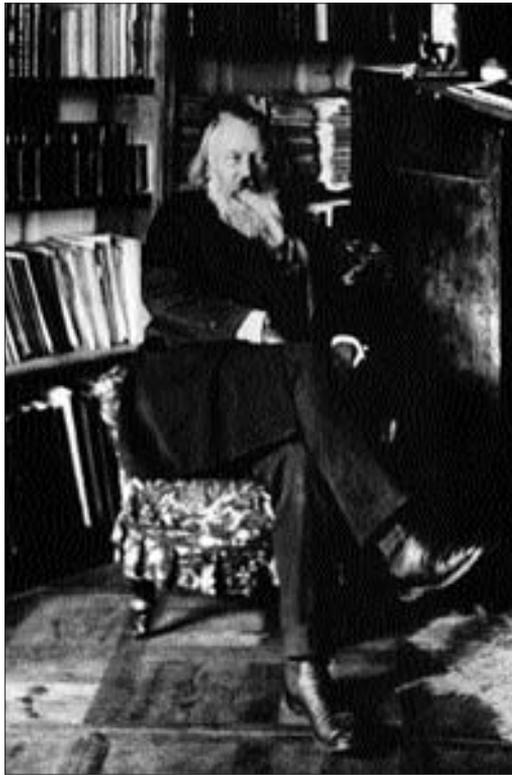
Continent. While paying close attention to regional differences, the author traces a bigger picture in which many of yesterday's villains emerge, if not as heroes, at least as three-dimensional, risk-taking, often discriminating people. In short, he rescues the much-abused middle class from what he calls "poorly researched and poorly argued anti-bourgeois clichés dressed up as scholarship."

The heart of this volume is Gay's diagnosis and history of "bourgeoisophobia," the tendency—especially widespread among sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie itself—to

see the middle class as the embodiment of everything banal, grim, and repressive. All the usual suspects are included among Gay's bourgeoisophobes, from Flaubert and Marx to Nietzsche. Acknowledging that their poisoned arrows often hit the mark, Gay nonetheless turns the usual story on its head, focusing on the bourgeoisophobes themselves, rather than on the target of their wrath. In the process, he forces several of their number to lie on the psychiatrist's couch where their

victims ordinarily squirm. It makes for immensely entertaining reading.

Judged by the best-known portrait of Johannes Brahms (1833–97), the Viennese composer was the epitome of the stolid bourgeois whom the critics of that class view with such contempt. There he sits at the piano, portly and self-satisfied, wrapped in a gloomy dark frock coat, smoking a cigar, and hiding his personality (if he has one) behind a full beard. Somewhere on a shelf out of sight are the piles of musical manuscripts by the old



Brahms in his study

masters which he collected the way parvenu businessmen collected old paintings.

Brahms's routine was similarly bourgeois. A workaholic, he often began the day by doing counterpoint exercises, the musical equivalent of step aerobics. He would end it with a few friends, gruffly talking politics (he was, of course, a good liberal), swapping nasty jokes over plates of heavy Viennese fare washed down with plenty of wine at the Café Czarda, and occasionally culminating the evening with a visit to prostitutes. In short, he lived the kind of earnest, repressed existence centering on work and self that any misogynist bachelor accountant or lawyer might have lived in the late 19th century. No wonder Brahms became the favorite whipping boy of musical modernists of his own and later generations.

The only problem with this picture is that Brahms's music touches the emotions in a way the work of few other composers can do. Although his contemporaries initially found his chamber music in particular inaccessible and "difficult," they eventually acclaimed him as the "third B," the successor to Bach and Beethoven. When Brahms died, life in Vienna came to a halt as the imperial city mourned the loss of the man who for a generation had expressed the deepest feelings of its musical public. Today, when nearly all the values and institutions of Brahms's world have crumbled, the music of this stolid burgher from Hamburg still exercises a remarkable power over our emotions.

Jan Swafford, whose biography of Charles Ives received warm praise in these pages, set out to discover the wellsprings of Brahms's achievement. He pays due attention to Brahms's extraordinary technical proficiency, the consummate sense of craftsmanship that led the composer to destroy countless works that did not meet his high standards. The author also acknowledges Brahms's profound appreciation for the music of previous masters, which made even his earliest compositions seem like the culmination of a line of succession stretching back centuries.

But if these qualities are necessary ele-

ments of Brahms's achievement, they are by no means sufficient to account for it. They do not help us understand the arresting G Major String Quintet, the rhapsodic F# Minor Sonata for piano, the "dark well" of his Fourth Symphony, or the haunting Quintet for Clarinet and Strings. After all, there were other proficient and historically informed composers in the 19th century whose works are now justly forgotten. And so Swafford carefully examines Brahms's private life in search of what might have imparted the emotional cast to his compositions. Brahms took extraordinary pains to make the biographer's task difficult, burning nearly all of his voluminous correspondence and sidestepping the prying questions put to him by contemporaries. Still, enough survives to enable Swafford to draw a picture of a man immersed in private pain that kept him from the happy, bourgeois family life of which he dreamed.

Employing the kind of "soft" psychoanalytical approach that Peter Gay uses so effectively in his cameo biographies, Swafford traces Brahms's agony to his early youth, when his father, a struggling bandsman, forced him to earn money playing piano for carousing sailors and prostitutes in Hamburg's notorious St. Pauli district. In the 20th century, work as a pianist in New Orleans's red-light district led Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton to create a boisterous music that celebrates earthiness and sensuality. For Brahms, the aspiring young burgher from an impoverished Lutheran family, the experience was markedly different. Something happened at the bordello in St. Pauli—we do not know precisely what, though Brahms sometimes alluded to it—that cast a dark shadow over his private world. He fell in love often, usually with teenage girls from good families who possessed wonderful singing voices, but he never married. His most sustained tie with any woman was with Robert Schumann's widow, Clara, a gifted pianist and composer who was his senior by more than a decade. She loved Johannes, but he kept her at arm's length and at times treated her with a coldness that seems brutal. Brahms remained immersed in his private agony of yearning,

love, and loss.

It is quite possible that Brahms, on one of his frequent walks in Vienna's Prater, encountered young Dr. Sigmund Freud, who was beginning his epochal studies during the last years of Brahms's life. Had Freud taken Brahms as a patient, he might have helped the composer recognize and overcome his inner dilemmas. Instead, Brahms, unable or unwilling to express his agony verbally, allowed it to find expression in his music. As Swafford argues, it guided his choice of themes, harmonic expressions, and metrics, imparting the mood of elegiac lyricism that suffuses so many of his compositions. Here, then, was a classic case of "bourgeois" repression, directed not toward others but toward himself, and with consequences that have

immensely enriched the lives of millions of Brahms listeners from his day to ours.

Just as Gay's book can be seen as less critique than appreciation of the bourgeois culture makers, so Swafford's biography is a warmly sympathetic account of an artist who shrank from sympathy. Delving behind the beard, cigar, raunchy tales, and gruff misogyny, Swafford has rescued a private person who was sensitive, vulnerable, and, in the biographer's word, feminine. By comparison, Brahms's critics among the modernists and "bourgeoisophobes," both in his day and ours, seem repressed, cold, and, yes, philistine.

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Spycraft and Soulcraft

THE FILE:

A Personal History.

By Timothy Garton Ash.

Knopf. 262 pp. \$23

by William McPherson

Two years after the opening of the Berlin Wall and one year after the unification of the two Germans, the Bundestag voted to open the files of East Germany's infamously efficient secret police as of January 2, 1992. Thereafter, anyone who had a file could read it (under carefully regulated conditions designed to protect the privacy of the innocent). There were six million of them, a file for one of every three citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR)—and one for the British historian, journalist, and author Timothy Garton Ash as well.

The files filled 125 miles of shelves. For the GDR to maintain this archive of shame and keep it current required, in the last year of its operation, more than 90,000 full-time workers and 170,000 unofficial collaborators, giving about one of every 50 adult East Germans a direct connection with the Ministry for State Security. While not unique in the extent of its spying on

citizens, Germany was and is unique in bringing the files to light—which, like the spying, has proved to be a vast and costly undertaking. In 1996 alone, Garton Ash tells us, the budget for the Gauck Authority, which administers the Stasi's voluminous records, was 234.3 million deutsche marks, about \$164 million, more than the entire defense budget of Lithuania.

But the personal costs were something else again. Families were split, lives shattered, friendships destroyed. The sense of betrayal was beyond imagining. To cite one well-known example, East German dissident Vera Wollenberger was constantly harassed by the Stasi, was once imprisoned, and was fired from her job. After unification she successfully ran for parliament, where she was instrumental in formulating the law that provided access to the files. Reading her own, she discovered that the man code-named Donald, who



Among the Stasi files

had most assiduously informed on her, could be no one but her husband, the father of her children.

Such knowledge can be costly indeed, and the outlines of Wollenberger's terrible story are unfortunately not unique. In the circumstances of Eastern and Central Europe, however, ignorance is neither blissful nor cheap; it comes with its own high price—I would say a higher price—in cynicism, suspicion, and despair. The experience of countries less open and less committed to coming to terms with the past than Germany, those countries that did not have a western half to assist in their decommunization (and pay the expenses of it), attests to that.

As has been remarked, evil often has a banal look. As a file, Garton Ash's is not remarkable; it is his excavation of it that fascinates. In 1978, as a 23-year-old student fresh out of Oxford, Garton Ash set off for Berlin to research his doctoral thesis on Germany in the Third Reich. During the course of his time there, his attention gradually shifted from Hitler's Germany to Erich Honeker's. After living in West Berlin for a year and a half, he passed through Checkpoint Charlie in January 1980 to East Berlin, where he had been offered a place as a research student at Humboldt University. He stayed there nine months, during which the Stasi accumulated most of his 325-page file. (Its size was fairly modest; the dissident singer Wolf

Biermann merited 40,000 pages.) In it he was given the code name Romeo, which Garton Ash would prefer to believe (who wouldn't?) referred to his youthful romantic adventures rather than to his new, dark-blue Alfa Romeo, which must have attracted considerable attention in the homeland of the Trabant.

After 15 years and with five books to his credit—distinguished studies of Poland, Germany, and Central Europe—he returned to

an undivided Berlin in order “to investigate their investigation of me.” That is, he intended to read his file, to compare it with his own contemporaneous notes, memories, and diaries, and to meet again the five who had informed on him (one of them an English communist teaching in East Berlin) and the officers who hired them. He also wanted to learn what “makes one person a resistance fighter and another the faithful servant of a dictatorship—this man a Stauffenberg, that a Speer?” He is less successful in answering that question, which is, finally, unanswerable. As retired intelligence officers of both sides wanted him to understand, “their best agents were always the volunteers.”

Garton Ash had been fascinated, as he puts it, with spies and spying since his undergraduate days at Oxford, when he was first approached by MI6, the Secret Intelligence Service. Two years later, shortly before leaving for Berlin, he applied to the service, returned from Berlin to take the exams, and later submitted to a long interview and finally a medical check and security examination. He was intrigued but uneasy, especially after an MI6 officer told him in reference to a planned trip to the Soviet bloc, “We would rather have you under our control.” Control, of course, was what got to him. Eventually he let the matter of his application trail off. Years later, after he had started work on his Stasi file, he was again

approached by British intelligence and asked if he would keep an eye from time to time on certain students and visitors to Oxford, where he teaches. He declined, but decided then to do a little investigating of “our British secret world.” He’s got a file there too, he was told, where he is registered as a “nonadversarial” for having “assisted SIS.” The contents of that file remain closed; no, he cannot see it.

There is of course, a certain satisfaction (along with a lot of other emotions) in knowing that one is important enough to *have* a file. In Berlin, there exists now a kind of “file envy,” the author tells us, the file as status symbol. Among the students, it is used by young men as an aid to the seduction of “luscious Sabine.” (When Sabine learns that in fact Joachim has no file, she moves on to someone who does.) Vanity crosses all borders, but it is not under investigation in this book.

His Stasi file becomes for Garton Ash what the cookie was for Proust, the key to a youthful and romantic lost time in the city where the opposing forces in the Cold War met head on, where the values of free society with all its attendant messiness confronted, on the other side of that very high Wall, the clear, clean lines of authoritarian dictatorship. Which is rather like the Wall itself, one might note (although the author does not): viewed from the west it was covered with graffiti; from the east it was austere, white as chalk, unapproachable. Seldom in life are lines so clear-cut.

This book is, in part, a rumination on time and the memories that the file unlocked. The temptation, as the author says, is always to pick and choose our past, but “we must take it all or leave it all.” What prevents his picking and choosing, what gives rein to the imagination, are his training as a historian, the “special truth tests” to which he must always submit—either something happened or it did not—and the scrupulously recorded details in his file, even when those details are wrong, as they often are. Imagination and memory are tempered here by fact.

When the facts in the file are right, they tend to be absurd, and absurdly detailed. On a particular day when he was living in

West Berlin, he bought three newspapers at 4:07 P.M. in the upper station concourse on the eastern side of the Wall. The newspapers are named. Eight minutes later, he greeted “a female person with handshake and kiss on the cheek.” The woman wore a red beret and carried a brown shoulder bag; Garton Ash wore a green jacket. And so on, and so on, through a series of coffees and restaurants until he returns by train to West Berlin at 11:55 P.M. and the surveillance is terminated. This is intelligence? Ridiculously, yes—although, had the situation been different, it might have been consequential, and not so ridiculous, either.

Other items in his file are more sinister. There is a careful description of the room he lives in. Telephones are tapped. (“Their equipment could be programmed to record any conversation in which a particular word or name was mentioned.”) His notes and papers are photographed during a clandestine search of his luggage at Schoenefeld Airport. He is followed and secretly photographed. His trips to Poland come under serious scrutiny. The file even contains copies of the references written by his Oxford tutors for the British Council. And then there are the informers, the “unofficial collaborators,” to one degree or another friends, who, although they did him no serious damage, provided a continuous feed of information to the hungry functionaries of the Stasi. (Under the circumstances, the playwright Arthur Miller’s blurb on *The File’s* book jacket—“No population was as closely watched for signs of dissidence, although Hoover’s FBI came fairly close at times”—is laughable. Even in its wildest excesses, the FBI never approached the scale, the thoroughness, or the physical menace—poisonings, irradiation, and the like—posed by any Eastern European secret police agency.)

The Stasi was interested in Garton Ash not so much for his studies as for his work as a journalist for *The Spectator* and the BBC, and for his growing connection to the Solidarity movement in Poland, the subject of one of his later books. For the Stasi, as for all the Communist intelli-

gence organs, “a Western journalist and a Western spy were both agents of Western intelligence-gathering, and both alike threats to the security of the communist system.” They were right, although not in the way they understood it. Eventually all of this and the book he published on East Germany got him banned from the country.

The author’s file survived, but many did not. In the offices of the Gauck Authority, which had been the Stasi’s central archive (“a ministry of truth occupying the former ministry of fear” is how Garton Ash describes it), is something called the “copper cauldron.” Once intended to house in an interference-free zone “a vast new computer system containing all the information on everybody,” it now contains “hundreds of sacks stuffed with tiny pieces of paper: documents torn up in the weeks between the beginning of mass protest in the autumn of 1989 and the storming of the ministry in 1990.” The Gauck Authority is attempting to piece them together. Although the shredders and incinerators and bonfires were busy all over the former Warsaw Pact as the old guys tried to save their skins while the regimes they supported were falling—and after they fell as well—other countries were not so careful to save the scraps. As I write this I am looking at the charred remains of files from the Romanian secret police, picked up from a remote pit where tons of them had been dumped and set afire several months after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime. Some of the files found there postdate the revolution of 1989.

In Germany, this shredding and burning of the most sensitive files temporarily stopped when the Stasi headquarters

were occupied in January 1990. “But then, in an extraordinary decision of the Round Table negotiating the transition from communist rule, the foreign intelligence service, alone among all the departments of the Stasi, was formally empowered to continue its own ‘self-dissolution.’” Most of the records of that branch have since been destroyed—or as is sometimes said, and as Garton Ash reports, transported in part to Moscow. Curious. Perhaps it was convenient for everyone that the records be destroyed or moved. Perhaps the records were too dangerous, not only to the East but to the West, which in the defense of liberty played some extreme games of its own.

So what is one to conclude? “What you find here, in the files,” Garton Ash writes, “is less malice than human weakness, a vast anthology of human weakness. And when you talk to those involved, what you find is less deliberate dishonesty than our almost infinite capacity for self-deception. If only I had met, on this search, a single clearly evil person. But they were all just weak, shaped by circumstances, self-deceiving; human, all too human. Yet the sum of their actions was a great evil.”

And, beyond the scope of Garton Ash’s search through his own file, some of the perpetrators did evil, too. The costs of bringing out this truth, of exposing the files to light and history, are enormous, but the benefits are greater.

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The Reluctant President

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS:
A Public Life, a Private Life.

By Paul C. Nagel. Knopf. 432 pp. \$30

by *Kenneth Silverman*

Beginning at age 11, John Quincy Adams kept a diary for nearly 70 years. It makes a Great Wall of self-reflec-

tion that, with related material, stretches across nearly 50 reels of the Adams Papers microfilm. Paul Nagel, author of two

books about the John Adams family, is the first biographer to explore this gigadocument beginning to end. The result is an affecting narrative of JQA's inner journey, tracking his conflicted feelings about politics, his lifelong literary ambitions, and his dismal evaluations of his own worth.

Adams (1767–1848) chose to spend much of his life in the public eye, beginning in 1794 with his appointment as American minister to the Netherlands. From then on, he manned one high-visibility post after another: minister to Prussia, Massachusetts state senator, U.S. senator, minister to Russia, minister to England, secretary of state, president of the United States (1825–29), and finally member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Yet he once announced that he would rather clean filth from the streets of Boston than be a politician.

Street cleaners got thanked; independent-minded politicians got dumped on. Adams's support in the Senate for an embargo halting exports from American ports (part of an effort to remain neutral in the war between Britain and France) brought down on him the outrage of fellow Federalists and the wisecrack that he represented not Massachusetts but Napoleon. In his first annual message as president, he called for the federal government to foster human progress by improving patent laws, funding geographical exploration, and establishing an astronomical observatory—visionary prospects that drew jeers in Congress and the press and died aborning. (Nagel joins a consensus in judging Adams's presidency a “hapless failure.”) When the ex-president returned to Washington as a House member representing the Plymouth district, his passionate campaign to repeal the new gag rule—by which all petitions concerning slavery

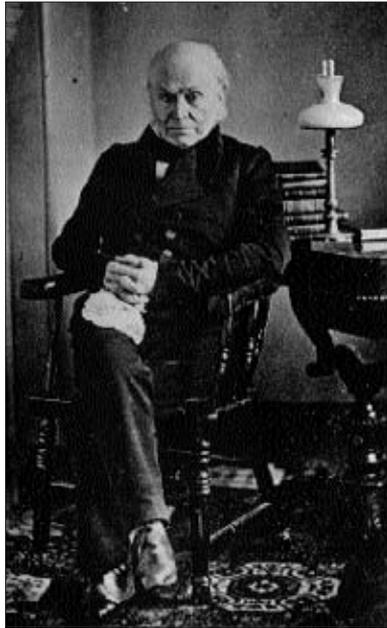
were tabled—led him so far as to bring up the possibility of disunion. From the floor of the Southern-dominated House came shouts of “Expel him! Expel him!” and a resolution accusing him of high treason.

Adams's pleasure in the excitement of public service was undermined not only by partisan abuse but by his reverence for literature. “Could I have chosen my own genius and condition,” he wrote, “I should have made myself a great poet.” During the seven years of his youth he spent abroad with his father, he read Alexander Pope, John Dryden, and Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*; mastered

French and rendered the fables of Jean de La Fontaine into English; and haunted the bookshops of Paris, London, and St. Petersburg. After returning to America in his teens, he met the Connecticut poet John Trumbull, author of the mock-epical *M'Fingal*, a work, Adams admiringly said, “in which Americans have endeavored to soar as high as European bards.” Bored with studying law after graduating from Harvard College, he experimented with different verse forms and indited

his first sustained poem, a satirical portrait of nine young women entitled “A Vision,” influenced by Trumbull's *Progress of Dulness*.

The political rough-and-tumble of Adams's adult life put hardly a crimp in his literary ambitions. At least at first, he treated his ministerial posts as sinecures, “a mode of life which will allow me leisure for my private pursuits and literary studies.” When serving at the court of Prussia he read Gotthold Lessing and Johann Schiller, published essays on German literature and culture in Joseph Dennie's *Port Folio*, and translated Christoph Wieland's 7,300-line *Oberon* (to relieve



the strain, he translated Juvenal). His passion for language did not desert him in the Senate. Between sessions he served as the first Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard, a service that resulted in his two-volume *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory*. Over the years he kept versifying—hymns and Psalm paraphrases, amatory verse, an ode on justice, and the lengthy *Dermot MacMorrough or the Conquest of Ireland*, which reached a second edition. He carried on a long correspondence with the actor James H. Hackett concerning the character of Hamlet. Adams considered the publication of these letters in 1844 “more tickling to my vanity than it was to be elected President of the United States.”

When he came to marry, Adams was drawn less to a possible first lady than to a muse. Schooled in Nantes, Louisa (née Johnson) Adams spoke French, played harp and piano, and wrote poems, plays, and essays. They read aloud to each other—Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, Sir Walter Scott, Maria Edgeworth. He copied out for her lines from John Donne’s lubricious “To His Mistress Going to Bed,” including the couplet “Off with that wyerie Coronet and shew / The haiery Diademe which on you doth grow.” Adams may be the first and last president to have read Donne, but he joins an expanding list in on-the-record sensuality. He rated Byron’s *Don Juan* “very licentious and very delightful.” His almanac during his early twenties intimates encounters with prostitutes or lower-class pickups in Boston: “my taste,” he explained to himself, “is naturally depraved.” He fancied delectable food and drink, and when leaving England to become secretary of state left behind for sale 560 bottles of claret and 298 of champagne.

Despite Adams’s conviction that authorship eclipsed “every other occupation,” a settled devotion to poetry would not have carried him far. The emotional temperature of the verse that Nagel quotes rises at best to muffled indignation, as if the astringent hauteur of Yeats were struggling to be heard above the soft-bellied platitudinizing of Longfellow:

The man tenacious of his trust,
True to his purpose fair and just,
With equal scorn defies
The rabble’s rage, the tyrant’s frown.

Wielding his pen during the period that brought to prominence Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the Transcendentalists, Adams remained on the far outskirts of American literary life, as he conceded in calling himself “one of the smallest poets of my country.”

The confession of incapacity is typical. Over and over in his diaries, Adams lashed himself for “slowness of comprehension,” for floundering “spell bound in the circle of mediocrity,” for being a “commonplace personage,” “a mere slave to circumstance!—nothing of the better sort of clay about me.” His chronic feelings of indolence, failure, and shortcoming, Nagel shows, grew out of his hunger for applause and renown, which in turn stemmed from his parents’ towering demand that he achieve something of significance on the stage of world history. “If you do not rise to the head not only of your profession, but of your country,” John Adams warned him, “it will be owing to your own *Laziness, Slovenliness, and Obstinacy.*” Abigail Adams, here a sort of stage mother of the early republic, pushed him too: “let your ambition be engaged to become eminent.” Adams evidently sensed how the racket his parents’ querulous voices made in his head had left him a self-reviling insomniac. When his mother lay dying of typhus in 1818, he did not travel from Washington to Massachusetts to come to her bedside, or even to attend her funeral. He began but never finished a biography of his father, finding endless excuses not to work on it.

Nothing and no one seems to have escaped Adams’s lust for the better-than-best. He turned even his relaxations into ordeals. When swimming for exercise in the Potomac, he strove day after day to see how much farther he could go before touching bottom, and stiffened the challenge by swimming clothed. He gave up chess because losing enraged him, he said, “to a degree bordering upon madness.” He

tried to inspire in his sons what he called “the sublime Platonic ideal of aiming at ideal excellence,” and inevitably thought them, too, withered by the “blast of mediocrity.” He forbade his son John to visit him in Washington from Harvard until he ranked among the top 10 students; without such a sign of industry and high achievement, “I would feel nothing but sorrow and shame in your presence.” Seeing the nation itself as a collective of Adamsses, he exhorted Americans not to “slumber in indolence” and thus “doom ourselves to perpetual inferiority.” His scorn for the average brought him a reputation for being harsh, tactless, arrogant, a world-class grouch.

In accounting for his own failure to become great, Adams singled out his susceptibility to distraction. Genius, he believed, was “nothing but the power of applying the mind to its object.” Unable to concentrate his energies, however, he often took up projects only to put them aside, leaving “the voyage of my life in the shallows.” Nagel proposes that the castoffs may have represented “sublimated rebellion” against his parents’ nonstop prodding.

The book entertains few other speculations. Adams’s intervals of seemingly clinical depression are discussed, briefly and solemnly, in terms of serotonin levels. Clearly no fan of psychobiography, Nagel largely passes over Adams’s damaging, unacknowledged rivalry with his father. It surfaces, for instance, in a meditation that Adams wrote in 1824 as he waited to hear whether he had won or lost the presidency: “To me the alternatives are both distressing in prospect, and the most formidable is that of success. All the danger is on the pinnacle. The humiliation of failure will be so much more than compensated by the safety in which it will leave me that I

ought to regard it as a consummation devoutly to be wished.” The remark smacks of both wishing and fearing to stand higher than his father, and a tormented need simultaneously to succeed and fail.

Nagel’s unwillingness to psychologize has its advantages. It leaves uninterrupted the good story he has to tell of a life crowded with incident—maybe too crowded for a biography of this length. The narrative whizzes by some consequential events, including Adams’s work in framing the Monroe Doctrine and his eight-hour closing argument before the Supreme Court in behalf of 39 Africans who had mutinied on the slave ship *Amistad*. Still, the author’s economical recounting of Adams’s many personal trials is often moving. JQA’s gambling, first-born son, George Washington Adams, apparently killed himself after fathering an illegitimate child. And the alcoholism of his son John made his life “Indian torture,” he said, “roasting to death by a slow fire.”

The most wrenching part of the book is Nagel’s dramatization of Adams’s octogenarian last years. Still eating and drinking too much, railing so savagely against slaveholders that some House members called him insane, he knew himself to be for all that “a tree dying downward from the top”—weepy, drooling, unable to remember the French poetry his wife read to him. At the end he sought not to be great but simply to calm himself, to purge, he said, “every sentiment of animosity, anger, and resentment against any and every fellow creature of the human family.” One finishes this strong biography regarding him in a like spirit of tenderness and awe.

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Arts & Letters

IMPRESSIONISM: *Reflections and Perceptions.*

By Meyer Schapiro. George Braziller.
359 pp. \$50

As a professor of art history at Columbia University for many years, the inimitable Meyer Schapiro dominated the field with an approach that was at once erudite and personal. A mythic talker, Schapiro was famous for his brilliant lectures, his performance art with slides. When he died in 1996, he was in the midst of reworking a series of his lectures on Impressionism for publication. Now, thanks to the efforts of his widow and his editor, the manuscript has become a handsome hardcover book with 100 color plates.

Schapiro explains that the term *Impressionist* originated with Claude Monet's *Impression, Soleil Levant* (1872). In titling the painting, Schapiro observes, "Monet was saying that the picture was not just an image of the



Haystack at Sunset (1891) by Claude Monet

dawn" but "an effect of the scene on the eye," a perception "with its own validity." The word *impression* alluded to "the reality of the unclear and atmospheric in nature." Having seen the painting, art critic and playwright Louis Leroy began describing the style as Impressionist.

Though Schapiro recognizes "great differences" among the individual painters—he compares Paul Cézanne to a dramatist and Monet to a lyric poet—he has no qualms about treating Impressionists as a group. "All of them were devoted to an ideal of modernity . . . in opposition to the then-current official taste for history, myth and imagined worlds." All had, like the non-doctrinaire Marxist Schapiro himself, "radical aims." The author gives Monet, "the clearest and

most far-reaching in accomplishing certain broadly shared goals," a chapter to himself. Other painters come up for discussion as the historian zooms in from a high interdisciplinary altitude, tracing the influences of nature, the city, the railroad. Schapiro goes on to show how the Impressionist cast of mind extended beyond the visual arts to literature (the prose of Henry James), photography, science, and history. A polymath and, like the British historian Paul Johnson, very much a connector of dots, Schapiro comfortably moves from realm to realm, epoch to epoch, macro to micro.

For the author, context—the historical, philosophical, and political realities within which people struggle to define their lives and ideas—is everything. Art, in his view, is much more than the dry confines of the finished canvas. Where the late critic Clement Greenberg sees formalism and a precursor to Cubism in the work of Cézanne, for example, Schapiro sees deeply repressed sexuality, an all-too-human art.

The author was fond of quoting the 18th-century poet Edward Young, who observed that we are born originals and die copies. Meyer Schapiro, who began life as just another Jewish immigrant off the boat from Eastern Europe, did the reverse.

—A. J. Hewat

THE BIRTH OF BEBOP: *A Social and Musical History.*

By Scott DeVeaux. Univ. of California Press. 572 pp. \$45.

When did jazz become *modern jazz*? "Such a question," writes DeVeaux, a professor of music at the University of Virginia, "is typically parried with mystification—'If you've got to ask, you'll never know.'" Fortunately, there is very little mystification in this thoughtful and meticulous study of a pivotal period in American culture: the early 1940s, when a coterie of dance band musicians created the demanding style of modern jazz known as bebop.

DeVeaux scrutinizes the two "master narratives" that are commonly used to explain the origin of bebop. The first is the "evolutionary approach," preferred by critics and musicologists. It acknowledges the disruptive originality of such figures as Charlie Parker,

Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk, but defines it as one more development in the century-old jazz tradition. The second master narrative is “the trope of revolution,” brandished by those who find in music “evidence of broader social or political currents.” In this view, bebop is both a radical break with the musical past and the prelude to Black Power, “a rebellion by black musicians against a white-controlled capitalist hegemony.”

DeVeaux tests the “lofty abstractions” of these master narratives against the “quirky contingencies” of biography. The result is a rare hybrid: a scholarly book about jazz that does justice both to the music and to the forceful personalities involved. This is no dry musicological treatise, although DeVeaux’s transcriptions and analyses are careful and precise. Nor is it a typical jazz bio, gushing enthusiasm at the expense of ideas. Rather, it is an intellectually informed account of how a remarkable group of people coped with the triple challenge of being distinguished artists, ambitious professionals, and African Americans. If the book contains no blinding revelations about bebop’s how and why, it does offer welcome confirmation of Ralph Ellison’s observation that the makers of this extraordinary music were less interested in becoming avant-gardists or in overthrowing the system than in coming up with “a fresh form of entertainment which would allow them their fair share of the entertainment market.”

—Martha Bayles

HEMINGWAY AND HIS CONSPIRATORS:
Hollywood, Scribners, and the Making of American Celebrity Culture.

By Leonard J. Leff. Rowman & Littlefield. 255 pp. \$22.95

In 1960, newspapers around the world erroneously reported that Ernest Hemingway had died in a plane crash in Africa. One obituary claimed that he had been trying to reach the site of his story “The Snows of Kilimanjaro.” The author may have been amused by the media efforts to link his life and his art, but he had no reason to be surprised.

Leff, a film professor at Oklahoma State University, shows that Hemingway came along just as publishers were learning to promote authors like movie stars, a marketing shift that resulted partly from Hollywood’s transformation of popular books into even more popular films. From the outset,



Hemingway recognized the conflict between celebrity and art, writing to his mother shortly after the publication of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) that he wanted to “write as well as I can, with no eye on any market.” Still, a part of him reveled in the attention. In a letter to his editor at Scribners, Maxwell Perkins, concerning a planned media campaign, he enthusiastically offered “all the pictures you want.”

After the failure of his novel *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), Hemingway remarked in a letter that he was “getting pretty well rid of a good lot of unsought popularity.” Soon after, though, Paramount released *A Farewell to Arms*, complete with a publicity campaign likening Hemingway to the courageous protagonist (played by Gary Cooper). The movie was a smash, and the novelist became more renowned than ever. According to Leff, this new measure of fame marked the end of Hemingway’s greatest creativity. For the rest of his life he remained first and foremost a celebrity, more interested in polishing his image than polishing his prose.

Who’s to blame? Leff implicates Hollywood, Scribners, the news media, and the culture, but he never lets us forget that the death of the artist, like the death of the man, was a suicide.

—Forrest Norman

THE END OF THE NOVEL OF LOVE.

By Vivian Gornick. Beacon Press. 165 pp. \$20

This slim book of intelligent linked essays is not well served by its sweeping title. Gornick, whose previous books range from a memoir of her mother to a meticulous sociological study of women in scientific careers, believes that the quest for love has lost its status as a central literary metaphor for transcendence and fulfillment, that “to-

day . . . love as a metaphor is an act of nostalgia, not discovery.”

Those words form the conclusion of the book's final (and title) essay, but Gornick seems little concerned with proving her insight or even systematically arguing it in the foregoing pages. What she does instead—and it's more useful, in fact, than a straight-out argument—is to revisit literary figures and landmarks of the past century, and show how they are already enmeshed in new stories and questions about the emotional life, male or female—stories that go well beyond what scholars like to refer to as “the marriage-plot.”

Some of the objects of Gornick's revitalizing attention are familiar: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and Willa Cather. Others have been neglected or half-forgotten, such as George Meredith and Jean Rhys. Some are remembered, but not for the works in which they grapple, successfully or unsuccessfully, with Gornick's themes. The best of the rediscoveries is the essay on George Meredith's novel *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), in which a passionately intellectual woman sabotages her romance with a politician because of a terrified certainty that intimacy will destroy, rather than fulfill, her hard-won individuality and autonomy.

What other stories, what struggles, might occupy a female character's inner life besides the search for love and a happy mar-

riage? Radclyffe Hall's *Unlit Lamp* (1924), written before *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) made Hall notorious, deals movingly with the deep and destructive mutual dependence of mothers and daughters; Gornick links it to D. H. Lawrence's parallel treatment of parent-child obsession in *Sons and Lovers*, then pivots to bring it up to date with Edna O'Brien's short story “A Rose in the Heart of New York”—which she judges “more erotically disturbing than any of O'Brien's love-affair-with-a-married-man stories. Certainly, it is more primitive.”

The struggle between intimacy and autonomy takes many forms, and not only in fiction: Gornick muses sternly upon the revelation that Hannah Arendt remained close to fellow philosopher Martin Heidegger until his death, despite her Judaism and his Nazi sympathies; in another chapter, she conjures up a plausible background to the mysterious suicide of Henry Adams's brilliant wife, Clover. The readings of literature work doubly well when paired with these readings of real life. They reinforce the sense that it is our selective response to these writers, not their own narrowness of range, that has kept us within the confines of the old-style happily-ever-after story. Gornick's obituary for the durable old “novel of love” seems premature at best. What she has shown instead is that it has plenty of competition.

—Amy E. Schwartz

Science & Technology

THE GORDIAN KNOT: Political Gridlock on the Information Highway.

By W. Russell Neuman, Lee McKnight,
and Richard Jay Solomon. MIT Press.
324 pp. \$20

It has become a commonplace that telecommunications technologies and markets move much faster than the regulatory process, yet policymakers persist in trying to micromanage them. The latest example is the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which aimed to resolve issues left over from the AT&T breakup—in particular, to end the monopoly in the local telephone market. The congressional horse trading among entrenched interests produced a statute with a Byzantine patchwork of incentives and burdens. And, almost two years after the

law's enactment, there's still very little competition in the local market.

The Gordian Knot explains why such legislation is bound to fail. The authors—Neuman is a communications professor at Tufts University; McKnight and Solomon are associate directors of the MIT Center for Technology, Policy, and Industrial Development—argue that American policy rests on outmoded principles inherited from the distant past. Requiring telecommunications companies to act as public trustees, for instance, may have been sensible in an era of legally sanctioned monopolies; in today's increasingly competitive environment, it is not. But the authors argue with equal force that a pure laissez-faire approach, devoid of regulation, would invite anticompetitive practices reminiscent of those of the turn-of-

the-century robber barons. Instead, they propose a third way: policymakers ought to adopt a set of well-defined objectives and then step aside, allowing private industry to decide how best to achieve them.

Without offering a fully realized alternative policy, the authors suggest four objectives that would produce a competitive, flexible, consumer-friendly system, one that they label the “open communications infrastructure.” “Open architecture” would permit different companies and technologies to interconnect, as cellular and wired telephones now do (and as VHS and Beta videocassette players do not). “Open access” would eliminate that mainstay of traditional telecommunications regulation, the legally designated monopoly. “Universal access” would ensure that competition would not deprive remote communities of telecommunications services. Finally, “flexible access” would let consumers send and receive digital data in a variety of ways: “The telephone company can deliver multichannel television; the cable company can provide telephone service; and each of these formerly distinct services (along with other competitors) can provide electronic home shopping, electronic encyclopedias, magazines and newspapers—all delivered to high-speed home printers.” With the old regulatory distinctions rapidly falling away, this cogent, clear-headed book invites a national debate on where we go from here.

—Janice Obuchowski

PLANET QUEST:
*The Epic Discovery of Alien
Solar Systems.*

By Ken Croswell. Free Press.
324 pp. \$25

Until a few years ago, only three human beings in history could claim to have discovered a planet, and only one of them—the late Clyde Tombaugh, discoverer of Pluto—lived in the 20th century. Today, however, a growing number of astronomers can make that claim. We now know of more planets beyond our solar system than within it, all of them discovered in the 1990s.

Croswell, an astronomer and the author of *The Alchemy of the Heavens* (1995), tells the stories behind these and earlier breakthroughs. We learn of the discoveries of Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto (the three planets in our solar system not visible to the

naked eye), the failed search for a “Planet X” beyond Pluto’s orbit, and the quest for planets outside our solar system. The first discovery of an extrasolar planet was made in 1992 by Alexander Wolszczan, and was soon followed by a raft of similar breakthroughs by Swiss and American astronomers.

Unfortunately, the history of searches for planets—whether inside or outside our own system—has not always been a happy one. Croswell explains why claims for the discovery of other planets get made in the first place, and how the continued refusal of the data to back up some claims eventually leads to their rejection. He also explains why these searches always involve indirect evidence—usually the distortion of a star’s motion by the gravitational pull of its partner—rather than direct observation.

Croswell re-creates one of the shining moments of 20th-century science. In 1991, English astronomer Andrew Lyne and his team announced the detection of planets around a pulsar (a dead star), which seemed to be the first extrasolar planets. In 1992, however, Lyne found a flaw in his data that invalidated his conclusion. Rather than send a terse letter of retraction to a professional journal, Lyne stood up and explained his error before a gathering of the American Astronomical Society in Atlanta. When he finished, the auditorium of astronomers gave him a standing ovation.

If Croswell’s book has a weakness, it is his excessive attention to side issues and even nonissues, including a chapter-long semantic quibble over whether a “brown dwarf” is or is not a star. As a result, the main story about modern planetary discoveries doesn’t begin until page 180.

That said, Croswell’s command of the nuts and bolts of the profession enables him to explain what would otherwise be rather esoteric debates. A nice touch is his inclusion of interviews with a number of astronomers involved in the story, together with thumbnail sketches of their careers and accounts of how they came to be astronomers. No parent reading this book can fail to be impressed by these scientists’ testimonies to their earliest shaping experiences: “My parents bought me a telescope” or “My father showed me the constellations.”

—James Trefil

History

KIDS' STUFF: *Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood.*

By Gary Cross. Harvard Univ. Press.
352 pp. \$29.95

Toys are us, and they always have been. More precisely, they are the material means of exchange between adult and child cultures, and between the folkways of individual families and the values promoted by teachers and preachers. From the homespun to the elaborate, from the crudely racist to the painfully pedagogically correct, toys convey contesting models of childhood. They make money, too: sales in the United States alone were \$17.5 billion in 1993.

Cross, a historian at Pennsylvania State University, finds the origins of today's toy industry in the late 19th century. Then, for the first time, many families had the leisure, a surging industry the equipment, and chain stores the distribution channels to create a mass market in playthings. Parents, when not buying for their own, sometimes sadistic amusement—one BB gun advertiser merrily suggested using neighbors' dogs and cats for target practice—grew more conscious of their children's development. Toys began not only to prepare children for adult roles and responsibilities through play but to nurture an autonomous world of youthful fantasy. Meanwhile our rosy-cheeked, cornucopian Santa Claus gradually displaced the judgmental, switch-bearing European St. Nick as the bringer of Christmas gifts to the new child-centered American family.

Small, conservative, and successfully protectionist by today's standards, the industry nevertheless exploded in the first two decades of the 20th century. For boys, model railroads, wind-up automobiles, and building kits such as Tinkertoys and erector sets brought new technology into the home. For girls, dolls provided substitute objects of nurturing, now that parents of smaller families no longer entrusted infants to older sisters.

For boys and girls alike, whimsy grew along with realism and competed with it. Cross argues persuasively that the fantasy character is a toy-box counterpart to the branded product: a differentiated, protected version of the formerly generic. Indeed,

trademark characters were spun off as tie-in playthings early in advertising history. The Campbell Kids touted soup, while Kewpie dolls promoted "chocolate, china, soap, and Jello." Having successfully sold groceries, dolls soon were promoting movies. Faced with rising production costs for soundtrack and animation in the 1930s, Walt Disney licensed merchandise rights in Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and other characters. Soon, feature films such as *Snow White* and *Pinocchio* were released to coincide with massive merchandising campaigns.

The postwar toy story is the triumph of the Disney formula, perfected by television. The classic, stable technology of the model railroad and the chemistry set has given way to open-ended change. For the first time, there is a radical break between parents' memories of their own childhood and their youngsters' experience. Indeed, parents, and even Santa himself, are marginalized as children live in an autonomous, television-driven culture that makes its appeals directly to them.

Kids' Stuff is a splendid analysis of dauntingly rich material, mining toys for new insights into American families—and American entertainment.

—Edward Tenner

THE TWO KOREAS: *A Contemporary History.*

By Don Oberdorfer. Addison Wesley.
472 pp. \$30

A year in Korea, Americans who have spent time there say, is like two years in any other country—not because the life is unpleasant (far from it), but because events rocket forward at twice their normal pace. Since the post-World War II separation of North and South, which followed 35 years of Japanese colonial rule, much of Korean history has been one of drama and instability. Tough, sentimental Koreans bridled beneath their superpower protectors and sought to rule their own kingdoms—in the North, a kingdom of hermits; in the South, one of world players.

The South did become a world player during its miraculous economic development of the 1960s, and a true working democracy in 1987 thanks in part to the surprising self-restraint of President Chun Doo-

hwan, who seven years earlier had brutally suppressed a political uprising. Lurking beneath the fiscal and political successes, though, was a level of violence that became part of the Korean power game. In this regard, the Korean War continued long after the conventional fighting ended in 1953. General Park Chung-hee, who orchestrated a military coup and took over the nation in 1961, was delivering a speech in 1974 when his wife, sitting on stage, was fatally shot by a North Korean agent—yet Park proceeded to complete the speech. (In 1979, Park himself was assassinated by the chief of his intelligence agency.) Amid preparations for the 1988 Seoul Olympics, North Korea blew up a South Korean airliner, but the Olympics proceeded as planned, becoming South Korea's great coming-out party. The North Korean saboteur, who was captured and who confessed, is now a born-again Christian. It is, as the author observes, "a land of surprises."

Oberdorfer, a former *Washington Post* reporter and the author of *Tet!*, provides a useful overview of Korean history since World War II. He describes the frustrations and strains as the two Koreas have tried to get together—the many promising moves that have ended in failure. He offers unforgettable accounts of events that he witnessed, including the assassination of Park's wife. And, in a cloak-and-dagger story reminiscent of John le Carré, he recounts the defection in 1996 of Hwang Jang Yop, the highest-level North Korean to change sides. I wish I could have read this book before going to South Korea as American ambassador in 1986. It's a fascinating account for anyone who cares about Korea, who worries about the United States in Asia, or who just likes a good read.

—James Lilley

SHIFTING FORTUNES:
The Rise and Decline of American Labor, from the 1820s to the Present.

By Daniel Nelson. Ivan R. Dee.

181 pp. \$22.50

Why have American labor unions grown strong in some periods and withered in others? For answers, both friends and foes of organized labor usually point to dramatic events and personalities: state militias stamping out strikes in the Gilded Age, class-conscious workers surging into John L. Lewis's CIO during the Great Depression, leaders of the Teamsters getting married to the Mob in

the 1950s.

Nelson, the author of several fine books on labor and business history, discounts any explanation that relies so much on headlines. To him, working people are rational men and women whose reasons for joining or not joining unions have changed little over time. Three intersecting factors, he argues, account for the ebb and flow of union membership: the leverage of workers who enjoy some autonomy on the job, the fear of reprisals by employers, and the larger economic and political environment. As that list suggests, labor organizers have had to make the best of a situation shaped by more powerful forces. Their fortunes have shifted over time, but the structures that govern those outcomes persist.

Nelson's approach enables him to resolve some of the nagging anomalies of U.S. labor history. He describes, for example, how coal miners were able to build the United Mine Workers, the only durable industrial union in the nation until the mid-20th century. Mining was dangerous work but difficult for bosses to supervise, and the camaraderie miners forged both underground and in their isolated communities sustained the UMW against employer attacks.

Factory labor was much harder to organize. At giant companies such as Ford and U.S. Steel, workers toiled for decades under the constant eye and thumb of management. Everyone knew a troublemaker could easily be replaced. It took the political earthquake of the New Deal—which established the pro-union National Labor Relations Board—to alter that condition. In recent years, as federal support for organizing has eroded, manufacturing unions have again become vulnerable. As Nelson notes, "By the late 1980s the NLRB did not even give lip service to the goal of encouraging collective bargaining. Instead it provided a veneer of legality for traditional open-shop policies."

Nelson's pithy survey is full of such sensible judgments. Writing in a crisp if bloodless



style, he provides what amounts to a balance sheet of union history. In outlining which paths led to organizational victory and which to failure, his approach has more in common with the models that economists construct than with the empathetic “history from the bottom up” that has dominated the study of American workers since the 1960s. His sober book helps dispel the illusion that labor’s power has ever been great or secure in this most capitalist of nations.

But Nelson’s stern antiromanticism also neglects the spirit of solidarity that at times has enabled American unions to generate a social movement. There is no place in his account for the 19th-century vision of a producer’s commonwealth, for the collective

rage that followed the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist fire, or for the mix of piety and ethnic pride that coursed through the California grape strike and boycott of the 1960s. Organized labor has a moral claim as well as an economic one, and the former has galvanized people inside and outside union ranks as much as the demand for higher wages and shorter hours. San Francisco organizer Frank Roney warned nearly a century ago, “A movement, however laudable and externally worthy, is bound to fail if it has no soul.” He would find an ally in current AFL-CIO president John Sweeney, a long-time apostle of Catholic teachings on social justice.

—Michael Kazin

Contemporary Affairs

THE APPEARANCE OF IMPROPRIETY:

How the Ethics Wars Have Undermined American Government, Business, and Society.

By Peter W. Morgan and Glenn H. Reynolds. Free Press. 272 pp. \$25

Between 1975 and 1995, the number of prosecutions of federal officials on corruption charges increased by an astonishing 1500 percent. Yet most informed observers would say that authentic corruption (graft, slush funds, and the like) *decreased* during those two decades, as potential wrongdoers heeded the cautionary example of Watergate. So what’s the explanation? Following the Gulf of Tonkin, the Credibility Gap, and the Nixon scandals, American culture changed. Legislators passed a slew of ethics laws, resulting in more violations, leading to still more laws and still more violations. Americans created in the process an Ethics Establishment—an army of lawyers, journalists, and consultants who make money and reputations on ethics scandals, and who further fuel our obsession.

Behavior that was once commonplace now is deemed unethical. In the political sphere at least, we have defined deviancy up. The resulting culture of scandal might be welcome if it increased public confidence in American institutions and decision makers. But the opposite is true: the more we focus on scandal, and the more ethics rules we enact, the worse voters seem to feel about leaders and institutions.

While there are few signs that scandal politics is abating—look at the Paula Jones embarrassment, the frenzy over campaign fund-raising, the myriad independent counsel probes and the pressures for more—a few authors have begun to raise questions about it. In their excellent scholarly study, *The Pursuit of Absolute Integrity* (1996), Frank Aneshiarico and James B. Jacobs showed how anticorruption efforts in New York have led to ineffective governance.

Now add to the list *The Appearance of Impropriety*. In this lively book, Morgan, a lawyer in Washington, and Reynolds, a law professor at the University of Tennessee, describe our ethics obsession while railing against it. They particularly target the frequent alarms over improper appearances, a concern they trace from Henry Fielding’s novel *Tom Jones* (1749) through Watergate and Whitewater. The appearance standard, they argue, has destroyed careers when evidence later suggested no wrongdoing at all. Along with convicting the innocent, the focus on appearance sometimes helps true miscreants slip away: those who dilute their shame by arguing that their only violation was a trivial one of appearance, and those who artfully hide their misbehavior beneath a façade of propriety.

The authors conclude that “ethics is in danger of becoming an elaborate legalistic ritual,” one that stresses multifactor tests instead of old-fashioned moral values. “For government employees who must negotiate this ritual, the

result is frustration and alienation. For citizens who hear all the ethics fanfare but nonetheless see government 'as usual,' the result is cynicism and disillusionment."

There is no easy way to change a culture, but repealing or sharply revising some of the ethics rules would be a good start. Instead of making such recommendations, Morgan and Reynolds close by offering seven guidelines for better behavior, including "Responsibility Is for Everyone"—a sensible but not very pragmatic prescription. Still, *The Appearance of Impropriety* is a good and useful book, part of what should be a growing body of work on a culture of scandal run amok.

—Norman Ornstein

FOR SHAME:
*The Loss of Common Decency
in American Culture.*

By James B. Twitchell. St. Martin's Press.
237 pp. \$22.95.

How do you write a jeremiad for an age that does not know the meaning of the word? Twitchell's brisk account of how we got from Adam and Eve covering their nakedness to Madonna hawking hers sounds the alarm about the state of contemporary American society, where we are more chagrined to be caught smoking than committing adultery. We have banished the age-old sentiment of shame in favor of an all-enveloping self-indulgence. Why feel guilty when you can feel good? Because, Twitchell argues, unless we understand and recover the social protections of shame, we shall pay a terrible price.

To give shame its due, Twitchell gathers evidence from various sources: biology (consider the blush and the flush, the instinct to hang one's head and hide—lose—one's face: "Clearly human biology and evolution have hardwired us to experience the jolt of shame for a purpose"); anthropology ("All cultures depend on shame; all cultures abhor shamelessness"); and history (he deplors the behavior of the prerevolutionary French upper classes, who were "immodest and haughty" and got what they had coming, and brandishes the enviable record of the Victorians, those over-achieving blushmeisters).

Twitchell's book derives from a course he taught on advertising and American culture and on the seismic changes in marketing strategy since the 1950s. Then, we bought because we were shamed into buying; now we buy because we're so bullish on ourselves. Twitchell

believes that the trouble began for America in the 1960s, when an ethos of self-gratification first began to infiltrate the society. From being a pathology of the counterculture, it metastasized to the dominant culture, and we are all now ailing from its settled hold on our spirits.

For Twitchell, who teaches English at the University of Florida, the dominance of commercial television in contemporary life is the key to understanding what has happened to shame in America. Advertisers relentlessly woo the attention of an audience, especially an audience of the young and affluent. "In an electronic culture, the stories are controlled by those hearing them," and the message is predictably skewed, Twitchell says, "toward entertainment and away from shame." The playing field is leveled, not to say scorched; hierarchy is abandoned; authority, direction, reserve, and reprimand are forgone. About the force of the media and their indifference to everything but commercial gain, the author is depressingly correct, and the real value of his book is in its insistence, yet again, on advertising's blindness to anything beyond its shallow range.

Twitchell hits all the easy targets—O. J.



Simpson, TV talk shows, politicians, megachurches, Hollywood and its calculated effluvia—but he has nothing particularly new to say about them. Instead, he repeatedly makes the same assertions about the deplorable condition of the society without developing his themes much beyond their initial sounding. As a result, the book feels both protracted and abrupt. Like a lively TV discussion—PBS, to

be sure, not NBC—it captures the attention but does not hold the mind.

The clock ticking for America is the timer on a bomb: that's Twitchell's message, and he delivers it in a book that is chatty, entertaining, and too informal, finally, for its own good. To be right is commendable, but you win no disciples unless you are convincing too. A funeral notice should arrive on an engraved card, not a Post-it.

—James M. Morris

***THE PARADOX OF PLENTY:
Oil Booms and Petro-States.***

By Terry Lynn Karl. Univ. of California Press. 360 pp. \$55 (\$22, paper)

In Frank Herbert's science-fiction classic *Dune* (1965), whoever controls the spice—the desert planet's most valuable commodity—controls everything. Karl, a political scientist at Stanford University, would disagree. The message of her book is that he who controls the spice will live to regret it.

The author finds proof in the way the oil boom of the 1970s affected five previously poor nations: Venezuela, Iran, Nigeria, Algeria, and Indonesia. Each nation spawned ungainly centralized bureaucracies, all geared solely toward generating more oil profits. Entrenched interests, such as foreign

investors and state officials, acquired additional influence and fought to retain it, creating enormous barriers to change. Policymakers put aside any plans for nurturing long-term, sustainable growth. When the prosperity ended, the results were economic crisis and political decay. In this important addition to the literature on political economy, Karl explains why sudden riches pushed the policymakers of these strikingly different nations toward the same unwise choices.

A wealth of natural resources, the author suggests, can enfeeble a nation's institutions and ultimately bring about economic decline. Conversely, some of today's newly industrialized nations, especially those in Asia, may have had success in part *because* they lacked natural resources: "The need to overcome this poverty may have been one of the chief catalysts for building effective states." To Karl, this is "the paradox of plenty."

She is not the first to recognize the paradox. Juan Pablo Perez Alfonso, the founder of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, said at the peak of the oil boom: "Ten years from now, 20 years from now, you will see. Oil will bring us ruin." He was right, and this valuable book helps us see why.

—Elizabeth Qually

Religion and Philosophy

***STEALING JESUS:
How Fundamentalism
Betrays Christianity.***

By Bruce Bawer. Crown. 352 pp. \$26

When Harry Emerson Fosdick preached his famous 1922 sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?," he answered with a rousing no. "They are not going to do it," he declared, "certainly not in this vicinity." Within a few years, it seemed that Fosdick was right. Following the humiliating Scopes "Monkey Trial" of 1925, fundamentalist Christianity was all but extinct in the vicinity of Fosdick's New York City pulpit and in other urban areas. For the next 50 years, the movement was largely confined to the back hills, storefronts, and radio waves of a white, anti-urban underclass. It was, from the perspective of the national culture, invisible.

Since fundamentalism returned to public view in the 1970s, the mainstream media

have scrutinized its clout, both cultural and political, and its demographics. But, by and large, the culture mavens have given a free ride to fundamentalist theology. Because there have been no modern-day Fosdicks subjecting these tenets to searching examination, many people have come to view fundamentalism and Christianity as essentially synonymous.

Bawer, however, contends that the teachings of fundamentalist Christianity are at odds with American history, principles of reason and fair play, and the Gospel itself. In fact, he argues that the fundamentalists are the heretics and apostates, twisting the text in pursuit of preordained conclusions. Fundamentalist Christianity "has stolen Jesus—yoked his name and his church to ideas, beliefs, and attitudes that would have appalled him."

The author proves surprisingly well suited

to his task. A literary critic and author of *A Place at the Table*, he writes neither as a historian, although he is a good one, nor from within the gilded circle of professional theology. He has grown up in the age of fundamentalist ascendancy; he has had an adult religious experience that caused him to join the Episcopal Church, of which he is a knowledgeable and devout member; and, in addition to having read and understood the literature of fundamentalism, he writes readable, at times even elegant, prose.

Bawer offers sophisticated theological and cultural portraits of Pat Robertson, James Dobson, and other Christian Right leaders, as well as their less-known allies and predecessors. In a distinction that at times becomes too simplistic, he contrasts their exclusive fundamentalism (“The Church of Law”) with inclusive liberal Christianity (“The Church of Love”). At a time when nearly everybody regards “liberal” as an epithet, Bawer lauds liberal Christianity as the essence of the Gospel, the kind of religion that Jesus would both recognize and practice because he preached it. This is a passionate, articulate, timely, and utterly useful book.

—Peter J. Gomes

**PUBLIC MORALITY AND
LIBERAL SOCIETY:
*Essays on Decency, Law, and
Pornography.***

By Harry M. Clor. Univ. of Notre Dame Press. 235 pp. \$32.95

It seems positively indecent to speak of indecency these days. Saying that a snuff film or a rap lyric offends public morality offends the civil libertarian in us, an overdeveloped part of our collective personality. In this tightly reasoned book, Clor reminds us that we still have a public morality and, what’s more, that it is compatible with a free society.

The author, a professor of political science at Kenyon College, argues that our moral codes are rooted in religion, but only in part. Habits of restraint come from two other sources, both of which influenced the American Founders: John Locke’s liberalism and the writings of the ancient thinkers about civic virtue and republican self-government. Protecting life, liberty, and property depends on many things, including “supplementary ethical attitudes and restraints among the public at large.” Where that sup-

plementary ethic needs legal support, “it may be supported—not for the sake of virtue but for the sake of preserving the moral environment that liberty and property need.” Compulsion, then, is necessary to maintain a free society.

In Clor’s view, the trouble with today’s liberal political theory lies in the shift from Locke’s emphasis on the rule of law to a new emphasis on personal autonomy. Libertarians, including John Stuart Mill and Friedrich Hayek, radicalize the liberty principle. They assume—wrongly, in the author’s view—that morals legislation is unnecessary because individuals exercise their freedom wisely. Meanwhile liberal theorists, including Ronald Dworkin, John Rawls, and Stephen Macedo, radicalize the equality principle. While the libertarians take good character for granted, the egalitarians find the very idea of good character paternalistic and obnoxious. Laws curbing prostitution and pornography, for example, “affirm that some ways of life are worse than others,” so they violate the Dworkinian principle that citizens have a right to be treated “with equal concern and respect” by their government.

Clor fits feminist theory into its egalitarian context. Feminists object to pornography because it shows men using women as objects; it “sexualizes inequality,” in Catharine MacKinnon’s phrase. When feminists set out to censor, as in an ordinance passed by the Indianapolis City Council in 1984, they depict pornography as discrimination against women. If explicit materials, no matter how violent or debased, were to treat both sexes equally, feminists would be untroubled. To Clor, pornography does indeed degrade women—but it also degrades everyone it depicts and everyone who watches. It is harmful because it objectifies human sexuality, not because it objectifies one gender and not the other.

Supreme Court jurisprudence on obscenity has largely respected community standards of decency while exempting from censorship serious works of art and literature. The Court, however, is increasingly influenced by contemporary liberal theorists. The author’s mild tone never wavers, but the import of his argument is that public morality hangs by the threads of Justice Souter’s black robe. Thin threads indeed.

—Lauren Weiner

POETRY

Horace

Selected and introduced by Anthony Hecht

Quintus Horatius Flaccus, known to us as the Latin poet Horace—contemporary of Augustus, Maecenas, Virgil, Propertius, Vitruvius, and Ovid—was the son of a manumitted slave who earned a modest living as a tax collector, yet managed to procure for his son a first-class education in philosophy both at Athens and Rome. When civil war broke out, following Caesar’s murder in 44 B.C., Horace served in the republican army of Brutus (the losing side) as military tribune, and reports that he ran away. This should be a matter of unqualified satisfaction for all posterity, the poet’s “cowardice” having guaranteed us the whole of his admirable and greatly admired works.

His is a poetry of serenity, balance, perfection of form both prosodic and syntactical. He can be angry, and glad, but usually temperately, and he evinces his capacity for gratitude and contentment with unfailing eloquence. A number of the major English poets, when they have not actually translated him, have written tributes of imitation, such as this one, composed at the age of 12 by Alexander Pope.

Ode on Solitude

Happy the man whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air,
In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
Whose flocks supply him with attire,
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,
In winter fire.

Blest, who can unconcernedly find
Hours, days, and years slide soft away,
In health of body, peace of mind,
Quiet by day,

Sound sleep at night; study and ease,
Together mixed; sweet recreation;
And Innocence, which most does please
With meditation.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown,
Thus unlamented let me die,
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie.

(Apart from other considerations, there can't ever have been many 12-year-olds who could contemplate such isolation, asceticism, and anonymity with calm pleasure.)

Classical Latin poetry was unrhymed, securing its effects by a system of long and short syllables, strategic word order, and devices that an uninflected language such as English can never actually attain. Still, attempts have been made, and one of the most lovely of these is Milton's version of Horace's Ode I.5, possibly composed when the English poet was 18, and bearing the superscription: "*Quis multa gracilis te puer in rose*, rendered almost word for word without rhyme, according to the Latin measure, as near as language will permit." (It should be noted in advance that in ancient Roman times the survivor of a shipwreck customarily acknowledged his debt to the favor of Neptune by placing a dedicatory plaque in the god's temple, along with the clothing in which he had escaped drowning.)

What slender youth, bedewed with liquid odours,
Courts thee on roses in some pleasant cave,
 Pyrrha? For whom bind'st thou
 In wreaths thy golden hair,
Plain in thy neatness? O how oft shall he
On faith and changèd gods complain, and seas
 Rough with black winds and storms
 Unwonted shall admire,
Who now enjoys thee credulous, all gold;
Who always vacant, always amiable,
 Hopes thee, of flattering gales
 Unmindful. Hapless they
To whom thou untried seem'st fair. Me, in my vowed
Picture, the sacred wall declares t'have hung
 My dank and dropping weeds
 To the stern god of sea.

The knowing, worldly bitterness, the complex contempt both for Pyrrha and her youthful lover, balanced by the shamed confession of the poet's own early folly—this wry music comes through to us despite Milton's archaisms. For all its remoteness, it works more persuasively than the contortions (increased by the addition of rhyme, and the maneuvers required to accommodate it) in a more recent version by C. E. Cox.

Slim, young and essenced, Pyrrha, who
On roses couched is courtying you?
 Whom charms in your sweet grot
 The bright hair's single knot,
The choice plain dress? How oft he'll sigh
"False gods, false faith!" with tears, and eye
 Poor novice, seas that change
 Storm-lashed to black and strange.
Who now enjoys you, thinks you gold,
Dreams you will love him,—still, still hold
 No hand but his, nor knows
 Winds change. Alas! for those

Who trust your sheen. On temple wall
My votive tablet proves to all
 That Neptune earned his fee—
 These dripping clothes—from me.

One more version, perhaps still more accessible, yet not for that reason necessarily the best, this by Joseph Clancy.

What slim and sweetly scented boy
presses you to the roses, Pyrrha,
 in your favorite grotto?
 For whom is your blond hair styled,
deceptively simple? Ah, how often he'll sob
over your faithless conversions, staring
 stupidly at the black
 winds and wild seas. He has you
now, for him you have a golden glow,
ever contented, ever loving
 he hopes, unaware of the
 tricky breeze. Poor things, for whom
you glitter before you're tried. The temple
wall with its plaque serves notice: I
 have hung my wet clothes up
 and bowed to the sea god's power.

Readers with shrewd ears will detect from these simple examples some of the problems involved in the translation of Horace's Odes. Here, in the latest translations I know of, is a selection of the odes, by David Ferry.



1.5

What perfumed debonair youth is it, among
 The blossoming roses, urging himself upon you
In the summer grotto? For whom have you arranged
 Your shining hair so elegantly and simply?

How often will he weep because of betrayal,
 And weep because of the fickleness of the gods,
Wondering at the way the darkening wind
 Suddenly disturbs the calm waters.

Now he delights in thinking how lovely you are,
 Vacant of storm as the fragrant air in the garden—
Not knowing at all how quickly the wind can change.
 Hapless are they enamored of that beauty

Which is untested yet. And as for me?
 The votive tablet on the temple wall
Is witness that in tribute to the god
 I have hung up my sea-soaked garment there.

I.9

See Mount Soracte shining in the snow.
See how the laboring overladen trees
Can scarcely bear their burdens any longer.

See how the streams are frozen in the cold.
Bring in the wood and light the fire and open
The fourth-year vintage wine in the Sabine jars.

O Thaliarchus, as for everything else,
Forget tomorrow. Leave it up to the gods.
Once the gods have decided, the winds at sea

Will quiet down, and the sea will quiet down,
And these cypresses and old ash trees will shake
In the storm no longer. Take everything as it comes.

Put down in your books as profit every new day
That Fortune allows you to have. While you're still young,
And while morose old age is far away,

There's love, there are parties, there's dancing and there's music,
There are young people out in the city squares together
As evening comes on, there are whispers of lovers, there's laughter.

I.22

The upright man whose conscience is perfectly clear
Can journey anywhere, unarmed, untroubled,
Whether it be the burning sands of Sidra,
Near where the quicksand waits for you under the sea,

Or the frozen Caucasus, or the fabled place
There are so many monster stories about,
Washed by the sinister River Hydaspes. For instance,
Fuscus, there was the summer day when I

Went out of my Sabine house, in the afternoon,
And wandered in the woods beyond my farm,
Singing my song about my Lalage,
Carefree, alone, and utterly unprotected,

When suddenly there was a wolf, more frightening than
The wolves in the oak tree forests of Apulia
Or the lions for which Numidia is famous—
And the wolf ran away from *me*! So let me tell you:

Set me down anywhere, say in a place
That's entirely lifeless, where not a single tree
Responds to any breeze, a place the gods
Have cursed with evil stagnant mists forever,

Or leave me where the sun comes near the earth
Too hot for any man to be able to dwell there,
And I will nevertheless go right on singing
My ardent song in praise of Lalage.

III.13

O clearer than crystal, thou Bandusian fountain,
To whom it is fitting to bring libations of wine

And offerings also of flowers, tomorrow the chosen
First-born of the flock will be brought to you,

His new little horns foretelling warfare and love
In vain, for the warm blood of this child of the flock

Will stain with its color of red your clear cold waters.
The cruel heat of Canicula the Dog Star

Can find no way to penetrate the glade
To where you are. Gladly your shady coolness

Welcomes the oxen that come, weary of plowing,
And welcomes also the wandering pasturing flock.

You shall become famous among the fountains
Because of my song that praises the ilex tree

That leans above the rocks the babbling waters leap from.

III.26

Experienced in your wars,
Not long ago I was
A not inglorious soldier,
But now upon this wall,
Beside the effigy of
Venus, goddess of love,
Born from the glittering sea,

I place these weapons and
This lyre no longer fit
For use in the wars of love.
Here I offer the torch,
The crowbar and the bow,
Siege weapons used
Against those closed-up doors.

O goddess, queen of Cyprus,
Queen of sunny Memphis,
Far from the snows of Thrace,
All I ask of you
Is one punishing flick
Of your uplifted lash
To sting arrogant Chloë.

THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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Taking the Globaloney out of Globalization

A Survey of Recent Articles

The supermarket tabloids and daytime talk shows haven't discovered it yet, but everyone else, it seems, has—and can't stop talking about it. *It*, of course, is “globalization.” With political, economic, and cultural dimensions, its meaning is not always clear. But despite that—or because of it—globalization is sweeping all before it, according to many who themselves have been swept off their feet by the idea, or who, alternatively, are rallying the resistance.

“The forces of global integration are a great tide, inexorably wearing away the established order of things,” President Bill Clinton has proclaimed, with only slightly qualified enthusiasm. House minority leader Richard Gephardt (D.-Mo.) strikes a very different chord, calling for an effort “to build a global economy that will lift up—and not drag down—our people and all the people of the world,” an effort, he insists, that “is not protectionism or isolationism, but a new and active internationalism.”

Dividing Republicans as well as Democrats, conservatives as well as liberals, globalization has produced some extremely strange bedfellows. Joined in opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for instance, were Jesse Jackson and Pat Buchanan, Ralph Nader and Ross Perot, labor leaders and “paleo-conservatives.” From both left and right, brickbats are hurled at NAFTA, the International Monetary Fund, and other manifestations of the malign “one world” forces that are undermining living standards and the nation-state.

Writing in the *Nation* (Dec. 15, 1997), journalist William Greider, author of *One World, Ready or Not* (1997), sounds the globalization alarm. “Like it or not, we are all in

this together now, rich nations and poor alike, all riding on the same runaway train. Globalization of markets means there's no place to hide. Americans are not going to get out of this—the continuing loss of good jobs, the long-term depression of wages—until they learn to think globally, and to devise remedies that do not depend on throwing poor people over the side.” Most economists, however, are far more sanguine, notes New York-based writer Eyal Press in a critical review of their ideas in *Lingua Franca* (Dec.–Jan. 1998). They view the “dark prophecies” of such doomsayers as Greider as “not only wrong but dangerous,” because they lend plausibility to crude protectionist siren songs, which reflect the interests of only “a narrow sector of aggrieved workers and manufacturers, not the public at large.”

Rising from the passionate war of words—and often lost to view—are some fundamental questions: Is globalization real? Is it new? How extensive is it?

“It is obvious to any casual observer of international affairs that today's world is far more interdependent than ever before. But it is not true,” writes Peter Beinart, a *New Republic* senior editor (Oct. 20, 1997). “International trade and investment have indeed been increasing since the 1950s. Yet after four decades of growing interdependence, the world is just now becoming as economically integrated as it was” in the early 20th century. Merchandise exports by the industrial countries—14 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) in 1992—were 13 percent in 1913. Foreign direct investment, as a percentage of GDP, was in 1993 roughly what it was in 1914: about 11 percent.

“So we too live in a highly interdependent world,” Beinart observes. “The problem is the widespread American belief that economic integration” is always and inevitably a benign, unifying force for peace.

“Consider the way globalization looks from Beijing,” he says. “Americans often see East Asia as the vanguard of the new economics-dominated world. But Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan all emerged as major world traders and investors under the protection of the American military. . . . The United States has promoted growth and economic integration in East Asia, but as part of a broader American strategy to prevent any Asian power from gaining regional hegemony.” Beijing is well aware of this. “What Washington calls globalization, Beijing calls American hegemony, and this difference of perspective helps explain why China is violating globalization’s core imperative”—pursuing rather than slowing the accumulation and projection of Chinese military power.

That is not the way Susan Strange, a professor of politics and international studies at England’s University of Warwick, and many others see it. Writing in an issue of *Current History* (Nov. 1997) devoted to the subject, she maintains that globalization is undermining the nation-state. Not only has war become largely obsolete, as the desire for market shares has supplanted the lust for territory, she believes, but “the state’s power to provide economic and financial stability, to protect the vulnerable in society, and to preserve the environment has been weakened, [leaving] society . . . at the mercy of big business.”

But Linda Weiss, a professor of comparative political economy at the University of Sydney, writing in *New Left Review* (Sept.–Oct.), is skeptical. “While national economies may in some ways be highly integrated with one another, the result—with the partial exception of money markets—is not so much a globalized world (where national differences virtually disappear), but rather a more internationalized world (where national and regional differences remain substantial and national institutions remain significant).” In the chief industrialized economies—those of the United States, Japan, and the European Union—roughly 90 percent of production is still peddled in domestic markets.

Multinational corporations are the chief force behind worldwide flows of capital,

goods, and services, notes the *Economist* (Nov. 22, 1997), in the sixth of an eight-part series on globalization, but national differences remain important. “Few companies . . . are truly global. The average multinational produces more than two-thirds of its output and locates two-thirds of its employees in its home country.”

Nor, despite what some globalization theorists contend, has the state become powerless, Weiss writes. The recent trend toward fiscal conservatism is due more to the domestic pressures that governments face than to global economic forces, and even those forces need not elicit a uniform response. The notion of governmental weakness is partly the fault of political leaders who, in seeking support for unpopular policies, have portrayed retrenchment “as being somehow ‘forced’ on them by ‘global economic trends’ over which they have no control.” Globalization, comment the *New Left Review* editors, has become “a marvelous political alibi.”

But globalization is also a cultural phenomenon, observes Peter L. Berger, a sociologist at Boston University, in the *National Interest* (Fall 1997). In international business, people “dress alike, exhibit the same amicable informality, relieve tensions by similar attempts at humor, and of course most of them interact in English.” The spread of American popular culture is another form of cultural globalization (or “cultural imperialism,” in critics’ eyes).

Despite the worldwide hegemony of the Big Mac, the notion that the world is moving toward a single, universal, basically Western culture is an illusion—and a dangerous one, in the view of Samuel P. Huntington, the noted Harvard University political scientist. He has stirred up a huge controversy with his thesis about the coming “clash” of civilizations. “The time has come,” he asserts in *Foreign Affairs* (Nov.–Dec. 1996), “for the West . . . to promote the strength, coherence, and vitality of its civilization in a world of civilizations.” Maybe so. But, as Linda Weiss points out, “the new globalist orthodoxy” is not all illusion. “The sheer volume of cross-border flows, of products, people, capital and, above all, of money is impossible to dispute,” even if its implications are not. The oft-predicted demise of the nation-state may not be at hand, but, clearly, globalization is not entirely globaloney.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Against Leadership

“Democracy and the Problem of Statesmanship” by Richard S. Ruderman, in *The Review of Politics* (Fall 1997), Box B, Notre Dame, Ind. 46556.

Liberal statesmanship, as practiced by democratic leaders from Pericles to Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, is out of favor these postmodernist days. It smacks too much of “elitism” and being “judgmental.” Contemporary democratic theorists such as Benjamin R. Barber want political leaders instead to act as “facilitators,” drawing citizens out, helping them to discover what *they* want to do, and letting *them* rule. Ruderman, a political scientist at the University of North Texas, objects.

Barber, a political scientist at Rutgers University and author of *The Conquest of Politics* (1988), argues that even the best statesmanship undermines democracy. By accepting the need for leaders, democratic citizens reduce themselves to mere followers. Thanks in part to communications technology, he contends, it is now possible to do what is safer, more fulfilling, and more just: let all citizens exercise political judgment. Leadership, Barber claims, is now “a matter of effective citizenship.” Robert Dahl, a prominent Yale University political scientist and author of *Democracy and Its Critics* (1989), adds that a democracy can develop only if all members of society “perceive themselves as about equally qualified to govern.” It should not be assumed that “only some people are competent to rule.”

Democratic citizens “are often sounder judges, even of moral dilemmas, than all but the greatest statesmen,” Ruderman acknowledges. Nevertheless, “leading or even on occasion opposing the people is a defensible and even essential element of

democratic politics.” Indeed, the chief attribute of a statesman may be “his ability to foresee problems before they are apparent to others.”

Barber’s “deepest objection to statesmanship,” writes Ruderman, is that it may impede the “often irresponsible desire to act—and act now—in imposing a ‘simple’ or ‘obvious’ solution to the problem of injustice.” To Barber and other critics, Ruderman says, the statesman appears as Lincoln did to Frederick Douglass, when viewing him from a strictly abolitionist perspective: “tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent.” But when Lincoln was measured “by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult,” Douglass reflected in 1876, “he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.” It was not Lincoln’s moral judgment that slavery was wrong that set him apart, Ruderman says. “It was his additional capacity for political judgment—namely, what to *do* about this tolerably clear moral judgment—that truly elevated him above his fellow citizens.”

The liberal statesman does not wish to do away with vigorous debate, Ruderman says, but when the talk is finished, “there may still be a need (at least in all the hard cases) for someone . . . to decide what must be done—perhaps by compromising or picking and choosing, or even ‘completing’ the partial and partisan arguments that he has heard.” As democratic theorists until recently well understood, there is nothing inherently undemocratic about that kind of political leadership.

An Emerging Democratic Majority?

“An Emerging Democratic Majority” by Paul Starr, in *The American Prospect* (Nov.–Dec. 1997), P.O. Box 383080, Cambridge, Mass. 02238; “Man Trouble” by Paul Starobin, in *National Journal* (Dec. 6, 1997), 1501 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

The Emerging Republican Majority was the title of Kevin Phillips’s famous and prescient 1969 book. Starr, co-editor of the liberal *American Prospect*, would like to think it’s now the Democrats’ turn to have

an emerging majority. Though explicitly refraining from making that prediction, he argues that the Democrats’ “long-term prospects may not be as dire as they look.”

The two parties are now roughly equal

in electoral strength, he says. “Republicans can now usually count on majorities among men, Democrats on majorities among women. Republicans win majorities among whites; Democrats can sometimes assemble majorities from whites and other groups combined. The parties have exchanged regional bases with the South trending toward Republicans, New England toward Democrats.”

But he discerns some trends that could prove favorable to Democrats. Chief among them: a dramatic increase in the number of Hispanics (an estimated 18 percent of the population by 2025) and seniors (about 20 percent). “Their growing numbers provide a historic opportunity for a flip of the lower, ‘Latinized’ Sunbelt back to the Democrats,” Starr believes.

He assumes that a continuing maldistribution of economic rewards will keep Hispanics “predominantly working-class in orientation” and thus more disposed to vote Democratic. As for the elderly of 2025, he expects them to be more Democratic than they were in middle age. Because men tend to die at a younger age than women, there will be a larger proportion of women. Joining these elderly widows will be large numbers of divorced women of all ages. The “gender gap” that works to the Democrats’ advantage, Starr notes, is chiefly among *unmarried* women.

Much ink has been spilled over the Republican Party’s woman problem. Less noticed, observes *National Journal* correspondent Starobin, is the Democratic Party’s man problem—the “Guy Gap.”

“Desertions by men cost the Democrats control of Congress in 1994,” he writes.

“Democrats did better among men in 1996, but not well enough to regain control of Capitol Hill.” Since then, according to a recent survey, support among men for Democratic congressional candidates has dropped sharply. Men favor Republicans over Democrats in the midterm elections coming up later this year by a margin of 14 percentage points. “You wouldn’t see Republicans elected in many places if it wasn’t for the fact that Democrats get trounced by men,” Republican pollster Glen Bolger told Starobin.

For men who embrace what Theodore Roosevelt once called “the stern and virile virtues,” the GOP is now home, Starobin contends. “The base of the pump-iron culture is in the South, the GOP’s stronghold, but its values strike a chord with men all over the country—and not only with ‘angry white males’ . . . In both the African-American and Hispanic communities, Democrats fared worse among men in the 1996 elections.” Exit polls that year showed that men and women have different visions of the role of government. In one survey, men, by a margin of 26 percentage points, said they believed that government was “doing too much,” while women divided evenly on the question. Men worried more about foreign policy and taxes; women, about education and health care.

Despite their party’s Guy Gap, Starobin says, Democrats don’t seem to be doing much to overcome it. As one unhappy moderate in Congress told him: “Many Democrats are more committed to trying to advance an agenda than in getting back a majority.”

The Pitfalls of Compassion

“Moist Eyes—From Rousseau to Clinton” by Clifford Orwin, in *The Public Interest* (Summer 1997), 1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 530, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Compassion is one of the cardinal virtues in American political life. Candidates who appear to have it will find many vices forgiven. Those who do not soon begin thinking about careers in the private sector.

Americans’ compassion, however, is not the same as that of Jesus or Plato, argues Orwin, a political scientist at the University of Toronto. It owes its character to Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), who, in

Émile (1762) and other works, “set out to devise a worldly, egalitarian, post-Christian, and post-Enlightenment morality” grounded in compassion.

Rousseau’s notion of compassion was different from the Christian idea of charity, says Orwin. “Charity is a theological virtue . . . : to love one another as God has loved, we must overcome our natural human self-love. Compassion, as Rousseau

presents it, is an emanation of that natural human self-love—which as such attests to the natural goodness of man.”

Like other Enlightenment thinkers, writes Orwin, Rousseau rejected the classical notion that human beings are united by “a natural common good.” But there he parted company with them. Thomas Hobbes and later thinkers held that the social contract is grounded in rational self-interest growing largely from fear: we don’t harm others so that they won’t harm us. But Rousseau insisted that society grows out of mutual concern: our awareness of suffering, and our desire to avoid it. “When the strength of an expansive soul makes me identify myself with my fellow, and I feel that I am, so to speak, in him,” Rousseau writes in *Émile*, “it is in order not to suffer that I do not want him to suffer. I am interested in him for love of myself.”

In a society that esteems compassion,

Orwin says, many of the sterner, self-denying virtues get pushed aside. Compassion breeds many political ills. It feeds America’s image-oriented politics, Orwin argues, as politicians respond to growing public cynicism about politics by emphasizing their personal, caring qualities—and call upon “handlers and image makers” to get the job done. In government, too, compassion often backfires, Orwin contends: “Almost always . . . too intense or too sporadic, liable alike to mindless excess and to calculated hypocrisy, compassion is anything but a reliable basis for public policy.”

Don’t blame Rousseau for all this, though, Orwin says. He saw that “the decay of Christianity,” the rise of a commercial society based on self-interested calculation, and other developments called for a new morality. He did not think he was providing a guide to public policy. That, Orwin suggests, may have been “his greatest error.”

The Not So Indifferent Voter

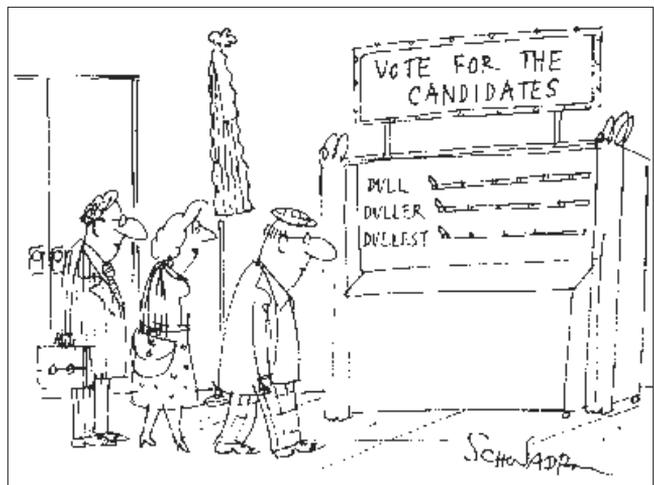
“How the Experts Got Voter Turnout Wrong Last Year” by Peter Bruce, “It’s Bruce Who Got the Turnout Story Wrong” by Curtis Gans, and “Reply to Gans” by Bruce, in *The Public Perspective* (Oct.–Nov. 1997), Roper Center, P.O. Box 440, Storrs, Conn. 06268–0440.

News stories shortly after the 1996 elections told a gloomy story. A majority of Americans did not even bother to vote. The 48.8 percent voter turnout was said to be the lowest since 1924, sparking a new round of lamentations about America’s civic decline. Hold everything! says Bruce, a research associate at the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, at the University of Connecticut. The real story is not quite that bad.

In the first days after the election, the nonpartisan, Washington, D.C.-based Committee for the Study of the American Electorate (CSAE), the chief source for most of the postelection news stories, reported that 95.8 million Americans (later upped to 96.3 million) voted for president, out of 196.5 million people of voting age—a turnout rate of 49 percent.

Bruce points out that CSAE uses the

Census Bureau’s estimate of the voting-age population to represent the eligible electorate. But that figure includes 14.6 million resident aliens and about 2.75 million



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felons. Subtracting these ineligible voters from the total produces an electorate of 179 million. But the story does not end there. Bruce agrees with CSAE director Gans that 1.1 million aliens naturalized in

1996 should be added to that figure, along with the 430,000 military and other government personnel living abroad. That makes the eligible electorate about 180.5 million—and the turnout 53.3 percent.

There are still other ways to gauge turnout. It rises to 54.1 percent if one counts those who went to the polls but did not vote for president. It drops to 51.8 percent, if—with Gans—one adjusts for the undercount of blacks by the 1990 census

and certain other factors.

Whatever the “best” turnout figure for the last election may be, it is clear now that a majority of eligible Americans did join in the great democratic ritual. But the larger truth—the pattern since 1960 that CSAE has shown, using the unadjusted voting-age population as the standard—is still rather gloomy, Bruce says. “The trend toward a declining voter turnout . . . is real and disturbing.”

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Foreign Policy à la Carte

“Fragmentation and Hubris” by James Schlesinger, in *The National Interest* (Fall 1997), 1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 540, Washington, D.C. 20036.

For decades, the Soviet threat kept anxious Americans attuned to events abroad. Now that it is gone, contends Schlesinger, a former secretary of defense (1973–75), the public is losing interest in foreign affairs, and domestic special interests, particularly ethnic groups, are gaining “excessive influence over [U.S.] foreign policy.”

The Clinton administration’s proclaimed goals of expanding democracy and free enterprise abroad “provide precious little in the way of specific guidance” about the conduct of foreign policy, he says. In the absence of “a hammered-out vision of the national interest,” ethnic interests have had a clear field.

“The aggregate list is almost embarrassing,” Schlesinger writes. Greek Americans have blocked delivery of helicopters and frigates purchased by Turkey, a critical U.S. ally during the Cold War and the Persian Gulf War. Armenian Americans are seeking to keep in force a legal prohibition on nonhumanitarian aid to Azerbaijan, which has been partially occupied by Armenia. Cuban Americans have “wholly dominated” U.S. policy toward Fidel Castro’s Cuba. “It is scarcely possible to overstate the influence of Israel’s supporters on our policies in the Middle East,” Schlesinger says. Pressure from the Congressional Black Caucus strongly affected U.S. policy toward Haiti. U.S. interventions in Northern Ireland, made “with an eye on the Irish-American vote,” repeatedly roiled U.S. relations with Britain during President Clinton’s first term. The

expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) “has been driven by concern over the politics of appealing to voters of East European origin.”

Just because a particular domestic group presses for a certain policy does not mean that that policy may not be an appropriate one, Schlesinger acknowledges. NATO expansion, for instance, may be in the national interest. “Yet overall,” he maintains, “these domestic pressures tend to damage our international position.” (So, he says, does the unrelated American propensity to nag other nations about their behavior.) Increasingly, Schlesinger maintains, U.S. foreign policy is seen abroad as “incoherent and capricious.”

Historically, ethnic politics, though a big part of American domestic politics, was not allowed to affect the nation’s foreign policy except “tangentially,” Schlesinger says. Today, however, politicians more and more regard foreign policy as the equivalent of another bag of goodies to pass out to ethnic constituencies.

Academe’s current enthusiasm for “multiculturalism” and ethnic identity only makes matters worse, says Schlesinger. “To sustain an effective and reasonably consistent foreign policy requires a national consensus, which in turn depends upon a sense of common purpose. The new intellectual fashions weaken and, in a sense, delegitimize the search for that common purpose.” No matter how great its power, Schlesinger warns, a fragmented society cannot function effectively as a world leader.

The Sanctions Dud

“Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work” by Robert A. Pape, in *International Security* (Fall 1997), Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Univ., 79 John F. Kennedy St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

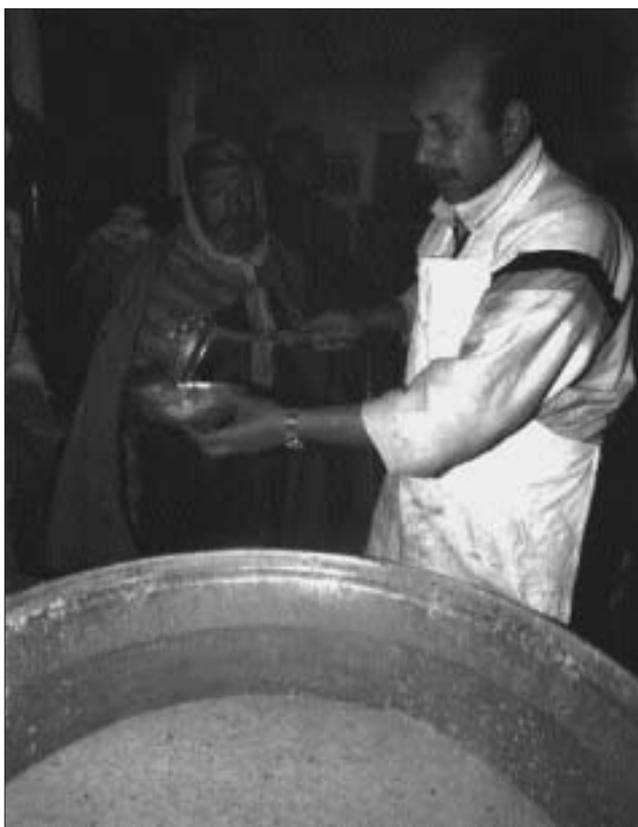
Economic sanctions, frequently regarded as the liberal alternative to war, have become an increasingly popular tool of U.S. foreign policy. Between 1993 and 1996, by one account, the United States imposed new sanctions on 35 different countries. But do such measures work? The conventional scholarly wisdom now says that, often, they do. Pape, a political scientist at Dartmouth College, throws considerable cold water on that optimistic view.

Until the mid-1980s, scholars generally agreed that economic sanctions were less effective than military force as a means of achieving major political goals, Pape notes. But then, in *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered: History and Current Policy* (1985; 2nd ed., 1990), Gary Clyde Hufbauer and Jeffrey J. Schott, assisted by Kimberly Ann Elliot, reported that sanctions worked in 40 of 115 instances between 1914 and 1990—or 34 percent of the time. That success rate was high enough to alter the conventional academic wisdom, Pape says. And in recent years, scholars have grown even more optimistic, in the belief that greater international cooperation in the post-Cold War era may make economic sanctions even more effective than in the past.

Unfortunately, the Hufbauer-Schott-Elliot study is “seriously flawed,” Pape maintains. Of the authors’ 40 success stories, he says, only five really deserve to be considered successes. Eighteen cases were actually settled by the direct or indirect use of force; sanctions failed in eight others, since the target state never made the demanded concessions; six cases were trade disputes, not instances of economic sanctions for political purposes; and three cases were too murky to determine whether the sanc-

tions worked or not. Hufbauer and his colleagues failed to apply their definitions rigorously enough, Pape charges, and, more seriously, they failed to take into account the role played by the threat of force.

Of the five instances in which sanctions clearly worked, Pape says, three “were over trivial issues.” Canada, for example, in 1979 agreed not to move its embassy in Israel



Tough United Nations sanctions have not managed to dislodge Saddam Hussein but they have forced many ordinary Iraqis to rely on charity for food, as at this mosque in Baghdad.

from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The “most substantial” success involved India’s sanctions against Nepal after Nepal purchased anti-aircraft guns from China in 1989. “King Birenda surrendered power to a pro-democratic government that agreed to consult India on defense matters,” Pape notes. In the fifth successful case, the United States and Canada pressured South Korea to abandon its plans to purchase a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant from France.

Republicans in Uniform

The hazards of an increasingly politicized military are described in *The New Republic* (Dec. 8, 1997) by Andrew J. Bacevich, of the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, and Richard H. Kohn, a historian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In recent years, Republicans have increasingly regarded the 1.4 million members of the all-volunteer military and their families as a political interest group—a part of the Republican coalition to be showered with benefits in the name of a strong national defense, just as Democrats have courted teachers' unions and environmental groups. And, according to a mounting body of political research, the professional officer corps that leads the armed forces is reciprocating. Heretofore a matter of temperament, military conservatism has become a matter of ideology. Today's officers scorn 'liberalism' and all its works, and consider Democrats presumptively anti-military and therefore untrustworthy. . . .

This reciprocal relationship is certainly good for the Republicans: nothing helps at the polls like the hearty endorsement of a decorated veteran. And it may be good for the armed forces, too, in the myopic sense of protecting the current level of military spending. But over the long haul, a politicized military, not to mention one whose officer corps is so closely identified with one party, is both bad for the services and bad for democracy. . . .

There are many possible causes for this trend. One may be the advent of the all-volunteer military in the mid-'70s that, along with the Vietnam trauma, had the effect of

Since economic sanctions have worked less than five percent of the time—not 34 percent—“the world would have to change considerably before sanctions could become a credible alternative to force,” Pape concludes. The hope that greater international cooperation will increase the effectiveness of sanctions is a mirage. “The key reason that sanctions fail” is that the target states are not fragile, according to Pape. Nationalism often

makes them “willing to endure considerable punishment rather than abandon their national interest.” External pressure against even the weakest of states is “more likely to enhance the nationalist legitimacy of rulers than undermine it.” After five years during which “the most extreme sanctions in history” shrank its economy by nearly 50 percent, for example, Saddam Hussein’s rogue state of Iraq still has not buckled.

Will OPEC Rise Again?

“OPEC: An Obituary” by Fadhil J. Chalabi, in *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1997–98), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1779 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

It is a very big dog that has not barked in a very long time. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has seen the oil revenues of its 11 member nations tumble from \$283 billion in 1980 to \$132 billion in 1995, notes Chalabi, who served as OPEC’s acting secretary-general between 1983 and ‘88. A world that once trembled when the OPEC oil ministers convened now yawns.

Founded in 1960 by Venezuela and four Persian Gulf producers (Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia) seeking to stabilize falling oil prices, OPEC stunned the world with its October 1973 decision to boost the “posted” price of oil by 70 percent, to \$5.11 per barrel. (By then, Algeria, Indonesia, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates had joined the cartel.) Then the Arab powers cut production to punish the

making the self-selected military subculture even less ideologically representative of American society. And increasing affinity for Republicans was also fed by President Ronald Reagan's defense build-up in the 1980s, which restored the self-esteem of career soldiers who had hung on after Vietnam, and for which officers not illogically gave the Republicans most of the credit. . . .

The victorious World War II-generation of officers was overwhelmingly nonpartisan. General George C. Marshall, for example, never even cast a ballot in any election while on active duty and pointedly let others know that he refrained from doing so. . . .

Marshall understood that the more the military becomes identified with one party, the more likely government officials and the voters are to perceive its recommendations as part of a political agenda—rather than the considered judgment of disinterested professionals. Within the military itself, partisan affiliation can jeopardize morale and, hence, effectiveness. If, for example, partisan views prompt soldiers to speak out for or against specific policies, this can only erode support among the troops for unpopular missions or those in which the U.S. national interest is unclear (such as Bosnia, Somalia, or Haiti, to name just a few deployments Republicans opposed).

At the same time, partisanship emboldens soldiers to take sides—even publicly to become advocates—on the great and controversial issues of the day, whether it's the prevalence of crime in the streets and the effectiveness of public schools, or gay rights and the character of the president. It engenders among soldiers (and some short-sighted civilians) dangerous notions that military institutions are morally superior to those of civilian life and that the armed forces may have a responsibility to save American society from its own decadent inclinations. Another name for the imposition of military ideals on the rest of society is, of course, militarism.

West for supporting Israel in that year's Arab-Israeli war.

A second oil "price shock" came in the winter of 1978–79, when domestic protests against the shah of Iran sharply curtailed Iranian production. By early 1981, the price of oil had soared to \$34 per barrel. But that, says Chalabi, was "OPEC's last hurrah."

What happened? A "market backlash" stole some of OPEC's power, Chalabi notes. By 1996, the world's industrialized countries were consuming *less* oil than they did in 1978, even though their economies were 42 percent larger. Oil prices now hover around \$20 per barrel. Chalabi cites several related developments:

- Consuming countries turned to natural gas, nuclear energy, and coal.
- Oil companies increased exploration in non-OPEC countries.
- The rise of an oil futures market allowed the market to fix a truer value on oil, reducing OPEC's ability to set prices.
- New technologies and techniques allowed oil companies to cut the costs of finding and pumping oil. For example, big oil companies have cut the share of "dry holes" hit in exploration from roughly 60

percent in the mid-1980s to about 40 percent today.

Internal political disarray and fallout from the 1991 Persian Gulf War have also hurt OPEC. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, already spending lavishly on arms and domestic subsidies, were staggered by the costs of the war. Now even routine maintenance in the oil fields is being deferred. The cartel's production quotas are becoming increasingly meaningless. Even OPEC stalwart Saudi Arabia sells more oil than OPEC quotas allow. If postwar sanctions limiting Iraq's oil output were lifted, OPEC would likely collapse.

OPEC is not dead yet, Chalabi says. Global energy demand may grow 40 percent by 2010, and OPEC countries control 76 percent of the world's oil reserves. But the Persian Gulf states have not adjusted to the times, he maintains. They need to give up futile anti-Western crusades and to recognize that there is now a "hypercompetitive" global market in oil. What they need most, Chalabi argues, is a bracing dose of "privatization, deregulation, and fiscal discipline"—hardly a prescription for restoring the big dog's same old bark.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Unsafe at Any Speed?

“The Regulation of Fuel Economy and the Demand for ‘Light Trucks’” by Paul E. Godek, in *Journal of Law and Economics* (Oct. 1997), Univ. of Chicago Law School, 1111 E. 60th St., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

Amid great fanfare, Congress passed legislation in 1978 supposedly aimed at compelling Detroit to save energy by producing more small, fuel-efficient cars. In reality, says Godek, of Economists Incorporated, a Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm, the much-ballyhooed Corporate Average Fuel Economy Standard (CAFE) was “an attempt to subsidize domestic car production disguised as a conservation policy.” Much of its attempt to cut gas consumption backfired, even as it compromised motorists’ safety and sparked a boom in minivans, sport utility vehicles, and other light trucks.

CAFE set an average miles-per-gallon (mpg) minimum that a domestic manufacturer’s new car fleet had to meet every year—18 mpg in 1978 and 27.5 today. Failure to meet the standard meant fines. The regulation gave U.S. automakers, already facing stiff competition from fuel-efficient imports, an incentive to turn out fewer large cars relative to small cars. They were barred, moreover, from importing foreign-made vehicles to meet the standard. That meant that they had to keep open small-car production lines they might otherwise have shut down—and keep employing workers they might have laid off.

CAFE did encourage Detroit to build lighter cars, Godek says, but the resulting fuel economy came at the cost of reduced safety. A study of 1989 vehicles showed that CAFE cut their average weight by some 500 pounds, which “is associated with a 14-27 percent increase in occupant fatality risk.” Big-car production dropped from nearly 70 percent of all vehicles in 1980 to

less than 50 percent in 1995. But the proportion of small cars, after a modest initial increase, actually fell. It is now just above 10 percent. What increased instead? Production of light trucks.

Congress had left a loophole. The CAFE standard for light trucks was much less stringent than the one for cars, rising from 17.5 mpg in 1982 to only 20.6 mpg today. Why? Godek thinks that it is no coincidence that Detroit faced relatively little foreign competition in this category. If Congress was more interested in saving jobs than fuel, as Godek believes, there would be no point in clamping down on light trucks.

In any event, consumers who were worried about auto safety knew what to do. From under 20 percent of all passenger vehicles in 1980, light trucks’ share grew to about 40 percent in 1995. Godek calculates that the regulation was responsible for about half of that increase. Moreover, Godek says, as gas prices (adjusted for inflation) declined through the 1980s, consumers opted for *heavier* light trucks, ones that weighed about the same as pre-CAFE passenger cars. By 1995, he calculates, additional light truck sales encouraged by CAFE added about 300 pounds to the average weight of motor vehicles, thus erasing about 75 percent of the reduction CAFE would have wrought.

If energy conservation had been its chief concern, Godek observes, Congress could have achieved it more effectively with a stiffer tax on gas. Instead, Congress wanted to save jobs—and it sacrificed some fuel economy and some auto safety to do it.

Abstemious Spenders

“What Spending Spree?” by Cheryl Russell, in *American Demographics* (Sept. 1997), 11 River Bend Dr. S., Box 4949, Stamford, Conn. 06907-0949.

If you believe the *Wall Street Journal* and the rest of the business press, American consumers in the 1990s have been on a shop-til-you-drop spending

spree. In reality, however, asserts Russell, author of *How We Live: The Mid-Youth Market* (1996), they have been cutting back.

Consumer spending as a whole, she notes, has indeed risen in real terms, from \$3.2 trillion in 1990 to \$3.3 trillion five years later—a four percent jump. But during the same period, the number of households (“consumer units”) increased by six percent. Expenditures *per household* actually fell by 2.5 percent.

People spent more on certain necessities (34 percent more on property taxes, for instance), Russell says, but they spent less on things they could live without: 13 percent less on men’s clothes, 18 percent

less on women’s clothes, 19 percent less on restaurant food, 12 percent less on new cars and trucks, three percent less on entertainment, and nine percent less on books, magazines, and newspapers. Consumers, Russell says, “are paying their bills, reducing their debts, and repositioning themselves for survival in our tough-as-nails economy.” That may help explain why the rate of inflation has stayed low—but it also suggests that the prospects for further consumer-driven economic growth are limited.

Educated Illiterates

“Wages and the University Educated: a Paradox Resolved” by Frederic L. Pryor and David Schaffer, in *Monthly Labor Review* (July 1997), Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Dept. of Labor, Washington, D.C. 20212.

Every spring, graduating college seniors all around the country giddily march up to the podium to accept their degrees and then stride off hopefully into an employable future. In recent decades, however, the flood of graduates has been so great that an increasing proportion—9.6 percent in 1995, compared with 5.7 percent in 1971—have found themselves, within a few years, working as sales clerks, cab drivers, and in other jobs that don’t require a college degree. Despite this apparent surplus of people with sheepskins, the real wages of college-educated workers have been going up. Economists Pryor, of Swarthmore College, and Schaffer, of Haverford College, explain the paradox.

Analyzing census data on prime-age (25 to 49) workers and the results, by education and occupation, of the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey, they find that it is mainly those college graduates who do not have the “functional literacy” (i.e. the practical ability to read, interpret documents, and do arithmetic) traditionally associated

with college degrees who are taking jobs that might previously have gone to people with high school diplomas only. The wages of these folks, after adjustment for inflation, have remained roughly constant over the years (about \$15 an hour in 1994). And they still get a payoff from having a college degree: workers with only a high school diploma earned about \$11 an hour.

Pryor and Schaffer also find that the major wage increases are going chiefly to the college graduates who are in jobs, such



as management analysis or financial administration, requiring the level of functional literacy that college degrees traditionally have represented. These workers

received an average of more than \$25 an hour in 1994, compared with less than \$21 (in 1994 dollars) in 1970. The wage

increase, the authors say, reflects a shortage of college graduates who are functionally literate.

Are Nonprofits Risking Their Souls?

“The Future of the Nonprofit Sector: Its Entwining with Private Enterprise and Government” by Burton A. Weisbrod, in *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (Fall 1997), Univ. of Pennsylvania, 3620 Locust Walk, Ste. 3100, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104-6372.

In their quest for revenue, many museums, universities, and other nonprofit organizations have been plunging into commercial ventures. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York, for example, now operates 16 museum shops in the United States and 21 abroad, and also deluges Americans with mail-order catalogs. As nonprofits increasingly behave like private firms, asks Weisbrod, an economist at Northwestern University, are they undermining their basic justification for being tax exempt?

Nonprofits are proliferating. They now number nearly one million, three times the total in 1967, with total revenues in 1990 amounting to more than 10 percent of the gross national product. They do everything from supplying social services to supporting medical research.

Some nonprofits are launching for-profit subsidiaries. Northwestern University’s Institute for Learning Sciences, for example, has established a for-profit firm to market a customized computer program; the institute’s director is the new corporation’s acting president. Other nonprofits have been forced to compete as well. Private health clubs, for instance, have moved into the traditional preserve of the nonprofit YMCAs and YWCAs.

Nonprofits also are increasingly joining forces with profit-making firms. The March

of Dimes, for instance, recently accepted \$100,000 from Kellogg’s, the cereal manufacturer, in return for what amounts to an endorsement of a Kellogg’s cereal that contains folic acid, which helps to prevent certain birth defects. Virtually every major university in the country has collaborated with drug and chemical firms in scientific research, stirring charges that some such research may be “tainted” (see p. 133).

The nonprofits’ tax-exempt status is coming under increasing scrutiny, Weisbrod notes. Their taxpaying competitors complain about unfair competition. Local governments worry about the erosion of their tax base as nonprofits expand. In 1993, 59 percent of the real estate in Syracuse, New York, was tax exempt; in Buffalo, New York, 34 percent was. Some cities have withheld zoning approval or construction permits in order to wrest “voluntary” payments from hospitals and universities.

Some economists, Weisbrod notes, regard nonprofits “as little more than inefficient private firms” that “waste resources and perform no socially desirable role.” But he argues that many undertake tasks that neither government nor the private sector perform, and some (e.g., nonprofit nursing homes) simply do a better job. Calls for limits on the nonprofits, however, if not their abolition, are bound to get louder.

SOCIETY

Why School Reforms Lose

“Learning-Free Zones” by Chester E. Finn, Jr., in *Policy Review* (Sept.–Oct. 1997), Heritage Foundation, 214 Massachusetts Ave. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.

Charter schools, vouchers, public school choice, privatized management of public schools. Conservatives these days are chock-full of good ideas for reforming education, says Finn, a former assistant U.S. secretary of education. But while some of these reforms have had modest tryouts in recent years, they

might just as well not exist as far as most American schoolchildren are concerned. The problem, in Finn’s view, is massive resistance to change, something for which conservatives themselves used to be famous. But this new resistance is coming from “old-fashioned bureaucratic monopolies.” How do

they thwart reformers? Let Finn count the ways.

“Would-be reformers are immediately challenged to prove that their proposal has been fully tested and evaluated, that it will have no undesirable side effects—and that it will not deflect any resources from the ‘regular’ system. In other words, nothing can be tried until it has been proven to work, but nothing can be proven until it has been tried.” And when a few charter schools fail in California and Arizona, or private management firms lose their contracts for public schools in Baltimore and Hartford, Connecticut, then defenders of the current system conclude that the innovations have been proven worthless.

Elected officials and the public, Finn contends, have little real influence over the education system. Instead, teachers, coaches, curriculum directors, guidance counselors, and others scratch one another’s backs and determine what happens. These days, local school board candidates, for instance, are “less likely...to be able, disinterested laymen [than] people beholden to education unions and other producer interests.”

Educators resist all efforts to specify what children are expected to learn and to test their performances with standardized tests, Finn says. The reason is simple: “Without reliable measures of performance in relation to precise objectives, it is impossible to hold

anyone accountable for success or failure.” This permits everyone involved “to blame someone else for whatever isn’t working well.”

The education system “channels almost all of its money into salaries, treats every change as an added cost, and has little freedom to substitute one use of funds for another.” During the 1995–96 school year, a classroom of 24 children accounted for an average total public expenditure of about \$150,000, while teacher pay and benefits averaged only one-third that amount. Where does the other two-thirds go? “Nearly all is locked up in salaries to specialists, administrators, and non-teaching personnel and kept there by collective bargaining and bureaucratic inertia.” Translation: Sorry, no money for new ideas.

“Education reformers come and go, but the permanent beneficiaries of the status quo work at their ownership every day, year in and year out,” writes Finn. Over the long haul, a reform-minded governor or outraged parents are no match for the teachers’ unions or textbook publishers.

Finn takes heart from surveys showing that more and more Americans believe that public schools are doing a poor job. Faced with the possible loss of Americans’ historic support for public education, Finn believes, the education establishment may eventually shed some of its mossback ways.

Psychic Wars of the Elites

“Conflicting Worlds of Welfare Reform” by Lawrence M. Mead, in *First Things* (Aug.–Sept. 1997), 156 Fifth Ave., Ste. 400, New York, N.Y. 10010.

Liberal and conservative poverty “experts” are failing badly to address the real needs of poor people, argues Mead, a professor of politics at New York University and the author of *Beyond Entitlement* (1986). Both are hampered by their own experiences, he says. The liberals can’t look upon welfare recipients as anything but victims, while the conservatives can’t see that some of the recipients desperately need ongoing help.

Their blind spots are partly a result of their own backgrounds, Mead believes: “Contrary to what one might expect, liberals as a group are the more privileged. They generally went to better schools and hold better jobs.” Now they populate the universities, the foundations, the liberal think tanks, and advocacy

groups. They empathize with the poor but don’t identify with them, and thus wind up condescending to them. No matter what is done to help the poor support themselves, liberals continue to view them “as too victimized to take responsibility for their own condition.” With equal implausibility, Mead says, conservatives insist that all of the poor can be as self-reliant as other people, if only government requires it.

Conservative specialists—chiefly at conservative think tanks and in GOP staff positions on congressional committees—“typically came up the hard way, with less education and more twists and turns in their careers,” he says. With a real sense of how they themselves could have slipped into poverty, the

conservatives identify with the poor but don't empathize with them. These specialists moralize, expecting the poor to do what they would do in their circumstances.

Until the landmark 1996 welfare reform, Mead says, the two sides were roughly balanced, each canceling out the most unreasonable features of the other's viewpoint. But Mead thinks the 1996 legislation, which eliminated welfare as a federal entitlement and turned it into a program of fixed block

grants to the states, was unduly harsh. It included new work requirements and a five-year lifetime limit on aid. Tough work programs alone, he contends, "were enough to bring the rolls down." He is hopeful that the states will take a more balanced approach, continuing to help the neediest, as many are, while "also expecting adults to work." Eventually, Mead hopes, welfare may become a manageable problem instead of "a battleground of elite psychic warfare."

Designated Targets

"Batter Up! Moral Hazard and the Effects of the Designated Hitter Rule on Hit Batsmen"
by Brian L. Goff, William F. Shughart II, and Robert D. Tollison, in *Economic Inquiry*
(July 1997), Western Economic Assn., International Executive Office,
7400 Center Ave., Ste. 109, Huntington Beach, Calif. 92647-3039.

A quarter-century ago, the American League introduced its still-controversial designated hitter (DH) rule, letting substitutes stand

Goff, Shughart, and Rollison, of Western Kentucky University, the University of Mississippi, and George Mason University, respectively.



Brady Anderson, centerfielder for the Baltimore Orioles, was hit by pitches 19 times last season—more than any other batter in the American League.

Even so, in the late 1960s and early '70s, some 300 to 400 batters in each league got hit each year. Then the American League—but not the National League—adopted the DH rule.

in for pitchers at the plate. Careful research now reveals that this has had an unintended and unwelcome consequence for batters: they get struck by pitched balls more often.

Before 1973, a major league hurler who deliberately threw at a hitter had to worry that he might get the same treatment when he took his own turn at the plate, observe economists

In a typical season since, the economists find (after controlling for differences in at-bats between the two leagues), 44 to 50 more American League batters have had close encounters with speeding baseballs. In other words, with American League pitchers able to throw at hitters with greater impunity, batters have suffered 10 to 15 percent more direct hits than their National League counterparts. Armed with this scholarly finding, perhaps ballplayers now should negotiate a premium for playing in the American League.

Bunk: The Sequel

"The Future of History" by Richard J. Evans, in *Prospect* (Oct. 1997),
4 Bedford Sq., London WC1B 3RA.

"History is more or less bunk," Henry Ford once declared, and today's postmodern

historians seem to agree. In their eyes, notes Evans, a professor of modern history at

Cambridge University, there is no single attainable truth about the past, “merely the histories which people construct to empower themselves in the present: black history, women’s history, gay history. Each is ‘true’ according to the perspective from which it is written.” The claim of “objectivity,” insist postmodernists such as Hayden White, is just a device to preserve the “dominance” of the history written by bourgeois white liberal males. Bunk, says Evans.

Certainly, most books in history published in Europe and the United States have been written by white males. But not all of these books have defended the interests of white males and the bourgeois universities that support them, and not a few have explored past oppression and exploitation. Moreover, Evans observes, many women “have written excellent history books about men, just as blacks have written about white slave owners.” And if the postmodernists’ radical subjectivism is correct, only white males can understand white males of the past.

Applying postmodernist ideas to the postmodernists themselves makes obvious the “logical tangle” into which their theories

lead, Evans says. “If all interpretations are equally valid, why should we believe a postmodernist interpretation rather than another one?” he asks.

Postmodernists may not realize it, he adds, but the arguments they make in the interests of “the politics of empowerment and liberation” can have perverse results when applied to the politics of oppression and violence. Can only Bosnian Serbs, for example, write a “true” history of the Bosnian Serbs? Is a Nazi perspective on the Holocaust just as valid as a non-Nazi one?

“If the only grounds we have for preferring one vision of the past to another are aesthetic, moral or political, as some postmodernists maintain, if the persuasiveness of a historical interpretation is simply a matter of the power of its advocates,” writes Evans, “then it does not follow at all that history should necessarily be a democratic, a tolerant or a skeptical enterprise, or that it should in any way favor the politically or culturally disadvantaged.”

Facts do matter, Evans insists. Historians are not free to give the evidence of the past just any meaning whatever. “History,” he says, “is nothing if it is not true.”

PRESS & MEDIA

The Megan Quandary

“Double Punishment?” by Judith Sheppard in *American Journalism Review* (Nov. 1997), 8701 Adelphi Rd., Adelphi, Md. 20783-1716.

New laws that require law enforcement agencies to make public the names and addresses of convicted sex offenders are giving the news media an ethics headache. Forty-five states now have such statutes on the books; Congress adopted a federal “Megan’s Law” in 1996. The problem, writes Sheppard, who teaches journalism at Auburn University, is that while publishing the information may alert residents to potential dangers, it may also encourage vigilantism.

Harassment of sex offenders is apparently the exception rather than the rule. A 1996 study by the Washington State University Institute of Public Policy found only 33 cases of harassment in a state with more than 10,000 registered sex offenders. Yet some of the cases are serious. Neighbors torched the house of one man who was about to return

home from prison. Other sex offenders have lost their jobs. The editor of one California newspaper published a list of sex offenders, only to find the name of her twice-convicted religion editor on it. She fired him.

Some journalists argue that shining a spotlight on sex offenders after they have served time is unfair. Others insist that the news media have a responsibility to expose dangerous people who are, after all, guilty of crimes. If a child molester strikes a second time, asks Philip Seib, a journalism professor at Southern Methodist University, “how do you say, ‘We had this information, and we decided not to alert the community to his presence?’”

The dangers posed by convicted offenders are hard to gauge, Sheppard notes. The oft-cited estimate that 80 to 90 percent of sex

What Makes Journalists Tremble

In remarks originally made at an awards dinner honoring journalists who brave danger to do their work in distant corners of the world, ABC newsman Ted Koppel says in *The Nation* (Nov. 24, 1997) that, in some ways, journalism may be in greater peril here in America.

We celebrate the men and women whose dedication to the collection and distribution of facts threatens their very existence. When they antagonize those with money, political power and guns, they risk their lives. We, on the other hand, tremble at nothing quite so much as the thought of boring our audiences. Antagonizing the rich and powerful is our bread and butter; far from involving any great risk to our safety, it is one of the more reliable paths to professional advancement. The preferred weapons of the rich and powerful here in America are the pollster and the public relations consultant. But they are no threat to the safety of journalists. Our enemies are far more insidious than that. They are declining advertising revenues, the rising cost of newsprint, lower ratings, diversification, and the vertical integration of communications empires.

They are the breezier, chattier styles insinuating themselves onto the front pages of our more distinguished newspapers. They are the fading lines between television news and entertainment. There is, after all, a haunting paradox in the notion that, even as we honor journalists abroad for “risking personal and political peril in upholding the highest standards of their profession,” their own stories and the stories they cover are increasingly unlikely to lead any of our broadcasts or appear on any of our front pages. We celebrate their courage even as we exhibit increasingly little of our own.

offenders repeat their crime is apparently not supported by any research. The real figure is probably much lower. And most sex offenses are not committed by strangers; 90 to 95 percent involve incest or acquaintances. “Maybe that’s the kind of question a newspaper ought to ask,” says Alex MacLeod, managing editor of the *Seattle Times*. “What danger do these people pose? I don’t know that we’ve ever tried to answer that.”

Another problem that bothers editors is the accuracy of the official lists. Critics say they

typically have a high rate of error, with many wrong or outdated addresses. Some newspapers now only print the names and addresses on a case-by-case basis.

In the end, the courts may spare the news media further anguish. In New Jersey—the state in which seven-year-old Megan Kanka, for whom Megan’s Law was named, was raped and murdered in 1996—the state has frozen the sex offender notification process pending a court challenge to the law. The plaintiffs: 20 convicted child molesters.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Myth of Jewish Liberalism

“American Jewish Liberalism: Unraveling the Strands” by Steven M. Cohen and Charles S. Liebman, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Fall 1997), Sociology Dept., Univ. of Maryland, College Park, Md. 20742–1315.

American Jews are well known for their liberalism. Some scholars contend that this evolved naturally out of Jewish tradition, with its strong concern for social justice and the welfare of the poor. After analyzing combined data from national surveys conducted between 1972 and 1994, the authors con-

clude that the extent of Jewish liberalism is much exaggerated and Judaic values are not at its root.

The perception that political liberalism is unusually strong among Jews does have a basis in fact, write Cohen, a professor at Hebrew University, in Jerusalem, and Lieb-

man, a professor of religion and politics at Bar-Ilan University, in Ramat Gan, Israel. American Jews are more likely than gentiles to identify themselves as liberals (47 percent, compared with 28 percent) and as Democrats or pro-Democrat (72 percent, compared with 52 percent). Jews are also more likely to oppose prayer in public schools; to favor civil liberties for atheists, communists, and homosexuals; to take permissive stands on abortion, divorce, and other social issues, and to favor increased government spending in such areas as health, education, and the environment. However, the level of Jewish support for increased spending on welfare, and for government efforts to aid the poor in general, was little different from that among non-Jews. The authors' big discovery: when education, income, and other such factors are taken into account, the gap between Jews and gentiles is significantly reduced in almost all instances. On civil liberties, for instance, the 21-percentage-point difference shrinks to 10 points. The gap nearly vanishes with respect to support for government efforts to help the poor and ill, sympathy for African Americans, and

opposition to capital punishment.

"Historically," Cohen and Liebman point out, "the premodern [Jewish] religious tradition harbors deep antagonism to, not to mention suspicion of, non-Jews." In this tradition, the concern for social justice and the welfare of the poor was chiefly about *Jews*. However, sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset, a Wilson Center Senior Scholar, and others have argued that contemporary Jews have universalized this tribal sense of responsibility. But if traditional Judaic values underlie contemporary Jewish liberalism, Cohen and Liebman argue, then Jews who attend synagogue more frequently should be more liberal than other Jews; in fact, however, they are less liberal.

American Jews "have historically seen themselves as a vulnerable minority group and have seen the Democratic Party as the party more favorable to their group interests," Cohen and Liebman note. For similar reasons, Jews have supported a high barrier between church and state. Most Jews (the Orthodox excepted) also have taken a relatively permissive stance on sexual matters. But otherwise, conclude the authors, Jewish liberalism seems more myth than reality.

The Unfolding of Faith

Feminist Elizabeth Fox-Genovese explains in *Crisis* (Nov. 1997) how she has come to join the Roman Catholic Church. For her, she says, conversion "has been less an event than an unfolding."

Why or how could a non-believing, woman intellectual—and a reputedly Marxist-feminist one at that—be joining that bastion of tradition and hierarchical authoritarianism, the Catholic Church? Those who, for years, had doubted my radical credentials and targeted me as a pernicious ideological opponent did not take long to decide that that is precisely what they would have expected if only the thought had crossed their minds. (It is an inadvertent testimony to the radical secularism of the academic world that the thought had not.) But even people who were friendlier toward me probably harbored similar thoughts, if for dissimilar reasons.

For such people, the friendly and the unfriendly alike, the notion of conversion, and indeed the very idea of religious faith, has become so foreign that the only plausible explanation for it must necessarily be political: In their view, my conversion merely marked the culmination of my progress toward political and cultural conservatism. . . .

The growing struggle in my heart and soul was not, however, a matter of left and right, but rather one of right and wrong and our ability to recognize them. Throughout the 1980s, I was increasingly writing and speaking about women's issues, especially abortion, and it was the attempt to understand their full implications that gradually pulled me toward church membership and faith. . . .

There are kinds of knowing that transcend the play of words and ideas. Of such quiet certainty, but more deeply so, is the knowledge of faith, which steals into the soul.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

The Big Night in Prehistory

“Archaeologists Rediscover Cannibals” by Ann Gibbons, in *Science* (Aug. 1, 1997), 1200 New York Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

When Arizona State University bioarchaeologist Christy G. Turner II first examined the jumbled heap of human bones in Arizona, he thought: *cannibalism*. They had, for example, cut marks and burns like those found on animal bones that had been roasted and stripped of their flesh. But Turner was working in the legendary '60s, when the new conventional wisdom held that all Indians, particularly the ancient Anasazi, were gentle, peace-loving folk. Moreover, in the eyes of most scholars, the fossil evidence for earlier claims of cannibalism had come to seem extremely weak, writes Gibbons, a *Science* contributing correspondent. So Turner's contention was greeted with, in his words, “total disbelief.”

Today, however, Gibbons reports, even skeptics concede that the evidence for cannibalism has grown a lot stronger, as Turner and others have developed criteria for distinguishing the marks of cannibalism. Just within the last 2,500 years, it appears, not only the Anasazi but the Aztecs of Mexico and the people of Fiji may well have feasted on their own kind—and often enough to indicate that it was not only at times of extreme hunger. Researchers in Europe have been coming to similar conclusions about the Neanderthals, who lived between 45,000 and more than 130,000 years ago.

After Turner's initial cannibalism thesis was hooted down, he and his late wife, Jacqueline Turner, systematically studied tray after tray of prehistoric bones in museums and private collections in the United States and Mexico. In several hundred specimens, they identified a pattern of bone processing that showed little respect for the dead. “There's no known mortuary practice in the Southwest where the body is dismembered, the head is roasted and dumped into a pit unceremoniously, and other pieces get left all over the floor,” Turner says.

Meanwhile, paleoanthropologist Tim D. White of the University of California, Berke-

ley, focused on Mancos, a small Anasazi pueblo on the Colorado Plateau from around A.D. 1150, where archaeologists had recovered the scattered and broken remains of at least 29 individuals. In *Prehistoric Cannibalism at Mancos* (1992), Gibbons says, White “describes how he painstakingly sifted through 2,106 bone fragments, often using an electron microscope.” He distinguished marks left by butchering from those left by animal gnawing or trampling; defined a new category of bone damage he called “pot polish,” shiny worn areas on bone tips resulting from the bones being stirred in pots; and compared the human remains with those of ordinary game animals at other sites, to see if they had been treated in the same way.

White concluded, Gibbons writes, that the Mancos remains “were the leavings of a feast



Goya's *Les Cannibales* (1812)

in which 17 adults and 12 children had their heads cut off, roasted, and broken open on rock anvils. Their long bones were broken—he believes for marrow—and their vertebral bodies were missing, perhaps crushed and boiled for oil. Finally, their bones were dumped, like animal bones.”

Though White's book has become the unofficial guidebook for the field, his and Turner's case for cannibalism among the Anasazi hasn't swayed all the critics. “It's still just a theory,” insists Museum of New Mexico archaeologist Peter Bullock.

Tainted Science?

“Ties That Bind: Do Corporate Dollars Strangle Scientific Research?” by Daniel Zalewski, in *Lingua Franca* (June–July 1997), 22 W. 38th St., New York, N.Y. 10018.

The image of the white-coated scientist in his ivory tower, disinterestedly pursuing knowledge for its own sake, has never been more at odds with reality. Today, researchers and universities patent everything from genes to vaccines, and most scientists rely on grants from industry, in addition to federal support. Is the profit motive leading scientists astray? asks Zalewski, a senior editor at *Lingua Franca*.

A recent study by Sheldon Krimsky, a professor of environmental policy at Tufts University, shows how common conflicts of interest are. Scrutinizing 789 articles in leading scientific journals, he found that in one-third of the cases at least one author had a vested interest in the research. The interests included “owning a patent directly related to the published work; being a major stockholder or executive in a company with commercial interests tied to the research; or serving on the board of directors of such a company.” Only one of the 268 articles included a disclosure statement. So what? say many scientists. “There’s a real trumping up of this issue,” maintains Boston University’s Kenneth Rothman, editor of the journal *Epidemiology*. It’s the science that counts, he says, not who did it or who funded it.

But others have concluded that disclosure is a good idea. In 1995, the National Institutes of Health adopted regulations obliging researchers who get federal funds to reveal their financial interests in companies to their universities. The rules grew out of a controversy that began with a *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) arti-

cle in 1988 heralding a Genentech heart-attack medication called TPA. *Newsday* then revealed that at least 13 of the researchers involved were long-time Genentech stockholders, some to the tune of \$100,000. The scientists angrily denied that their financial interests biased their work. But after “several conflicting studies,” Zalewski says, “the medical community today remains divided” over their findings.

JAMA now demands disclosure from prospective authors, as do *Science*, the *Lancet*, and the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Scientists and editors, Zalewski says, now confront “an even more troubling phenomenon: industry’s manhandling of manuscripts during the period before publication.” Scientists who receive industry funding typically agree to keep their research results confidential until any possible patents are secured. Firms naturally want to examine a researcher’s data before publication, Zalewski says, and “it appears they often use the opportunity to suggest, or even demand, alternative ways to frame data.” Recently, four of the major authors of a study of a hypertension medication quit to protest pressure along those lines from the drug’s Swiss manufacturer.

Some scientists say the problems are exaggerated. “Collaboration between science and industry is crucial, particularly in the medical realm,” says JoAnn Manson, a professor of medicine at Harvard University. “This is how the public gets safe and effective therapies.” Trading these in for “some fairy-tale vision of academic purity,” she says, would make little sense.

Catching Criminals Early

“Interaction between Birth Complications and Early Maternal Rejection in Predisposing Individuals to Adult Violence: Specificity to Serious, Early-Onset Violence” by Adrian Raine, Patricia Brennan, and Sarnoff A. Mednick, in *The American Journal of Psychiatry* (Sept. 1997), American Psychiatric Assn., 1400 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Efforts to prevent young people from turning to violent crime should begin when they are still in the womb. That’s the conclusion Raine, a professor of psychology at the University of Southern California, and his colleagues draw from their study of 4,269 Danish males born between 1959 and 1961.

Elaborating on an earlier, more limited

study they did, the authors find that boys who suffered both birth complications (such as a breech delivery or forceps extraction) and early rejection by their mother (as indicated chiefly by her attempt to abort the fetus or by her placing the infant in a public institution for more than four months during his first year) were more likely to com-

mit serious violent crimes by age 18.

Nine percent of the boys who had experienced both difficulties committed murder, rape, assault, or other violent crimes by the time they turned 18. By contrast, only four percent of the boys with neither characteristic followed that path. And the percentage for those who had experienced only one of the problems was even lower: three percent of the boys with only birth complications, and two percent of those with only maternal rejection.

The infants' twin disadvantages played out early in life. Among men who turned to vio-

lence *after* age 18, there is no sign that these handicaps played any special role.

The authors suggest that disruption of mother-infant bonding early in a child's life may result in "more callous, affectionless, unempathic, psychopathic-like" behavior. That increases the likelihood of violence—especially in individuals who also suffered birth complications, which can cause neuropsychological damage, weakening their self-control and making them prone to "explosive, impulsive aggression." Providing mothers with better prenatal health care, the authors say, might be one way to fight crime.

Overhauling Highway Design

"The Asphalt Rebellion" by Alan Ehrenhalt, in *Governing* (Oct. 1997), 1100 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Ste. 1300, Washington, D.C. 20036; "Look, Ma, No Hands!" by Corinna Wu, in *Science News* (Sept. 13, 1997), 1719 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

For decades, America's roads and highways have been getting wider, in accordance with the engineering design principle that wider means safer and more efficient. Alas, it has also meant turning city streets and scenic country roads into multilane speedways. Now, the assumptions behind this trend are coming under challenge. In New England and elsewhere, writes Ehrenhalt, executive editor of *Governing*, "a rebellion against an entire half-century of American engineering ideology" has begun.

That ideology, he says, is embodied in a 1,044-page tome published by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and commonly known as the "AASHTO Green Book." Federal law no longer requires that roads built with the help of federal funds adhere to Green Book standards, but that publication remains the engineering profession's sacred text, Ehrenhalt says. It makes safety the primary objective in highway design; insists that safety means accommodating drivers traveling at high, even illegal speeds; and assumes that safety at high speeds requires wide roadways.

Local officials in New England and other regions have been challenging those assumptions. When Connecticut's state government offered two years ago to help address problems with a 17-foot-wide stone arch bridge on a picturesque rural road in southwestern Connecticut by replacing it with a 28-foot-wide structure of steel and concrete, Redding selectmen told the state highway engineers to

take their \$350,000 in state and federal aid and get lost. "It's a sad commentary on our system," said First Selectman Henry Bielawa, "when historic preservation, neighborhood esthetics and common sense are displaced by cookie-cutter design requirements." In the past year, Connecticut has relaxed its rules on bridges, while Vermont has enacted a law virtually inviting its transportation department to depart from AASHTO standards in road building. Maybe, the "Asphalt Rebels" assert, high-speed travel is not always the highest good.

The principle that safety requires width is also coming under challenge from a different, perhaps ultimately more powerful source: technology. Under the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, a research consortium has been working to develop a prototype automated highway system. Such a system, reports Wu, a *Science News* writer, "promises to reduce accidents, cut travel times, and reduce fuel consumption and pollution"—and to reduce the need for new, ever wider highways.

Under one approach, ceramic magnets would be embedded in the roadway, spaced a few feet apart. Automated cars equipped with sensors and tracking one another through radio signals would travel at high speeds close together in a pack without the intervention of human drivers. This could double or even triple the lane capacity of existing roads. And the cost of automating an existing highway would be only a fraction of the cost of building new roads.

ARTS & LETTERS

Shine or Sham?

A Survey of Recent Articles

Never in recent memory have classical music critics and audiences been so passionately at odds as they were last year over the concerts of David Helfgott, the mentally ill Australian pianist made famous by the 1996 Oscar-winning movie *Shine*. His rapt audiences believed they were witnessing a triumph of the human spirit, but irate critics saw instead musical incompetence and an unseemly spectacle resembling a freak show.

To Terry Teachout, music critic for *Commentary* (June 1997), who saw Helfgott's New York concert in March, it is appalling that "a mentally-incompetent man was being paraded before a paying audience for the financial gain of his managers." The pianist "grunts, mutters, sings, and talks to himself—very loudly—as he plays," and his playing "suggested a weird cross between a gifted but uninhibited child and a player piano that has been badly regulated." Not all reviewers during Helfgott's three-continent "Shine Tour" were so caustic, yet most were indignant that so inadequate a pianist, a man mentally deranged, should be appearing before sold-out audiences in some of the world's great concert halls.

Peter Feuchtwanger, a vice president of the European Piano Teachers Association, who has been giving Helfgott private lessons since 1986, claims that his pupil is "a very great musician," whose playing has impressed numerous professionals. However, he admits in a symposium on the Helfgott phenomenon in *Philosophy and Literature* (Oct. 1997), the pianist's performances are uneven as a result of constant medication.

Elizabeth Silsbury, a music critic and visiting scholar at Flinders University of South Australia, had heard Helfgott play before, but his post-*Shine* concert in Adelaide, at the beginning of his international tour, she says in the same journal, was "the most

ghastly experience" of her professional life. "Not only was his playing even more shapeless than ever, it had become arrogant, flagrantly disregarding the composer's dynamic directions as though the pianist knew better than Beethoven and Liszt how the pieces should go. Even worse, his onstage antics . . . seemed to show that he was fully aware of just how outrageous he was being."

To most members of his audiences, however, many obviously attending a classical music concert for the first time, Helfgott's performances were deeply moving. "This wasn't just a piano recital," said one woman quoted by Denis Dutton, editor of *Philosophy and Literature*, "it was a chance to touch the world of an extraordinary human being." In the film, the Australian-born prodigy is abused by a cruel father; suffers a mental breakdown at the moment of his prize-winning performance of the Rachmaninoff Third Piano Concerto in London; returns to Australia, where his father refuses to speak to him and he is institutionalized; and then, eventually, he is released, starts to perform again, and, with the help of a good woman who marries him, succeeds in giving a formal concert. Many concertgoers seem to assume that this is an accurate picture of Helfgott's world. But his family strongly disputes the portrait of his father, and key facts have been



Pianist David Helfgott performs in Toronto during his 1997 Shine tour. Many critics said that Helfgott offered a shining example of musical inadequacy.

altered or invented for dramatic effect. Helfgott did win an award for performing Rachmaninoff, for example, but his “break-down” came later, in Australia.

Helfgott is not the first eccentric or even mentally ill musician to be widely acclaimed, Jennifer Judkins, of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Canadian musicologist Kevin Bazzana independently observe in *Philosophy and Literature*. Rachmaninoff himself had symptoms of manic-depression. Glenn Gould, Bazzana points out, “wore gloves in summer and had a Linus-blanket obsession with his favorite piano chair and played with hands flailing, nose to keys, with obbligato croaks and hums.” What is new about the Helfgott phenomenon, he says, is that “never has such a successful musical

career been built on performances of such transparent and undisputed inadequacy.”

Helfgott’s playing has “moments of virtuosity and beauty,” writes Renée Cox Lorraine, who teaches at the University of Tennessee. What is often missing (besides many of the inscribed notes) is “a sense of continuity, a meaningful relation of present to past and future, any sense of the work as an integrated whole.” Descriptions of his playing, she points out in *Philosophy and Literature*, “are quite similar to descriptions of Helfgott’s psyche or consciousness—splintered, erratic, chaotic, fragmented.” His performances could be regarded as the work of “an extreme example of a postmodern consciousness”—which, given today’s “cultural *zeitgeist*,” may be part of their appeal.

The Real Meaning of Oz

“Silver Slippers and a Golden Cap: L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and Historical Memory in American Politics” by Gretchen Ritter, in *Journal of American Studies* (Aug. 1997), Cambridge Univ. Press, Journals Dept., 40 W. 20th St., New York, N.Y. 10011-4211.

L. Frank Baum’s *Wonderful Wizard of Oz* has enjoyed a century of popularity. But few of today’s fans, introduced to the story by the classic 1939 movie, even guess at the rich cultural and political satire readers found in it when it was a best seller in 1900, writes Ritter, a political scientist at the University of Texas, Austin.

The young heroine, Dorothy, part of a struggling farm family, begins her journey in Kansas, the nation’s heartland. When she arrives in Oz, Ritter writes, she finds it has a sectionalist geography that bears a striking resemblance to the late-19th-century Populists’ America: “the North and South are lands with good rulers, while, in the East and West, the people may be good, but their leaders are oppressive.” The strongest power resides in the East—until the cyclone brings Dorothy’s house down on the Wicked Witch of the East.

As Dorothy travels west toward the Emerald City (read: Washington, D.C.), she is joined first by the Scarecrow, an agrarian figure (no accident here) in quest of brains who eventually learns that real intelligence comes from experience, which he has in abundance. Then the Tin Woodman falls in with them. A worker from the East, he has been turned into a heartless machine by the Wicked Witch of the East. Next comes the

Cowardly Lion, who may represent William Jennings Bryan, the failed Populist (and Democratic) candidate in the 1896 presidential contest.

The Populists bitterly opposed the gold standard—Bryan’s famous Cross of Gold—and favored a silver standard to ease the flow of money and credit in rural America. “Oz is an abbreviation for ounces, one measure of the worth of gold and silver bullion,” Ritter points out. “In the land of Oz, gold and silver are often the arbiters of power.” In Oz, a brick road the color of gold leads to the Emerald City. Ruled by the Wizard of Oz, who turns out to be a fraud, the Emerald City, Ritter notes, “is made out to be a place of illusions where deception and aloof behavior provide the basis for authority.”

In the book, Dorothy dons silver slippers (not ruby ones, as in the movie) that had belonged to the Wicked Witch of the East. When she travels in them along the yellow brick road to the Emerald City, Ritter says, she is in effect practicing the bimetalism (a standard that mixes gold and silver) favored by some reformers.

Only at the book’s end does Glinda, the Good Witch of the South, reveal to Dorothy that the slippers “can carry you anyplace in the world in three steps.” With this knowledge, Dorothy is able to return to Kansas. On

the trip, however, she loses the slippers. “The mysterious power of silver has disappeared before it was ever broadly tested,” writes

Ritter. Just as the hidden meaning of Baum’s tale was lost by the time Hollywood put it on the big screen in 1939.

Updike’s Christian Slant

“While one can be a Christian and a writer, the phrase ‘Christian writer’ feels somewhat reductive, and most writers so called have resisted it,” notes novelist John Updike, in accepting the Champion Award to a “distinguished Christian person of letters” from the Jesuit magazine *America* (Oct. 4, 1997).

Is not Christian fiction, insofar as it exists, a description of the bewilderment and panic, the sense of hollowness and futility, which afflicts those whose search for God is not successful? And are we not all, within the churches and temples or not, more searcher than finder in this regard?

I ask, while gratefully accepting this award, to be absolved from any duty to provide orthodox morals and consolations in my fiction. Fiction holds the mirror up to this world and cannot show more than this world contains. But I do admit that there are different angles at which to hold the mirror, and that the reading I did in my twenties and thirties, to prop up my faith, also gave me ideas and a slant that shaped my stories and, especially, my novels.

The first, The Poorhouse Fair, carries an epigraph from the Gospel of St. Luke; the next, Rabbit, Run, from Pascal; the third, The Centaur, from Karl Barth; and the fifth, Couples, from Paul Tillich. I thought of my novels as illustrations for texts from Kierkegaard and Barth; the hero of Rabbit, Run was meant to be a representative Kierkegaardian man, as his name, Angstrom, hints. Man in a state of fear and trembling, separated from God, haunted by dread, twisted by the conflicting demands of his animal biology and his human intelligence, of the social contract and the inner imperatives, condemned as if by otherworldly origins to perpetual restlessness—such was, and to some extent remains, my conception.

Is Photography an Art?

“From *The World Is Beautiful* to *The Family of Man*: The Plight of Photography as a Modern Art” by Roger Seamon, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Summer 1997), American Society for Aesthetics, Haggerty Museum of Art, 404 Cudahy Hall, Marquette Univ., Milwaukee, Wis. 53201-1881.

Since its beginnings more than a century ago, photography has remained something of a stepchild to the art world. The poet Charles Baudelaire bitterly attacked its earliest aspirations to high-art status in 1859, calling it an intrusion of “industry” into art that had “greatly contributed to the impoverishment of French artistic genius.”

There have been a number of very different attempts to explain the low status of photography, notes Seamon, a professor of English at the University of British Columbia. In the 1960s, French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu asserted that photography was considered a middlebrow form because it depicted, or appealed to, ordinary people,

whereas “high” modern art “systematically refuses . . . the passions, emotions and feelings which ordinary people put into their ordinary existence.” Recently, Kendall Walton and Roger Scruton, professors of philosophy at the University of Michigan and England’s Birkbeck College, respectively, have stirred fresh debate. They claim that photography is entirely devoid of an aesthetic dimension. The photograph is not an interpretation of reality but merely a representation of it, they say.

Seamon believes that none of these arguments get to the heart of the matter. Although it was a product of modern technology, he argues, photography was a creature of

classical values in art. But, with the rise of modernism in the 20th century, aesthetic standards changed. Photography, however, continued to express the “official” values of Western culture. “The beauty and moral dignity (the two are really one) of the ordinary is at the heart of what we might call democratic classicism, but to top-level intellectuals . . . that ethos is aesthetically heretical,” Seamon observes. Yet these were the values on display in the work of the great 20th-century photographers, such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Henri Cartier-Bresson—values epitomized in the famous

1955 exhibit at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, *The Family of Man*.

Since the 1970s, Seamon notes, photography has enjoyed wider critical acceptance, as some avant-garde photographers have abandoned “pure” photography for what he calls the romantic aesthetic. Their work, Seamon argues, “emphasizes the eccentric, ironic, allegedly ‘individual’ response, whereas photography is an expression of communal ideals.” The question, Seamon suggests, is whether by embracing the romantic aesthetic, photography is losing many of its unique and most important characteristics.

OTHER NATIONS

The Liberal Solzhenitsyn

“Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Russian Nationalism” by David G. Rowley, in *Journal of Contemporary History* (July 1997), SAGE Publications Ltd., P.O. Box 5096, Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91359.

When Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, after his expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1974, thundered against the West’s materialism and waxed nostalgic for traditional Russian values, disappointed Western liberals swiftly dismissed him as a “Russian nationalist.” Yet when he returned to his homeland in 1994, he was enthusiastically welcomed by Russian liberals—and denounced and vilified by right-wing “nationalists.”

“What went unremarked in the [Western] debate over how liberal or authoritarian Solzhenitsyn was,” writes Rowley, a historian at the University of North Dakota, “was the fact that he stood for something unprecedented in Russian history. He has consistently advocated a Russia by, of and for Russians; he wants the Russian nation to be congruent with the Russian state. It is pre-eminent upon this point that Solzhenitsyn differs from the Russian chauvinist right wing.”

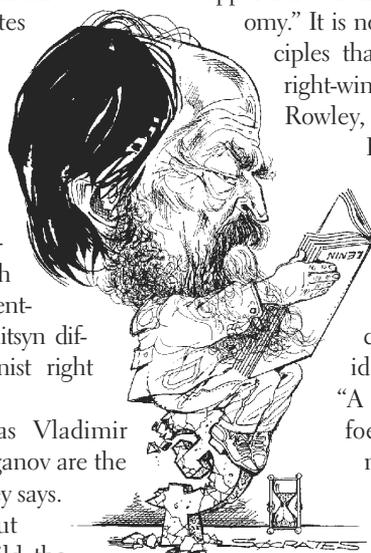
Nationalist leaders such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Gennady Zyuganov are the ones who are mislabeled, Rowley says. They are not nationalists, but imperialists who want to rebuild the old Soviet empire. Solzhenitsyn, by contrast, “is a staunch anti-imperialist.” In his 1990 brochure, *Rebuilding Russia*, he urged that Russia give up its empire, though he hoped

that Belarus and Ukraine, as well as certain traditionally Russian territories within other Soviet republics, would remain part of Russia. A critic of *perestroika* (he favored far more gradual change), Solzhenitsyn is now critical of the Russian Federation, which he calls “a false Leninist invention. Russia was never a federation.”

“Solzhenitsyn’s support of democracy continues to be extremely limited and grudging,” Rowley claims, amounting to “little more than support for a strong presidency and local autonomy.” It is not so much his political principles that distinguish him from the right-wing chauvinists, according to Rowley, as his conception of the Russian state.

Solzhenitsyn “provides an alternative to the messianic concept of Russian imperialism that has underlain the traditional conceptions of Russian national identity,” Rowley concludes. “A consistent and implacable foe of imperialism, Solzhenitsyn is a nationalist of a very modern and Western type.” Indeed, Rowley says, his defense of modern

nationalism may turn out to be his greatest contribution to his country. “If Yeltsin is Russia’s Cavour,” he suggests, “Solzhenitsyn is her Mazzini.”



The Colombian Soul

Nobel Prize-winning novelist Gabriel García Márquez, writing in *Américas* (Dec. 1997), limns the character of his fellow Colombians.

Our banner is excess. Excess in everything: in good and evil, in love and hate, in the jubilation of victory and the bitterness of defeat. We are as passionate when we destroy idols as when we create them.

We are intuitive people, immediate and spontaneous autodidacts, and pitiless workers, but the mere idea of easy money drives us wild. In our hearts we harbor equal amounts of political rancor and historical amnesia. In sports a spectacular win or defeat can cost as many lives as a disastrous plane crash. For the same reason we are a sentimental society where action takes precedence over reflection, impulsiveness over reason, human warmth over prudence. We have an almost irrational love of life but kill one another in our passion to live. The perpetrator of the most terrible crimes is betrayed by his sentimentality. In other words, the most heartless Colombian is betrayed by his heart.

For we are two countries: one on paper and the other in reality. We are precursors of the sciences in America but still take a medieval view of scientists as hermetic wizards, although few things in daily life are not scientific miracles. Justice and impunity cohabit inside each of us in the most arbitrary way; we are fanatical legalists but carry in our souls a sharp-witted lawyer skilled at sidestepping laws without breaking them, or breaking them without being caught. We adore dogs, carpet the world with roses, are overwhelmed by love of country, but we ignore the disappearance of six animal species each hour of the day and night because of criminal depredations in the rain forest, and have ourselves destroyed beyond recall one of the planet's great rivers. We grow indignant at the nation's negative image abroad but do not dare admit that often the reality is worse. We are capable of the noblest acts and the most despicable ones, of sublime poems and demented murders, of celebratory funerals and deadly debauchery. Not because some of us are good and others evil, but because all of us share in the two extremes. In the worst case—and may God keep us from it—we are capable of anything.

What Price Democracy?

“Misreading Mexico” by M. Delal Baer, in *Foreign Policy* (Fall 1997), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1779 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Drugs, corruption, and the “perfect dictatorship”—that is the lurid picture of Mexico in the minds of many Americans, observes Baer, a Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in Washington, D.C. But the happier reality, highlighted by the historic midterm elections there last July, is that Mexico is moving from single-party rule to competitive democracy “in a way that most other developing countries can only dream about—without sudden collapses or charismatic saviors.” The question now, he says, is whether Mexico will also move away from the free-market economic reforms of recent years.

When Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa said in 1990 that Mexico was a “perfect dictatorship,” having all the characteristics of a dictatorship except the appear-

ance of one, his phrase was widely repeated in Mexico. But it was already becoming out of date, Baer says. Change began in earnest “soon after an embarrassing electoral computer ‘crash’ marred the 1988 election” of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, presidential candidate of the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). (When early returns showed opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solorzano in the lead, the computerized vote tabulation system providing returns over national TV suddenly went dead. Votes were counted “the old-fashioned way.”) By the 1991 elections, Baer says, the Salinas administration had overhauled the electoral system, taking needed steps such as issuing fraud-proof voter ID cards.

Still, Mexican voters did not deal the PRI

any big defeats until last July. In balloting for seats in the Mexican Congress's lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, the PRI won only 39 percent of the popular vote—the lowest level of support in its 68 years of rule—and lost 59 seats. Cárdenas's leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) garnered 26 percent of the popular vote and gained 60 seats, while Cárdenas himself was elected Mexico City's mayor.

Now the question is not whether Mexico can hold free elections, Baer says, but whether the Mexican electorate will tilt left, rejecting the free-market economic reforms of recent years, including the 1993 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The Mexican Left "bitterly opposed" NAFTA in particular. Is the Mexican Left now reconciled to it? So far, notes Baer, Cárdenas has given only mixed signals.

Enslaved by the Past

"'God Created Me to Be a Slave'" by Elinor Burkett, in *The New York Times Magazine* (Oct. 12, 1997), 229 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

The best testimony to the persistence of slavery in the West African country of Mauritania may be the number of times it has been outlawed. It was banned by the French colonial government in 1905, again in 1961, after independence, by the first government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and yet again in 1980 by presidential proclamation. Even so, reports Burkett, a free-lance writer, in Mauritania's "endless expanses of wind-swept nothingness . . . an estimated 90,000 slaves labor as they have for more than 500 years—serving their masters by tending their herds, bleeding their acacia trees for gum arabic, picking dates, and bearing the next generation of human property."

Though there have been occasional instances of slavery elsewhere in modern times, only in Mauritania, Burkett contends, does widespread, institutionalized slavery continue to exist. The enslaved are blacks who serve the nation's ruling Arab tribes. "Slaves here, descendants of generations of human chattel, receive no salaries, no education," she says. "They cannot marry without permission or plan the futures of their children."

The 1980 emancipation proclamation by President Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidalla freed the slaves without making slave ownership illegal, and specified that owners should be compensated for the loss of their property. In the absence of compensation, masters generally consider the law null and void. Many religious leaders also oppose it as contrary to the Koran. "The state, if it is Islamic, does not have the right to seize my house, my wife or my slave," said El Hassen Ould Benyamine, imam of a mosque in Tayarat. Most

of Mauritania's slaves are unaware of their legal emancipation, Burkett says.

Slavery in Mauritania is not the same as the slavery that once existed in the United States, she notes. Slave markets are unknown. No self-respecting master would resort to selling his slaves, since that would be an admission of economic desperation. In fact, "slaves are so numerous," she says, "that they are routinely 'discharged' to save their owners the expense of feeding them." There is virtually no chance of rebellion. "After 15 or 20 generations, people become totally submissive," observes Boubacar Ould Messoud, founder of SOS-Esclave, the Mauritanian underground railroad.

"God created me to be a slave, just as he created a camel to be a camel," a young runaway named Fatma Mint Mamadou believes. Her mother was an *abd*, a slave, as her mother before her had been. Only when Fatma suffered a particularly severe beating from her master in 1990 did she take off across the desert. In the capital city of Nouakchott (population 700,000), she learned that Mauritania's slaves had been emancipated 10 years earlier.

Fatma "might be a black African, but like all Mauritania's raised as slaves, she thinks of herself as an Arab," Burkett writes. "She considers herself part of the tribe and clan of her master. She has no other identity in a society where individualism is anathema, a world where to belong is to be." Fatma and an estimated 300,000 other black Mauritania's—most of them abandoned during the decades of drought that have killed off their masters' herds—are now mired in poverty and caught between slavery and freedom.

RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

“Factors Affecting East Asian Views of the United States: The Search for Common Ground.”

Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1800 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006. 77 pp. \$19.95

Author: *David I. Hitchcock*

East Asia’s financial crisis has quieted talk of the “East Asian miracle.” Now, perhaps, the notion of “Asian values” championed by Singapore’s Lee Kwan Yew and others can also be put in perspective. After interviewing 100 “opinion leaders” from seven nations, Hitchcock, a senior associate at Washington’s Center for Strategic and International Studies, finds that East Asians’ assertive claims about “Asian values” have stemmed in part from anxiety about social problems in their own countries—the same sort of problems that worry Americans.

In each country—Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, China, South Korea, and Japan—Hitchcock found that rapid economic and social change have produced “a sense of loss as old traditions weaken and urbanization brings new life styles.” Divorce rates, while still far lower than in America, are mounting; in urban areas of Thailand,

Malaysia, and Singapore, the rates have nearly doubled. The elderly increasingly live on their own. Drug abuse is rising (14 percent of teenagers surveyed in Malaysia were using hard drugs), school dropouts are more numerous, and crime and juvenile delinquency are on the upswing.

Asians have mixed feelings about the United States, and many resent U.S. demands for reforms in trade and other areas that would only accelerate social and economic change, and their accompanying problems.

The trend, a lawyer in Kuala Lumpur lamented, “is towards materialism—we are losing sight of values in the race for materialism.” Although many temples, shrines, mosques, and churches are crowded, Hitchcock writes, skepticism is common in the region “about the ability of religion or traditional concepts to reverse the deterioration of old values.”

“Race, Self-Employment, and Upward Mobility: An Illusive American Dream.”

Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Johns Hopkins University Press. Order from Johns Hopkins University Press, Hampden Station, Baltimore, Md. 21211. 288 pp. \$16.95

Author: *Timothy Bates*

Seeing Asian-owned convenience stores, dry cleaners, and other small retail ventures in America’s cities, many people ask: where are all the black entrepreneurs? The surprising answer advanced by Bates, a professor of labor and urban affairs at Wayne State University and a former Wilson Center Fellow, is that they have better paths into business. “Running a small retail store in the ghetto, bluntly, is a waste of their time,” he writes.

Contrary to the stereotype, Bates says, small businesses are generally the domain of well-educated and highly skilled people. “The bedrock of small-firm creation is the owner’s human capital, that is, the founder’s education, training, work experience, and skills.” Many Asian business owners are underemployed, “blocked from occupying professional or managerial jobs . . . because of language barriers or employ-

er hesitation to recognize foreign credentials.” Often, moreover, Asians launching new businesses have good access to capital, including assets of their own and funds borrowed from banks, friends, and ethnic networks.

In a Census Bureau database of 25,337 start-ups between 1979 and ‘87, nearly 58 percent of the Asian business starters held college degrees, compared with 30.2 percent of their black counterparts and 37.7 percent of their nonminority counterparts.

Most new firms are launched by experienced people in their thirties and forties, Bates says. The first generation of blacks with widespread access to higher education is now entering those years. Indeed, black-owned firms are proliferating in lucrative fields such as finance, manufacturing, and business and professional services.

as a practical tool. He went sleepless so the rest of us would know anything essential in the journals we were intending to read.

*T. George Harris
La Jolla, Calif.*

Defending May Swenson

Perhaps Edwin B. Weissinger mistook May Swenson for someone else when he dressed down Anthony Hecht for lauding her ["Correspondence," *WQ*, Autumn '97]. Let him read, preferably in an old *New Yorker*, the elegant dirge for an American leader, "The Lowering (Arlington Cemetery June 8, 1968)."

Before denouncing Ms. Swenson's "gibberish," he might look up "Southbound on the Freeway," "Centaur," and "Question" as samples of her distinctive voice. To her credit, she carried less ideological baggage than more fashionable poets.

*David H. Stewart
Bozeman, Mont.*

Absolutes

James Scofield's letter ["Correspondence," *WQ*, Autumn '97] expressing his "distaste for and fear of Absolutes" is rife with irony. After getting past his vitriol (a feat in itself) against religion, and Christianity in particular, it dawned on me that Mr. Scofield is apparently not that afraid of Absolutes; he makes a number of rather firm statements himself: "Religion is not a matter of God, church, or holy cause," and "Those for whom a central idea is the most important aspect of existence already have one foot mired in the pathology of fanaticism. Their truth is never seized by doubt . . ."

In addition to placing the vast majority of humanity into a box labeled "fanatic" (and doing so in the fell swoop of a single sentence), Mr. Scofield manages rather disingenuously to stand out in bold relief as the parody of the very thing he despises: absolutism. I doubt very much, for example, whether his truth has ever been "seized by doubt." On the contrary, he seems to hang on to his every opinion with a zealot's fervor.

He remarks at the close of his letter that "our culture functions best at room temperature." If that is the case, I fear Mr. Scofield is running a fever.

*Rev. Michael Bruner
Hopewell, N.J.*

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FROM THE CENTER

In the last issue of the *WQ*, this space was devoted to an account of the congressional debate over the proper level of taxpayer support for the Woodrow Wilson Center. The Senate had approved the full amount requested last winter in President Clinton's fiscal year 1998 budget, \$5.8 million; the House of Representatives had voted an amount sufficient only for the Center to close down and go out of business. A conference committee would reconcile the two proposals. Hanging in the balance was the very survival of the nation's official memorial to its 28th president.

It is gratifying to be able to report that Congress has since decided to provide the Center its full request for the fiscal year that began on October 1, thus assuring its near-term survival. It is even more gratifying to report that the Center is doing more than surviving. The challenge to its existence, and Congress's vote of confidence last fall, have both invigorated the Center. The year ahead promises to be an exciting one, as we plunge into a variety of activities designed to build a secure and productive future.

Central among these is the thoughtful work, already far along, of the Strategic Planning Committee of the Center's Board of Trustees. The committee's task is no less than to revisit the Center's basic mission and forge a plan that will harness the value of this unique advanced-study center in ways that busy members of Congress, government officials, private-sector businesspeople, potential donors, and the general public alike can more easily see and appreciate. And support.

Augmenting this effort, and adding immeasurably to the Center's public visibility, will be our move this summer into a distinctive wing of Washington's new Ronald Reagan Building. Designed expressly for the Center, this new space, fronting on Pennsylvania Avenue, will for the first time provide a fitting public memorial to Woodrow Wilson while also allowing us to offer lectures and other events for both the

Washington policy community and the general public. We hope that President Clinton or Vice President Gore will be on hand to help us celebrate the grand opening of the Center in its new home, and we hope that readers of the *WQ* will make it a point to visit when they come to town.

A third major event in the life of the Center was the recent retirement of its distinguished and long-serving director, Charles Blitzer. A search committee is now actively at work vetting candidates to succeed him as only the fourth director in nearly 30 years. By any measure, the Center has been very fortunate in its executive leadership: Benjamin Read, James Billington, and Charles Blitzer each served the Center and the public interest extraordinarily well. Their invaluable work will continue to exert a major influence on the institution in the years ahead.

Not to be overlooked as the Center plans its future is the importance of generating additional sources of financial support. A highly successful public-private partnership from its very first year, the Center has annually relied on the kindness of many strangers, converting them in short order into fast friends. This we need to continue, and accelerate, and broaden. The Center's Development Committee has an appropriately ambitious plan for 1998 in which all interested parties, including readers of the *WQ*, can play important roles. We need to offer more people an opportunity to help support the programs and products of the Center that they have come to value. Happiness, after all, is caring—and being able to do something about it.

With the hard work and assistance of literally thousands of people, these ingredients of an active 1998—a revised strategic plan, a new home, new leadership, and a broader base of financial support—will together assure that the Woodrow Wilson Center, and its quarterly, will not just survive but thrive in the years ahead.

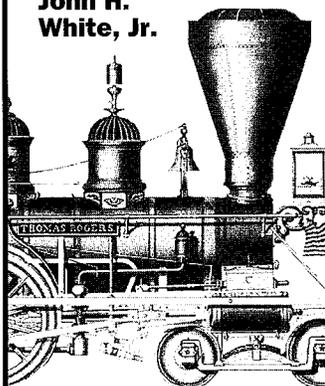
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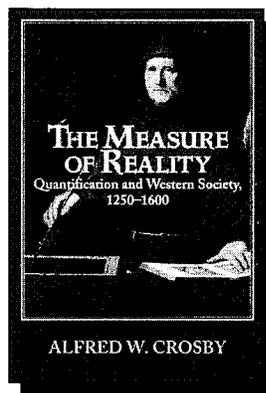
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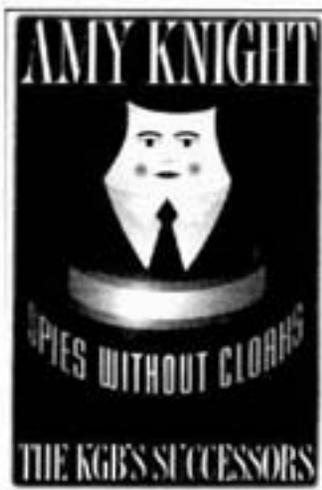
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