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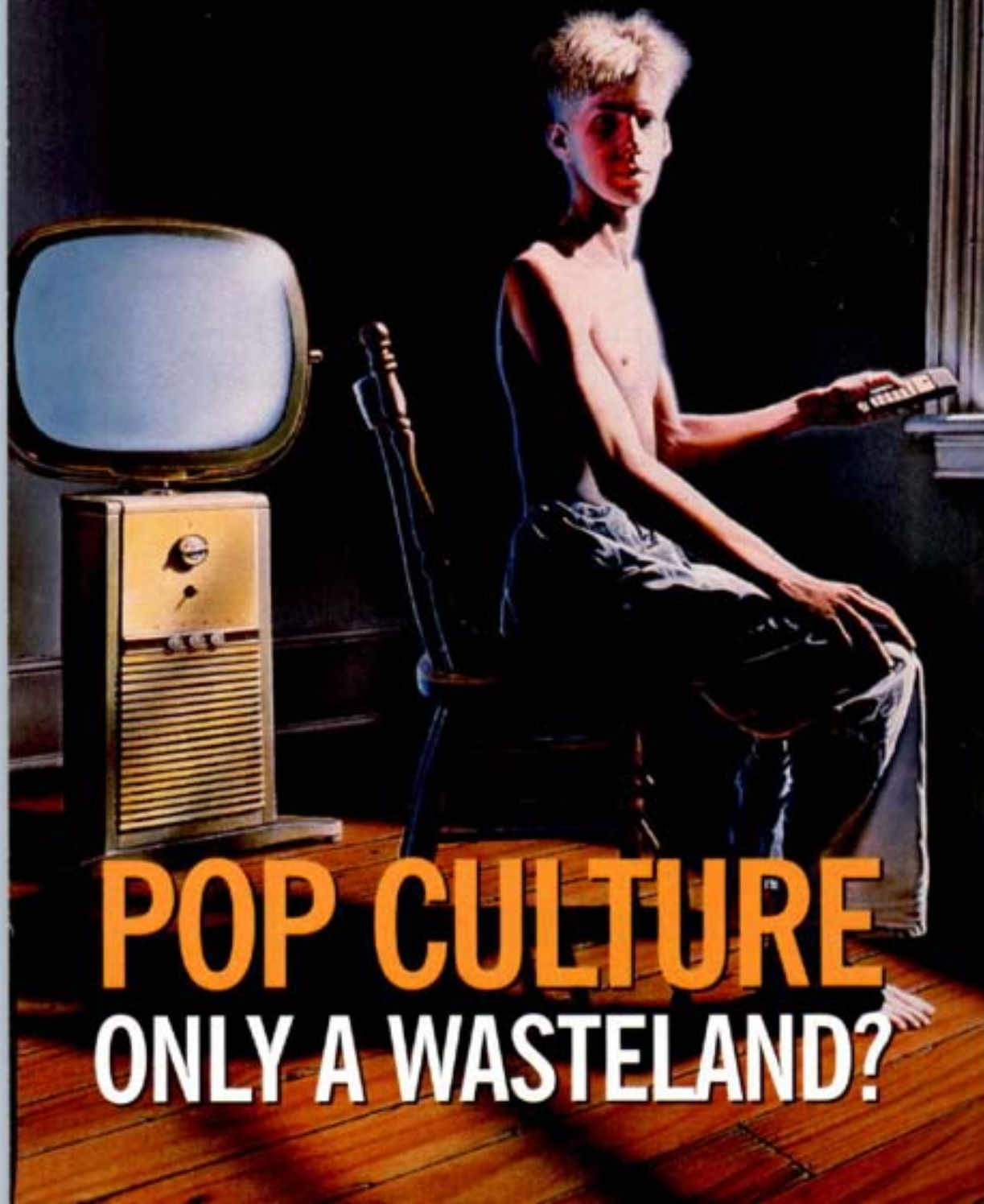
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POP CULTURE
ONLY A WASTELAND?

Wilson Center Events

"A Globalist Manifesto for Public Policy"

Charles W. Calomiris, Paul M. Montrone Professor of Private Enterprise at Columbia University, **July 27**

"How China Privatizes: A New Institutional Perspective"

Xiaobo Hu, Wilson Center public policy scholar and assistant professor of political science at Clemson University, and **Nicholas Lardy**, senior fellow, Brookings Institution, **July 31**

"Building Democracy in Asia: Transitional Elections and Indonesia"

Eric Bjornlund, Wilson Center fellow and former director, Asia Programs, National Democratic Institute, **August 2**

"The Economics of War"

William Zartman, Jacob Blaustein Professor of International Organizations and Conflict Resolution at Johns Hopkins University, and others, **September 10**

"Trade Strategies in International Relations"

Albert Fishlow, senior fellow, Council on Foreign Relations, **Osvaldo Rosales**, Chile's Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, and others, cosponsored with the University of California at Berkeley, **September 24**

"The Russian-Iranian Partnership: Strategic or Tactical?"

Mark Katz, professor of government and politics at George Mason University and former Kennan Institute research scholar, **September 24**

"The Nuclear Threat Initiative"

Director's Forum with **Sam A. Nunn, Jr.**, former U.S. senator, **October 3**

"Our Common Future"

Director's Forum with **Ted Turner**, vice chairman of AOL Time Warner, **October 10**

This calendar is only a partial listing of Wilson Center events. For further information on these and other events, visit the Center's Web site at <http://www.wilsoncenter.org>. The Center is in the Ronald Reagan Building, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. Although many events are open to the public, some meetings may require reservations. Contact Maria-Stella Gatzoulis at (202) 691-4188 to confirm time, place, and entry requirements. Please allow time on arrival at the Center for routine security procedures. A photo ID is required for entry.



**Woodrow Wilson
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SUMMER 2001

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Like the ancient Greeks, Americans know themselves through their popular culture.

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Behind today's plague of media sex and violence lies a mischievous idea.

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The past century witnessed a complete reversal in the way humans relate to the landscape; the new century will need to cope with the result.

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COVER: *Power Windows* (1985, detail), by Hugh Syme. Design by David Herbick.

The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

Editor's Comment

Historians looking back on our time may say that we lived in a golden age of popular culture. Music, TV, film, and other popular forms are all flourishing, and the new media have yet to reveal their full potential. But those same historians may also say that we lived in a time of extraordinary decadence and cultural exhaustion, amid a cornucopia of ripe and rotten fruit.

As a culture, we seem to have lost the ability to insist upon the kinds of distinctions that would allow us to alter the balance in favor of the ripe and the ripening. It's instructive to watch those ubiquitous awards shows in which a succession of recording "artists" strut across the stage—the latest boy bands, navel-baring teenyboppers, and thuggish poseurs alongside more accomplished acts. Our promiscuity with the name of art is partly an effect of American society's lingering bad conscience over its slowness to recognize the genius of people such as Louis Armstrong, Howard Hawks, and Hank Williams. So now there are no more performers and entertainers: Everybody's an artist, with the full complement of artistic privileges and immunities in the court of public opinion.

Whether you are happy with the condition of American popular culture or not, it's important to recognize that that condition is not inevitable. As our authors in this issue's cover story remind us, it grows out of our ideas about culture and the distinctions that we do and do not make.

* * *

Congratulations to contributing editor Max Holland, winner of the J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award for his study of the Warren Commission. His article in our Spring issue ("The Demon in Jim Garrison") was based on research for his forthcoming book.

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The writer's telephone number and postal address should be included. For reasons of space, letters are usually edited for publication. Some letters are received in response to the editors' requests for comment.

Views of America

"How the World Views America" [WQ, Spring '01] was so timely, and necessary, that I hope you'll make it a regular department.

Since 1973, the monthly *World Press Review*, of which I was founding editor, has been virtually alone in providing Americans with samplings from the foreign press. During upheavals from Watergate to our latest "unpleasantness" with China (clearly, a mere harbinger), these compilations have demonstrated how crucial others' findings and insights are to understanding complex issues.

It's ironic that, as America's global strategic and economic stakes have grown, so has Americocentrism in our media. With today's communications wonders we could share in the best of every culture, from arts and entertainment to reporting and social commentary. Yet our information and entertainment streams overwhelmingly flow in one direction—out. For all but a privileged few in serendipitous locations, even regular access to foreign films is problematic.

Such Americocentrism not only diminishes and endangers us but alienates others. More than ever, it constitutes a challenge to our communities. No nation, not even a superpower, is an island. We have much to teach, but so do other societies, about education, child care, employment practices, ecology, historic preservation, and more. We ignore that, and others' perceptions of us, at our peril.

Alfred Balk
Huntley, Ill.

Barbaric Americans? Such an incomplete picture ["The Barbaric Americans," WQ, Spring '01] is in keeping with the American image of the French as incredibly rude people pretending not to speak English. Both pictures are shallow and idiotic. France is a cradle of much of modern civilization, more like Rousseau and Voltaire than Robespierre and Danton. America is a noble and generous country, not perfect, but always striving. We have nothing to be ashamed of, and neither does France. Regrettably, we slaughtered Indians and France slaughtered Huguenots. We had black slavery; France had colonies. Nations have bright

and dark regions of their history. But focusing on one or a few dark aspects does not show an understanding of a nation; it is an exercise in ego.

J. Frank Palmer
Garland, Tex.

The Black Book

Andrzej Paczkowski's essay ["The Storm over *The Black Book*," WQ, Spring '01] contains a breathtaking omission that undermines his entire case. In praising—rightly—the essays by Nicolas Werth and Jean-Louis Margolin in that collection, Paczkowski completely fails to mention that these authors later publicly attacked the introduction to *The Black Book* by Stéphane Courtois and disassociated themselves from it, and therefore from Paczkowski's approach as well.

Werth and Margolin are extremely hostile to communism (as am I), but they are also scholars, and their essays are works of scholarly research—the only ones in *The Black Book* that can be so described. Their criticisms therefore clearly have devastating force. They accused Courtois of an ahistorical lumping together of different phenomena and different crimes, with the aim not of explanation but of polemic: in particular, the desire to prove that the Soviet labor camps were the equivalent of the Nazi death camps (which Werth and Margolin reject) and the twisting of evidence in the obsessive desire to reach a round figure of 100 million deaths from "Communism."

It is extremely important to remember and condemn the crimes of both Nazism and communism, in the hope that they will never be repeated. But they and other historical crimes need to be remembered and described precisely, not mixed up into a featureless soup for the purposes of contemporary political agendas. In fighting against totalitarian tendencies, one central duty of Western scholars is to observe strict rules of evidence, logic, and fairness in debate. Just because Paczkowski has forgotten this, we need not all do so.

Anatol Lieven
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Washington, D.C.



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The Meaning of Life

Mark Kingwell ["What Does It All Mean?" *WQ*, Spring '01] arrives at the Socratic conclusion that the examined life is the one worth living. The path taken is the transformation from the essay's title question into the more specific "How ought one to live a life?" Admirable! But the journey down that path is tortuous indeed.

Despite his claim that philosophy is not a profession, Kingwell is so self-consciously a "philosopher" (and must show it) that even so traditional an insight as the one he provides is made to run the gauntlet of current philosophical practice in order to gain legitimacy. Thus, the acknowledged attractiveness of both "minimalist" ordinary language and "maximalist" systematic thinking, in whatever form, cannot command approval because both do violence to the primal qualities of consciousness. The sociobiologists' theory of memes (physiological genes) and material biology's assertion of the redundancy of consciousness are also found wanting. Both fail to acknowledge the "very ineffability of human consciousness," without which there is nothing for meaning to be meaningful for.

My complaint is obviously not that Kingwell is well read in current philosophy. It is rather that his use of it doesn't contribute to his conclusion. In fact, his references call attention to themselves by the unease they raise in a reader who has even a passing familiarity with the philosophies in question. For example, to suggest that medieval Scholasticism and 20th-century mathematical and logical analysis, two maximalist positions, are both in search of a perfect or universal language is staggeringly unnuanced. Thomas Aquinas and Willard Van Orman Quine conceive of philosophy's task in radically different ways. The shift from talk about "the mind's plastic capacity to find things significant" to talk about the brain's "generalist architecture" should not be so serene. There is, after all, an Aristotelian-inspired position that thinking is vital activity not performed by any bodily organ.

Kingwell's suggestion to the contrary notwithstanding, the nature of meaning is hardly a "modest theme." Its exploration requires more than a modest nod to other philosophers—if they are to be used at all.

William Carrington
Forest Hills, N.Y.

Garrison's Demon

To suggest, as Max Holland does ["The Demon in Jim Garrison," *WQ*, Spring '01], that Jim Garrison somehow is the root cause of Americans' current distrust in their government is absurd. Garrison himself, a combat veteran who had served in the U.S. military for 23 years, accepted the Warren Commission's verdict on the Kennedy assassination for three years. By the time he started his investigation, a substantial number of Americans already believed there was a conspiracy and a cover-up. So Garrison was catching up to the American people, not leading them.

Americans' distrust of their government stems from decades of lies and cover-ups by arms of the government, including the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1940s and '50s, the Warren Commission, the executive branch (especially during the Vietnam War: the "credibility gap" existed long before Garrison said a word about the Kennedy assassination), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (e.g., COINTELPRO, etc.). As the lies have accumulated, so Americans' distrust of their government has grown.

Holland's comparison of Garrison to Senator Joseph McCarthy shows that he lacks a fundamental understanding of McCarthyism. The essence of McCarthyism was that a member of Congress or a witness before a witch-hunting congressional committee could throw accusations around about Communists and spies in the State Department or in Hollywood or in labor unions without ever having to produce any evidence. The accusers were not accountable because they were protected by congressional immunity. Those accused did not have the right to scrutinize the evidence or to confront or cross-examine their accusers. In other words, Joseph McCarthy never operated under the rules of law.

Jim Garrison, as a prosecutor, brought his accusations through the legal process. Clay Shaw was indicted by a grand jury of 22, had a pretrial hearing before three judges, and received a full trial. The evidence was available to him. He was able to confront his accusers and to cross-examine them. The fact that Garrison lost the case does not make him a Joseph McCarthy. Prosecutors bring cases all the time that do not gain convictions.

And in the Shaw case, there are many reasons why Garrison lost. His investigation was sabotaged from day one. Every single one of his requests for extradition of witnesses from other states was denied. Federal attorneys refused to serve his subpoenas on Allen Dulles and other former Central Intelligence Agency officials. Garrison's offices were bugged, and he was constantly under surveillance by the FBI. His requests for crucial evidence such as Lee Harvey Oswald's tax records and the Kennedy autopsy photos were denied. Key witnesses such as David Ferrie and Eladio del Valle died under mysterious circumstances. The CIA, as reported by former CIA official Victor Marchetti, was helping Shaw at trial. Garrison's files were stolen by a "volunteer" and given to Shaw's defense attorneys before trial. And Garrison was pilloried in the press.

Garrison's treatment by the press was part of an orchestrated effort by the CIA to discredit critics of the Warren Commission. A CIA memo dated April 1, 1967, outlined the strategy and called for the agency's "assets" in the media (writers and editors) to publish stories about the critics that said they were politically motivated, financially motivated, egomaniacal, crazy, sloppy in their research, etc. This is exactly the inaccurate portrait of Garrison that emerged in the press.

Garrison's book *On the Trail of the Assassins* describes what actually led him to the conclusion that the CIA was involved. He gradually uncovered pieces of evidence and witnesses, beginning with David Ferrie, who worked for the CIA; a gunrunning raid by CIA operatives in Houma, Louisiana; the fact that several of Oswald's coworkers at Reily Coffee Company in New Orleans now worked at NASA; the fact that Oswald was working out of an office that was running the CIA's local training camps for Operation Mongoose; many eyewitnesses who saw Clay Shaw, David Ferrie, and Oswald together, etc.

There is no doubt that the *Paese Sera* article was another piece of the puzzle for Garrison, but he had neither the staff nor the resources to go to Europe and follow up its leads. And it was not the centerpiece of his thinking that Holland makes it out to be.

A final note: During the shooting of our film in New Orleans, we noted that in spontaneous encounters on the street or in places of business, Jim was constantly hailed and approached by

Correspondence

local supporters with great respect, greetings, and smiles. He was a clear favorite of the African American population and white working class, and was a popular, twice-elected district attorney who ran on and enforced a reform slate. The only hatred we found directed at him was expressed by people with special interests in the case, or by the power structure of the city.

We continue to be amazed and appalled at the disproportionate obloquy and scandal directed at Mr. Garrison. Anyone really interested in witnessing the man's probity and clear-headedness need only watch his 30-minute address (without any notes) on national TV, granted him by the Federal Communications Commission after NBC aired a clearly biased and uncorroborated disinformation piece about him.

*Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar
cowriters, JFK
Santa Monica, Calif.*

Education Debates

As a former educator still involved in trying to change Americans' views of education, I want to comment on "Schools, Dazed" and "Spare the Homework, Save the Child?" in your Findings section [WQ, Winter '01]. Like Diane Ravitch, I am apprehensive about society's inclination to rush reforms without first deciding what the fundamental objectives of education should be. Ravitch believes that "the main purpose of education is to develop the mind and character of the students." But what exactly do we mean by that? For one thing, that there is no conflict between developing students' ability to think abstractly and a teacher's role in imparting specific knowledge. Both types of knowledge are means to the same end: the development of an individual's sense of humanity.

Ravitch asks what makes a good educator. As someone who began teaching with an M.A. in English but without a single credit in education, I learned quickly that teaching a subject is very different from having an extensive knowledge of it. But I easily remedied my lack of pedagogical training by observing other teachers during my off periods and by continually soliciting advice and ideas from my colleagues. Teachers need to know what their colleagues are teaching and how they are teaching it, and school administrations need to encourage professional

development and provide financial incentives for it. If we are going to require advanced degrees of teachers, we must figure out a way to compensate them as we do members of other professions in which such degrees are required. The extra \$1,000 per year my M.A. would bring me working in a private school would not amount *over the course of my career* to the costs I incurred to attain the degree. The situation is beyond illogical; it is intolerable.

Teachers should teach not only smaller classes but fewer classes. They should not be in the classroom for the full day because the most time-consuming aspects of their job occur outside class time. And students are as strapped for time as teachers. Homework is necessary, I would argue, because it reinforces what students have learned and ensures that they comprehend a task well enough to repeat it without prompting. But voluminous homework assignments do not lead to better student performance. Fifty redundant math problems will not make students comprehend the underlying principles of mathematics more clearly if they just repeat the same mistakes throughout.

Because there is an undeniable connection between society's values and what gets validated in the classroom, education reform depends upon societal reform. The acceptance of hours and hours of homework fits right in with our culture's workaholic mindset. Even extracurricular activities and play have become calculated extensions of that same mindset: Many students are more interested in what colleges the activities can get them into than in the pleasure they get from the activities. Our world is a competitive one, and it is in the students' best interest to pay attention to grades and scores and résumés. But even as we acknowledge this and prepare students adequately to face it, we should challenge them to understand as well the deep satisfaction of being motivated by a love of learning for its own sake.

*Sharon Discorfono
New York, N.Y.*

Corrections

The Philip Morris antismoking campaign described in the Findings item "Classrooms for Sale" [WQ, Spring '01] was not a court-ordered effort.

Several readers wrote to point out that the image on the cover of our Winter '01 issue was reversed.

Findings

The Empire Bites Back

The flamboyant British historian Niall Ferguson dropped into Washington recently to rally America to the cause of colonialism. It wasn't the old tweeds-and-cricket colonialism of the raj he had in mind. Clad in one of those silky European suits of indeterminate greenish hue, a pink-and-white checked shirt, and a dark tie, the young Oxford don, a veritable version 2.0 of the British actor Hugh Grant, made a very new-school argument for planting the American flag everywhere from Kosovo to Sierra Leone. Who benefits more than Americans from globalization? he asked. Self-interest and moral obligation require them to spread democracy and stability along with capitalism.

As if to demonstrate conclusively the quixotic nature of his campaign, Ferguson chose as his venue the libertarian Cato Institute, a headquarters of isolationist sentiment. The historian seemed to enjoy himself as many of the 20-odd guests tried not to sputter bits of their turkey wraps in indignation when he reminded the Americans of their responsibilities and summoned them to service as the world's policeman.

It was a bravura performance, but not merely a performance. Ferguson is the author of several substantial books, including *The Cash Nexus: Money and Power in the Modern World, 1700–2000* (2001). A listener didn't have to agree with him to appreciate the bracing effect of a keen (but friendly) foreign

mind. The guests were pushing back their plastic plates and getting ready to leave when Ferguson made a final point, as surprising as it was wicked in libertarian confines: If the United States is not prepared to live up to its responsibilities, then it should go all out in support of the United Nations.

The Words for the Word

What's a sure-fire way these days to tackle a problem and delay its solution? Appoint a committee. But committees have known better days. In *Wide as the Waters* (2001), Benson Bobrick recounts the astonishing tale of how a committee produced the King James Version of the Bible.

The king himself was the irresistible force behind the project. In July 1604 he approved a list of 54 translators, who were

to work under three principal directors: Edward Lively, the regius professor of Hebrew at Cambridge University; John Harding, the regius professor of Hebrew at Oxford University; and Lancelot Andrewes, the dean of Westminster. The translators were divided into six companies, based two each at Oxford, Cambridge, and Westminster (the universities were encouraged to turn for help to other knowledgeable scholars), and the great labor was then portioned out: Three

companies tackled the Old Testament, two the New, and one the Apocrypha. "The First Westminster Company," writes Bobrick, "was assigned Genesis through



Title page of the 1611 King James Bible

Findings

2 Kings; the Second, Romans through Jude; the First Oxford Company, Isaiah through Malachi; the Second, the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation; the First Cambridge Company, 1 Chronicles through the Song of Solomon; the Second, the Apocrypha.”

It all sounds like a recipe for impasse and delay. But no. The work of translation, review, and revision went on for some six years, during which time the companies consulted every known text, commentary, and translation, ancient or modern. The groups cloaked themselves in anonymity, and we can only surmise the contributions individual members made to the finished version.

When the first copies of the new Bible were printed, in 1611, the English language was transformed. The 19th-century historian Thomas Macaulay made the point: “If everything else in our language should perish, [the King James Bible] would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power.” Bobrick provides the bare beginnings of a roll call of those who over the centuries have spoken and written a language learned from this Bible: Jonathan Swift, Edmund Burke, Patrick Henry, William Blake, Charles Dickens, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Abraham Lincoln, Walt Whitman, Thomas Carlyle, Herman Melville, Thomas Hardy, Winston Churchill, D. H. Lawrence. And he reminds us how often—and perhaps how unwittingly—we still speak the words of that miraculous committee: labor of love, lick the dust, clear as crystal, a thorn in the flesh, a soft answer, the root of all evil, the fat of the land, the sweat of thy brow, hip and thigh, arose as one man, a broken reed, a word in season, how the mighty are fallen, the eleventh hour, pearls before swine, a law unto themselves, weighed in the balance and found wanting, the shadow of death.

A Baptism

The term *World War* has become so much a part of the way we order history that we forget it was once an option.

On July 23, 1919, U.S. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker wrote to President Wood-

row Wilson and asked him to name the war that had ended the previous November. Wilson’s typewritten response (reproduced in *American Originals*, a new volume from the National Archives and Records Administration) was as follows:

My dear Mr. Secretary:

It is hard to find a satisfactory “official” name for the war, but the best, I think, that has been suggested is “The World War,” and I hope that your judgment will concur.

I know you will understand the brevity of this note.

Cordially and faithfully yours,
Woodrow Wilson

Among the competing names were “The Great War” (which remains a rival designation), “The War of 1917,” and “The War against Teutonic Aggression.” Barely two decades later, Wilson’s official name for the conflict shed its article and gained the identifying number “one.” The world, to its sorrow, had to learn to count.

The Rainbow from Coal

In 1856, when he was only 18 years old, William Perkin created a color and changed the world.

In *Mauve* (2001), Simon Garfield celebrates Perkin, who is today largely forgotten but who was one of the 19th century’s most influential chemists and inventors. He made his reputation and a great fortune from the synthetic dye industry, and he was knighted for his achievements. Perkin was attempting to synthesize quinine (for use against malaria) when instead his efforts yielded the first aniline dye and artificial color to be extracted from coal-tar derivatives. Rather than discarding his mistake, he tried the color out on silk (successfully), gave it a French name, and abandoned a purely scientific career for the commercial manufacture of “mauve.”

The new hue got an immediate boost from European royalty. Empress Eugénie, the wife of Napoleon III and a powerful influence on fashion, decided that the color complemented her eyes—and dressed

accordingly. Queen Victoria wore mauve to her daughter's wedding in 1858, and four years after the death of her husband Albert in 1861, she changed her widow's attire from somber black to the new purple. By 1869, the popularity of the color had run its course. But other Perkin-inspired colors took its place, causing one observer to complain about the terrible glare cast by the fashionably dressed in Hyde Park.

When he wed chemical research to commerce and took out a patent for the manufacture of his aniline dyes, Perkin—and the techniques he pioneered—set in motion a revolution. Coal-tar derivatives later came to be used in photography, the manufacture of perfumes, the preservation of canned foods, and the creation of saccharine. The more dramatic scientific advances of the 20th century have obscured Perkin's achievement. American chemists honor one of their own each year with the Perkin Medal (for innovation in applied chemistry that results in significant commercial development), but few others know the man's name these days, or are aware of how his accidental purple brightened the world. Colors manufactured by Perkin surround us still, but he is all but invisible. Even the site of his grave is unmarked.

Tight Spot

In the days before high-tech medicine, it was a creepily common story: A grave is opened for one reason or another and found to contain a corpse with contracted limbs, torn clothing, abraded fingers, and a horrified rictus. Is the evidence grisly proof of premature burial? Not necessarily, medical writer Jan Bondeson reassures us in *Buried Alive* (2001). It turns out that rigor mortis and rats can cause all those phenomena. But for another feature that was sometimes reported, Bondeson admits there's no innocent explanation: The clenched fists of the cadaver are full of human hair, torn out by the roots, and the hair matches that on the corpse's head.

The 21-Essay Salute

The senior academic figure told that he or she is to be the subject of a festschrift—a volume of learned/reminiscent/servile essays celebrating the achievements of a career—may feel both flattered and alarmed. There's satisfaction in the notice and the fuss, of course, but dread that the occasion is the first shovelful of earth to be lobbed at a lowered casket. The grave might then be topped off with unsold copies of festschrifts.

In the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Peter Monaghan reports that university presses no longer want to publish festschrifts because no one reads them and, worse, no one buys them. In fact, the presses have not wanted to publish these “hodgepodes of uneven quality by authors of uneven reputation” for some time now—and yet they do, they do. They often “attempt to disguise the volumes as thematic collections of papers that just happen to be in honor of one graying eminence or another.” But in the last year or so, the presses have also published festschrifts that wear the moniker as visibly as a nose ring, “in homage to renowned figures in probability, musicology, Bible studies, neurobiology, ethics, vocational psychology, gay and lesbian studies, and student assessment in higher education, to name just a few.”

If a stake doesn't find the genre's heart soon, we may see within our own lifetimes festschrifts for soccer coaches, budgetary officers, cafeteria heads, security police, and campus tour guides. And some press in denial will have done the honors.



The Premature Burial (1854), by Antoine Weirtz

The World Turned Inside Out

In the second half of the 20th century, a fundamental reversal occurred in the way we relate to the physical landscape. Whereas nature once framed the works of man, the sprawling works of man now threaten to overwhelm nature. If we are to cope with this new configuration, we must first understand its deepest meaning.

by Suzannah Lessard

It has long been striking to me that people who write about place, even from the most scholarly or technical perspective, often find a way to introduce their own childhood experiences into otherwise impersonal texts. These references, inevitably, have an emotional timbre that is in startling contrast to otherwise rigorously cerebral approaches. And yet, the reminiscent passages seem to thrust their way to the surface as irrepressible touchstones of truth—messengers from what playwrights call the backstory, the unspoken experience out of which the spoken arises.

But the actual evolution of thought from backstory to professional perspective is rarely unfolded. In particular, that intermediate zone where personal experience meets political reality, the truly formative stage of education by place, tends to remain mysterious. As I lay out here my own experience of that zone, I mean to suggest nothing absolute. I know that even minute gradations in period, location, family background, and personal proclivities could change everything. Indeed, the very point of recounting the experience is to acknowledge the relativity that governs our deepest ideas about places. The great paradox of place is that it's the most personal, and also the most common, thing. Therefore, no place education is purely relative. It's a connection to a history that we share.

My education by place began in the 1940s, and had three major components, of which a love affair with the rural landscape of Long Island was the first and the deepest. A certain kind of 19th-century American landscape painting, known as "luminist," perfectly captures the way I saw the landscape around me when I was growing up. The subject of those paintings is usually ordinary—such as a field at dusk or a bit of beach with some weather gathering—and most often it is of a fleeting moment. And yet the moment has a feeling of timelessness about it, and the paintings convey a sense of being alone with something hidden but large. When, as a teenager, I first encountered these luminist works, I thought that I was looking into my own soul.

In appreciating both the paintings and the landscape, I also felt that I was being touched by something uniquely American—as indeed I was, though what was uniquely American was a certain way of seeing the landscape and a set of feelings attached to that way of seeing: a sense of aloneness, both societal and personal, and a sense of national specialness and providential protection. The feelings belonged more to the 19th century than to my own.

That I should be so in tune with a 19th-century way of seeing was not unusual. It takes decades, maybe a century, for a culture to catch up with the worlds it creates and, subsequently, understand them. Of necessity, we see with the eyes of the past. Our 19th-centu-



Approaching Thunder Storm (1859), by the luminist painter Martin Johnson Heade

ry landscape painters were chasing after a world that had already been lost; after all, their contemporary world was disrupted by the Industrial Revolution, which does not appear in the luminist paintings at all. This delay in perception is an example of a many-layered history quietly structuring one's thoughts in deceptive ways. So there I was, a child of the 20th century, unconsciously formed by 19th-century longings for the 18th century.

Behind that unconsciously layered view of the American landscape there was set down in my mind an even more ancient notion of the basic configuration of the landscape—the assumption that the natural world was vast and enclosing, that it encompassed cities, towns, and villages and served as their mysterious, indissoluble context. The prototype is medieval: the enclosed hill town surrounded by the Umbrian landscape, with savage mountains—the wilderness—in the distance. The town occupies the foreground, but it derives its significance in relation to the natural world in the background, to which the town contrasts in a variety of ways that give it meaning.

Of course, over time a much more romantic and benign idea of the landscape developed in our culture. We began to see landscape as a subject in its own right and brought it into the foreground, moving towns and villages into the distance, if they were depicted at all. Whereas in medieval times the wilderness was hostile, in

19th-century America painters saw the natural world as an infinitely meaningful providential cradle, a safety net under the human condition. That sense of being enclosed in a vast and benign context was what the field at dusk or the bit of beach revealed—empty, and yet so pregnant with invisible presence, so intimately and eloquently seen, by the painter, by me. American painting emphasized the providential significance of the natural world (even as we were in the process of raping it). And most contemporary representations of American landscapes in my world—Christmas cards, calendars, picture books—also reinforced the assumption that we were profoundly safe in a landscape that enclosed the world built by man.

The second major element in my education was a powerful, unacknowledged reality that pounded me at a subrational level with a lesson whose meaning was just the opposite of the message of safety and enclosure that the traditional ideas conveyed. That other reality was the most fundamental truth of the century: Whereas for all of history we had conducted our affairs in the cradle of providence, in the course of the 20th century we had become capable of destroying that cradle by our own hands. Those were the early days of the Cold War, when adults were telling children to hide under their desks if nuclear holocaust should end the world. The message was that we

had become both all-powerful and pathetically helpless, in a way the human race had never been before. We had the power to destroy our environment, and we might not be able to keep ourselves from using it. What a paradox that was, and yet nothing much in the culture helped us with its riddles. Apart from the drills and the talk of shelters, little was said about the extraordinary change in the relationship between man and the natural landscape that had occurred through this pervasive but invisible danger of our own making. The change, in effect, was the end of providence. We were now our own custodians, though stumbling around in the role.

This change penetrated the meaning of everything, and the landscape in particular, and yet nothing at all changed physically. That was especially perplexing. The invisibility of the inversion in our relationship to the world had the effect of falsifying the landscape for me. The field at dusk and the bit of beach looked the same, and yet seen with the knowledge of our new state, they seemed to have become ghosts of their former selves, or to be in disguise. It was as if they lied. Complex factors in the history of art, most of them technical, led to abstraction. But I am convinced that there is also a connection between the disappearance of the physical landscape from art in the mid-20th century and the nuclear inversion of our relation to place. Because we no longer had an understanding of our relation to the landscape, it was logical for artists to turn to an interior dimension of experience.

But through all this, society acted as if we were on an uninterrupted continuum with the past. Even arms negotiations—noticed as I got older—proceeded as if the safety net were still there. And because the old composition of the world was relentlessly reinforced by everything from Christmas cards to high literature, it was easy enough for me to carry on my love affair with an old idea of the landscape. This, my heritage told me, was the timeless thing, the deepest thing—even as I was permeated with a subverbal awareness that, in fact, the world had been turned inside out, and that nothing was what it seemed.

The third component of my childhood

education was a brutally visible manifestation of history moving plainly across the landscape and rendering it physically unrecognizable: suburbanization. In the late 1940s and the 1950s, Long Island became the fastest-growing area in the country. I saw the advancing development only as rapine. My feelings of violation and loss were constant, brought on by the disappearance of specific places that had meaning for me. But I also felt a kind of confusion that was linked to a larger undoing of the structure of landscape. Though a built world, suburbia spread out as only farmland or wildernesses (or the sea) were supposed to do. It engulfed not only the countryside but towns and villages too, dissolving their discrete definition, draining them of their centripetal character. In so doing, it broke down the age-old distinction between city and country—and, along with it, untold layers of inherited understanding of the world.

A romantic 19th-century eye could not make sense of the suburban landscape—could not find place in it at all. I regarded those parts of my countryside that became suburban as a kind of nothing, like splotches of plaster in a fresco where the painting has worn away. As time went on and the suburban splotches spread, they began to link up, surrounding and isolating what stretches of countryside remained. There comes a point in the life of a declining fresco when so much plaster is evident that one can no longer make a whole out of the bits of painting that remain. In similar fashion, it grew harder and harder to make a landscape out of what became increasingly smaller islands of countryside in suburban seas.

What was evolving was a landscape in which the built world surrounded and framed the natural world, instead of the other way around. Instead of Assisi surrounded by Umbria, we have bits of Umbria surrounded by a vast Assisi. In the visual arts, that is called a figure-field reversal. In such an inversion of landscape composition lies the radical nature of suburbanization, although many years would pass before I could accept that, and before I could regard the new landscape as something

>SUZANNAH LESSARD, a 2001–02 Wilson Center fellow, is the author of *The Architect of Desire: Beauty and Danger in the Stanford White Family* (1996). She is writing a book about the decentralization of the landscape. Copyright © 2001 by Suzannah Lessard.



Rising above the horizon of the Moon beyond Smyth's Sea on the lunar terrain, the Earth, as photographed by the Apollo spacecraft in July 1969, appears, at once, complete, vulnerable, and majestic.

to look at in itself—or as a meaningful landscape at all. The very word *suburbia* saved me from needing to see it by implying that this landscape was an appendage of cities, a secondary thing. Thus, to the extent that the word dissolved the old distinction between city and country, it did so only as a form of transition between the two. The word clearly suggested that if you traveled far enough from the city, you would inevitably come to the end of the suburbs too, and would enter the wide “unspoiled” natural world. And so, though misshapen, the old template of city surrounded by country remained intact in my mind. Suburbia could be ignored because, somewhere out there, the old countryside rolled away into the night, in all its innocence and encompassing transcendence.

Thus, I approached adulthood with an impossibly unintegrated sense of place, in which a 19th-century vision that seemed profoundly true conflicted with the nuclear and suburban inversions of which no sense could be made at all. Then, two very public events in the 1960s had an additional major impact on my—and probably everyone’s—

sense of place. The first was the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, during which it seemed that a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union was imminent. The crisis removed the possibility of pandemic destruction from the realm of the theoretical, and the trauma generated in me, as in many others, an annihilating, mind-blanking fear. The actuality of the crisis brought the compositional bizarreness of the nuclear predicament out of abstraction. What difference did it make if the missiles were near or far? On what pretext did one risk world incineration? And yet, in the long run, the crisis seemed to normalize the nuclear predicament. It was fashioned, in retrospect, into a traditional story of courage under pressure and the triumph of heroes. Our survival enabled us to tell the story to ourselves as if it had taken place in a providentially secured world.

The second event of enormous consequence to the relationship of mankind to the landscape was our arrival on the moon in 1969. Where the actuality of the missile crisis had been isolating and mind blanking, the moon landing created a sense of wholeness and connectedness. Events in space inevitably

tend to heighten our consciousness of humanity as a family, but this event was very special. My parents were in France at the time, and I remember hearing how the bells of Solemnnes, the Benedictine monastery where monks devote their lives to medieval chant, rang out in the middle of the night in celebration.

We thought that we were on the threshold of an age of space travel. But the greatest impact of the trip to the moon was on how we view the Earth. Photographs taken by the astronauts showed our planet as it had never been seen by the human eye—complete, finite, beautiful—framed by a limitless blackness. The lasting impression of space left by the moon-shot was of its inhospitality rather than of its inviting qualities as a frontier. Interest in space travel in fact dwindled in the succeeding decades, while the environmental movement burgeoned, launched by that eloquent image of our free-floating Earth.

Environmentalism arises out of an awareness similar to that implied by nuclear weapons—a planetary consciousness, a sense that responsibility has shifted from providence and Mother Nature to ourselves. The two dangers—from nuclear weapons and from pollution of the environment by peaceable processes and inventions—are certainly not in competition; indeed, nuclear weapons could be said to pose the ultimate environmental hazard. But of the two, the nuclear situation is surely the more difficult to understand. It makes us too big—bigger than we know how to be, or than any foreground could hold. It introduced confusions of scale from the beginning, as, for example, in the statement physicist Robert Oppenheimer made at Trinity Site: “I have become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” The statement implied that there were many worlds and a place to stand securely apart as we destroyed this one.

The environmental predicament is a softer, more manageable truth. The photographic image of Earth in space evokes the composition of the medieval landscape, in which the hill town is a compact and self-contained whole within a limitless but barren context. The picture makes it easy to grasp the meaning of the term “space-ship Earth,” or the idea of the globe as a single ecosystem. Further, the awesome black infinity

in which we are enclosed and our feelings of smallness before it are eloquently addressed within our cultural heritage—by the sensibility of Gregorian chant, for example. In contrast, our heritage cannot help us shape a response to the nuclear situation, in which man is too big for the foreground to hold, and there is no background at all.

With the Cuban Missile Crisis and the moon landing, the first stage of my education by place was complete. In the next stage, I began to write. It was not that I wrote directly about place, but that I tended to interpret whatever subject I took up through the medium of place. That led me to turn many places into a language of a kind. I learned to ask of landscape, “What does it seem to mean?” and “What does it really mean?” The answers to the two questions were often polar opposites and surprising in their implications. For example, I learned to pose the questions to my childhood landscape—the touchstone of truth that I had taken for a simple 19th-century landscape reflecting a kind of purity in the American relationship to place. The questions forced me to face something I knew about that landscape and yet had preferred to overlook: that it was actually the “Gold Coast” of Long Island, a landscape of fading Gilded Age estates on its northern shore.

That my beloved, mystically profound landscape reflected the shallowest, most deluded period in our history was shocking enough. Even more unsettling was the connection between the countryside and the suburban incursions that the revelation pushed me to accept. The values underlying the Gilded Age estates—escape from the city, land for leisure and status, isolation, the exclusion of commerce—were actually precursors of the suburban ideal. (Suburban subdivisions often call themselves “estates.”) In other words, far from having annihilated the older landscape, the suburban one was derived directly from it, with the difference that it reflected an alternative distribution. It was a landscape of a little for many, rather than of a lot for a few. And was that reality not a truer reflection of the American soul than any field or bit of beach could ever yield? Didn’t that changing, upwardly mobile, inclusive society—the churning thing that America

is—didn't that loathed landscape in truth represent our best hope?

After I had written about place and architecture in a variety of indirect ways for many years, the time came to take on the subject directly. And that brought me, a mature writer in the middle of life, to the present stage of my education. The landscape of America would be my subject, of that I had no doubt. But what aspect of landscape? I engaged with landscapes about which I was curious—farmland, an edge city, a southern town, a metropolis in the Rust Belt. In each I delved and listened and looked, and asked my questions: “What is this landscape in fact, and what does it mean?” I did not go looking for sprawl. Indeed, I rather avoided the suburban landscape. But to sum up a long, inductive process, what I found on my journeys was that, in one way or another, visibly or invisibly, sprawl was everywhere. It was the shaping force in our landscape. It was the ascendant, determining place form of our time.

Sprawl was there in central Kentucky, for example, where a seamless pastoral quilt

extended to the horizon, but where, in fact, international real-estate companies were snapping up every farm that came on the market. The companies were banking on projections that development would eventually fill the entire triangle between Louisville, Cincinnati, and Lexington, even as, outside that triangle, abandonment set in—it, too, a consequence of sprawl. The central squares of small towns in Pennsylvania were often lovingly restored and exuded a confident air of establishment, while the spill on the outskirts—the box store, the gas stations, the chain restaurants with their sky-high signs—was amorphous and jerry-built. But the squares were empty, while the parking lots on the outskirts were full of cars, and the stores and restaurants were full of people. The seemingly timeless towns had been reduced in the space of a few decades to barnacles on the back of an octopus, and, again, the determining force was sprawl.

Sprawl was invisibly present in the central cities, famously drained by flight to the suburbs. Some cities were returning literally to the wild: In Youngstown, Ohio, I found lawns gone to hay,



In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, a sprawling subdivision redefines a landscape once dominated by farmland.

around ruinous houses with vines taking over the outbuildings. Cities that had survived experienced a physical invasion of sprawl. In Brooklyn, New York, the puffy toyland gigantism of a suburban-style mall made the row houses, the little shops, even the churches seem shabby and tiny, almost illusory, as if they were in a faded old photograph of a city that existed long ago. In Harlem, windswept fields of rubble had the eloquent ghostliness of old battlefields, while renewal on 125th Street meant the introduction of suburban-style movie theaters and chain stores.

Sprawl was there in the old-fashioned New England landscape that was really the preserve of millionaires who used their wealth to keep out sprawl. In the age of sprawl, a natural-looking rural landscape has become a form of conspicuous consumption as surely as a formal park was in aristocratic Europe. Sprawl was present too in the agricultural landscapes of Maryland that had been preserved from sprawl by the edict of the state; this farmland, over time, would become more and more museum-like, which is something quite different from self-sustaining farmland. In other words, sprawl defined these landscapes by its absence: To see them truly, you had to understand them in relation to sprawl. One of the things I learned on my journey was that in the age of sprawl, many landscapes—the New England countryside, the preserved farmland—are not what they appear to be, with the notable exception of sprawl itself, which, though rife with affections—shopping malls built to look like medieval villages, subdivisions called Camelot—is always exactly what it appears to be.

Above all, nature was not what it appeared to be, or what I wanted it to be, or what centuries of culture had taught me it would always be. As I had noticed in childhood, instead of being the context for the built world, nature in the landscape of sprawl was framed by the built world. When I saw that sprawl was ubiquitous, that great inversion also seemed to me to be pervasive. Even on the wildest mountaintop, I came to feel that sprawl was present—in the consciousness one had of the absence of the human world. That consciousness now surrounded nature. Even the mountaintop—or the shore, or the desert—was not “the country” in counterpoint to “the

city.” The mountaintop was really not wild at all; it was more of a sanctuary, a protected place. It was sprawl—proliferating endlessly, out of control—that was wild, that needed civilizing. Our nature, not Mother Nature, framed the world and supplied its principal dangers.

I had known this from my earliest days, in the eerie effect of the nuclear reality on the meaning of the landscape. Surely the invention of the bomb dissolved forever the old distinction between city and country. And surely the moonshot sealed those changes. After the moonshot, we could see with our own eyes that Earth was “the city” and space was “the country”—a natural setting more desolate and inhospitable than any conceived by a medieval imagination. But what was new for me in this period was a closing in, from various quarters, of what I had experienced as separate shafts of awareness. The confluence revealed that the world in which I lived and traveled and sought the solaces of nature, the world in which politics took place—that is to say, the landscape in its entirety—was structured by the fundamental shift that had occurred in the 20th century, the movement from a natural environment that is larger than we are to a configuration in which man surrounds nature, literally in many cases but figuratively everywhere. The convergence established the primacy of what I had come to think of as the nuclear truth, that preposterous configuration in which we are responsible for the ground we stand on, a figure-field reversal of a moral kind.

Sprawl was not literally everywhere, but it was the landscape that had emerged over the past half-century, created by the same technology that brought about the fundamental shift. The technology made a spreading, decentralized world inevitable, a world in which the distinction between city and country was dissolved and the works of man framed nature. Sprawl was the physical reflection of a world turned inside out.

Thus did I come to see that sprawl is our quintessentially contemporary landscape. It is a text of who we are in relation to each other and to the world. And because it reflects our condition on many levels, it has a certain legitimacy. Of course, much about it is also destructive and out of control and needs to be

brought into the realm of intention. But I have concluded that in order to do this effectively we must first accept sprawl's fundamental legitimacy—its inevitability—as a form. The essence of that form, in my view, is the figure-field reversal, the inversion of the old landscape in which the natural world framed the architectural world. At this new stage of my education and my work, I see no point in trying to reconstitute either the cityscapes or the landscapes of other centuries, dear to us and meaningful as they may be. Why bother to put boundaries around cities to reestablish or protect the old distinction between city and country, when sprawl has already shown that it will leapfrog over regulated areas and proliferate far beyond them? Why build enclaves modeled on old-fashioned towns when the enclaves are in fact surrounded not by old-fashioned countryside, as the form would suggest, but by oceans of sprawl? Any effective solution, I believe, requires us to accept the figure-field reversal implicit in the form of sprawl and begin to work—aesthetically, practically, spiritually, emotionally, environmentally, responsibly—with *that* configuration.

The idea of accepting a figure-field reversal is not so far-fetched, or without precedent in the work of landscape thinkers of the past. None goes quite so far as to state that the reversal has occurred, but each helps make it possible for us to view the world that way. Frederick Law Olmsted, for example, saw nature as something to be managed and molded, and liked suburban settings best. Frank Lloyd Wright thought he invented suburbia, and saw in it a kind of utopia. The planner Benton MacKaye rejected urban growth boundaries in the 1930s and urged instead that green space be intruded into cities. Lewis Mumford advocated a scattering of metropolitan growth into the countryside. The landscape architect Ian McHarg proposed that ecology govern the shape of the built world, and thereby implicitly acknowledged the figure-field reversal. Among our contemporaries, the architect Peter Calthorpe has drawn plans that accept the decentralized nature of sprawl as a regional city, and the geographer Peirce Lewis has called sprawl a “Galactic City”—more like the Milky Way and its spread-out, disseminating pat-

tern than like the solar system, which suggests a 19th-century hierarchy of towns and villages around a central metropolis. The environmental historian William Cronon has debunked the idea of wilderness as a 19th-century construct. He sees all nature as historical now and has challenged environmentalists to focus on the nature in our midst—suburban nature, enclosed nature—rather than to indulge in a cultish fiction of wilderness. The work of all these thinkers can help us bring sprawl into the realm of intention in ways that work with its nature instead of fighting its nature, and that draw on its deep meaning instead of denying that it has meaning.

My education by place has led me to the wholly unexpected conclusion that the landscape of sprawl is the most interesting subject one could find. In it, some of the principal issues of our time converge. But I must mention one particular aspect of sprawl separately because it is so important to every other consideration, and because it is usually left out of the picture. Though sprawl is a factor in the decline of cities and the abandonment of the underclass, and though there can be no question that, with sprawl, a new divide—economic, social, and geographical—has appeared in our landscape, and no question that this divide must be a central component of any treatment of sprawl, the larger truth is that the landscape of sprawl is a landscape of upward mobility and assimilation in America. It is not monolithic, as is commonly believed, but it is panoramically middle class. True, there are gated communities, and communities that distinguish themselves by tiny differences in income. But they are all indelibly middle class. And yes, there are mansions on the landscape, but most of them are called McMansions, hardly a nickname one would attach to the architecture of a tyrannical or exploitative elite.

I would venture that suburban sprawl as it emerged in the second half of the 20th century is probably the most democratic man-made landscape ever created on a national scale. That is its nature; that is what lies at the heart of the form. It is the landscape of a little for many, and however we seek to reconfigure it—and we *must* seek to reconfigure it—we must start with that truth. □

Democracy Inc.

Hardly an election occurs outside the developed world today without an international corps of observers flying in to certify the results. But the outsiders sometimes do more harm than good.

by Eric Bjornlund

Friends and foes of the United States smirked last fall as the champion of the free world waded in embarrassment through Florida's electoral swamps. Even as U.S. government agencies and nonprofit groups were busily monitoring "troubled" elections in half a dozen foreign lands, from Haiti to Azerbaijan, America's presidential election was thrown into doubt by arthritic voting technology, sloppy voter registration, and partisan election officials—flaws that were supposed to afflict only "less developed" countries. One Brazilian pundit half-seriously called for international sanctions to force a new vote in Florida.

But American democracy has never been faultless, and—derisive comments in the international press notwithstanding—U.S. efforts to promote democracy abroad have never been predicated on its perfection at home. Indeed, the American groups that work to spread representative government overseas have drawn heavily on non-American models precisely because they recognize the shortcomings and idiosyncrasies of the U.S. system.

The real flaws in the global effort to foster democracy, meanwhile, have gone largely unnoticed—and they are flaws that threaten great harm to the democratic cause. The scattered and diffuse democracy movement of decades past has been transformed into a worldwide industry of sorts, led but not controlled by the United States. The industry has done much good. But it has also put a stamp of legitimacy on Potemkin-village democracies in Cambodia, Egypt, Armenia, and other countries. It has frustrated local democratic activists from Indonesia to Peru,

and it has provided autocratic rulers with ammunition to dismiss courageous local democrats as lackeys of foreign powers. Worst of all, it has undermined efforts to apply uniform democratic standards around the world.

The democracy industry has its deepest roots in the United States. From the time of President Woodrow Wilson's crusade to "make the world safe for democracy" to the era of the Cold War, Americans of virtually all political persuasions shared an ideological commitment to advancing the democratic cause in the world. But only under the Reagan administration did the United States begin to focus and institutionalize its efforts. Washington now devotes some \$700 million annually to democracy promotion. Much of it is channeled through the Agency for International Development—which parcels out the money to private consulting firms and more than a score of nongovernmental organizations, such as the Carter Center and the Asia Foundation—and a small but significant portion goes to the congressionally-chartered National Endowment for Democracy. It is a substantial commitment, equal to about 10 percent of the entire U.S. foreign aid budget.

The United States, however, is outspent by others. The European Union and developed countries such as Japan and Australia, along with multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, also pour large amounts of monetary, human, and diplomatic capital into the global crusade. The stated purposes are the same: fighting cor-



Cambodia's 1998 election was not the democratic idyll promised in this voter education poster.

ruption, establishing the rule of law, fostering civil society, developing democratic parliaments, and monitoring elections. But not all of the industry's "players" share the same commitment to democracy, and some are willing to sacrifice its pursuit to other foreign-policy goals.

The industry's rise has coincided with a revolutionary expansion of democracy around the world. What Harvard University political scientist Samuel Huntington has called the "third wave" of democratization began in the late 1970s with political transitions in Spain and Portugal, and spread in the 1980s to Latin America and Asia. Democracy swept through Eastern and Central Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and continued after the breakup of the Soviet Union. The 1990s also saw dramatic political openings in Africa and Asia. Since 1988, a total of 50 countries have made the transition to democracy, from Poland and Brazil to Taiwan and Nigeria.

The democracy industry can't claim credit for the third wave, but it has reinforced the trend. Last year, under the weight of domestic and international pressure, repressive regimes in Yugoslavia and Peru fell after

election monitors helped expose their attempts to manipulate national elections. Two decades ago, such a feat would have been almost unimaginable.

The industry has been fortunate: Its successes have been more sensational than its failures. But an examination of highly publicized elections, such as the recent ones in Cambodia and Indonesia, shows that its failures can be deleterious.

I worked in both countries as an official of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), one of the four main nongovernmental organizations supported by the National Endowment for Democracy. (Each of the two major political parties sponsors an organization, and organized labor and business sponsor the other two.) While my work involved several areas of democracy promotion, the monitoring of elections best illustrates the tensions caused by the involvement of foreign activists. I have seen outside monitors contribute to public confidence in the integrity of elections, provide invaluable moral support to democratic activists facing authoritarian regimes, and deter fraud.

But I have also seen them stumble—and do great harm to many of the world’s fragile democracies.

Cambodia suffered more violent turmoil than almost any other country in the 20th century. It endured intense American bombing during the last years of the Vietnam War, and three years (1975–78) of terror under the communist Khmer Rouge, which, according to some estimates, left nearly a quarter of the Asian country’s eight million people dead. A Vietnamese invasion in 1978 was followed by more than a decade of civil war.

In 1991, a glimmer of hope appeared when Cambodia signed an internationally sponsored peace agreement calling for liberal democracy and genuine elections. The United Nations established the largest, most costly peacekeeping force in its history (15,000 troops and a budget of \$2 billion) to organize the election of a new government and administer the country during its transition. But the 1993 election failed to bring either democracy or stability, and in 1997 First Prime Minister Prince Ranariddh was overthrown in a bloody coup by his putative coalition partner, former communist Hun Sen. The United States and other countries suspended aid, and the United Nations denied the new government a seat in the General Assembly.

Hun Sen eventually agreed to a new election. But the international community was far from united in its approach. Though democracy watchers around the world deplored Hun Sen’s violent putsch, many diplomats and aid providers believed that Cambodia could not be governed effectively without him. To them, an election—even an imperfect one—that lent Hun Sen legitimacy but also preserved a niche for political opposition seemed to be the best Cambodia could hope for.

With decisions about the future of foreign aid and diplomatic relations hinging on judgments about whether the contest was “free and fair,” the pressure was on to grant it a clean bill of health—giving Hun Sen a

sense of how much he could get away with. Eager to end the political crisis, the European Union, the United Nations, Japan, and Australia offered money, equipment, and technical assistance for the administration of Hun Sen’s far-from-perfect election.

The Americans were more squeamish about lending legitimacy to a dubious election. But the U.S. government tried to have it both ways: It declined to offer election aid—but watched from a distance, poised to resume aid and improve diplomatic relations if the process miraculously turned out well.

One Cambodian newspaper dubbed the Americans “idealists” and the Europeans “pragmatists.” But the difference was rooted in more than attitude. The United States, with its long history of activism by independent human-rights and prodemocracy groups, has largely separated election monitoring from foreign policy. In its efforts to monitor elections abroad, the United States relies heavily on nongovernmental organizations such as NDI and the International Republican Institute (IRI). These groups have a single, clear mission: to further democracy. It’s then up to the government to make decisions about whether and how to engage or aid foreign governments. Other players in the democracy industry assign diplomats and bureaucrats to monitor elections. Their judgments are inevitably colored by the fact that democracy is only one of the ends they seek.

Cambodia held its much anticipated election on July 26, 1998. Despite the atmosphere of intimidation created by Hun Sen and his followers, an astonishing 97 percent of Cambodian voters turned out to cast their ballots. Domestic monitoring groups described the process as relatively peaceful and well administered, as did the hundreds of assembled international observers. Speaking before a packed press conference at the plush Le Royale Hotel two days after the election, our own delegation’s coleader, former representative Steven Solarz (D-

> ERIC BJORN LUND, a Wilson Center fellow, is a former senior associate and director of Asia programs at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Copyright © 2001 by Eric Bjornlund.

N.Y.), went so far as to speculate that the election might one day be seen as “the miracle on the Mekong.”

Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) was declared the winner of approximately 42 percent of the ballots cast, which translated into a 64-seat majority of the 122-member assembly. Prince Ranariddh’s constitutional monarchist party won 31 percent of the vote and 43 seats, and a second opposition party, led by activist Sam Rainsy, won 14 percent and 15 seats.

But the Cambodian election was no miracle. Politically motivated killings had been commonplace since the ’97 coup, and they stopped only weeks before the election. Opposition members of Parliament, led by Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy, had fled the country in fear of their lives after the coup. Though opposition leaders were induced to return in early 1998, the violence hardly provided the backdrop for a “free and fair” democratic competition.

Violence was not all that marred the election: The CPP government denied opposition parties access to radio and television, threatened opposition supporters, and banned political demonstrations in the capital city of Phnom Penh during the campaign. Hun Sen’s supporters freely exploited their control of the judiciary and security forces. Two weeks before election day, an NDI-IRI report concluded that the process up to that point was “fundamentally flawed.”

Some foreign observers, however, failed to report these problems or blithely dismissed all signs of trouble. While the United States funded 25 long-term observers recruited through the Asia Foundation, none of their reports were made public or shared with other observer groups. The Joint International Observer Group (JIOG), a UN-organized umbrella organization of 34 delegations with some 500 members, didn’t even wait for the initial ballot count or for its own observers to return from the field before it endorsed the process as “free and fair to an extent that enables it to reflect, in a credible way, the will of the Cambodian people.”

Among the JIOG’s grab bag of groups were delegations dispatched by the governments of Burma, China, and Vietnam—regimes hardly known for their democratic

credentials. One JIOG delegation, which openly positioned itself as a Hun Sen apologist, urged even before balloting began that the election “not be discredited for reasons of international politics.” Most troubling of all, however, was the tendency of the JIOG’s *democratic* members—the “pragmatic” Europeans and Japanese—to gloss over the election’s undemocratic features.

Notwithstanding Solarz’s hyperbolic “miracle” remark, the NDI-IRI assessment as a whole was quite levelheaded. It made clear our concern about “violence, extensive intimidation, unfair media access, and ruling party control of the administrative machinery.” British politician Glenys Kinnock, speaking for the delegation from the European Union, rendered a terse and similarly restrained verdict—one that implicitly distanced the EU observers from both the “miracle” statement and the JIOG’s unqualified endorsement. Indeed, Solarz himself had said that the election would prove a “miracle” *only* if the tranquility of election day prevailed, and if the subsequent grievance process and the formation of the government proceeded smoothly. But in most press accounts, little more than Solarz’s sound bite survived.

The press, however, was not really to blame for the world’s failure to come to terms with what happened in Cambodia. As they have in many other cases, international democracy groups erred by making election day the big media event. By bringing observers to Cambodia only days before the polls opened, issuing much anticipated (and hastily composed) assessments of the polling, and hopping on the next plane home, monitoring groups encouraged journalists to zero in on “E-Day”—which constituted, after all, only 24 hours of a months-long process.

It didn’t take long for things in Cambodia to fall apart, making the foreign observers’ upbeat assessments of the election seem all the more disconnected from reality. (“Sometimes I wonder if we’re in the same Cambodia,” one exasperated local democrat said.) After struggling to complete the vote count, including a perfunctory attempt to conduct a recount in a few token locations,

the CPP-dominated election commission and constitutional court summarily dismissed the numerous complaints filed by opposition parties. After election day, it was revealed that the election commission had secretly altered the formula for allocating seats, thus giving Hun Sen a majority in the National Assembly. There is some evidence that the commission was only responding to international advisers who wanted to correct their own technical mistake. No matter. The change was made in secret, depriving the election of whatever shred of legitimacy it might have claimed.

In Phnom Penh and other Cambodian cities, post-election protests turned violent. One man was killed. The formation of a new government stalled amid finger pointing and threats.

One month after the election, our group decried the violence and utter lack of an appeals process. But our warnings went unheeded. The army of observers and reporters was gone, and international attention had waned. Neither the United Nations, nor the European Union, nor the JIOG ever made a single additional public statement after their relatively positive assessments immediately following election day. That would have required them to confront uncomfortable facts.

Three years after the “miracle on the Mekong,” Hun Sen presides over a corrupt and undemocratic regime. His security forces regularly harass opponents and commit rape, extortion, and extrajudicial killings with impunity. But, with American support, the Hun Sen regime has regained Cambodia’s seat in the United Nations, and the flow of foreign aid, including American aid, has resumed.

A year after the dismal proceedings in Cambodia, Indonesia held a much happier and more legitimate election—its first genuinely democratic contest in 44 years. Many of the democracy-industry circuit riders who had been in Cambodia promptly turned their attention to the archipelago. But again, the global democracy industry made serious mistakes, perhaps missing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shore up a fragile new democracy.

Indonesia’s democratic opening came in May 1998, when public anger at the regime’s corruption and economic mismanagement forced an aging President Suharto to step down after 32 years as the country’s autocratic leader. Democratic activists in Indonesia quickly organized the most extensive domestic election-monitoring effort ever seen. The prospect of establishing democracy in the country with the world’s largest Islamic population helped open foreign wallets. By early 1999, the United Nations Development Program and the interim government in Jakarta had launched an effort to raise \$90 million in international contributions for election administration, voter education, and poll watching. Just over a third of the total was to come from the United States.

When the polls opened on June 7, 1999, more than half a million Indonesians and nearly 600 foreigners from 30 countries were on hand to monitor the proceedings. It can only be called a messy election—but the vote was undeniably democratic. In the subsequent indirect election of the president, moderate Islamic leader Abdurrahman Wahid pulled out a surprising victory. Unfortunately, he has been ineffective, and the Indonesian national legislature now looks poised to remove him from office. Whether he stays or goes, Indonesia seems bound to endure a period of turmoil.

In Indonesia, the democracy industry inflicted a subtler form of damage than it did in Cambodia. In their drive to ensure fair procedures, the well-intentioned outsiders inadvertently disrupted the efforts of Indonesia’s many democrats. They once again allowed too much attention to focus on election day. And they stole the spotlight from local groups that could have benefited from more media attention.

The sudden influx of foreign money—much of it dumped into the country only weeks, or even days, before the election—touched off a mad scramble among the Indonesian groups. At the very moment they should have been focusing on the logistics of election monitoring, they were pouring their time and energy into grant proposals and budgets. Huge sums encouraged infighting among the Indonesian organizations.



Former president Jimmy Carter, his wife Rosalynn, and South African observer Tokyo Sexwale look on as an Indonesian woman casts her ballot in Ciputat, on the outskirts of Jakarta, in the 1999 election.

Misguided donors often made things worse by favoring different groups or factions.

Foreign aid also encouraged the need-less proliferation of new monitoring groups—organizations with little experience and even less commitment. Twelve months before the election, only one monitoring group existed in Indonesia. The next nine months witnessed the appearance of two more. But in the two months before the election, some 90 more groups elbowed their way to the table. New organizations sprang up like American dot-com companies in the heyday of high-tech opportunism—and many of them showed just as little resiliency.

Having created incentives for Indonesians to compete with one another, the donors then tried to compel them to join forces in ways that didn't always make sense. The monitoring groups, for example, were required to divide their responsibilities along geographical lines, which touched off new struggles as leaders haggled over their territories. The division could more effectively have been made along, say, functional lines, with some groups looking into such matters as pre-election complaints while others

educated voters or monitored vote counts. In any event, it was a decision best left to local activists, not outsiders.

As the head of the NDI's 20-person professional team in Indonesia, I saw firsthand some of the ill effects of all this. Three weeks before election day, at a final planning meeting of the University Network for Free Elections held at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, I was pained to see the group's leaders mired in arguments over money. For three days, student leaders from around the country complained about inadequate budgets, criticized the headquarters for hoarding money, and made apparently specious allegations of corruption. The urgent issues at hand—volunteer training, communications systems, vote count monitoring—went virtually undiscussed.

For the University Network's idealistic national leaders, such as human rights lawyer Todung Mulya Lubis and professor Smita Notosusanto, it was a profoundly dispiriting experience. After the election, they and their colleagues abandoned any ambitions of building a national grassroots prodemocracy network, instead creating a Jakarta-based advocacy organization called the Center for Electoral Reform.

The Indonesian experience is a reminder that elections are not an end in themselves; they are, rather, one step in the ongoing process of building democracy. Local organizations and networks created to monitor elections often go on to promote democracy in other ways, by fighting corruption, monitoring government performance, or engaging in civic education. They must be strengthened, with moral as well as material support, not treated like voting machines or ballot boxes to be stored away until the next election.

The democracy industry did a few things right in Indonesia. Not least, it helped ensure fair elections. And former president Jimmy Carter, the reigning celebrity in the international observer corps, offered a fine example of how foreign observers should behave. Carter was a careful student of the election, studying verification techniques, visiting polling stations, and listening to the reports of Indonesian monitors. On the day after the polls closed, he was enthusiastic. But hours before he was to address a press conference, he agreed to meet a small group of Indonesian democracy activists. They were worried about more talk of miracles. Carter listened, and he went before the television cameras with a very different message. He expressed optimism, but he also emphasized the need to pay attention in the days ahead as the votes were counted, the president was selected, and the new government took power. Carter focused attention where it belongs: on the long-term process of building democracy and the local groups that make it work.

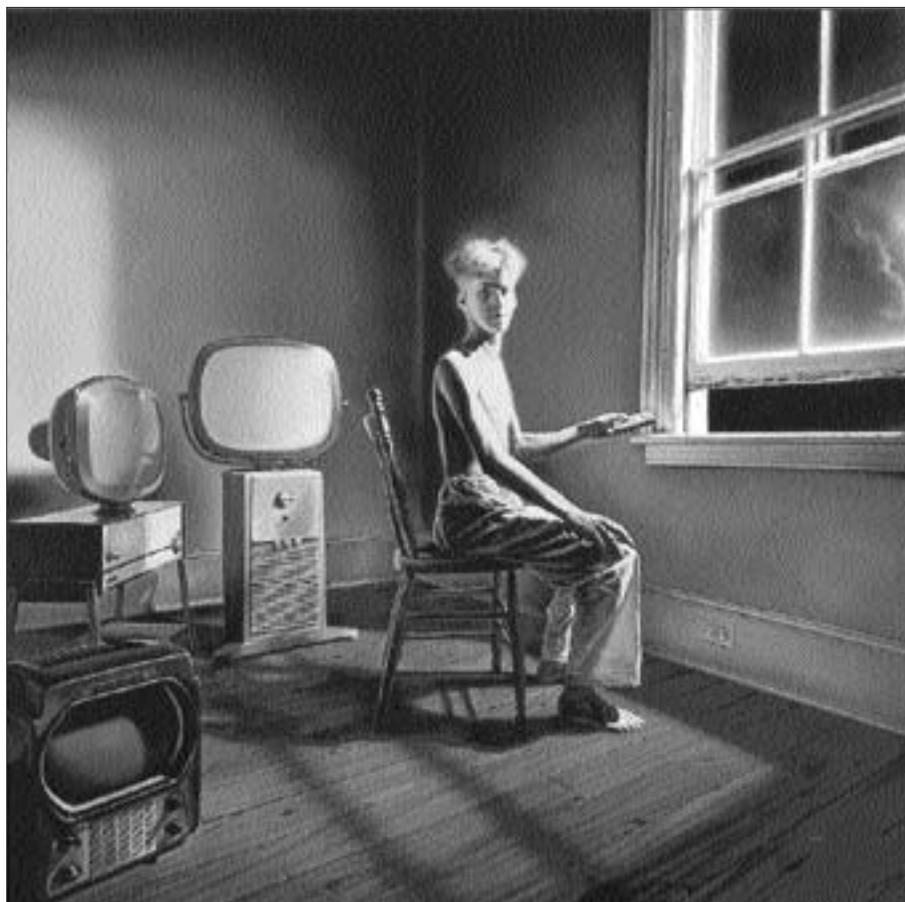
With experience, attention, and care, many of the ills that beset the new global democracy industry can be overcome. Shifting attention from election day to the months before and after voters go to the polls is a matter of common sense. Such a shift would also underscore the broader point that genuine democratization takes time, and that those who are sincere in their efforts to help must commit for the long term. Democratization, says Cambodian opposition leader Rainsy, depends on political forces “who’ll remain here, who’ll fight here, who’ll die here, and who are determined to fight for democracy—not just

observers who come for a few days.” There should be nothing controversial about helping local democratic activists become continuing players with a stake in their country’s future. But because so many of the democracy industry’s important actors regard representative government as just one goal, to be balanced against others, this will be difficult to achieve.

All elections must be judged honestly, by the same internationally recognized standards. We know what they are: In addition to fair balloting and counting, there must be opportunities for political parties to compete, reasonably equitable access to the news media, an impartial election administration, freedom from political intimidation, and prompt and just resolution of election-related grievances. But until international donors break the link between the promotion of democracy and other foreign-policy goals—something only the United States has attempted—diplomatic goals will inevitably dilute efforts to establish true democratic governance around the world.

The United States is often criticized for taking a retrograde stance on the environment, national missile defense, and other issues. But when it comes to promoting democracy, Americans are criticized for their crusading idealism. What the Cambodian and Indonesian elections show is that a little more idealism might not be so bad. American nongovernmental groups are motivated by an altruistic desire to help people establish democracy. Whatever the flaws of American assistance, the separation of activities such as election monitoring from the official role of government yields a special kind of commitment. Other countries would do well to emulate the U.S. approach.

In the last decades of the 20th century, democracy established itself as the world’s dominant political ideal. Yet much of the world’s population has yet to enjoy democratic rights, and the commitment of many ostensibly democratic countries remains questionable. If we are to deliver on the promise of global democracy, those who carry its banner must not compromise its simple principles. □



POP CULTURE Only a Wasteland?

With all its sound and fury, the debate over the state of American popular culture is beginning to resemble one of television's high-squawk talk shows: Love it or loathe it, we're told. But it's not that simple. America's movies, music, and TV programs are full of both degrading sex and violence and extraordinary creative vitality. Our two critics draw on the perspective of history to sort through what's right with pop culture and what's wrong with it—and why.

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The Art in the Popular

by Paul A. Cantor

“I remember, in the course of making *Speed*, I learned *Hamlet*,” says Reeves. What does that tell us about *Speed*? “It ain’t Shakespeare.”

—Interview with Keanu Reeves, *Rolling Stone*

I have just finished writing a book titled *Gilligan Unbound: Pop Culture in the Age of Globalization*. That may not sound so odd, until I reveal how I have spent the rest of my life. Most of my scholarly career has been devoted to Shakespeare, about whom I have published 15 essays and three books, including the volume on *Hamlet* in the Cambridge University Press *Landmarks of World Literature* series. I have also published extensively on Romantic literature, and even when I have written on contemporary subjects, I have dealt with authors generally regarded as both serious and complex, such as J. M. Coetzee, Don DeLillo, and Salman Rushdie. In my teaching, I have always been a staunch champion of what is usually called the Western canon. I began my career in the old General Education program at Harvard with a course on myths of creation, and at the University of Virginia today I regularly teach the introductory comparative literature survey, which begins with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and runs through all the traditional great authors, such as Virgil, Dante, Cervantes, Goethe, Austen, and Dostoevsky.

With these credentials, why am I now writing about *Gilligan's Island* and *Star Trek*? I could simply say that everyone needs to relax and have a little fun once in a while. But in truth, I hope to show that we can learn something from American popular culture, especially if we study it with the same care we have learned to bring to the analysis of traditional literary masterpieces. And perhaps the serious study of popular culture might have a genuine pedagogical value. I am not one of those misguided optimists who think that television (or any other technological development, such as the Internet) is the answer to all our educational problems. In fact, I am as appalled as anybody at what television appears to be doing to our young. Every year, it seems, I



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Shakespeare's immortality has rarely been more sorely tested than it was by episode 72 of Gilligan's Island, in which the dimwitted castaways performed a musical version of Hamlet.

watch the attention span of my students shorten and their ability to read the complex language of older literature diminish. I do what I can to combat these trends, but there is something to be said for a strategy of "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." Given that we are now forced to live with television—proposals to ban it have not generated much support—we might as well search for ways to turn it to some good use, even if its overall influence on students remains deleterious.

If my students seem to be totally immersed in popular culture, I try to meet them halfway—not surrendering completely to the world of the media, but using it to help my students understand the world of high culture that is supposedly so remote from their experience. For example, when I discuss the centrally important theme of vengeance in the *Iliad* or the *Oresteia*, I relate it to modern forms of revenge tragedy, westerns such as *The Searchers* or *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, or gangster movies such as the *Godfather* films or *Goodfellas*. John Ford's *The Searchers* is positively Aeschylean in the way it uses the theme of revenge to explore the complex and ever shifting boundary between civilization and barbarism. I show my students that if they have seen *The Godfather*, they already know something about the tension between law and justice, which is such an important issue in Greek and Shakespearean tragedy. My new book culminates in a discussion of one of the most bizarre hours of television ever broadcast, the "Home" episode of *The X-Files*. Though clearly an exercise in American Gothic, this grim tale of incest and infanticide harks back to the origins of Western drama, and, like Greek tragedy, pits the primal power of the family against the civilizing power of the community and its broader standard of justice.

Getting our students to “read” popular cultural critically may well become our task as teachers in an age increasingly dominated by the mass media. If students can learn to reflect on what they view in movies or on television, the process may eventually make them better readers of literature. The many critics of popular culture, who adamantly oppose its inclusion in the college curriculum, fear that studying it inevitably involves dragging what has traditionally been regarded as high culture down to the same level. This is a legitimate concern and should caution us against any easy embrace of popular culture or surrender to its cheap thrills and superficial charms. But that is not to say that no embrace is possible. By being selective and rigorously analytical, one may be able to lift popular culture up to the level of high culture, or at least pull it in that direction.

The process of beginning with popular culture and attempting to ascend from it to higher levels of reflection has a name: the Socratic method. I am not talking about the parody of the Socratic method used by law professors and other academics, but the real thing—the philosophic procedure Plato shows Socrates pursuing in dialogue after dialogue. In the most philosophically autobiographical passage Plato ascribes to his teacher, Socrates explains in the *Phaedo* (96a-100a) that he became disillusioned with what we would call scientific attempts to understand the universe in terms of material causes. So he decided to turn from the study of the heavens to the study of human things, and that meant studying the accounts of the universe people give when they speak to each other in the city. For Socrates, what human beings *say* about their world is the best starting point for philosophy, and his aim, as Plato shows, is always to move in the direction of true knowledge from the confused and contradictory opinions people commonly express about the most important subjects, such as justice and the good. Socrates recounts in the *Apology* (22b-c) that among the most important people in Athens he interrogated were the poets, because, as becomes clear in several Platonic dialogues, the poets both reflect and help shape popular opinion on wisdom, piety, and other virtues. Poetry in its various forms, including drama, was the popular culture of ancient Greece. As Plato makes clear in the *Republic*, Homer was the educator of the whole Greek world, and the theater in Athens was a civic institution, the center of religious festivals for which much of the city’s population regularly turned out. Thus, when Plato portrays Socrates, directly or indirectly, in conversation with the poets, he is showing him beginning his philosophic ascent from what we call popular culture.

I can hear the howls of protest: “You’re comparing a TV critic talking about *Gilligan’s Island* to Socrates discussing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: Shame on you!” It no doubt tells us something about the astoundingly high cultural level

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of fifth-century B.C. Athens that authors such as Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes were genuinely popular in the city and attracted large crowds to public performances of their work (including recitations from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*). Ancient Greek literature has become our epitome of high culture, the touchstone by which we judge all later authors. But let us not forget that the Greek culture that looks so elevated to us today looked

debased to many of its most intelligent contemporaries—precisely because it was popular, and hence seemed in many respects vulgar. Plato was no partisan of ancient Greek culture. Indeed, he was its harshest critic. And his criticism might help us rethink our conception of the Greek cultural world, and perhaps our concep-

tion of culture in general. Time and the changes it has wrought have distorted our view of ancient Greece. Our image of the chaste beauty of a temple such as the Parthenon is shaped by the fact that the bright colors with which it was originally painted have long since faded. If we could be magically transported to the Acropolis as it existed in Socrates' day, we might well comment on how "unclassical" and even garish its color scheme looked to us. Similarly, if we could see a fifth-century B.C. performance of a Greek tragedy, we might well be shocked by its "operatic" quality. The dionysian element in the staging—all the music and the dancing—might well overwhelm us, as it evidently did the ancient audiences, according to the few contemporary accounts of performances that have survived. Especially since the 18th-century German art historian Johann Winckelmann, we have tended to think of Greek culture in terms of restraint, dignity, and repose. But as cultural revisionists since Nietzsche have been reminding us, the ancient Greeks were a Mediterranean people, with powerful emotions and a need to express them in their art. Characters in Homer weep uncontrollably, and they rage with even less restraint. Ancient Greek literature was much closer to the immoderation and emotional excess of modern popular culture than its champions today would like to think.

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Our view of ancient Greek literature might be quite different if we had more of it. Only a fraction of the output of the Greek tragedians has survived, some 33 of an estimated 1,000 tragedies produced in fifth-century B.C. Athens. The carnage of comedies was even greater: of the presumably vast world of Athenian Old Comedy, only 11 plays by Aristophanes survive. Some element of accident was no doubt at work in determining which plays survived, but on the whole we

have every reason to believe that a process of canon formation was taking place. The ancient world gradually sifted out the best playwrights, and generally chose their best works to preserve. We do not pick up the *Poetics* and find Aristotle saying, to our dismay, “Sophocles was a good dramatist, but he was no Agathon,” or “I like *Oedipus tyrannos*, but the other plays in the trilogy are much better.” Of course, there is a risk of circular reasoning here. *Oedipus tyrannos* may have been preserved partly because Aristotle praised it, and we might in fact prefer one of Sophocles’ lost plays if we could but see it. No doubt much of value in Greek drama has been lost. Having read *Prometheus Bound*, who would not wish to have the rest of Aeschylus’s trilogy on the Titan? Still, on balance we seem to have a fair selection of the best of Greek tragedy in the texts that have come down to us, and all the authorities we have agree that Aristophanes was the greatest of the Greek comedians.

But that is precisely the problem. We have an idealized view of Greek drama because only the best works have survived. If we had the works of a playwright such as Agathon, we would have a broader sense of what culture in ancient Athens was like. We might then realize how “popular” it really was, and have a better idea of why astute contemporaries such as Plato were so critical of Greek drama. In short, Greek culture was a much more mixed phenomenon than we tend to think today, and embraced the high and the low. From all the evidence we have, the

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Athenian public was basically indiscriminate about culture, in just the way mass audiences often are. Sometimes great playwrights such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides won in the public contests that were at the heart of dramatic production in Athens, but often

they lost, and not just to each other. The records show that they were repeatedly beaten by dramatists who have long since been forgotten, presumably with just cause. Much as is the situation with the Academy Awards today, the Athenian drama judges sometimes rewarded true artistic quality, and sometimes did just the opposite. Aristophanes revised his comedy *The Clouds* after he suffered the humiliation of seeing it finish last in the competition for which he originally wrote it. In the text of the play that has come down to us, he has the chorus berate the audience for failing to appreciate the “wisest” of his comedies, and he complains bitterly about being “worsted by vulgar men” at the first contest. Plato has left his indirect comment on Athenian drama contests in his *Symposium*, a dialogue that takes place during a drinking party to celebrate Agathon’s having won first prize with his first tragedy. When Agathon gets up to speak in praise of love, Plato exposes him as a shallow thinker, chiefly interested in showing off and dazzling his audience with cheap rhetorical tricks. Agathon wins the applause



Life in Plato's Academy, as imagined in a first-century A.D. mosaic in the Roman town of Pompeii.

of the dinner party, much as he won the drama contest, but within moments Socrates is able to make intellectual mincemeat of him by asking a few questions that reveal the hollowness of his rhetoric. "So much for the Academy Award-winning tragedian of Athens," Plato seems to be saying.

In general, Plato shows Socrates puncturing the pretensions of the chief representatives of Athenian popular culture in his day. In the dialogue called the *Ion*, Socrates interrogates a rhapsode of that name, one of the performers who made a living from public recitations of Homer's poetry. According to the dialogue, rhapsodes such as Ion attracted huge audiences and drove them into an emotional frenzy; these performers had something of the status of rock stars today. Socrates leads Ion to reveal that, puffed up by the adulation of the crowds who throng to hear him recite Homer, he has developed an inflated sense of his own importance. Considering himself an expert on Homer, he has come to believe that he is also an expert on all the subjects Homer deals with in his poetry. Socrates eventually gets the little fool to claim that he would make the best general in the whole Greek world because he recites the military passages in Homer so beautifully. He should remind us of the movie stars in our day who flock to Washington to testify on matters of national security at congressional hearings: "I'm not a general, but I play one on TV." With his typical insight, Socrates sees right into the depths

of Ion's soul (shallow as he is) and leads him to reveal his true motives as he looks out at his audience:

I look down upon them from the platform and see them at such moments crying and turning awestruck eyes upon me and yielding to the amazement of my tale. For I have to pay the closest attention to them, since, if I set them crying, I shall laugh myself because of the money I take, but if they laugh, I myself shall cry because of the money I lose. (translation by W. R. M. Lamb)

Ion truly is a pop star. Far from possessing the art of generalship, he turns out to be mainly concerned with the art of moneymaking. And he earns his money by giving his audience what it wants—an emotional high from the more dazzling passages in Homer's poetry.

The *Ion* shows how deep Plato's critique of Athenian culture goes. It is one thing to be reminded that in addition to the great authors we revere today, such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, Athens was filled with pretenders such as Agathon and Ion, second- and third-raters who had no artistic depth and were basically in the business for the fame and the money. But in the case of Ion, Plato shows us something more: What we think of as the great artistic achievements of ancient Greece were transformed as they became part of the popular culture of their day. The Athenians did not study the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in universities as we do today. They did not pour over the epics with learned professors and scholarly commentaries to guide them, to point out the artistic shape of the poems or the subtlety of their details (all that came later, in the Alexandrian period of Greek culture). Indeed, by and large the Athenians did not *read* Homer at all. They heard his poems recited, often in huge crowds with performers paid well to make them sound as exciting as possible. In short, the Homer of Athenian popular culture was not "our" Homer, the Homer of Great Books courses. He was "packaged" for Athenian audiences by a kind of entertainment industry, much the way Shakespeare is for mass audiences today—and with the same inevitable distortions.

Viewers of a movie version of a Shakespeare play rarely get its text complete. Often, by the time the director is finished updating and adapting the play to the screen—adding music, rearranging scenes, transposing the setting, and so on—little remains of the original work. What should be the occasion for thoughtful reflection on the human condition is turned into just another Hollywood movie, sometimes even an action/adventure flick (such as the Mel Gibson *Hamlet*, which some of my students referred to as *Lethal Bodkin*), and almost always in a form that emphasizes emotion at the expense of dramatic logic. For example, Baz Luhrmann's version of *Romeo and Juliet* turned the play into what amounted to a series of MTV videos, and was so geared to the teenage market that at the time I proposed renaming it *Saved by the Bell: The Renaissance Years*.

The *Ion* reminds us of the distinction between the actual monuments of high culture and the way they may be received once they enter the realm of popular culture, and it points us toward the crucial role of the cultural intermediaries who translate high culture into popular. Plato's *Ion* is the Dino DeLaurentiis of his day, making the story of Odysseus attractive to a mass

The Simpsons' America

By dealing centrally with the family, *The Simpsons* takes up real human issues everybody can recognize and thus ends up in many respects less “cartoonish” than other television programs. Its cartoon characters are more human, more fully rounded, than the supposedly real human beings in many situation comedies. Above all, the show has created a believable human community: Springfield, USA. . . .

Springfield is decidedly an American small town. In several episodes, it is contrasted with Capital City, a metropolis the Simpsons approach with fear and trepidation. Obviously the show makes fun of small-town life—it makes fun of everything—but it simultaneously celebrates the virtues of the traditional American small town. One of the principal reasons why the dysfunctional Simpson family functions as well as it does is that [its members] live in a traditional American small town. The institutions that govern their lives are not remote from them or alien to them. The Simpson children go to a neighborhood school (though they are bussed to it by the ex-hippie driver Otto). Their friends in school are largely the same as their friends in their neighborhood. The Simpsons are not confronted by an elaborate, unapproachable, and uncaring education bureaucracy. Principal Skinner and Mrs. Krabappel may not be perfect educators, but when Homer and Marge need to talk to them, they are readily accessible. The same is true of the Springfield police force. Chief Wiggum is not a great crime-fighter, but he is well-known to the citizens of Springfield, as they are to him. The police in Springfield still have neighborhood beats and have even been known to share a donut or two with Homer. . . .

The overall tendency of *The Simpsons* is to present Springfield as a kind of classical polis; it is just about as self-contained and autonomous as a community can be in the modern world. This once again reflects the postmodern nostalgia of *The Simpsons*: With its self-conscious recreation of the 1950s sitcom, it ends up weirdly celebrating the old ideal of small-town America. I do not mean to deny that the first impulse of *The Simpsons* is to make fun of small-town life. But in that very process, it reminds us of what the old ideal was and what was so attractive about it, above all the fact that average Americans somehow felt in touch with the forces that influenced their lives and maybe even controlled them.

In a presentation before the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 12, 1991 (broadcast on C-SPAN), series creator Matt Groening said that the subtext of *The Simpsons* is: “The people in power don’t always have your best interests in mind.” This is a view of politics that cuts across the normal distinctions between Left and Right and explains why the show can be relatively evenhanded in its treatment of both political parties and has something to offer to both liberals and conservatives. *The Simpsons* is based on distrust of power, and especially of power remote from ordinary people. The show celebrates genuine community, a community in which everybody more or less knows everybody else (even if they do not necessarily like each other). By recreating this older sense of community, the show manages to generate a kind of warmth out of its postmodern coolness, a warmth that is largely responsible for its success with the American public. This view of community may be the most profound comment *The Simpsons* has to make on family life in particular and politics in general in America today. No matter how dysfunctional it may seem, the nuclear family is an institution worth preserving. And the way to preserve it is not by the offices of a distant, supposedly expert, therapeutic state, but by restoring its links to a series of local institutions, which reflect and foster the same principle that makes the Simpson family itself work—the attachment to one’s own, the principle that we best care for something when it belongs to us.

—Paul Cantor

Excerpted from an article in Political Theory (Dec. 1999). Copyright © 1999 by Sage Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and Sage Publications, Inc.

audience. He serves up a form of Homer-lite—a stripped-down, jazzed-up menu of excerpts—and in the process he loses the soul of the great epics. The *Ion* helps explain the seemingly puzzling fact that Plato has Socrates criticize Homer so vehemently. Socrates is criticizing not so much the Homer of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as the Homer of *Ion*, Homer repackaged for a mass audience by a clever merchandiser. As staged by *Ion*, Homer's texts become occasions not for studied contemplation but for emotional indulgence—and that, evidently, is the way Athenian audiences liked their Homer.

Plato thus helps us to distinguish two levels of popular culture. On the one hand, there are the merely popular artists such as Agathon, who care for nothing but popularity. They flatter their audience to gain its approval, giving it only what it wants to hear. To maintain their popularity, these poets remain within the audience's horizon of opinions, never challenging its beliefs but, rather, reinforcing them. They lend the prestige of their art to common opinion, casting an aesthetic enchantment over the most ordinary ideas and making them look beautiful. Such poets differ from other holders of conventional opinion only by the skill with which they can formulate it (think of Alexander Pope's line: "What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed"). On the other hand, though this point is no doubt controversial, I believe that Plato was willing to acknowledge that some poets, even though popular, might possess a genuine form of wisdom. He makes fun of Agathon's pretensions in the *Symposium*, but he gives the comic poet Aristophanes a brilliant and moving speech, one that anticipates the view of love Socrates himself ultimately develops in the dialogue. I believe that Plato could discriminate between a crowd pleaser and a poet who is more than merely popular. The greatest of poets may be able to see beyond the limited horizons of their community and offer a critique of its conventions. But this critique will be largely lost on the public, who, even if they choose to embrace unconventional poetry, will tend to assimilate it into the conventional notions they already hold.

Thus, from the community's standpoint, in many respects it does not matter whether a poet is genuinely wise or not—if his wisdom will inevitably be diluted and distorted in the process of being made popular. Homer may be the wisest man who ever lived, but Plato suggests that if his thoughts reach the public only through a cultural intermediary such as *Ion*, their effect will be debased. If the fate of Socrates taught Plato anything, it was the profound tension between thoughtfulness and "popularity." Plato was deeply suspicious of any idea that had been packaged for communal consumption. He was, in effect, the first critic of popular culture, and precisely for its "popularity." That is the basis of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry Plato has Socrates speak of in the *Republic* (607b-c), and that is why when Plato shows Socrates trying to work his way up from common opinion, he often depicts him beginning with the poets. Plato may have had a low opinion of what we call popular culture, but he recognized its importance in shaping common opinion—and thus, in shaping the political community.

I have dwelled at length on Plato's critique of the poets in the hope of shaking up my readers with the thought that the artistic world that serves today as our paradigm of high culture was once viewed as popular culture, and indeed condemned as such by perhaps the most intel-

ligent and perceptive thinker of his day. Plato's critique of the Greek poets ought to sound very familiar to us. He has Socrates accuse Greek poets of inflaming the passions of their audiences, and in particular of inciting them to violent behavior and unleashing their lusts. At various points, particularly in the *Republic*, Socrates argues that the poets teach improper and even impious ideas about the gods, and undermine the authority and stability of the political community. Spelled out this way, Plato's critique of the poets sounds uncannily like the litany of complaints conservative critics make about American popular culture today, especially about television programs. One is forced to wonder: If the critics who hold up classical culture as their model today had lived in fifth-century B.C. Athens, would they have been singing the praises of Homer and Greek tragedy? Or would they have rejected the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as too violent and, like Plato, viewed Greek tragedy as a symptom of cultural decadence (in particular the work of that most subversive of playwrights, Euripides)? What would our cultural traditionalists have made of Aristophanes if they had been forced to live as his contemporaries? (And perhaps more interesting, what would he have made of them?) Aristophanes' comedies set standards of obscenity that have never been equaled, let alone surpassed (and no English translation comes close to doing justice to the sustained anatomical vulgarity of their double-entendre).

It is no use countering that Aristophanes was a serious and profound critic of Athens (which I believe he was), and that his obscenity was merely a concession to the demands of his audience. Plato's critique concentrates on the effect the Greek poets had on their audience. It brackets out the question of whether their works had any deeper meaning in favor of asking how they were actually received as they entered popular culture. After all, critics of contemporary popular culture are always talking about its effects and not about any hidden meanings. If they want to exonerate Aristophanes on charges of obscenity because his plays had a deeper purpose, they need to ask whether the contemporary works they condemn might also have some purpose other than just titillating their audiences. Of course, much obscene art in the contemporary world may in fact be just obscene, with none of the famous "redeeming social value" it is supposed to have. But the fact that works we now regard as classics were once regarded as obscene should give us pause, and we might at least be willing to think twice before rejecting contemporary popular culture without a fair hearing.

Plato's critique of the poets is useful for reminding us how complex a living culture is. It does not divide up neatly into high and low art, into works that are clearly classic and works that are merely popular. Some of the greatest works of art (including Shakespeare's plays) were popular in their own day, and as Aristophanes' comedies attest, they may present a puzzling mixture of the high and the low (Shakespeare was known to come up with an obscene pun or two himself). We are often tempted to think that Plato did not understand art because he appears to condemn it, but in fact he develops a deep understanding of art and artists in his dialogues, especially the *Symposium*. He



Scully (Gillian Anderson) and Mulder (David Duchovny) shine yet another of their signature shaky flashlights into yet another of The X-Files' signature dark corners.

shows that the highest flights of the human imagination may be strangely linked to the lowest impulses of the soul. Thus, any culture offers a truly problematic whole, a strange circulation of artistic energies, in which what we sometimes simplistically try to separate as the classic and the popular elements mix and interpenetrate in surprising ways.

Plato should prompt us, when we look at our own culture, to look high *and* low to appreciate its full achievement. The lasting cultural accomplishments of our age may not always be conveniently where we expect to find them, based on past experience and our ingrained assumptions about what constitutes true art. To be sure, we probably will not go far wrong if we expect that most of American popular culture will turn out upon closer inspection to be more or less mindless entertainment after all. But sometimes genuine art may masquerade as mindless entertainment. Careful analysis of Plato's critique of the poets suggests that we cannot dismiss a work simply because an audience reacts to it in emotional and irrational ways. We must always be alert to the possibility that even in the most conventional venues of popular culture—television, for example—genuine artists may find means to sneak in under the audience's radar to present unconventional ideas in ways that are acceptable and even entertaining to a mass audience. Classic works of art do not always carry a neat label informing us: "This

is one for the ages.” They may at first be hard to distinguish from the common fare of their day. A wacky and obscene comedy such as Aristophanes’ *The Birds* may turn out to embody a profound understanding of the Athenian polis and its imperial aspirations. And, as I argue in my new book, an apparently bizarre sci-fi series such as *The X-Files* may have much to tell us about the American nation-state (and its imperial aspirations). Cultural history is full of surprises, and we should take pleasure in its unpredictability.

Plato encourages us to study popular culture carefully. He has Socrates interrogate the poets because they help reveal the horizon of common opinion in the community—as television programs do today. I do not see how anyone could claim to understand contemporary America without understanding something of contemporary American television. Television is not the only component forming the horizon of American

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common opinion, but, as many commentators have noted, it surely has become the most important. The American people have increasingly come to understand their world in terms of what they see of it on television, which often provides them with both their raw data and the categories with which they analyze it. Television is constantly creating the myths of contemporary America, stories that exemplify our common experience and that therefore might help us reflect upon those myths.

From what I have said thus far, I may seem to be endorsing the movement in my profession known as cultural studies. Though I admire some of the work in this field, I have a basic quarrel with the movement as a whole, which approaches popular culture from a largely Marxist perspective. It tends to treat what appears on television as an example of “false consciousness,” an ideological smokescreen designed to hide from people the forces that are oppressing them, thus making them content with a social system against which they should in fact be rebelling. In the view of most practitioners of cultural studies, television simply serves the interests of capitalism, promoting the consumption of commodities and providing ideological justification for the market economy that produces them. The cultural studies movement generally does not turn to popular culture to learn something from it, but rather to teach it a lesson. Unlike Socrates, proponents of cultural studies do not take popular culture as their starting point for reflection; rather, they believe that they come to popular culture already possessing all the knowledge they

need—the theoretical machinery of Marxism, which allows them to expose the false consciousness embodied in television. As his attraction to the Athenian agora shows, Socrates did not share cultural studies' outright hostility to the "marketplace."

I am offering a Socratic approach to popular culture as an alternative to cultural studies as it is usually practiced today. There is nothing essential in the analyses of cultural studies that cannot be found (more elegantly developed and expressed) in Socrates' confrontation with the poets in Plato's dialogues. Plato is acutely aware of how poets often serve the dominant interests of their age—for example, by flattering the rulers in monarchies or aristocracies and the people in democracies. As we have seen, Plato's principal critique of the poets is that they reinforce the reigning ideas of their day, and hence the existing power structure. In the figure of Socrates, Plato was already offering what is known today as "ideology critique" or "culture critique." But Plato offers something more—and above all the possibility that some poets might point beyond the limited horizons of their age. Cultural studies generally takes a historicist approach to artistic activity and philosophic thought. In its view, all art and thought are historically determined; no artist or thinker is free of the biases and limited premises of the historical period in which he or she lives. Plato's parable of the cave in the *Republic* is, of course, the most vivid image ever invented of this kind of imprisonment within a limited worldview. But Plato's image allows for the possibility of a sun outside the cave and for the perennial human ability to ascend from the cave to view it. That is the fundamental meaning of Socratic philosophy as Plato presents it. Beginning with the images human beings create for themselves in the cave of their civic existence, philosophers such as Socrates begin an ascent from conventional opinion to true knowledge. Hence, the importance for Socrates of poetry and, more broadly, of popular culture as we understand it. Poets give us our best representations of the mental horizon of the human community, and some of them may well lead us beyond it.

By contrast, in Platonic terms, cultural studies' adherents view popular culture as consisting of all opinion and no knowledge, and, what is worse, as lacking the possibility of ascending from opinion to knowledge. For these critics, the only true knowledge comes entirely from outside the civic community, from cultural studies itself and the truth of its Marxist theory, which from its Olympian theoretical height passes judgment on the false consciousness of the common people down in the cave. Plato's Socrates actually has more respect for the popular culture of his day. For all his sense of its limitations, he chooses it as the starting point of his philosophy. He recognizes that a kind of partial knowledge may be embodied in the admittedly biased opinions of the civic community. Artisans, for example, though they lack clear knowledge of the cosmic whole, may have genuine knowledge of certain of its parts. As a philosopher, Socrates regards all opinion, no matter how conventional and confused, as potentially partial knowledge. Instead of trying to understand popular culture from an external theoretical standpoint, as cultural studies scholars do, he immerses him-

self in it, begins by accepting it on its own terms, and then tries to work his way up to true knowledge from within conventional opinion. He uses his conversations with such representatives of popular opinion as the poets to uncover the contradictions in their thinking and move beyond them.

That is the difference between Marxist and Socratic dialectic. In Marxism, dialectic is a historical process, moving through contradictions in material conditions from one self-contained culture to another (say, from feudalism to capitalism). Hence, for Marxists, at any given stage everyone is imprisoned within a certain cultural horizon (in a capitalist culture, for example, all art embodies capitalist ideology). In Plato, dialectic is a philosophical process, moving within any given cultural horizon from opinion to knowledge by means of uncovering intellectual contradictions. Plato always allows for the possibility of mental lib-



Nam June Paik's TV Rodin (1975)

eration, even while acknowledging how powerfully imprisoning the dominant ideas of any community tend to be.

I would be the first to admit that when a popular culture consists in part of Homer, the Greek tragedians, and Aristophanes, its usefulness for a philosophic ascent is greatly enhanced. All popular cultures are not created equal, as my epigraph from Keanu Reeves so eloquently attests. Nevertheless, the point of Socrates' famous turn from the heavens to the earth, his embrace of human speeches as the medium of philosophy, is that we must always begin not from an abstract theoretical standpoint but from what is first for us as members of a human community—and that, in effect, means popular culture. If the likes of *Gilligan's Island* and *The X-Files* are what currently appear on the wall of the cave, the way out and up may be longer and more circuitous than in Socrates' day, but his example tells us that these works are nonetheless where we must begin. I am not claiming that if Socrates were alive today, he would be writing a weekly column for *TV Guide*. But I do believe that he would be interrogating filmmakers and TV scriptwriters in the marketplace of Hollywood, just as he once did the poets and other artisans in the marketplace of Athens. Socrates never knew where philosophy might take him, but he always knew where to begin. □

The Perverse in the Popular

by *Martha Bayles*

At its best, American popular culture possesses a vitality that belies the facile criticisms of both Right and Left. At its worst—as in Jerry Springer’s daytime talk show, in which private misery and family dysfunction become public spectacle, a cockfight with psyches instead of roosters—popular culture seems to pose incalculable risks to what used to be called public morality.

In discussing both the vitality and the danger, we keep returning to the same dispiriting clichés. There’s more sex and violence than ever, yet sex and violence sell. Young people are being exposed to material that would have shocked their grandparents, yet there seems no way to protect them from it. We call for positive programs, yet our mass obsessions—murder trials, political scandals—focus almost entirely on the negative. Not surprisingly, we throw up our hands.

At this juncture, it is natural to turn to the scholars in the social sciences and the humanities who study popular culture and the electronic media. Popular culture includes novels, magazines, and other printed matter, but in most discussions the term chiefly refers to the realm of electronic media: radio, records, film, television, video games, and now the ubiquitous Internet. Many of our received ideas about popular culture so defined come from three sources of academic expertise: Communications theory focuses on the psychological impacts of media. Cultural studies is concerned with the role of popular culture in reinforcing and expanding the existing social order. Traditional philosophy emphasizes the perennial difficulty of sustaining excellence, or even decency, in a culture seemingly devoted to the lowest common denominator.

Each of these perspectives contains more than a grain of truth. But none addresses the most serious problem facing popular culture: the democratization, now on a global scale, of what I call “perverse modernism.” To the familiar vices of popular culture—notably, vulgarity and kitsch—perverse modernism has added a new twist: a radically adversarial stance toward society, morality, and art itself. That stance has gone from being the property of a tiny avant-garde a century ago to being part of the cultural mainstream today.

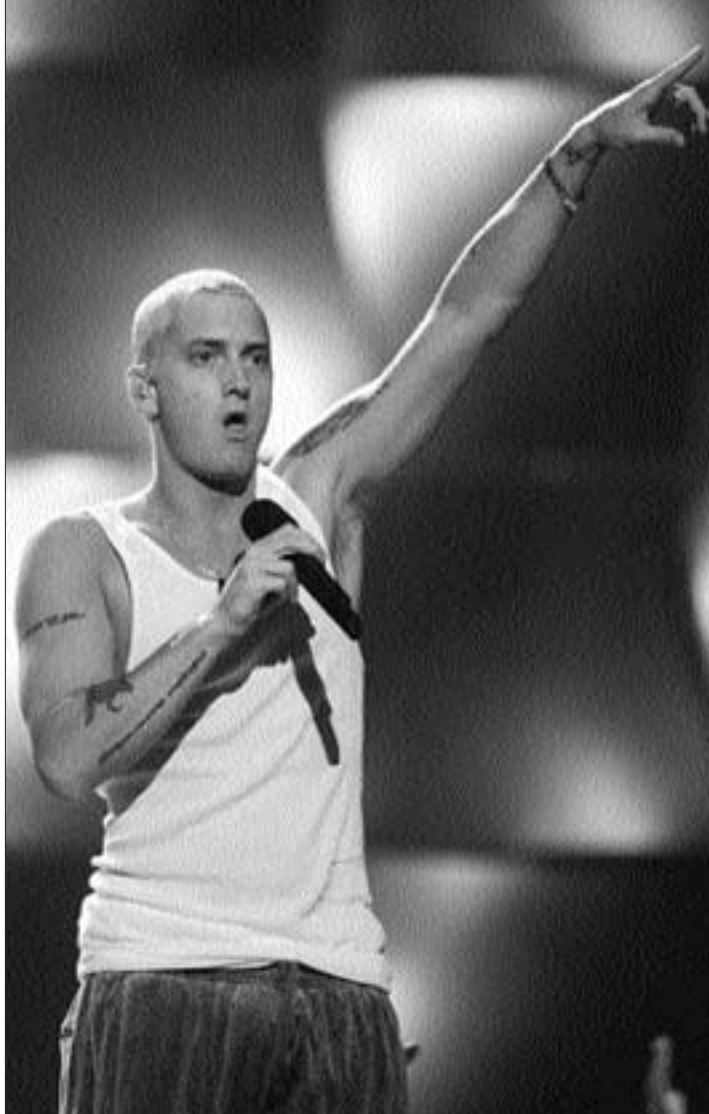
Perverse modernism is not the whole of modernism, by any means. But it is the easy part. Millions of people who cannot grasp the formal innovations of cubism have no trouble comprehending the publicity stunts of the dadaists. To the extent that today’s popular culture uses shock and scandal as a way of attracting attention and boosting sales, it is the child of perverse modernism. The “cutting edge” keeps shifting, of course. To perform in a bra was considered shocking when Madon-

na did it in the early 1980s; by the late 1990s, it was part of the Mexican-American singer Selena's "mainstream" image. Even many creators of popular culture who are not on the cutting edge assume that "pushing the envelope" of sex and violence is the very definition of "creativity."

Communications theory begins with what the media scholar W. Russell Neuman calls "the perception of a helpless mass public." Many of our received ideas about media come from Marshall McLuhan's bold hypothesis that "the medium is the message"—that the electronic media in this instance, like the print media before them, have the power to retool the human sensorium and, by extension, transform human consciousness.

McLuhan was by turns optimistic and pessimistic about this transformation, so it should come as no surprise that communications theory today has its optimists and its pessimists. In this era of the Internet, the optimists dominate. They predict a bright future in which every human being on the planet will be "empowered" by instant access to every other human being and to the species' shared information cornucopia. The pessimists, whose heyday coincided with the rise of television, foresee a gloomier future, in which the endless distractions of the screen will bring the death of literacy, reason, and civilization as we know it.

Both optimistic and pessimistic communications theorists embrace McLuhan's somewhat paradoxical assertion that the human mind is weaker than the media it creates for itself. How well grounded is this assertion? Neuman ventured an answer in *The Future of the Mass Audience* (1992), the product of a five-year study conducted for several major media companies. Noting that McLuhan raised important questions, but that it was "not his style" to research the answers, Neuman surveyed the available evidence and found what advertisers and educators already knew—that most human beings are "obdurate, impenetrable, resourcefully resistant" toward any message, regardless of medium, that does not fit "the cognitive makeup of the minds receiving it."



Rapper Eminem, the latest star to climb the stairway of shock, has made his mark with misogynistic and homophobic lyrics.

Anticipating the vast potential of the Internet, Neuman suggested that the same pattern of obduracy would be repeated. To judge by the evidence (including a decade of dot-com overreaching), the Internet has not caused a radical change in the way people relate to media. Despite the ubiquitous image of the perpetually cybersurfing teenager, the vast majority of us mortals do not seek complex interactivity or deep information retrieval. Wrote Neuman: "The mass citizenry, for most issues, simply will not take the time to learn more or understand more deeply, no matter how inexpensive or convenient such further learning may be." People want from the Internet what they have always wanted from media: easy access to material of general interest and, especially, entertainment. The pattern may change with the next generation. But then again, it may not.

Is that regrettable? Only if you were hoping that the new media would transform human nature for the better. If you were expecting the opposite, it should be reassuring to think that is likewise beyond them.

While communications theory zeroes in on individual psychology, cultural studies focuses on the political and social impacts of media, and it too has its pessimists and its optimists. The pessimists take their cue from the Frankfurt School—that band of influential German-Jewish émigré intellectuals, spooked by the Nazis' skillful use of radio and film, who argued during the 1930s and 1940s that American "mass culture" was itself a new totalitarianism, all the more powerful for being so subtle. In the minds of Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and other Frankfurt School thinkers, American popular culture could not possibly produce true works of art, because all of its products were by definition commodities manufactured by the advanced capitalist "consciousness industry."

The optimistic branch of cultural studies emerged in the 1960s, when the leading lights of the German New Left, Jürgen Habermas and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, seized upon the ideas of another Frankfurt School theorist, Walter Benjamin. In a famous 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin had argued that the electronic media, especially film, could in the right hands (not Hollywood's) be used to mobilize the masses in favor of socialist revolution. This idea inspired a new generation of cultural theorists who had grown up with television and movies, not to mention rock 'n' roll, to begin a passionate debate about whether particular works of popular culture were liberating or repressive, marginal or hegemonic, oppositional or dominant, and so on *ad dialecticam*.

Although its sex appeal has since faded somewhat, the optimistic branch of cultural studies now rules within the academy's humanistic disciplines. Its academic practitioners place all "cultural products"—including objets d'art as traditionally defined, along with the artifacts of popular culture—on the same level, as specimens to be analyzed, not evaluated. Indeed, the concept of evaluation is itself regarded (theoretically, at least) as another datum to be analyzed.

This approach is not altogether bad. We live in an incredibly complex and dynamic cultural economy that delivers all kinds of objects, images, texts, and per-

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formances to all kinds of people, who respond to them in all kinds of ways. The intricate workings of this economy are fascinating, and as far as I can tell, cultural studies is the only field that makes a serious effort to map them.

But as anyone knows who has read an academic paean to the “transgressive” antics of Madonna, cultural theorists do not refrain from making judgments of value. What they do refrain from is basing those judgments on the standards of excellence worked out by artists (and critics) within a certain tradition. Instead, they apply their own standards, which begin with the assumption that all cultural products are ultimately about power and possess value only to the degree that they attack the established social order. The result, when translated into public discourse about the arts, is the now familiar culture war between moralists who insist that kitschy television series such as *Touched by an Angel* are genuine art because they preach family values, and academic apologists who celebrate decadent horror films such as *Hannibal* because their graphic depictions of gross criminality promise to *épater le bourgeois*.

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It would be nice to think that traditional philosophy provides the key to understanding what’s wrong with popular culture. But here again, there is a pronounced academic tendency to miss the point. Because most traditionalists in the humanities dismiss popular culture as the unappetizing fruit of democracy and commerce, they sidestep the urgent question of what makes it good or bad.

What would constitute a democratic model of excellence? I can sketch only a faint outline here. But one aspect would be the lack of a single center, of a geographic and aesthetically authoritative capital. In all high civilizations, the existence of a center has been a deeply rooted expectation. Even the rebellious romanticists and modernists who dissented from the Académie Française quickly recreated it in their own image. It was a short step for the impressionists from the Salon des Refusés to the walls of the Louvre. The alternative, it has always seemed, is relativism and a long, messy slide into decadence and chaos.

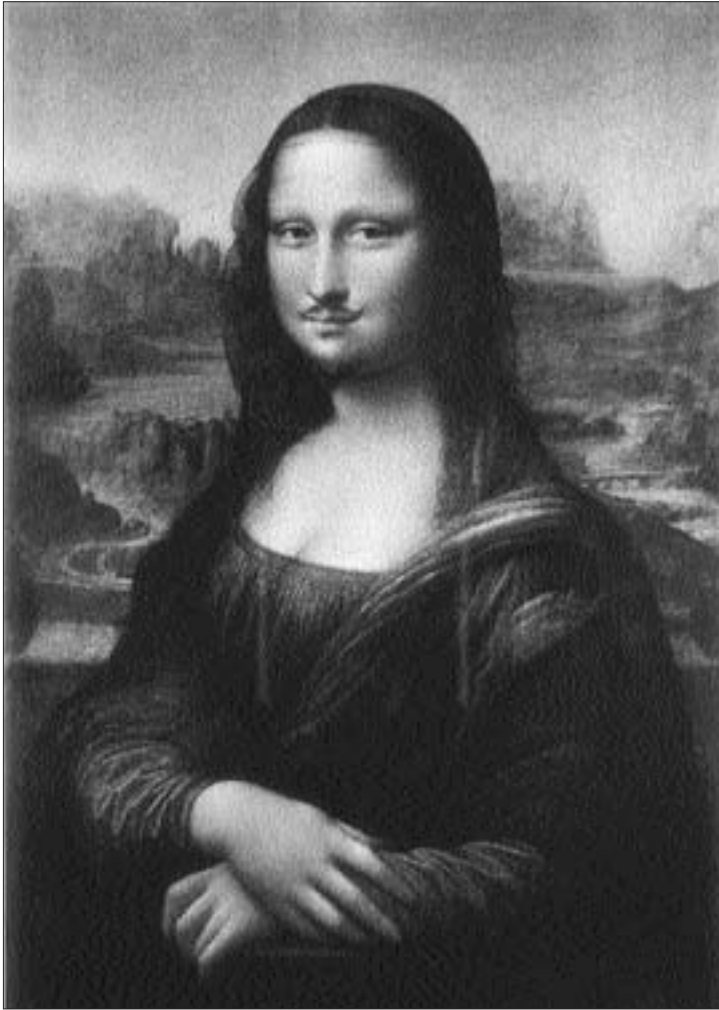
Such worries apply with special force to popular culture, which is generally understood to have no center, no tradition, and certainly no understanding of excellence apart from profitability. But is that understanding accurate?

It has long been evident that, for good or ill, American elite culture lacks a capital. No matter how hard the practitioners of cultural studies try (and some of them try pretty hard), they have not proved convincingly that standards of artistic excellence in the United States emanate from a single (and, by definition, repressive) social-economic-political center. There is, of course, the National Endowment for the Arts. There is, of course, New York City. But there are also Chicago,

Milwaukee, Los Angeles, and a hundred other places where good work is being done, and any one of them may well generate the next big trend.

It's not just the geography of cultural production that is decentralized and in flux. What else could one expect in a society committed to the moral and political equality of its citizens and to a marketplace model of culture? The question is whether such a society necessarily drives out excellence. The novelist Ralph Ellison noted that "in this country, things are always all shook up, so that people are constantly moving around and rubbing off on one another culturally." He admitted that this can be confusing, even disquieting. "There are no easily recognizable points of rest, no facile certainties as to who, what, or where (culturally or historically) we are," he wrote, adding that "the American condition is a state of unease."

Yet, as Ellison went on to argue, American diversity and unease are more often than not the parents of American excellence. Jacques Barzun, no admirer of popular culture, lends weight to the case when he reminds us that "the arts" are at best fragmentary and plural—not monolithic, as implied by that grand but misleading abstraction "Art."



Marcel Duchamp's L.H.O.O.Q. (1919) was shocking in its day but now, with the triumph of Duchamp's perverse modernism, seems almost innocent.

It is not relativism but realism to make the same observations about popular culture. The entertainment industries are full of cultivated, intelligent people who think about their work in a much more traditional way than academics do. Recording artists ponder melody and rhythm; film and television scriptwriters wrestle with plot and dialogue; production designers worry about color, texture, and line; actors and directors compare themselves with admired predecessors in film and theater. The language these people speak is a craft language, directly descended from that of the older performing arts. In other words, each craft has its own center of excellence.

These people understand the depredations of commerce. But they also strive for that rare prize, the chart or ratings or box-office success that is also a work of art. Such miracles don't happen every day, or even every year. But they do happen. And what's more, they last. In this time of dispute over the elite cultural canon, there is surprising agreement about what belongs in the canon of popular culture. The songs of Cole Porter, the compositions of Duke Ellington, the films of John Ford, the comic strips of Walt Kelly, the novels of Dashiell Hammett, and the 39 episodes of *The Honeymooners* that ran on CBS from 1955 to 1956 are just some of the works now described, without irony, as classic.

Given this sanguine picture of popular culture, why not stop worrying and learn to love it? What, after all, is the problem? The problem is perverse modernism. Not postmodernism (as some call it), because every item on the cultural agenda that currently bedevils us—rejecting tradition, attacking standards, provoking the audience, blurring the line between high and low and between art and life, and (last but not least) commandeering the mass media for subversive purposes—has been present since the dawn of modernism. This is the *révolté* impulse in modernism, rooted in the belief that if an artist makes the right anarchic gesture in the right place at the right time, he or she will help to spark social and political revolution. In this spirit, the German expressionist playwright Frank Wedekind staged scatological one-man shows in Munich's Café Simpli-cissimus at the end of the 19th century, the Italian futurists called for the razing of Venice in the years before World War I, and the dadaists later turned cabaret into the precursor of what we call performance art.

Severed from any viable expectation of revolution, the bold, outrageous gesture remains the true and only form of "creativity" for many people who have the wherewithal to know better (critics and pundits), and many more who do not (teenagers). In its present form as the guiding impulse of cutting-edge popular culture, perverse modernism goes beyond the usual run of sex and violence into a deliberate, intellectualized attempt to make sex and violence as offensive as possible. That means treating such primal experiences (the stuff of all great art, after all) in ways that are unfeeling, indifferent, detached from the consequences of actions, and contemptuous of moral concerns.

Perverse modernism would be a nonstarter today without obscenity. Gone are the days when audiences could be provoked by free verse, loose brush strokes, pounding rhythms, or vivid descriptions of lovemaking. In America, most people accept the right of the artist to do whatever he or she wants, because they know all too well that even if some fussbudget tries to drag an artist into court, the law contains a loop-

hole big enough to drive a Hummer through. If 2 Live Crew's *As Nasty as They Wanna Be*, Robert Mapplethorpe's *X Portfolio*, and other controversial landmarks of the past 20 years can all be said to have "serious artistic value" in the eyes of the law, then blood-soaked video games and pornographic Web sites are home free.

That Americans are still (mildly) shocked by obscenity does not mean that the culture is still puritanical. In puritanical cultures, the slightest reference to the body causes undue shame. Shedding puritanism does not require that we extirpate *all* shame, or that we abandon the concept of obscenity.

By obscenity I do not mean hard-core pornography but something broader, a concept that encompasses violence as well as sex, and that does not exempt material judged to be of "serious artistic value." I take this definition from the political theorist Harry M. Clor, who makes it the basis of a principled argument for more censorship. But that is not my purpose. My purpose is to expose perverse modernism for the cheap gimmick it has become.

In Clor's view, obscenity does not reside in the representation of any particular bodily functions or conditions, but in the angle of vision taken toward them: Obscenity "consists in a degradation of the human dimensions of life to a sub-human or merely physical level. . . . Thus, there can be an obscene view of sex; there can also be obscene views of death, of birth, of illness, and of acts such as . . . eating or defecating. Obscenity makes a public exhibition of these phenomena and does so in a way such that their larger human context is lost or depreciated."

D. H. Lawrence made the point very lucidly when he said that repression and obscenity are two sides of the same coin. Repression, he argued, led to "sex in the head," or the inability to move beyond fantasy. Hence the infantile preoccupation with pornography that is, in Lawrence's famous judgment, "an attempt to insult sex, to do dirt on it."

When challenged for trading in obscenity, today's perverse modernists wrap themselves in the mantle of the great modernists—Flaubert, Stravinsky, Monet—who suffered opprobrium and even censorship because of their formal innovations or sexual candor. But that is nonsense. The great modernists were original without being obscene; today's charlatans are obscene without being original.

Our situation is unprecedented because never before in the history of culture has so perverse a view of art been so widely popular. One could argue that this is good news, because as perverse modernism flows into the mainstream, it faces something it has never had to face before: a plebiscite. Although I would not place undue faith in the artistic judgment of the millions of consumers who will cast the deciding votes, my Ellisonian side says better they than the "arts community," with its mindless reverence for offense. In the past, at least, the philistine public has weighed the claims of art against those of civility, decency, and morality.

Yet a plebiscite could also be bad news, because as the grim history of the last century shows, the worst kind of culture war is between artists who hate morality and moralists who hate art. Push the envelope hard enough, and you invite popular revulsion, which can lead all too swiftly to backlash, censorship, and worse. To judge by the atmosphere at many college campuses in recent years, the human urge to censor is alive and kicking.

Equally distressing is the widespread failure of cultural stewardship among prominent citizens who seem to find it more advantageous to fan the flames than to dampen them. Two years ago, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani touched off a media firestorm by attacking the *Sensation* exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, with its now infamous painting of an African Madonna replete with elephant dung. But if Giuliani was really concerned about the religious sensibilities of New York's Catholics, why didn't he act 10 months earlier, when his administration signed off on the proposal to mount the exhibit?

I'm not suggesting that Mayor Giuliani conspired with the sponsors and organizers of *Sensation*. But surely these sophisticated individuals understood that they were investing in a publicity windfall. The pattern is all too familiar: Third-rate art is shot into orbit by a first-class media blitz. In exhibitions such as this, you can forget the mediocre objects on display. The point of the exercise, the real masterpiece, is the PR.

To repeat, it was one thing when the outrageous gestures of avant-garde artists shocked a small number of *haute bourgeoisie* café and gallery goers. It is quite another when the same mentality dominates the makers of popular culture. Last May, Robert Wright, the president of NBC, wrote a letter to his industry colleagues complaining about the unfair advantage HBO's hugely successful series *The Sopranos* enjoys in the race for audiences and awards. What did Wright point to as the reason for the series' success? Not to its extraordinarily high level of writing and acting but to the regulatory environment that allows cable shows to show more (you guessed it) sex and violence.

Is *The Sopranos* a huge hit because it offers bigger doses of sex, violence, and profanity than network shows? Think about that for a minute. If the formula were really so simple, wouldn't every trashy program be a hit? This is the intellectual fallout from perverse modernism: a preoccupation with "pushing the envelope" that excludes from consideration any other definition of what makes a program good and successful in the marketplace. Yet last year, when *The Sopranos* triumphed in the ratings and swept the Emmys, the producers of the show had consciously reduced its quotient of sex and violence.

The real danger is this: As the game of artist versus moralist intensifies, it will drive everyone else off the stage. Jesse Helms against Robert Mapplethorpe, the Reverend Donald Wildmon against Marilyn Manson, the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation against Eminem. Who benefits? The answer is obvious: the players. Politicians and preachers get to posture on C-SPAN; fat-cat art dealers and auction houses get fatter; Hollywood titans get to quote from the ACLU edition of the First Amendment; Johnny-come-lately dadaists, neglected outer-borough museums, and obscure record labels hit the big time; and a legion of lawyers get to sling the kind of dung that does not come from elephants.

And who suffers? Again, the answer is obvious: in the elite arts, the many poets, painters, and performers who strive to move audiences, not disgust them; in popular culture, the countless hard-working craftspeople (and the handful of genuine artists) who go to work every day hoping to create not just another product but something of lasting value. And, of course, the rest of us suffer too—the vast, unwashed, imponderable democratic audience, whose good judgment may or may not lead us out of this predicament. □

Remembering Santayana

The philosopher George Santayana was an eloquent, contradictory figure—a resolute materialist utterly devoted to the life of the spirit. Little known today, he was a considerable intellectual presence 60 years ago. Our author explains why Santayana deserves to regain a good measure of that lost reputation.

by Wilfred M. McClay

George Santayana (1863–1952) regarded the world with serene detachment. He savored all the tart ironies and bittersweet paradoxes of existence, and he cheerfully faced up to the futility of human striving. The Spanish-born sage would surely be amused to observe how he is remembered today, almost a half-century after his death. His reputation, such as it now is, rests upon a single sentence, a portentous and wise-sounding (though often misquoted or misused) epigram taken from the middle of a paragraph in one of his philosophical works: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

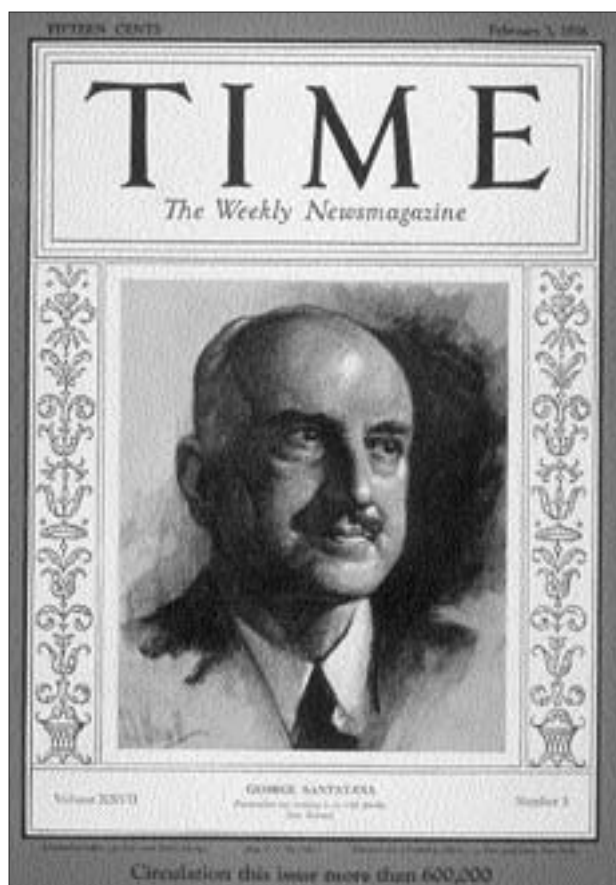
So memorable has the adage proved that we seem condemned rather to hear it repeated endlessly, in sober op-ed pieces, earnest letters to the editor, and bully pulpits of every sort. But the bare sentence does not do Santayana justice. Those who use it rarely know its source or wonder whether, in taking the words out of context, they have altered their meaning. In the 1905 book *Reason in Common Sense*, where the words first appeared, Santayana clearly seems less concerned with the “lessons of history” than with the basic preconditions for adult, civilized life:

Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. When change is absolute there remains no being to improve and no direction is set for possible improvement: and when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. In the first stage of life the mind is frivolous and easily distracted, it misses progress by failing in consecutiveness and persistence. This is the condition of children and barbarians, in which instinct has learned nothing from experience.

The irony of ironies is that 11 words praising the faculty of memory form the principal legacy of an otherwise forgotten man. Though Santayana himself might not have been surprised by this fate, such bar-

ren obscurity is not a fit end for one of America's most subtle and interesting minds.

Make no mistake about it: Santayana was an abundantly gifted philosopher, a quicksilver-brilliant, prolific, and versatile writer, and an influential teacher. His years on the Harvard University faculty (1889–1912) were squarely at the center of what historians now call “the golden age of American philosophy.” In addition to a shelf of distinguished philosophical tomes, he wrote poetry, general and occasional essays, literary and cultural criticism, political and social thought, a superb novel called *The Last Puritan* (a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1935), and a classic auto-



A celebrated Santayana makes the cover of Time in 1936.

biography, the three-volume *Persons and Places* (1944–53), which is the equal in many respects of *The Education of Henry Adams*. He was a complete man of letters, and what he wrote was written to last.

It has lasted. Only the poetry falls short of greatness, perhaps because “reason,” as his admirer the poet Wallace Stevens once observed, “is a jealous mistress” and insists that “a man whose whole life is thought” not stray too far from his calling. But the prose is another matter. All of it, even hastily tossed-off journalistic pieces, bears the signs of mastery. His was a powerful,

supple style—elegant, lucid, spare, and direct—infused with wry and understated humor and made vivid by ingenious and unforced metaphors. In matters of style, Santayana's prose writings leave those of his philosophical competitors (with the exception, perhaps, of his Harvard colleague William James) far behind. Indeed, the best of Santayana's prose deserves comparison with the finest in the language—and of how much philosophical writing can that be said? Although his detractors tend to disparage him as a belletristic dilettante, Santayana did not scatter his energies. On the contrary,

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his many creations, in a wide variety of genres, proved to be remarkably of a piece. Each was a different way of organizing and expressing the same philosophical vision. For him, literature and cultural criticism were philosophy pursued by other means. All his works reinforce one another, woven together like the warp and woof of a single fabric.

Yet today those works lie untended and unknown, even in (no, *especially* in) academic departments of philosophy and among specialists who, if only as a matter of professional responsibility, ought to know more about them than they do. To be sure, we Americans are a prodigal people, no less in expending our culture than in expending our natural resources. But the neglect now suffered by Santayana is in such stark contrast to the reputation he enjoyed at the height of his long and productive career that one cannot help but ask, What happened?

Explanations are not hard to find. Though the current fate of Santayana is unjust, it might have been foreseen. His thoughts have always been thoughts out of season, both in his time and in our own, and obscurity is one of the prices paid for being unseasonable. Historians of American thought tend to ignore Santayana because they find it so hard to "place" him. His blend of unflinching materialism and unswerving devotion to the life of the spirit did not have much in common with German idealism, or pragmatism, or any other current of thought prevailing or emerging at the time in the United States. His timing was unfortunate in another way as well. He began to carve out a niche for himself as a philosophically inclined man of letters in the late 1880s, at the very moment philosophy began to be transformed into a professional discipline and the exclusive intellectual domain of specialists and technicians. Along with William James, Santayana fought a brave rear-guard action against that development, employing abstract arguments and, more important, an elegant and engaging way of writing that was accessible to an educated "lay" audience—an indiscretion that helped seal his fate.

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Finding himself a misfit was hardly an unfamiliar experience for Santayana. He lived four decades in Boston and Cambridge, from the time he was transplanted there at the age of eight until the day he left his Harvard professorship for good. But his stubbornly independent spirit could never take root in the stolid Protestant soil. Instead, his imagination was drawn back irresistibly to the Spanish Catholic world of his birth, with its rich storehouse of mythological imagery and poetic resonance. Under the circumstances, it became his responsibility, as he put it, to “say plausibly in English as many un-English things as possible,” a statement that would be even more accurate if “un-American” were substituted for “un-English.”

That was no way to court fame and immortality. We love eccentricity in theory but dislike it in practice. We love to mock conventional wisdom, so long as it is yesterday’s wisdom. Santayana was nothing if not eccentric by the lights of American conventional wisdom. Yet his extraordinary circumstances were precisely what made him so valuable an observer of American civilization, for they gave him the detachment to see American life without first accepting its premises. It was as if his tangled origins and personal history bred him for the role. His thought emerged out of a struggle to give shape to his own experience.

Santayana was born in Madrid in 1863, the offspring of an unlikely marriage whose contours already suggested an interplay between “English” and “un-English.” To begin with, his mother, Josefina Borrás, although the daughter of two Catalonians, had been born in Glasgow. She was brought up there and in Winchester, Virginia. In the company of her diplomat father, she moved to the Philippines, where her father unexpectedly died. That was the first of several tragedies to strike her. The 18-year-old Josefina suddenly had to fend for herself, an orphan in a strange land. Eventually, she met and married a tall, blond Yankee merchant, George Sturgis, who came from a solid Bostonian family. But the marriage too was touched by tragedy. Although Josefina bore Sturgis five children, only three grew to maturity, and the death of her first child, at the age of two, seems to have afflicted her with crippling grief; by all accounts, she was never the same woman again. “She regarded [her later-born children] as inferior,” George Santayana would write, “entirely inadequate to console her for what she had lost.” As a consequence, she became a “cold, determined” mother, absorbed in her “separateness.” When George Sturgis died in 1857, at the age of 40, she moved to Boston to raise her children under the protective wing of her late husband’s family. But on a visit to Madrid in 1861, she re-encountered Agustín Ruiz de Santayana, a retired minor Spanish diplomat in his fifties, whom she had met years before in the Philippines. She married him that same year, and Josefina’s sixth, and last, child was born two years later. Revealingly, he was named George, after George Sturgis.

The marriage of Josefina and Agustín was strange and unpromising. For one thing, she was committed to bringing up her Sturgis children in Boston,

while Agustín was bound irrevocably to Spain and to Spanish ways. In 1869, Josefina decided to leave George in the care of his father; she returned to Boston with her Sturgis children. Three years later, Agustín and George joined the family in Boston. But Agustín returned to Spain after a year, having found that he could not adjust to American life. George was left behind, in an alien world he would never learn to love. For the next decade, he would know his father only through letters. But in them, Agustín kept alive in the mind of his beloved son, whom he addressed as “Jorge,” the humane warmth and poetry he had known in Spain. The memories were a valued resource, and Santayana frequently drew upon them in coming to terms with the cold unresponsiveness of his mother and with a Yankee “pettiness and practicality of outlook and ambition” that he soon learned to despise. The wrenching away from Spain, and from his father, ensured that all his future loyalties, whether national or personal, would be highly provisional and susceptible to change. Early in life, he had learned the hard lesson of detachment.

If there was great pain in Santayana’s unusual situation, he made the most of it. Like any immigrant, he had a complex perspective on American society, defined by multiple frames of reference. The move from his father’s ancient town of Avila to the Sturgis home at 302 Beacon Street must have brought a dizzying collision of worlds for the boy. He grew up in proximity to members of a distinguished old Boston family, but his own home was bilingual and drawn by inevitable, living ties to the Old World his father still inhabited. From that world, George received a steady stream of epistolary advice and support, in which “a distinctly non-American philosophy of life and language was proffered,” a philosophy that very much included Agustín’s anticlerical and freethinking agnosticism. It was Agustín perhaps who gave Santayana the idea that the objects of religious faith might be “creations of man himself, like poems,” a lesson he took very much to heart. Exposed when young to radically different perspectives on the world, Santayana learned not to rely on any single one. That may help to explain why, for so many years, he could thrive within the Puritan-Protestant milieu of Cambridge and Boston without being driven crazy by it and without being driven to accept it. From an early age, Santayana learned to ask little of the world, and to keep what was precious to him safe within his thoughts. That was how he made his peace with things.

Evidence of how well he managed that peace can be found in his academic record, for Santayana was very much a success, both in the classroom and in his social activities. During his eight years at the Boston Latin School, he discovered a knack for poetry and filled the *Latin School Register* (of which he was the first editor) with his fluent and clever verses. In his final year at the school, the Spanish boy impressively made both major and lieutenant colonel in the Latin School Battalion. At Harvard, he was an outstanding student, and graduated summa cum laude in 1886. But he also had a full and satisfying social life in college, managing, despite the relative modesty of his financial means, to be active in some 11 organizations, including the *Lampoon*, the *Harvard Monthly*, the O.K. Society, and the Hasty Pudding.

Santayana in His Own Words

Cultivate imagination, love it, give it endless forms, but do not let it deceive you. Enjoy the world, travel over it, and learn its ways, but do not let it hold you. Do not suffer it to oppress you with craving or with regret for the images that you may form of it. You will do the least harm and find the greatest satisfactions, if, being furnished as lightly as possible with possessions, you live freely among ideas. To possess things and persons in idea is the only pure good to be got out of them; to possess them physically or legally is a burden and a snare. (*Persons and Places*, 1944–53)

Art, in its nobler acceptance, is an achievement, not an indulgence. It prepares the world in some sense to receive the soul, and the soul to master the world; it disentangles those threads in each that can be woven into the other. (*Reason in Art*, 1905)

Skepticism is the chastity of the intellect, and it is shameful to surrender it too soon or to the first comer: There is nobility in preserving it coolly and proudly through a long youth, until at last, in the ripeness of instinct and discretion, it can be safely exchanged for fidelity and happiness. (*Skepticism and Animal Faith*, 1923)

My eclecticism is not helplessness before sundry influences; it is detachment and firmness in taking each thing simply for what it is. Openness, too, is a form of architecture. (*Realms of Being*, 1942)

True reason restrains only to liberate; it checks only in order that all currents, mingling in that moment's pause, may take a united course. (*The Genteel Tradition at Bay*, 1931)

We have no claim to any of our possessions. We have no claim to exist; and as we have to die in the end, so we must resign ourselves to die piecemeal, which really happens when we lose somebody or something that was closely intertwined with our existence. It is like a physical wound; we may survive, but maimed and broken in that direction; dead there. Not that we ever can, or ever do at heart, renounce our affections. Never that. . . . On the contrary, I wish to mourn perpetually the absence of what I love or might love. Isn't that what religious people call the love of God? (Letter to the Marchesa Origo on the death of her little son, 1933)

Fanaticism consists in redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim. (*Reason in Common Sense*, 1905)

[Americans have] the habit of thinking in terms of comparison, of perpetual competition; either a thing must be the biggest and best in the world, or you must blush for it. But only ways and means are good comparatively and on a single scale of values. Anything good intrinsically, anything loved for its own sake, is its own standard, and sufficient as it is. The habit of always comparing it with something else is impertinent and shallow. It betrays a mind that possesses nothing, loves nothing, and is nothing. ("Marginal Notes on Civilization in the United States," in *The Dial*, 1922)

Yet even during his years as a Harvard undergraduate, Santayana's connection to Spain remained strong. His mind was capable of moving comfortably on two tracks at once. The steady flow of correspondence from his father in Avila kept him informed about events there and refreshed his Spanish sympathies. And after a week caught up in the round of Cambridge life, he would repair to his mother's house on weekends and speak Spanish with her and his half-sister. He spent part of the summer after his freshman year with his father in Avila, the first time he had seen Agustín in a decade. He would make such visits frequently in the years to come. In shuttling between his father's old Avila, with its medieval walls and its static way of life, and the drab industrial modernity of cold, progressive, Anglo-Saxon Boston, Santayana became a traveler between worlds, a practical relativist. This oddly dichotomous existence would continue for as long as he remained in the United States.

After graduation, Santayana went to study in Berlin. He then returned to Harvard, applied himself to graduate studies, and dutifully produced a dissertation on the German philosopher Hermann Lotze. The dissertation was accepted, and Santayana (who was, members of the faculty told him, "the most normal doctor of philosophy that they had ever created") was offered an instructorship in 1889. Despite his growing reservations about American academic life, especially as it was evolving under the direction of such educational entrepreneurs as Harvard president Charles William Eliot (whom he loathed), he was now to be a part of it. Eventually he would rise to full professor and become a fixture in the department of philosophy.



Once Santayana joined the faculty at Harvard, his annoyances with that institution, kept at bay during his student years, began to build. The problems were rooted partly in clashes of taste, personality, and temperament. But, as was always the case with Santayana, the clashes correlated ultimately with disagreements about ideas. Santayana found his colleagues—who included William James, Josiah Royce, Hugo Münsterberg, and George H. Palmer—to be insufferably narrow and moralistic, their minds filled with an unwarranted sense of Anglo-Saxon cultural superiority, and their hearts reflexively bound by archaic Protestant pieties that had no basis in reason or nature. Even James, whose pragmatism and openness to experience Santayana admired, fell victim to that harsh verdict. "I wonder if you realize," Santayana complained in a letter to James in 1900, "the years of suppressed irritation which I have passed in the midst of an unintelligible sanctimonious, and often disingenuous Protestantism, which is thoroughly alien and repulsive to me." Santayana's own reverence for pagan thinkers such as Lucretius and for the rich pageant of Spanish Catholicism was bound to set him at odds with the others, and even the hypertolerant James derided Santayana's thought as "a perfection of rottenness . . . representative of moribund Latinity."

What, then, was this system of perfect rottenness? Although Santayana's thought, like that of most accomplished philosophers, is very difficult to sum-



The Harvard Philosophical Club, with its president Santayana seated at the center.

marize, its basic elements are easily grasped. Santayana was a convinced materialist, and that conviction was never absent from anything he wrote. He did not grant any separate existence to the soul. He held that consciousness was merely a special outgrowth of matter, the result of nothing more than a chain of complex chemical interactions. He accepted, without difficulty, Charles Darwin's conclusions about the origin and development of species and the implications of those conclusions for humankind's status in the universe. He entertained no illusions about humanity's significance in the great scheme of things.

But Santayana was no garden-variety mechanistic philosopher, for he was equally devoted to the life of the spirit. That was a residue, in part, of the Catholicism in his makeup. The spirit, to be sure, was nothing more than a byproduct of matter. But the realm of the spirit was all the more to be cherished because it was the only truly human consolation within the vast indifference of nature. As Santayana argued at length in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1911), the sphere of the spirit encompassed poetry as well as religion, for the two were different expressions of the same thing. "I am not myself a believer in the ordinary sense," he admitted, "yet my *feeling* on this subject is like that of believers, and not at all like that of my fellow-materialists." The enduring value of religion lies not in its pretension to deal with matters of fact, but in "its ideal adequacy, in its fit rendering of the meanings and values of life, in its anticipation of perfection." In his later work, Santayana elaborated a doctrine of "essences," which was meant to define with more precision the realm in which the "meanings" and "anticipation" had their being.

Small wonder, then, that Santayana objected so violently to liberal Protestantism's attempts to demythologize Christianity by eliminating from it all beliefs that could no longer pass scientific muster. That was exactly what religions should *not* do. Liberalism, he complained, "subtracts from faith that imagination by which faith becomes an interpretation and idealization of human life," and leaves behind only "a stale and superfluous principle of superstition." Nor did he have a higher opinion of those who gave themselves over entirely to materialism and the natural sciences, for they neglected the noblest and most precious capacities of man. Thus, he found himself in an unusual position, as a kind of materialistic idealist, or an atheistic Catholic, and, at bottom, his thought was an attempt to reconcile the opposition between the two. Like the romantics, Santayana reserved his deepest reverence for the products of the imagination; and like the faithful, he valued religion for the glimpses of eternity it promised. Yet he always insisted, at the same

time, that such creations of the mind had no ground in nature.

It was a paradoxical stance, guaranteed to confound the literal-minded. But however odd his ideas may have been in the context of the time, he was very well liked by the Harvard students he taught, and the feelings were warmly reciprocated. Santayana preferred the company of students, and it is astonishing how many intellectual figures of the 20th

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century can be counted among those he taught. A short list would include T. S. Eliot, Walter Lippmann, Gilbert Seldes, Max Eastman, Van Wyck Brooks, Horace Kallen, Conrad Aiken, Wallace Stevens, Samuel Eliot Morison, Felix Frankfurter, and James B. Conant. Many of them remembered Santayana, with awe and reverence, as a quiet, reserved, and gently aristocratic presence. He dressed with impeccable care and attention to detail. Instead of an overcoat, he liked to wear a military cape, which he would swing off in a single dramatic sweep as he entered his classroom. His lectures were models of clarity and eloquence. Captivated no less by his powerful dark eyes and exotic Spanish features than by his exotic ideas, many students spun elaborate fantasies around his person. Conrad Aiken compared him to Merlin or Prospero, "with his wizard's mantle from Spain." Another (Herbert J. Seligman) saw in "his poise, with the fine domed forehead, the brilliant myopic brown eyes, the fine dark moustache, and the smiling detachment . . . something akin to the presence of a Chinese sage or a Mongolian Buddhist." The fanciful descriptions suggest how striking a figure he cut.

But the pleasure Santayana took from his students' admiration and affection was insufficient compensation for his ever-growing discomfort in Harvard Yard and in the United States. Despite his success, Santayana was never comfortable as a professor. He believed that professing other people's philosophies was not the same as being a true philosopher. He had come to feel that the circumstances of American intellectual life would always be unpropitious for a thinker like him, and he began plotting his escape. In 1912, Santayana left Harvard and the United States, never to return again. He would spend the next three decades in a second career as a peripatetic scholar, living in rooms and hotels all over Europe, before finally settling in Rome in 1941 at the Clinica della Piccola Compagna di Maria (known as "the Hospital of the Blue Nuns" for the habit worn by its staff). There he remained secluded for the last 11 years of his life—a final act, as it were, of withdrawal.



The summer before Santayana left America, he delivered a lecture at the University of California, Berkeley, in which he made clear some of his reasons for leaving. The lecture, which he titled "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," bequeathed to subsequent observers not only an indispensable term of analysis, "the genteel tradition," but an enduring diagnosis of what Santayana perceived to be a fault line in American culture. The American mind was divided, he said, between what was inherited and what was native born, or, as he expressed it, between "the belief and standards of the fathers" and "the instincts, practices, and discoveries of the younger generation." The latter represented the burgeoning, if somewhat callow, vitality of a young, prosperous, and enterprising industrial America—an America Santayana thought admirable and healthy, even if its crudeness was not entirely to his own taste. But the former represented the artificial, derivative, moralistic, and disconnected world of "genteel culture"—what passed for intellectual and artistic achievement on the American scene. That was the world he had known for many years in Boston and Cambridge, and that world, in his view, was hopeless. As he wrote in a letter to Van Wyck Brooks in 1927, "Art, etc. has a better soil in the ferocious 100% America than in the Intelligentsia of New York," for it is "veneer, rouge, aestheticism, art museums, new theatres, etc., that make America impotent. The good things are football, kindness, and jazz bands."

The becalmed artificiality of the American intellect, Santayana concluded, resulted from its continuing enslavement to a moralistic Protestant tradition. That tradition was rigidly upheld, even though its basis in reality had disappeared and the strain of holding on to beliefs that ran contrary to nature made the production of a vibrant culture next to impossible. Unless Americans abandoned the genteel tradition—the outmoded premise that "man, or human reason, or the human distinction between good and evil, is the center and pivot of the universe"—a disjunction would persist between their intellectual life and their actual life, and neither would do much to inform the other.

Better, he argued, to remember how infinitesimal is one's place in the vastness and impersonality of nature: "What you can do avails little materially, and in the end nothing." Better to dispense with the genteel tradition and to learn instead "what you are really fitted to do, and where lie your natural dignity and joy, namely, in representing many things, without being them, and in letting your imagination, through sympathy, celebrate and echo their life." It is the "interest and beauty of this inward landscape, rather than any fortunes that may await [man's] body in the outer world, [that] constitute his proper happiness." The conquest of nature and the perfection of material life are not goals worthy of our human nature, Santayana believed. "Let us therefore be frankly human. Let us be content to live in the mind." Like some strange hybrid, a cross between Lucretius and Teresa of Avila, or between his fellow Spaniards Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Santayana could hardly have projected a more puzzling image to Americans in this, his valediction.

Santayana's willingness to "live in the mind" certainly bespeaks the aspect of him that preferred to withdraw. To some, it also bespeaks a cold and isolated man, who delighted more in the inner music of rhymes and rhythms, the daydreams of intellect, than in passionate engagement with the world. It's an impression many have had of Santayana, but it's not entirely fair, for it presumes that he was without passion, and to do that would be dead wrong. Consider, for example, the following passage from his autobiography (a passage that is also an admirable sample of his prose style):

The passion of love, sublimated, does not become bloodless, or free from bodily trepidation, as charity and philanthropy are. It is essentially the spiritual flame of a carnal fire that has turned all its fuel into light. The psyche is not thereby atrophied; on the contrary, the range of its reactions has been enlarged. It has learned to vibrate harmoniously to many things at once in a peace which is an orchestra of transcended sorrows.

The words bespeak not an absence of affect but intense interior drama—an unending series of inner battles, renunciations, and transformations. A stoic learns not to join battles he cannot win, for the will is most free when it reaches for what it can grasp: the realm of essence, not the realm of nature.

The passivity in Santayana's makeup, his willingness to dwell in the mind at the expense of the world, strikes Americans as a strange combination of dreaminess and asceticism that is alien to their temperament. Alien, too, is Santayana's disdain for the idea of progress, which he derided as a destructive superstition: "[Progress] seems to multiply opportunity, but it destroys the possibility of simple, rural, or independent life. It lavishes information, but it abolishes mastery except in trivial or mechanical efficiency." Nor did he have much respect for modern liberalism, the political handmaiden of progress. He thought that it denied the very existence of an intractable human nature, and Santayana's first philosophical loyalty was always to nature. Liberalism's genius lies in the provision and extension

of individual freedom, but precisely because of its dogma of tolerance, it is silent as to how that freedom should be used. As Santayana argues in *The Genteel Tradition at Bay* (1931):

A universal culture always tolerant, always fluid, smiling on everything exotic and on everything new, sins against the principle of life itself. We exist by distinction, by integration round a specific nucleus according to a particular pattern. Life demands a great insensibility, as well as a great sensibility. If the humanist could really live up to his ancient maxim, *humani nil a me alienum puto* [Nothing human is foreign to me], he would sink into moral anarchy and artistic impotence—the very things from which our liberal, romantic world is so greatly suffering.

That thoughtful challenge to liberalism tells us something important about its author. Santayana himself possessed both a great sensibility and a great insensibility, and it is impossible to separate the two. The preternatural serenity with which he contemplated the human condition made him a most penetrating observer; but the same detachment led him into a quietism that bordered on fatalism. Any serious and deeply considered conservatism faces the same risk, for a premature acceptance of existing evils may shrink too soon from opposing those evils that can be altered. There was a strain of irresponsibility in Santayana's naturalism—not in the sense that he was reckless, but in the strict sense that he never regarded his insights as categorical imperatives or rules by which we all should live. On the contrary, his philosophy was an exquisitely wrought image of his own highly individual condition. It was rather like one of his custom-tailored European suits: cut from fine material, artfully tailored, elegantly turned out—and designed to fit just one body.



Like any number of other modern philosophers, Santayana could make political judgments that were less than acute, and sometimes downright appalling. When William James objected to American annexation of the Philippines, on the ground that such imperialism violated the principles of the Declaration of Independence, the Spaniard brushed aside the moral reservations. The Declaration was “a piece of literature,” he sniffed, and a “salad of illusions.” James was lapsing into the genteel tradition, imposing universalistic Protestant morals on the amoral workings of history. Santayana also had surprisingly benign feelings about the Mussolini government in Italy, and on a number of occasions expressed a preference for the focused energy of authoritarian regimes—whether fascist, communist, or theocratic—over the “moral anarchy” and centrifugal impotence of liberal regimes.

Perhaps the least attractive of all Santayana's views were his anti-Semitic thoughts and sentiments, which were never systematically propounded but, rather, pop up disturbingly in various letters and obiter dicta. The sentiments



In the summer of 1944 an 80-year-old Santayana looks out over the Vatican from his residence in Rome, the city where he spent the final 11 years of his life.

became far more prominent as he entered old age, during his post-American years, but they are certainly detectable early on in his writings. In general, they reflect the automatic prejudices characteristic of his Avila upbringing and his fin-de-siècle Harvard milieu, although, somewhat more ominously, we also know that in the 1930s he frequently read the virulently anti-Semitic writings of Louis-Ferdinand Céline. Santayana was certainly no Ezra Pound. But it is difficult nonetheless to reconcile a taste for Céline with the equipoise and fineness of mind Santayana shows elsewhere. According to his biographer, John McCormick, who is the most judicious and knowledgeable of Santayana's critics, the philosopher's anti-Semitism was the exception rather than the rule. But McCormick also insists that so deplorable a failure of moral imagination not be minimized. It was an example of Santayana's insensibility, the shadow side of his sensibility, and that insensibility is impossible to accept in the wake of Auschwitz.

Perhaps his self-satisfied and self-protective detachment made Santayana prone to such lapses. We mere human beings cannot face the world with



absolute composure without also sacrificing some of our humanity. The spectacle of Santayana's wartime years with the Blue Nuns in Rome reveals both the strengths and the weaknesses of his mind. Recall the historical circumstances. By the time General Mark Clark and his Fifth Army finally made their triumphal entry into Rome on June 1, 1944, the Eternal City had gone through nine months of German occupation and had experienced all the horrors of modern warfare: Allied bombing raids, fierce guerrilla clashes between Germans and partisans, forced-labor roundups of Roman men, mass deportations of Italian Jews to German death camps, grisly executions (culminating in the Germans' murder of Mussolini and his mistress), and the hungry roving the

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countryside in packs, in desperate search of food. But amid the darkness and the chaos, Santayana (by then in his eighties) continued to work placidly and industriously on his many projects: He reflected upon the highest things, as he had done all his life. There is something awesome in that picture and something deeply disturbing as well. Great genius often contains an element of the monstrous, and even the godly single-mindedness of saints manifests itself, on occasion, as an icy hardness of the heart.

Santayana's war years became a form of benign imprisonment. Travel was unthinkable, and communication with America and the rest of Europe increasingly difficult. Perhaps the circumstances reinforced his predisposition to "live in the mind," but they did not diminish his literary presence in America, where successive volumes of his memoirs were published to considerable attention and impressive sales. Soon after the liberation of Rome, a steady stream of admirers began to appear at the Blue Nuns, pilgrims bent on seeing the mysterious sage in the flesh. After the years of isolation, he was now, he remarked amusedly, "visited by dozens of strangers, as if I were one of the ruins of Rome." First came U.S. military men and war correspondents, such as Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times*; then the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, the Spanish poet José María Alonso Gamo, the American poet Robert Lowell, and the literary scholars Richard Lyon, Cyril Clemens, and Edmund Wilson. Wilson's word-portrait of Santayana became the basis for Wallace Stevens's magnificent poem of homage "To an Old Philosopher in Rome."

It was, of course, both ironic and fitting that Santayana chose to spend his last days in the company of nuns—ironic because, by all indications,

he remained a firmly convinced materialist to the end; but fitting, too, because there remained in his temperament to the end a profound Catholicism, an unyielding respect for religious insight as a form of poetic truth and an “anticipation of perfection.” Stevens’s poem provides not only an evocative glimpse of Santayana’s last days, but a faithful distillation of the philosopher himself, and of the ends toward which he directed his life’s work:

The bed, the books, the chair, the moving nuns,
The candle as it evades the sight, these are
The sources of happiness in the shape of Rome,
A shape within the ancient circles of shapes,
And these beneath the shadow of a shape
In a confusion on bed and books, a portent
On the chair, a moving transparency on the nuns,
A light on the candle tearing against the wick
To join a hovering excellence, to escape
From fire and be part only of that of which
Fire is the symbol: the celestial possible.

The flurry of attention after World War II proved, to use one of Santayana’s favorite bittersweet metaphors, an Indian summer for his reputation and influence. After he died in 1952, interest in his work fell off rapidly, and by the 1970s he seemed well on his way to permanent obscurity. But a modest revival of interest has been underway for more than a decade. The respectful reception of McCormick’s magisterial biography, a finalist for the 1987 Pulitzer Prize, was an encouraging sign, as has been the appearance of the first four volumes in a definitive critical edition of Santayana’s collected works, published by the MIT Press and supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities. There has been a sharp increase as well in the attention paid other serious American thinkers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James, in part because of their insistence that philosophical writing not become the exclusive province of specialists. That insistence is bound to work to the advantage of Santayana’s even more masterly and evocative prose.

But Santayana’s writings will never be more than a minority taste in this country, and his thought will never be as widely cherished as that of Emerson and James, who perform for us something of the role of national philosophers. Santayana would not have relished that role, to put it mildly, and he is unlikely ever to be nominated for it. His thoughts ran doggedly against the American grain, and especially against its modern, Protestant, democratic, liberal, progressive, technological, and quantitative propensities—although, to be sure, he had no desire to counterevangelize the American people or transform their institutions in his image. The principal task of Santayana’s philosophy is the task of interior cultivation. In the end, that is its weakness. And yet,

that is also its strength. If it is not all-sufficient—and what philosophy is?—it offers a corrective precisely where one is most needed: It presents, by the richness of its example, a bracing challenge to a civilization that tends to dote on the external, the perishable, and the quantifiable.

Like Alexis de Tocqueville—another European observer of American society, to whom he bears some resemblance—Santayana fully accepted the demise of the world of the ancien régime and the rise of egalitarian liberal democracy. He was not a reactionary, dreaming of a Bourbon Restoration. But he worried that our fervent, one-sided faith in progress, especially material and technological progress, might lead us thoughtlessly to despoil all the spiritual fruits that had given life meaning in the past—just as, in a very different way, the effects of the genteel tradition estranged us from the sustaining vitality of nature. Contrary to the usual pattern, Santayana was a conservative precisely because of his materialism. He had no doubt that the realm of essences rested upon the fragility of civilizations, and that civilizations, in turn, were answerable to the ineluctable force of nature. But he cherished the ideal realm above all else, because it alone makes our lives worth living, by fulfilling our peculiar human need for beauty, love, speculation, and meaning—our need to be in contact with that “hovering excellence” toward which the flickering candlelight gestures. Such an aspiration was fundamentally spiritual, not material. Indeed, Santayana believed that the aim of perfecting material existence was doomed to inadequacy:

Man, if he is a rational being, cannot live by bread alone, nor be a laborer merely: He must eat and work in view of an ideal harmony which overarches all his days, and which is realized in the way they hang together or in some ideal issue which they have in common. Otherwise, though his technical philosophy may call itself idealism, he is a materialist in morals; he esteems things, and esteems himself, for mechanical uses and energies.

Such words deserve a hearing in any age, but especially in our own.

The late professor of philosophy Charles Frankel had good reason to remark, in 1956, that “what happens to Santayana’s reputation will be a touchstone of the quality of our culture, and of our growth in maturity and wisdom.” The statement does not mean that we ought to turn Santayana into the new Emerson and demand that his every dictum be a star to which we can confidently hitch our wagons. It means rather that Santayana’s vision and example have much in them by which our current civilization, and especially our current intellectual life, might be made saner, richer, more modest, and more sustaining. We ought not deprive ourselves of a voice so independent, a presence so singular, a life so devoted. Rarely in our history have we seen his like. Santayana to the contrary notwithstanding, those who cannot remember the past are condemned to lose it. And that we cannot afford. □

Ignorance and Bliss

The great triumphs of modern science, from splitting the atom to unraveling the human genome, increasingly raise a troubling question: Is the pursuit of knowledge always a good thing? A long tradition in Western thought—largely ignored even by today’s critics of science—says it is not.

by Mark Lilla

“O nce upon a time there was a great rabbi in Prague.” Thus began a charming speech given in 1969 by the Jewish historian and thinker Gershom Scholem, who had been asked to preside over the dedication of a new computer at an Israeli research institute. He dubbed the machine “Golem Aleph” (or Golem #1), referring to the traditional Jewish myth of the golem, an artificial creature fashioned by men through the magical arts. There are many versions of this legend, but on that day Scholem had in mind the most famous one, which involves the 16th-century rabbi Judah Löw of Prague.

The story goes that Rabbi Löw made a clay figure and endowed it with the power of his own mind, though that power derived ultimately from God. The transfer was effected when the rabbi wrote God’s name on a slip of paper and put it into the golem’s mouth, animating the figure. From that moment on, the golem served the rabbi and did his bidding—except on Friday evenings, when Rabbi Löw would remove the slip of paper for the Sabbath and give the golem the day of rest all humans are obliged to observe. Yet rabbis, even great ones, are notoriously absent-minded. So it happened one Friday that Rabbi Löw forgot to remove the divine name from the golem’s mouth and left the creature home alone while he went to the synagogue. No sooner had he departed than the golem grew to giant proportions and began raging through the streets of the Prague ghetto, threatening all in its path. The rabbi was called from his prayers by the frightened population, and with some effort he managed finally to tear the paper from the golem’s mouth and render the creature powerless, a block of inanimate clay.

Scholem told the story humorously, making many witty comparisons between the clay golem of Prague and the new golems of transistors and wires.



The Poem of the Soul: The Passage of Souls (1855), by Louis Janmot

But as with most stories that begin “once upon a time” and include rabbis, this one had a serious point. Scholem finished with an exhortation to the creators of the modern golem: “Develop peacefully, and don’t destroy the world.” That for him was the lesson to be drawn from the golem legend. Although we are created in God’s image, our aspiration to become like God is fraught with dangerous temptations. For once we learn something from God, and use that knowledge to create, what need have we of our own creator? Scholem was convinced that Nietzsche’s pronouncement of the death of God was foreshadowed parabolically in the Cabalistic tale of the Prague golem, and he may very well have been right.

But Scholem’s speech overlooked a dimension of this version of the golem story that another great Cabalist, Sigmund Freud, probably would have seen. Among the many things Freud got right was that our myths, like our dreams, often mean more than they mean to mean; sometimes they enact the fulfillment of a wish we dare not admit to ourselves. Taken on its surface, Scholem’s golem fable appears straightforward. Like the ancient myth of Prometheus, or the modern one of Frankenstein, it is a cautionary tale about hubris, with the rabbi representing mankind and the golem representing man’s works—what we call today science and technology. The moral of the story appears to be simple, though important: Man must always beware that

the divine powers entrusted to him not escape his control.

But let us consider the story from a different angle. What if its subject is not human creation, but divine creation—that is, what if the golem is meant to represent man himself? Scholem hinted at this possibility in his speech when he remarked on the old rabbinic traditions that consider Adam to have been the first golem, who became human only after God breathed life into him. Let us pursue this possibility and assume, for the moment, that the golem represents us, mankind. What might the fable mean then?

It begins to sound like a lament, a cry of complaint against the cruelty of a God who created us in his image and breathed his powers into our lungs. We have no reason to doubt that the golem was content before it was animated by the rabbi; we can even imagine that it remained happy after receiving the divine name, so long as it could live and work without having to speak or think. But on that fateful Sabbath when Rabbi Löw forgot to remove the name and the golem grew in stature and power, not only did it become a threat to the good people of Prague, but it also lost the happiness of its innocent, pious existence. The fable describes the threatened destruction of Prague. With a little psychological sophistication we might see in it as well a symbolic representation of the golem's *own* loss, for its innocent world has also been destroyed. Only when the rabbi finally seizes the divine name from the beast's mouth is the wish buried in the dream fulfilled: The golem—and through him, mankind—is relieved of the burdens of mind and language and freed to return to its original state of ignorance and bliss.



The source of the proverb “Ignorance is bliss” is a poem by the 18th-century English poet Thomas Gray, who wrote in passing: “Where ignorance is bliss,/ ’Tis folly to be wise.” Though the poem is now forgotten, the verse remains very much alive in the English language and reminds us of an important and often forgotten element of our intellectual and spiritual tradition, especially as that tradition has been filtered through the European Enlightenment. The assumption of the Enlightenment was that ignorance is, always and everywhere, a curse, and that lifting it is the duty of all magnanimous thinkers. This is not to say, as some have charged, that the Enlightenment was in the grip of its own ignorance—a naive optimism about our ability to reason, or a blind faith in the progress to be expected once the shackles of religion and despotism were removed. The mainstream of the Enlightenment was actually quite pessimistic about how much ground an army of writers and scientists could hope to gain against the well-trained battalions of cardinals and privy councilors. Their optimism lay not in their faith in ultimate success but in their unquestioned assumption that every inch of terri-

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tory won back from the forces of darkness would be transformed into a garden. Knowledge, they believed, could only contribute to happiness.

Malleable though it may be, this equation of knowledge with happiness can be found at the very root of the Western philosophical tradition—one is tempted to say, it *is* the root. Plato's *Republic* takes a long detour through the issues of politics in order to establish to the satisfaction of two young men that knowledge, virtue, and happiness are identical. The crux of the conversation is to determine what *constitutes* knowledge, virtue, or happiness and what is the genuine object of each, and the questions are complicated by the recognized difficulty of turning recalcitrant human nature around and enticing it out of the cave. But genuine knowledge, were we to achieve it, would be happiness; that is the Socratic position. And although no subsequent thinker has been so bold as to defend without qualification the equation of knowledge with happiness, it remains an inspiration to the mainstream of philosophical and scientific tradition down to our time.

Of course, there have been important modifications. Aristotle contrasted intellectual virtue with the moral virtues and distinguished the kinds of happiness each could bring; the Stoics and Skeptics, ancient and modern, raised doubts about our capacity for knowledge and the existential posture we should adopt toward ignorance; Kant tried to wean us from vain metaphysical speculations and to refocus our attention on the moral duties revealed through practical reason; Marxists and structuralists cast dark shadows of ideological suspicion on any claim to impartial knowledge; American pragmatists attempted to reorient our thinking from the search for unshakable principles to the continuous revision of intellectual constructs in line with practical demands and interests. Yet in every one of those cases, however strong the critique of our faculties or the prudential warnings against over-reliance on them, and however developed the recognition of the variety of human pursuits and the kinds of happiness they can bring, knowledge as such is never considered to be a potential source of unhappiness, or ignorance a kind of bliss.

There is, however, a countercurrent in the Western tradition that rejects the Socratic equation, and not merely on skeptical or stoic grounds. This current of thought portrays the human pursuit of knowledge, whether about the world or the self, as a curse under which we suffer and from which we should struggle to free ourselves. In this countertradition, which is mythical, religious, and sometimes philosophical, many charges have been brought against knowledge and its pursuit, and they are not always consistent and coherent. But it is possible to distinguish two different indictments: the charge that the pursuit of knowledge is impious, and the charge that the acquisition of knowledge corrupts the young.

The charge of impiety assumes a theology—that there is a god (or gods) who is offended by our behavior, and that angering a god seldom contributes to one's well-being. But whether or not we share the theological assumption, we can all see the psychological force of the charge, for it focuses on a characteristic of our behavior about which we clearly have mixed feelings. That characteristic is human curiosity. By the time of the European

Enlightenment, curiosity had been so thoroughly rehabilitated as a virtue that Kant's challenge — "*Sapere aude!*," dare to know — was taken up by the man in the street, who now asserted his right to be curious. Yet for many centuries, curiosity had been considered a serious vice, closely associated with vanity, and both were taken to be targets of divine retribution. To dare to know is to tempt the gods and risk losing their favor, without which no one can be happy. "Know thyself," interpreted theologically, means know thy place.

The mythological warnings against curiosity are many and well known: the story of Prometheus, and the related myth of Pandora and her box of trouble; in Genesis, the account of the tree that brings knowledge of good and evil, and the story of the tower of Babel. The folktale of the golem echoes the same fear expressed in those earlier myths: that by seeking knowledge, we seek to become like God, and for punishment will be placed a little closer to the beasts. Less dramatic, but no less effective, is the ambiguous lesson the Hebrew Bible teaches regarding curiosity. Take, for example, those verses that address the momentous question of whether we are to seek God's face, and, if so, how we are to go about it. In the First Book of Chronicles (28:9), David tells Solomon, "If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever" — which is a promise but not a command. The psalmist, however, sings of precisely such a command delivered by his heart and of the fear it evokes in him: "In Thy behalf my heart hath said, 'Seek ye my face.' Thy face, lord, will I seek. Hide not thy face from me" (Psalm 27:8-9). Stronger still is a verse from the prophet Amos, which carries with it an implied threat: "For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel: Seek ye me, and [ye shall] live" (5:4). From those verses, it seems we are to conclude that, as God's creatures, we are duty bound to seek him out. He is not a completely hidden god, though sometimes he covers his face; neither is he an idol always present for inspection. He must be sought out — and that implies, or at least has been taken to imply, a certain sanction for our curiosity about him and his creation.

Yet the Hebrew Scriptures are also careful to hem in our curiosity, lest it excite our pride. "The knowledge of the All-Holy is understanding" the proverb goes, though we are first warned that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). In seeking knowledge of God, we must seek wisely, and wisdom, it turns out, is not derived from the knowledge we pursue: Wisdom is acquired through piety, and tempered by fear. "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5) is not a sanction for willful ignorance, as many mystics, mainly Christian, would later assume. But it does set a precondition of piety on any fruitful pursuit of knowledge, and therefore on happiness. "I love them that love me," another proverb states, "and those that seek me earnestly shall find me" (8:17). That is, only if we love God can we expect to be loved in return, and only then will he reveal his face to us. If we do not love God, our pursuit will be in vain — or worse, if the haunting words of Ecclesiastes are to be believed: "In much wisdom is much vexation, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (1:18).

That paradoxical message, which conditions knowledge of God on piety toward the God we wish to know, is maintained in almost identical terms in the Christian gospels. Jesus preaches, “Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7), which seems to promise that our curiosity will be divinely rewarded. But he also teaches what the primary object of our search must be: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Jesus holds out the promise that “ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32), but in the preceding verse of the Gospel of John he lays down the following condition for attaining the truth: “If ye shall continue in my ways, then are ye my disciples indeed.” First things first, Jesus teaches: No one comes to knowledge, or happiness, except through me.

In St. Paul, however, any ambiguity in this message disappears, to be replaced, within a major tradition of Christian thinking, by a frontal attack on the impious pretension of philosophy, and by a celebration of holy ignorance that has no antecedents in orthodox Judaism. Perhaps the most notorious figure in this tradition is the early church father Tertullian, who equated philosophy with heresy by asking contemptuously, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” Martin Luther followed in this line when he held up Abraham as an example of someone who knew how to “imprison his reason”: “Listen, Reason, thou blind and stupid fool that understandest naught of the things of God. Cease thy tricks and chattering; hold thy tongue and be still! Venture no more to criticize the Word of God. Sit thee down; listen to His words; and believe in Him. So do the faithful strangle the beast.” Yet Tertullian and Luther are only the most prominent and rhetorically accomplished figures in a tradition that flows directly from St. Paul and his fiery attack on philosophy in his first letter to the Corinthians:

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. . . . Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1: 19-21, 25).



“**T**he foolishness of God is wiser than men.” Ever since St. Paul, the holy fool has been a central motif in the Christian imagination, and he appears and reappears in various guises in the secular literature of Christendom—from Cervantes’s *Quixote* to Dickens’s Mr. Pickwick, from Melville’s *Billy Budd* to Dostoyevsky’s Prince Myshkin. The Christian holy fool is taken to be pious, and therefore happy, *because* he is ignorant—*because* his ignorance is preferable to the wisdom of men.

But why should this be? It might perhaps be more reasonable, theologically speaking, to assume that his ignorance would tempt him into impiety or sin, because he would know no better. There seems to be no explicit sanction for this sort of ignorance in Judaism, not even among those, such as the Hasidim, who seek an immediate, ecstatic experience of the divine. (Gimpel the Fool is no Prince Myshkin.) But in Christianity there *is* such a sanction for ignorance, in explicit opposition to the Jewish ideal of being learned in the law.

Why is that so? What is it about Christianity that permits it on occasion to idealize human ignorance, and in all cases to be profoundly sympathetic to it? This is a deep question that cannot be fully answered without taking up the old—and now rather scandalous—issue of the uniqueness of Christianity. But however we stand on that issue, we must still concede that a significantly new element of the Christian message was its glorification of innocence—the innocence of the child, whose ignorance is next to the godliness of the saint. For it was Jesus himself who, when asked by his disciples who is the greatest in heaven, answered by calling a child to him and saying:

Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3-4).

And again:

Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein (Mark 10:14-15).

Christianity is unimaginable without these images of innocence. The most significant one, of course, is that of the Christ child swaddled in the manger, an image as venerated by Christians as the image of Christ on the cross. Indeed, because the holiday of Christmas has now totally eclipsed Easter, one is tempted to say that the baby Jesus is more important to Christians today than the crucified Christ, who has become something of an embarrassment.

Other images of innocence include plants (“Consider the lilies of the field”) and animals (“Behold the Lamb of God”). What lilies and lambs share is the original whiteness of creation, a sign of their purity; what lambs and children share is a lack of maturation, the assumption being that the forces of nature that develop a creature to its final end actually spoil it. This much is clear: Whoever or whatever would rob the child of his innocence is guilty of corrupting the young. But the images imply something more, which is that development itself, whether natural or artificial, is suspect because it occurs at the cost of innocence (even Thomas Aquinas did not succeed in uprooting that assumption from the Christian mind). “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like these” (Matthew 6:28-29). If



Suffer the Little Children to Come Unto Me (1538), by Lucas Cranach, the elder

the lilies toil not, if they trust completely in God's bounty, why are we so eager to expand our knowledge and master our fate?

Among the many spiritual and social forces that corrupt our childlike innocence, St. Paul and Tertullian singled out for special condemnation the pretension to wisdom, especially through philosophy. "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world," Paul writes, "let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God" (1 Corinthians 3:18-19). Or again, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). Believers are to shun philosophy not only because it questions revealed truths and propagates falsehoods, but because it robs us of that innocent, childlike ignorance into which we are reborn through Christ Jesus. As we have learned to expect, it was Tertullian who followed the logic of this thought to its most extreme conclusion, declaring in no uncertain terms that "it is better for you to remain in ignorance, lest you should come to know what you ought not because you have acquired the knowledge of what you ought to know."

Orthodox and rationalist forces within Christianity have continually had to do battle with this moral ideal, which lies at the heart of countless enthusiasms and heresies. So powerful is the ideal that it has even managed to outlive belief in Christian revelation in our secular age. Misgivings about human curiosity have not fared so well, for it has proved difficult to express them in any terms but those of piety, and an impious age such as ours is unlikely to feel their force. In the mid-17th century, Pascal could still write that "the greatest illness afflicting man is his nervous curiosity about things he cannot know," but he was the last great religious critic of this vice until Kierkegaard.

A century after Pascal, however, the charge of corrupting the young through reason and the accumulation of knowledge was given new life, independent of belief in Christian revelation, by Jean Jacques Rousseau. The work that first made Rousseau famous, his *Discourses on the Sciences and Arts* (1750), sang the praises of “the happy ignorance in which eternal wisdom has placed us,” and his song soon became a rousing chorus heard from one end of Europe to the other. Never before the appearance of Rousseau’s writings had the lives of simple people and simple minds appeared so attractive and the pursuit of knowledge seemed so perverse and destructive of happiness.

Yet Rousseau was no Tertullian, let alone a Luther, and therein lay his power. Rousseau was willing to concede that the happy ignorance of the natural state left us stunted, and that we could perfect ourselves only by leaving it and developing our mental faculties. Such a move was necessary, and inevitable. Yet it also meant the loss of the only complete happiness we will ever have known, and it carried the threat of moral corruption. Our blessed innocence could not be recovered, certainly not through the kind of Christianity preached by St. Paul, Tertullian, and Luther. Instead, the most Rousseau thought possible was the establishment of a counterideal of sincerity and authenticity, to be cultivated by a new education devised to keep our curiosity well directed and within moral bounds. His insight, which he elaborated in the treatise *Émile* (1762), may be summarized as follows: The only way to challenge the artificial world that human curiosity has bequeathed to us is to construct a morally responsible yet equally artificial system of education that will preserve our natural innocence for as long as possible before sending us into the world. The draft of the sequel to *Émile*, left unfinished at Rousseau’s death, suggests that even this carefully crafted education will be insufficient to ward off the corruptions the world prepares for the innocent.

“Learn to be ignorant,” Rousseau beckons in *Émile*, “you will betray neither yourself nor others.” The artfulness of this dictum is that it takes the Christian ideal of innocence and (almost) makes it speak Greek, persuading us that the only way to know oneself genuinely is to maintain a prudent ignorance of much that lies beyond the self, and an unreasoned attachment to what is originally one’s own. In Rousseau’s hands, this aspiration is made to sound beautiful and noble, and it remained so in the imaginations of Goethe and Schiller, whose classical ideal of “recaptured naïveté” (*wiedergewonnene Naivetät*) owes much to Rousseau. But beginning in the 19th century and continuing down to our time, the modern ideal of learned ignorance, in coarser hands, took on an altogether different character and became harder and more willful. Once freed from Christian humility, the myth of lost innocence created a powerful thirst in Europe for a re-enchanted world that would fill the voids and erase the indifference that modern man, following Rousseau, now believed to be inseparable from modern life. This yearning is familiar to us in all its forms today: aesthetic, religious, philosophical, political. What is perhaps less apparent is how precisely the sacred image of the innocent child entering the Kingdom of God was transformed into Rousseau’s daydream of *Émile*, only to become the grotesque nightmare of Wagner’s Siegfried.



The Gulf Between Man and Robot (1953), by Frank Kelly Freas

The most profound figure to think through this myth of innocence and make it his own was undoubtedly Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche was not taken in by Siegfried, for he quickly discerned Wagner's psychological shallowness and ersatz nobility. Yet Nietzsche's abandonment of lugubrious Bayreuth, and half-serious promotion of Bizet, was inspired by an even deeper appreciation of the link between ignorance and human happiness. Nietzsche begins his famous essay "On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life" not with the words of the Gospel, "Consider the lilies of the field," but with the exhortation "Consider the herd grazing before you"—for it is the cow, slowly nibbling its grass, ignorant of the past and unconcerned about the future, that

inspires Nietzsche's admiration. The cow is a master of forgetfulness, an art that modern man, burdened above all by historical knowledge and consciousness, has lost. Man's new historical knowledge weighs him down; he knows what great men have achieved and feels himself to be small; he knows that other civilizations have risen and collapsed, and feels his own to be contingent and ephemeral. Man's pursuit of knowledge, now extended from the physical world to the historical world, has rendered him smaller than he once was: The more he knows, the less he is, and the less he is, the less happy he is. "Whoever cannot settle on the threshold of the moment forgetful of the whole past," Nietzsche writes, "whoever is incapable of standing on a point like a goddess of victory without vertigo or fear, will never know what happiness is, and worse yet, will never do anything to make others happy."

In his later books, Nietzsche developed a whole psychology based on his insight that two antagonistic drives are at war in the human soul: the will to knowledge and the will to ignorance. Both wills are present in every human being and every culture, Nietzsche teaches, but a human being or a culture can be healthy and strong only if the battle between the two drives reaches the highest intensity. In an age of total darkness, Nietzsche might have written in praise of the light of knowledge; yet he felt himself to be living in an age of blinding illumination, in which the modern European seemed to stand utterly naked, paralyzed by his smallness and weakness and in despair of ever recovering his strength. In such an age, Nietzsche was convinced he had no choice but to celebrate "a suddenly erupting decision in favor of ignorance, of deliberate exclusion, a shutting of one's windows, an internal No to this or that thing, a refusal to let things approach, a kind of state of defense against much that is knowable, a satisfaction with the dark, with the limiting horizon, a Yea and Amen to ignorance."



Nietzsche's "Yea and Amen" to ignorance is a loud, aggressive cry that rings differently to our ears than does the rueful lament of Ecclesiastes, "He who increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow," or the whispered invitation of Jesus, "Become as little children." Yet if we listen closely to all three voices, I think we begin to hear not the strains of influence, still less those of harmony, but a common chord of *moral* doubt about the Socratic equation of knowledge with happiness. I stress the *moral* to distinguish this kind of skepticism from epistemological doubts about the possibility of genuine knowledge. Epistemological skepticism raises genuine issues about the status of modern science, but it does so in the skeptical spirit of the sciences themselves, which breathe the oxygen of systematic doubt. Moral skepticism about the pursuit of knowledge in general, and the modern sciences in particular, is of a different order: It accepts that genuine knowledge and science are possible but questions their worth, on the assumption that the issue of "worth" is not one the sciences can decide. And on this point, at least, the moral skeptics are in agreement with modern science, which was

founded on the explicit assumption that knowledge breeds happiness—and then abandoned that assumption in the last century on the grounds that it could be supported only on the basis of nonscientific “values.”

The moral critique of science runs back many centuries, but it lacked a coherent and responsible voice in the century just past, though it did echo disturbingly in the thought of Martin Heidegger. The sciences have come under attack recently by academic critics who believe themselves to be inspired by Nietzsche, yet these critics stubbornly avoid discussing the morally ambiguous ideal Nietzsche defended: the “health” of the species. In reading our contemporary critics, one senses the moral revulsion against science that animates them and wonders why they don’t examine the nature of that revulsion. Instead, they cast a shadow of suspicion on the knowledge claims of science, which are entirely beside the point. The deeper issue is not whether knowledge through science is possible (it is); the issue is whether that knowledge is good, and on this question serious minds have been divided since the very beginning of our civilization.

In her novel *Daniel Deronda* (1874–76), George Eliot writes, “It is a common sentence that Knowledge is power; but who hath duly considered or set forth the power of Ignorance?” Eliot understood that ignorance is not simply the absence of knowledge, that for many it is an aim and a motivating force in its own right. It is good to be reminded of the moral significance of the old notion that ignorance opens a path to happiness, for if we are to judge by the history of our sacred and profane literature, the wills to knowledge and ignorance are permanent features of the human psyche. All human beings may, as Aristotle thought, desire to know; but our tradition, in which the golem legend has a small place, also teaches that we sometimes actively wish not to know—that we prefer to remain in the dark, convinced that it is warmer there. That is an understandable wish, is it not? Yet like so many wishes, it has the power to draw us toward mad schemes that promise to satisfy it—and that cause us to ignore the human price we would pay for achieving what we desire.

When the Spanish thinker Miguel de Unamuno heard Goethe’s apocryphal last words—“Light, light, more light!”—he famously retorted, “No, warmth, warmth, more warmth! For we die of the cold, not of the darkness. It is not the night that kills, but the frost.” The assumption of the Enlightenment—indeed of every Enlightenment since the time of Socrates—has been that darkness and coldness are inseparable, and that the light generated by the sun will also warm us. The assumption of the countertradition I have been describing is that the darkness, or at least the twilight, is a more appropriate setting for us, that we will be happy only if we learn to live within this more limited horizon. This countertradition prides itself on its piety, and indeed it does have something to teach us about respecting our place between “the beasts and the gods.” Yet it also expresses the impious, perhaps Gnostic, wish that the drama set in motion in Eden had never begun, that the divine name might still be snatched from our mouths, that we might return to what is more elemental in us—dissolve back into the earth and experience once again the bliss that preceded creation. □



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Goodbye to the Citizen-Soldier?

A Survey of Recent Articles

America's armed forces have been finding it hard to attract and keep all the people they need—and not solely because of the strong economy. In *Parameters* (Summer 2001), a publication of the U.S. Army War College, a cast of noted scholars and specialists analyzes the woes of a transformed military. For all the homage that Americans have lately been paying to World War II's "greatest generation," several contributors conclude, the first step in fixing the problems of the all-volunteer force may be to recognize that the military is different now, and that the day of the mythic citizen-soldier is over.

"Since World War II, the citizen-soldier has been on the wane, for a variety of reasons," writes Eliot A. Cohen, a professor of strategic studies at Johns Hopkins University's Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. Technological advances in weaponry made the need for a mass army questionable. "As military organizations shrank in size, it became more difficult to sustain conscription on a universal basis. . . . When most young men do not serve in the military, those who do are not fulfilling a common obligation of citizenship, but are merely unlucky."

Contrary to popular mythology, most American youths over the past two centuries have not been eager to volunteer for military service "out of a sense of patriotism

or political obligation," contends Peter Karsten, a professor of history and sociology at the University of Pittsburgh who served as a junior naval officer in the early 1960s. Most of George Washington's stalwarts at Valley Forge had joined "out of need, or for economic plums they could use as nest eggs." Today's far more affluent youths, Karsten notes, generally "do not want to surrender their personal freedoms for a stint of military service, be it involuntary or voluntary."

Between 1980 and 1999, the proportion of youths telling pollsters that they definitely would not serve in the military increased from 40 to 63 percent, observes Charles Moskos, a military sociologist at Northwestern University. Recruitment difficulties in the early 1990s were alleviated by the post-Cold War reduction in the size of the active-duty force (now at about 1.4 million). But as the drawdown ended, Moskos says, recruitment shortfalls began appearing in the late 1990s in all the services except the Marine Corps. Last year, recruitment goals for the active-duty forces were met—but only by the outlay of about \$10,000 per recruit, twice the amount spent in the late 1980s. Between fiscal 1993 and 1998, according to a General Accounting Office report, the army's annual advertising expenditures more than tripled—from \$34 million to \$113 mil-

lion. Even so, recruitment for the reserves has fallen short for several years.

A high attrition rate compounds the problem: Thirty-seven percent of enlistees in the 1990s did not finish their first term. Retention of junior officers, reports Moskos, is also a headache for the services: The number who quit after their first term increased by 50 percent in the mid-1990s.

The boom economy of the past few years is not the only culprit behind the recruitment and retention woes, in the view of Andrew J. Bacevich, director of Boston University's Center for International Relations, and Elliott Abrams, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center. (The two cochaired the Washington conference last fall that gave rise to most of the *Parameters* papers.) Other factors may well have been "the cultural revolution touched off in the 1960s," a related narrowing in the definition of citizenship, and the post-Cold War use of military power for "humanitarian" purposes. Because of these changes, and the altered nature of warfare, "the mythic tradition of the citizen-soldier is dead," Bacevich and Abrams contend. Conscription is no longer an option.

But Moskos, a long-time proponent of national service, sees a way in which the citizen-soldier ideal might be brought back to life. Military recruiters, instead of focusing on high school graduates and, recently, high school dropouts, he says, should also pursue college students and graduates. "Today, some two-thirds of high school graduates go directly on to higher education," he observes. Instead of the prospect of military careers, shorter enlistment terms of 15 or 18 months—five or six months of training, followed by an overseas assignment—should be offered, along with generous postservice educational benefits linked to a reserve obligation of, say, two years. Such limited enlistments, Moskos believes, "could become the military equivalent of the 'junior-year abroad.'" Surveys he has done of his own students suggest that short-term service for peacekeeping and humanitarian missions would indeed appeal to a small but significant proportion of the collegiate young. "If the

military could recruit just five percent of the 1,200,000 who graduate from college each year . . . our recruiting woes would be over," he notes.

Bacevich and Abrams—who also favor ideas like Moskos's—argue that the traditional identity of the soldier as "warrior" needs to be updated. To be sure, "a traditional combat ethos" will still be needed, but a dwindling proportion of soldiers can expect to be put in harm's way. The current U.S. peacekeeping missions in the Balkans and the recent humanitarian deployments to Somalia and Haiti suggest that fighting wars will be only one of a soldier's functions in the future. "The reality of U.S. military history offers a rich trove of experience from which to forge just such an identity," they write, noting that American soldiers of old explored the West, governed colonies and protectorates, advanced the cause of public health, and built the Panama Canal.

In recruiting a force to serve as "a global constabulary," Bacevich and Abrams assert, the services should, insofar as possible, focus on 19- or 20-year-old males rather than men or women who are parents of young children. "Of course, since the creation of the all-volunteer force, the services have found it expedient to do just the opposite."

The trick, they say, is to set policies that "make military service more attractive to males without creating an environment antagonistic to women or formally restricting the opportunities available to [them]."

Army majors Kim Field and John Nagl propose that their service establish physical standards—the same for women as for men—in each of its occupational specialties now closed to women, and let only those men and women who meet the unisex standards serve in the specialties.

Bacevich and Abrams agree. It is important, they say, to shift "the 'qualifications' debate from gender to standards—from a losing 'culture war' battle to a necessary and winnable struggle to restore military professionalism. . . . The aim here is to eliminate the existing doublespeak and double standards that are eating away at the military's tradition of integrity and destroying the confidence of junior officers in their seniors."

The Diminished Presidency

"The Weakening White House" by Richard E. Neustadt, in *British Journal of Political Science* (Jan. 2001), Cambridge Univ. Press, Journals Fulfillment Dept., 110 Midland Ave., Port Chester, New York, N.Y. 10573-4930.

The American presidency may still be the most powerful office in the world, but it has been progressively weakened over the past three decades. So contends political scientist Neustadt, of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, expanding on a theme he first enunciated in *Presidential Power* (1960).

It's not just that the well-known presidential follies and scandals from Lyndon Johnson's day to Bill Clinton's have lessened public respect for the office, he says. Other debilitating forces also have been at work.

Both Congress and the Supreme Court have chipped away at the office's formal powers. "After Watergate," Neustadt says, "the Democratic Congress, with misplaced self-righteousness, combed the statute books to locate and repeal all discretionary powers vested in the president upon his declaration of a national emergency." Most of those powers dated from Woodrow Wilson's time in office. Gone, too, are "the reorganization powers, subject to legislative veto, won by FDR in 1939 and used for two generations thereafter." Today's presidents can no longer rearrange the bureaucratic structure "in the so-called 'executive branch'" without congressional approval. "Nor do they any longer have the freedom to 'impound'—thus saving—funds appropriated by Congress to departments." Congress also carved out for itself a much more active role in preparing the federal budget, and the Senate has inflated "senatorial courtesy" to allow a single senator secretly to block a presidential appointee's confirmation.

The Supreme Court has been no less active

in hamstringing presidents, Neustadt says. The Court's 1997 ruling in the Paula Jones sexual harassment case "made the sitting president subject to civil suit for acts preceding his incumbency," with "consequences for the ordered conduct of White House business [that] need not be described."

Though the presidency's most consequential formal powers, such as command of the armed forces and the power to conduct foreign relations, have not been eliminated, Neustadt notes, congressional aggressiveness toward the presidency is no longer restrained by war or the threat of war.

The presidency is not the "bully pulpit" that it once was, says Neustadt. In a media world no longer ruled by three TV networks, the president has difficulty attracting a mass audience. Americans have too many alternatives. Yet at the same time, the man and the office are trivialized by constant media coverage. The radio "fireside chats" of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, by contrast, were effective precisely because he was spared such overexposure.

Finally, Neustadt says, recent presidents themselves have weakened the office by grossly enlarging the White House staff—nearly a hundred civilian aides for Clinton, compared with no more than a dozen for FDR even during World War II. Young, vigorous, and opinionated, the aides "compete for the president's eye and ear, bemusing him in the process"—and sometimes getting him into serious trouble. "You will recall," says Neustadt, "that Watergate began with a burglary [Richard] Nixon himself called 'dumb.'"

The Lost Philosophy

"On the Degeneration of Public Philosophy in America: Problems and Prospects" by George W. Carey, and "What Is the Public Philosophy?" by James W. Ceaser, in *Perspectives on Political Science* (Winter 2001), 1319 18th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-1802.

Nearly a half-century ago, journalist and political thinker Walter Lippmann lamented the decline of "the public philosophy."

Lippmann had in mind the ideas about human nature and the good society, based in natural law, that undergird America's liberal

democratic institutions and shape the character of its citizens. The public philosophy seeks to restrain “our appetites and passions,” and Lippmann worried that its “formative beliefs” had come to be seen as a strictly private matter. Yet only on its premises, he maintained in *The Public Philosophy* (1955), can “intelligible and workable conceptions” be reached of such democratic goods as “popular election, majority rule, representative assemblies, [and] free speech.”

The public philosophy as Lippmann described it has since fallen into greater neglect, a victim of social change and widespread skepticism toward authority, argues Carey, a professor of government at Georgetown University. He sees no prospect of a revival in the near future. Even the chances of getting political scientists and high school

teachers to present a watered-down version—in the form of civic education in the principles of self-government and the responsibilities that go along with constitutional rights—seem very slim, he says. “If the leading textbooks be any guide, students of American government learn very little about the origins and development of our political institutions or the theory underlying them.”

In any event, writes Ceaser, a professor of government at the University of Virginia, the term *public philosophy* has lost much of its meaning. In the late 1960s and ’70s, leading political scientists appropriated Lippmann’s coinage, but stripped it of its normative aspect, turning it into a synonym for ideology. In their hands, “public philosophy” became “a core set of ideas embodied in long-term public opinion that influences

EXCERPT

The Real Road to Serfdom

In recent years, there has been a backlash against the national government. “Government is not the solution to our problem,” [Ronald] Reagan said in his first inaugural address. “Government is the problem.” Democratic presidents proclaim that the era of big government is over. . . .



“Government is the problem.”

*The attack on affirmative government had long been on the way. “The slogan of a ‘welfare state,’” said Herbert Hoover, “has emerged as a disguise for the totalitarian state by the route of spending.” In 1944, Friedrich Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* endorsed the proposition that countries go totalitarian when governments acquire excessive power under the pretext of doing good for their citizens.*

The Hoover-Hayek thesis was, and is, historical nonsense. Impotent democratic government, and not unduly potent democratic government, has laid the foundation for totalitarianism. Fascist and communist regimes arose not because democratic government was too powerful but because it was too weak. Sixty years ago, Thurman W. Arnold scoffed at “the absurd idea that dictatorships are the result of a long series of small seizures of power on the part of the central government.” The exact opposite, he pointed out, was the case. “Every dictatorship which we now know,” he wrote, “flowed into power like air into a vacuum because the central government, in the face of a real difficulty, declined to exercise authority.”

Or, as FDR said, “History proves that dictatorships do not grow out of strong and successful governments, but out of weak and helpless ones.” The New Deal did not put the Republic on the road to serfdom; it liberated the serfs to become producers and consumers (and, as they prospered, to start voting Republican).

—Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in *The American Prospect* (Apr. 23, 2001)

public policy over a full era," Ceaser says. And no longer was it just one set of ideas. Instead, writers often spoke of public philosophies, successive "sets of transforming ideas, whatever those ideas might happen to be."

In the 1980s, Ceaser continues, the term was widened in scope, coming to refer generally to ideas that shape how people think about the political world. But by becoming "so large and all-embracing," the concept "all but disappears," he observes. In the 1990s, intellectuals such as Michael Sandel and Richard Rorty got into the act, seeking to design new public philosophies. Sandel views American history as a struggle between

two "public philosophies": republicanism (or communitarianism) and liberalism. Rorty plumps for a postmodern public philosophy that will sustain a new Left.

Proposals for new public philosophies have multiplied, Ceaser says, in the absence of a clear idea of what a public philosophy is. Political scientists cannot create a public philosophy, in his view, but they could help thinkers striving to create one. By using their analytic powers "in a neutral or scientific way" to refine the general concept, he concludes, political scientists could make "the whole enterprise of public philosophy thinking" more realistic.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

A Shameful Necessity?

"The Lesser Evil" by Richard K. Betts, in *The National Interest* (Summer 2001),
1112 16th St., N.W., Ste. 540, Washington, D.C. 20036.

During the Cold War, the United States was often wrongly accused of neo-imperialism. "Today, however, we are engaged in *real* neo-imperialism" in the Balkans, says Betts, director of the Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University. He calls for "a modified bug-out."

When President Bill Clinton sent troops to Bosnia in 1995, he said they would be out within a year. Today, there are 5,700 U.S. troops in Bosnia and 5,400 in Kosovo.

Reluctant to face "an unpalatable choice between the much stronger efforts that cultivating political stability would require and a withdrawal that might reignite war," the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the United Nations have "drifted toward open-ended occupation," says Betts. But that has seemed the path of least resistance only because the costs thus far have been low, with no U.S. casualties. The odds that the costs will remain low indefinitely are poor, especially in the event of further economic decline, he says. Rumbblings can already be heard—Croat rioters have disturbed the calm in Bosnia, for example.

"Contrary to the implicit logic of enthusiasts for limited intervention," Betts says,

"there is no evidence that a liberal, tolerant, de-ethnicized political order is the natural default option once a peaceful truce is attained." Re-establishing civic trust among the ethnic groups whose members have been killing one another in large numbers is no easy task. "To create secular liberalism in the Balkans amounts to remaking the societies—nation-building and state-building," he says. Even if the United Nations, with Russia and China in the Security Council, did sanction an effort to impose Western-style democratic liberalism, neither the United States nor the European Union would be likely to undertake it, Betts says.

What about partition? "To make states both ethnically homogeneous and territorially defensible . . . would require revised borders and forced population transfers," he observes. "This would contravene international law and Western moral sensibilities to a degree that makes it a fanciful option."

That leaves, says Betts, the least bad option: Plan for an American withdrawal in, say, six months, and turn the policing of the Balkans over to the European Union, which has been groping for an independent "defense identity." If the Europeans refuse, then the United States still should get out but also should arm "the weaker of

the local states” in the region to give them a chance of survival. An American withdrawal would be “rather shameful,” Betts

says—but it could be no more disastrous than what continued temporizing may bring.

Lessons of the Purple Heart

“Half a Million Purple Hearts” by D. M. Giangreco and Kathryn Moore, in *American Heritage* (Dec. 2000–Jan. 2001), 90 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011.

In 1999, as the American-led bombing campaign in Kosovo was being stepped up, news broke that the Pentagon had ordered 9,000 new Purple Hearts, the decorations awarded to troops wounded or killed in action. Some observers read that as an indication that the United States planned to send in ground forces. In fact, the run of Purple Hearts—the first large-scale production of the medal in more than half a century—told a very different story, write Giangreco and Moore, the authors of *Dear Harry. . . : Truman’s Mailroom, 1945–1953* (1999).

That order for new medals, they explain, cast light not on the war in Kosovo, but on the end of World War II: So many American casualties were averted by the dropping of the atom bomb on Japan that only now, three wars and many Cold War incidents later, was the United States running out of the stockpiled Purple Hearts.

In all, some 1,506,000 Purple Hearts were produced for use in World War II, say Giangreco and Moore, “with production reaching its peak as America geared up for the invasion of Japan.” The Navy ordered 25,000 Purple Hearts in October 1944, and then

50,000 more in the spring of 1945, and “borrowed” 60,000 more from the Army when it feared that delivery would be delayed.

“And then the war ended,” the authors write. “The most wonderful of all its surplus: 495,000 unused Purple Hearts.”

That’s not the only tale the medals tell. The evolving nature of modern warfare can be glimpsed through the debates over what constitutes a wound and who deserves the medal. When a powerful laser was directed briefly at a helicopter taking part in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia in 1998, the pilot and his crew chief were temporarily blinded, suffering “mild to moderate” burns—but neither was awarded the Purple Heart.

But undoubtedly the most significant tale involves the World War II surplus. Its sheer size, say the authors, undermines critics’ continuing attacks on President Harry Truman’s decision to drop the atom bomb on Hiroshima. Such critics contend that the U.S. military’s own secret estimates of the alternative, an assault on the Japanese home islands, predicted relatively light casualties for American forces. The unused Purple Hearts, say the authors, give the lie to that.

People Do Matter

“Let Us Now Praise Great Men” by Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, in *International Security* (Spring 2001), Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Univ., 79 John F. Kennedy St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Political scientists striving for a theoretical explanation of international relations are inclined these days to pooh-pooh the significance of individual leaders. Of what importance could “Cleopatra’s nose” be in shaping history, they ask dismissively, compared with the anarchic system of nation-states, the weight of domestic politics, or the dynamics of institutions? It’s impersonal forces such

as those, they insist, that determine the course of international events.

How strange, then, that makers of foreign policy in the world’s capitals expend so much time and effort trying to fathom the goals, abilities, and idiosyncrasies of leaders such as George W. Bush, Vladimir Putin, and Jiang Zemin. Are the policymakers daft? No, argue Byman, research director of RAND’s Center for



After Napoleon Bonaparte defeated the Russians in the Battle of Friedland in 1807, he held sway over Europe—but because of his personal demons he drove France to wage more wars.

Middle East Public Policy, and Pollack, a senior research professor at the National Defense University.

Why are theorists reluctant to explore the role of individuals? If pressed, most will admit that individuals do make a difference in international relations, at least on occasion, say the authors. But “their influence does not lend itself to the generalizations that political scientists seek” in their effort to explain how international relations work, some theorists contend. Byman and Pollack disagree. Plausible and testable hypotheses can indeed be set forth, they aver, and they offer a baker’s dozen (e.g., “States led by leaders with grandiose visions are more likely to destabilize the system”).

While German resentment of the harsh Treaty of Versailles, and other large, impersonal forces helped bring on World War II, Adolf Hitler still was the most important single cause. His grandiose aspirations for Germany far exceeded the ambitions of the German people, and went well beyond even the appetites of most of the mainstream nationalist parties and the army high command. Since

Britain and France were eager to compromise in order to avert war, say the authors, Germany “should have been able to achieve the moderate revisionist goals espoused by most Germans without sparking a general European war. Only Hitler’s personal ambitions made such a conflict unavoidable.”

Hitler’s influence on events was unusual but not unique. The authors also examine in detail several other cases: the contrasting impacts on European politics of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (for peace) and Kaiser Wilhelm II (for war); Napoleon Bonaparte’s role in determining not only the intentions of France, but its capabilities and the reactions of other states; the difference that the contrasting personalities of dictators Saddam Hussein (reckless) and Hafiz al-Asad (cautious) made in the behavior of Iraq and Syria, respectively, after the Cold War.

It is especially important to acknowledge the role of individuals, the authors argue, in order to dispel the dangerous illusion that events are the inevitable products of forces—nationalism, ethnic differences, economic imperatives—beyond human control.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

The West's Population Bust

"Labor Supply Prospects in 16 Developed Countries, 2000–2050" by Peter McDonald and Rebecca Kippen, in *Population and Development Review* (Mar. 2001), Population Council, One Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Latter-day Malthusians, warning about the dire impact of the global population explosion, have been crusading for decades to depress birthrates around the world. Now it turns out that low fertility also can present a problem: not enough workers in an aging population to sustain economic growth.

In the coming decades, if current demographic and labor force trends continue, the size of the work force in most economically advanced countries will either become stagnant or shrink, predict McDonald and Kippen, demographers at Australian National University. The United States, however, with a relatively high fertility rate near the population "replacement level" of 2.1 births per woman, is likely to fare better than most. Without any changes in the current levels of fertility or immigration, or the proportion of the populace working, they say, the United States "can maintain a fairly brisk growth" in its labor force over the next half-century, from 142 million to 176 million. Further expansion could be achieved by inducing older workers to retire later. Yet with increasing demand for a much more skilled work force, and with the consequent need for education taking people out of the work force, even the United States may face very tight labor markets in the coming decades.

The outlook for many other developed nations is much less sanguine. Of the 16 countries McDonald and Kippen examined, Japan faces the worst situation. "Its labor force participation rates for men are already high, offering little scope for increase," and the nation has

long discouraged immigrants. If net immigration remains close to zero and the fertility rate stays low, the authors project that Japan's labor supply will fall from 67 million to 45 million over the next 50 years. Although increased fertility would help somewhat in the long term, the "most effective" short-term solution, they say, would be to get more women into the work force. But it runs counter to Japanese tradition for mothers to work.

Major cultural changes would be required in some other countries, too. In Italy, for instance, with low fertility, current net immigration of 100,000 per year, and low labor force participation, the labor supply is projected to fall from the present 23 million to 14 million in 2050. Like Greece, Spain, and the Netherlands, Italy will need both more women in the work force and, as a long-term solution, increased fertility—a combination, note McDonald and Kippen, that "would require substantial cultural adjustments, as would the acceptance of much larger numbers of immigrants."

Just maintaining services in the economically advanced countries at their current levels in the coming decades, say the authors, is likely to produce "a demand for immigrant labor on a scale never seen" except in the United States and other nations traditionally receptive to immigrants. For a long-term solution, however, many countries will need to consider "policies capable of arresting or reversing the fall in fertility."

SUVs Save Lives!

"The Truth about Light Trucks" by Douglas Coate and James VanderHoff, in *Regulation* (Spring 2001), Cato Institute, 1000 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.

Critics say that thousands of lives could be saved every year if sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and other light trucks that crowd the nation's roads were replaced by cars. Various studies seem to bear the critics out, note Rutgers

University economists Coate and VanderHoff. But there's something that such studies ignore: the difference between rural and urban driving conditions. When this is taken into account, the reviled SUV appears in a far better light.



"It's a vehicle suitable for both the defensive and the offensive driver."

It's no coincidence, the authors suggest, that as the percentage of light trucks on the road has doubled over the past two decades, traffic accident fatalities per capita have *decreased* by one-third. SUV critics attribute this decline to other factors, such as greater use of seat belts and stiffer penalties for drunk driving. But Coate and VanderHoff believe that the increase in SUVs and other light trucks (pickups and minivans) also helped.

Fatal accidents and light trucks "are both more prevalent" in rural areas than in urban areas, they point out. For every 10,000 drivers in 1997, the 10 least populous states had three motor vehicle fatalities, while the 10 most densely populated states had two. And 52 percent of the rural states' registered vehicles were light trucks, compared with 28 percent in the urban states. But is the higher rural fatality rate

caused by the higher number of light trucks?

Not necessarily, observe Coate and VanderHoff. It could be the other way around. Rural drivers may favor light trucks because rural driving is more dangerous. They travel greater distances, at higher speeds, and on less safe roads than their city cousins. And light trucks' stiffer frames, higher ground clearance, and greater weight provide more protection.

Analyzing the effect of light truck usage on fatality rates in

states between 1994 and 1997, the two economists found that when they controlled for rural factors (e.g., population per square mile), it appeared that light trucks did indeed help to lower the overall fatality rate.

Coate and VanderHoff acknowledge that SUVs and other light trucks may actually boost the number of deadly accidents (including solo crashes and multivehicle collisions). They may also kill more of the people in cars they hit. But the added protection the behemoths give their own occupants, say the authors, offsets those additional deaths. By their calculations, the rising number of light trucks on the road between 1994 and 1997 lowered fatalities per driver by 7.5 percent in one-vehicle crashes, and by two percent in multivehicle ones: in all, a net savings of some 2,000 lives—good news, at least for those not in the "other" cars.

EXCERPT

Out of My Way!

A recent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study found SUVs two-and-a-half times as likely as other vehicles to kill the occupants of the vehicles they collide with. Many of the larger models are so high off the ground that during collisions they either ram their heavily reinforced bumpers straight into the passenger cabin of the other car or else climb up and over the other car, crushing it and its hapless occupants. The override problem is so acute that automakers are presently installing steel rails beneath SUV bumpers. In theory, such rails will push other cars out of the way, like a train cowcatcher, though this will do nothing for the tens of millions of SUVs already on the roads.

—Paul Roberts, a contributing editor at *Harper's Magazine* (Apr. 2001)

Sen-sational Economist

"Food for Thought" by Jonathan Steele, in *The Guardian* (Mar. 31, 2001), 119 Farringdon Rd., London EC1R 3ER, U.K.; "Portrait: Amartya Sen" by Meghnad Desai, in *Prospect* (July 2000), 4 Bedford Sq., London WC1B 3RA, U.K.

Although a celebrity in his native India since winning the 1998 Nobel prize in economics, Amartya Sen is otherwise little known outside academic circles in Britain and the United States. Yet his ideas have had a global impact. By the reckoning of a fellow economist, Sudhir Anand of Oxford University, Sen "has made fundamental contributions to at least four fields: social choice theory, welfare economics, economic measurement, and development economics."

Born just north of Calcutta in 1933, on the campus of a university founded by poet Rabindranath Tagore, Sen went to study at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1953, returning a little more than a decade later to teach at the Delhi School of Economics. His serious scholarly attention in those days was given to social choice, the abstruse, mathematically oriented field opened up by RAND Corporation economist Kenneth Arrow in a 1951 essay showing how hard it could be for democratic mechanisms to reflect a majority's true preferences.

Grappling with Arrow's paradox, Sen "returned to first principles on the nature of choice," explains Desai, who teaches economics at the London School of Economics. A person choosing to buy fish rather than meat may not be asserting a simple preference for fish, Sen pointed out. He may be acting on a whim, or perhaps participating in a meat boycott in support of a meatpackers' strike. "Sen showed that we must take into account notions of sympathy or commitment in order to understand voting behavior, paying for public goods . . . and so on." In short, he brought economics closer to the real world. Sen's 1970 book, *Collective Choice and*

Social Welfare, marked the end of a decade's work on social choice and "a definitive advance on Arrow's work," Desai says. The next year, Sen left Delhi and joined the London School of Economics.

In *Poverty and Famines* (1981), Sen studied the 1943 Bengal famine (and several others). By detailing the weekly arrivals of food grains in Calcutta, he showed that it was not a scarcity of food but the lack of money to buy it that caused the mass starvation. In short, says Desai, "Sen showed that a functioning market economy could leave millions dead."

In the mid-1980s, Sen left Britain for Harvard University. With Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq, notes the *Guardian's* Steele, he created "the Human Development Index as a rival to the World Bank's system of ranking countries by classical macroeconomic criteria such as savings rates and GNP [gross national product]." On the new index—which incorporated measures of life expectancy, adult literacy, and income inequality—rich countries with unequal income distribution scored lower than some sub-Saharan African countries. The index soon proved influential in UN, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund circles.

Sen (who is now Master of Trinity College, Cambridge) has in recent decades "made his peace with the market," Desai told Steele, "though on his own terms and without going all-out for a free market." Sen himself denies ever having been antimarket. As for globalization, Sen maintains that it is "neither particularly new or a folly," and that the real problem is not free trade but the inequality of global power.

SOCIETY

How Mothers Find Time

"Maternal Employment and Time with Children: Dramatic Change or Surprising Continuity?" by Suzanne M. Bianchi, in *Demography* (Nov. 2000), Carolina Population Center, Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Univ. Sq., CB#8120, 123 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill, N.C. 27516-3997.

Even though many more American women with children have gone off to work in recent decades, today's mothers

still spend about as much time—an average of five and a half hours a day—with their offspring under 18 as mothers did in 1965. So

time diary studies show, reports Bianchi, a sociologist at the University of Maryland.

How can that be? Mainly, she maintains, because mothers today, for the most part, continue to do what they must to ensure their family's well-being, as well as their own.

For one thing, many working mothers cut back on outside work when their children are very young, Bianchi notes. Only one-third of new mothers return to full-time work within six months of their child's birth, or "remain firmly attached to full-time work during their childbearing years."

At the same time, Americans are having fewer children, so mothers are able to give more individual attention to the children they do have. In the past, not only did mothers with larger families have less time for each child, but they often called on older children to mind the younger ones. They also did more cleaning and cooking than today's women. Now, even stay-at-home mothers do less housework than in the past—25 hours a week in 1995, compared with more than 37 hours in 1965. Working mothers, who did nearly 24 hours of housework a week in 1965, have cut that to less than 18 hours.

Working mothers have also cut back on volunteer work, leisure pursuits, and even sleep. In a 1998 study, working moms reported having 12 fewer "free time" hours a week than the stay-at-home mothers

reported, and getting six fewer hours of sleep.

(A recent, much publicized University of Michigan study, based on children's time diaries, kept with parental aid in some cases, found that working mothers with children ages three to 12 in 1997 spent only 48 fewer minutes a day with them than stay-at-home moms did—and about the same amount of time as stay-at-home moms spent in 1981.)

Even stay-at-home mothers aren't with their school-age children much of the day, of course. And in recent decades, moms have increasingly waved goodbye to their younger "preschool" children, too. In the late 1960s, less than 10 percent of children ages three to five were in nursery school or some other form of preschool. But by 1997, the number was several times greater. Fifty-two percent of the children of working mothers were enrolled in preschools (including child care settings with educational programs)—and so were 44 percent of the kids of stay-at-home mothers. With fewer brothers and sisters today, Bianchi observes, children "are often judged to 'need' prekindergarten socialization to launch them on their educational careers."

For children lucky enough to live in intact families, she points out, there has been a bonus. Married fathers spent nearly four hours a day with their kids in 1998, an hour more than they did in 1965.

Whom Do You Trust?

"Producing and Consuming Trust" by Eric M. Uslaner, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Winter 2000–2001), 475 Riverside Dr., Ste. 1274, New York, N.Y. 10115–1274.

What ails the American civic spirit? The leading school of thought today is that as people have cut back their participation in voluntary organizations, their trust in others—so vital to a community's health—has declined. "Joiners become more tolerant, less cynical, and more empathetic to the misfortunes of others," maintains Robert Putnam, the author of *Bowling Alone* (2000) and a seminal 1995 article of the same title. He believes that when individuals take part in civic organizations,

their trust in people they know leads to trust in those they don't know.

Uslaner, a University of Maryland political scientist, is skeptical. Joining with people much like oneself in a bowling league or a fraternal or religious organization, he argues, does not promote trust in strangers. We learn that kind of trust, essential for a civil society, "early in life from our parents, who impart to us a sense of optimism and a belief that we are the masters of our own fate."

People who possess what Uslaner calls “moralistic trust” see little risk in putting their faith in strangers, because they “believe that . . . other people are generally well motivated” and share the same underlying moral values. Such optimists become active in their communities, tackling civic problems large and small, and giving time and money to charity—but not necessarily taking part in social clubs, fraternal organizations, bowling leagues, and the like.

Their kind of trust is waning, writes Uslaner. Surveys indicate that the proportion of Americans who believe that “most people can be trusted” has plummeted in recent decades—from 58 percent in 1960 to 36 percent in 1998. Why? Putnam ultimately points a finger at TV and the dangerous world it presents to viewers. But while television viewing “has leveled off in recent years,” observes Uslaner, there has been no rebound in trust.

He blames the trust deficit on other culprits, including the simultaneous rise in

the numbers of Christian fundamentalists and the “unchurched.” “Religion has been the source of much of American civic life. Half of charitable contributions . . . and almost 40 percent of volunteering are based in religious organizations,” he notes. But fundamentalists “are more likely to put faith only in their own kind.” They are twice as likely as other believers to join only religious groups. The unchurched are almost 20 percent more likely than believers to join no groups at all.

But the main reason for the trust deficit, Uslaner believes, is that Americans have become more pessimistic about the future. The proportion of Americans who told pollsters that their children would have better lives than they themselves did fell from 60 percent or more in the 1960s to around 15 percent in the 1990s. Why? Uslaner blames growing economic inequality. Until that trend is reversed, he says, many Americans will continue to be wary of their fellow countrymen.

Resisting Slavery

“Shipboard Revolts, African Authority, and the Atlantic Slave Trade” by David Richardson, in *The William and Mary Quarterly* (Jan. 2001), Box 8781, Williamsburg, Va. 23187–8781.

It’s now well known that Africans sometimes violently resisted enslavement by Europeans, but historians have focused almost entirely on slave revolts in the Americas. Recently amassed data from European shipping records on more than 27,000 voyages show that many Africans also fought back on the African coast and at sea.

Between about 1650 and 1860 there were at least 485 collective acts of violent rebellion, including 392 shipboard revolts and 93 “attacks from the shore by apparently ‘free’ Africans against ships or longboats,” says Richardson, an economic historian at the University of Hull, in Great Britain. More than 360 ships were involved, some more than once.

Ninety percent of the shipboard revolts occurred in (or shortly before or after) the 18th century. Despite gaps in records and a lack of data on ships other than those of the French, Dutch, and British, Richardson estimates that as many as 10 percent of the

ships in that period may have experienced an insurrection.

The revolts rarely succeeded, he says, but they were common enough to induce traders to take preventive measures, including doubling the number of crew members, which increased the pecuniary costs of the Middle Passage. Had there been no revolts, the number of slaves shipped across the Atlantic—at least 11 million embarked at the African coast, including more than six million between 1700 and 1810—would undoubtedly have been considerably greater. Richardson estimates that the resisters “saved perhaps 600,000 other Africans from being shipped to America in the long 18th century and one million during the whole history of the trade.”

Enslaved Africans from the Senegambia region (the basins of the Senegal and Gambia rivers) appear to have been especially likely to fight back.

America was hardly the only market for

slaves from Senegambia, Richardson notes. “For centuries before contact by sea with Europeans, Senegambia was an important source for the trans-Saharan slave trade as well as for the trade in the desert.” There was also a substantial local demand for slaves.

Most of the slaves shipped to America from Senegambia had been captured in warfare or by slave raiders, usually employed by Muslim states in the far interior or by “warrior states” near the coast. Historians have tended to think that most slaves shipped to America from Senegambia in the 18th century came from the far interior. As the American demand grew after 1750, slavers probably worked the coastal areas more intensively, instead of moving inland, as they did elsewhere in Africa.

That, Richardson says, may well have contributed to a breakdown in political order. It, in turn, may have led to more warrior regimes and perhaps to a new willingness among the Africans there to sell previously protected domestic slaves



Shipboard revolts helped depress the 18th-century slave trade.

and other persons to the Europeans. The explosive end result, now newly visible in the amassed shipping records: more attacks on ships and more shipboard revolts.

Thinking the Unthinkable

“Let Them Drop Out” by Jackson Toby, in *The Weekly Standard* (Apr. 9, 2001), 1150 17th St., N.W., Ste. 505, Washington, D.C. 20036-4617.

Why has the rash of school mass murders afflicted stereotypically “good” suburban schools, such as Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, rather than wretched inner-city high schools? In the answer, argues Toby, a Rutgers University sociologist, lies a practical way to prevent some of the massacres.

The disruptive students responsible for the everyday (but usually less lethal) violence in inner-city schools are able to escape, he says, before their frustration with being

trapped in the classroom “reaches a flash-point.” They become chronic truants or actual dropouts; schoolwork does not enjoy sufficient parental or peer group support to keep them in class. But for kids in excellent suburban schools, Toby says, dropping out is unthinkable: “Their parents would be horrified. Their friends would be bewildered. Their teachers would be shocked.” Though students in such schools can feel trapped and miserable for what adults would consider trivial reasons—“the teasing

of classmates, a poor body-image, athletic or romantic failures, unpopularity”—the consequences of their feelings sometimes can be explosive.

Let the troubled youths go, urges Toby. If they are too young to leave school, then get

them into alternative schools. If they are old enough, let them drop out. McDonald's may succeed where the high school failed. The dropouts can always finish high school later. "Formal education is not the only path to responsible adulthood," Toby notes.

Gender on the Bench

"Gender and Judicial Decisions: Do Female Judges Decide Cases Differently than Male Judges?" by Phyllis Coontz, in *Gender Issues* (Fall 2000), Transaction Periodicals Consortium, Rutgers Univ., 35 Berrue Cir., Piscataway, N.J. 08854-8042.

If men and women approach moral problems in different ways, as "difference" feminists maintain, then do male and female judges decide court decisions differently? Coontz, a sociologist at the University of Pittsburgh, conducted a survey of state trial judges in Pennsylvania to find out.

The state has 366 trial court judges, of whom 28 are women. All 28, along with 167 male jurists, answered Coontz's questions about how they would decide hypothetical cases involving self-defense homicide, personal injury, divorce, and assault. Coontz found significant male-female differences in almost half of the judges' hypothetical decisions.

In the homicide case, a female defendant claimed to have been abused by her boyfriend and to have killed him in self-defense. Twenty-seven percent of the female judges found her guilty, compared with 13 percent of the male judges. In the personal injury case, a plaintiff was left paralyzed from the waist down by an auto accident. The female judges awarded an average sum that was less than half that awarded by their male counterparts. But a woman being

divorced by her husband fared slightly better before the female judges. All of them awarded her alimony, while three percent of the male judges did not.

Both male and female jurists were more likely to find a male defendant guilty of assault, in a scuffle growing out of a basketball game bet, than they were a female defendant. But that inclination was stronger in the women on the bench. The female judges also were more likely to impose a longer sentence in such an assault case and to award higher damages (\$955, compared with \$353). The male jurists were twice as likely (22 percent, compared with 11 percent) to award civil damages.

Coontz concludes that the women on the bench in Pennsylvania do indeed speak with "a different voice" from their male counterparts. This may be because of their different "lived experiences," she says. "We, of course, expect judges to set aside personal viewpoints when deciding cases, yet beneath the robe of justice is an individual whose perceptions of the world have been influenced by [his or her] experiences in it."

PRESS & MEDIA

News You Can Lose

"Doing Well and Doing Good: How Soft News and Critical Journalism Are Shrinking the News Audience and Weakening Democracy—And What News Outlets Can Do about It" by Thomas E. Patterson, in a Shorenstein Center Report (Dec. 2000), Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard Univ., 79 John F. Kennedy St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Struggling against increased competition for readers and viewers, news organizations have been steadily substituting entertaining "soft" news for reporting on public affairs. The

remaining coverage of politics and government has grown relentlessly more critical. In the long run, this approach may only drive more people away, argues Patterson, a

professor of government and the press at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

There's little doubt that "soft" news—a category in which Patterson includes routine crime, accident, and disaster stories, along with celebrity stories and other fluff—has mushroomed. After analyzing more than 5,000 TV, newspaper, and newsmagazine stories since 1980, he finds that the soft stuff has grown from less than 35 percent to about 50 percent of the total today.

News executives are acting on the basis of marketing and ratings studies, Patterson acknowledges. But the studies focus on the short term, he argues. Over the long term, he suggests, audiences may find that news outlets stuffed with fluff are outlets they can do without.

Americans today "are ambivalent at best" about the news they are being given, says Patterson. In a national survey of 511 adults last October, 84 percent said they found the news "informative," but 50 percent considered it "superficial," and 52 percent "not enjoyable." Sixty-three percent claimed to prefer "news that sticks mainly to stories about major events and issues affecting the community and the country"—and most of these folks said they would like to see less of the soft

stuff. Twenty-four percent of the respondents were soft-news fans. But they tended to think hard news was pretty good, too. And the remaining 13 percent liked hard and soft equally.

The people looking chiefly for hard news constitute the core audience for news, Patterson says. Forty percent of them regularly read a daily paper's news pages, for example, compared with only 26 percent of the soft-news types. And it's those in the core audience who are most discontented today, Patterson points out. "They are also more likely . . . to say they are paying less attention to the news than in the past."

Ninety-three percent of the folks paying less attention complain that the news is too "negative" in tone. Patterson agrees. Since 1976, press coverage of the presidency and the federal agencies has grown steadily more critical. America needs a watchdog press, Patterson believes, but one that can distinguish between "real abuse" and trivial offenses. As Americans have become more turned off by politics and government, more and more of them—not surprisingly—have been turning off the news.

"In the long run," concludes Patterson, "the best way to build an audience for news is through balanced public-affairs reporting."

TV Medicine

"Primetime Pushers" by Lisa Belkin, in *Mother Jones* (Mar.-Apr. 2001),
731 Market St., Ste. 600, San Francisco, Calif. 94103.

Turn on the TV these days, and you are almost sure to see an ad for Viagra, Prilosec, Lipitor, or a host of other drugs that you cannot buy without a doctor's permission. Critics contend that this isn't a healthy development, reports medical writer Belkin, author of *First, Do No Harm* (1993).

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) opened the floodgates four years ago, when it eased restrictions on prescription drug ads. Pharmaceutical companies last year



The maker of this drug for a painful stomach condition spent \$80 million on TV ads in 1999 and saw sales jump 27 percent.

spent an estimated \$1.7 billion on television ads, more than twice what they spent in 1998. The “direct-to-consumer” advertising “has paid off handsomely” for the drug firms, says Belkin. Pfizer, for instance, “upped consumer advertising for its cholesterol drug, Lipitor, by more than \$45 million in 1999, and sales of the drug jumped too—56 percent, to \$2.7 billion.”

Proponents of the liberalized FDA policy contend that “it creates a more informed patient because viewers see the ads, then have an intelligent give-and-take with a doctor,” says Belkin. Critics, however, maintain that the ads encourage patients “to seek out expensive, potentially dangerous drugs that they—and too often their doctors—know lit-

tle about.” Sales of Celebrex, an arthritis drug, reached \$1 billion even before the final clinical-trial results were published in a peer-reviewed journal.

“Patients can be difficult to dissuade,” one physician told Belkin. It complicates the doctor-patient relationship, he added, when the patients start directing the treatment “based on what they learned on TV.” A further complication, notes Belkin: Some impressionable TV viewers don’t even bother to see a doctor before obtaining the advertised drugs from “the growing number of Web sites that sell prescription medications without a doctor visit.” The FDA is scheduled to review its new approach to TV ads this summer.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The New Clergy

“Avoiding Moral Choices” by Gordon Marino, in *Commonweal* (Mar. 23, 2001), 475 Riverside Dr., Rm. 405, New York, N.Y. 10115.

About 30 years ago, a stranger began to appear at the bedside of the sick: the bioethicist. Today, America swarms with ethics experts, thousands of them, dispensing their putative wisdom not only in medicine but in business, law, engineering, sports, and other fields. But do these secular specialists really know much more than the rest of us about right and wrong? Marino, a professor of philosophy at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, is doubtful.

Most professional ethicists are lawyers or doctors of philosophy who have studied ethical theory and its application to concrete situations in the professions. They “may have extraordinary acumen in the dissection of moral problems,” Marino acknowledges. But their moral reasoning, just like that of nonexperts, “is based on assumptions that, in the end, cannot be justified against competing assumptions.” Ultimately, “we are all flying by the seat of our moral pants.”

Given even a common, straightforward problem, ethics experts often disagree, he points out. In a *Journal of Clinical Ethics* study, 144 ethicists were asked whether life support should be removed from a

patient in a vegetative state. Their answers were “all over the board,” Marino says. So how expert can they really be? Many ethicists would respond that certain other fields, such as economics, also are rife with disagreement. But at least economic theories generate predictions, Marino observes, which then “either confirm or deny the theories. It is hard to fathom what consequences would confirm a bioethicist’s recommendations for stem-cell research.”

One thing that ethicists do agree upon is that they should be relatively disinterested parties with respect to the issues and cases they handle. But instead, Marino asserts, they “are often in the pockets of the hospitals and corporations that employ them.” The market for ethicists is small, he notes, and ethics consultants who continually arrive at inconvenient conclusions may find their career prospects limited.

Though in many cases their advice is no more than common sense, professional ethicists “have done some good,” Marino believes. “In the medical field, [they] have made sure that people undergoing surgery or participating in experiments give their

informed consent,” and most businesses that employ ethicists “are, ethically speaking, better off for their presence.”

Nevertheless, Marino warns, the rise of the ethicists as “the new clergy” poses this dan-

ger: that the rest of us, taking the easy way out, will avoid moral decisions and issues on the excuse that they are too complicated and best left to the “experts.” Unfortunately, he says, there aren’t any.

The Chastened Liberal

“Bertrand de Jouvenel’s Melancholy Liberalism” by Brian C. Anderson, in *The Public Interest* (Spring 2001), 1112 16th St., N.W., Ste. 530, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Many of today’s enthusiasts for liberal democracy overlook its serious weaknesses. A neglected French thinker named Bertrand de Jouvenel (1903–87) knew better. “[His] melancholy liberalism has a lot to teach us,” writes Anderson, a senior editor of *City Journal*.

Born into an aristocratic French family and educated at the Sorbonne, Jouvenel saw the rise of totalitarianism firsthand. A radical socialist in his twenties, he then swung to the other extreme, but rapidly became disillusioned with it, too. As a journalist in the 1930s, he interviewed Mussolini and Hitler at length, and witnessed the Austrian Anschluss and the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia. Jouvenel joined the French Resistance, eventually fleeing to Switzerland with the Gestapo on his heels. By then, Anderson says, he was “the full-fledged anti-totalitarian liberal that he remained for the rest of his life.”

In exile as the war raged, Jouvenel wrote his first major work of political philosophy, *On Power: The Natural History of Its Growth*, examining how the modern state—even in contemporary liberal democratic societies—had become dangerous to liberty. Outside of small communities, the doctrine of popular sovereignty, if taken literally, is absurd, he argued, since the people themselves cannot actually govern. And whoever governs in their name can invoke the doctrine to justify almost anything, from the rounding up of political foes to the bombing of civilians. The notion of popular sovereignty also burdens the state with a host of new responsibilities, all supposedly to secure the people’s well-being. By making right and wrong a matter for each individual to determine, moreover, popular sovereignty unleashes a moral relativism that inevitably leads to

social disorder and to demands that the state suppress it.

“Despite its excessive pessimism,” writes Anderson, “*On Power* stands as a permanent warning to the citizens and statesmen of liberal democratic regimes that their freedom is difficult to sustain, for reasons inseparable from the logic of their own principles.” And later, particularly in his 1957 masterpiece *Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good*, Jouvenel developed “a more constructive political science,” which viewed liberal constitutionalism more positively.

In *Sovereignty* and other writings, he offered “a dynamic and political conception of the common good” that was more than just the sum of individual goods. Jouvenel was not a libertarian, wishing to do away with politics; neither was he an “armchair communitarian,” eager to restore the ancient Greek polis. For Jouvenel, says Anderson, the moral task of the modern democratic state “is to create the conditions that let ‘social friendship’—a common good compatible with the goods and freedoms of modernity—blossom. . . . To nurture this mutual trust is the essence of the art of politics.” Balancing innovation and conservation, the liberal statesman must do “everything possible to help a culture of ordered liberty prosper short of imposing a state truth.” This includes regulating “‘noxious activities’” and deflating “hopes for a permanent solution to the political problem.”

Liberal democracies can achieve genuine human goods, Jouvenel believed, but politics is seldom guided by the light of reason. Fragile liberal democracies, notes Anderson, “must remain on guard, lest their many weaknesses—from the erosion of personal responsibility, to their tendency toward collectivism, to the abiding hope for final solutions—make dust of these goods.”

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Low-Fat Fraud?

"The Soft Science of Dietary Fat" by Gary Taubes, in *Science* (Mar. 30, 2001), American Assn. for the Advancement of Science, 1200 New York Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Urged on by experts from government and other quarters, healthy Americans for decades have been struggling to rid their diet of fat—and thus, they hope, lose weight, ward off heart disease, and live longer. The food industry spends billions of dollars a year pushing the antifat message, and thousands of food products claiming to be low-fat or no-fat now crowd supermarket shelves. The only thing the whole crusade lacks, reports Taubes, a *Science* contributing correspondent, is the hard scientific evidence to justify it.

"Despite decades of research," he says, "it is still a debatable proposition whether the consumption of saturated fats above recommended levels . . . by anyone who's not already at high risk of heart disease will increase the likelihood of untimely death. . . . Nor have hundreds of millions of dollars in trials managed to generate compelling evidence that healthy individuals can extend their lives by more than a few weeks, if that, by eating less fat."

Weight loss? It seemed reasonable to suppose that trimming fat from the diet would help, since fat has nine calories per gram compared with four calories for carbohydrates and protein, but science now suggests otherwise, Taubes says. "The results of well-controlled clinical trials are consistent: People on low-fat diets initially lose a couple of kilograms, as they would on any diet, and then the weight tends to return. After one to two years, little has been achieved."

For individuals at high risk of heart attack, notes Taubes, the evidence has mounted in recent years that cholesterol-lowering *drugs* can be beneficial, and for those people, a low-fat diet may also be somewhat helpful. But for healthy individuals, he says, the consequences of a low-fat diet are simply unclear.

In 1988, when Dr. C. Everett Koop was U.S. surgeon general, his office issued a landmark report declaring fat the single most unwholesome component of the American diet—and then set out to produce the definitive scientific report on its dangers. Eleven years later, having run through four directors, the project was quietly killed. The subject proved "too complicated," said one specialist involved.

Since the early 1970s, Americans' average fat intake has fallen from more than 40 percent of total calories consumed to 34 percent. Yet, as a 10-year study published in 1998 in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found, the inci-

dence of heart disease does not appear to have declined. "Meanwhile," observes Taubes, "[the incidence of] obesity in America, which remained constant from the early 1960s through 1980, has surged"—from 14 percent of the population to more than 20 percent. This raises the possibility,

however remote, he says, "that low-fat diets might have unintended consequences—among them, weight gain."

Diet is a tradeoff, notes Taubes. If people eat less fat, "they will eat more carbohydrates and probably less protein," since most protein comes in foods such as meat that have considerable fat. A low-fat diet, then, is necessarily a high-carbohydrate diet, just as a low-fat cookie and a low-fat yogurt are necessarily high in carbohydrates. When the federal government began urging low-fat diets, Taubes says, the scientists and others involved hoped that Americans would balance their diets with fruits, vegetables, and legumes. But instead of eating broccoli, Americans simply loaded up on foods rich in carbohydrates. That "may even be worse" than a high-fat diet, Taubes reports.



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Throw Away That Science Book!

"Errant Texts" and "Where's the Book?" by Janet Raloff, in *Science News* (Mar. 17 & 24, 2001), 1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

*Don't know much about history,
Don't know much biology.
Don't know much about a science book,
Don't know much about the French I took.*

Those memorable lines from Sam Cooke's "Wonderful World," that golden oldie from 1960, could well be the anthem of American students today, to judge from the grades they regularly get on international tests in science and math. U.S. fourth graders did poorly in 1996, and four years later, as eighth graders, they did even worse, trailing their counterparts in 17 other countries. Ironically, a big part of the problem may be that very science book they don't know much about.

A recent study of the dozen physical-science textbooks most widely used in American middle-school classrooms found them riddled with errors, reports Raloff, a senior editor at *Science News*. Reviewers, led by John L. Hubisz, a physicist at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, compiled a list of mistakes 500 pages long. "Diagrams often did not display what the text or caption indicated," Raloff says. "Sometimes a book asked questions that were impossible to answer—either because it offered too little information (for example, the values for two dimensions when the student needed to compute volume) or because explanations necessary to solve a problem wouldn't appear for another couple [of] pages or even chapters." Scientific principles were often depicted or defined incorrectly.

But errors of fact are just part of the problem. Summarizing a 1999 study of 10 texts sponsored by the American Association for the

Advancement of Science, project director George Nelson says, "Even if the science had been 100 percent accurate, students still wouldn't learn from these books, because the instruction [in them] was inadequate." Often, legions of facts were crammed into the texts, with little to connect them.

The middle-school textbooks are typically put together by an editor working with contributions from contract writers who often have little control over the final product. And the results are less likely than high school and college science textbooks to be vetted by professional scientists.

One exception to the dismal rule, Raloff found, is *Introductory Physical Science* (1999, seventh rev. ed.), written by a team of scientists and science teachers, and warmly praised by textbook critics. Originally brought out by Prentice Hall in 1967, the book "briefly became a top selection for eighth- and ninth-grade classrooms," Raloff says. Since the early 1990s, it's been published by co-author Uri Haber-Schaim's firm, Science Curriculum. But the book doesn't sell well enough to have made Hubisz's study of the top dozen.

Some science educators want to get rid of the middle-school textbooks entirely, says Raloff. Larry Malone, a curriculum developer at the University of California's Lawrence Hall of Science in Berkeley, and others favor having students learn scientific principles and methods of analysis by working together on investigations of hypothetical oil spills, epidemics, and the like. Students, they hope, would then be singing a different song.

Enlightened Architecture

"X-Ray Architecture" by Ken Shulman, in *Metropolis* (Apr. 2001), 61 W. 23rd St., New York, N.Y. 10010.

For four years, Bill Price, a lecturer in the University of Houston College of Architecture, has been working on an invention that could be architecture's next cool thing, dramatically changing the way buildings (and other things) look and function: translucent concrete.

Price's quest began when he was director of research and development for the Office of Metropolitan Architecture, the Rotterdam firm of avant-garde architect Rem Koolhaas. "Could we make the concrete translucent?" Koolhaas asked at a meeting about a concert hall

the firm was designing. “Koolhaas may have been the first to utter the words,” notes Shulman, a *Metropolis* contributing editor, “but there’s no question that it’s Price’s baby.”

Price began a systematic analysis of concrete to find out which of its elements—aggregate (usually crushed gravel), binder (customarily cement), reinforcement (normally steel rods), and form—or which combination of elements, could best be made to transmit light. He came up with a translucent concrete made from a crushed-glass aggregate and a plastic binder; for reinforcement, he also turned to plastic. The initial samples of translucent concrete appeared two years ago. Lit from underneath, says Shulman, a sample poured block of

translucent concrete “seems to breathe light like the sun breaking through winter ice.”

“Price believes his material could be used in construction as well as for design objects: bathtubs, toilets, tables, even lamps and lampshades,” Shulman writes. But many questions—about thermal dynamics, seismic stability, and other crucial matters—remain. Tests so far are promising, Shulman reports, but large-scale applications may be many months, even years, away. The cost of the new material is likely to be high: perhaps five times greater than that of traditional concrete. But the price may be right if Price is right about the promise of see-through concrete.

Farewell to Linguistics?

“The End of Linguistics” by Mark Halpern, in *The American Scholar* (Winter 2001), 1785 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., 4th fl., Washington, D.C. 20036.

In today’s wars over English usage, strict constructionists battle a growing corps of linguistic freethinkers, who take an “anything goes” approach to language. After all, these anti-authority folk say, language is a living, growing thing. Why fetter it with artificial rules and regulations?

Rubbish, says Halpern. “Language is not living, not growing, and not a thing; it is a vast system of social habits and conventions, inherited from our forebears, and showing every sign of being an artifact rather than an organic growth.” It changes—but it does so “when we [emphasis added] change it, and the metaphor that makes it autonomous only obscures our real task, which is to consider just how and why we change it.”

What has given that metaphor of language as a natural and autonomous creature such influence? In large part, Halpern believes, the culprit is the failed science of linguistics. The modern discipline began with much fanfare in the 18th century. Sir William Jones’s recognition in 1786 of the relationships among Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit led to the idea of an Indo-European family of languages. And linguistic scholars’ subsequent efforts to identify other such relationships and families were so successful that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, linguistics seemed well on its way to becoming “a science—a discipline dedicated to

elucidating the laws that govern an order of nature.”

But linguistics has not lived up to its early promise, Halpern maintains. Since the 19th century, “no great new principles have been formulated, no epoch-making discoveries have been announced.” Not that linguists have not been busy on all sorts of interesting projects: “Some are in effect anthropologists, gathering linguistic data from remote peoples”; others, following linguist Noam Chomsky, “try to find ‘deep structure’ behind language’s façade”; still others study how children learn to speak, or try to teach apes or whales the basics of human language. But there’s no sign of the “comprehensive and unified theory of language” that would have cemented linguistics’ status as a “natural” science.

What does the future hold? Halpern predicts that linguistics “will be broken up, and its fragments annexed” by related disciplines, “as geography has been.” Good riddance, as far as he is concerned. The English language can only benefit if the educated public, led perhaps by writers and philosophers, regains authority over the way it is spoken and written. “In the hands of its most skillful users rather than in those of its academic observers, the language will take on not an independent life, but the dignity and efficiency of a tool shaped and wielded by its proper masters.”

Rewriting Literary History

"Racial Memory and Literary History" by Stephen Greenblatt, in *PMLA* (Jan. 2001), Modern Language Assn. of America, 26 Broadway, 3rd fl., New York, N.Y. 10004-1789.

The idea that nations have their own distinctive literary histories has come under strong scholarly assault in recent decades. Feminists, deconstructionists, and New Historicists have charged that traditional national literary histories, with their narratives of collective progress, give a false unity to what was a multicultural reality. But now, as feminist, black, Hispanic, and gay and lesbian scholars write their own literary histories, many are adopting the same traditional historical narrative of unfolding progress, even if not on the national level. In doing this, contends Greenblatt, a professor of humanities at Harvard University and a leading New Historicist, they are making "a serious mistake."

"It is one thing," he says, "to celebrate powerful literary achievements and to understand how new work can build on the work of the past; it is quite another thing to endorse a theory of evolutionary progress or steady, organic development that one knows is bankrupt." In *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* (1996), for instance, editors Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker "genially acknowledge that [their] sense of continuity is a fiction," Greenblatt says, yet they insist "it does not matter." But truth, he objects, does matter in writing literary history, as in any other form of history.

"If the assumptions of an originary or primordial culture or of a stable linguistic identity progressively unfolding through time or of an ethnic, racial, or sexual essence are misguided," he declares, "then they must not be embraced, even with a sly wink and a whispered assurance that the embrace is only ironic and performative." That way, he warns, lies "the most corrosive and ultimately self-defeating cynicism."

Today's literary historians, says Greenblatt, offer "no coherent arguments" to justify setting aside the "withering critiques" of the national literary narratives in order to use similar narratives in the service of "identity politics." They have not explained "why claims of racial memory or ethnic solidarity that are anything but progressive in the real-world politics of, say, Serbia, Rwanda, or Sri Lanka . . . should somehow be transformed when they are . . . canonized in literary history."

What is the right course now for literary studies? In Greenblatt's view, it is toward world history, written with "a sharp awareness" of the historical roles of mistakes, accidents, and tragedies. "We need to understand colonization, exile, emigration, wandering, contamination, and unexpected consequences, along with the fierce compulsions of greed, longing, and restlessness." Instead of merely putting "the hitherto marginalized groups" on the map, he says, the new literary histories "should transform the act of mapmaking."

EXCERPT

Painting Hits the Jackpot

The big event in the modern history of visual art was the invention of photography. A paradox: Photography (which competes with painting) was the loveliest gift painting ever got. The invention of photography meant that painting hit the jackpot—won a billion dollars in the lottery, quit its job, and was free to do whatever it felt like for the rest of history.

—David Gelernter, a professor of computer science at Yale University, in *Commentary* (Apr. 2001)

Manet's Hidden Talent

"The Potency of Pure Painting: Manet's Still Lives" by Karen Wilkin, in *The New Criterion* (Mar. 2001), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019; "The Urbane Innocent" by Peter Schjeldahl, in *The New Yorker* (Nov. 20, 2000), 4 Times Sq., New York, N.Y. 10036.

Édouard Manet (1832–83) is so much associated with large painted images of the human figure, in *Olympia* (1863), *Le Bar aux Folies-Bergère* (1881–82), and other masterworks, that even art critics Schjeldahl and Wilkin were surprised to learn how much of a still-life painter he was. The 80 or so still lifes he did during his brief career constitute a fifth of his oeuvre.

"I was even more surprised," writes Schjeldahl, "by a dawning conviction that still-life wasn't a sideline of his art but fundamental to it. What are his celebrated figure paintings but still-lives in which people are objects of a particular variety?"

Until *Manet: The Still-Life Paintings* opened at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris last fall, and then at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore this past winter, no major exhibition focusing on Manet's still lifes had ever been organized. Though the exhibition was "short on masterpieces," that "turns out to be a virtue,"

Schjeldahl says. "A viewer is admitted to the workshop of the artist's technique and rhetoric, which are indistinguishable from his soul."

Oysters (1862), which is considered Manet's first still life, and other works from the 1860s use motifs of earlier painters and "are self-consciously showy, exuding decorative panache," observes Schjeldahl. The other main group consists of still lifes done toward the end of Manet's life, when he was ill (probably with syphilis) and racked with pain. Most of these paintings, Schjeldahl says, "memorialize bouquets that were brought to him by friends: roses, peonies, lilacs, tulips, carnations, and pansies in glass or crystal vases against dark grounds. They are desperately moving."

The best of these later paintings, writes Wilkin, "are energetic and dazzling, with their rapidly evoked particularities of petals and the complexities of stems and leaves seen through water and crystal." Manet's greatest talent, it



Oysters (1862), by Édouard Manet

seems, may have been bringing inanimate objects to life.

Despite his most celebrated figure paintings, Manet was, in Schjeldahl's view, "a terrible portraitist—too respectfully well mannered and too shy, I think, to express anybody else's personality. He was also too honest, perhaps. (What mood, besides glum torpor, can a person who must hold still for hours and days convey?) Only when Manet's affection for a sitter is intense does a portrait sparkle."

"A painter can say all he wants to with fruit

or flowers or even clouds," Manet once told an artist friend. But he did not confine himself to still lifes. The naked women in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) and *Olympia* caused public scandals, which much vexed him. "Some critics who initially found *Le Déjeuner* or *Olympia* vulgar in subject and wanting in execution," notes Wilkin, "were receptive to Manet's treatment of inanimate objects." But while he wanted to please, he kept going his own way. "What is Manet's essential quality?" asks Schjeldahl. "I think it's innocence."

Longfellow's Footprints

"The Importance of Being Earnest" by Rochelle Gurstein, in *The New Republic* (Mar. 12, 2001), 1220 19th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Once deemed America's greatest poet by critics and public alike, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–82) has long since been relegated to the literary shadows. He deserves better, argues Gurstein, the author of *The Repeal of Reticence* (1996).

Longfellow's poetry was so popular during his career that he was able to quit his job as a professor of modern languages at Harvard University. He established his reputation with his first book of poetry, *Voices of the Night* (1839). "Nothing equal to some of [the poems] was ever written," novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne said. Longfellow became "a literary sensation," Gurstein notes, and 50 years later—after 12 volumes of poetry, five book-length poems (including *Evangeline*, *The Song of Hiawatha*, and *The Courtship of Miles Standish*), and many other works—his bust was placed in the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, to this day a unique honor for an American poet.

"Life is real! Life is earnest!" Longfellow proclaimed in "A Psalm of Life," one of his earliest poems. For Victorians, writes Gurstein, "to be in earnest meant recognizing that life was more elevated and more serious than money-making and sensual gratification. And this recognition entailed the assertion of a transcendent moral and spiritual order."

By the time of Oscar Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), however, earnestness had become a term of derision, Gurstein observes. "And by the time of the centenary celebration of Longfellow's birth in 1907, the revolt against

gentility and classicism was in full bloom." Longfellow and his age came to be accused of "shallowness, conventionality, sentimentality, moralism, and willingness to sacrifice art to didactic purposes." Modernists, favoring free verse, disdained Longfellow's long, rhyming, storybook poems. His "extraordinary prosodic virtuosity" now went largely unappreciated, says Gurstein. "What could be said for a poet who was not exercised by irony, tension, and paradox, whose utterance was distinguished by unaffected simplicity and clarity?" By the early 1930s, his reputation was shattered.

Longfellow's legacy has been almost reduced to the astonishing number of his lines that have come into common use: "Ships that pass in the night," "The patter of little feet," "Into each life some rain must fall," "Footprints on the sands of time," "When she was good, she was very, very good."

If his poetic achievement, judged on aesthetic grounds, is not first rank, Gurstein says, there is no denying his historical importance. And while complex and profound meanings usually are absent from his poetry, this is not always so. To his great translation of *The Divine Comedy* he affixed some of his own sonnets. One of them pays tribute to Dante, poetry, prayer, and the memory of his beloved wife, recently dead. "With this beautiful sonnet," Gurstein says, "Longfellow reminds us that the great poetry of the past was great not least because it transcended the confines of subjectivity and turned personal, unbearable, and ineffable experiences into a public expression of humility."

OTHER NATIONS

China's 'Political Lunatics'

"Judicial Psychiatry in China and Its Political Abuses" by Robin Munro, in *Columbia Journal of Asian Law* (Spring 2000), Columbia Law School, Rm. 116, 435 W. 116th St., New York, N.Y. 10027. Available online at www.law.washington.edu/clnet/features/articles/judicialpsychiatry2001.pdf

Beijing's two-year-old campaign to crush the Falun Gong spiritual movement has focused fresh attention on the Chinese regime's misuse of forensic psychiatry to suppress dissent. The abusive practice has been going on for decades in China, perhaps even to a greater extent than it did in

As the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) unfolded, Munro says, "the distinction between political crime and mental illness—one that had apparently been tenuous even at the best of times—was effectively abandoned." Until about 1978, two years after dictator Mao Zedong's death, the situation in China, he notes, was much like that in Europe in the Middle Ages: "The political or religious dissenter was viewed as being possessed by a deeply wicked, or 'counterrevolutionary,' form of madness, [while] the genuinely mentally ill were all too often condemned and punished as dangerous political subversives." A limited-circulation official Chinese report in 1981 stated that "numerous cases have been discovered of people who were obviously mentally ill but who were wrongfully imprisoned or even executed as 'political lunatics.'" But many Chinese who were arrested after shouting banned political slogans were suspected of mental illness—and then feigned the symptoms to avoid being



A policeman blocks a protester holding a banner of the banned sect Falun Gong at Beijing's Tiananmen Gate last January.

the Soviet Union, writes Munro, a senior research fellow at the University of London.

Soon after the Communist regime was established in 1949, at a time when political and religious dissent in the Soviet Union was beginning to be blamed on mental illness, Soviet-style forensic-psychiatric assessment centers were set up in Beijing, Shanghai, and other cities. By the early 1960s, if not before, Chinese leaders were aware of how the Soviets conducted political psychiatry, and very similar cases in China from that period later came to light.

executed, according to a former political prisoner who spent more than 16 years in various labor camps, detention centers, and prisons for the "mentally disordered." He himself, after his arrest in 1969, declared that he was quite sane—and just because he did *not* feign mental illness, his warders, using Catch-22 logic, regarded him as indisputably insane.

In 1979, "in the interests of revolutionary humanism," 4,600 mentally ill prisoners (by official count) were released. Many of them were older than 80, and one-third had spent 10 years or more in prison. The Chinese authorities, says

Munro, concluded that henceforth such “political lunatics” should be “placed in police-run psychiatric custody, rather than in regular prisons as before.”

The abuse of forensic psychiatry has continued, albeit, official accounts indicate, at a much reduced level. A 1987 study at one mental hospital—the same one where a Falun Gong adherent recently died, reportedly from ill treatment—found that seven percent of the “patients” had been institutionalized for “antisocial

political speech and action,” down from 54 percent in 1977. Still, Munro conservatively estimates that Chinese forensic psychiatric examiners have seen more than 3,000 “political” cases over the past two decades, with the great majority of the individuals then being put in some form of forced psychiatric custody and treatment. That total is well over the several hundred confirmed (and highly publicized) cases of such abuse in the Soviet Union during the 1970s and 1980s.

The Court Philosopher of Berlin

“Portrait: Jürgen Habermas” by Jan-Werner Müller, in *Prospect* (Mar. 2001),
4 Bedford Sq., London WC 1B 3RD, U.K.

Like Joschka Fischer, the erstwhile rock-throwing activist who is now German foreign minister, the world-renowned German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has moved away from radicalism in recent years and helped the Left to reconcile itself to liberal democracy and the German state. Indeed, Habermas is the unofficial court philosopher to Fischer and the Social Democrat-Green government in Berlin, writes Müller, author of *Another Country* (2000).

Heir to the Frankfurt school and its Marxist-Freudian “critical theory” about society, Habermas was intent during the 1950s on ridding German academic life of persistent Nazi influence. He vigorously opposed Martin Heidegger and other right-wing thinkers whom he deemed dangerous to the then-young West German democracy. “Habermas found an ideological antidote,” Müller says, “in a mixture of Marxism and an idealized version of British and U.S. democracy.”

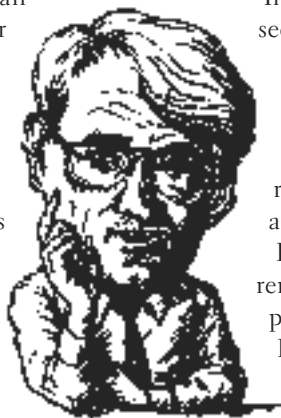
His first major work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), says Müller, “already contained his master idea—the connection between undistorted, domination-free communication and democracy.” Student radicals of the 1960s took up his criticisms of the way in which free debate

was distorted by private or sectional interests. “He was sympathetic to the student revolt,” says Müller, “yet he also warned the rebels” against trying to achieve social change through violence.

In *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968), Habermas argued that, contrary to Marx, communication was as vital as labor in the evolution of society. The book, which thus gave social scientists a significant “progressive” role to play, “caused great excitement on both sides of the Atlantic,” Müller says. Habermas next “made critical theory absorb the ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy, and synthesized huge areas of contemporary thought.” As he accomplished this, Müller notes, his writings became “even harder to understand”—which may have helped to make him a cult hero among academic Marxists in America.

In recent years, Habermas has seemed “to abandon any theoretical criticism of capitalism,” Müller says, “instead focusing on the importance of law in modern societies and on the relationship between liberalism and democracy.”

Patriotism, with its inevitable reminder of the Nazi era, has long posed a problem for Germans. Here, too, Habermas has found a middle way. During the 1980s, he strongly opposed “what he saw as an attempt to ‘sanitize’



Jürgen Habermas

German identity and relativize the Holocaust,” Müller says. Yet unlike, for instance, left-wing novelist Günter Grass, Habermas accepted German unification in 1990. Instead of ethnic nationalism, he advocates *Verfassungspatriotismus*, or constitutional patriotism, which, Müller explains, would be “a new form of ‘postnational’ political belonging, not just for Germany but for Europe as a whole.” Citizens would “transcend their particular national traditions,” and the German state

(like others) would “melt into a European federation of some kind.”

That proposal may have little appeal outside Germany. Still, says Müller, “Habermas’s constitutional patriotism has helped the radical 1968-ers—mostly no more than liberal social democrats today—to come to terms with their country, to have the old *Bundesrepublik* without the nightmare of *Deutschland*. For anyone who recalls the tension of the terrorism-ridden 1970s, that is no small thing.”

Castro’s Fig Leaf

“Cuba’s Road to Serfdom” by Carlos Seigle, in *Cato Journal* (Winter 2001), Cato Institute, 1000 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001-5403.

Since the loss of his Soviet patron, Fidel Castro has opened up Cuba to foreign investment. An estimated 4,500 companies from more than 100 countries now do business with Cuba. But because of a U.S. embargo, none of those companies are American. Castro blames the U.S. embargo for Cuba’s low level of foreign investment, but the real fault, contends Seigle, an economist at Rutgers University, lies with his mismanaged socialist economy.

Foreign firms in Cuba cannot hire Cuban workers directly. The firms pay the government an average of \$500 a month for each worker—and of that monthly amount, the government keeps an average of \$486, giving the worker only a \$14 wage. In a competitive labor market, the economist writes, wages would be much higher—and so would levels of employment, production, and foreign investment. Allowing Cubans, not just foreigners, to own private property would also help, he says.

During the 1990s, estimated foreign investment in Cuba totaled little more than \$188 million a year, in an economy with an estimated gross domestic product (in 1996) of \$16.2 billion.

After Castro opened Cuba to foreign investment, the United States responded by putatively strengthening the nearly four-decade-old embargo on trade with Cuba. In the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the so-called Helms-Burton legislation of 1996, Washington tried to ban foreign subsidiaries

of U.S. firms from doing business with Cuba and to impose penalties on foreign firms that did. But at the same time, Washington undercut the embargo by adopting “humanitarian” measures that let Cuban Americans send money to Cuban relatives and travel to the island, Seigle observes. During the 1990s, Cuban Americans sent an average of \$250 million a year in remittances to the island—much more than the annual amount of foreign investment in Cuba. And in 1999 alone, 124,000 Cuban Americans visited Cuba, using, for the most part, the Cuban government-operated travel service, Havanatur, and spending a “sizable” sum of money while there.

From the U.S. point of view, Seigle observes, the embargo made sense during the Cold War, because it forced the Soviet Union to divert more of its resources to propping up the Cuban economy. Today, however, the situation is different, and the embargo, with its “humanitarian” loopholes, is having only a “negligible” effect on the Cuban economy.

Even if the embargo were lifted, “the low returns to capital resulting from the mismanagement of the economy” guarantee there would be no major increase in foreign investment, Seigle believes. Without the embargo, Cuba would be “just one more capital-hungry country competing for funds” in a world full of investment opportunities. And Castro would lose his excuse for his regime’s economic failures.

RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

“Voting Technologies in the United States: Overview and Issues for Congress.”

Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C. 24 pp. Available to the public only at

www.house.gov/markgreen/crs.htm. Author: Eric A. Fischer

After the disputed vote count in Florida turned last fall’s presidential election into a hanging chad, there was much talk of election reform to ensure that America would never again be so bedeviled by undervotes, overvotes, and unintended votes. In an analysis of voting technologies now used in the United States, Fischer, a senior specialist in science and technology resources at the Congressional Research Service, makes it apparent that while improvement is possible, perfection is bound to remain elusive.

Five types of voting technology are now in use: punch cards (used in 37.4 percent of precincts); marksense, or optical scan, the same technology used in standardized tests (24.7 percent); lever machines (21.8 percent); electronic voting (7.3 percent); and paper ballots (2.9 percent). Mixed systems account for the balance. Lever machines (which are no longer made, though replacement parts remain available) and electronic systems can reduce the incidence of overvoting (i.e., voting for more candidates than permitted). But no system can prevent erroneous undervotes or unintended votes, Fischer says. Electronic systems, however, potentially can reduce undervotes by, for example, “indicating via a light or other mechanism the offices for which a voter has not yet cast a vote.” Some touchscreen electronic systems also can discourage unintended votes by letting the voter review a summary of the choices made before the ballot is cast. Internet voting, currently limited to demonstration projects, presents “special challenges for ensuring

authentication, secrecy, and security in the voting process,” Fischer notes.

The clarity of the ballot design can make a difference, as the infamous butterfly ballot in Palm Beach County showed. But design goals can conflict. Large type can enhance readability, for instance, but can push the ballot onto a second page, encouraging errors.

Elections are administered by states and localities through roughly 10,000 jurisdictions at the county level or below. Replacing an existing voting system in a jurisdiction might well cost \$1 million or more, Fischer says. Replacement “may therefore be considered a low priority compared [with] other needs, such as schools and roads.” Recent estimates of a nationwide upgrade in voting systems have ranged from \$2 billion to \$9 billion.

Some reformers urge adoption of a uniform national voting technology or a standard national ballot. But that could have drawbacks, observes Fischer. Since elections are often consolidated, with federal, state, and local candidates, as well as referendums and other items, on the same ballot, a standard national technology “might reduce the flexibility of local governments to respond to local circumstances.” Almost all states now use more than one basic type of voting technology, and a few use all five. “Some observers,” Fischer notes, “believe that the very diversity and decentralization of the voting systems used in the United States enhance the integrity of the voting process by making widespread tampering more difficult.”

“Intercollegiate Athletics: Four-Year Colleges’ Experiences Adding and Discontinuing Teams.”

U.S. General Accounting Office, P.O. Box 37050, Washington, D.C. 20013. 36 pp. No charge.

GAO-01-297. Available at www.gao.gov.

In part because of federal pressure on colleges and universities to achieve “gender equity,” the number of women’s athletic teams

at 1,310 four-year schools has mushroomed in recent decades, to the point where women’s teams now outnumber men’s (by 330). And

since the 1992–93 school year, reports Congress’s General Accounting Office, more than twice as many men’s teams (386) as women’s (150) have been discontinued.

Some 163,000 women (5.5 percent of female undergraduates) took part in intercollegiate sports in 1998–99, up from 90,000 in 1981–82. Soccer experienced the most growth—from 1,855 participants to 19,987. The net number of women’s athletic teams increased from 5,695 to 9,479.

On the other side of the gender ledger, about 232,000 men (9.3 percent of male

undergraduates) played in 1998–99 on 9,149 teams—some 12,000 more men and 36 more teams than in 1981–82. Football was the biggest sport, with more than 60,000 players in 1998–99, more than twice the number in the next biggest sport, baseball. Half of the men’s sports, including wrestling and gymnastics, experienced a decline in the number of teams.

Of the 1,191 schools that responded to a questionnaire, 948 added one or more women’s teams between the 1992–93 and 1999–2000 school years—and 72 percent did so without discontinuing any other teams.

“Breaking Away from Broken Windows: Baltimore Neighborhoods and the Nationwide Fight Against Crime, Grime, Fear, and Decline.”

Westview Press, 5500 Central Ave., Boulder, Colo. 80301–2877. 386 pp. Paperback. \$35.

Author: *Ralph B. Taylor*

“Illusion of Order: The False Promise of Broken Windows Policing.”

Harvard Univ. Press, 79 Garden St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138–1499. 304 pp. \$35.

Author: *Bernard E. Harcourt*

Few social-science propositions have been as influential as the famous “broken windows” thesis. Just as one broken window in a vacant building, if ignored, leads to more broken windows, argued political scientist James Q. Wilson and criminologist George L. Kelling nearly two decades ago, so disorder and petty crimes, if ignored, make law-abiding citizens fearful, put a neighborhood on the skids, and often lead to more serious crime. By attending to panhandlers, rowdy youths, and drunks, they argued, police could reduce serious crime and urban decay.

Police in New York and other cities began to take that advice in the mid-1990s—and, lo and behold, the crime rates fell. Other factors, such as demography and increased incarceration, were also at work, however [see *WQ*, Winter 2001, pp. 121–122]. Now, Taylor, a professor of criminal justice at Temple University, attacks the broken windows approach as less than it’s been cracked up to be, and Harcourt, a law professor at the University of Arizona, insists it is fundamentally flawed.

Drawing on extensive interviews and inspections of Baltimore neighborhoods over recent decades, Taylor finds that panhandlers and other disorderly persons, and

abandoned buildings, graffiti, and other forms of physical deterioration, did encourage some fear, crime, and neighborhood decline—but not as much as zealous advocates suppose. Looking at 66 neighborhoods selected in 1981, Taylor calculates that “incivilities” (disorder and deterioration), both as perceived by residents and independently assessed, made for higher neighborhood rates of assault and rape a decade later. Moreover, the independently assessed “incivilities” boosted the later homicide rates. Yet the pattern was inconsistent: None of the “incivility” indicators seemed to affect the later robbery rates.

Nor did any “incivility” indicators seem to contribute significantly to lowered neighborhood status (as reflected, for example, in a softening of the housing market). In neighborhoods where disorder and deterioration were independently judged extensive in 1981, poverty and vacancy rates increased faster than elsewhere. But when the “incivility” measure used was based on residents’ assessments, no similar pattern appeared.

Taylor’s conclusion: Police should not blindly assume that attending to “broken windows” is the best use of their resources. “Crime fighting may be more important

than grime fighting for long-term neighborhood preservation.”

Harcourt goes much further. Not only is there little solid evidence to support the broken windows thesis, he argues, but the very category of “disorder” is an imprecise and artificial one that is being used to justify

police crackdowns on people previously regarded as harmless nuisances. “Repressive” broken windows policing, he maintains, makes things worse, with “increased complaints of police misconduct, racial bias in stops and frisks, and further stereotyping of black criminality.”

WILSON CENTER DIGEST

“Veterans as Revolutionaries.”

A speech by Anthony J. Principi, U.S. secretary of veterans affairs, at a Wilson Center Director’s Forum, Mar. 14, 2001.

In 1932, thousands of Depression-scarred World War I veterans converged on Washington with their wives and children to demand immediate payment of promised future “bonuses.” Congress refused, most of the discouraged vets and their families went home, and the government resorted to armed force to disperse the many remaining diehards, one of whom was fatally shot. The significance of that “Bonus Army” protest was not lost later on officials planning for the reintegration of World War II veterans into postwar society, said Anthony J. Principi, the U.S. secretary of veterans affairs.

Soldiers returning from the battlefields can turn into “either an asset or a threat to the society they serve,” he noted. “History is littered with governments destabilized by masses of veterans who believed that they had been taken for fools by a society that grew rich and fat at the expense of their hardship and suffering.”

Partly to avert such unrest, the U.S. government offered generous benefits to the GIs returning from World War II—and ushered in a very different sort of revolution. “Much of what we now think of as normal in middle-class America,” Principi said, “is rooted in those GIs—and the veterans’ benefits they used to transform our country. . . . In many ways, veterans have been the point men in the revolutionary expansion of federal involvement in the lives of Americans.”

Before World War II, relatively few Americans went to college, Principi noted. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (the “GI Bill”) offered education benefits to veterans, including up to \$500 a year for college tuition. Between 1944 and 1956, the

federal government spent \$14.5 billion to help 7.8 million returning World War II veterans (slightly more than half of the total) to get a college education or vocational training. Since then, the government has vastly expanded higher-education subsidies and loans to the general population.

The GI Bill also offered home loans, Principi observed. Before the war, home purchases were hard to finance. “A long-term, no-down-payment home loan was unknown and, for most, homeownership was nothing but a dream.” GI loans helped some 4.3 million veterans buy homes in the decade after the war. Today, Washington offers a raft of mortgage subsidies to the population at large through institutions such as the Federal National Mortgage Association and the Federal Housing Administration.

After World War II, Principi said, the Veterans Administration health care system also “entered into a partnership” with private medical schools. An estimated 40 percent of physicians practicing today got at least part of their training in the VA health care system. VA medical research, he said, “led the way to a successful treatment for tuberculosis” and sped a number of technological advances.

Ironically, the “revolution” veterans wrought has meant that they now enjoy few benefits that the general population lacks, Principi noted. Their benefits are viewed differently today. Instead of being a reward for service, helping veterans find their way in civilian life and “catch up” with their peers who did not serve, the benefits now are simply “part of the remuneration package” given to members of the all-volunteer force.

CURRENT BOOKS

Reviews of new and noteworthy nonfiction

Who Lost Spain?

SPAIN BETRAYED:

The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War.

Edited by Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, and Grigory Sevostianov.

Yale Univ. Press. 576 pp. \$35

Reviewed by Christopher Hitchens

When Winston Smith first breaks off from reading the forbidden text in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), he reflects that the best books are the ones that tell you what you already know. I had a distantly comparable feeling on closing this volume. In a sense, I had always known that George Orwell was right in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938): Stalinism in Spain had been not an ally of the Republic and the revolution, but a fatal metastasis of an already lethal Soviet despotism. Yet Orwell's awareness of this had been partial and improvised, based on the data of personal experience and a combination of insight and instinct. As a result, he had gone to his grave in 1950—almost writing himself into it with the effort of producing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—more than half convinced that historical truth could never be salvaged from the ordure and mendacity heaped over it. This feeling, acquired in Barcelona while he was a volunteer in the anti-Fascist militia, had never left him. But now there is a Plaza George Orwell near the Barcelona waterfront, and—as the Stalinist show-trial convenors used to say—we have the documents and the confessions that vindicate him.

By a nice irony, these documents and confessions are supplied directly from the Stalinist sources themselves. A fair amount of instant history and sensational disclosure has resulted from the hasty or partial opening of

Soviet archives since the implosion of the USSR; it is good to be able to report that this volume, by contrast, is coherent and consistent, and has been prepared by professional scholars in two countries and three languages. The verdict is in: Everything that was ever suspected about the Comintern line in Spain turns out to have been true.

According to the conventional view, the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) was a tangle of factions and alliances, idealism and duplicity. Francisco Franco's Fascists had the support of Italy and Germany. Opposing Franco, the Republican Popular Front was aided by the Soviet Union and the International Brigades of volunteers. With time, the Republicans splintered. The anti-Stalinist Marxists supported an immediate workers' revolution, but the Communists insisted that revolution be postponed until after Franco's defeat—the line laid down by Stalin, the Republicans' putative ally. Orwell, however, suspected, as he wrote in *Homage to Catalonia*, that the Communists were seeking “not to postpone the Spanish revolution till a more suitable time, but to make sure that it never happened.”

Unearthing the truth is no mere antiquarian task. The argument about Spain is probably the one argument from the age of 20th-century ideology that is still

alive. You cannot any longer get into a hot-eyed, friendship-breaking dispute over collectivization, or the Moscow trials, or the Hitler-Stalin pact; all the essential concessions were made years ago, and the toxicity has leached out of the controversies. Yet I have seen people become seriously agitated in tussles over the American volunteers in the anti-Franco Abraham Lincoln Battalion, and have myself come close to blows in exchanges over the anti-Stalinist Marxist party, the POUM. (Indeed, for a while I was not on speaking terms with Ronald Radosh, one of the editors of this volume, because he had rashly told an interviewer, "I think it's fine that Franco won." We resumed conversations only after he said he regretted the remark.) To many people even on the merely liberal left, the Popular Front policy in Spain is the holiest of the old causes. Their illusion received a second life in the 1950s, when the less polished elements of the American Right accused those who had borne arms for the Spanish Republic of aiding Sovietism.

The evidence assembled here demonstrates that, to phrase it dialectically, the Soviet Union actually guaranteed Franco's victory. In cold print and in the words of the perpetrators, we learn how Moscow exploited the weakness of its Republican ally in order to fleece it through one-sided arms deals, how it sequestered Spain's gold reserves, and how it planted its own agents or nominees throughout the military and security services of the embattled Popular Front.

Some orthodox historians—most notably Paul Preston, but also Hugh Thomas—have for many years advanced the apparently commonsensical view that communism in



A propaganda poster supporting the Republican cause.

Spain furnished discipline, organization, and weaponry, the preconditions for a successful wartime strategy. In this view, dissension in the anti-Franco ranks and at the rear was at best a distraction, one that belonged in the province of disaffected intellectuals. Over the years, however, these disaffected intellectuals, especially Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz, have accumulated a body of evidence and argument that points in a diametrically opposite direction. Stalin and his surrogates, by fighting harder against the enemy within—principally the Catalan left opposition—than against Franco, put their own interests ahead of the survival of democracy, and exhibited the tendencies that were to become explicit in the Hitler-Stalin treaty that followed the eclipse of Spanish resistance.

I looked first in this volume at the documents about events familiar to me. There's no

room for doubt about the event Orwell described in *Homage to Catalonia*, the attempted Communist coup against the Republican government in Barcelona in May 1937. Far from being a spontaneous reaction to disorder, it was a carefully choreographed attempt to provoke a crisis and then take advantage of it. It is weirdly fascinating to read the letters sent from Spain to the desk of Marshal Voroshilov in Moscow, coldly analyzing the obstacles to a successful putsch. (There seems a high probability that this is the deadly prose of André Marty, the French Comintern agent whose reptilian character was caught by Ernest Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.)

A succeeding document would have interested Orwell very much if he had lived to see it. Regretting the failure of the party's initial plan, the author of the document tells Moscow of the need for a show trial of the Trotskyists and other subversive elements, along the lines of the macabre charade already enacted in the Soviet Union. (From Soviet secret police documents published by Alba and Schwartz, we already know that potential defendants before such a tribunal included Orwell and his wife.) There are

moments when documents seem to speak aloud: I am still reeling from this one.

The survivors of the International Brigades publish a journal that presumably will have to review this volume; it will be interesting to see how they confront the frigid cynicism of the archive. It is clear that the brave volunteers were repeatedly and systematically manipulated, and their reputation exploited, by a nexus of commissars whose names very often turn up in the later Stalinization of Eastern Europe. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, this book is not just another rebuke to misguided idealism. It shows that Spanish democracy was vital and vivid enough to resist the false friend in Moscow, to continue fighting Hitler's and Mussolini's mercenaries at the same time, and ultimately to outlive both communism and fascism. Some defeats are exemplary as well as moving, and the murder of the Spanish Republic is indubitably preeminent among them.

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Dream Depot

GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL:

Railroads, Engineering, and Architecture in New York City.

By Kurt C. Schlichting.

Johns Hopkins Univ. Press. 208 pp. \$26.50

GRAND CENTRAL:

Gateway to a Million Lives.

By John Belle and Maxinne R. Leighton. Norton. 192 pp. \$39.95

Reviewed by Tom Lewis

The spring of 1913 in New York saw three important events in America's cultural life. On lower Broadway, merchant prince Frank W. Woolworth opened the world's tallest skyscraper, a 792-foot Gothic masterpiece whose height would not be eclipsed until the completion of the

Chrysler Building in 1930. On seeing the five-and-ten tower, the popular Methodist divine Samuel Parkes Cadman declared it nothing less than St. John's vision of paradise and proclaimed it the "Cathedral of Commerce." In the 69th Regiment Armory on Lexington Avenue, the International



Sunlight streams through Grand Central Terminal's unobstructed windows in an early 20th-century photograph.

Exhibition of Modern Art introduced Americans to 1,600 avant-garde European and American works. While the curious professed shock at Marcel Duchamp's cubist *Nude Descending a Staircase*, more thoughtful viewers understood that they were witnessing a profound change in modern aesthetics. And, on 42nd Street, the new Grand Central Terminal opened. Travelers immediately recognized Grand Central as more than just a station. It was a soul-uplifting monument, a dramatic entrance to a great city. When you stepped off the train from South Bend or Toledo or Rochester into the marble-walled main concourse and looked up at the constellations on the barrel-

vaulted ceiling 125 feet above, you knew you had arrived.

The story of Grand Central is a true American tale, featuring selfless heroes and self-serving villains, visionary designers and rapacious developers—plus a triumphal ending. A professor of sociology at Fairfield University, Kurt C. Schlichting writes with deep understanding of Grand Central's engineering feats and artistic qualities. Though John Belle was the principal architect in Grand Central's recent restoration, and Maxinne Leighton is an associate partner in Belle's firm, the two have produced a careful appreciation of the termi-

nal's architectural history rather than a self-promoting puff piece. The publication of two books on the same subject within a year often leads to questions of which is better. In this case, we have eloquent companions rather than rivals: Schlichting's book largely considers the engineering and construction of Grand Central, while Belle and Leighton's considers the great terminal's cultural importance, as well as its preservation and restoration.

Grand Central as we know it first existed in the mind of a self-taught engineer from Buffalo, William J. Wilgus. By the turn of the century, the once imposing and elegant Grand Central Depot that Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt had built on the site in 1871 seemed seedy and dangerous. The *New York Times* condemned it as "a cruel disgrace to the metropolis." But development around the depot prohibited horizontal expansion. Wilgus, chief engineer of the New York Central Railroad, proposed a solution in 1902: Use the same land and build a new terminal vertically.

Under Wilgus's plan, trains would arrive and depart on two underground levels—79 acres of train yard between Lexington and Madison Avenues stretching north to 56th Street. A loop track would eliminate the switching and shunting needed to get departing trains headed in the right direction. Electricity would replace steam as the motive force for the engines. Most important, the railroad would sell the "air rights" above the buried tracks. The vast, grimy train yard would be transformed into city blocks bustling with people—and the sale of these rights would finance the new terminal. "Thus from the air," Wilgus said, "would be taken wealth."

It's difficult to overstate the importance of Wilgus's proposal. Before Wilgus, the tracks serving Grand Central ran along the surface of what is now Park Avenue. The rails divided communities and brought urban blight. (One need only compare the difference in land value between, say, 87th Street and Park Avenue, where the tracks run underground, and 10 blocks north at 97th Street, where they emerge into Harlem.) And the "Terminal City" that Wilgus envisioned would be erected on the air rights ultimately became a well-integrated mix of hotels, apartments, and

office buildings, anticipating by several decades the development at New York's Rockefeller Center.

In the years that followed his proposal, Wilgus solved the vast three-dimensional puzzle of excavating the train yards and constructing a new underground terminal without disrupting train service. He planned the conversion of the engines from steam to electricity and negotiated with General Electric to build the locomotives. Collaborating with another engineer, Wilgus even designed a safety cover to protect workers from the third rail. When the first of the new locomotives pulled out in September 1906, Wilgus sat at the controls.

Five months later, it all went sour. One of the new electric locomotives flew off the tracks while rounding a bend in the Bronx. Twenty passengers died and scores more were injured. The New York district attorney investigated Wilgus for negligence, and, though he defended himself vigorously, his relationship with the New York Central officers deteriorated. He resigned in September 1907. At that point, William J. Wilgus became a non-person in the history of Grand Central, forgotten by all but a few.

While Wilgus is responsible for the creation of the underground terminal, Whitney Warren may take credit for most of Grand Central above ground. His story is not always honorable. Initially, Warren's architectural firm was to build the new terminal in collaboration with a St. Louis firm, Reed and Stem, whose principal contribution to the project is the ramps that enable passengers to move easily through the terminal's various levels. When a partner in the St. Louis firm died, Warren connived for his own firm to become the sole architects. Though neither book speculates on the motive, we can probably attribute Warren's machinations to his enormous ego. Recognizing Grand Central's importance to New York, America, and architectural history, he wanted his name to stand alone as that of its architect. For this breach of professional ethics, the American Institute of Architects expelled Warren from its ranks.

Ethical considerations aside, we owe to Warren and his patron William K. Vanderbilt, grandson of the Commodore, the monumental Grand Central we see today. While Reed

and Stem had proposed a 12-story office building for the site, Warren substituted a classical Beaux-Arts terminal with only limited commercial space. It was Warren, too, who commissioned the gargantuan statue of Mercury flanked by Minerva and Hercules for the terminal's south face. In the final analysis, Warren truly was the chief architect of Grand Central.

The opening of Grand Central marked the high point of passenger rail travel and the high point of civic responsibility on the part of America's railroads. Automobiles were about to open up new suburban lands, just as the railroads had earlier. In the decades that followed, as the market shrank and money became dearer to the railroads, the quality of passenger service declined. More and more rail executives seemed to be living by the maxim first uttered by William Vanderbilt's father: "The public be damned."

When America fell into the Great Depression, Grand Central began to feel pressure from sources other than the automobile and indifferent rail executives. In 1932, while workers were putting the final touches on the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, one of the last buildings in the Terminal City, New York's Museum of Modern Art mounted a show of Bauhaus architecture. Philip Johnson, the director of the museum's architecture division, declared the Beaux-Arts school dead. Serious architects began rejecting dense brick and stone for other styles, ultimately open-box skeletons covered in glass. In the 1950s, Johnson worked with Mies van der Rohe to design the Seagram Building, which replaced the Montana Apartments, one of the original buildings of Terminal City.

By then, as Belle and Leighton make clear, the New York Central Railroad had fallen into the hands of stock manipulators, who greedily looked to the real estate at 42nd Street as a way of turning a quick profit. They tarted up the main concourse, first with a giant Kodak photo screen that obliterated the east balcony, and then with a huge clock advertising *Newsweek*. On the floor level, Merrill Lynch built a sleek booth with ticker-tape machines, and Chrysler installed a display of its latest-model cars.

Having marred the inside, real estate moguls turned their attention to the outside.

Here they had the aid of ego-driven, arrogant architects. In 1954, I. M. Pei proposed replacing Grand Central with a 108-story "hyperboloid" skyscraper that suggested an oversized cooling tower for a nuclear plant. Fortunately, the project went nowhere. In 1963, however, developers did succeed in constructing a 59-story glass-and-concrete octagonal pile known as the Pan Am building behind the station.

Then, in 1968, Marcel Breuer designed a 55-story skyscraper resembling a massive tombstone that would be cantilevered over Grand Central. Meeting resistance, Breuer designed a second tombstone that would obliterate the exterior of the terminal. When New York's Landmarks Preservation Commission used its authority to reject these proposals, Breuer accused it of thwarting the "natural growth of the city. Sooner or later, there is absolutely no doubt a skyscraper will be built above the Terminal." Others were not so sure. A group of citizens, including Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and an older and wiser Philip Johnson, created a Committee to Save Grand Central. "If we don't care about our past," Onassis said, "we cannot hope for our future." In 1978, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the landmark status of Grand Central. It was a victory for preservationists across the nation. By the end of the century, the great terminal had been restored to its former grandeur.

While we should honor William J. Wilgus for the terminal's underground tracks and air rights and Whitney Warren for its Beaux-Arts façade and awe-inspiring concourse, we must credit the Metropolitan Transit Authority and the architect John Belle for a restoration of Grand Central that is sensitive, painstaking, and, above all, quiet. Down came the Kodak sign and *Newsweek* clock. Out went the ticker-tape machines and automobiles. Warren possessed an ego as great as the age in which he lived; Belle saw his job as preserver of a sacred space. Rather than impose a new order of his own, he was content to restore the order that once had been. This meant reconstructing passageways that had been obliterated in the name of commerce, and implementing Warren's plans fully. Belle has made Grand Central a grand, transcendent experience once again.

>TOM LEWIS, a professor of English at Skidmore College, is the author of *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (1997).

The New Morality

MORAL FREEDOM:

The Search for Virtue in a World of Choice.

By Alan Wolfe. Simon & Schuster. 256 pp. \$24.95

Reviewed by Jean Bethke Elshtain

If sociologist Alan Wolfe is right about where our culture stands on moral matters, we're in trouble. Americans embrace what he terms "moral freedom," which means tailoring moral norms to the moment. It means considering *all* the options before choosing a course of action, because the process of choosing is itself the overriding good. It means being faithful to who you *really* are, because in that fidelity lies a salutary honesty. And it means rejecting every fixed standard of right and wrong, every norm, rule, law, and belief that is external to yourself.

For this book, as for his earlier *One Nation, After All* (1998), Wolfe helped design a public-opinion poll and then oversaw in-depth interviews with randomly chosen Americans—in this case, two dozen people from each of eight "distinct communities," including the Castro district in San Francisco, Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Fall River, Massachusetts. Methodological choices invariably slant research results, and it's telling that some of Wolfe's questions provided a narrow range of options on complex matters. Are people born with character, he asked, or do they acquire it? The vast majority of respondents said character is acquired, which Wolfe takes to mean they're opposed to the notion of original sin. One prevailing tradition of moral thinking in the West, however, holds that although we are born with an inheritance of sin, we are nonetheless called to conform to moral norms. Cultures pay special attention to families, churches, schools, and other institutions of moral formation precisely so that children can be made decent, kind, and responsible. Wolfe's options bleach out that complex view. Your choice is either original sin, which Wolfe equates with determinism, or acquired character. You're not permitted to mix the two.

Take a second example. In Wolfe's poll, nearly three-quarters of respondents agreed

that "all people are born inherently good." By contrast, the Western tradition to which I've alluded argues that we are born neither good nor bad. At birth, we lack a developed norm of conduct and moral culpability. But we're born with free will—divided wills—and so moral conflict is inevitable. Over time, we come to know moral norms, and we orient ourselves toward either good or evil. Eventually, as adults, we can be held morally responsible. The whole process underscores once again the importance of moral development through key institutions. But Wolfe's prototypical Americans mistrust the basic institutions of their society. They "look with suspicion" on families, churches, and schools. And why not? There's nothing to aspire to if you're simply born good. You just do what comes naturally.

Throughout this briskly written work, the interview data are often so seamlessly interwoven with Wolfe's commentary that it's hard to tell where one strand ends and the other begins. What's clear is that those who speak of loving their neighbors as themselves, who enjoin us to "think of an entire community," who believe that it's possible for people to make the wrong choices—and that they should be called to account when they do—are a distinct minority. They are the people Wolfe calls "conservatives."

The understanding of moral freedom reflected here makes it difficult, if not impossible, to chastise those who violate even the moral mean, however modest it may be. So long as people consider "all possible actions before deciding which one to take," they're acting in moral freedom, according to Wolfe. It follows that a person accused of a moral violation can reply that he was abiding by the standard he chose, so what's the problem? From time to time, Wolfe asks pointed questions about America's slide downward to the lowest common moral denominator, but for the most part he seems to march in time with his respondents.

The majority of respondents equate our capacity to make judgments with small-minded judgmentalism, and the articulation of moral norms with narrow moralism. If you harm only yourself or other consenting adults (as in sadomasochistic experimentation), what you do is nobody else's business. Harm, for folks who think that way, is direct injury only. The social costs of patterns of behavior go largely uncalculated.

So, for example, "the divorce rate" isn't "necessarily a bad thing," in the words of one interviewee. Wolfe depicts divorce as a last resort "when abuse and violence spin out of control." Of course divorce seems a good thing under such circumstances. But those who lament a divorce culture, Wolfe's moral conservatives, do not argue that divorce should be impossible—and certainly not impossible in cases of terrible cruelty. Rather, they worry about the social costs of divorce and criticize a culture in which it is anything but a last resort. If each individual is to be the final arbiter of what counts as cruel treatment, we sacrifice serious reflection on when divorce is an agonizing necessity and when it is more akin to a consumer option.

Wolfe's respondents on the whole believe that one should tailor moral norms to "the needs of real people," and that "any form of higher authority" should conform to the same needs. But how can we think intelligibly about needs without a way to think as well about distorted desires? In Wolfe's account, moral freedom requires you to be faithful to what you "really are," and puts a premium on subjective claims about personal authenticity. It's not surprising that an interviewee who's exploring sadomasochism opposes "limits on the right of a person to engage in explorations that might teach him more about his desires." If we accept that as an instance of authenticity in practice, and agree that authenticity is a good thing, how do we oppose those who "really are" something quite harmful—pedophiles, for example? They, too, will claim the right to "engage in explorations" that "teach" about "their desires." If we take pains to prevent people from engaging in destructive behavior, we're imposing outside norms—and that's moral conservatism for Wolfe, and antithetical to moral freedom.

Even as most of Wolfe's respondents express the belief that you should not make moral demands of people, they retain what he calls a "nostalgic longing for the old days," when moral matters were judged differently. But why is it nostalgia to find genuine worth in past human patterns of behavior? Why not think of it instead as the product of tough-minded, historically grounded social learning?

Moral freedom, the heart and soul of what it means to hold human beings responsible for their actions, isn't a new idea, despite Wolfe's claim that no generation before our own was morally free. Surely the pithiest statement of moral freedom remains St. Paul's: "That which I would, I do not. That which I would not, that I do." We have a choice. Perhaps we fall down on the job. That's called "backsliding," and I, like many other Americans, heard a good deal about it while growing up. You may fail, but you have another chance. You need not repeat your infraction. You need not capitulate to the lowest common denominator. To be sure, not all our great moral teachers have emphasized the opportunity we have to put things right, but without exception all have raised up a standard to which we can aspire. If we reduce moral norms to "actual behavior," we lose any standards that call us to something higher.

Too many Americans have a flawed and confused understanding of freedom. They believe, at once, that people should be free to "choose how to live" *and* that people should not consider themselves "unbound by moral rules." But once you opt for such rules, you risk being called "judgmental" and "Victorian." So you don't criticize how people actually behave because only they can judge whether they're bound in any way.

If Wolfe is correct, we Americans have become a nation of moral free-riders. We're glad that some people still adhere to a moral standard we ourselves find narrow, limiting, stuffy, and, worst of all, judgmental. And we live off the moral capital such folks continue to generate. But thank goodness we're not one of them.

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HISTORY

THE HOLOCAUST ENCYCLOPEDIA.

Edited by Walter Laqueur.

Yale Univ. Press. 816 pp. \$60

Though the Nazi murder of six million European Jews was obscured or ignored by Allied governments and newspapers while it was happening, and though it registered hardly at all in the public consciousness of the United States, Britain, and other countries at the time, the Holocaust has come to occupy a central place in the popular memory of World War II, in some ways even eclipsing the fighting itself. The impact isn't surprising. As a military operation, the war differed from its predecessors principally in its gargantuan scale. By contrast, the Holocaust—what the late historian Lucy Dawidowicz termed “the war against the Jews”—differed from previous mass killings in its fundamental nature, its focus, and its ferocity.

The effort to murder every Jew who could be found constitutes one of the defining events of the 20th century, the underside and mockery of our march toward modernity, and a moral and social touchstone for the new millennium. Small wonder, then, that the number of histories, memoirs, works of fiction and art, musical compositions, and memorials that focus on the Holocaust continues to multiply. It's as if the years render us increasingly desperate to examine the Holocaust, plumb its depths, and represent its meaning for this and future generations.

All of which makes the appearance of *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* both timely and propitious. The subject is so large and varied, with dimensions that fall under so many academic disciplines, that it is well served by an encyclopedia. An earlier, four-volume *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (1990), edited by Israel Gutman, was a breakthrough achievement, and it remains indispensable for those who want information, often in significant depth, about one or another aspect of the event. This new encyclopedia not only offers its material within a single volume, but also deepens and complements the previous effort by taking into account information that has become available during the past decade. Laqueur, cochairman of the International Research Council of the

Center for Strategic and International Studies, deserves considerable gratitude, as do associate editor Judith Tydor Baumel, the many contributors, and the staff of Yale University Press.

Unlike most encyclopedias, this one can actually—and profitably—be read. With the context provided by Laqueur's fine preface, and with the assistance of the chronology that opens the encyclopedia, even someone with little knowledge of the Holocaust can delve into individual topics and get a sense of their relationship to the subject as a whole. Some entries offer particularly good, if necessarily brief, expositions on important matters: Raul Hilberg on Auschwitz, the late Sybil Milton on art, Wolfgang Benz on the death toll, Nechama Tec on resistance in Eastern Europe. Entries on topics that could have been overlooked, such as “First-Person Accounts,” which covers diaries, memoirs, and oral histories, are also especially useful. In this time of Holocaust denial, the entries “Gas Chambers” and “Final Solution: Preparation and Implementation” have particular value. And the comprehensive bibliographical essay points the interested reader to books on many of the topics that an encyclopedia can cover in only a few pages or paragraphs.

Indeed, *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* is full of fine contributions, some of them quite original. Libraries and schools, as well as individuals interested in an event that has sobered humanity's sense of its possibilities, should welcome this authoritative, illuminating, and accessible volume.

—WALTER REICH

WHEN WE LIKED IKE: Looking for Postwar America.

By Barbara P. Norfleet. Norton.

159 pp. \$35

I find it difficult to accept the title's past tense, for I continue to like Ike, who employed me at the White House Conference on Education in 1956. And the whole idea of looking for a postwar America confuses me a little—after all, postwar America still surrounds us. I do appreciate, however, the many photographs of my Aunt Liz (or did I just make her up?) assembled by Norfleet, a photo archivist



An Ike supporter in 1952

at Harvard University. There are beautiful young women in these pages, and sometimes what seems to be my whole family tree. The book is a good extension of Edward Steichen's *The Family Of Man* (1955).

And yet I wish that Norfleet somehow could show postwar America's impact on those of us who returned after a seemingly endless time away. Military service had given us a kind of self-control and dignity. The wartime agonies seemed to melt away, leaving us, in our own opinion at least, stronger than ever. The war changed the nation too, and we came back to a strange new world, which gave us a lot.

That world still seems alien. Some photos in *When We Liked Ike* provoke the eerie feeling of wandering among strangers. There are few smiles on display, though I am glad to see that, as a sign proclaims, there will be no profane language at any time.

—SLOAN WILSON

**SEEKING VICTORY ON
THE WESTERN FRONT:
*The British Army and Chemical
Warfare in World War I.***

By Albert Palazzo. Univ. of Nebraska Press. 245 pp. \$50

Though World War I has been written about exhaustively, Palazzo offers a genuinely fresh dimension by focusing on the British army's extensive and imaginative use of gas. The Germans may have pioneered its use in

1915, but the British developed it, devised and put into mass production the most lethal chemicals, and provided their troops with by far the better gas masks. Above all, the British incorporated gas into their operational doctrine and training in a methodical way, a key consideration in the defense of Field Marshal Douglas Hague and his much maligned staff against the usual charge that they were unimaginative butchers.

In 1915, Major Charles Foulkes of the Royal Engineers took command of the Special Brigade, as the chemical warfare unit was formally known. An inventive bunch, many of them drawn from universities and chemistry labs, the Special Brigade experimented with pepper sprays, itching powder, nicotine, and other poisons before concentrating on phosgene and mustard gas. (They also developed flame-throwers.) Their work was reasonably well known in the 1920s and 1930s, partly through Foulkes's memoir, *Gas!* (1934). But the dominance of tanks in World War II, along with the decision on both sides to avoid gas, has blurred the focus of modern military historians. Palazzo, a research associate at the Australian Defense Force Academy, does a service in restoring awareness of the prominent role of gas and demonstrating that it was part of a new British military doctrine of combined arms.

The Allied victories of 1918 are usually said to start with the Battle of Amiens on August 8, which the German commander Erich Ludendorff described in his diaries as "the black day of the German army." Palazzo, after describing the earlier British efforts with gas at the battles of Loos and the Somme, focuses instead on the small Battle of Hamel on July 4. It was here that the Fourth Australian Division, supported by four companies of American troops, fought one of the most successful and most significant actions of the war. Through the combined use of gas, tanks, and artillery, along with tactical surprise, they showed that the stalemate on the Western front could be broken.

It was not gas alone but the incorporation of gas into a wider offensive strategy that brought success. The British calibrated each individual gun barrel and calculated the effects of wind and temperature to ensure that guns could hit targets the first time, without the traditional ranging shots that would have alerted the Germans to their

presence. They also used gas in the days before the attack as a morale weapon, drenching the approaches through which German ration parties brought food and drink and ammunition by night to the front lines. The British had so much of the stuff that they would routinely continue gas bombardments for days at a time, knowing that at some point the German gas masks would be overwhelmed. And they would mix their fire, using shrapnel to force the German troops to take cover in trenches and dugouts, where the follow-up rounds of gas would be most lethal. From research in the archives of artillery units and the Ministry of Munitions, Palazzo demonstrates that by 1918 British barrages were routinely half gas and half high explosive.

At the Ministry of Munitions, Winston Churchill was so enthusiastic that he promised to triple the number of gas shells in 1919 if the war continued. By the time of the Armistice in November 1918, the British, French, and American armies were all enthusiastic converts to the new potential of chemical warfare. The heartening surprise is that, in the 1920s and 1930s, memories of the horrors and a strong pacifist sensibility produced such public outrage that statesmen sought to ban gas warfare and generals agreed to abjure it.

—MARTIN WALKER

LAW WITHOUT VALUES:
The Life, Work, and Legacy of
Justice Holmes.

By Albert W. Alschuler. Univ. of Chicago Press. 325 pp. \$30

When I ask law students to name three leading Supreme Court justices, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841–1935) always gets mentioned. Was he, as the students maintain, one of the great liberal justices on the Court? The answer is a definite maybe.

Along with those who resolutely defend Holmes's liberal credentials, there are those who vigorously challenge them. Grant Gilmore, selected by the Holmes estate to write the justice's authorized biography (a project he never completed), reached this conclusion: "Put out of your mind the picture of the tolerant aristocrat, the great liberal, the eloquent defender of our liberties, the

Yankee from Olympus. All that was a myth, concocted principally by Harold Laski and Felix Frankfurter, about the time of World War I. The real Holmes was savage, harsh, and cruel, a bitter and lifelong pessimist who saw in the course of human life nothing but a continuing struggle in which the rich and powerful impose their will on the poor and weak."

Alschuler, a professor at the University of Chicago Law School, quotes Gilmore's statement, adopts it, and makes it his theme. He charges that Holmes injected a poisonous skepticism into the body of American law, that he permitted government to behave unjustly, and, worst of all, that he did not believe in a divinely imposed distinction between right and wrong. The book bespeaks careful scholarship and a long-term, intense, and, one might say, obsessive interest in Holmes and his legacy.

Like other Holmes biographies (this is the fourth in 12 years), *Law without Values* says much about the main event in Holmes's life, the battlefield woundings he suffered as a Union soldier in the Civil War. For the rest of his years, Holmes reflected on his military service. He often described life itself as a battle carried on by soldiers blindly following orders drafted by an unseen hand.

After the war, Holmes attended Harvard Law School. He did some teaching. He wrote *The Common Law* (1881), a book that is still in print, still being scrutinized by cheerleaders and detractors. He tried practicing law but didn't like it. When offered an appointment to the Massachusetts state trial court, he grabbed it. In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed him to the Supreme Court, where he served for 30 years.

Moral preferences are "more or less arbitrary," Holmes wrote. "Do you like sugar in your coffee or don't you? . . . So as to truth." He believed that these "more or less arbitrary" choices ought to be made by legislators, not judges, so he was disinclined to strike down laws as unconstitutional. He voted to uphold progressive laws (hence, in part, his liberal reputation), but he also voted to uphold regressive ones. The author blames Holmesian moral skepticism for some of the social disintegration we see today—no discipline, no standards. Strange that Holmes, a man who imposed

strict military discipline on himself, should be indicted for such an offense.

During his long lifetime, Holmes worked hard, read widely, knew many of the great personages of the day, and, especially in his letters,

grappled with the big subjects—history, philosophy, literature, life, and death. After all the shot and shell, this intriguing figure remains standing.

—JACOB A. STEIN

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON.

By Meg Greenfield. PublicAffairs.
272 pp. \$26

Meg Greenfield richly enjoyed stories about the peculiar characters whose talents and ambitions (or hungers) led them to assume roles on the national political scene. When she began her career as a Washington reporter, the vast majority of such persons were those elected to public office by their less driven fellows in the rest of the country. Another sizable number were staffers, bit players empowered and obligated by their politician bosses. Later on, masses of journalists joined the scene, either in print or on the tube. By the time she became editorial page editor of the dominant paper in the capital, the Washington stage was crammed with politically interested men and women, talking and writing up a storm, measuring and rating as they schmoozed, using others at least as often, and as effectively, as they themselves got used.

Greenfield's memoir, published two years after her death, depicts this political tableau in rather muted colors. It is not a Daumier or a Nast, in which political actors fairly leap off the canvas or page. It is more like a carefully composed setting by the American painter William Merritt Chase. There are beautiful disclosures in Chase's paintings; he knew the environment inhabited by late-19th-century gentlefolk, and rendered it well. Yet few of his works had the pulse and heat of common life. In the same way, Greenfield's elaborate, witty observations have the feel of occurring to her not on the street, or even in the newsroom, but in the quiet of the editorial office.

There are, to be sure, amusing snapshots of the political animal. "I haven't done anything scientific to corroborate this," she writes, "but it does seem to me that an awful lot of our national political leaders established their reputations for

special moral worthiness and a sense of responsibility beyond their years precisely against the backdrop of that entirely different sibling who slept in the next bed—the defiant player-around, breaker of rules, and flunker-out, who, though often the more charming of the two, was always either in trouble or just about to be. Let your mind range over the astonishing number of exhibitionists, rogues, and ne'er-do-wells who have turned up in the exalted role of First Brother, for instance—people like Sam Houston Johnson, Donald Nixon, Billy Carter, and Roger Clinton. Right along with their willingness to exploit their presidential brother's status, many have betrayed a smirking disdain for Mr. Goody Two-Shoes and a self-centered indifference to whether or not they caused him embarrassment with their kited checks and turbulent nights spent drying out in the local jail."

Whether Bill Clinton was ever precisely a Mr. Goody Two-Shoes can be argued, but the passage has a wonderful plausibility, and it embodies many of the concerns Greenfield wrote about for nearly 40 years: the moral character and personality of politicians; the attractions of charming rascals, and the need to deal with, to manage, both their charm and their rascality; the sense that arguments over policy, and even over such things as conviction and ultimate purpose, were often less significant to those involved in them than were things like loyalty and rooted connections. She writes with affecting sympathy about Bob Haldeman, whom her *Washington Post* regularly skewered in its pages, and his son Peter, as they struggled to maintain the bonds between them in a time of awful stress. In the din of Watergate denunciations and high-minded preachments, many of them issuing from the *Post*, Greenfield heard the whisper of the vulnerable.

There should be more such stories in *Washington*. The painter's strokes should have

been bolder, more vivid. Or, to change the metaphor, her clever insights and musings should have found their way into a novel—in the manner, say, of a modern Trollope. Perhaps in that novel there might have been more room to say what these Washington characters, at least the elected ones among them, were trying to accomplish, and in what ways they remained involved with citizens outside the Beltway. Throughout her long career, Greenfield cared much about such things, and her last work would have been richer for her reflections on them.

—HARRY MCPHERSON

***THE RACE TO THE BOTTOM:
Why a Worldwide Worker Surplus
and Uncontrolled Free Trade***

Are Sinking American Living Standards.
By Alan Tonelson. Westview. 225 pp. \$25

In the 1990s, the Washington consensus held that free trade and deregulated markets would best promote prosperity in countries at all stages of development. This “neoliberal” consensus was shared not only by conservatives and libertarians but by center-left advocates of the Third Way, such as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, who sought to reconcile progressive redistribution programs with free-market economics. Tonelson, a research fellow at the U.S. Business and Industry Council, provides a well-informed and often witty assault on the conventional wisdom.

He argues that economic globalization, by enlarging the pool of low-wage labor, tends to reduce wages in advanced countries—a point now acknowledged by some free-trade supporters, such as Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati. Tonelson writes that the trade-induced “movement of U.S. workers from high-wage industries to low-wage industries has hit U.S. wage levels with a double whammy. It has lowered wages by greatly reducing the number of Americans working in high-paying jobs [in the manufacturing sector]. In addition, it has just as greatly increased the number of Americans competing for jobs in the lower-paying service sector.” To make matters worse, immigration has depressed service-sector wages further. California, he observes, “was importing people while exporting their likeliest jobs.”

This is dangerous, Tonelson argues, because “alone among the industrialized first world countries, the United States has a large population with what might be called Third World levels of education and skills. Other countries can in theory let labor-intensive industries like apparel or traditional manufacturing industries like textiles and steel migrate abroad without undue social fallout. . . . The United States, however, has more to worry about.”

In addition to questioning the conventional wisdom about how free trade and mass immigration affect ordinary Americans, Tonelson argues that other countries do a better job of promoting the interests of their companies and their workers. For example, China, South Korea, and many other developing nations require U.S. multinationals “to transfer technology, to provide investment capital for other parts of the buyer’s economy, or to purchase goods completely unrelated to the original transaction.” Such governments strategically shape the pattern of global trade and investment, contrary to the oft-heard claim that the global economy is shaped by market forces before which governments stand powerless.

Tonelson’s alternative to the free-market consensus is a robust American economic nationalism. Such a policy might hurt some developing countries hoping to export to the U.S. market, he acknowledges, but “when trade policy is the chosen tool of U.S. economic development policy, our nation’s most economically vulnerable citizens bear the brunt of the costs.”

Some of Tonelson’s arguments can be questioned. For example, he does not consider the possibility that automation, by shifting workers from high-wage factory jobs to low-wage service jobs, would have the same effects as the expatriation of industry to low-wage countries. And his critique of the neoliberal economic consensus is unlikely to change the views of those who identify free trade with intellectual clarity and moral virtue.

But with the failure of free-market “shock therapy” in Russia and Eastern Europe, the Asian financial crisis, and the collapse of the high-tech stock bubble, free trade has hardly inaugurated the golden age of global prosperity that neoliberals promised. Whether

one agrees with Tonelson or not, *Race to the Bottom* is a timely book.

—MICHAEL LIND

**THE MONEY AND THE POWER:
*The Making of Las Vegas and Its
Hold on America, 1947–2000.***

By Sally Denton and Roger Morris.
Knopf. 479 pp. \$26.95

It takes effort to make Las Vegas boring, but Denton and Morris have produced an opus so dense and tedious that it sinks like a second-rate mobster in concrete shoes. God forbid they should dress up their Latinate compound sentences with a few colorful anecdotes, or assemble an original history of the place from primary sources. Instead, they rehash tales told a hundred times—Meyer Lansky, Benny Binion,



Estes Kefauver, Kirk Kerkorian, Steve Wynn—and they lace each story with moralizing about corruption in high places.

Power is not a new topic for the husband-and-wife team. Denton is the author of *The Bluegrass Conspiracy: An Inside Story of Power, Greed, Drugs, and Murder* (1990); Morris's books include *Partners in Power: The Clintons and Their America* (1996). Here they argue that the "shadow capital" of Vegas had a hand in, among other things, the Kennedy assassination, the Bay of Pigs, Watergate, and Iran-contra. And they blame Vegas's dirty money and dirty politics for creating "an end-of-century America whose economy was dominated by a corporate oligarchy controlling much of government finance and business."

Denton and Morris have written not a history

of Vegas but a history of organized crime, which for most of the past 50 years operated out of Vegas simply because the juice went further there. What's really needed is a history of Vegas after 1986, when the last truly wired mob enforcer, Anthony "The Ant" Spilotro, was found buried in an Illinois wheat field, and the corporate wolves, led by Steve Wynn, moved in. But the authors devote just one slender chapter to Vegas in the '90s, choosing instead to dwell on dead Italian dons and the weasels who worked for Howard Hughes.

Denton and Morris have a grim view of gambling itself, calling it the only industry that produces nothing of lasting value. Couldn't the same be said of Coca-Cola or, for that matter, 90 percent of movies? And they're revolted by the influence peddling that has made Nevada into a greedy corporate fiefdom with "kept men" occupying almost all major political offices. That's certainly a sad thing for Nevada—and perhaps for Mississippi and other states that have embraced the hydra of legalized gambling—but it's an old story in America, and better told by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris in *The Green Felt Jungle* (1963).

Although there are occasional flashes of insight here, notably in the portraits of weak men who begin with high ideals and are beaten down by the enormity of Vegas's single-minded hunger for lucre (crusading *Las Vegas Sun* publisher Hank Greenspun, Senator Paul Laxalt), the dots don't connect. Las Vegas remains an island through which the money passes on its way somewhere else. The most you can say is that, thanks to the city's laissez-faire attitude, we know where the bad guys' clubhouse is.

—JOE BOB BRIGGS

**LOOKING FOR LOVEDU:
*Days and Nights in Africa.***

By Ann Jones. Knopf. 268 pp. \$25

Journalist Jones and Kevin Muggleton, a photographer she has just met, hatch an impromptu plan to drive the length of Africa. The result is an epic road trip from Tangier to Cape Town—and a look at what happens when a middle-aged New Yorker and a Briton half her age and twice her size spend too much time in a Land Rover that's disintegrating almost as fast as their friendship.

Their goal is to find the present-day descendants of the legendary Lovedu, a cooperative, peaceable tribe led by a rainmaking queen. The quest begins as “a good excuse for gallivanting,” Jones writes, but it becomes the book’s defining theme in an unexpected way as she finds herself struggling over gender roles with the supermacho Muggleton. In one recurrent battle, he is hell-bent on getting into and out of countries as fast as he can; Jones, who calls herself an “inspecteur du monde,” wants to go slowly enough to see what she terms “the real Africa.”

Jones is at her best when they do manage to slow down. Their traverse of the Sahara is unforgettable, and her description of Zaire’s infamous roads should give pause to anyone contemplating a similar trip. At one point, the mud is so thick that it takes them five days to drive a distance that two women with heavy loads cover on foot in two.

Thanks to Muggleton, however, most of Africa remains a blur outside the window of the speeding Rover. Jones doesn’t have time

to connect with many locals beyond immigration officials and customs agents, so she succumbs to generalizations: “In the United States, if you don’t like conditions, you try to change them. In Africa, you accept”—a statement that would surprise those who fought to make Africa more than just a collection of colonies. Likening her view of the continent to an astronaut’s view of Earth, Jones is reduced to providing capsule histories of each country she passes through. She relies so heavily on John Reader’s *Africa: A Biography of the Continent* (1998) and other sources that she could have written much of her own book without leaving home.

Jones eventually dumps Muggleton and finds more congenial traveling companions. But, suffering from a sort of Stockholm syndrome, she presses on with Muggletonian haste. By book’s end, she has found the Lovedu but lost the spirit that animated the search in the first place.

—REBECCA A. CLAY

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

DOGS:

A Startling New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior, and Evolution.

By Raymond Coppinger and Lorna Coppinger. Scribner. 352 pp. \$26

Even with dogs, there is a backlash. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas wrote a brilliant book, *The Hidden Life of Dogs* (1996), a masterpiece of observation, description, and empathy. It inspired many readers, and was followed by other books in a similar vein, including Marjorie Garber’s thorough study *Dog Love* (1997), Caroline Knapp’s beautifully written *Pack of Two* (1998), and Thomas’s own follow-up, *The Social Life of Dogs* (2000). So it was inevitable, I suppose, that Stephen Budiansky would write the bad-tempered *The Truth about Dogs* (2000), faulting the earlier books for being sentimental. I have never understood what is so terrible about being sentimental, for which read *emotional*, when one feels passionate about a topic.

The Coppingers—he is a professor of biology at Hampshire College and the author of

Fishing Dogs (1996); she is the author of *The World of Sled Dogs* (1977)—are scientific but not disputatious. Their bibliography lists only specialized works, with nothing for the general reader. Theirs is not an easy book to read, understand, or love, but it is plainly the work of two people who know a hell of a lot, and anybody interested in dogs ought to read it.

A chapter on sled dogs illustrates the book’s strengths and weaknesses. When the distance to be covered exceeds 10 miles, the Coppingers point out, modern racing sled dogs are the fastest animals in the world. In the annual Iditarod Trail Race in Alaska, teams average 125 miles a day for nearly nine days—which is the equivalent of running five marathons a day for nine days. Why do the dogs do it? The Coppingers argue that the reward is intrinsic in the performance—it just feels good. Fair enough, but they say almost nothing about the relationship between dog and driver, or about the costs of the sport, such as the selective culling (i.e., killing off puppies) required to get the perfect sled dog.

While mostly enthusiastic about sled dogs, they raise serious questions about service dogs, such as seeing-eye dogs and dogs that pull wheelchairs. They question whether the animals can possibly enjoy work that, unlike the work of sled dogs, is not in their genetic history. They also demonstrate that the physical work of pulling a wheelchair is very hard on the dog. But, again, they say nothing about the bond that develops between dogs and their guardians (I won't call them owners). And they apply their master-slave critique selectively; the exploitation of sled dogs and herding dogs doesn't trouble them.

The Coppingers' interest in the emotional lives of dogs seems limited to aggression, but they do a fantastic job of exploring that topic. I always wondered how a dog that guards sheep could possibly fend off a wolf much stronger than itself. According to the Coppingers, a predator rarely engages a dog in a fight, because victory is bound to be costly in terms of energy and potential injuries. Even bears, consequently, are cautious around dogs.

There is lots more here that is first rate—scientific explanations and conjectures that are intelligent, well observed, even brilliant. But sometimes you wish the Coppingers were not quite so scientific, that they were willing to indulge readers, if not themselves, with a bit more sentiment, a few more telling anecdotes, and a great deal more imaginative empathy.

—JEFFREY MOUSSAIEFF MASSON

BOLTZMANN'S ATOM:

The Great Debate That Launched a Revolution in Physics.

By David Lindley. Free Press. 272 pp. \$24

Though they may grasp little of its meaning, most reasonably educated people who encounter the equation $E = mc^2$ immediately think of Albert Einstein. But only true physics aficionados know that the equally illustrious expression $S = k \log W$ is inscribed on the grave of Ludwig Boltzmann (1844–1906).

The Viennese theorist's work marked the transition between two great ages of scientific thought: the classical and the quantum. His formula describes entropy, a measure of disorder. Implicit in the arrangement of the symbols is an explanation of why, as the Second Law of Thermodynamics holds, entropy tends to increase in the universe. Lindley, the author of

The End of Physics (1993), provides a lucid account of Boltzmann's discovery and its implications. By the time readers reach the end, they will have a good idea of what his epitaph means.

In the late 19th century, when Boltzmann was making his mark, physicists knew how to describe a gas using such measures as temperature and pressure. Inject a gas into a container, heat it with a flame or squeeze it with a plunger, and the outcome could be foretold by a collection of seemingly ironclad laws. For

many physicists, that was enough. Temperature and pressure were treated as irreducible components of the physical world.

Boltzmann was among those determined to look deeper, to show that temperature, pressure, viscosity, heat conduction, and other qualities were epiphenomena arising from



Ludwig Boltzmann

the jostling of invisible specks of matter: molecules and atoms. The motion of each of these tiny objects could, like that of marbles or billiard balls, be described by simple laws of mechanics. But because there were far too many individual trajectories to track, their mass behavior had to be treated statistically using the mathematics of probability. First, though, one had to believe in atoms—and the only evidence for them seemed to be that positing their existence made the theories work. Skeptics, led by the physicist/philosopher Ernst Mach, denounced the “atomists” and the statistical magicians for straying into metaphysics.

Boltzmann ultimately prevailed by showing that his approach could explain the Second Law. Given a collection of atoms or molecules, there are vastly more disorderly arrangements than orderly ones. So it was most likely that, without outside intervention, order would give way to entropy. Before long, almost everyone believed in atoms, and statistical methods became an important tool in the development of quantum mechanics. More significantly, Lindley shows, the constricting Machian philosophy—rejecting any phenomenon that could not be directly perceived by human

senses—gave way to the rigorous creativity of modern physics.

Boltzmann wasn't content with his accomplishment. Plagued by depression and still surrounded by doubters, he hanged himself at age 62. Though his fate may sound romantically tragic, his dyspeptic, neurotic manner keeps him from being a very sympathetic character. But the unfolding of his ideas, rendered so well by Lindley, makes for a very absorbing story.

—GEORGE JOHNSON

THE BOTANY OF DESIRE:
A Plant's Eye View of the World.

By Michael Pollan. Random House.
304 pp. \$24.95

In a common schoolbook image of evolution, all forms of life are represented by the forking branches of a vast tree. This scheme positions man and his fellow mammals far from their green cousins, the elms, algae, and artichokes. Pollan, a contributor to the *New York Times Magazine* and the author of *Second Nature* (1991), shows how the evolutionary branches of man and plant have come to be intertwined, with complicated consequences for each. In a meditation by turns poetic, historical, and scientific, he traces the reciprocal strategies of the cultivator and the cultivated. If man has moved nature by domesticating certain plants, so nature has moved man, first by stimulating his desires, and then by evolving to gratify them.

Pollan takes four plants that he himself has grown—the apple, the tulip, marijuana, and the potato—and relates their social histories to the human desire each has been bred to satisfy: sweetness, beauty, intoxication, and, through manipulation of the potato's genetic code, control. He travels to central Ohio on a search for

traces of John Chapman, known to schoolchildren as Johnny Appleseed; to Amsterdam, the center of the 17th-century Dutch tulip craze and, more recently, the city where pothead botanists have developed highly fortified marijuana; and to the St. Louis headquarters of Monsanto, where the potato's genes have been redesigned and licensed as intellectual property.

In *Second Nature*, Pollan used Thoreau to illuminate the tension between wildness and cultivation. Here he summons Nietzsche, particularly the philosopher's idea of the dual tendencies of the Greek spirit: the apollonian will toward form, restraint, and balance, and the dionysian will toward dissolution and ecstasy. Pollan describes both gardening and hybridization as contests between these forces.

Although their cultivation may be apollonian, the recombinant potato, supercannabis, applejack, and the rare tulip are intended to satisfy the dionysian appetite for pleasure. The suggestion of sensual excess naturally galvanizes an opposition. Against these hybrids has stood a mixed group of moralists, Calvinists, organic farmers, temperance groups, antidrug forces, the cautious, and the just plain frightened. The author treats this response with a light touch, as a form of evolution in its own right.

Pollan writes crystalline prose. He brings a generous curiosity to the scientists and plantsmen he interviews, some of them odd specimens themselves. In the end, though, the main character in his meditation may be the human imagination, which is capable of regarding the apple (to choose but one example) as cash crop, childhood memory, Eve's undoing, national emblem, gene bank, and consummate companion to cheddar.

—CHRISTOPHER HEWAT

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

JOHN UPDIKE AND RELIGION:
*The Sense of the Sacred and the
Motions of Grace.*

Edited by James Yerkes. Eerdmans.
290 pp. \$24

Preachers tend to read narrative (if at all) as fable or allegory. The intricate tissue of experiential detail vital to fiction is apt to be set

aside as extrinsic to meaning and treated as an attractive but disposable container for the hard nugget of moral instruction within. Happily, no such tendency mars this collection of 15 essays by religious and literary scholars. The contributors all take fiction seriously enough to engage it on its own terms. They are able to confront irresolvable tensions without forcing res-

olution or resorting to what Updike calls “verdict” and “directive.”

Prefacing the collection is Updike’s 1997 speech upon receiving the Champion Medal, awarded by the Catholic Book Club. After briefly questioning his eligibility, the author recalls his affiliation with three Protestant denominations (Lutheran, Congregational, and Episcopal) and the comfort and courage his Christian faith has given him: “For it tells us that truth is holy, and truth-telling a noble and useful profession; that the reality around us is created and worth celebrating; that men and women are radically imperfect and radically valuable.”

Updike notes that his first novel carried an epigraph from the Gospel of Luke, the second from Pascal, the third from Karl Barth, and the fifth from Paul Tillich. His character Harry Angstrom, he says, represents a Kierkegaardian figure: “man in a state of fear and trembling, separated from God, haunted by dread, twisted by the conflicting demands of his animal biology and human intelligence, of the social contract and the inner imperatives, condemned as if by otherworldly origins to perpetual restlessness.”

Updike, by his own admission, is not a “Christian writer.” What he has said of Harry Angstrom seems to apply to him as well: “Harry has no taste for the dark, tangled, visceral aspect of Christianity, the *going through* quality of it, the passage *into* death and suffering that redeems and inverts these things, like an umbrella blowing inside out.” And, while gratefully receiving the Champion Award, the novelist asked “to be absolved from any duty to provide orthodox morals and consolations in my fiction.”

In the thought-provoking essays that follow the Champion speech, scholars explore the influence on Updike of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Barth, and others, along with the impress of Updike’s early Lutheranism. Most memorable, on the literary side, is Charles Berryman’s essay “Faith or Fiction,” which argues that the dark, tragic visions of the great naysayers Melville and Hawthorne cut closer to the nerve of living faith than do the muted affirmations of Updike.

A minor complaint: This collection suffers from an excess of civility; more dissent would have been bracing. Critics as astute as Alfred Kazin have praised Updike’s dazzling prose

while questioning the depth of his work. The charge of “moral passivity” has been laid upon Updike’s writing more than once. His lavish depictions of sexual exploits—ostensibly a sort of hymning to the goodness of the created world—might also be viewed as evidence of the author’s captivity to the mores of contemporary secular culture. These essays duly note and answer such critical comments, but why not let a few of the critics speak for themselves? Surely the case made here for the authenticity of Updike’s religious search is strong enough, sufficiently supple and undoctinaire, to permit the unconvinced their full voice.

—A. G. MOJTABAI

*HUMAN NATURE
AFTER DARWIN:
A Philosophical Introduction.*

By Janet Radcliffe Richards.

Routledge. 336 pp. \$65

Richards, author of the much admired *The Skeptical Feminist* (1980), takes a philosophical approach to the perennial wars over Darwinism, with an emphasis on the bitter hostilities now being fought over sociobiology (and its equivalents under other, and safer, names, such as evolutionary psychology). The book, which grew out of her university teaching, uses modern Darwinism as a heuristic for identifying and defining the main subdisciplines of philosophy, and as object material for teaching the elementary operations of logic. The argument is supported, as in any good course of study, with practical exercises—and with answers thereto. These etudes are fascinating in their own right. Thus, what must have begun as a generous handout for a college-level course emerges as a lucid treatment of one of the most important intellectual (and political) conflicts of our time.

Human Nature after Darwin begins, as it should, with a short, reliable summary of the pertinent science. This is also the author’s opportunity to introduce some key concepts from the epistemology and philosophy of science. She follows with a taxonomy of influential commentary on Darwinian evolution and its implications, ranging from the radical, reductionist evolutionary claims, through the various categories of skepticism, and finally to the outright rejection of evolutionary biology, and hence of

essentially all modern biology. She takes up the key arguments and reduces them to sets of clear statements that can be assessed in a straightforward manner. This is applied philosophy at its best.

Though Richards is sympathetic toward modern evolutionary science, she never proselytizes. The exposition identifies all weaknesses and ambiguities in the philosophical stands she favors as well as in those she rebuts. But her rebuttals are devastating. To begin with, she pays scrupulous attention to what the belligerents actually say, and the results sometimes surprise even the author. She writes, "If you follow up in detail any of the claims about what opponents [of one position in the controversy] are supposed to have said . . . you may be quite startled by the extent of misquoting, quoting out of context, looking for the worst

interpretation of what is said, and flagrant misrepresentation that goes on."

Largely, though, she concentrates on the logical validity of the complaints against Darwinism in general and sociobiology in particular. Not surprisingly, a central chapter addresses the common assertion that a radical Darwinian, materialist view of the world (and hence of human origins and behavior) requires the conclusion that there is no such thing as objective moral truth. The corollary is, of course, that some form of spirit or deity is needed if we are to have any moral universals at all. Richards's persuasive refutation of this claim should give comfort not only to biologists but to honest religionists as well. This book is a course that everyone with an opinion about Darwinism ought to take.

—PAUL R. GROSS

ARTS & LETTERS

LIBRARIES IN THE ANCIENT WORLD.

By Lionel Casson. Yale Univ. Press.
192 pp. \$22.95

The royal librarian to Ashurbanipal, the monarch who ruled Assyria from 668 to 627 B.C., apparently had a theft problem. A clay tablet dug up in Nineveh in the 1800s bears this inscription: "Your lordship is without equal, Ashur, King of the Gods! Whoever removes [the tablet] . . . may Ashur and Ninlil, angered and grim, cast him

down, erase his name, his seed, in the land."

Ashurbanipal maintained a library because he could read and write cuneiform, a rare skill among rulers of the ancient Near East. His collection has come down to us with such homely details of its bibliographic housekeeping still intact because it had the great good fortune of being engraved on clay tablets. These, as Casson points out in his short and elegant history of the early growth of libraries, are vastly more likely to survive than papyrus, because fire only makes them more durable: "When a conqueror set a Mesopotamian palace ablaze, he helped ensure the survival of any clay tablets in it."

This drama of preservation and destruction echoes through Casson's account of the gradual development of modern library practices. A classics professor emeritus at New York University and the author of many accessible accounts of ancient culture, Casson tracks that development through references in contemporary accounts, artistic depictions of people reading, and other such hints. The collections themselves, of course, have mostly vanished.

But the outlines of the story are clear. Near Eastern libraries such as Ashurbanipal's were the first to assign titles to their



Scholars read papyrus scrolls in a hall of the library in Alexandria, Egypt.

texts for easy reference and to create something we can recognize as a catalogue. Greece, where literacy was far more widespread, saw the first signs of an economy of book (that is to say, scroll) distribution, which allowed individuals such as Aristotle to amass private collections of high repute. Ancient Egypt probably had libraries—but with the contents on papyrus.

The great library at Alexandria, the first to be both truly comprehensive and open to a large scholarly public, was also the first to practice alphabetization and to have a complete shelf list, the famed *Pinakes* that listed and described every work of Greek literature. The *Pinakes* perished along with the rest of the library in the still mysterious catastrophe that ended its existence. (Weighing in on this longstanding conundrum, Casson says the library was probably burned not by Julius Caesar but by the forces of the Roman emperor Aurelian as they put down a rebellion around A.D. 270.)

Casson's story continues through Rome, which contributed the innovation of non-scholarly public libraries for leisure reading, and up to the rise of Christianity, which helped spread use of the parchment codex (the ancient equivalent of a book)—probably because it was free of the scroll's cultural and religious associations. Throughout, the tale is told in upbeat tones. But its feel is bittersweet, a story of progress in the preservation of human knowledge set against a backdrop of constant loss.

—AMY SCHWARTZ

DOUBLE FOLD:

Libraries and the Assault on Paper.

By Nicholson Baker. Random House.
384 pp. \$25.95

Baker, best known as a novelist, has a new obsession. Previous obsessions have included John Updike (*U and I*) and sex (*Vox*, *The Fermata*). *Vox*, of course, is the *Moby Dick* of phone-sex narratives, the book Monica gave Bill so that he'd get the idea; *The Fermata*, duller but longer, is no one's idea of a gift. What's got Baker heated up these days is, of all things, the misbehavior of the nation's librarians. No, not *that* kind of misbehavior, but rather the librarians' complicity in a decades-long conspiracy to rid themselves of a good portion of the stuff that so complicates their lives: those space-hungry books, newspapers, and periodicals.

In *Double Fold* (the term refers to a way of testing the durability of a page), Baker argues, with a master rhetorician's tricks and a clever lawyer's selective regard for facts, that our great research libraries, led by the Library of Congress, have betrayed the cultural heritage they were supposed to guard. And what is the implement of their treason? The microfilm camera. The libraries have transferred to film—brutally and imperfectly, in Baker's version—the contents of hundreds of thousands of books and newspapers and destroyed the originals in the process, or discarded them subsequently, on the grounds that they were no longer required. (The destructive procedures he rails against, by the way, are no longer the preservation standard.) The justification for the filming was the inexorable workings of chemistry: The acidic content of paper produced in America throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries has doomed it to inevitable darkening and weakening.

What's in dispute is just how weak, and therefore how useless, the printed materials will eventually become. Baker challenges the scientific evidence that persuaded the librarians, though he cannot dismiss what is plain to anyone who has ever left a newspaper too long in the light, or even in the dark. Baker discredits the microfilming process too, but how hard is that? Who in his right mind has a good word to say about using microfilm, which ranks as a form of torture with economy-class air travel or reading *The Fermata*?

There's no denying Baker's charge that we're the poorer for having destroyed the original copies of books and newspapers that represent—often uniquely—aspects of the nation's historical temperament; the microfilm versions are no adequate replacement but a mere grim expedient. Of course, we're a lot poorer for the loss of most of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles too, but life goes on. The world's a destructive place, and to pretend otherwise, to insist, as Baker is disposed to insist, that we save every scrap of original printed matter—book, magazine, flier, inscribed Post-It—because you never know what the future may decide was significant about the past, is to be blind not just to economics but to reality.

So is half the truth better than none? Not when the result is a deceptive half-truth. What's shameful about *Double Fold* is its systematic dis-

tortion of motive—its attribution of malice or madness or, at best, massive ignorance to individuals who acted in good faith and, indeed, out of a sense of obligation that, if they did not do something, chemical decay would take from the world a significant chunk of the materials they were charged to protect. Librarians saw no option but to film. Should they have moved the materials instead to ideal storage conditions (salt mines, Himalayan caves) and kept them forever from light and thumbs, inaccessible but intact? Perhaps Baker is just too thoroughly a novelist. Led astray by imagination, he can't help but make fiction.

—JAMES MORRIS

COMIC BOOK NATION:
The Transformation of Youth Culture in America.

By Bradford W. Wright. Johns Hopkins Univ. Press. 336 pp. \$34.95

A mainstay of popular culture for over 70 years, comic books have at times been as controversial as they've been common. They've been piled and torched in schoolyards as a "violent stimulant" to the young, and Superman himself, that quintessential dogooder, has been denounced as a Nietzschean, Nazi-like figure. Wright, who teaches history at the University of Maryland, treats the genre seriously without slighting what makes it fun.

Through an extensive reading of surviving comics from the 1930s to today, Wright shows how they closely followed, and even presaged, major trends. During the depression, Superman and Green Lantern fought corporate greed, for example, and Captain America took a punch at Hitler well before the United States entered the war. It's not surprising that comics of the era appealed to many adults. Indeed, a 1945 study found that roughly half the population read comic books.

Comics lost most of their adult audience after the

Korean War, when publishers began targeting a distinctive youth market. They achieved their greatest commercial success by demolishing the complacent myths of Cold War America. Horror and crime comics, some of them lurid even by today's standards, soon were condemned by concerned parents, pundits, and politicians, who, with scant evidence, blamed the images for a rise in juvenile delinquency. With Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) and subsequent U.S. Senate hearings, comics briefly became the most pilloried mass medium. "Not even the Communist conspiracy," one senator declared, "could devise a more effective way to demoralize, disrupt, confuse, and destroy our future citizens."

The controversy subsided when the industry adopted a self-censorship code in 1956, and the debate over possible causes of delinquency switched to movies, television, and rock music, which had followed comics' lead in catering to teens. Instead of helping define the rebellious youth culture, comics largely restricted themselves to a preadolescent niche for the next decade. The self-censorship slowly abated, starting with Marvel Comics' pitch to adolescent angst in such comics as *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *The X-Men* in the 1960s. In the 1970s came comics' resurgent attention to social issues, and in the 1980s the violent realism of so-called graphic novels.

Even so, comic books haven't been prominent in recent controversies over misguided youth—simply because much of the teen audience has shifted to movies, the Internet, and video games. The audience didn't move on because comics "failed to keep up with changes in American culture," Wright maintains, but rather because "American culture has finally caught up" with comics in its devotion to the "perpetuation of adolescence." For better or worse, we truly have become a comic book nation.

—ROBERT J. YULE



Along with Batman and Spider-Man, the X-Men became the most popular superheroes of the 1980s and '90s.

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FROM THE CENTER

In our world of Palm Pilots and 10-inch laptops, the enormous computers of the 1950s seem as distant as the abacus. But at the upper echelons of computing, size still matters. This September, the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico and Compaq Computer Corporation will begin assembling a supercomputer, called the Q machine, that will occupy a room the size of a football field. The main part of the computer, resembling a huge collection of cabinets and racks of equipment, will cover about 25,000 square feet. The supporting infrastructure, including peripheral parts, electrical supply, and air conditioning, will occupy an additional 50,000 square feet.

The power derived from the Q machine's tremendous size will enable it to perform 30 trillion operations per second. That makes it roughly three times faster than today's most powerful computer, and several thousand times faster than a typical PC. The new machine will execute in one second as many calculations as a human being could do with pencil and paper in several million years.

Why does Los Alamos need this extraordinary machine? Along with two other national laboratories, Los Alamos is responsible for assessing and certifying the nation's nuclear stockpile. Because the United States no longer conducts live nuclear tests, the best way to verify the safety, reliability, and performance of the stockpile is through computer simulations of explosions—and those simulations demand tremendous computing power.

But supercomputing's applications reach far beyond national security. Within a decade, one of the national labs is likely to have a supercomputer that operates several tens of times faster than the Q machine. At that speed, the computer will be able to simulate a living cell, and perhaps even a simple brain, by representing every atom, neuron, and synapse. When scientists observe how simulated cells and brains respond to various inputs, they will be able to devise new treatments for mental illness and other diseases.

A generation from now, a similarly incredible computing power may be available to us on our personal computers. Consider that today's advanced PCs are 50 to 100 times more powerful than the fastest supercomputer of 1976. If Moore's

Law—which holds that computer power doubles every 18 months—remains in force, we may all be able to simulate life on our PCs within 30 years. How will that revolutionary capacity transform our perception of the world?

We explored that issue, and others just as urgent, at the Wilson Center during a three-day conference in June cosponsored with Los Alamos. The conference brought together some 100 participants—scientists, economists, sociologists, political scientists, policymakers, industry leaders, and others—to consider the ramifications of supercomputing for many facets of human life, from culture and ethics to economics and politics: How might simulations of life affect our religious beliefs and alter our conception of what it means to be alive? Will a better understanding of the brain allow us to understand the mind? What are supercomputing's technological and ethical limits?

Discussion focused on near-term practical concerns, such as how supercomputing can help us retrieve information, forecast economic trends, and create precise maps. What public policies should be implemented to prepare for the new technological world? Some participants noted that human choices, as much as science, will determine supercomputing's course.

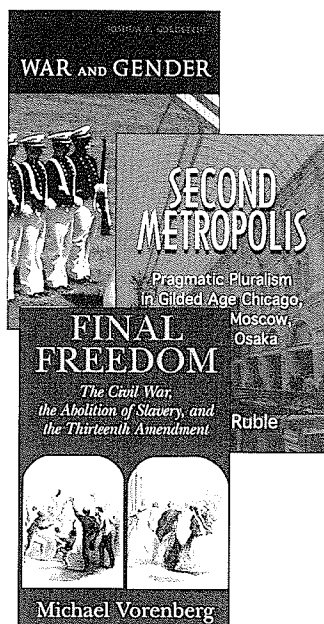
The conference was part of a new focus at the Wilson Center on future challenges facing the United States. In today's political environment, where policymakers rarely have the time to consider complex long-term issues, we want to provide a stronger foundation for decision making by identifying the crucial challenges of the future and bringing the relevant experts to Washington to discuss them. We do so out of an enduring conviction that serious, informed dialogue among scholars and policymakers produces better public policy.

Few challenges will be more important for the United States in the decades ahead than ensuring that the awesome power of computers be used for wise purposes. The supercomputing revolution is just beginning, but that is none too soon, we believe, to think about its ends.

Lee H. Hamilton
Director



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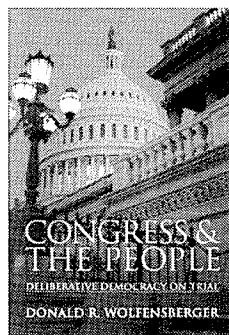
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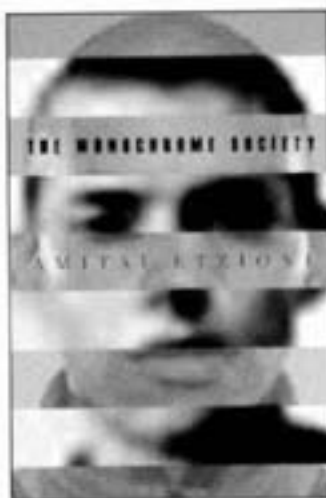
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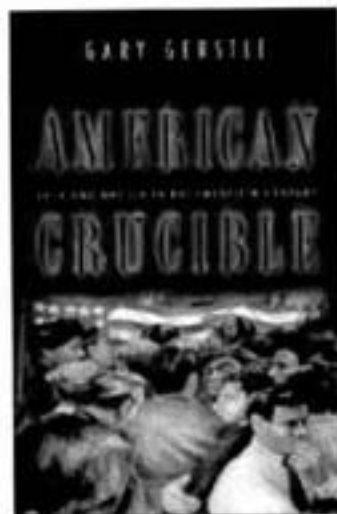
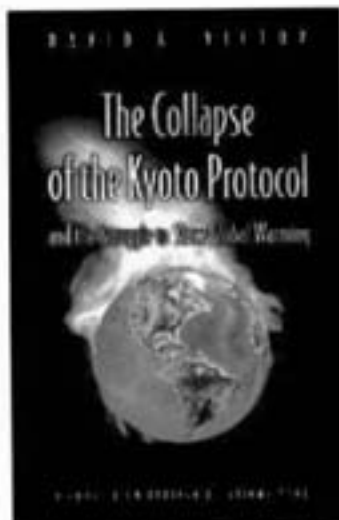
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