
ington Post. Remnick attempts something more ambitious than the court history that Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott presented in *At the Highest Levels* (1993), or the straightforward political analysis of John B. Dunlop's *Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (1993). He hopes to make comprehensible and alive what happened in the Soviet Union by narrating the story through the voices and experiences of the people there. He paints an immense, vivid canvas, crowded with characters and events from every corner of the collapsing empire. Remnick's account deals, of course, with the "fall of Marxism"; in his explanation, Marxism suffers, as it were, a second kind of fall. Perhaps most observers, in one good Marxist tradition, have written about the Soviet Union's collapse in terms of economics—that is, of economic corruption and inefficiency too extreme to deliver even the minimum of goods to keep a cowed populace in its place. This economic framework is largely missing from Remnick's account; instead he focuses on what he calls the "revenge of history." For decades, history (or rather its interpretation) had been a servant of the Communist Party, which shamelessly rewrote textbooks and airbrushed photographs to support the current party line. But then Gorbachev decreed that the "blank spots" of history be filled in. By admitting the crimes committed by Stalin (the purges, the famines, the Nazi-Soviet pact, the Katyn Forest massacre), Gorbachev hoped indirectly to cleanse the socialist system of its crudest and cruelest features. But once Gorbachev dropped the myth of party infallibility and the threat of physical punishment for historical heresy, people quickly advanced beyond Stalin's tattered image to criticize the very state and system that had enabled that tyrant to rule. "When history was no longer an instrument of the Party, the Party was doomed to failure," Remnick writes. "For history proved precisely that the Party was rotten at its core."

Remnick is optimistic about a "gradual and painful rise from the wreckage of communism," confident "that the former subjects of the Soviet experiment are too historically experienced to return to dictatorship and isolation." In *Black Hundred*, Laqueur presents a darker possibility. A prolific historian of modern Europe who earlier traced the parallels between Russian and

German right-wing extremism, Laqueur acknowledges that the demise of the Soviet empire was "probably inevitable" but laments that the "way it did unravel was a disaster." Parliamentary democrats like Boris Yeltsin are still too weak, Laqueur maintains, and they are being challenged by a "nationalist movement firmly believing that Russia can be saved only by a strong, authoritarian government that restores law and order and pursues a conservative policy." In a restrained, pedestrian tone, Laqueur discusses the born-again incarnations of long-suppressed right-wing groups and that stewy concoction of chauvinism, anti-Semitism, anti-Westernism, racism, conspiracy theories, yearning for dictatorship, and messianic interpretations of history that bubbled over in tsarist times and is now on the boil again. The simultaneous collapse of empire, economy, and prestige has caused many Russians to look for easy explanations and identifiable scapegoats. Laqueur can never quite resolve, though, whether the current crop of extremists is merely a local variant of fringe groups that arise in most societies or a unique and grave threat to Russia. Certainly, after Remnick's stirring optimism, *Black Hundred* is a sobering reminder of the ugliness that might prevail should the post-Soviet democratic effort falter.

LIFE'S DOMINION: An Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom. By Ronald Dworkin. Knopf. 273 pp. \$23

The United States needs a great book about abortion. Such a book, written perhaps by one of our more eminent political thinkers, would illuminate what may be the leading moral issue of our time for the mass of Americans, who are less "pro-choice" or "pro-life" than confused, troubled, or ambivalent about abortion.

Dworkin, who is the author of *Taking Rights Seriously* (1977) and who divides his time between Oxford University and New York University's law school, is certainly qualified to write such a book. And he very nearly succeeds. He argues that very few "pro-life" advocates actually believe in a "right to life." If they did, he notes, then logically they would insist on prohibiting abortion under all circumstances. The fetus,

after all, would have the same right to life no matter if rape or incest or marital intercourse were the cause of conception, and no matter if bearing the fetus to term might endanger the mother's life. But most abortion foes, Dworkin points out, are willing to make certain exceptions.

Dworkin argues that people on both sides of the issue are secretly united by a devotion to "the sanctity of life" but divided by their different understanding of the sacred. Opponents of abortion see the biological "gift of life" itself as sacred; more liberally inclined folk tend to think that life is made sacred by human "investments" in it. In this view, writes Dworkin, "it may be more frustrating of life's miracle when an adult's ambitions, talents, training, and expectations are wasted because of an . . . unwanted pregnancy than when a fetus dies before any significant investment of that kind has been made." The "pro-choice" position, he argues, is thus really a spiritual view.

Unfortunately, Dworkin soon abandons his provocative venture into moral philosophy for the familiar terrain of rights and interests and constitutional law. For him, as for many other liberal thinkers, abortion (like euthanasia, to which he devotes far fewer pages) ultimately comes down to a clash over individual rights. The pregnant woman, in other words, has them; the fetus does not. Arguing that the "pro-choice" position is religious in character, he adds a new twist, contending that a woman's right to an abortion is grounded not in the sketchy right to privacy cited in the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973 but in the First Amendment's protection of the free exercise of religion. (For

similar reasons he insists that "any honorable constitution" will guarantee individuals their right to die.) Dworkin's provocative case would have been stronger, however, had he subjected his own assumptions—especially those concerning what is sacred—to the same penetrating scrutiny he gives here to the "pro-life" position.

SYSTEMS OF SURVIVAL: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics. By Jane Jacobs. Random House. 236 pp. \$22

What is it that binds society together? Why don't corporations and governments descend into corruption and lawlessness? Jacobs, in a book as ambitious as her landmark *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), ponders this question by examining various commercial and political systems throughout history. Unlike many philosophers who have tried to rest society on a single moral foundation, Jacobs uncovers two separate "systems of survival." On the one hand, a "commercial syndrome," which covers dealings in the marketplace, values working easily with strangers, respecting contracts, and promoting "inventiveness and novelty." The "guardian syndrome," on the other hand—represented by the military, the police, or any other organization of control—prizes obedience, discipline, loyalty, and shows of force. The alternating compatibility and conflict between the two systems allow society to function.

When people stay within their own syndromes—when corporations engage in free trade or when police concentrate on fighting crime and not, for example, meeting an arrest quota—the result, according to Jacobs, is overall success and prosperity for the society. But problems arise when the lines become blurred. The Mafia, for instance, is one of these "monstrous hybrids," a commercial entity that operates under a guardian mentality, adhering to a strict code of discipline, honor, and loyalty. The former Soviet Union, a guardian bureaucracy, strayed disastrously into the commercial syndrome when it undermined local officials by accepting kickbacks for not exposing shoddy workmanship or engaged in the falsification of production figures.

