

“misconstructions” endlessly repeated by educated people who should know better? With this provocative question, Hamilton, a sociologist and political scientist at Ohio State University, launches his powerful assault on academic groupthink.

Drawing on an earlier work, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (1982), Hamilton refutes the entrenched claim that the lower-middle class is historically the most “reactionary.” Combing through voting records from the Weimar Republic, he finds that support for the Nazis actually rose with voters’ social class, and that the lower-middle class nowhere exhibited a strong preference for Hitler. But while evidence of this voting behavior has long been available, too many scholars of Nazism have preferred to derive their conclusions from faulty Marxist models of German class attitudes.

Equally striking is Hamilton’s reconsideration of the influential French philosopher Michel Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison* (1975), Foucault advanced the thesis that the 18th-century shift in penology from retribution to character reform was not, as many assume, a progressive step for humankind. Instead, said Foucault, the rise of the modern prison—exemplified by Jeremy Bentham’s “panopticon,” a circular structure in which observation-tower guards could see into all cells—marked a quantum leap in oppression. Foucault asserted not only that the panopticon was “the architectural programme of most prison projects,” but also (in Hamilton’s paraphrase) that the modern prison “extended its principles, an all-pervasive system of surveillance and discipline, to the entire society.”

There is just one problem with Foucault’s argument: the panopticon was never built. Nor was it imitated anywhere, except for three highly modified experimental prisons in the United States. This fact is no secret among historians, as Hamilton reports. Yet not a single reviewer of *Discipline and Punish* questioned Foucault’s grandiloquent claims.

How did Foucault get away with such pseudoscholarship? In a broader discussion of “validity and verification,” Hamilton shows how a reluctance to check original sources results in lengthy, little-examined citation chains. Struggling to keep up with “knowledge overproduction” in their own

highly compartmentalized fields, most academics receive scant reward for undertaking literature reviews, replication studies, or other efforts to keep abreast of what is happening in adjacent fields.

There is one question that Hamilton does not ask but probably should. Which ideologies—and ideologues—do most of the misconstructing? His case studies focus on the academic Left. It seems self-evident, however, that scholars of all political persuasions are capable of distorting their work to serve ideological interests. But then, after reading Hamilton, one might feel less secure about what seems self-evident.

—John Rodden

**THE PRICE OF A DREAM:
*The Story of the Grameen Bank, and
the Idea That Is Helping the Poor to
Change Their Lives.***

By David Bornstein. Simon & Schuster.
360 pp. \$25

A real page turner on economic development? Unlikely as it may sound, that is exactly what Bornstein, a free-lance journalist, has produced. His subject, the Grameen Bank, was founded by an irrepressible economics professor from Bangladesh named Muhammed Yunus. Educated at Vanderbilt University, Yunus was teaching at Chittagong University in his native country in 1976 when he first got the idea that the poor remain poor because they have no access to the resources that would enable them to improve their lot—they can’t get there from here. So, beginning with the impoverished residents of a nearby village, Yunus began practicing “capitalism with a social conscience.”

Yunus’s idea was to jump-start the development process by making “micro-loans” of \$10, \$25, or \$50 to landless or near-landless peasants. Borrowers formed teams of five for the purpose of mutually guaranteeing the loans taken out by each. If any member defaulted, no other member of that team could ever again receive a loan from the Grameen Bank. Peer pressure did the rest. The borrowers used the money to establish themselves as peddlers, vegetable gardeners, seamstresses, or dairy farmers. More than 90 percent of the borrowers were women, because their poverty is most acute and they are the primary providers of care to children. The idea worked aston-

ishly well. By 1995, the Grameen Bank had two million borrowers in Bangladesh and 90 percent of its stock was held by borrowers (who are required to buy shares). While still dependent on donors, the bank is close to self-sustaining.

What's missing from Bornstein's otherwise fine reporting is a sense of the broader institutional arrangements in the Bangladeshi economy. He mentions corruption in passing, but he neglects the vital issue, so pertinently raised by the Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto, of how government corruption and overregulation stunt the growth of grassroots entrepreneurship. The tough question is whether Grameen Bank borrowers will graduate from micro-

enterprise into fully legal business operations, or whether they will be driven by bureaucratic red tape into the vast "informal economy."

Despite such gaps in his story, Bornstein makes it dramatically clear that the Grameen Bank has pioneered a far better way to help the poor than the massive, top-down schemes so long favored by the World Bank and other international development agencies. Already, several countries, including Chile, are attempting to replicate the bank's success. Bornstein's superb account may drum up even more business for Muhammed Yunus's excellent idea.

—Ronald Bailey

Religion & Philosophy

THE POLITICS OF FAITH AND THE POLITICS OF SKEPTICISM.

By Michael Oakeshott. Yale Univ. Press. 128 pp. \$25

In this volume, released six years after his death, the distinguished British political philosopher Michael Oakeshott (1901–1990) crystallizes what for him are the two "poles" of modern political thought. "The politics of faith" begins in Francis Bacon's assertion that human beings can achieve perfection, and that government can be the primary agent of human betterment. Such a regime places all human activity under the surveillance of its notion of the good.

"The politics of skepticism," by contrast, originating in Thomas Hobbes and Niccolò Machiavelli, rejects any attempt to order human experience according to a single standard. In this view, government should strive not to be the expression or fulfillment of the common good but rather to serve as the instrument for assuring basic order, rights, and liberties. Beyond this, the regime should abstain from involvement "with the souls of men."

Oakeshott seeks neither to inform our practical decisions about public policy nor to plead for one form of government over the other. Rather, he would redirect the contemporary discussion of politics away from an ambiguous lexicon (of which the present uses of "liberal" and "conservative" are but

the most egregious examples) and toward a new vernacular. His principle of moderation, or "appropriateness," eschews the "nemesis" of pure faith on the one hand, pure skepticism on the other. Where the middle ground lies at the moment, he does not say. Nor does he need to. By clarifying "the 'charges' of the poles of our political activity, each exerting a pull which makes itself felt over the whole range of government," he has written a guide to the future of political thought.

—Joseph Landau

THREE GOSPELS.

By Reynolds Price. Scribner. 288 pp. \$23

"Forget that you ever read a gospel; forget you ever heard of Jesus." With these startling words, Reynolds Price invites readers to ignore the accumulated knowledge of centuries of Christian theology. The invitation is easier to accept than one might think. Price—the author of numerous works of fiction and nonfiction, including *A Palpable God* (1978), a consideration of the Old and New Testaments—provides fresh access to the foundational texts of Christianity. Bringing decades of study to the task, he has produced convincingly faithful translations of what he believes are the two central Gospels: the Book of Mark, arguably the oldest Gospel (though recent