Trumpism, Nationalism, and Conservatism

Essay by
Christopher DeMuth

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The Little Engine that Could
by Charles R. Kesler

SIX YEARS AGO, IN HIS STATE OF THE STATE SPEECH, THEN-GOVERNOR JERRY BROWN DEPARTED FROM HIS TEXT TO ENCOURAGE THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE TO BUILD HIS PET PROJECT, A HIGH-SPEED RAIL SYSTEM FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO LOS ANGELES. IGNORE THE NAYSAVERS AND SKEPTICS WHO SAY IT COSTS TOO MUCH AND IS TOO GREAT A CHALLENGE, HE SAID, LIKENING THE PROJECT TO THE CHILDREN’S CLASSIC, The Little Engine that Could. “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can!” he exclaimed. “And over the mountain, the little engine went!”

That was perhaps an unfortunate allusion. This little engine is not going over the mountains, at least not anytime soon, as Brown’s successor, Governor Gavin Newsom, announced in February in his first State of the State Address. “[L]et’s be real,” he declared. “The current project, as planned, would cost too much and...take too long. There has been too little oversight and not enough transparency.”

Thus the rail line will not cross the Tehachapi Mountains into Los Angeles—a difficult, treacherous, and extremely expensive operation—but will be confined to offering (when finished, many years from now) high-speed service between Merced and Bakersfield up and down the flat Central Valley.

Merced and Bakersfield? Even Newsom found it hard to justify that. “Merced, Fresno, Bakersfield, and communities in between are more dynamic than many realize,” he said lamely. “But let’s just get something done.” If you add together the populations of those three cities you get about a million people, in a state whose total population is just shy of 40 million. The limited rail service will cost about $15 billion, estimated the Los Angeles Times.

Even Anthony Rendon, the Assembly Speaker who presides over its Democratic supermajority, found the proposal puzzling. He put it delicately: “The extent to which it does not link two of the three largest urban areas in the state seems problematic.” A Republican senator, Jim Nielsen, who grew up in the Central Valley, called the plan “almost humorously.” “We’re going to put more billions into a train in a place where there is no ridership and no freight will be hauled.”

Governor Newsom began his speech by declaring, “We face hard decisions that are coming due,” and claiming credit for “[t]he tough calls we must make.” He went out of his way to lambaste President Trump for his alleged “xenophobia and...nativism,” and to order the return of some 360 California National Guard members who had been stationed at the border by Brown at Trump’s request. But when it came to the train, there were no hard decisions or tough calls in sight.

HE DIDN’T SCRAP THE REST OF THE PROPOSED SYSTEM BEYOND the Central Valley; he simply postponed further construction of it, while ordering continued work on the environmental impact documents for the whole San Francisco to L.A. line. He promised to continue to seek more federal funding and private investment, but pointedly did not pledge any additional state funds. So the program will go on until the money runs out, or until a Democratic president reopens the spigots. “Abandoning high speed rail entirely,” Newsom argued, “means we will have wasted billions and billions of dollars with nothing but broken promises...to show for it.” His decision will mean California and the feds will waste many more billions of dollars with nothing but broken promises and a short, pointless stretch of track to show for it.

But there is a point, a political point, to Newsom’s decision. As he admitted, “I have no interest in sending back $3.5 billion of federal funding that was allocated to this project to President Donald Trump.” Why, that would be enough, with what Congress has already appropriated, to build a wall on the southern border...

California’s high-speed railroad manqué is a metaphor for progressive politics today. Increasingly, Democrats are drawn to grand, visionary, hopelessly expensive, but ultimately unworkable “solutions” to public problems. The Green New Deal, Medicare for All, free college, universal pre-school—the list goes on, culminating in that cure for all ailments public and private, socialism.

What’s odd or interesting about this state of affairs is how many Democrats see through these purported cure-alls. Even as Newsom sees the futility of high-speed rail in California, so intelligent Democrats realize that Americans will not abolish airplane travel or automobiles; that you can’t guarantee national health care for all and expect it to be cheaper than, or as good as, the prevailing system; that socialism takes too many evenings and turns rich, free countries into poor, unfree ones.

Many progressives know this already, and nevertheless are irresistibly drawn to these illusions. “I think I can,” said the little engine. “Yes, we can,” said Barack Obama. “Electrified trains are part of the future,” Jerry Brown told his listeners in 2013. Don’t count on it.
CORRESPONDENCE

Aristotle and America

A reader of Ken Masugi’s review will miss, I fear, the originality and importance of Leslie Rubin’s America, Aristotle, and the Politics of a Middle Class (“Can Aristotle Make America Great Again?”, Fall 2018).

Yes, Masugi at the start and finish acknowledges the book’s “estimable revival of republicanism” and its contribution to scholarship on “political friendship.” He agrees, too, that “America’s practice [at the founding] closely resembled Aristotle’s theory.” But the review never brings out the book’s masterly analysis of Aristotle’s thoughts on middle-class politics and morals (Part 1), and a demonstration that America’s founders would foster something similar in order to moderate the excesses of rich and poor (Part 2). Rubin instructs about Aristotle and America, both. What unifies her book is her warm liking for America, especially decent and moderate Americans, and her fear of “polarization”—divisions that can lead to “despotism,” whether demagogic or oligarchic. Aristotle’s political science could help rebalance our republic around a middle class that has recovered moral and political authority, especially in its own eyes.

Masugi sets forth a string of objections that dwell on America’s distinctiveness: its work ethic, doctrine of rights (especially property rights), and the influence of the Bible. But Rubin sees the similarity, too, noting our framers’ “improved science” of politics. The Americans she quotes insist that civic education attend to rights, to the economic virtues of industry and frugality, and to the Bible. But these same writers commend simpler mores and balancing the power of a middle class—with John Adams, for one, expressly praising Aristotle’s account.

Nor are moderate and middling ways themselves as foreign to the patriotic “We’re #1!” American pride, as Masugi claims. Aristotle himself insists that a middle-class republic is the best regime—with room enough for patriotic heroes and decent go-getters—and its citizens should pride themselves on being the best. Rubin’s defense of free politics and clarification of its superiority to aristocracy is a high point of the book. It is a far cry from the corrosive libertarianism, doctrines of salutary transgressiveness, and anti-bourgeois egalitarianism all too fashionable and often dictated to the poorly educated and resentful by the explosively educated and contemptuous. Aristotle’s case for middle-class power and morals can help steady a theoretically severed and otherwise divided republic.

Misled, perhaps, by the academy’s excesses, Masugi goes so far as to suggest that institutional civic education may not be necessary at all. But then he should welcome Rubin’s richly informed turn to Aristotle, who holds that moderate politics comes chiefly from middle-class lives—that is, from those with property enough to live decently, unlike an envious and expropriating poor, but not enough to be at leisure without work, unlike an arrogant and overreaching rich. But we also need citizens sufficiently enlightened about free government to resist the attractions of modern-day sophists, an education that Rubin’s timely and deeply considered book could help restore.

Robert Faulkner
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, MA

Ken Masugi replies:

My thanks to Robert Faulkner for his letter. It is humbling to be instructed by such an esteemed scholar and teacher. Yet, differences remain.

“Frequent recurrence to fundamental principles,” as the Virginia Declaration of Rights puts it—and the spiritedness they invoke—is the key to reviving republican government today. Institutional solutions need to be reassessed in light of those principles, those of the Declaration of Independence. In seeking the common good, the republic Leslie Rubin described seemed to slight this virtue, so she tried to supply it from outside the people, from elite institutions. It doesn’t work that way—neither the Harvard divines of the 17th and 18th centuries nor the idols of the 21st are the most fitting teachers of a free people.

I know I am not the only reader to be put off by Rubin’s use of “middling” and “mediocrity” in her praise of the middle class. Her institutions of republican virtue might appear to be aristocratic but in practice they are oligarchic, or, as we say today, elitist or anti-republican. But perhaps I overreact.

Politics is about the whole regime, not just parts combined, however cleverly. (When Republicans complain about “class warfare,” they misconstrue the real issue—they aren’t defending a class, after all).

Faulkner addresses some necessary, but not the sufficient, conditions of republicanism. His recommended modesty of economic desires can be caricatured into Nancy Pelosi’s advice to enjoy unemployment for all the life opportunities it brings. Such imposed “moderation” by the administrative state and bad trade policies is what striving Americans elected President Trump to reject.

The more philosophic issue is that, while Aristotle’s polis or republic is about a middle class, it is even more about civic friendship or patriotism, a love by all for the polity’s just and noble elements. (Recall that Aristotle’s Ethics has “timocracy”—rule of honor, that is, inequalities—in place of republican polity in its study of regimes.) The republic is about the whole regime, about citizen-soldiers and fellow workers united together for the common good. It is not fundamentally about one class or part (pace John Adams), nor is it simply moderation of property in the largest class. In this way, Trump is a better Aristotelian than, say, Paul Ryan.

In the review I explicitly referenced Alexis de Tocqueville’s civic associations. Even parts of academia do more good than harm. But the institutions of the founding era, including the greatest itself, the Constitution, need to be revived.

Finally, if anyone needs to be cut down to size, it is those “arrogant and overreaching... modern day sophists” (to quote Faulkner’s letter), who impose
political correctness and are the masters of the administrative state. The latter-day sophists may well be middle class or better, economically, and they may even recommend severe moderation—albeit mostly for others (telling them to carpool or take the bus). But they embody the hubris and oligarchy of falsehoods that is destroying republican government.

I’ll add that I last saw Leslie Rubin in December 2016 when she gave a spirited talk about Aristotle and the elections. “This is a teacher!” I thought. She still is.

**Jaffa’s Vitality**

In his typically perceptive way, Charles Kesler pays deserved honor to Harry V. Jaffa on the centennial of his birth (“Harry V. Jaffa at 100,” Fall 2018).

Kesler describes Jaffa as a medieval, and notes that his first book was *Thomism and Aristotelianism*, though Jaffa later came to modify his original interpretation of Thomas Aquinas. At first, Kesler explains, he had “understood Aquinas to be trying to make Aristotle safe for Christianity. Now, he realized, Thomas had been trying to make Christianity safe for, i.e., compatible with, Aristotle.”

It is interesting to compare this with Jaffa’s more famous reconsideration, regarding Abraham Lincoln and the American Founders.

“I [Jaffa] regarded the founders as condemning slavery from the perspective of a prudent form of modern natural rights,” Jaffa wrote in an essay near the end of his life. “Now I believe that the prudent form of classical Aristotelianism was already present in the founding.” The preeminent political virtue, he explained, cannot be divided between ancient and modern versions. “[P]rudence is singular,” because “natural right and practical wisdom are virtually synonymous.” One might say that Jaffa moved from making the founding safe for America (i.e., transforming an inadequate beginning into something new through Lincoln) to making America safe for the founding (i.e., reviving contemporary America’s commitment to its classically prudent—or, therefore fully adequate—origins).

These examples are emblematic of Jaffa’s devotion to finding the harmonies—the “underlyingunities” as he described them—within those things his teacher Leo Strauss had contrasted: reason and revelation, ancients and moderns, theory and practice. Of course, a complete philosophic education would make use of the insights derived from both separating and combining.

The great medieval thinkers—including not just Aquinas, but also Alfarabi and Maimonides—were not exactly ancient, nor were they exactly modern. In calling Jaffa a medieval defender of the Declaration’s classically modern faith, Kesler highlights Jaffa’s project of bridging the gaps, and exploring the tectonic foundations that make natural right and practical wisdom virtually synonymous.

The dynamic heart of Western civilization found in the tensions—and harmonies—between Athens and Jerusalem was also the secret to Jaffa’s own vitality.

---

**Glenn Ellmers**
Washington, D.C.

**J. Eric Wise**
Old Greenwich, CT

**Racism at Home and Abroad**

My thanks to William Voegeli for his brilliant essay on the new racism (“Racism, Revised,” Fall 2018). I would like to offer a further perspective. I am a WASPish Canadian who has lived in South America and traveled in many countries. I have encountered a lot of nice people, and some who disliked me (explicitly) because of my skin color. In the Left’s new paradigm that Mr. Voegeli describes such an attitude may be other than racist because, in North America, non-Hispanic whites have power. What about in Venezuela, or Tanzania, or China? Am I inherently racist, because of my skin color, when I am home in Vancouver, but non-racist on an alternating basis depending on which cultural and political leaders have power as I move from place to place? Does the new radical framework for analysis go no further than the Harvard diversity officer’s line of sight, or are the Left’s deep thinkers ignoring the experience of a majority of the world’s citizens?

**Frederick G. Huggins**
Louisville, KY
Less than seven months after President Trump’s inauguration, conservative pundit William Kristol called for “liberating...conservatism from Trumpism”—a battle cry that treats conservatism and Trumpism as separate entities, impossible to reconcile or synthesize. To ask whether that premise is sound raises a question that is difficult, interesting and, above all, important. For many years to come, conservatism’s fortunes and meaning will turn on how conservatives interpret Donald Trump’s political career.

The first step, however, is to reflect on the meaning of their cause prior to, and apart from, Trump. Two hundred years ago, following the chaos unleashed by the French Revolution, people began to describe the fundamental political antagonism as “liberalism” versus “conservatism.” There has been conflict and confusion over the two terms’ meaning ever since. There is an asymmetry, however: only “liberalism” has a clear referent. Liberals promote liberty, even as they disagree among themselves and with their opponents about what it encompasses and requires.

To declare oneself a conservative, on the other hand, is to employ a verb without providing its direct object. What, exactly, does conservatism exist to conserve? And whatever those objects of its solicitude might be, why must they be conserved, rather than being able to fend for themselves?

**Precarious**

The one constant for conservatives, clearly implied by the designation they have chosen, is an acute sense of precariousness. In *How to Be a Conservative* (2014), the English philosopher Roger Scruton says that conservatism originates in “the sentiment that good things are easily destroyed, but not easily created.”

This is especially true of the good things that come to us as collective assets: peace, freedom, law, civility, public spirit, the security of property and family life, in all of which we depend on the cooperation of others while having no means singlehandedly to obtain it. In respect of such things, the work of destruction is quick, easy and exhilarating; the work of creation slow, laborious and dull. That is one of the lessons of the twentieth century. It is also one reason why conservatives suffer such a disadvantage when it comes to public opinion. Their position is true but boring, that of their opponents exciting but false.

Conservative policy agendas and philosophical explications, Scruton maintains, all derive from a disposition. For conservatives, “We’ve never done things that way before” is not a decisive objection, but one that does carry considerable weight. They worry that the more sustained and substantial are the benefits enjoyed under long-standing arrangements, the more we take them for granted. In doing so, we stop comparing our condition favorably with known, existing alternatives, and begin comparing it unfavorably with hypothetical possibilities. On the political supply side, public officials compete to be visionary and idealistic, to promise those transformations that will be the most fundamental. Those citizens increasingly disposed to believe that their glass is half-empty welcome or even demand such boldness.

Scruton’s “good things” is, of course, a capacious term, rendered only somewhat more definite by the idea of collective assets dependent on others’ cooperation. One result of this indeterminacy is that conservatives never lack for reasons to argue over which good things are most valuable, thereby meriting conservation, and most vulnerable, thereby requiring it. A second implication is that conservatism is more explicable in prudential than in essentialist terms. The dangers posed in a particular time and place to those things conservatives...
protect mean that conservatism will be what the circumstances demand that it must be.

A third implication follows from the first two: the fact that conservatism lacks a clear, fixed meaning helps its adversaries explain conservatives’ words and deeds in the most sinister terms. Always and everywhere, conservatism is driven by “animus against the agency of the subordinate classes,” according to political scientist Corey Robin’s The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump (2017). Seeking a rationale for why the poor, women, or ethnic and religious minorities “should not be allowed to exercise their independent will,” conservatism amounts to nothing more than “a meditation on—and theoretical rendition of—the felt experience of having power, seeing it threatened, and trying to win it back.” Robin regards “the right as a unity,” going so far as to insist that the differences among Edmund Burke, John Calhoun, Winston Churchill, Phyllis Schlafly, and Donald Trump are trivial. The only consideration that really matters, and defines them all as conservatives, is the shared desire to thwart those seeking their place in the sun.

**Books discussed in this essay:**

**How to Be a Conservative,** by Roger Scruton. Bloomsbury Continuum, 208 pages, $25 (paper)

**The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump,** by Corey Robin. Oxford University Press, 354 pages, $74 (cloth), $19.95 (paper)

**Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition,** by Roger Scruton. All Points Books, 176 pages, $24.99

**The Case for Trump,** by Victor Davis Hanson. Basic Books, 400 pages, $30

**Donald J. Trump: A President Like No Other,** by Conrad Black. Regnery Publishing, 256 pages, $27.99


**The Corrosion of Conservatism: Why I Left the Right,** by Max Boot. Liveright, 288 pages, $24.95


**Saving Liberalism from Itself**

This sweeping amalgamation ascribes to all subsequent conservative politics the earliest conservatives’ categorical rejection of liberalism, expressed most forcefully by Joseph de Maistre, implacable opponents of the French Revolution. Such “throne-and-altar” conservatives repudiated modernity in toto: the separation of church and state; accountable, representative government; individuals’ rights to make up their own minds and follow their own paths. Applying the preference for the familiar over the novel in the broadest way, these conservatives interpreted the fact that liberal democracy had never even been attempted prior to the 18th century as a warning to be heeded rather than a challenge to be met.

Defenders of monarchic and papal supremacy had been on the defensive for a century prior to the storming of the Bastille, however, and neither the Reign of Terror nor the Napoleonic wars allowed them to regain the upper hand. As a practical matter, two centuries of savage warfare between and among Catholics and Protestants had exhausted Europe, leaving it newly receptive to addressing political disputes without having to settle religious ones. The ideas that governmental authority was conferred by the people, not the mandate of Heaven, and that people of different faiths could live in civic union but creedral diversity, offered a way out of this dilemma.

More basically, the advent and spread of Christianity had caused a “fundamental transformation in the human condition,” according to Harry V. Jaffa, from “a world in which each city had its own god—to one in which there was but one God for the human race.” It took more than 17 centuries, but the radical innovation of severing temporal from ecclesiastical authority finally reshaped both in the broad ideas of popular sovereignty, the liberty of the individual, and constitutional rights.” Rather than save the ancien régime from liberalism, the conservative mission became to save liberalism from itself. That is, instead of worrying exclusively about liberalism’s enemies, liberals should—although they mostly don’t—also worry about liberalism’s self-destructive proclivities to undermine the foundations on which democracy, liberty, and constitutionalism rest.

Consider John Stuart Mill, the foremost 19th-century liberal theoretician. It’s significant that Mill believed liberal democracy was the only completely defensible form of socio-political organization, but also that it was not self-generating. “Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion,” he wrote in On Liberty. Accordingly, he considered benevolent despotism the least bad way to govern and civilize “barbarians.” Yet Mill also believed that liberalism, once established, would be self-sustaining: “But as soon as mankind have attained the capacity of being guided to their own improvement by conviction or persuasion... compulsion...is no longer admissible as a means to their own good, and justifiable only for the security of others” (emphases added).

The conservative is far less sanguine about progress being irreversible. Instead, he considers civilization to be something “laboriously achieved” but only “precariously defended,” as novelist Evelyn Waugh wrote in 1964. (Twenty-five years earlier Waugh had warned that barbarism “is never finally defeated,” which means that civilization “is under constant assault,” requiring “most of the energies of civilized man to keep going at all.”) The result of these ineradicable dangers, and liberalism’s blithe complacency about them, is that the conservative considers liberals’ “gullible and feeble,” in Waugh’s account, “believing in the easy perfectibility of man and ready to abandon the work of centuries for sentimental qualms.” Georges Clemenceau said that war is too important to be left to the generals; conservatives think liberty too important to be entrusted to liberals.

**After the Cold War**

The disarray about the meaning and boundaries of conservatism did not, then, commence with Donald Trump’s famous escalator ride in June 2015. Rather, that event followed two decades of far-ranging but fruitless efforts to reorient conservatism. The Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, five years
before a Democratic president declared that the era of Big Government was over and signed a bill abolishing the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. Conservatives took pride in these Reaganite victories for limited against unlimited government, but also felt that liberal democracy remained in jeopardy.

Writing in 1993, Irving Kristol forcefully conveyed the sense of continuing and even heightened danger: 'There is no after the Cold War' for me. So far from having ended, my cold war has increased in intensity, as sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos.' Less clear, however, was the nature of the peril and the way to defeat it. The liberal ethos, Kristol wrote, ‘aims simultaneously at political and social collectivism on the one hand, and moral anarchy on the other.’

Twenty-two years later, very little flesh had been put on these bones, though not for lack of trying. The roster of reformulated conservative mission statements include: Newt Gingrich’s ‘Contract with America’; national greatness’ conservatism; George W. Bush’s ‘ownership society’ and ‘compassionate conservatism’; a ‘war on terrorism’ conceived to require establishing stable democracies in the Middle East; Paul Ryan’s ‘roadmaps’ to make entitlement programs solvent; the Tea Party movement; and ‘reform conservatism.’ Many of these efforts offered valuable insights, but all turned out to be either too unclear, too unpopular, or both, to frame a 21st-century conservatism that would be intellectually and politically formidable.

Trump, Considered

The intra-conservative debate over Trumpism is not only bound up with those over conservatism, but also with the debate about Trump himself. Even The Case for Trump, by historian and Hoover Institution scholar Victor Davis Hanson, calls the president ‘mercurial’ on its first page, a judgment repeated several times. Elsewhere in the book, Hanson says that Trump can be ‘vulgar, uncouth, [and] divisive,’ and that many of his Twitter broadsides have been counterproductive. For the sake of ‘evening scores with nonentities,’ he laments, the president ends up ‘furthering a media narrative that he was isolated, petulant, puerile, and erratic.’ In an October 2016 National Review article, also titled ‘The Case for Trump,’ Hanson wrote that he preferred all 16 of the other Republican candidates to Trump at the outset of the nominating contest, but ultimately concluded that Trump had shown himself likely to be Hillary Clinton’s toughest general-election opponent. Unlike Hanson, who has never met the president, Conrad Black knows him well. A businessman as well as an author, Black recounts tough but fair, forthright, and mutually beneficial business dealings with Trump before he entered politics. (Chicago’s Trump International Hotel and Tower was erected on a site owned by the Chicago Sun-Times when Black was its publisher.) Yet even in a book so supportive as Donald J. Trump: A President Like No Other, Black at one point describes Trump the businessman as ‘a right-fisted, devious employer, a very tenacious litigant, and an efficient and imaginative developer.’ As a politician, Trump has proven to be ‘unpredictable and somewhat erratic,’ a leader whose ‘strenuous and ill-tempered outbursts are not what Americans expect of their presidents.’

These measured evaluations of Trump are, of course, quite unlike the ones made by his conservative detractors. In How the Right Lost Its Mind, author and former radio talk-show host Charles J. Sykes derides Trump as ‘a serial liar, a con man who mocks the disabled and women…a narcissist and a bully, a man with no fixed principles who has the vocabulary of an emotionally insecure nine-year-old.’ Max Boot, Washington Post columnist and advisor to Republican Senator Marco Rubio’s 2016 presidential campaign, uses some of the same terms in The Corrosion of Conservatism: Why I Left the Right, castigating Trump as a ‘bigoted bully’ with ‘few fixed convictions outside of narcissism and nativism, racism and sexism.’ The conservative commentator David Frum’s Trumpocalypse calls Trump ‘cruel, vengeful, egoistic, ignorant, lazy, avaricious, and treacherous.’

Hanson’s observation that ‘Trump’s criticism despire rather than just oppose him’ is especially true of his conservative detractors. After all, left-of-center politicians and writers have a cry-wolf problem when anathematizing Trump, since so many of them also despised rather than simply opposed Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Newt Gingrich, and George W. Bush. The conservatives who de-test Trump cannot be discounted so easily. The intensity of their loathing takes the form of using Trump’s odiousness to make a prima facie case against allowing conservatism to be defined and defiled by him. A movement associated with, much less led by, such a man is one the ‘Never Trump’ conservatives reject as bankrupt, intellectually and morally.

Never Trumpism

Where that repudiation leaves the Never Trumpers with respect to conservatism is a harder question. One can imagine some of them reenlist-
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isolationism, and know-nothingism.” Conservatism lost its way at the very beginning of the journey, in the 1950s, when it should have embraced Dwight Eisenhower’s “Modern Republicanism” rather than scorn it as capitulation to the New Deal and the anti-Soviet containment policy.

**The Trump Treatment**

Conrad Black’s case for Trump and Trumpism is virtually identical to the case Trump made for himself as a candidate, not only substantively but expressed with the same direct, emphatic style: America had been governed so badly, for so many years prior to 2016, that it was far less reckless to choose a completely different kind of president than it was to pick yet another member of the same discredited governing class, whether a Republican like Jeb Bush or a Democrat like Hillary Clinton. Once in office, Trump began “slowly winning his tumultuous crusade against political correctness and systematic defeatism in foreign and domestic policy,” according to Black. Above all, Trump has “promoted Americanism over the atomization of identity politics” while pursuing the country’s national interest without “evangelical or Wilsonian notions of purifying other countries.”

Victor Davis Hanson’s argument has more facets. Indeed, *The Case for Trump* presents what would be more accurately described as a case for Trump. When Hanson asks whether Trump is better understood as “a clumsy buffoon who said the first thing that came into his one-dimensional mind” or “a multidimensional strategic thinker who liked to bait and goad elites, as a mockery for others to enjoy,” it doesn’t appear to be a rhetorical question. A chapter titled “Trump, The Tragic Hero?” suggests—note the question mark—that Trump is one of those necessary but unasailable figures identified by George Orwell: “men can be highly civilized only while other men, inevitably less civilized, are there to guard and feed them.” Hanson offers examples from ancient literature (Achilles in *The Iliad*), film (Gary Cooper in *High Noon* and Clint Eastwood in *Dirty Harry*), and military history (George Patton and Curtis LeMay). The tragedy is such figures’ awareness “that the natural expression of their personas can lead only to their own destruction or ostracism from an advancing civilization that they seek to protect,” Hanson writes. “And yet they willingly accept the challenge to be of service.”

*The Case for Trump* offers, less equivocally, a different analogy: nominating and electing Donald Trump is like chemotherapy—the effects are nauseating or even debilitating but, in the circumstances, any milder remedy will allow the patient to die. The power of that argument depends on the accuracy of the diagnosis. In October 2016 Hanson wrote that Hillary Clinton’s victory would not be just another turn of the wheel, but would consummate the fundamental transformation promised by Barack Obama over 12 or 16 years of uninterrupted Democratic administrations. “A likely two-term Clinton presidency would complete a 16-year institutionalization of serial progressive abuse of the Constitution,” he wrote.

David Frum, writing the same month, made the opposite judgment: it was madness to resort to a drastic remedy to avert a manageable problem. Hillary Clinton, he declared, “is a patriot” who will “uphold the sovereignty and independence of the United States,” “defend allies,” and “execute the laws with reasonable impartiality.” A vote for her amounted to a vote to defend America’s commitment to norms and rules that today protect my rights under a president I don’t favor, and that will tomorrow do the same service for you.” Elect her opponent, and those norms and rules will shudder and shake in a way unequaled since the Union won the Civil War.”

**Malignant or Benign**

We cannot know whether the Clinton presidency Trump’s election prevented would have proven as malignant as Hanson feared or as benign as Frum expected. We do know, however, the direction of the Democratic Party, before, during, and after her campaign. It forced Clinton to move steadily to the left from the day she announced her candidacy, to the point that she and her husband spent more time apologizing for his administration’s triangulations on crime, race, welfare, taxes, spending, and regulation than they did boasting of his achievements.

And we know that since Trump’s victory the Democrats have been “The Resistance,” not the opposition party. As a result, the hectoring self-righteousness that grievance studies professors display in faculty senates is now an increasingly common feature of the U.S. Senate. Thus, Judiciary Committee hearings on a Supreme Court nominee became a venue for the same contempt for procedural fairness and epistemological humility as a campus sexual harassment tribunal run by the campus Women’s Center’s Grand Inquisitors.

By the same token, had President Hillary Clinton placed two new Justices on the Supreme Court, they would have joined the four nominated by her husband and President Obama to form a sturdy liberal majority. In a 2014 campaign finance case three Justices joined Steven Breyer’s dissenting opinion, which held that the First Amendment exists not to secure inalienable rights but so that “public opinion could be channeled into effective governmental action.” With two more votes, the idea that rights should be calibrated according to whether they satisfied jurists’ ideas about what constitutes effective governance would have formed the basis for majority opinion. By the same token, there would be enough votes to enshrine Justice Sonia Sotomayor’s opinion that “race matters.” Indeed, in *Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action* (2014) she ruled it matters so much that a state cannot abolish affirmative action policies, even if a majority of the state’s voters have already voted for a referendum to end preferences.

In short, a commitment to norms and rules protecting the rights of those not allied with the Democrats appears to be weakening steadily within the party, the continuation of a trend that predated Donald Trump’s political career. If conservatism must adapt to meet the changing threats to liberal democracy, then it has no choice but to be preoccupied with American liberalism’s menacing evolution. Waugh’s claim that liberals are gullible and feeble, complacently unaware of the threats to liberty, needs to be modified to account for the ways that liberalism has itself become such a threat.

A 2018 *New York Times* article, for example, lamented that conservatives have “weaponized” the First Amendment, whose defense was once the raison d’etre of liberal activists in general, and the American Civil Liberties Union in particular. Though he used to have “the standard liberal view of civil liberties,” one law professor explained, he has now come to realize “that it’s a mistake to think of free speech as an effective means to accomplish a more just society.” The Occam’s Razor explanation for this shift is that free speech “was only ever a means to an end” for liberals, in
the words of law professor and blogger Ann Althouse. “When they got their free speech, made their arguments, and failed to win over the American people, and when in fact the speech from their opponents seemed too successful, they switched to the repression of speech, because the end was never freedom.”

The Evolving Threat

Also evolving, and also requiring conservatives’ close attention, is the liberal understanding of what a just society demands. Any conservative who lives long enough will eventually be astounded by the need to defend propositions long considered self-evident. The idea that Western civilization is a real and good thing, whose preservation is necessary to hopes for a better future, is one of these. That human beings are either men or women is another.

Trumpism is especially forceful in upholding a third: the nation-state is the best, most workable basis for sovereignty in the modern world. The growing liberal challenge to this belief treats the nation-state as both dangerous and irrelevant. In its stead, the political attachments that do and should matter are either transnational, the core tenet of globalization, or subnational, the core tenet of multiculturalism. In these circumstances, writes Scruton in Conservatism, conservatives have found it necessary to remind that “governments are elected by a specific people in a specific place, and to insist on ‘the defence of the homeland, the maintenance of national borders, and the unity and integrity of the nation.”

Scruton goes on to contend that popular sovereignty is impossible, logically and practically, without national sovereignty. That is, “accountability is possible only if the electorate is bound together as a ‘we’. Only if this ‘we’ is in place can the people trust the politicians to look after their interests.” By way of attacking Trump and his followers, Charles Sykes declares that the “rejection of populism runs deep in the conservative tradition.” But that assessment is selective and mostly wrong. It has, after all, been nearly 60 years since William Buckley declared, “I should sooner live in a society governed by the first 2,000 names in the Boston telephone directory than in a society governed by the 2,000 faculty members of Harvard University.” In doing so, Buckley deftly captured what is best about populism and worst about progressivism: governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, not the expertise of the experts.

Leverage

Clearly, more than an aversion to the president’s bearing and character drives the Never Trump conservatives. Trump has spent his adult life identifying and making the most of situations where he has leverage, power to help or hurt partners, lenders, or adversaries exceeding their power to help or hurt him. And he has done it again. Conservatives know Trump does not need the conservative movement, least of all its intellectuals, and has little reason to fear it. National Review devoted most of its February 15, 2016 issue to denouncing him, a widely discussed event that proved utterly inconsequential. Unlike Reagan, then, Trump is neither a product of the conservative movement nor a president who considers its well-being among his responsibilities.

So, how should conservatives play their weak hand? The Never Trump answer is that after years of obsessive-compulsive political hygiene, the conservative movement emerged from the other side of the Trump presidency can credibly deny complicity with his failures and fronts. There are several reasons to believe this approach makes the worst of a bad situation. For one, Trumpism has both a constituency and a stunning win to its credit, unlike all the other efforts to reformulate conservatism for the post-Cold War era. The New York Times columnist Ross Douthat, one of the leading reform conservatives, once called Trumpism, with its focus on working-class needs and fears, reform conservatism’s “evil twin.” He later acknowledged that it could also be described as reform conservatism’s “more politically successful twin.” Defenestrating Trumpism in favor of one of the options that predated it now entails violating one of the most basic conservative principles, as summarized by Thomas Sowell: don’t replace one thing that works with a different thing that sounds good.

Moreover, the Never Trump effort, now in its fourth year, has been procedurally unfair and politically obscure. Run a two-party democracy in a diverse nation of 328 million people, and each party will necessarily be a broad, ungainly coalition. No major party can cohere if one big part of it has good reason to believe that it is expected to endorse decisions made by others, but never be allowed to have its own position prevail. As Hanson points out in The Case for Trump, the Trump Republican voters dutifully supported Mitt Romney and John McCain as the party’s nominees, despite well-founded doubts about both men’s commitment to conservatism and ability to defeat Barack Obama.

Donald Trump won the nomination contest by the same rules as all his GOP opponents, which would only have intensified his followers’ bitterness if the Never Trump efforts to thwart his nomination, election, and presidency had somehow succeeded. The fact that, after all this time, the Never Trump effort has gotten much attention but little traction does not prove it is wrong, but strongly suggests that it is imprudent—quixotic rather than noble. As Max Boot concedes about the Never Trumpers, “There’s enough of us for a dinner party, not a political party.”

The challenge, then, is not to liberate conservatism from Trumpism in the belief that the latter “poses an existential threat to the conservative vision of ordered liberty,” as Sykes asserts. Nor is it to exchange conservatism for Trumpism. It is, rather, to elaborate a conservatism for the 21st century that integrates Trumpism by absorbing what Donald Trump’s presidency rather than through it. Donald Trump won the nomination contest by the same rules as all his GOP opponents, which would only have intensified his followers’ bitterness if the Never Trump efforts to thwart his nomination, election, and presidency had somehow succeeded. The fact that, after all this time, the Never Trump effort has gotten much attention but little traction does not prove it is wrong, but strongly suggests that it is imprudent—quixotic rather than noble. As Max Boot concedes about the Never Trumpers, “There’s enough of us for a dinner party, not a political party.”

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Book Review by Michael Anton

**DRAINING THE SWAMP**


In February 2017, Steve Bannon—at the time, President Donald Trump’s chief strategist—made something of a splash at the Conservative Political Action Conference when he identified the third of the Trump Administration’s three core “lines of work,” after national sovereignty and economic nationalism, as the “deconstruction of the administrative state.”

The media and its taskmasters in the intelligentsia and universities were at once horrified and baffled. Deconstruction is all well and good in English departments, and (more broadly) when the things being deconstructed are “white privilege” and Western civilization. But something as sacred as the state? How dare he! And what’s with the qualifier? Aren’t all “states” in some sense “administrative”?

That confusion launched a thousand “explainer” articles, none of which got the answer even remotely correct (not that they were intended to). The other thing notable by its absence was the name of John Marini.

Marini didn’t coin the term “administrative state”; that was political scientist Dwight Waldo in his 1948 book of the same name. But there can be little doubt that the phrase wouldn’t have escaped Bannon’s lips if not for Marini. No one—certainly not Waldo—has done more to explain what the administrative state is, how it works, and how it came to be. And not just in the historical sense, though Marini does show how the apparatus was built, by whom, and for what purpose. But his far greater contribution is to lay bare its theoretical roots. Plumbing those depths requires both a first-class education as well as practical experience in the swamp, both of which Marini has. In the 1980s, he served as a special assistant to then-Chairman Clarence Thomas at the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission before returning to academia and writing and editing essential books on the federal budget process and the separation of powers from his perch at the University of Nevada, Reno.

And now, finally, one on the animating interest of his entire career. *Unmasking the Administrative State*—ably edited and introduced by Ken Masugi, Marini’s friend, fellow student, and former co-worker at the EEOC—is actually a collection of Marini’s writings over 40 years, but its themes, messages and lessons are remarkably consistent. And, to some of us, familiar.

When Donald Trump announced his candidacy in June 2015, I had already been reading (and listening to) Marini for more than 20 years. His analysis of the insidious ways the administrative state undermines democratic politics prepared me to begin to understand the populist revolt against bipartisan orthodoxy.
Our opinion-making class, by contrast, thrashed about for explanations. How can this man say these things? Why are so many people listening? What’s the common thread, if any? The term one saw bandied about was “source code,” as in, “We must find the source code of Trumpism.” While most elites insisted that Trump was simply winging it, making things up as he went along, a few intuited that there might be—out there somewhere—a body of ideas (though they were quick to add: not any with which Trump himself was personally familiar!) that could explain the appeal of his candidacy. They were right, but they did not know where to look.

I didn’t have to look; the source code found me. Shortly after Trump took his famous escalator ride, Marini began sending long, erudite, profound emails to a select few. They appeared in the inbox as giant walls of text, hardly any (if any at all) paragraph breaks—just words, words, words. To begin reading did not in any way alleviate the anxiety. It’s not that the missives were rambling but precisely that they were not. They were so dense and closely reasoned that every line, every word demanded complete attention. It soon became clear that Marini had it all figured out before the rest of us had tied our shoes. Yet he steadfastly refused to take any kind of public bow.

In the heat of the primary season a few intellectual insurgents and I started a pseudonymous blog called the Journal of American Greatness, which was broadly pro-Trump, or at least pro-Trumpism, which we took it upon ourselves to define. I secured Marini’s permission to post (under the name “Cato the Elder”) two of his emails. They were almost certainly the most intellectually challenging of all the content on JAG—which is saying something, since the rest of us more than occasionally let our grad seminar freak flags fly. They were also among the most popular.

Portions of them appear, expanded and reworked, in Unmasking the Administrative State. But this is not a book about Trump—not directly anyway. With all due respect to the president, it’s much bigger than that. This is a philosphic book about the grounding, conditions, functions, ends, and means of politics. You’re more likely to encounter Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, or Auguste Comte than Donald Trump.

Taken together, Marini’s essays provide the finest available account of so-called “rational historicism” and its consequences. Inaugurated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, more fully developed by G.W.F. Hegel, and consummated by Alexandre Koèjeve, this school of thought replaces fixed human nature with the notion of man’s consciousness evolving rationally through the historical process to its ultimate endpoint. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, rational historicism faced a withering critique from its irrational younger half-brother—crystallized in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger—which holds that history never ends and has no point. But, as Marini shows, the older brother survived and still rules. The administrative state is its actualization—its malevolent word made flesh.

The true subject of this book, then, is “regime change,” how we got from “there”—our founders’ understanding of justice, morality, and politics—to “here”: the tradition-and-history-destroying, common-good-denying, anarcho-tyrannical, pathologically altruistic dystopian oligarchy currently throttling the West. In a way, Unmasking the Administrative State is the perfect companion to 2017’s The Political Theory of the American Founding by Thomas G. West, Marini’s fellow student at the Claremont Graduate School in the late 1960s when Leo Strauss taught there and Harry Jaffa was in his prime. West’s book explains the founders’ principles; Marini’s their repudiation. Read together, the two books convey the grandeur and accomplishments and leave one saddened and bewildered by their loss. How could we let such a glorious inheritance go? Why did our elites and a growing portion of the populace come to despise it all?

For the United States is not now, and has not been for some time, a constitutional republic as the founders and their heirs understood that term. As Marini shows, the administrative state is not merely unconstitutional; it is anti-constitutional. Leo Strauss identified the essence of constitutionalism as the practical reconciliation of wisdom and consent. Because wisdom can be approached but never achieved, the consent of the governed is required to preserve man’s natural freedom in the face of wisdom’s limitations. Hence, Strauss writes, the best and most stable foundation for political order is that a wise legislator frame a code which the citizen body, duly persuaded, freely adopts. That code, which is, as it were, the embodiment of wisdom, must be as little subject to alteration as possible; the rule of law is to take the place of the rule of men, however wise.

Make “legislator” plural and you have a fine description of the drafting and ratification of the United States Constitution.

The administrative state dismisses all this, declares itself wise, and dispenses with consent. On a functional level, it steamrolls the separation of powers, ignores the limits set by the enumeration of powers, and further rejects any limits either to government’s means or ends. Jealous and unwilling to tolerate rivals, it centralizes power unto itself, enervating state and local governments and destroying civil and religious institutions. These practical consequences flow inexorably from the administrative state’s animating theory, which is a root-and-branch rejection of nature—especially of human nature—in favor of “science,” “history,” and “freedom.”

The sneer quotes are necessary, because in all cases the words within have taken on entirely new meanings. “Science” has gone from being synonymous with philosophy to its antithesis and superior: allegedly exact rather than imprecise, authoritative rather than questioning, hubristic rather than humble, instrumental rather than theoretical. “Science” occasionally feigns humility and admits that it doesn’t quite yet know everything, but it’s also confident that anything it does not or cannot understand is either irrelevant or not knowledge.

“History” no longer refers to the record, or an account, of the past—of deeds, events, human choices, greatness, mediocrity, baselessness—but is seen as a process that, in a sense, replaces God and nature. Times change, and therefore man and his principles and institutions must change with the times. This has always been partly true, of course. But the older understanding knew that a permanent ground underlay the changing currents, and so men used prudence to apply their knowledge of the permanent to guide themselves through the ephemeral. “History” rejects the permanent ground, leaving prudence with nothing to do.

The new science and history purport to expand greatly man’s freedom by opening up new vistas that vastly extend the horizon. But this “freedom” proves illusory. In the older understanding, freedom consists primarily of steering the ship of state via public deliberation. It was accepted that man cannot fully control or determine his destiny, but also believed that he can shape it by applying prudential judgment to identify and implement effective means to secure just and rightful ends, which are supplied by nature. The new understanding doesn’t merely outsource prudence’s job; it automates it. Science becomes history’s handmaiden, supplying means for achieving the latter’s ends. Subjects once open for debate become closed as science supposedly discovers the workings of History with a capital H. There is no politics because there is nothing for man to deliberate or choose. Science has spoken, and everyone...
better get on the "right side of History." Man turns out to be far more enslaved to "History" in the new understanding than he was limited by nature in the old.

The administrative state, then, is the apparat that applies the alleged insights of science to the governance of man. But 'apparat' is such a mild word for what it actually does, how it really works, what it really is. And that, Marini shows, is exactly the soft despotism about which Alexis de Tocqueville warned.

Yet, as he further shows, that warning was insufficient. Ultimately, Tocqueville looked to History rather than nature and thus was unwilling or unable to take seriously the American Founders' argument that they had found a way to resolve—in theory no less than in practice—the apparent tension between equality and liberty. Marini gives Tocqueville his due for seeing modern democracy's inherent tendency to degenerate into administrative tyranny. Yet—unlike so many of Tocqueville's admirers—Marini firmly, if gently, refuses to let the Frenchman off the hook for his unwitting contribution to that tyranny. Appeals to "History" only feed and strengthen the beast. The only way out, Marini shows, is a return to nature as the basis for the good and for political right. Tocqueville denied such a return was possible, and so, despite his prescient and terrifying insight, the very tyranny he most feared is now our master.

Everyone knows about the federal bureaucracy's supernova-like growth in the 20th century. Marini puts that growth in context—not merely or even primarily in size but more fundamentally in power. He is especially merciless on Congress, which voluntarily and happily surrendered its own constitutionally enumerated powers to an unconstitutional fourth branch—the bureaucracy housed within the executive branch—which looks upon its nominal master with indifference or bemused contempt.

Every government of course needs executive agencies; politics is about making decisions, and decisions must be implemented. That said, to what ends do executive agencies work? How are those ends determined and by whom? What is the source of those agencies' political legitimacy? What—if any—limits are placed on their power? And the decisive question: who controls them and by what means?

The ends of our government are no longer determined by the people through public deliberation constrained by moral and natural limits; nor are they even to give the people what they want regardless of those limits. They are rather to force upon the people what "science," the research universities and public intellectuals have determined they should want. Since these "discoveries" are held to be "scientific" and therefore incontrovertible, limits on administrative power are not merely unnecessary but harmful. When you know what's right and necessary, why wait? Why let yourself be held up by mere procedural hurdles, or worse, by the contentless objections of the ignorant?

The United States is not now, and has not been for some time, a constitutional republic. The whole intelligentsia—the media, academia, intellectuals, columnists, pundits, artists, comedians, show-runners and executive producers, authors of airport bookshop best-sellers—all agree and hammer the message home. They know they are right. You merely believe, and mere belief has no place whatsoever in the making of public policy. Thus the entire phalanx locks shields when some part of the people has the impudence to question its narrative and rises in fury when anyone questions its authority.

Much of this will sound like James Burnham's The Managerial Revolution (1941). Although Burnham and Marini begin from different places, it's fair to say that, on this score, they end up more or less adjacent. A theme worthy of further exploration is the vast amount of common ground that exists between the pre-collaborationist Right and today's philosophically-grounded pro-Trump, or Trump-sympathetic, conservatism. Indeed, the differences that Marini elaborates with Burnham in this volume have nothing to do with high principle but concern merely the practical question of Congress's fate vis-à-vis the rising administrative state. Burnham argued that Congress would either reassert itself or die. Marini shows that Congress instead became a handmaiden.

In perhaps the book's most extraordinary chapter, Marini illustrates his point with a wholly new (at least to my eyes) interpretation of Watergate. In his account, Watergate was indeed—as conventional wisdom insists—the most serious constitutional crisis in our history (so far), but not for the reasons usually assumed. Richard Nixon's real sin was not abuse of power but his serious constitutional challenge to the administrative state. Marini quotes Henry Kissinger:

[T]he bureaucracies have developed the instinct for self-preservation at all costs. They do not, however, defend themselves on the basis of self-interest. Rather, they see themselves as defenders of institutional rationality, as a part of the social intelligence that establishes the legitimacy of rule within the administrative state.

[Nixon] had been reelected by a landslide in 1972 in a contest as close to being fought on ideological issues as is possible in America.... The American people for once had chosen on philosophical grounds, not on personality.

Marini then makes clear what Kissinger leaves out: the "ideological issues" and "phil-
osophical grounds” included not just America’s approach to Communism, nor even simply control of executive branch agencies, but the very (il)legitimacy of the administrative state. Eight years as vice president and four as president had demonstrated beyond doubt to Nixon that the bureaucracy runs the government for its own purposes, without the consent of the people. He further understood that the administrative state (though he didn’t use the term) both concentrated power in Washington, away from states and local communities, and that the executive agencies he was elected to control and which, on the flow chart, reported to him were (and remain) in fact independent of electoral, or political, control. So he made the agenda of his second term to diffuse much of Washington’s power and restore executive control over the remainder.

This the administrative state could not abide. Congress by this point had completed the transformation of itself “from primarily a legislative body to an administrative oversight body.” It saw, counterintuitively but correctly, Nixon’s threat to curtail the power of executive branch agencies as a threat to its own power, to its own new role in the administrative regime.

Granted, Nixon foolishly handed his enemies the gun with which to shoot him. But, for Marini, that was mere pretense:

Nearly every political scandal in American politics has been transformed into a legal one in order to expose and reveal guilt as violation of law. It is fought out in the public, or political arena, on legal grounds to establish culpability, again with reference to the law. If successful, it is justified as upholding the rule of law. Although it provides clarity in terms of simplifying the issues in a manner suitable for presentation to a mass public, it often obscures the deeper, or more fundamental, problems that give rise to the necessity of political scandal.

The parallels to today are obvious. President Trump has not handed his administrative state enemies the gun with which to shoot him, but no matter; they have 3-D printers and so made their own: the ridiculous “dossier” and the “collusion” narrative that 18 months, dozens of prosecutors and investigators, and $25 million have not been able to substantiate in any way. The same agencies that leaked to take down Nixon are leaking to take down Trump, and for the same reason. As Marini puts it:

Watergate was not a partisan affair in the ordinary sense, nor was it simply a legal controversy. Rather, it was an institutional struggle between the political branches of government. Such an event could not but be political.

And, more ominously:

Republican presidents, at times representing national majorities opposed to the expansion of government, and Democratic Congresses organized around private interests in support of its expansion, became rival forces to an extent incompatible with the pursuit of a long-term public interest.

Except this time it’s worse. The conspiracy to unseat the president began before he was even elected; the pretense was made up out of whole cloth; the agencies aren’t bothering to conceal or dress up their agenda; and the tidal wave of misinformation utterly shameless despite the transparent phoniness of it. Most depressing of all: our best and brightest have met this new attempt to overturn the result of a democratic election either with loud cheers or a collective shrug. Other commentators, whose hearts are in the right place, have called this the biggest political scandal in American history. Lord knows it should be. But it manifestly isn’t, at least not in public perception, which, with respect to scandal, is everything.

Even more disgraceful, though, are the former “conservatives” egging all this on. As the ever insouciant, newly woke Bill Kristol tweeted: “If it comes to it, prefer the deep state to the Trump state.” No clearer evisceration of principle, self-righteously announced in the name of principle, could be imagined. This is what so much of the conservative movement has been reduced to: active collaboration with the Left to overturn democratic elections in the name of democracy. Despite the glaring hypocrisy and idiocy, it’s all too sordid to elicit even a mirthless laugh.

But it should not have been surprising (though I admit to having been surprised). Marini explains the essential convergence of “Right” and Left under historicist philosophy and administrative state rule:

Both parties have participated in recognizing the legitimacy of the cultural narrative established by postmodern theory—and enforced by political correctness—as the ground of understanding civil society, public policy, law, and bureaucracy itself. Before the end of the
twentieth century, contemporary politics had created an equilibrium agreed on by both parties and written by the intellectual authority of positivism and historicism.

In other words, Trump’s voters saw intuitively what the entire political class missed. And they wanted a choice, not an echo.

I said that this book is not about Trump. And yet it is. Marini explained Trump, the rise of Trump, the need for Trump, well before the escalator ride that inaugurated his candidacy. The need for Trump begins from the recognition that

America is in the midst of a great crisis in terms of its economy, its chaotic civil society, its political corruption, and its inability to defend any kind of tradition—or way of life derived from that tradition—because of the transformation of its culture by the intellectual elites. This sweeping cultural transformation occurred almost completely outside the political process of mobilizing public opinion and political majorities. The American people themselves did not participate or consent to the wholesale undermining of their way of life, which government and the bureaucracy helped to facilitate by undermining those institutions of civil society that were dependent upon a public defense of the old morality.

Our elites “deny the seriousness of the crisis and see Trump himself as the greatest danger.” Because he is—to them. Or more precisely, to their hitherto uncontested rule and total exemption from any accountability for their failures. Before Trump, writes Marini, there had been no honest evaluation of Washington that originated in Washington: no policy ever really fails, private corruption never rises to the level of public corruption (let alone is punished), no officeholder of significance has been held personally responsible for their behavior since Watergate. Ironically, it has taken a reality television star—one who knows the difference between the real and the imagined—to make reality a political issue with respect to Washington. Indeed, in recent years, Washington has presented itself as a kind of reality show. It is difficult to distinguish what is real from the way it is spun. Benghazi was just one example of the unwillingness of the Washington establishment to denounce deception in a political matter. Trump was willing to denounce the deception by passing personal judgment on those policies, personalities, and issues, and he was willing to judge them as personally accountable.

Can’t have that!

But the crisis is real, and our elites are too arrogant, venal, greedy, blinkered, and stupid to resolve it. All they can do is tenaciously cling to their power and privilege. How long their reign may last, how it might end, and what comes after are large and vital questions. Those inclined toward gloom on this score may find their spirits lifted by Marini’s implicit reminder that if there is nature—the nature historicists deny—then sooner or later their utopian project will bump up against natural limits. Nature will reassert itself against antinature. New possibilities will arise.

Some on the right sympathetic to Marini’s thought will say (as I have heard it said) that this is all well and good, but how does talking about the administrative state possibly help fight the barbarians storming the gates? Philosophy requires leisure, which is not to be indulged in the midst of crisis. I do not at all doubt or deny the severity of the crisis. But I absolutely believe that it’s better to understand its roots than not. In fact, “winning” requires understanding, which requires studying arguments that on the surface appear not to be urgent. The order of battle of spiritual warfare is multidimensional. We need bloggers, meme-makers, Twitter trolls, street artists, comedians, propagandists, theologians, playwrights, essayists, novelists, hacks, flaks, and intellectuals (among others). But behind, underneath, and above them all is the philosopher. If the foundational arguments are wrong, everything else will be wrong. Besides, it’s essential to get the argument right for no other reason than if future generations ever get a chance to rebuild, they will need to understand our mistakes in order to avoid them.

Though Marini seldom directly weighs in on the pressing issues of our time, when he does so indirectly, he arms those engaged in the struggle with the strongest possible reasons for, and arguments to defend, our convictions. For example, he writes:

America has often been called a nation of immigrants, as if that is what has distinguished it among the nations of the earth. But every human society that did not spring full-blown from the soil with a common identity is a nation of strangers, or immigrants, who were somehow united in civic friendship. Some nations with long histories have forgotten their origins, or what it was that made it possible to distinguish themselves from others. The problem of immigration, therefore, is unintelligible in the absence of an understanding of what it is that constitutes the ground of unity or common identity. Any human association that considers itself as separate or distinct from other political societies—or, in modern times, one which considers itself sovereign—must make distinctions between those who are citizens and those who are not.

That paragraph says, at once, nothing and everything about the crisis at our southern border. In its density and gravity are the deepest reasons why objections to the ruling class’s insistence on open borders are legitimate and moral, despite the tidal wave of propaganda angrily shouting the contrary.

Others may complain that Marini can be hard to read. I am tempted to reply that you either enjoy this sort of thing or you don’t. But maybe that’s too glib. Marini himself is anything but glib. Reading his sober, elevated prose is to be reminded that, when it comes to the most important things, true understanding is incompatible with neutrality.

I must warn, however, that the book can be repetitive. Phrases, sentences—in a few cases, even whole paragraphs—reappear. But allowance must be made for a body of work written over a lifetime arising from the same wells of study and concern. That Marini has not—unlike so many who pass for “conservatives” today—flirted from one contradictory preoccupation to the next redounds to his credit. This is a man who understands both the shifting tectonic plates and the core underneath.

I do, however, wish that more prefatory material had been included to introduce each chapter, explaining the original setting and context of each essay. Although not necessary in order to get the big picture, it might have helped with the details.

In the book’s preface, Masugi recalls giving Clarence Thomas one of the articles now reprinted in Unmasking the Administrative State. The copy came back with a demand scrawled at the top: “I must see Marini!!” If I may update the entreaty for 2019 and beyond: We must read Marini!!
David Remnick, editor of The New Yorker, asked staff writer Lawrence Wright to “explain Texas.” Why would Wright choose to live there? “I hope this book,” says Wright, “answers the question.” But the book—God Save Texas: A Journey into the Soul of the Lone Star State—does not explain Texas. It does not even explain why Lawrence Wright of The New Yorker chooses to live in Texas, a question of limited interest. It is not, as it proposes to be, a meditation on the culture and politics of Texas and their influence on the wider American scene. It is an overflowing slop-bucket of ignorance, laziness, and snobbery in the shape of a book. The structure of the work will be familiar to those obliged to read books produced by columnists and broadcast-media figures: a series of mostly disconnected essays and vignettes repackaged as a monograph, lightly stitched up with newly written connective material and punctuated every fourth page or so by something the author doesn’t realize is hilariously stupid or obviously wrong. As with chainsaw sculpture, the process leaves its mark on the product: columns and essays are arranged in a particular order and then written through (sometimes by the author, often by a junior editor) two or three times until the recycled material smells fresh enough to put a cover and title on. Wright has spent decades writing about the politics and personalities of Texas, and this book is a kind of greatest-hits album underneath a thin wash of the now-familiar indignant moral hysteria induced in the NPR crowd by the Age of Trump.

The book begins with Wright and his friend Stephen Harrigan, author of The Gates of the Alamo (2000), riding their bicycles through one of the ugly stretches that sprawl between Texas cities, just as they sprawl between most American cities. Wright is disappointed by the scenery. “The actual vista in front of us was an unending strip mall hugging a crowded interstate highway,” he writes—a sentence that could have been written about nearly identical scenes in almost any of these United States. This is somehow the fault of the oil business, which left Texas with “cruddy strip shopping centers, garish beach communities, the ugly sprawl of car lots and franchise chicken joints and prefab warehouses that issued out of the heart of every city and crawled along our highways like poison vines.” They stop at Buc-ee’s, a Texas-based chain convenience store that sells fudge and kolaches and kitsch along with the usual gas-station fare, and which (accurately) advertises the remarkable cleanliness of its bathrooms in humorous billboards along the vast ghastly asphalt lengths of Eisenhower’s Folly. Buc-ee’s is not Lourdes; it is a place dedicated to urination and defecation and the acquisition of things that later will be urinated and defecated, and to gasoline: go with the flow, and flow with the go. It is bigger and stranger than, say, those excellent Autogrills straddling the Italian Autostrade serving strong espresso and salami sandwiches, and it is over-engineered compared to those stunted and hobbled little gas stations on Manhattan’s west side, but it is recognizably an example of the same genre: it’s a gas station. Wright concludes from his visit that Texas is “a lowbrow society…that finds its fullest expression in a truck stop on the interstate.” The areas alongside intercity highways tend, for obvious reasons, to be home mostly to the unsentimental, un-quaint, unlovely, high-volume/low-margin businesses that serve people in transit through places that do not have much of a sense of community because
there aren’t any communities there. The interstate isn’t where you’re going, it’s how you get where you’re going—a means rather than an end. This is true in Texas, as it is true in Southern California, New Jersey, Maine, Ohio, and any other blasted and blighted slice of exurbia where three gas stations rub up against an Applebee’s and a Burger King.

Even as Wright sneers at Texas for the sin of having ugly commercial and transit zones indistinguishable from those in Connecticut or Oregon, he misses the story in front of his face. Convenience-store owner Arch “Beaver” Aplin III (“Beaver” and “the Third” coming together to form one of those wonderfully unlikely American names) built Buc-ee’s out of almost nothing in the 1980s, a time when the highways already were well stocked with gas stations selling fuel and fare (in Texas, the gas-station burrito is a food genre all its own, perfected by Allsup’s) and the market apparently saturated. How is it that Aplin (who is the opposite of the stereotypical businessman braggart and hardly an emissary from “a lowbrow society”) went from owning one convenience store to owning a business with hundreds of millions of dollars in sales in such a mature market, while turning up his nose at a huge share of high-paying customers (Wright calls it a “truck stop,” but Buc-ee’s in fact excludes commercial trucks from its facilities) and paying remarkably high wages ($15 an hour) to car-wash attendants and cashiers? How many chain gas stations have admiring articles written about them in Bon Appétit? And how does a reporter in possession of a Pulitizer Prize stand there in the middle of that story and never even think to ask a question?

Someone might have saved poor David Remnick some effort and mystification with this simple explanation: Wright doesn’t live in Texas—he lives in Austin, the world capital of extended adolescence. Wright’s ruminations on Texas are those belonging to a familiar kind of permanent teenage holocaust associated with that city. Wright is a son of privilege who attended all-white schools in suburban Dallas—his wealthy father was a socially prominent bank executive. He is a Marxist in Dallas in 1963. Wright’s the worst kind of angry lefty: he cannot forgive his weakness for phony “authenticity.” He mocks museums and galleries for boasting of rustic: a rustic from one of the least rustic backgrounds imaginable, a rustic who grew up with the founder of Neiman Marcus as a family friend, a rustic who lives in a city with a metropolitan population north of 2 million, a rustic with a sideline business in Hollywood. The quest for authenticity often leaves one vulnerable to fraud, and Wright has fallen for the very ersatz Texanism that he here intends to expose and flaunt—the idea that the “real” Texas is to be found at some quaint out-of-the-way steakhouse rather than in a Dell facility or Panhandle hydrocarbon cracker.

God Save Texas is full of sloppy writing of the kind that raises the question of what exactly it is that book editors are for: using staunch when Wright means stanch, ca- reen when he means career, jealousy when he means envy, nonplussed when he means interested; deriding “Daddy Warbucks capitalism” as “heartless, rapacious, and predatory”—the opposite of the benevolent ethic of Harold Gray’s self-made philanthropist in Little Orphan Annie; repeating the myth that Texas enjoys a unique right to subdivide itself into five states (Article IV, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution confers the right of subdivision on all states, assuming legislative cooperation); classifying Louisiana as a Saudi-style petro-state without considering that health care and education employ about ten times as many people in the state as oil or wondering why its economy has sunk while Texas thrives. Those errors come alongside some truly strange assertions. Wright complains that he knew no liberals and hardly any Democrats growing up in a state that was at the time almost uniformly Democratic and whose political foundation was New Deal liberalism. (I myself grew up not far from New Deal, Texas, surrounded by cotton farmers who would barely spit the word “Republican”—but then, I worked at 7-Eleven and think Buc-ee’s is pretty interesting, so I suppose I have unfair advantages.) Only four of Dallas’s 59 theoretically nonpartisan mayors have been Republicans, and none served before the 1980s. Rick Perry first held office as a Democrat (his CV does not emphasize his energetic support for the presidential campaign of Al Gore) and Texas did not go all meshuga Republican until the 1990s. The state didn’t have a Republican governor between Reconstruction and the Reagan era. If Wright didn’t know any Democrats, he wasn’t looking very hard.

This book is full of evidence of not having looked very hard. Wright goes tottering here and there with potted biographies of Texas political and cultural figures, half-understood anthropologies of Houston and Dallas, reminiscences of a space program about which he evinces almost no knowledge at all (and a strange contempt: he recalls his disappointment at the pitiable sight of a space shuttle being carried by an airplane), and a fair bit of padding that adds nothing to what purports to be the argument. It has the feel of a collection of memoirs that should have been written by someone else. The book’s final chapter finds Wright shopping for a cemetery plot, which seems appropriate. Whatever power he may once have enjoyed as a writer has been expended. If this is what Wright can do, it would be better if he did not do anything at all. Let him retire to his fajitas and bicycling, and tell his LBJ anecdotes to whoever will listen.

Or perhaps to a hermitage where he might be more contented, maybe up around Woodstock or Big Sur. Texas, as it is—as it actually exists—does not suit him. And it plainly does not interest him, either, except as a vessel for his contempt and disappointment, neither of which seems to have a great deal to do with Texas per se. Wright repeatedly returns to the physical ugliness of Texas’s public spaces, and what he abominates as the low tastes of its cultural powers. He mocks museums and galleries for boasting of the “largest display” of this and the “finest collection” of that, the “largest Robert Rauschenberg painting,” the “largest painting by Mexican artist Rufino Tamayo.” Oh, here he’s got ‘em! “Only in Texas is Large Art an aesthetic category.”

Because I, too, am a beneficiary of American capitalism, I read those words while sitting on a beautiful terrace in Rome with an arresting view of the Pantheon. Do you know how the Romans describe the Pantheon—what they boast of? That almost two millennia after its construction, it remains the world’s largest reinforced concrete dome. They boast that the Coliseum was the largest amphitheater of its time. Paris boasts
of having the world’s largest number of annual visitors…and the largest bicycle-sharing program outside of Asia. The world’s great cities compete to have the tallest building and the tallest examples of certain categories of buildings. Wright and his New Yorker colleagues surely must recall a certain New York City property developer boasting (inaccurately, as is his habit) that after the 9/11 attacks one of his buildings became the tallest in Manhattan. The Dallas curators’ pride in their collection of Chinese porcelain is relatively modest. It is King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, and Aventura, Florida, duking it out for the title of nation’s largest shopping mall—Houston’s Galleria is way down there in a four-way tie for seventh.

Wright follows his fusillade against largeness with a sustained sneer at Wendy Russell Reves, the former model and philanthropist who donated a splendid collection of European art to a fledgling Dallas museum but attached an “intransigent demand that her residence be faithfully reproduced in order to showcase the art.” If that seems strange to you, consider that Albert Barnes did approximately the same thing with his storied Barnes Foundation, specifying in the institution’s charter that his eccentric arrangement of Matisses and Cézannes be displayed just as he left them, a request that was honored until the clowns to whom he entrusted his bequest ruined it. The difference is that Barnes was an East Coast physician with an Ivy League education, and Reves a hick from Texas. When the Barnes Foundation went to court and broke its indenture, overturning Barnes’s ban on loaning out his paintings, it took its famous collection on tour. The first stop was Fort Worth, Texas, where they no doubt boasted of just how many Renoirs were in the holdings.

There is an interesting story to be told about Texas, and, contrary to what many of my conservative friends insist, it is not without exception a success story. Something weird did happen in Texas around the turn of the century, when its partly prideful and partly self-deprecating sense of Texan-ness curdled and mutated into the strange and distasteful thing it is now. Wright almost gropes his way there with his comparison between AM Texas and FM Texas, which is to say, the Texas represented by right-wing talk radio and the Texas of well-heeled NPR-listening progressives in Austin (or Winnetka Heights or Montrose). But Wright would have to get out of himself a little bit to tell that story, which is, as reality tends to be, more complicated than the just-so stories political partisans like to tell themselves. (Texas’s leading talk-radio figure is my friend Michael Berry of tiny Orange, Texas, and the University of…Nottingham, U.T. Austin’s sister school. He’s a politically moderate lawyer who once served as Houston’s youngest city councilman, married to an Indian-American woman who served as Texas’s secretary of state. The us-vs-them, white-hats/black-hats progressive story breaks down when confronted with the realities of Texas political life.) Wright, unfortunately for his readers, is almost entirely self-absorbed. His great takeaway from his account of the flooding following Hurricane Harvey is that it interfered with the premiere of a play he had written. There are remarkable stories related to that episode, and Wright’s is not one of them.

What to make of Texas? Don’t ask poor Lawrence Wright. He just lives there.

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It is less than two years until the end of President Donald Trump’s first term. Whether or not there will be a second is already a consuming question.

Will he even choose to run? Since he established his re-election committee last year, the earliest start of any president, the question may seem moot. But we’ve never had a billionaire president who would be 74 years old at his second inauguration, and so it’s at least conceivable that Trump might announce he has won so much in four years that even he has grown tired of winning.

Like the vast majority of presidents faced with the decision, however, the 45th will probably run again. He faces an uphill fight, as he did in 2016, though with the added consideration that he has a record now. The first two years of the Trump presidency are in the books. What light might they shed on the coming contest?

Before the Nomination

In the first place, Trump faces an unusual array of obstacles. Before he can claim his party’s nomination, he will have to survive some potentially formidable challenges, beginning with the multiplying investigations of his 2016 campaign and his presidency. Of these, the one launched by his own Justice Department is central.

Robert Mueller, the special counsel investigating the administration’s supposed collusion with Russia, is the most implacable prosecutor since police inspector Javert began pursuing the hapless Jean Valjean. We shall see what Mueller has on Trump, if anything, when he gets around to issuing his report. But the possibility of an anticlimax seems to grow with every indictment of a Trump associate for...something other than collusion with Russia. The very notion of “collusion,” implying careful collaboration in a secret, deceptive project, appears foreign to this administration. On any given day, Trump is barely on speaking terms with his own White House advisors. If he can hardly cooperate with his own staff, how could he coordinate a plot with Russian Intelligence?

Nonetheless, Mueller has probed embarrassing aspects of Trump’s disorderly business and personal life. It is here that the special counsel could strike paydirt, or at least dirt. This would make Democrats happy, and provide fodder for their pornographic impeachment fantasies. And they are fantasies: though it’s possible a majority of the Democratic-controlled House might indict the president, it’s almost unimaginable that two-thirds of the Republican-controlled Senate would vote to convict and remove him from office. Back in 1974 GOP senators told Richard Nixon to resign—or be impeached and convicted. Two decades later Democratic congressmen told Bill Clinton to fight it out, no matter what. Which lesson do you think sticks with today’s Senate Republicans?

Besides, Trump, unlike Nixon, would not go quietly. And sober Democrats remember at least this cautionary lesson from l’affaire Clinton: the failed attempt to remove him from office made him more popular than ever. They don’t want their persecution of Trump to make him, at last, a sympathetic figure.

Which is why, of all the forces gathering to deny Trump a shot at a second term, the most interesting and unexpected is the possibility of an intraparty challenger. No Republican upstart could count on defeating Trump in the primaries. The hope would be to damage him enough to cost him the gener-
al election. Why would a Republican candidate collaborate in trying to throw the election to a Democrat? Why would a Republican collude—where’s a special counsel when you need one!—with the Democratic Party? Why would (to name a few reported to be weighing it) Senator Mitt Romney, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, and Senator Ben Sasse, risk it?

Interest and Honor

Along with many right-wing, or formerly right-wing, Never Trumpers, these gentlemen claim that Trump dishonors the party, the presidency, and the country. For them, it is not a question of interest so much—running against him would probably injure their political careers; and some of them, especially Romney, are probably better off because of Trump’s tax cuts. It is a matter of honor. The two are not mutually exclusive, inasmuch as doing the noble thing may sometimes conduce to one’s long-term advantage. But often doing the noble thing (e.g., rushing into a burning building to save someone’s life) means rising above, or harming, one’s own interest.

If there is a persistent theme to the Never Trumpers’ and these potential challengers’ discontent, it is their passionate conviction that Trump exalts the spirit of self-interest and pleasure-seeking above the nobler virtues of public service and love of the public good. They paint him as a corrupt figure, a bad man, even a “racist,” and their opposition to him comes closer to personal disgust or revulsion than to any merely political disagreement over policy, though they do disagree with him over immigration, trade, and other matters.

Hence Hogan, Romney, and others contemplate running against Trump in the GOP presidential primaries in order, they tell one another, to save the country’s honor. Some even claim to be inspired by the late John McCain’s brand of maverick courage. McCain cast the decisive vote against the GOP’s repeal of Obamacare, and conspicuously didn’t invite Trump to his funeral. But when in 2016 he ran for re-election to the Senate, he accepted Trump’s endorsement. Even McCain’s courage had limits. The potential challengers wouldn’t resolve to oppose Trump in 2020 if they thought he could simply ignore the attack or escape unscathed. The decision to enter the race would probably turn, therefore, on signs of his potential weakness—economic recession, foreign policy setbacks, drooping poll numbers.

Saving America from Trump would mean, in this case, almost certainly delivering it into the Democrats’ hands, but like Teddy Roosevelt running against incumbent William Howard Taft in 1912, these would-be challengers rate that outcome as the lesser of two evils. (Honor plus interest, you might say.) Even as T.R. thought Taft would spoil the GOP’s reputation for idealistic Progressivism, so they have persuaded themselves, or are trying to persuade themselves, that Trump’s reelection would spoil forever the compassionate conservative movement and this kinder, gentler country.

A similar chain of reasoning led T.R., after his 1912 race for the Republican nomination had been defeated, to run as a third-party candidate against Taft, effectively splitting the Republican vote and throwing the race to Woodrow Wilson, the Democrat. For fear of dividing the anti-Trump vote, none of our potential challengers would likely exercise such a third-party option in 2020. But politics is a strange business, and if the Democratic nominee were so left-wing as to seem unelectable, or if the Democratic vote were about to split between the socialists and the billionaires (Michael Bloomberg or Howard Schultz), or if Trump’s candidacy simply swooned, a three-way race might suddenly seem viable.
This disdain for Trump’s disdain for moral-ism would not have taken hold without some help from the man himself. It would be hard to imagine Trump defending his own selflessness because as a brash New Yorker, real estate tycoon, and TV celebrity he has never asserted such a thing. “The Donald” is, by definition, not self-effacing.

For example, he promises to make “great deals” on behalf of the American people. To make a deal it’s usually necessary to cut some moral corners: to conceal or to dissemble the ultimate price you are willing to pay or to accept, and to exaggerate costs and benefits in the course of the negotiations. Trump enjoys the process, celebrated it in a book (The Art of the Deal), and dislikes politicians who think they’re above it, or who can’t occasionally drop their high-minded mask.

But there are disadvantages to non-stop egotism and egoism, summed up in the charge that his morality is purely, as they say, “transactional.” The art of “the deal” seems to imply that life is nothing more than one deal after another, without any permanent partners or friends, much less sacred ties of family, citizenship, and religion. The very shape of his business career—moving opportunistically from New York real estate to New Jersey casinos to reality TV to branding deals, sometimes leaving unhappy creditors in his wake—lends itself to this interpretation. Though this indictment is terribly one-sided, it is a side of Trump he likes to show in public.

Of all his potential Republican challengers, Romney is best positioned to press this critique of Trump, which is why I regard him as the most dangerous to the president should he enter the race. He is or was a businessman, too, but Romney doesn’t boast about cutting corners. He likes to think of himself as a moral capitalist, and as a religious and moral man simply, who stands for honor in both private and public life. During the 2016 Republican primaries, his denunciation of Trump, though it came too late to make a difference, glowed with a fierce indignation that none of Trump’s actual rivals for the nomination could muster. (For instance, he said Trump’s promises “were as worthless as a degree from Trump University.”)

As president, Trump sometimes has treated his political allies with astonishing indifference and even disrespect, dismissing members of his staff and cabinet (e.g., Reince Priebus, Rex Tillerson, Jeff Sessions, Jim Mattis) without even the courtesy of his Apprentice trademark, a face-to-face “You’re fired.” He has been as shifting and elusive in negotiations with his Republican allies on the Hill as he has been with his Democratic congressional opponents. Such high-handenedness will come back to haunt him, and betrays a position not so much above, as outside of, party, including his own GOP.

A president caught between the two parties is a weak president. Transactional loyalty runs both ways. The number of tell-all books is bound to increase, as is the reluc-tance of congressional Republicans to help clean up his rhetorical and policy messes. Many suburban GOP and independent voters who were with Trump in 2016 stayed home or voted Democratic in 2018. Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, which provided his margin of victory in the electoral college, trended Dem-ocratic last November. Ties of mere interest areickle.

Yet his poll numbers are not in free fall. The Republicans gained seats in the Senate this time. Trump’s base remains loyal to him—because many conservatives see him not only as a guardian of their interests but also as standing for something rare, admirable, and patriotic.

Choose Greatness

Trump’s campaign slogan was “Make America Great Again.” The goal of greatness, as Trump invokes it, embraces both interest and honor. It strives to unite might and right in a proud or honorable combination, a distinctly American combination that we have lost, or at least are in danger of losing. To make her great again means America was once great and that it is in our power to make her so once more. It is our choice. Neither greatness nor decline is inevitable.

Trump wove these themes together brilliantly in his second State of the Union Address, the opening salvo of his 2020 campaign against the Democrats. Though not well delivered by normal standards, the speech displayed a deep political cunning and a gratifying statesmanship. More in sadness than anger, and by quiet contrasts more than emphatic confrontations, Trump seized the common-sense middle ground of our politics and laid the premises for his coming campaign to marginalize the Democrats.

The speech opened by commemorating two anniversaries that showed “the majesty of America’s mission and the power of American pride.” The first was D-Day (75 years ago this June), the start of what General Eisenhower called “the Great Crusade,” when 75,000 “young American men” stormed Europe “to save our civilization from tyranny.” He pointed to three of them, now 90-something-year-olds, in the gallery. The second anniversary was Apollo 11’s landing on the moon (50 years ago this July); of the “brave young pilots” who made the journey and “planted that flag,” the sole survivor, Buzz Aldrin, rose and saluted from his seat in the gallery.

It was good theater, and even better politics. Ronald Reagan had struck similar chords; Barack Obama, too, though with subtle reservations. But patriotic nationalism is out of fashion, especially among the leftists young and old who are planning to run for president or who are otherwise celebrated these days. Can anyone imagine Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez singing such paens to American majesty and pride? Why, the very mention of a “great crusade” would have triggered her into a rancid denunciation of Islamophobia. Or Bernie Sanders, who longs to be the first socialist president—who would also be, and not exactly incidentally, our first chief executive to have honeymooned in the Soviet Union.

Trump let the sheer political incorrectness of his remarks remain implicit. Those heroic “young American men” who liberated Europe stood in silent contrast to the Left’s contemporary obsession with toxic masculinity; and to the chaste virtue-signaling exhibited by what Lance Morrow called the “white-clad vestal brigade” of new Democratic congresswomen. Those woke priestesses would be puzzled by the notion of saving “our civilization from tyranny,” insofar as they’ve learned at university that our civilization is tyranny, from the racism, sexism, and capitalism of which they have been elected to deliver us, in a political invasion far more consequential (in their fevered imaginations) than D-Day.

Trump spoke movingly of his, and America’s, horror of late-term abortion, which he put tacitly in the context of the Nazi horrors to which those American boys had put an end. His lengthy discourse on immigration policy, one of the best of his presidency, emphasized its moral dimensions, and the way that “mass illegal migration” unfairly burdened the working class with “reduced jobs, lower wages....
and a depleted social safety net.” His rediscovery of pre-Cold War Republican policies continued with his defense of tariffs and trade protectionism on grounds of national defense and fairness to American workers.

Perhaps the most striking moment, sending a kind of premonitory shudder through the Democrats and offering a clear preview of the 2020 contest, was Trump’s warning against socialism. “America was founded on liberty and independence, and not government coercion, domination, and control. We are born free and we will stay free. Tonight,” he declared, “we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country.” He had Venezuela at hand as an example of socialist folly and evil. He didn’t have to mention that the Nazis were socialists, too. From their dreams of socialism, a Green New Deal, and Medicare for All, the Democrats in the chamber suddenly seemed…woke. They sat there, stunned, or at least silent, realizing that soon they would have to face this man in the ring. As Mike Tyson said, “Everybody has a plan until they get hit.” And Trump was only sparring.

At the end Trump returned to D-Day, to those “young men of 18 and 19, hurtling on fragile landing craft toward the most momentous battle in the history of war,” and to those whose lives and freedom they saved, including the two Holocaust survivors in the gallery. Why did those young men do it? Trump asked. “Their cause was this nation and generations yet unborn…. They did it for America. They did it for us.” They chose greatness, and freedom, and life, as we should, too. Let the Democrats run on infanticide, socialism, and porous borders.

### The Persuasion Gap

It was a smart speech highlighting an attractive form of civic nationalism. At the least, it will make it harder for leftists and Never Trumpers to compare Trump to Hitler—harder, but they will still do it, because they can’t help themselves. At its best, this State of the Union foreshadows the terms on which the president may enlarge his base of support, and perhaps win a majority of the popular vote, in 2020.

Yet his SOTU from 2018 was also a very effective address. Does anyone remember it? This president has given some good set-piece speeches but their influence, not only on public opinion but even within his own administration, seems to have faded rapidly. Reagan’s and Obama’s speeches set the tone for their presidencies. They and their spokesmen and appointees referred back to the speeches in order to explain where the country was and whither it was tending, and in order to justify what the administration was doing.

Trump’s speeches tend to disappear in the next day’s or next week’s Twitter storm. This is unfortunate, because if Americans could focus on his more deliberative statements they would have a less chaotic, more consistent view of his policies and goals. They could see his administration unfolding in a series of choices, i.e., deliberate decisions connecting means to ends, rather than in a daily hailstorm of congratulation and indignation.

Andrew Roberts, whose *Churchill: Walking With Destiny* is deservedly a bestseller, said in January that Winston Churchill would have been a master tweeter, a virtuoso of vitriol and wit in 280 characters. But still, those tweets would have been ornaments to his speeches, not a substitute for them. Twitter is anti-deliberative most of the time, and needs to have a dignified connection to something greater than itself. Reagan, and *a fortiori* Churchill, used their speeches to introduce and explain important policies, but Trump has advanced his own policies with little or no rhetorical cover. An egregious example is the decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria, announced via Twitter. It isn’t necessary to stop tweeting, but it is urgent to pursue a larger strategy of persuasion.

Mrs. Thatcher’s famous motto was, “First you win the argument, then you win the vote.” The Trump Administration needs to keep its eye on the argument, if it intends to win the vote.

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Book Review by Angelo M. Codevilla

DEFENDING THE NATION

The Virtue of Nationalism, by Yoram Hazony.
Basic Books, 304 pages, $30

For Yoram Hazony, governments are either nations or empires. This is a more superficial distinction than Aristotle’s, for whom a regime’s purpose is paramount, whether ruled by one, few, or many. Despite its limitations, however, Hazony’s new book, The Virtue of Nationalism, is worth reading because it focuses so succinctly on what nations are, why they are good, what distinguishes nations from empires, and why Western elites’ attempt to drown nations in “liberal” supranationalist institutions is bad. The book presents “an anti-imperialist theory that seeks to establish a world of free and independent nations”—un monde des patries, as Charles de Gaulle would have said.

The president of the Herzl Institute in Jerusalem, and himself an Israeli, Hazony is a proud part of the prototypical nation: a people forever defined by the covenant they made with the Lord God. In quasi-Platonic terms, Israel is thus the idea of the nation. Others are nations insofar as they approach that idea. The Israelites defined themselves by their adherence to God, who shaped His people morally by giving them the Ten Commandments to instruct them in basic personal behavior. Hazony calls these “the moral minimum.” God at once endowed and limited his nation by giving them a land to be their own, while warning them—as he does in Deuteronomy 2:4-19—to “meddle not” with other peoples, whom He had also endowed with lands to be their own.

Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir…. Meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession…. Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession…. And when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession; because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession.

From the beginning, then, Hazony shows that the prototypical nation was “living within limited borders alongside other independent nations…and uninterested in bringing its neighbors under its rule.” It welcomed strangers who said, as Ruth did, “thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” God willed that Israel rule itself, as the prophet Jeremiah declared: “And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them.” Its rulers would serve the people, because only God Himself is master of all. Having freed Israel from the Egyptian empire, the Lord settled His people in the midst of the Assyrian, Babylonian, and other Near Eastern empires, whose masters intended to deprive of self-rule as many peoples—nations—as they could conquer.

Hazony rightly reminds us that “all states are perpetually on the verge of losing their cohesion and independence.” The Hebrew Bible first taught the fragility of political order, “at every moment either rising or falling, moving toward either consolidation or dissolution,” depend-
The right of national self-determination (secular Western world’s taste for empire to Catholic Israelites eventually became the successive vassals of the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

Empire also results from the mistaken faith that only an authority superior to discrete peoples can prevent their pursuit of disparate purposes from ruining peace and prosperity. Hazony may be excused for attributing the Western world’s taste for empire to Catholic Christianity. But regarding the Holy Roman Empire as a continuation of Roman imperialism, as he does, misconstrues Christian political thought.

In fact, Pope Gelasius I’s doctrine of “the two swords,” secular and spiritual, restating as it does Augustine’s City of God, simply reiterates Christ’s distinction between duties to Caesar and duties to God. Hazony himself notes the same distinction, and tension, between the demands of what he calls the “right of national self-determination” (secular power) and those of the “moral minimum.”

What’s more, the medieval political order was anything but imperial: countless jurisdictions flexed manifold autonomies. The emperor was one German potentate among many.

Hazony credits the Protestant Reformation for having introduced diversity in Christendom. But in fact, for good and ill, it only confirmed its constituent parts growing independence. Hazony cites Sir John Fortescue’s De Laudibus Legum Angliae (In Praise of the Laws of England, circa 1470) as an example of the new diversity. But Fortescue was describing laws and customs elaborated during the Middle Ages, while kingdoms in Spain and Christian republics in Italy were doing the same. Throughout Europe, post-Reformation politics became much harsher as rulers, Protestant as well as Catholic, arrogated to themselves spiritual as well as temporal powers— for which they were roundly criticized by both Catholic cardinal Roberto Bellarmino and Protestant divine Richard Hooker.

In Praise of the Pax Romana

Nevertheless, any number of Americans today, including conservatives, yearn to administer a Pax Americana.

But in America, where imperialism is a curse word, advocacy of such things as the European Union, Hazony points out, “is conducted in a murky newspeak riddled with euphemisms such as ‘new world order,’ ‘ever-closer union,’ ‘openness,’ ‘globalization,’ ‘global governance,’ ‘pooled sovereignty,’ ‘rules-based order,’ ‘universal jurisdiction,’ ‘international community,’ ‘liberal internationalism,’ ‘transnationalism,’ ‘American leadership,’…and so on.”

He strives to show how modern liberalism subverts any people’s capacity for nationhood and readies them to become imperial subjects. Citizens need “the minimum requirements for a life of personal freedom and dignity for all,” which, in turn comes from observing the Ten Commandments or something close. This
provides the strength and coherence (wisdom, too?) for securing “political independence…a right of self-determination…the right to govern themselves under their own national constitutions and churches without interference from foreign powers.” “Yet these two principles,” he observes,

also stand in tension with each other.…. [N]atural standards of legitimacy…[mean] that nations cannot do rightly whatever they please…. On the other hand the principle of national freedom strengthens and protects the unique institutions, traditions, laws.

This tension “imparted a unique dynamism to the nations of Europe”—and, one might add, to the United States.

This beneficent nationhood is being undone from within by what Hazony calls the “liberal construction,” namely, the assumption that “there is only one principle at the base of legitimate political order: individual freedom.” Its root, he argues, is John Locke’s contention in his Second Treatise that “consent” is the only bond between human beings. “[T]he individual becomes a member of a human collective only because he has agreed to it, and has obligations to that collective only if he has accepted them.” That individual is motivated, argues Hazony, only to achieve and preserve a secure and pleasant life. “Anyone embracing [such premises] would be unable to understand, much less defend, the existence of the family…. [I]n real life, nations are communities bound together by mutual bonds of loyalty, carrying forward particular traditions…common historical memories, language and texts, rites and boundaries…identification with their forefathers and a concern for what will be the fate of future generations.”

LIKE NOTRE DAME’S PATRICK J. DENEEN, Hazony sees modern progressivism as the culmination rather than the repudiation of the founders’ liberalism. Thus, America was corrupt from the start. Yet, an elementary acquaintance with the founders’ writings should be enough to show that they did not read Locke in the way Hazony and Deneen do. Consider John Quincy Adams’s description, in his 1821 Fourth of July speech, of the Americans who declared independence:

[T]he people of the North American union, and of its constituent states, were associated bodies of civilized men and Christians, in a state of nature…bound by the laws of God, which they all, and by the laws of the gospel, which they nearly all, acknowledged…by the principles which they themselves had proclaimed in the declaration…by all those tender and endearing sympathies, the absence of which, in the British government and nation, towards them, was the primary cause of the distressing conflict in which they had been precipitated…by all the beneficent laws and institutions, which their forefathers had brought with them from their mother country…by habits of hardy industry, by frugal and hospitable manners, by the general sentiments of social equality, by pure and virtuous morals; and lastly they were bound by the grappling-hooks of common suffering under the scourge of oppression…. Had there been among them no other law, they would have been a law unto themselves.

Any people that lacks adherence to laws natural and divine, reverence for their ancestral institutions, habits of frugality and industry, general sentiments of social equality, pure and virtuous morals, and a willingness to endure personal suffering for common causes—in short, who lack “bonds of mutual
That is because the question “who rules?” hovers over all politics. The answer, which Plato and Aristotle never forgot and which Hazony reminds his readers, is: more often than not, rulers rule on their own behalf. Even imperial imposition of imperials norms is an illusion because, invariably, empires reflect the emperor’s character. As Hazony explains:

The empire... necessarily concerns itself with abstract categories... that are, in its eyes, “universal.” But these categories are always detached from the circumstances and interests, traditions and aspirations of the particular clan or tribe to which they are now to be applied. This means that from the perspective of the particular clan or tribe, imperial law will often appear to be ill-conceived, unjust, and perverse. Yet... the unique clan or tribe with no standing to protest... must inevitably strike the imperial order as narrow-minded.

More importantly, “the imperial state has to be built on some bond of mutual loyalty, or its soldiers will not be willing to fight and die for it.” This means that every empire depends on “a ruling nation, its language and customs, and its unique way of understanding the world.”

This discussion would have been more enlightening had Hazony descended from generalities to describe the empires that have ruled so much of mankind for so long, and then compared them with the “liberal empire” that attracts so many of today’s elites. The best such discussion is James Kurth’s “The Adolescent Empire” (National Interest, Summer 1997). Consistent with classical philosophy, Kurth cites particulars to show that every empire reflected and promoted a certain type of person and corresponding way of life. For the Spanish empire it was the pious warrior, Ignatius of Loyola. The British empire was by, of, and for Harrow’s and Eton’s noble graduates. The brief post-World War II American empire was about Dwight Eisenhower, George Marshall, and Dean Acheson—intensely practical adults. Kurth then asks what human type his contemporary America honored, what way of life did it promote? Youthful entertainers like Michael Jackson and Michael Jordan, he regrets to say.

Since then, a very different kind of person has set the tone of life in America and the rest of the Western world. In our time, adults imitate and children aspire to become wealthy, well-connected CEOs, such as Tesla’s Elon Musk and Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg, or one of the bankers or high-ranking officials who join them for the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting every January in Davos, Switzerland, for conspicuous consumption, collusion, and self-congratulation. And in fact, during the past quarter-century, Newspeak terms like “multilateralism,” “new world order,” “globalization,” “pooled sovereignty,” and “rules-based order” have meant neither more nor less than more power and wealth for “Davos Man.” Hence, in practice, Hazony’s choice between “nationalism” and “imperialism” asks whether Europeans and Americans will succeed in clawing back the power—domestic and international—they have ceded to Davos Man’s empire.

Unfortunately, readers must wait a hundred pages before the book’s key term is defined. A “nation,” Hazony writes, is:

a number of tribes with a shared heritage, usually including a common language or religious traditions, and a past history of joining together against common enemies—characteristics that permit tribes so united to understand themselves as a community distinct from other such communities that are their neighbors.

There is nothing here either about independence or morality, though Hazony adds both two pages later without connecting them to the original definition. He also considers India a nation, though it has none of the main definition’s qualities, never mind a moral minimum.

The author’s explanation for European nationalism’s violent history may be the book’s weakest point. Although the leaders may be “sometimes misguided,” he writes, “wars between national states tend to be relatively limited in their aims, in the resources invested in them, and in the scale of the destruction and misery they cause.” Nevertheless, Europe has “known general wars of virtually unlimited devastation” because, Hazony asserts, these were not really national wars but ideological wars “in the name of some universal doctrine.” This includes the Second World War, “in which a German-Nazi empire aimed at establishing a new order according to its own perverse universal theory.” That is a plausible explanation, but weak. Most of the Second World War’s fighters—Germans and Russians, too—fought for their nation rather than for Nazism or Communism or democracy.

Our God. Nineteenth-century European literature presents each nation as a self-contained “race,” with its own “genius,” and that devotion to the nation was indeed “über alles.” Nothing stood in that pseudo-religious devotion’s way. Socialists were sure that since the workers had no fatherland, they would not fight each other. But did they ever? And the Christian churches, instead of pointing out that the Great War’s disproportion between harm inflicted and goods sought was the very definition of unjust war, abetted its slaughter. The nationalism of that era died a bloody death, between 1914 and 1918, for better and for worse.

But that nationalism is not today’s problem. We suffer instead from the insidious growth of an imperialism that seeks to expand its global reach while feeding on the last of its decomposing remains. Because Yoram Hazony’s The Virtue of Nationalism states the essence of today’s problem so clearly, we may cheerfully overlook its shortcomings.

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Our progressive march toward a harmonious, borderless world, with universally accepted rules governing everything from commerce to human rights, appears to have stalled. Though globalization’s devotees continue their annual political pilgrimage to Davos, most political leaders appear more interested in protecting their citizens or ensuring their regime’s survival than in solving “global challenges.” Global citizenship’s promise and the exalted values of diversity and inclusivity, moreover, don’t seem to appeal to the masses. People are preoccupied with the fate of their own cities, neighborhoods, families, friends, and—yes—nations. The quest to create global citizens who fervently face the day’s global challenges—from sweating polar bears to plastic swirling in the oceans—leaves them cold.

The most common response to such indifference is condemnation. Before being elected president, Barack Obama bitterly complained about people clinging to their “guns or religion.” Hillary Clinton similarly derided the “deplorables” who wouldn’t accept the progressive agenda. Donald Trump’s 2016 electoral victory and analogous developments in Europe have drawn denunciations on both sides of the Atlantic. Learned critics fear the world is regressing to a condition where states have borders, mass migration is controlled, and nations protect their heritage. Instead of postmodern globalization, we seem to be relapsing into the pre-modern age of nationalism and tribalism. War, they think, is surely to follow.

In her new book, *Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations*, Yale professor Amy Chua tells the worried Davos man to calm down. Chua—whose first book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011), became a *New York Times* bestseller for four months—explains that the desire to belong to a group—a tribe—is neither unique to premodern man nor a modern redneck psychosis, but simply part of our human nature. In the book’s first words Chua states a truth most of us know, though it bears repeating:

*Humans are tribal. We need to belong to groups. We crave bonds and attachments, which is why we love clubs, teams, fraternities, family.*

This need to belong demarcates our tribe from others: the “tribal instinct is not just an instinct to belong. It is also an instinct to exclude.” We love our kids, not just kids in general; we crave these friends, not friendship in the abstract.

Left, Right, center, progressive or conservative, nationalist or globalist—we are all tribal. Many reject that claim, believing they’ve achieved a higher level of civilization. “American elites,” Chua observes, “often like to think of themselves as the exact opposite of tribal, as ‘citizens of the world’ who celebrate universal humanity and embrace global, cosmopolitan values.” That’s plain silly, of course;
they simply belong to a cosmopolitan tribe as judgmental and exclusive as any other. Chua’s strong introduction refreshingly describes groups across the ideological spectrum as just that—groups—which necessarily exclude outsiders.

Unfortunately, after this promising beginning, her book meanders, becoming multiple books compressed into one lengthy pamphlet on the United States’s ills. Five of her eight chapters recount how Americans, in particular, fail to understand tribes. We become involved in wars without understanding the motivations of the parties we support or oppose. As a result our foreign policy generates one disaster after another. Chua begins with the Vietnam War, in which U.S. policymakers misdiagnosed Vietnamese motivations, ignoring the anti-Chinese sentiments of the majority of the local population. The reader is next transported to Afghanistan where, since the Soviet invasion, we’ve ignored the intricate tribal divisions between Pashtuns and other ethnicities. Iraq presents another example of our failure to understand tribes—though a brilliant officer, H.R. McMaster, got his soldiers to develop in-depth knowledge of Iraqi tribal configurations, so there’s hope. But the problem was (and is) much bigger, and a few brave individuals could only address the symptoms rather than the deep causes. As she notes, the prevailing belief is that “markets and democracy would transform the world into a community of prosperous, peace-loving nations, and individuals into civic-minded citizens and consumers.” Instead, we find tribes killing each other, and enjoying it.

Chua next examines Islamist tribalism, showing how group mentality can lead to acts of unspeakable brutality. She warns that ISIS and similar terror groups will continue to form so long as Muslims feel victimized throughout the world. A chapter on Venezuela—a country we don’t understand—follows. Hugo Chavez’s rise was surprising only to those who did not comprehend the deep cleavages in Venezuelan society, driven by skin color (Latin American societies are, we’re told, “pigmentocratic,” favoring those with lighter skin color) and wealth inequality.

Chua’s dizzying survey ends with Trump and the United States, moving from “Nascar nation” to “Occupy Wall Street,” from MS-13 to the more than 50 Facebook designations of gender. Her overarching point is that the United States, torn by tribalism, no longer acts as a “super-group” in which tribes coexist. Undoubtedly, there is something to this: the continued postmodern insistence on identity as the self-realization of individual preference is indeed splintering society.

Unfortunately, in trying to explain everything from the Vietnam War to President Trump’s appeal, Political Tribes loses its analytical value. At the heart of this problem is its bloated concept of tribes, encompassing family and friends, churches and Berkeley activists, ethnic and racial groups, social classes and sports fans—the list goes on. When “antifa” and the family are both “tribes,” equal in their effects on society, the concept becomes of questionable utility. Not every woman is my wife and not every kid is my kid—and I won’t pay for college for anyone but my kids. We naturally prefer our own. But this preference does not make me a racist or a hater of other groups.

Not all tribes are created equal. Some are necessary for a well-ordered polity; others, destructive of it. The whims of utterly confused, gender-bending millennials are not comparable to a family that works hard at passing traditions and culture to the next generation. The problem is not with “tribes,” but with some of them. The difficult, divisive question is: which tribes are the problem?

Given the impossibility of answering this question without taking a clear stand, Chua is left with only a vague hope that the U.S. will transcend its current tribal fights. But it remains unclear how this will occur: Chua senses only a “shift.” For instance, we are moving past our tribal differences over same-sex marriage, she claims; and the all-minority cast portraying the Founding Fathers in Hamilton indicates for her a similar transcendence of race. Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Lin-Manuel Miranda are among her heroes. If “we’re to come together as a nation,” Chua declares, “we all need to elevate ourselves.”

But is accepting a drastic redefinition of marriage or rewriting history really a sign of a return to a more united and ordered community? The divide in the U.S. and the West largely arises from our inability to agree on the fundamental issues of justice and the good life—not just on proper levels of taxation or the scope of foreign military involvements. If to “elevate ourselves” means accepting the existence of an objective reality, a higher law to which our laws ought to be “brothers” (as Socrates says in Plato’s Crito), then there’s hope. Unfortunately, Amy Chua’s assumptions prevent her from seeing it.

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Trumpism has an essence, and that essence is nationalism. It is the American version of the revival of the spirit of nationhood in the rich democracies of the North Atlantic. It is bigger than President Trump’s personality and program, and is certain to outlast the drama and fate of his tenure in office.

A useful analogy is the 1848 “Spring of Nations,” when ecstatic revolutionary uprisings swept across continental Europe and Scandinavia, taking everyone by surprise. The target of discontent was the self-absorbed global elites of the day—pan-European networks of monarchs, royalty, and aristocrats. The popular demands went under various banners with many local variations—national self-determination, liberal reform, democracy, and the then-amorphous notion of “socialism.” Their common goal was representative government for people united by language, religion, culture, and geography.

The uprisings, spontaneous and disorganized, were largely suppressed by the end of the year. But they reflected irrepressible social changes—the emergence of a sizable middle class, the discontent of workers and rural serfs and outcasts, and the introduction of consciousness-raising communications media such as popular magazines and the telegraph. The years to come would see the establishment of new nations (including Germany and Italy), the formation of representative assemblies in many nations new and old, and the extension of the voting franchise to many or all adult men.

Our nationalist upheavals have been much less violent than those of 1848, but they have been similarly abrupt and tumultuous. They have pressed upon and sometimes trespassed contemporary boundaries of civil politics. And the similarities, I believe, run deeper. In what follows, I argue that our upheavals are the result of powerful social and technological developments that have weakened our institutions of representative government. Harnessing today’s nationalist impulses is a task for conservatives and libertarians, who stand in the shoes of the liberal reformers of the middle and late 19th century. I have several suggestions for how to proceed.

Anywheres vs. Somewheres

Donald Trump’s presidential candidacy began as a furious attack on both the Democratic and Republican political establishments, and a vow to do something neither party had done recently—to put “America First.” In both respects, his campaign and presidency have been strikingly similar to the nationalist movements in England and Europe, from Brexit to the E.U.-skeptic governments in Poland, Hungary, and Italy, to the neo-nationalist parties of Germany and France. In each case, the insurgents have claimed that their nation’s political and business leaders are really part of, and loyal to, an international elite with its own, self-serving agenda. The elites sacrifice the sovereignty of their home nations in ways—from free trade and open immigration to murky treaties and remote bureaucracies—that harm many of their countrymen.

The harmed countrymen are, disproportionately, less educated, working-class, old-stock hinterlanders and, in the urban centers, laborers and service providers. They feel they
have been left behind by modern society and government, and have now at last found robust political representation in the nationalist movements. Their electoral successes have come as a surprise, sometimes as late as the evenings the votes were counted. The shocked establishments of each nation—incurbent politicians of Left and Right, government careerists, mainstream media and entertainers, executives of leading corporations, academics and intellectuals—have responded in striking unison. The political arrivistes, they say, are ill-informed populists, xenophobic at best, racist at worst, inflamed by irrational hatred of immigrants, exhibiting authoritarian tendencies. In Hillary Clinton’s incautious term, “deplorables.” Europe’s leading internationalists on the one hand and “Trumpism” or “nationalists” on the other.

Anywheres are people who are cosmopolitan, educated, mobile, and networked. They live their personal and professional lives in communities of affinity rather than locality, among friends and colleagues who might be anywhere on any given day—Santa Barbara or Singapore, Boston or Berlin. Their attachments to place are secondary; they tend to regard national differences as quaint, national borders as nuisances, and divergent regulations as irrational. Their politics are liberal—some are liberal progressives, others classical liberals or libertarians. The Anywheres are generally more affluent than the Somewheres, but they include many people of moderate income such as younger academics and schoolteachers and employees of government agencies and non-profit organizations.

The Somewheres, in contrast, are rooted in particular local communities. Their jobs and weekends, their commitments and friendships and antagonisms, are part and parcel of their families, neighborhoods, clubs, and religions. Many work with their hands and on their feet. Whether their partisan leanings are to the left or right, they tend to be socially conservative and patriotic. Somewheres probably have a smartphone but their loyalties are with the home team—with the folks they associate with personally. They do not have strong inclinations or opportunities for cutting free and following some abstract dream to a distant horizon. Less disposed to “vote with their feet,” they are more affected by local economies and government policies than the Anywheres.

The Decline of Representative Government

Now these differences in circumstance and allegiance have been around for quite a while, at least since the appearance of commercial jet travel, easy long-distance communications, and multinational business corporations. The economic divide between those who did and did not graduate from college has been growing for decades. So why is it that they have burst upon the political scene, all across the advanced democracies, in just a few short years—suddenly and by surprise, accompanied by angry polarization and sometimes violence, threatening serious instability?

Several recent books address this question, including David Goodhart’s just mentioned, Yuval Levin’s The Fractured Republic back in 2016, and, just in 2018, Sir Roger Scruton’s Where We Are, F.H. Buckley’s The Republican Workers Party, and Tucker Carlson’s Ship of Fools. I have an explanation of my own, based on my studies of regulation and the administrative state. I believe that an important cause of our political turmoil is the decline of representative government—where law is enacted by elected legislatures—and the rise of declarative government—where law is dispensed by bureaucracies and courts.

In recent decades, the U.S. Congress has permitted its constitutional powers to atrophy. It has delegated its lawmaking powers: voting for clean air and gender equality by lopsided margins, but leaving the hard choices—the real legislating—to specialized agencies in the executive branch. It has abandoned regular budgeting and appropriations and put most federal spending on autopilot, which has greatly weakened its “power of the purse” over the executive agencies. And it has stood by passively, and often with palpable relief, as courts have resolved contentious issues of sexual autonomy and moral obligation that were previously matters for legislative deliberation. The national legislatures of Europe and the United Kingdom have done approximately the same thing, with the added twist that they have delegated consid-

Books mentioned in this essay:

The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics, by David Goodhart. Hurst, 256 pages, $24.95

The Fractured Republic: Renewing America’s Social Contract in the Age of Individualism, by Yuval Levin. Basic Books, 272 pages, $27.50 (cloth), $17.99 (paper)

Where We Are: The State of Britain Now, by Roger Scruton. Bloomsbury, 256 pages, $24 (cloth), $18 (paper)


Why Liberalism Failed, by Patrick J. Deneen. Yale University Press, 248 pages, $30 (cloth), $18 (paper)

The Virtue of Nationalism, by Yoram Hazony. Basic Books, 304 pages, $30


Our Enemy, the State, by Albert Jay Nock. William Morrow and Company, 224 pages, out-of-print
erable powers as well to the supernormal bureaucratic and courts of the European Union.

The conventional criticism of these developments is that they evade democratic accountability and lead to overregulation and “agency capture” by special-interest groups. Administrative agencies can make rules—de facto laws—in much greater profusion than a cumbersome assembly of generalist representatives. Agencies often go to extremes, or cut deals among insider groups, that could never survive in an elected legislature. Delegation produces more law than most citizens want, and often bad law by any objective standard. But bureaucratic lawmakers cannot be voted out of office except by extreme measures such as Brexit (and even here it remains uncertain whether the 2016 popular vote will actually be followed).

Now the nationalist insurgencies cast a new light on these issues. The administrative state has emerged since the early 1970s partly in response to two broad social developments—high affluence and high technology. In wealthy, educated societies, many more people have the time, interest, and facility for politics, and they bring many refined, upscale issues to the table. Traditional domestic issues of jobs and economic welfare now jostle with a multitude of new ones concerned with personal health and safety, environmental quality, consumerism, and individual and group identity, dignity, lifestyle, discrimination, and “access.” At the same time, modern technology, especially in mass and networked communications, has radically lowered the cost of political organization. The slightest complaint or enthusiasm can now find far-flung allies, achieve self-awareness as a political cause, and press its claims in the public square and in the Congress.

On the government side, political aspirants and officeholders can now build their careers as solo entrepreneurs, by joining and servicing networks of ideological and economic interest. Party and legislative hierarchies that had long disciplined political careers and policy platforms have lost their clout.

These trends have swamped Congress with demands for action that vastly exceed the capacities of legislative decision-making, with its profuse internal conflicts and elaborate procedures. They are what have led Congress to delegate policymaking to missionary agencies that can be proliferated without limit, and to sigh with relief when courts take prickly issues off the legislative docket. But they have also led to something else. While the United States, United Kingdom, and Europe have become highly affluent, educated, and networked in general, some of us have become so to a much greater degree than others, and the changes in government structure have reflected our proclivities. Declarative government suits the interests and values of Anywheres, while representative government suits the interests and values of Somewheres.

Those who are highly educated, articulate, mobile, and networked are more beholden to their votes and the votes of their representatives. They are attached to a locality and no one else champions local interests with the zeal and particularity of a congressman. National government may appear as a distant, corrupt, impenetrable mess. One might think that national lobby groups and membership organizations would provide Somewheres with the means to influence the administrative state. But often they do not. EPA rule-makers navigate around the positions of manufacturers, refiners, utilities, unions, and environmental groups. In doing so, they may and often do give short shift to local interests. Community solidarity is foreign to regulatory missions; lost jobs may count as efficiencies in the agencies’ cost-benefit analyses.

It is telling that Donald Trump’s two galvanizing issues, trade and immigration, have been matters of extreme policy delegation. Since the 1960s, trade agreements have been forged by executive officials in collaboration with business and union leaders, with Congress relegated to fast-track, up-or-down votes on the whole package. When President Obama took it upon himself to rewrite fundamental immigration policies in 2016, congressional opponents responded that they would simply forbid the changes with a rider to the appropriations of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Then came the sheepish apology: They discovered that the USCIS doesn’t need congressional apro-
plications—it is entirely self-funded by its own fees and other devices.

Beyond immigration and trade, President Trump has made “deconstructing the administrative state” a top priority. Similarly, Brexit proponents emphasize repatriating domestic lawmaking from the E.U. to Westminster, and the nationalist governments of Eastern Europe devote considerable energy to outfoxing their bureaucratic overlords in Brussels. Declarative government seems to be adverse to nationalist constituencies in many different circumstances.

The suddenness and ferocity of the nationalist insurgencies and counterattacks suggests a thought experiment. Imagine that, during the past several decades, government in the U.S., U.K., and Europe had continued to be dominated by their national legislatures, with all of the posturing, parochialism, and muddled compromises that would have entailed. The march toward centralized E.U. government and a common currency, and toward executive and judicial government in the United States, would have been much slower and more complicated and compromised (and less highhanded) than it was. In other words, more representative and less declarative. The governing elites and Anywheres would have had to accommodate the hinterlanders and Somewheres at every incremental step. Each side would have won some and lost some. But the results, quite plausibly, would have been more stable and harmonious than where we have ended up—at rule-or-ruin precipices in nation after nation. In politics, stability is a cardinal virtue, something we had lost sight of and are relearning.

Conservative Nationalism

The political energies Donald Trump has unleashed present a singular challenge to American conservatives and libertarians. Liberal progressives are entirely unconflicted by Trumpism: they are fervently opposed, and many have joined “The Resistance.” It is true that some Democratic Party stalwarts are unhappy to lose, once again, many white working-class men—the “Reagan Democrats”—to the Republicans. They are comfortable with global governance and the industrial unions are generally happy with President Trump’s trade and tariff policies. But the Democratic Party is dominated by progressive activists, who view it as a holding company for groups, causes, and grievances that depend on the administrative state and the courts for their rights and remedies. They are comfortable with global governance and many are ethically committed to the idea of a universal humanity of open borders. Nationalism seems to them a sly euphemism for “white nationalism” and an impotent excuse for the many injustices of American society.

Conservatives, in contrast, are deeply conflicted. Donald Trump invaded their party, not the other one, and made sport of many of their apostles. Some conservatives were America Firsters to begin with, others have become converts, and others began and remain Never Trumpers who loathe the man and his policies. Some love his judicial appointments but are aghast at his protectionism. Some admire his nerve, media bashing, and political incorrectness but wish these were a bit more modulated. Some regard his nationalism as an overdue reassertion of American sovereignty and foreign-policy realism, while others see a destabilizing retreat from global leadership. One thing certain is that when President Trump has finished his work, the conservative movement and Republican Party will not be the same. The result will not be a mid-point between Trump and John Kasich. Rather it will be a fresh formulation of what it means to be conservative or libertarian in the modern age.

This is, initially, an intellectual enterprise, which if successful will set the stage for practical political leadership. We have two robust precedents. In the 1950s, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower was accommodating the New Deal and Soviet Communism was on the march, William F. Buckley and the band of diverse, disputatious intellectuals he gathered at National Review—lapsed Communists, anarcho-libertarians, conservative Catholics, Southern agrarians—created the modern conservative movement. It led to Barry Goldwater’s capture of the Republican Party and his losing-but-galvanizing 1964 presidential campaign. Years later, rising from the social turmoil and government failures of the late 1960s and early 1970s, came the neoconservatives, led by Irving Kristol at The Public Interest and Norman Podhoretz at Commentary. This period of conservative ferment was even more variegated than Buckley’s had been. It featured academic and empirical research as well as intellectual essaying, embraced moderate liberals such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and included distinct schools such as the law-and-economics movement at the University of Chicago. Some traditional conservatives—the “Old Right”—fretted that the newcomers were weakening their movement’s fiber and cohesion. But it was a period of tremendous intensity and growth that infused conservatism with new energy, ideas, adherents, and institutions—eventually incarnated in Ronald Reagan.

A third era of intellectual reformulation is now underway. This time it is not central-
ized in a few journals, institutes, and godfathers. Rather—reflecting the spread of wealth and education and improvements in communications that I have emphasized—it is distributed and reticulated. Dozens of new and old journals, websites, and think tanks, plus innovations such as long-form podcasts and celebrity recirculation platforms, are variously devoted to politics, policy, law, economics, society, culture, philosophy, and security and foreign policy. The digitized, networked competition of ideas has generated new conservative and libertarian divisions and alliances, a parade of impressive new talents, and the appearance almost daily of substantial books and essays and vigorous rebuttals and surrebuttals to what was published last week. There is a certain amount of pro- and anti-Trump positioning in all of this, but also an abundance of serious analysis of the fissures and problems Trump’s ascendency has revealed and what ought to be done about them. The voluminous pro-and-con commentary on Patrick J. Deneen’s Why Liberalism Failed, Yoram Hazony’s The Virtue of Nationalism, and Oren Cass’s The Once and Future Worker (again, just in 2018) has been equal to the best of the conservative argumentation in the previous eras. The Left, meanwhile, has doubled down on identity progressivism in its strongholds in the universities, popular entertainment, and the national media. It has fielded some striking political figures (the Democrats’ 2020 presidential primaries will certainly be a hoot) but has largely abandoned the high-brow introspection and sharp ideological insightfulness that were once its hallmarks. Today the intellectual action is on the Right.

My interpretation of Trumpism suggests that the conservative recirculation should aim to give shape and substance to the nationalist revival. The nation-state has acquired a bad reputation in recent decades, and not only among liberal progressives and globohotters. It is widely regarded as an arbitrary inheritance and source of misery—of wars over territory and ancient myths, and of grievances and hatreds among racial and ethnic groups. The uprisings of 1848, in the view of many historians, replaced relatively stable empires and principalities with jerry-built, unstable nations—taking continental Europe to World War I and thence to fascism. Among libertarians, the nation-state is often seen as a mechanism for exploitation and the suppression of individual liberty—recall Albert Jay Nock’s great polemic, Our Enemy, the State.

But this reputation is superficial. All political orders—nation-states, empires, federations, tribal societies—have grave imperfections and have been the setting of terrible violence and injustice. Hazony’s The Virtue of Nationalism includes a compelling demonstration that the nation-state is less conducive to violence and discord, and more conducive to liberty and progress, than any alternative known to history. The self-governing nation-state was forged in the Israelites’ Biblical escape from Egypt to a homeland of their own: much later, it was developed and propagated in the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, the Peace of Westphalia in the 17th, and the American Revolution in the 18th. It was seen as the ideal unit of political order as recently as Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points during World War I and Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill’s Atlantic Charter during World War II. The nationalist order rested on two principles: First, nations were obliged to protect their people and dispense justice—so as to promote individual freedom and dignity and collective cohesion and cooperation. Second, nations possessed self-determination—each one free to follow its own traditions, institutions, and ways-of-life. The successful nation-state has been the seedbed of our living institutions of individual liberty and democratic equality—separation of powers, representative assemblies, the universal franchise, due process, the common law.

Successful orders of nation-states—decentralized, diversified, and competitive—have fostered historic advances in art, science, commerce, and social well-being.

President Trump’s articulation of nationalism follows the classical formulation precisely: “We do not expect diverse countries to share the same cultures, traditions, or even systems of government,” he told the United Nations General Assembly in September 2017, “[b]ut we do expect all nations to uphold these two core sovereign duties: to respect the interests of their own people and the rights of every other sovereign nation.” He reiterated these principles in his September 2018 U.N. address. His formulation, despite its distinguished heritage, has prompted crude “white nationalism” attacks in the blogosphere and more refined ones elsewhere. French President Emmanuel Macron, in his November 2018 Armistice Day speech in Paris with President Trump sitting nearby, asserted that nationalism is a “betrayal of patriotism” and a cauldron of “chaos and death.” True patriotism, he said, consists of adhering to moral values that have now been entrusted to international law and institutions.

The proof of these arguments will come in deeds and consequences. President Trump’s immigration, trade, and foreign-policy initiatives are vivid applications of his nationalist credo, and time will tell their results. But they need to be complemented by domestic initiatives. The successful nation-state not only asserts but cultivates its sovereignty—and that requires sustaining the allegiance of its citizens and tangibly promoting their interests and well-being. It does not negate, but rather respects and builds upon, the parochial loyalties of its constituent tribes of community, locality, and ethnic, racial, and religious identity. It does so both to moderate internal conflict and to pursue objectives that require large-scale cooperation across its entire geography. Americans have done this brilliantly down the centuries: our shared devotion to pragmatic compromise, prosperity and opportunity, and the Declaration and Constitution have gotten us through many bitter, often violent, conflicts. But lately we seem to have lost the knack. In the wake of the Trump rebellion, we should aim to supplant rebellion with relatively stable political competition and mutual accommodation and a spirit of common destiny. We need a more capacious nationalism. I have three suggestions.

Conserving Congress

My first suggestion is a determined effort to resurrect the U.S. Congress. It is difficult to conceive of an effective revival of American nationalism that does not involve a revival of representative government. In the West, the rise of the legislative assembly was coterminous with the rise of the nation-state; while it admits of many variations in electoral design and internal structure, no one has yet conceived of a plausible substitute for the basic institution.

Consider the alternative proposed by Harvard’s Adrian Vermeule (‘Integration from Within,’ American Affairs, Spring 2018): “integration from within” the current structure of declarative government. Communities of local and moral commitment that have been ignored or suppressed by the executive state should, Vermeule says, insinuate themselves into the bureaucratic apparatus and use it to propagate their own values. There have been a few stabs at this in Republican administrations, such as the George W. Bush Administration’s “community and faith-based initiatives” and the Trump Administration’s proposals to call off the “war on coal.” But the results have been marginal. The approach founders on the specialization and instrumental rationalism of executive government and the incentives of missionary agencies. The representative legislature is the forum where a nation’s multiform tribes and communities make peace with one another, and where numbers and intensity count even when cogent rationalization is lacking. It is nice to say that the Anywheres, depending as they do on
“Richard Gergel presents a deeply researched account of [Isaac] Woodard’s tragic story and weaves it into a larger narrative. . . . The definitive account of Woodard’s blinding.”

“Remarkable . . . riveting.”

“There are many histories of American expansionism. How to Hide an Empire renders them all obsolete. It is brilliantly conceived, utterly original, and immensely entertaining —simultaneously vivid, sardonic, and deadly serious.”
—Andrew J. Bacevich, author of Twilight of the American Century

“This is a brilliant and urgently necessary book, eloquently making the case against bigotry and for all of us migrants—what we are not, who we are, and why we deserve to be welcomed, not feared.”
—Salman Rushdie

“The must-read book for 2019. Suketu Mehta is one of our finest thinkers and writers on the subject of immigration.”
—Gary Shteyngart
the Somewheres for the necessities of daily life (household and transportation services, food), ought to be more respectful of Somewhere interests in the political realm. But the conflicts between the two are genuine and wide-ranging. As a practical matter, Congress is the only available institution where they can come to terms on national policy and negotiate through the twists and turns of national politics.

The great difficulty is that, as I have argued, the developments in society and technology that have fostered our new political cleavages are the same ones that have sidelined Congress as an effective arbiter. Think tanks and advocacy groups are now bristling with programs on congressional reform. Their proposals run to restoring annual budgeting and appropriations, strengthening the committees and their chairmen, revising internal rules and procedures such as the Senate filibuster, and requiring up-or-down votes on agency rules. These are excellent ideas, and very few members of Congress are interested in any of them. Most have adapted to the times and are content with their new business model of affinity networking, agency lobbying, and nonstop personal fundraising. The Madisonian ideal of a Congress whose members’ interests are “connected with the constitutional rights of the place” has lost its tug. There are a few exceptions, such as Senator Mike Lee (R-Utah), but not nearly enough to form a Vanguard of Reconstruction.

These problems have been conspicuous in the last two congresses, when the Republicans held majorities in both chambers and had strong incentives to unlimber legislative powers. During the 114th Congress (2015-16), the Obama Administration engaged in repeated, aggressive usurpations of legislative authority; individual members responded with speeches and press conferences and a few lawsuits, but the institutional Congress offered no resistance at all. The 115th Congress (2017-18) roused itself to just one consequential reform: the Senate abolished its supermajority procedures for Supreme Court appointments in order to confirm President Trump’s two nominations of judicial conservatives. The 115th did pass a few regular appropriations bills and, using established exceptions to the Senate supermajority, repealed several fairly narrow Obama-era regulations and enacted major tax reforms. But the Republicans ignominiously failed to make good on their other big campaign promises—to repeal-and-replace Obamacare and to secure the Mexican border. They also failed to counter the president’s tariff campaign that many of them, and many Democrats too, opposed on legal or policy grounds (recall that this is a field where Congress has delegated particularly wide discretion to the executive). The Congress concluded with a short-term “continuing resolution” spending bill—a patch for its failure to pass seven of the requisite 12 appropriations bills for 2019. That set the stage for the extended partial government shutdown over President Trump’s insistence on funding for walls along portions of the Mexican border. Border security is a critical national issue. In a world of regular agency appropriations, it would have proceeded on its own merits—with less free-floating rage, less collateral damage to non-germane federal activities, and more attention to the prerogatives of president and Congress on the matter at hand.

Congressional reform, it seems, will have to come from without. Three institutions are sufficiently powerful for the assignment—the other two federal branches and the political parties.

The courts have accommodated the growth of the administrative state by giving Congress free rein to delegate its Article I powers to the executive and by deferring extravagantly to agency interpretations of statutes and rules. They are now beginning to reconsider their “nondelegation” and “agency deference” doctrines and are likely to move toward greater constitutional discipline. The result would be to oblige Congress to make more policy decisions itself—and, consequently, to choose its policy interventions more carefully. American law would become somewhat more representative and less declarative, and less expansionist to boot.

The executive branch may seem an unlikely source of congressional revival because it is Congress’s political rival in the constitutional scheme. But the president is its CEO, and his interests often differ from those of the bureaucracy that nominally reports to him. Americans look to their president for national leadership; if presidents shared greater responsibility with Congress, they would be more popular and less polarizing than ours have become in recent decades, and therefore more powerful when we really need them. President Trump has taken two major policies that President Obama decided by declaration (concerning the status of children of illegal immigrants and certain Obamacare appropriations) and referred them to Congress for resolution in tandem with priorities of his own. He has complained repeatedly that the Senate’s cherished supermajority for legislation has prevented Congress from resolving these and other matters by partisan majority (as it did for Supreme Court confirmations, tax reform, and repeal of Obama regulations). At the same time, he rejected the congressional Democrats’ proposal, during the January 2019 government shutdown, to send him regular appropriations for the agencies not involved in the border-wall dispute—a reform he would have welcomed in other circumstances and should have welcomed here. A president committed to constitutional rebalancing could pledge himself to a set of procedures in advance of individual policy battles—for example, to submit all major new regulations to Congress for approval, or to refuse to sign budgetary “continuing resolutions” in place of regular agency appropriations.

The political parties may seem unlikely reformers because congressional paralysis is frequently blamed on excessive partisanship. But partisan paralysis is actually the result of weak parties beholden to ideological activists—the Tea Party kept Republican leaders from making deals with Democrats during the Obama Administration, and the Resistance now keeps Democratic party leaders from making deals with Republicans. In a forthcoming paper to be released by the American Enterprise Institute in the spring, political historian Jay Cost argues that the surest route to congressional revival is strong national parties—parties with the wherewithal to select House and Senate candidates, bankroll their political campaigns, and announce party election platforms and enforce legislative adherence to them. In times of unified government, such parties could enact the campaign pledges that brought them to power; in times of divided government, they could negotiate with each other from positions of strength.

Each of these approaches has advantages and disadvantages. The shift in judicial doctrines is well underway, grounded in years of scholarship by legal conservatives and reinforced by President Trump’s Supreme Court and lower court appointments—but it will be limited to the issues arising in litigated cases, and it will never reach the “political questions” in executive-legislative relations that courts wisely avoid. Presidential leadership is a proven method for overcoming Congress’s inherent irresolution (the legislative “collec-
thought leaders.” Leadership often requires K-12 schooling, the hardening of progressive finance laws, state prerogatives in the design of elections (especially primary elections), and other obstacles. Congressional reconstructionists should pursue all three approaches and be alert to opportunities for combining them.

The New Nationalism

My second suggestion for effective nationalism is to bring issues of American identity and purpose to the forefront of political debate. This is not a job for Congress, which at its best is a reactive institution, devoted to managing the political inbox and parceling out benefits. Rather it is for presidents and governors, leaders of civic institutions, and intellectual activists and “thought leaders.” Leadership often requires taking sides on controversial subjects; nationalist leaders should do so in ways that counter our tribal politics and fissiparous technologies and emphasize our collective interests.

Consider, for example, three governing precepts that are distinctively American and deeply engrained in our national experience—equal educational opportunity as an instrument of citizenship and social mobility, freedom of inquiry as an instrument of knowledge and discovery, and the competitive market economy as an instrument of prosperity and growth. Our commitment to these precepts is now in doubt, due to the politicization of K-12 schooling, the hardening of progressive orthodoxy at colleges and universities, and the spread of regulation in naturally competitive economic sectors. But I believe the precepts still run deep in popular understanding and can be drawn upon to make headway in today’s divisive controversies. Doing so could demonstrate their continuing worth.

The issues I have in mind are already well developed in the intellectual wing of the conservative-libertarian movement; they need to be picked up by the political wing and marched into partisan combat. My three all-American precepts were once widely embraced within the Democratic Party and liberal intelligentsia. But there they have fallen victim to the rise of progressivism—which is devoted to segmenting the populace into interest and identity groups, and which conflates “progress” with political control and cultural hegemony. In response, American conservatism has been gradually assimilating these and other tenets of old-fashioned American liberalism. Republican presidents and governors have been following in fits and starts, and the Trump Administration’s education and regulatory officials have gone furthest of all. But we are still not there yet.

K-12 public schools in poor and minority communities are performing extremely poorly. There and elsewhere, union rules inhibit superintendents from sanctioning poor teachers and promoting good ones, and teachers from using their best judgment in managing their classrooms. School curricula are increasingly devoted to political indoctrination on issues of race, sex, and environmentalism, and to portraying American history as a saga of unmitigated injustice and exploitation. Now, these and other troubles involve many variations and subtleties best left to local policy and management; the most ambitious Republican effort to nationalize reform, George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act, was a terrible failure. But there are three structural reforms where national leadership is appropriate and could be largely free of regimenation and micromanagement: school choice, charter schools, and vocational education.

These are not panaceas but are almost certainly necessary preconditions of major improvement; they are popular with the general public; and Democrats are bound to oppose them because of their party’s heavy dependence on the teachers’ unions and devotion to college-for-everyone progressivism. There is much that federal policy could do to facilitate parental school choice and advance the already-robust charter school and vocational education movements against the opposition of local school, school accreditation, and teacher certification monopolies. Persistent, top-level Republican leadership on these issues would address the interests of the Party’s Somewhere constituents and aim to garner new constituents from poorer and minority communities and maybe even suburban moms. That would stimulate partisan controversy of the most productive kind.

American higher education is much more competitive and variegated than K-12 education and boasts many outstanding institutions with impressive records of teaching, scholarship, and scientific discovery. The system is, however, decaying. Colleges and universities have always featured rowdy protests against unpopular speakers, and faculty shunning of scholars who challenge reigning academic paradigms. But these have now become routine and systematic—they are no longer inci-
Academy. But there are important national wage application of the programs’ founding Following the 2008 financial collapse, “de-

First Amendment and are subject to several

versity-based research (accounting for more

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grants, colleges and universities were required

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demics of all stripes.

“Dezoning” the electromagnetic spectrum

would eliminate obnoxious bureaucratic

blockades against innovation in high-infor-
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Requiring banks to maintain adequate eq-

ity capital would make owners rather than
taxpayers the underwriters of bank per-

formance. Defenestrating Fannie Mae and

Freddie Mac, the “government sponsored

terprises” that engineered the 2008 finan-
cial collapse, would stop them before they
kill again. These steps would permit market

competition to do its work where govern-

ment cartels have failed. Like airline dereg-

ulation in the 1970s, they could be introduced

at the agency level, would provoke vociferous

opposition from industry insiders (which

Republicans could turn to advantage), and

would produce palpable, widely shared con-

sumer benefits. A federal deregulation cam-
paign against state occupational licensure,

now infesting quotidian callings such as gar-
dening and hair-braiding, would be a natu-

ral for mobility-promoting Republicanism;

like vocational education and other school

reforms, it would appeal to job-challenged

Somewheres and also aim to convert others,

of earlier years.

The Trump Administration has swept

mation communications and cybersecurity.

The Welfare State

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The third plank in my nationalist

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of earlier years.
numbers, and the various ratios and historical comparisons that usually accompany them, are difficult to interpret. For every economist who warns the debt is much too large, there is another saying we should borrow more and invest it in worthy things such as repairing our dilapidated highways and bridges. Our growing debt is sometimes tied to growing entitlement spending on Medicare and Social Security; we are told that funding for them will run out in 10 or 20 years. That means the spending trends are “unsustainable”—which, to political officials, means they will need to be addressed sometime in the future and will be headaches for their successors. President Trump has said so explicitly ("I won’t be here"). We already have more than enough problems this year!

These formulations mask a deep problem in the here-and-now, and the most seductive of all of modernity’s corruptions of representative government. From 1789 through the late 1960s, the U.S. Congress used its taxing, spending, and borrowing powers to follow a balanced-budget policy, where annual revenues and regular expenditures were kept roughly in balance. It sometimes borrowed heavily—to finance wars and continental expansion and to respond to natural disasters and economic hard times—but it paid the debts down in businesslike fashion. Then, beginning in the early 1970s, everything changed. Congress increasingly sloughed off its fiscal responsibilities. The government ran large and growing deficits as a matter of routine—in good times and bad, whether faced with emergencies or not. And federal spending was radically transformed, from mostly providing public goods (national defense, federal courts, interstate highways) to mostly making payments to individuals as entitlements or means-tested welfare. The burgeoning “transfer payments”—for pensions, medical care, food, housing, and other particulars of personal welfare—were about 35% of federal spending in 1970 and are now more than 75%.

Federal borrowing is not generally allocated to particular spending items, but there is no doubt that its growth has been driven by the growth of payments to individuals. Regular annual deficits emerged and grew on approximately the same path as entitlement and welfare spending. The entitlement programs are exempt from budget procedures and most have been exempted from our recurrent government shutdowns and spending-control bargains. At the same time, a succession of tax reforms has lowered tax rates and taken many citizens off the income tax rolls altogether. Through a long sequence of moves and reactions—"learning by doing"—public officials and voters have discovered a new calculus of political consent. It is for the government to pay our benefits to voters considerably in excess of what it collects from them in taxes, and to borrow the difference from nonvoting future generations. State and local governments have pioneered a similar path, accumulating trillions of dollars of unfunded liabilities (implicit borrowing) for employee pensions.

This is a jolly state of affairs for the time being, highly agreeable to both Somewheres and Anywheres, but it is not going to last. Expenditures on national expansion and infrastructure are long-term investments and therefore, in principle, appropriate to borrow against. (Of course, they may or may not turn out well—the Louisiana Purchase was one of the highest-return investments in history, while several recent investments in green energy have gone bust.) In contrast, transfer payments to individuals are devoted largely to immediate personal consumption. However worthy, urgent, or enriching the purchases may be, they are not going to generate returns to pay down the borrowed funds.

So our current borrowing habits are certainly “unsustainable,” but they are worse than that. Cutting the link between tax revenues and transfer payments unleashes many pathologies that undermine political unity. Public officials are much less constrained to police against waste and fraud, or to resist extending benefits to ever-larger categories of citizens. Liberal progressives are free to pretend that payments to ordinary folks are going to be made tax-free, although that is unlikely to be rescued by enlightened statesmanship. Much more likely, a crisis will deliver us to a reckoning. On the day the secretary of the Treasury is forced to choose between paying bondholders and paying Social Security annuitants, the political system will respond.

One way or another, America is going to have increased borrowing before the end of the decade. At our current level of debt, a sustained increase in interest rates could bring us to this point. So could a military crisis or natural or economic disaster that requires massive borrowing beyond current levels. (The main reason for fiscal prudence is to be prepared to borrow heavily for such catastrophes, which come along for America at least once every generation.)

Our current federal government is likely to be opposed to any of these reforms. And it is unlikely to be rescued by enlightened statesmanship. Much more likely, a crisis will deliver us to a reckoning. On the day the secretary of the Treasury is forced to choose between paying bondholders and paying Social Security annuitants, the political system will respond.

At our current level of debt, a sustained increase in interest rates could bring us to this point. So could a military crisis or natural or economic disaster that requires massive borrowing beyond current levels. (The main reason for fiscal prudence is to be prepared to borrow heavily for such catastrophes, which come along for America at least once every generation.)

One way or another, America is going to move from a debt-financed welfare state to a tax-financed welfare state. If the transition is abrupt and chaotic, it will bring widespread hardship, especially to the Somewheres who have become increasingly dependent on transfer payments, and possible political instability. For this reason, it would be nice if a few courageous souls in active politics would specialize in mastering and advertising the problems; this could help condition public expectations and encourage personal contingency planning, and might even set the stage for a Churchill-like summons to leadership down the road. But the transition, hard or soft, will present opportunities as well—as the political scientists say, the American system gets around to needed reforms only in response to crises. When Congress is obliged to fund a much larger share of entitlement and welfare spending with tax revenues, it will just have to pick up its fiscal reins and exercise a level of collective discipline that no current member has experienced. The political parties will have to wake up from populist hallucinations over taxation, redistribution, and economic growth. And American citizens will acquire a much keener sense of their obligations to one another.

These eventualities are not to be relished, given the risks and adversities lying in wait, but now is not a moment too soon for patriotic nationalists to begin preparing for them. We are a very rich people, fully capable of paying for our own government. When we do, we are bound to insist on better, more continent government. Facing up to these responsibilities will be a severe test of our national character and ability to remain united.

Christopher DeMuth is a distinguished fellow at the Hudson Institute. This essay grew out of presentations at the Transatlantic Law Forum in Bayreuth, Germany, in October 2018, and at the Reagan Ranch Foundation in Santa Barbara, California, in November 2018.
Sometime in the early 1970s I persuaded editors at the Washington Post to run a column I had written entitled “Why Not Abolish the Vice Presidency.” In it, I argued that vice presidents had seldom contributed much to governance and that the office tended to diminish the serious politicians who had held it. Succession to the presidency could be arranged in other ways. Within days, a letter arrived on official stationery from former vice president Hubert Humphrey, once again a senator, protesting that the office was a worthy and necessary one. Alas, I didn’t save the letter. But it was obviously dictated in a hurry, with no attempt made at orderly argumentation, and signed with a flourish. Even after his dreadful four years as vice president, Humphrey wrote with cheerful ebullience.

Surprisingly, there has not been much in the way of a serious biography of this man, a major player in national politics from the 1940s to the 1970s. Now comes Arnold Offner, emeritus history professor at Lafayette College, to fill the gap. Offner doesn’t try to conceal his enthusiastic support for his subject. When he disagrees with Humphrey, he does so only to endorse conventional liberal wisdom (e.g., that a South Vietnamese government coalition with the Viet Cong would have produced a desirable denouement in Vietnam). His workmanlike prose, however, does a good job of informing readers of the politics of the time, and his narrative proceeds in chronological order: one cannot assume that readers today, even readers of political biographies, have much knowledge of what are now 40- to 70-year-old political events. This particular reader would have preferred a more poetic evocation of the times, places, and peculiar personalities—but few political scientists have the gifts of the late Richard Ben Cramer.

Hubert Humphrey played a critical role in both the rise and decline of mid-20th-century American liberalism. It bears mention that few members of Congress during the 1930s were committed New Deal liberals. Only a handful of Democrats (including Senators Robert Wagner of New York, Edward Costigan of Colorado, and Burton Wheeler of Montana) and a few Progressive Republicans (Robert La Follette of Wisconsin) believed in economic redistributionist legislation; most Congressional Democrats were either big-city hacks or Southern segregationists. Humphrey fit into neither category. He grew up in South Dakota, the son of a pharmacist who had briefly served in the state legislature and who had sacrificed a shot at the governorship in order to finance Hubert’s education at the University of Minnesota. Humphrey then received a master’s degree from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, where he saw segregation in action and met future colleague Russell Long.

Returning to Minnesota, Humphrey got a New Deal patronage job. When Pearl Harbor was attacked he was already 30 and a father. He ran for mayor in then Republican-leaning
Minneapolis and lost badly in 1943, then won in 1945 and 1947. In those years he midwifed the merger of the left-wing Farmer-Labor Party (DFL) with the state’s third-place and less liberal Democrats. In 1948 he was the new Democratic-Farmer-Labor candidate for U.S. Senate—and, suddenly, a nationally prominent liberal.

On two important issues in the late 1940s—civil rights and foreign policy—Humphrey helped lead the Democratic Party to liberal positions which were far from inevitable extensions of the party’s history. On civil rights, Republicans had always been more supportive of equal rights for blacks than had Democrats. Even in the New Deal years the Democrats who were most pro-civil rights—Eleanor Roosevelt, Henry Wallace, Harold Ickes—were all former Republicans. Humphrey, with roots in almost all-white South Dakota and Minnesota, was appalled by the segregation and racism he saw in Louisiana and always favored equal rights. His fiery speech for the minority civil rights platform plank at the 1948 Democratic National Convention, and its passage by the convention, converted what had been a segregationist party within living memory into a civil rights party.

On foreign policy, Minnesota was an isolationist state before World War II, and many Farmer-Laborites, including appointed senator and one-term governor Elmer Benson, supported the anti-anti-Communist Henry Wallace. Humphrey opposed isolationism before World War II and supported the Truman Administration’s anti-Communist Cold War policy afterward. Nationally he was one of the founders, along with Eleanor Roosevelt and United Automobile Workers president Walter Reuther, of the anti-Communist Americans for Democratic Action. In Minnesota he led the successful drive (with help from future Governor Orville Freeman, Minneapolis Mayor Arthur Naftalin, lawyer Max Kampelman, and 20-year-old college student Walter Mondale) to oust Benson’s comrades from control of the newly merged DFL. 1948 was his annus mirabilis: Humphrey’s stirring convention speech committed the Democratic Party to civil rights; as DFL nominee he beat incumbent Republican Senator Joseph Ball by 60% to 40%; and as a 37-year-old senator he could escort his father to a White House meeting with President Harry Truman after his surprising and decisive victory. Broad sunlit uplands seemed to stretch before Humphrey and his fellow liberals in every direction.

Instead they faced frustration. Truman’s Fair Deal legislation went nowhere in a heavily Democratic Congress, and the Korean War throttled domestic reform. Humphrey’s political instincts were unsure, and he was humiliated when he assailed the elderly Virginia Senator Harry Byrd in a series of speeches to Byrd’s own special committee for its failure to cut federal spending. Lyndon Johnson—who was elected to the Senate in the same year, but with 11 years of prior experience in the House—took the naïve Humphrey under his wing in what Offner characterizes as a father-son relationship, though LBJ was only three years his senior. Humphrey did have one legislative success, Public Law 480, which allowed warehouses with huge surpluses of farm products resulting from New Deal programs to send them abroad. The political reason for its passage was to slow the inevitable migration from increasingly mechanized farms in the South and Midwest (including Minnesota). Humphrey always maintained a sentimental regard for the family farmer.

Offner slides quickly over Humphrey’s hapless 1960 presidential campaign, which, like all of Humphrey’s campaigns, seems to have been underfunded and bereft of strategic guidance. The author doesn’t address the tan-

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talizing questions of whether Lyndon Johnson was encouraging him to run in order to stop the Kennedys, and he only skittered over the enormity of the Kennedy operation. One Joseph P. Kennedy agent inquired how much it would cost to get one West Virginia county boss's support and was told “thirty-five”; the sheriff in question was surprised when he opened the attaché case to find it contained not 35 hundred but 35 thousand dollars.

Offner shows more insight when he writes that “Humphrey was highly dependent emotionally on Johnson’s goodwill.” As vice president he had an institutional reason not to disagree publicly with Johnson, especially so soon after a traumatic presidential assassination. But Humphrey acquiesced in Johnson’s control over his travel schedule, over even anodyne public statements, over his total exclusion from contact with military and civilian national security officials. Even as a presidential nominee himself, and unlike other 20th-century vice presidents running for the top office (Richard Nixon in 1960, George Bush in 1988, Al Gore in 2000) he trembled with fear at presenting his own policies, until finally offering alternatives on Vietnam five weeks before the general election.

This biography doesn’t tell us what if anything Humphrey thought of Johnson’s selection of the visually impressive but intellectually clueless William Westmoreland as commander in Vietnam, or why Johnson kept him in place so long. Perhaps that’s because he had no thoughts on that subject at all. The American presidential selection system tends to produce commanders-in-chief with limited knowledge of military issues and no contact with the military officers from whom they must select commanders. Humphrey, who had been within a heartbeat of the office for four years, seems to have been especially underprepared in this regard. His instinctive anti-Communism was a good start, but on Vietnam he tended to vacillate, arguing sometimes that bombing halts would somehow satisfy Communist enemies, sometimes snapping back peevishly at those denigrating America. Unlike Nixon, whom we are told repeatedly he loathed, he could not figure out how to move toward military victory while reducing American troop levels.

On domestic policy, Humphrey fans intuitively feel, he would have done better. Certainly he had been right about civil rights, and his management of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was skilful—although Offner does not mention his vow to eat the Act if its employment sections were used (as they soon were, by the Nixon Administration) as a justification for racial quotas and preferences. And a case can be made that Humphrey-style liberalism served postwar America well—but also that it stopped doing so in the years just after he was elected vice president in 1964. It had already produced for the vast majority of Americans the “welfare state which assured a decent standard of living and human dignity to every citizen,” that Humphrey was arguing required increased federal funding of education, housing, and health care. For the two postwar decades the nation’s economic competitors had been put out of commission by the war, and so America managed to grow and generate jobs up and down the skill scale, despite the burden of New Deal laws that imposed labor union restrictions on management, and regulations designed to freeze existing arrangements in place rather than encourage competition and innovation. Such arrangements reached their maximum peak of celebration in the 1964 Johnson-Humphrey campaign, which boasted of its support from both big business and big labor, Walter Reuther and Henry Ford II, by big-city bosses and civil rights leaders, Richard J. Daley and Martin Luther King, Jr. Consensus!

But with postwar recovery, America had stronger competitors and a new generation of adults with more demanding expectations. Humphrey’s impulse on policy can be boiled down to the title of William Voegeli’s book Never Enough (2010). If corporate-labor cartels seemed to work, let’s have more of them. If real wages and salaries had increased despite government supervision and control, let’s have more of that, too. Incomes may have risen and poverty declined, but let’s also create an antipoverty program, and let’s rely on those in poverty to tell us how to get out of it. If blacks rioted in large cities, even those with liberal mayors, then more money must be sent to city governments, their entrenched bureaucracies, and community organizations dominated by self-chosen malcontents.

A better and more truly liberal response was on offer in those years from Ralph Nader, who in between calling for legislation to require safety features in automobiles also was busy sponsoring studies and books urging deregulation of trucking, freight rail, airline fares, and communications. Nader’s proposals received serious consideration during the Ford Administration and were widely adopted by the Carter and Reagan administrations. But this wave of reform, which squeezed enormous amounts of cost out of transportation and communication, to the benefit of everyone with modest and low incomes, passed Humphrey by. His attentions were elsewhere, on the Humphrey-Hawkins Act, which purported to require the Federal Reserve to consider full employment as well as low inflation as policy goals—something that the Fed usually did anyway. Humphrey-Hawkins was something of a parting gift from a Democratic Congress and president to a party leader of good cheer and great energy who was generally persevering while visibly dying of cancer in his mid-sixties. That came in early 1978, and so Humphrey was spared the knowledge that the man who would dominate American politics and public policy for most of the next decade would be a man born in another small Midwestern town in the same year, a fellow traveler in postwar liberal anti-Communist politics who cheered on Harry Truman’s victory in 1948, whose ideas had taken a different turn in the intervening 30 years: the former movie actor Ronald Reagan.

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Book Review by John C. Eastman

**CONSISTENTLY ORIGINAL**

Yale University Press, 248 pages, $30

**In constitutional law, the theory designed to accomplish the progressive vision is known as “living” constitutionalism.** The idea was to treat the Constitution as an evolving document that could be expansively reinterpreted—manipulated may be a better word—by judges in order, among other things, to ratify the exercise of power by experts in independent administrative agencies. The Constitution was still the supreme law of the land, they acknowledged, but it was merely whatever the judges said it is, as Charles Evans Hughes (later to become Chief Justice of the United States) infamously said in 1907 at the dawn of the Progressive movement. By the 1970s, this view had become the prevailing orthodoxy in the halls of government and in the legal academy.

Ronald Reagan’s attorney general, Edwin Meese, III, challenged this view, most notably in a speech delivered to the American Bar Association in 1985, arguing for a return to the original understanding of the Constitution as binding law. The following year, President Reagan appointed to the Supreme Court Antonin Scalia, who promptly began to articulate how “originalism” was a constitutionally-compelled restraint on the judiciary. The originalism project, under Scalia’s leadership—later joined (with some important but nuanced differences) by Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, and advanced in the law schools by the Federalist Society and more broadly by the Claremont Institute—proved to be so successful that by the 25th anniversary of Meese’s speech, even a “living” constitutionalist like Elena Kagan had at least nominally to subscribe to the view, in her Supreme Court confirmation hearing, that “we are all originalists” now.

Richard Hasen’s *The Justice of Contradictions* takes a new tack. If even Justice Scalia couldn’t faithfully apply originalism as a jurisprudential theory, the book argues, then the enterprise itself is flawed and must be abandoned. For Hasen, who teaches at the University of California, Irvine School of Law, Scalia’s originalism was merely a “pretext” and a “fig leaf,” masking the conservative ideology that drove his decisions. This was true even of these decisions cheered by liberals, such as the flag-burning case *Texas v. Johnson* (1989) and his “remarkably pro-defendant” decisions in *Apprendi v. New Jersey* (2000), *Crawford v. Washington* (2004), and *United States v. Jones* (2012). For Hasen, those cases only showed that Scalia’s distrust of government outweighed his antipathy toward criminal defendants.

Hasen barely acknowledges that these and other opinions might actually be the result of Scalia’s deep commitment to the Constitution itself. His opinions upholding the death penalty, for example, only prove that Scalia was an “enthusiastic supporter of the death penalty”; they have nothing to do with the fact that the Constitution itself explicitly recognizes the validity of capital punishment. Likewise, Scalia’s supposed prejudice against affirmative action trumped his commitment to the original understanding of the 14th Amendment, claims Hasen, which fully supported race-based preferences because the
Hasen charges that Scalia refused to defer to Reconstruction Congress gave “legal advantages to...newly freed slaves who needed state aid in becoming self-sufficient.” The clear distinction between the Reconstruction-era laws aimed at benefiting former slaves, and modern race-based preferences that bestow benefits on the basis of skin color’s alleged contributions to diversity, seems to have escaped his attention. But this crucial distinction made Scalia’s opposition to modern racial preferences perfectly compatible with—even mandated by—equal protection under the 14th Amendment.

Hasen makes much of this question of consistency in Scalia’s use of originalism, dodging, to a great extent, the much harder task of proving why Scalia’s opinions were unconstitutional. Thus, to take another example, Hasen charges that Scalia refused to defer to the legislature when it limited money in politics (exhibiting the Left’s ongoing anger over the Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission [2010]), but two years later did defer to the legislature in voting to uphold the law banning foreign money in American political campaigns, a “contradiction.” Yet, far from being inconsistent, the two cases are perfectly compatible with the original understanding of both the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence: citizens have the right to engage in political speech unfettered by government regulation, but foreign nationals have no right to try to influence the choice of the government to which they are not a party. That distinction merely embodies the “consent of the governed,” an idea that seems to give progressives like Hasen a lot of trouble.

Hasen also attempts to discredit Scalia (and through him originalism itself) by dwelling on what he calls the Justice’s “unparalleled level of nastiness and sarcasm,” even while acknowledging that his “sarcasm was rarely ad hominem.” Scalia “served to coarsen judicial discourse and may have helped undermine the legitimacy of the Court,” Hasen writes, because his “constant claims that the majority’s decisions were illegitimate, and not even true, acts of judging, served as a model for populist denunciations of elitist Court decisions.” “As partisan talk about the Court has increased,” he adds, “public opinion about the Court has grown increasingly polarized.” Missing from this analysis is even a nod to the possibility that judges who impose their own political views from the bench—such as the late Harry Pregerson, who declared at his confirmation hearing to the Ninth Circuit that he would “find a way to follow my conscience and do what I perceived to be right and just” rather than faithfully apply the law—are to blame for the Court’s loss of legitimacy, not Justice Scalia for calling them out.

What really seems to trouble Hasen is that Scalia has had a lasting impact on jurisprudence. Although it’s bad enough that Scalia had a profound influence in moving the political pendulum back from the progressive side of things, for Hasen and most of the legal academy that is just a temporary setback—however unpleasant in the interim—that will ultimately be set right again. The real danger from their perspective is that Scalia may have “transformed” the law of the Constitution back to what it was supposed to be—a fixed text that remains binding both on the political branches and on the judiciary, until altered by the sovereign people. That view—and we should concede here, as Hasen himself notes, that Scalia was not always as thoroughly originalist as, say, Justice Thomas—does not merely threaten to moderate the swings of the pendulum, but to stop it in its tracks.

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Citizens United v. FEC (2010) affirmed the First Amendment right of corporations to spend money on behalf of political candidates. Ever since, progressive politicians and pundits have denounced it for treating corporations as persons with the same constitutional rights as individuals. UCLA law professor Adam Winkler’s new book, We the Corporations: How American Businesses Won Their Civil Rights, turns this critique on its head. Winkler explains that courts have consistently used the notion of “corporate personhood” to limit corporations’ legal rights. Because they are creations of state law, corporate “persons” have been subject to special legal restrictions. Corporations have been more successful in asserting constitutional rights when courts ignore “corporate personhood” in favor of seeing corporations as asserting the rights of their (human) shareholders.

Populists of all parties have long attacked corporations as unwelcome intruders in American life. Winkler, however, emphasizes that corporations have been with us from our colonial beginnings. Many of the original settlements, and eventually the colonies themselves, were products of corporate charters authorized by the king of England.

American colonists became accustomed to the notion that their rights and responsibilities were delineated in colonial charters, and that their relationship with their governments was voluntary and business-like. When Parliament chose to override this relationship by ruling directly from England, the colonists rebelled. Winkler makes a compelling case that American constitutional development was heavily influenced by this experience.

Winkler’s history of corporate rights will likely surprise those who only ever see anti-corporate good guys battling it out with black-hatted corporate shills. Chief Justice Roger Taney, for example—who wrote the infamous Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857) opinion declaring that persons of African descent have “no rights the white man was bound to respect”—was a leading opponent of corporate rights. Decades later, the Lochner Court, often (unfairly) depicted as the handmaiden of rapacious corporations, halted the ongoing expansion of corporate rights, allowing corporations to claim property rights but denying they could claim liberty rights, such as freedom of expression or association.

As Winkler notes, the denial of corporate liberty rights provided a readily-available rationale for the Court in 1908 to deny Berea College’s challenge to a Kentucky law requiring it to segregate. The Court’s focus on Berea College’s corporate charter seems a bit pretextual, but in other circumstances anti-corporate sentiment directly benefited segregationist forces. Though Winkler neglects the case, Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) is instructive.

In Plessy, the Supreme Court upheld a Louisiana law requiring separate railroad accommodations for blacks and whites, on the grounds that the law appropriately prohibited forced integration. This is an odd way to describe a state law requiring segregation, and, as Justice John Marshall Harlan pointed out in dissent, seemed to prohibit freedom of association among train riders. This oddity is explained by resentment over railroad corporations’ economic power. Left to their own devices, many railroads, leery of segregation’s costs, would have permitted integration, “forcing” Southern whites to bow to the rules of monopolistic out-of-state corporations and involuntarily mingle with blacks on railroad cars. The Court saw the Louisiana law as a justified restriction on the power of private railroad corporations to undermine local white supremacist mores.

Counter-intuitively, though the purportedly reactionary Lochner Court denied liberty rights to corporations, the liberal New Deal and Warren Courts granted them. Once the Justices shifted their focus from property rights and federalism to freedom of speech, they had to grant corporations liberty rights to protect corporate-owned
To protect the NAACP—a corporation—from an Alabama libel lawsuit motivated by harassment by the State of Alabama, the Court had to recognize that non-profit corporations may assert their members’ right to “expressive association.” Winkler doesn’t mention it, but concerns about freedom of speech and civil rights coalesced when the Warren Court, in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* (1964), held that the Constitution protected the *Times* from an Alabama libel lawsuit motivated by hostility to the *Times’* civil rights coverage.

Winkler wrote *The Corporations* for a popular audience. He therefore spends much of the book depicting the often-colorful backgrounds of various individuals who played major roles in the battle over corporate rights. Whether this is a sound choice is a matter of taste. Some may find these descriptions liven a dull subject; others, like this reviewer, might find them trivial and distracting. Consider the following representative example: “As he took the stand in the Aldermanic Chamber of City Hall, the slender George Perkins, with his youthful, innocent face and hair neatly parted in the middle like a schoolboy, appeared no match for the tall, broad-shouldered, stern-looking lead investigator for the Armstrong Committee, Charles Evans Hughes.”

I would be more tolerant of these descriptive detours if Winkler’s legal analysis were more thorough and meticulous, as should be expected from a 400-page tome by a law professor. Though I don’t have any significant reservations about the general trustworthiness of the book, I did notice a lack of precision in his discussion of case precedents.

One of the book’s important themes is that businesses, blessed with the resources to pursue novel legal theories through top lawyers, are often pioneers in establishing constitutional rights that also apply to individuals. Winkler cites *Allgeyer v. Louisiana* (1897), which he rates one of the most important Supreme Court cases because it established the right to liberty of contract, and was a “groundbreaking precedent” for protecting other unenumerated liberty rights under the 14th Amendment’s due process clause. At best, this is exaggerated. The Court first asserted a generalized right to liberty of contract two years earlier, in *Frisbie v. United States*, not in *Allgeyer*. Allgeyer’s holding, meanwhile, established only the narrow proposition that a resident of one state has the right to contract with parties residing in another state without undue interference by his own state. And the Supreme Court made no significant progress on protecting unenumerated rights beyond liberty of contract until *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923), by which time Allgeyer was relied upon only as one of 14 cases in a string citation to relevant precedents.

Moving forward over a century, Winkler treats *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* (2014) holding that a closely-held corporation may claim free exercise of religion rights as a significant innovation. In 1961, however, the Court ruled on a free exercise challenge by Crown Kosher Supermarket, a corporation owned by Orthodox Jews, to a law requiring that stores be closed on Sunday. Although the Court rejected the free exercise claim by a vote of 6 to 3, none of the Justices objected to a closely-held corporation claiming free exercise rights. *Hobby Lobby* was controversial because it involved a corporation owned by conservative Christians challenging Obamacare birth control mandates, which pushed various ideological buttons on the left, not because it was unprecedented for the Supreme Court to permit corporations to assert free exercise rights.

Winkler also fails to reckon with the incorporation doctrine’s importance in the development of corporate rights. This doctrine, which developed in the middle of the 20th century, holds that the 14th Amendment’s due process clause protects almost all rights delineated in the Bill of Rights against the states, and that these rights are interpreted the same way against states as against the federal government. As a result, when a state
law restricting corporate speech is at issue, in practice the Court is interpreting the First Amendment’s right to freedom of speech, not the 14th Amendment’s due process clause—and as a textual matter, it’s far easier to justify the regulation of corporate speech as not depriving anyone of liberty under the due process clause than to explain how it fails to infringe upon the freedom of speech protected by the First Amendment.

We the Corporations is not an ideological tract, but Winkler repeats standard—and dubious—progressive historiography as fact. For example, he regurgitates progressive dogma about the evils of late 19th-century trusts, ignoring several decades of public-choice economics literature that casts significant doubt on that narrative. He also endorses the notion that state competition in creating corporate law creates a “race to the bottom,” as if this view is uncontroversial. Many corporate law scholars, on the contrary, believe such interstate competition is a healthy process that encourages efficient rule-making.

Winkler wildly overemphasizes the significance of one of the great bogeymen of the modern American Left, the so-called “Powell Memo.” In 1971, future Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell, who was then a lawyer in private practice, urged the American corporate community to organize a legal and political defense against the increasingly assertive regulatory state. Given the increased power of federal agencies, the rise of left-wing “consumer” groups, and the growth of the lawsuit industry (thanks to various legal innovations that encouraged lucrative lawsuits against corporations), increased political assertiveness by corporate America was inevitable, with or without Powell.

Winkler confuses pro-free market organizations founded in the 1970s, such as the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation, with pro-corporate flack. This conflation of corporate interest with free markets raises a broader conceptual issue. Any given corporation’s interest can lie in either more or less government regulation, depending on the circumstances. An American steel company may support tariffs to protect its product from foreign competition, and an automobile manufacturer oppose those same tariffs if it can produce cars more cheaply with foreign steel. The widely diverse interests of corporations, depending on location, size, industry, and so on, provide an important reason that “corporate” political influence is frequently exaggerated—the influence of one corporate interest group is often counterbalanced by another with opposing interests. We the Corporations neglects this dynamic, instead implicitly adopting the premise that corporations have a uniform interest in less regulation.

As the continuing hullabaloo over Citizens United suggests, the most salient First Amendment controversy over corporate rights is whether and to what extent the government may limit corporate political speech. Winkler simply assumes that good-guy public interest groups, seeking campaign finance “reform,” are pitted against voracious corporate self-interest. Yet the effects of limiting campaign spending on “speech” are not politically neutral. The ideological Left controls most leading sources of influence on American public opinion, including Hollywood, the arts, mainline churches, universities, the public-school establishment, corporate bureaucracies, National Public Radio, and the three legacy news networks. One arena in which the Right competes on something like a level playing field is in raising and spending money on political causes. The desire to circumscribe the Right’s ability to appeal directly to the public surely helps explain why the Left is so keen on regulating political spending.

The Left does not, however, want the government to regulate how the New York Times spends its resources, even though, by setting the news agenda, the Times likely has had a greater influence on public opinion than all corporate political spending combined. That raises an important question for opponents of Citizens United: under what theory may the government regulate the participation of a non-media corporation in the political process, which would not also to regulate the content of the Times? Answering this question has proven extremely difficult.

In We the Corporations, Adam Winkler resolved the dilemma by not even raising the question.

David E. Bernstein is University Professor at George Mason University’s Antonin Scalia Law School.
Boys are natural spies. Eager to perfect our crafty skills, we (my friends and I) always wanted to play the Indian—the wily Mohawk whistling a "bird" call signal from the forest depths beyond the campfire, or the silent Apache peering through a cleft rock at the unsuspecting trail riders below. Growing up on the edge of the Atlantic shore we shaded our evening lamps so the German U-boats we knew were out there could not see our cottages' silhouettes.

We read Sherlock Holmes's "Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans"—the designs for our side's ultimate submarine, the most jealously guarded of all government secrets. At a boardwalk newsstand I discovered, for 35 cents, *The Spy's Bedside Book* (1957), edited by Graham Greene, and his brother, Hugh. After reading Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), about a boy spy in "The Great Game," I felt my tradecraft was nearly complete.

Later, my Foreign Service Officer A-100 orientation class was titillated by the CIA briefer who told us he "wore two cloaks," improbably one for operational, the other for analytical missions. Then came *Orchids for Mother* (1977), Aaron Latham's roman à clef about James Jesus Angleton, the Agency's Cold War counterintelligence maven whose Yale College literary bent gained the notice of Ezra Pound and provided Angleton with "The New Criticism" as a methodology for detecting any Soviet "mole" in the American intelligence system by "close reading" the evidence, stripped of all external theories.

At Yale I found spying-as-patriotism represented in the statue of Nathan Hale, hands bound, awaiting execution by the hated British (I was told a replica fronted CIA headquarters at Langley). Yale's Robin Winks, a British Empire buff, explained the genealogy from Nathan Hale to James Jesus Angleton in *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939–1961* (1987). Yale men formed a core cadre in World War II's Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which transmogrified into the CIA for the Cold War. It was an "old boy thing," thrilling, romantic, and pursued in the shadows of world-historical events.

*Intelligence, we learn in Christopher Andrew's monumental new book, The Secret World: A History of Intelligence,* is entrenched in all we call history, and indeed in the human condition itself. Implicit throughout *The Secret World's* hundreds of pages are four sets of questions:

1. What's going on? This most obvious question is the most difficult to answer; strategy and policy flow from speculation about "what those guys are up to." The answers offered are
always varied and disputed. We can never be quite sure that we’ve got it right; but the attempt must be made.

2. What do they have or are trying to get—and how much does it matter? Where do they stand in the “race” to acquire an operational advantage? Despite great efforts to gain such knowledge, we are repeatedly surprised, as with the Soviet Sputnik or North Korea’s astonishing leap into long-range deliverable nuclear weapons.

3. Who is really in charge? What is the shifting internal political situation at the top? On this matter Americans often assume that the other party’s political contest is between “hardliners” and “moderates,” and that our task is to avoid acts that strengthen the former.

4. What is the intelligible field of study? Are we looking at a state or a “non-state actor”? An oligarchy? A family? If the area is large and long-in-place—a culture or a civilization—is there something to be learned from what Alexis de Tocqueville called the country’s point of departure?

**THE SECRET WORLD PROVIDES AN INispensable basis for recognizing intelligence as something far more than even aficionados of spy literature could imagine. Sun Tzu, unsurprisingly, opens the story. Andrew, who is emeritus professor of modern and contemporary history at the University of Cambridge, mentions the likelihood that The Art of War is an ancient forgery—precepts drawn together in the Warring States Period purporting to be of an earlier time in order to portray the military as not brutish but “Confucian.” The late Michael Handel of the U.S. Naval War College, in his study of enduring strategic principles, Masters of War (2000), concluded that Sun Tzu’s advice amounts to “Buy Low, Sell High”; students today adore Sun Tzu for his claim that wars can be won without fighting, and his advocacy of something like “soft power.” But the fundamental importance of The Art of War is its insistence on deception and intelligence.**

**AT THIS POINT IN THE SECRET WORLD’s account of intelligence, the function becomes inseparable from international relations and foreign policy in general. Andrew’s vivid examples range from Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s addition of finance to the French state’s secret portfolio, to Britain’s intrigue-packed Jacobite uprising, at the end of which Bonnie Prince Charlie escaped “Over the Sea to Skye” through the machinations of an extensive Jacobite intelligence network. Intelligence and the American Revolution appear as well (though the secret diplomacy behind the Louisiana Purchase and the masked purposes of Lewis and Clark go unmentioned). Intelligence shifted its focus in the Age of Revolution, from state rivals to the danger of subversion and overthrow from within. Andrew highlights some gross missteps in intelligence analysis here. The 1814 Congress of Vienna, for example, at which Clemens von Metternich devised a system for a retrograde state legitimacy dedicated to monitoring and neutralizing revolution, focused unduly on gossip and back-stair rumor, allowing such “analytical” missteps to produce “alarmist intelligence assessments derived from a grotesque exaggeration of the threat of student revolution.” Andrew’s final chapters merge the forces of revolution with the strategies of the Great**
I n the end, we are left with the irreducible human factor. That Winston Churchill was fixated on intelligence and Franklin Roosevelt indifferent may have decided the shape of World War II. The CIA’s institutionalization in 1947—the first publicly created intelligence agency in history—was, as its name indicates, central to the Cold War cause. Yet at the same time the vast Soviet intelligence and surveillance empire kept the USSR in being well beyond its “natural longevity.” The great underlying issue across the pages of The Secret World takes us back to Sun Tzu: know the enemy, know yourself.

Neither of these is well understood at present. Area studies in today’s universities—the languages, history, culture, and religion of a place—is a spavined vestige of what the field was in the mid-20th century. America once led in such studies, but politicization has ravaged our ability to inform ourselves about the cultures and civilizations we must understand in order to make decisions about their purposes and intentions.

Probably no major power ever had to acquire as much intelligence on another great culture as did Britain, through the British East India Company in its 17th- to 19th-century encounters with India. In North America the British had a natural foothold among the colonists they governed; but nothing on the Ganges resembled anything on the Thames or the Potomac. Bernard S. Cohn’s Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India (1996) and C.A. Bayly’s Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870 (1996), ably detail the immense British struggle, in all its vicissitudes, to comprehend “the bazaar, temple, and mosque.” Such in-depth, country-specific studies of intelligence compliment Andrew’s sweeping history, by casting light on the importance, and great difficulty, of understanding and engaging foreign cultures.

T he CIA was an “old boy thing,” thrilling, romantic, and pursued in the shadows of world-historical events. This excursion into India is not meant to take anything away from Professor Andrew’s indispensable The Secret World but to note what is available to be learned from one, or several, ultimately failed efforts to understand that particular tactical approaches to intelligence gathering need to cohere. There is no substitute for a comprehensive program for “knowing the country.”

Even more important than knowing the other country is knowing your own. Over the past half-century the U.S. has lost, or thrown away, its sources of self-knowledge: its Tocquevillian “point of departure” in colonial New England, its cultural coherence shaped by Revolutionary and Federalist ideas, the 19th-century “American Renaissance” in literature, the 1930s Depression-era works program to collect the myths, stories, and music of the heartland, and the Cold War pride in “Americanism.” Until these and other genealogies of nationhood are located anew and woven into secondary school and college education, the work of intelligence collection and analysis cannot hope to attain the levels of importance and understanding chronicled in Christopher Andrew’s The Secret World.

Charles Hill, a career minister in the U.S. Foreign Service, is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution as well as Brady-Johnson Distinguished Fellow in Grand Strategy, Senior Lecturer in International Studies, and Senior Lecturer in Humanities at Yale University.
The Dutch-American writer Nicholas Spykman observed in 1944 that “geography is the most fundamental factor in foreign policy because it is the most permanent.” Many thinkers treated geography and geopolitics as passé fields of study after America’s victories in the Cold War and against Iraq in the early 1990s. Instead, many U.S. policymakers accepted a vision of the world that might be described as “strategic happy talk,” a misguided view forever distilled in Thomas L. Friedman’s *The World Is Flat* (2005)—his paean to the belief that interdependence and cooperation had replaced competition in international affairs, with the gratifying result that peace and prosperity would perpetuate and reinforce themselves.

To a great extent, those rosy assumptions shaped the policies of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. Unfortunately, this century’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the failure of the Russian “reset,” Europe’s self-induced travails, China’s seemingly relentless military rise, and the failure of Islamic states to embrace liberal democracy reveal that strategic happy talk continues to run up against geopolitical reality.

**A Herodotus for Our Time**

Enter the anti-Friedman, Robert Kaplan, regular contributor to the *Atlantic* and fellow at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS). His 18 books and scores of articles, which explain why the world is definitely *not* flat, have established him as one of the most consequential geopolitical thinkers of our time. The military historian John Keegan called geography the “Rosetta Stone of battles.” Kaplan shows that geography is also the Rosetta Stone of world history.

Rather than negating geography, he argues, technology has only made the world “smaller and more claustrophobic, so that each patch of earth is more dearly held and more closely contested than ever before, while each region and crisis zone is more interconnected with every other one as never before.” The shrinkage and crowding of the globe means a world of never-ending, rapid-fire crises, which should encourage us to be prudent when considering foreign intervention.

Kaplan describes himself as a realist, arguing that realism is a “sensibility” rooted in a “mature sense of the tragic.” The realist recognizes that he must work with the elemental causes of war identified by Thucydides—honor, fear, and interest—rather than against them. His books are part travel narrative, part geopolitical treatise, combining remarkable observational talents with strategic insights. His method for understanding the world is captured by a diplomat’s comment that Kaplan noted in *The Arabists: The Romance of*
an American Elite (1993): “Read, travel, read, travel, that’s the way to go.” Kaplan not only travels through the world’s regions but also “travels” through scholars’ ideas, testing his own concepts against theirs. One sees this in his essays on such exemplary realists as Henry Kissinger, Samuel Huntington, and John Mearsheimer.

Kaplan is the contemporary heir to Herodotus, the great observer of human affairs. While Herodotus is described as the first historian, the correct translation of the title of his work, The Histories, is Inquiries. Herodotus the Greek was inquiring into the ways of the other peoples with whom the Greeks were in contact, especially the Persians, Scythians, and Egyptians. One result of his inquiries was the conviction that each of these peoples was shaped to some degree by its territorial setting. Kaplan, following Herodotus, understands that cultures and civilizations continually interact in time and space and are therefore shaped by geographic realities. He explicitly acknowledges Herodotus in The Revenge of Geography (2012), which includes a tour d’horizon of the works of earlier geopolitical thinkers, especially Marshall G.S. Hodgson and William H. McNeill, who challenged Arnold Toynbee and Oswald Spengler’s belief that separate civilizations pursued their destinies more or less independently of one another.

Geopolitical thinkers are often dismissed as determinists who believe that geography is destiny. Kaplan shows that, for the most part, these writers’ arguments are far from deterministic: only the main directions of a state’s proper strategy may be deduced from its geographical situation. Thus, the strategies of commercial seafaring peoples like Athens, Great Britain, and the United States have differed from those of land-based Sparta, Germany, and Russia.

Europe and Eurasia

In the Revenge of Geography, for example, Kaplan rejects the idea that Europe is merely a financial construct. It is a much broader, cultural phenomenon, he contends, a “truly ambitious work in progress” that “will be influenced by trends and convulsions from the south and east in a world reeling from a crisis of room.” He implicitly criticized the Obama Administration strategy of “pivoting” to the Pacific: there will be history made in Europe, he writes, and hence significant threats and opportunities for the United States.

Kaplan returns to Eurasia in his most recent book, The Return of Marco Polo’s World (2018), arguing that what we call “the West” reached its point of maximum cohesion in the conclusion and immediate aftermath of the Cold War, which brought to a close the Long European War (1914–89). NATO and the European Union constituted a kind of geopolitical “condensation” of the West’s moral and political tradition. Having defeated Communism, these institutions extended the Western European system eastward into the “Inter-marium” between the Baltic and a tide of refugees into Europe. As a consequence, Europe now “fractures from within as reactionary populism takes hold” and “dissolves from without, as it is reunited with the destiny of Afro-Eurasia as a whole.”

As Europe disappears, Eurasia coheres. The supercontinent is becoming one fluid, comprehensible unit of trade and conflict, as the Westphalian system of states weakens and older, imperial legacies—Russian, Chinese, Iranian, Turkish—become paramount. Every crisis from Central Europe to the ethnic-Han Chinese heartland is now interlinked. There is one singular battle space.

Kaplan contends that we can learn much about the emerging geopolitics of Eurasia by recasting the travels of the late 13th-century Venetian merchant Marco Polo. China’s ambitious new “One Road, One Belt” initiative, for instance—essentially a modern manifestation of the land and maritime “Silk Road”—follows exactly the route that Marco Polo traveled. He concludes: “The unipolarity that defined the Post Cold War is over, the West itself is dissipating, and we are back to classical geography—particularly in Europe.”

The Indo-Pacific

Asia’s Cauldron (2014), about the South China Sea, describes how the region’s character arises from the intersection of Indian/Khmer and Sinic (Chinese) cultures. Rather than placing Southeast Asia in the East Asia and Pacific realm (as both the Pentagon and State Department do), we should, Kaplan argues, consider the region as “part of an organic continuum that is more properly labeled the Indo-Pacific, whose maritime heart is the South China Sea.” What makes this body of water so important—and so dangerous—is that it is where the interests of China, the states that border it, and the United States come into conflict. Kaplan argues that war between the two great nations is not inevitable. But it is possible. The military rise of China alarms its neighbors. Will they “bandwagon” with China, or seek counterbalancing alignment with the United States? How will China react if weaker states in the region choose the latter course?

The South China Sea is a nervous region, crowded with warships and commercial vessels, where sea denial is cheaper and easier to achieve than sea control. Such a region is particularly vulnerable to miscalculation or miscommunication. Despite the region’s volatility, Kaplan contends that the United States must

Books by Robert D. Kaplan discussed in this essay:

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<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite</td>
<td>Free Press</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>$18</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate</td>
<td>Random House</td>
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<td>The Return of Marco Polo’s World: War, Strategy, and American Interests in the Twenty-first Century</td>
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<td>Earning the Rockies: How Geography Shapes America’s Role in the World</td>
<td>Random House</td>
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safeguard a maritime system of international legal norms, buttressed by a favorable balance of power regimen.

As a realist who believes that states operate in their own interests and seek to maximize power relative to other actors in the international system, Kaplan acknowledges that China’s actions are merely reflective of the South China Sea’s role as its strategic hinterland. He likens China’s approach to the Monroe Doctrine. Just as the Caribbean is close to the United States and far from the great European powers of the 18th and 19th centuries, so the South China Sea is close to China and far from the United States. The difference is that, unlike the newly independent Caribbean and Latin American states that saw the United States as a bulwark against the re-imposition of European colonialism, China’s neighbors look to the United States as a counterbalance against Beijing’s military growth.

**America and the World**

K Kaplan argues that the source of America’s power is rooted in geography and history. *Earning the Rockies* (2017) shows that America derives its power from being a continent, nation, and empire all at once. In travels from Massachusetts to San Diego he reflects that, “America’s geography is the most favored in the world: one perfectly apportioned for nationhood and global responsibility. America combines splendid isolation and oceanic access to both Europe and Asia.” If the United States is to provide the security necessary for a liberal world order, something it has done since the end of World War II, it must begin by maintaining its own geographical base.

How should the United States cope with the new geopolitics of Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific? As Europe dissolves and NATO weakens, depriving America of its main point of entry into Europe, the U.S. has the luxury of falling back on its primary source of strategic leverage: sea power, which permits us to “act with caution and restraint, without drift” —War II, it must begin by maintaining its own power regimen. As Europe dissolves and NATO weakens, depriving America of its main point of entry into Europe, the U.S. has the luxury of falling back on its primary source of strategic leverage: sea power, which permits us to “act with caution and restraint, without drift”—a world where chaos and wealth creation go hand in hand—is one that will keep our competitors preoccupied.” What’s more, America’s emerging energy dominance provides us with breathing room that the Eurasian powers lack.

**His Critics**

K Kaplan’s academic critics, many of them postmodern “geographers,” criticize him for defending imperialism as a prosperous, stabilizing force in the world. For this he is unapologetic. From a 2014 Atlantic essay, “In Defense of Empire”:

> [I]mpiricism is now seen by global elites as altogether evil, despite empires having offered the most benign form of order for thousands of years, keeping the anarchy of ethnic, tribal, and sectarian war bands to a reasonable minimum. Compared with imperialism, democracy is a new and uncertain phenomenon. Even the two most estimable democracies in modern history, the United States and Great Britain, were empires for long periods.

Many political thinkers, but not all, have regarded republic and empire as incompatible. A notable exception was Machiavelli, who in his *Discourses on Livy* wrote, “If any one therefore wishes to establish an entirely new republic, he will have to consider whether he wishes to have her expand in power and dominion like Rome, or whether he intends to confine her within narrow limits.” And despite their political differences, both Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson linked republic and empire, the former referring to the United States as a “republican empire” and the latter as an “empire of liberty.”

Other critics accuse him of “orientalism,” militarism, and worst of all, Americanism. And there is perhaps a tension between his realism and his apparent belief in the United States as a force for good in the world. He himself has acknowledged as much by repudiating the Iraq War, which he supported in 2003 but later deplored as imprudent, the cardinal sin of realism. Nonetheless, he continues to believe that the United States plays an essential role in international geopolitics. This nation alone, he argues, possesses the continental resources and transoceanic power needed to underwrite a liberal international order. That order, in turn, is the only basis for securing liberty and prosperity to an increasing number of people in a dangerous world.

Although Kaplan does not use the term, he advocates in effect “hegemonic stability,” the international relations theory which holds that free and open international trade—globalization—requires more than simply a global invisible hand. Instead, it needs a hegemonic power willing and able to provide the world with economic stability and international security. During the 19th century, Great Britain functioned as the hegemon; since World War II, the United States has fulfilled this role. Despite the attendant burdens, hegemony is a win-win, beneficial to the hegemon and the world at large. Conversely, a decline in relative American power could create a more disorderly, less peaceful world. As the late Samuel Huntington wrote in his essay “Why International Primacy Matters”:

A world without U.S. primacy will be a world with more violence and disorder and less democracy and economic growth than a world where the United States continues to have more influence than any other country in shaping global affairs. The sustained international primacy of the United States is central to the welfare and security of Americans and to the future of freedom, democracy, open economies, and international order in the world.

Kaplan’s realism is not indifferent to such liberal principles as human rights and free trade. On the contrary, his style of realism makes defense of those principles possible in the first place. The realist knows, declares Kaplan, “that order comes before freedom, and interests come before values. After all, without order there is no freedom for anybody, and without interests a state has no incentive to project its values.”

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alcibiades will always have a
prominent place in the rogues’ gallery
of history. Son of Cleinias, nephew
and, after his father’s death at the Battle of
Coronea, ward of Pericles, he was at differ-
ten times the enemy of three competing em-
pires: the Athenian, the Spartan, the Persian.
A rogue is not necessarily villainous, but he
is aberrant, unpredictable, often attractive,
rarely dull. He is also, inevitably, in business
for himself. Alcibiades qualifies on all counts.
A note of dubiety is struck straight off by
Thucydides when he first introduces Alcibi-
ades more than halfway through his History of
the Peloponnesian War. There we are told that
Alcibiades was the leader of the opposition
to the Athenian treaty signed with Sparta in
421 B.C., which initiated the so-called Peace
of Nicias before being abandoned in 414. He
felt his own participation in the war leading
up to the peace had been ignored because of
his youth, and that “considerations of his own
dignity affected his opposition to the peace
with Sparta.” History, for Alcibiades, was, in
the cant phrase of our day, all about him.

Nemesis, David Stuttard’s biog-
raphy of Alcibiades, sets out, in
admirably clear detail, the twists
and turns in the life of its subject. Stuttard,
an Englishman, is an independent scholar
(someone doing serious scholarship without
a permanent university affiliation) devoted to
the worthy mission of popularizing classical
subjects, through books, translation, and di-
recting plays. Nemesis, as its author allows, is
a book “not for the specialist but for the gen-
eral reader,” one that he hopes “will prove not
just instructive but entertaining, too,” and he
is correct on both counts.

Such flaws as the book presents are minor,
and chief among these is that Stuttard’s prose
can sometimes lapse into a purple more strik-
ing than Alcibiades’ robe. He also on occasion
avails himself of clipped sentence fragments:
“The admiral, Astyochus, had received fresh,
urgent orders. From Sparta and King Agis. T o
put Alcibiades to death.” The device is meant
to heighten the drama, but its effect is instead
to divert one’s attention from the action to
the author. Stuttard also has what might just
be the winning entry in the this year’s goofy acknowledgments sweepstakes, citing “the crucial role played at all times by our two cats, Stanley and Oliver, as handsome, demanding, and enigmatic as Alcibiades, but considerably more faithful.”

Nemesis is a work of synthesis, but one of great scrupulosity. Scarcely a paragraph in the book is without its footnote. These notes refer to the wide literature on the Peloponnesian War generally and to Alcibiades in particular. The three great sources on the latter are Thucydides, Plato, and Plutarch; the first two among current-day writers, Stuttard leans most heavily on the Yale classicist Donald Kagan. Stuttard also mentions in one of his notes a Freudian interpretation of Alcibiades, which I’ve not yet but should one day be amused to read, if only to discover if Alcibiades suffered an Empire Complex, Pericles Envy, Narcissism, Sex Addiction, or all of the above. The possibilities here are boundless.

Alcibiades was the art of seduction. “As a boy, he enticed husbands from their wives,” Stuttard writes, “as a young man wives from their husbands.” As he grew older, the stakes rose, and he set out to seduce entire empires—the Athenian, the Spartan, the Persian in turn—and in each instance met with more than a modicum of success. What he really wanted was dominance over the known world. When he proposed to the Athenians their expedition to conquer Syracuse, he added that, while at it, they might next go on to conquer Carthage. Alcibiades was, avant la lettre, an Alexander the Great, but an Alexander manqué.

By all accounts Alcibiades had astonishing physical beauty. According to Plutarch, this beauty “bloomed in him in all the ages of his life, in his infancy, in his youth, and in his manhood; and, in the peculiar character becoming to each of these periods, gave him, in every one of them, a grace and a charm.” A detailed account of his good looks is not known, but what is certain is that he had the vanity to go along with them. As a youth, he is said to have rejected learning to play the aulos, an oboe-like instrument, because blowing on it distorted his face. He had a lisp, supplying the letter “I” when “r” was indicated. So much admired was he among the young that it is said that the aulos went out of fashion and lisps came into fashion in the Athens of his day.

Alcibiades’ relationship with Socrates—they comprised the oddest of odd couples—is not the least fascinating strand of his biography. The philosopher claimed to discern great potential in Alcibiades, and put in much time attempting to bring it out while simultaneously hoping to smother his waywardness. For his part, Alcibiades esteemed Socrates above all men, recognizing his depth and his virtue. In the Symposium, Plato, in an ancient world version of a student evaluation, has Alcibiades remark (in Michael Joyce’s translation):

“Socrates is the only man in the world who can make me feel ashamed. Because there’s no getting away from it, I know I ought to do the things he tells me to; and yet the moment I’m out of his sight I don’t care what I do to keep in with the mob. So I dash off like a runaway slave, and keep out of his way as long as I can; and then next time I meet him I remember all that I had to admit the time before, and naturally I feel ashamed. There are times when I’d honestly be glad to hear that he was dead, and yet I know that if he did die I’d be more upset than ever.”

At an Athenian expedition to Potidaea, in Macedonia, Alcibiades fell wounded. Socrates, however, despairing of his recovery, prayed for his victory. Socrates, he tells the participants, was “when I got up next morning and saw him lying I had no more confidence in him than if I had been his father or an elder brother.” With the result, Alcibiades concludes, that he felt both humiliation and “admiration for [Socrates’] manliness and self-control, for this was strength of mind such as I had never hoped to meet.”

This wasn’t sufficient to cause Alcibiades to cease playing the genial screw-off, and to the highest power. Plutarch reports that he “intermingled exorbitant luxury and wantonness, in his eating and drinking and dissolve living.” Thucydides, remarking on his extravagance, noted that “most people became frightened at a quality in him which was beyond the normal and showed itself both in the lawlessness of his private life and habits and in the spirit in which he acted on all occasions.”

Somehow it seems foolhardy to moralize about Alcibiades. Michel de Montaigne quotes or cites Alcibiades no fewer than ten times in his Essays, neither praising nor condemning but largely fascinated by the grandeur and swagger of the man. In Antiquity Matters (2017), Frederick Raphael asks whether Alcibiades behaved any worse than other Greeks. Raphael reminds us that Themistocles went over to the Persians, the Spartan king Demaratus traveled with Xerxes, and Achilles, by petulantly withdrawing from the battlefield because Agamemnon appropriated his war trophy (the maiden Briseis), caused the death of many Greeks at Troy.

Cornelius Nepos, in his Lives of Eminent Commanders (the Palatine Press edition), notes that Alcibiades was, “when occasion required, laborious, patient, courteous, liberal, and splendid, no less in his public than in his private life; he was also amenable and courteous, conforming dexterously to circumstances; but when he had unburdened himself, and no reason offered why he should endure the labor of thought, was seen to be luxurious, dissolute, voluptuous, and self-indulgent, so that all wondered there should be such dissimilitude, and so contradictory a nature, in the same man.” The standard moral categories, in any case, somehow do not seem to apply to him.

The two express tickets to advancement in the ancient world were military prowess and oratory, and Alcibiades held both. Of his oratorical skills, Stuttard writes that “he would become one of Athens’ leading orators,” roundly admired for his abilities—he knew exactly what to say in any situation—and “in time the whole of Athens regarded them with awe.” Oratory is of course, then as now, the art of persuasion, rarely the vehicle of truth. Alcibiades and truth didn’t much mix.

Behind Alcibiades’ every move—his most cunning calculation, his rashest reckless-

ness—was the motive of personal glory. Of the democratic faction in Athens, no one was more mindful of his own personal fortunes than he. When in 415 he helped argue Athens into its fateful Sicilian expedition, against the sensible warning of the Athenian general Nicias, who saw the folly of Athens entering on two major wars at once, Alcibiades did so chiefly in the hope of self-aggrandizement. As Thucydides reports, his motives were “his desire to hold the command and his hopes that it would be through him that Sicily and Carthage would be conquered—successes which would at the same time bring him personally both wealth and honor.” If Alcibiades may seem unattractive when in pursuit of power, it is worth recalling that the only parties less attractive than those pursuing power are those who have already attained it. Plutarch felt that “[c]ertainly, if ever man was ruined by his own glory it was Alcibiades.”

When Alcibiades was called back to Athens to stand trial for the destruction of the herms—the statues of Hermes set in public places in the hope of protection from the god—and for his presumably mocking the religious rite known as the Eleusian mysteries, he fled instead to enemy Sparta. While there he went native, let his hair grow out in the Spartan manner, dispensed with his ornate wardrobe, ate the drear dark porridge that was the staple of the Spartan diet. He advised, quite sensibly, the Spartans on the best military strategy to take up against the Athenians. And to pass the time he seduced and made pregnant Timaea, the wife of the Spartan King Agis. (Spartan women were notoriously free with their favors.) Plutarch reports that Alcibiades “would say, in his vain way, he had not done this thing out of mere wantonness or insult, nor to gratify a passion, but that his race might one day be kings over the Lacedaemonians.” Later, when the Spartans, led by the properly resentful Agis, grew suspicious of Alcibiades, he went over to the Persian satrap Tissaphernes, whom he charmed out of his silken trousers. As he had earlier advised the Spartans about how to defeat the Athenians, he now advised the Persians how to weaken both the Athenians and Spartans by allowing them to fight out an under-financed war of attrition.

Owing to an elaborately complicated concatenation of events, of plans made and others gone awry, Alcibiades would return to Athens in 407. This was eight years after the disastrous Sicilian expedition, which he had done so much to promote. He was 43. He claimed to long for his native polis, and held that he had never truly betrayed it but only the simulacrum of it that existed after his forced departure. When he sailed into the Piraeus, he was greeted with music and flowers as a returning hero. A much weakened Athens looked to him to restore its grandeur. As Stuttard recounts: “They voted to make him general-in-chief, strategos autocrat, with supreme command on land and sea, the most powerful man in Athens…. In democratic Athens, it was the greatest honor he could ever hope for, the pinnacle of his ambition.”

So great was the esteem in which Alcibiades was now held, so desperate were the Athenians for leadership, that some among them—”the lower and meaner sort of people,” in Plutarch’s phrasing—wanted to abrogate all the city’s laws and allow him to govern as tyrant. Whether this would have been just fine with Alcibiades we cannot know. Cooler heads thought it best to send him on a military mission against the Lacedaemonians at Andros. With a fleet of 100 triremes (ancient galleys), he was able to do this easily enough. But the difficulty came when, after this victory, he entrusted this fleet to a lieutenant, one Antiocbus, who, against Alcibiades’ orders not to engage the Spartans, lost much of it to Lysander at Ephesus. The loss, along with deniting his newfound reputation for military infallibility, played into the hands of Alcibiades’ enemies at Athens, who were able to hurl about rumors of his luxurious habits and irresponsibility causing the defeat and thus strip him of his supreme command. Once again Alcibiades was in business for himself.

Freelance now, leading a band of mercenaries, he ventured into Thrace, where he won the favor of a local governor named Seuthes, and through him of the Thracian king, Medocus. Stuttard writes that “just as in Persia and in Sparta, he had quickly adopted local customs, so, in Thrace, he effortlessly transformed into a Thracian.” Which meant heavy boozing, displays of horsemanship, and whoring—at all of which Alcibiades was long proficient. But soon enough his Thracian gig was up, too, especially after the Athenian defeat at Aegospotami in 405, where the Spartans under Lysander wiped out the entire Athenian fleet of 160 triremes and put to death more than 3,000 Athenian captives. The Peloponnesian War, 27 years long, ended the following year.

After Aegospotami, Alcibiades’ many enemies coalesced against him: Lysander and Agis in Sparta; Critias, the dominant figure among the Thirty Tyrants put in charge of Athens by the Spartans; and finally the Persians, who could not afford to harbor him lest doing so damage their peace pact with Sparta. He was on his own, which is to say utterly abandoned. In a house in Sardis, accompanied by two courtiers, he awoke one night to find the smell of smoke in the air and his weapons missing. Naked, armed only with a blanket and his short sword, he ran out of the burning building to meet with a cascade of arrows and javelins. “All Alcibiades could do,” Stuttard writes, “was run into the night, and run, and keep on running while he could until the night engulfed him.” When they discovered his body, his courtesan lovers, Timandra and Theodote, were unable to close his eyes, for his bloodless head had been lopped off and was presented as a trophy to the Persian satrap Farnavaz, as conclusive evidence of his death.

David Stuttard’s biography is well titled. Nemesis, recall, was the Greek goddess who doled out happiness and misery to mortals—a cruel lady who took particular pleasure in visiting disaster on those too richly endowed by nature. She must have spit on her palms and rubbed them enthusiastically together at the prospect presented by Alcibiades. With his good looks, his several talents, his surpassing ambition, his overheating pride, Alcibiades, clearly, was her kind of guy.

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Book Review by Richard Brookhiser

**HERO TRAITOR**

Yale University Press, 384 pages, $30

Pegasus Books, 336 pages, $27.95

“Never since the fall of Lucifer has a fall equaled his,” was the verdict of Nathanael Greene on his comrade-turned-traitor, Benedict Arnold. Arnold’s 1780 defection to the British during the depths of the Revolutionary War seemed cosmic for several reasons. It was serious: Arnold’s plot to give the enemy West Point, and thus control of the vital Hudson River corridor, could have aborted independence. It was shocking: before he switched sides, Arnold had been America’s most brilliant tactician. Time has been unkind to him. Unlike the men in gray, Arnold has lacked regional or ideological apologists (most Americans who were active loyalists became Canadians).

Stephen Brumwell and Joyce Lee Malcolm are not pro-treason. But each tries to soften, as much as possible, Arnold’s reputation. Brumwell, a prize-winning independent scholar, has written the more academic book: detailed, crisp. Malcolm, a professor at the Antonin Scalia Law School at George Mason University, writes warmly and passionately. They cover the appropriate ground, make no crazy claims, and acknowledge that their (anti-)hero had other options besides the one he fatally chose. But in the end, the reader must find Arnold guilty as charged.

Arnold was born in 1741 in Norwich, Connecticut, the son of a merchant. Benedict had a good early education and was bound for Yale College, but those plans had to be scrapped when his father succumbed to drunkenness and debt. Malcolm writes well of the effects of this family tragedy: “Benedict had the bitter disappointment of a sudden collapse of his hopes, coupled with public shame…. If he was to acquire personal honor after this deep disgrace, [he] would have to earn it himself.”

The path to restored honor began in business. Arnold became first an apothecary and bookseller in New Haven, then a merchant, trading horses in Canada and sailing his own ships to the West Indies. His horse-trading made him familiar with upstate New York, where he would later lead troops. His merchant career included a duel in the Bay of
Brumwell sums him up on the eve of the Revolution thus: “Headstrong, hot-tempered… tough, experienced, worldly wise, and long accustomed to giving orders.”

**The war brought two and a half years of glory.** He proved to be a peerless planner, fighter, and leader. In 1775 he joined Vermonten Ethan Allen in the capture of Fort Ticonderoga, though a dispute over command bred him enemies who would dog him for years (Arnold had the commission, Allen had the men). At year’s end he led an army across Maine, up the Kennebec River and down the Chaudière to the St. Lawrence—a wild route that had only been taken once before, by a British army engineer—and suffered his first wound, a bullet to his left leg, during a gallant, doomed attack on Quebec. When the British counterattacked down Lake Champlain in 1776, Arnold built a small fleet, sprung it from an ambush, and grappled so furiously with the larger enemy flotilla that the British had to abandon the offensive for the year.

In 1777 the British made a more determined push, with an elaborate three-pronged effort to split New York State, and hence the United States. Lord Howe would move north up the Hudson from occupied New York City, General John Burgoyne would move south from Montreal, and Colonel Barrimore St. Leger would swing from the west, via Lake Ontario, all converging on Albany. Much went wrong with this plan: Howe occupied Philadelphia instead, and St. Leger was mauled at Saratoga. But the decisive American blows were inflicted on Burgoyne in two autumnal battles near Saratoga: Freeman’s Farm and Bemis Heights. The American commander was Horatio Gates: cautious, by-the-book, jealous of rivals. But it was Arnold who led from the front. Years later, an old veteran remembered him at Bemis Heights: “He was dark-skinned with black hair, and middling height; there wasn’t any waste timber in him; he was our fighting general, and a bloody fellow he was. He didn’t care for nothing; he’d ride right in.”

Arnold himself would remark: “High rank in the American army often went with black hair, and middling height; there wasn’t any waste timber in him; he was our fighting general, and a bloody fellow he was. He didn’t care for nothing; he’d ride right in.”

Victory at Saratoga encouraged France, which had been helping America on the sly, to become an open ally. Britain, grieving for a world war, concentrated its forces in New York. Commander-in-Chief George Washington made the wounded hero military commandant of liberated Philadelphia. The occupation had exacerbated local political passions. A go-along, get-along elite had prospered while patriots suffered. Now that the wheel had turned, radical patriots wanted revenge. Arnold’s assignment was to keep the peace, which made him suspect in radicals’ eyes. American civil authorities generally were wary of all military leaders, having had bad examples throughout history, both ancient (Julius Caesar) and modern (Oliver Cromwell).

Arnold made matters worse by living well—he moved into the house of John Penn, the colony’s last proprietor—and by trying to recoup his fortunes as a merchant by doing a little business on the side. The Pennsylvania state government accused him of corruption, and an old enemy from his days in upstate New York and Canada pressed similar charges. Arnold bristled at his civilian detractors and demanded a court martial to exonerate him. In January 1780, after many delays, a court martial found Arnold guilty on two minor counts. In April, Washington wrote a firm, but regretful, reproof. Arnold had been in contact with British intelligence for 11 months.

**Why? Brumwell and Malcolm sort through the traditional explanations, besides Arnold’s political troubles.** For years Arnold had resisted the slowness with which he had been promoted. High rank in the American army often went to the well-connected. Arnold himself would claim, after his treason, to abhor the French alliance, on the grounds that France was absolutist and Catholic (anti-Catholicism had not prevented him from trying to bring Catholic Canada into the Revolution, however). One traditional reason—Arnold’s marriage to his second wife Peggy Shippen, a young, high-class Philadelphia beauty—is endorsed by Brumwell, who accepts the consensus view that she knew, and approved, of her husband’s defection. Peggy was one of those Philadelphians who had enjoyed the occupation; one of her British admirers was a dashing young officer, Captain John André. Malcolm acquits Peggy of precocious disloyalty. Her best argument, made by one of Arnold’s aides, is that Peggy was so given to histrionics that she was never told anything important.

Both authors downplay a reason emphasized by enraged Americans when Arnold’s treason was fresh—greed for gain (anti-Arnold parades and cartoons featured devils proffering bags of gold). Yet Arnold, his...
biographers admit, needed money. He had spent out of his own pocket on the patriot cause, and the war had destroyed his merchant business. He carefully stipulated the rewards he expected from his new masters.

Arnold’s main reason for betrayal, both Brumwell and Malcolm argue, was his sense of wounded honor. He considered the slights he experienced to have been worse than lost opportunities. They were signs of disrespect. The biographers write intelligently about the role of honor in the 18th century and in the revolutionary army. Rebel- lious provincials needed to feel themselves peers of their professional enemies. Courts martial and duels—legal and extra-legal tests of rectitude—were regular features of American military life.

The power and pervasiveness of honor culture do not by themselves explain Arnold, however. All officers prized their honor, and many had grudges. Why did he almost alone switch sides?

Arnold’s honor seems to have been fatally self-contained. He was like Alcibiades, Coriolanus, or Plantagener noblemen—a gentleman freelance. He professed concern for the greater good, and for causes larger than himself, but he himself defined what those goods and causes were. His commander, George Washington, thought and acted differently. Honor for him flowed from serving alongside one’s fellow Americans. The terms were set by the institutions that they, as free men, chose. Congress might be full of dolts and pettifoggers (sound familiar?). But there was no other source of authority, and hence no other source of honor.

Arnold’s handler, once he went over to the dark side, was John André, now a major in charge of British intelligence in New York. The plot Arnold and André devised was that Arnold should be posted to West Point, a fort 60 miles north of New York City with command of the Hudson. If, by weakening its defenses, he could allow the British to take it, the river would fall. What Burgoyne, Howe, and St. Leger had failed to accomplish could be done in one swoop. As an added bonus, the British might capture George Washington and his staff, due to visit West Point in the autumn of 1780. (Malcolm, ever loyal to Arnold, doubts this nefarious detail.) The plot, so glowing on paper, so risky in reality, faced a last-minute complication. The British wanted to be certain that the American with whom they had been dealing via coded letters and go-betweens was in fact Arnold. On a night in late September 1780 traitor and handler rendezvoused face-to-face at a spot about 16 miles below West Point. André, who had been brought to the meeting by boat, set off afterward for his own lines on horseback, with the plans of the fort stuffed in his boot. He was captured by ruffians who turned him over to the American army once they saw the importance of whom they had robbed. The officer in charge of the prize captive, not realizing whom André had gotten the plans from, promptly notified Arnold, who bolted for a British ship in the Hudson. Once aboard, he asked the American bargemen who had rowed him to join him in treason. “No, sir,” one replied, “one coat is enough for me to wear at a time.” Brumwell writes that this “uncompromising reaction was the first indication of just how badly Arnold had misjudged the mood of his countrymen; grumbling was one thing, outright defection quite another.”

Washington and his staff were staggered. Peggy succumbed to (or feigned) hysterics, and she was eventually sent to rejoin her husband. André was convicted of espionage by an American board of officers, and hanged. Arnold sent Washington a pair of letters, full of self-justification and bluster. The British let him raid Virginia and his native Connecticut, but after the Revolution ended, never gave him military employment again. He died in 1801.

A tradition among his descendants had it that in his final delirium he asked to put on his old American uniform. Too late.

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Gordon Wood, the dean of historians of the American Revolution, has been chasing John Adams his entire career. From his Bancroft Prize-winning The Creation of the American Republic (1969) to his Pulitzer Prize-winning The Radicalism of the American Revolution (1992) and beyond, Adams has been a favorite source. Friends Divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson is Wood’s first book-length study of Adams, along with his friend and rival Jefferson.

The new book is a study in contrasts. Many accounts of Adams and Jefferson begin with Benjamin Rush’s comment that they were “the North and South Poles of the American Revolution.” Wood does not see it that way. Rather, Jefferson is American and Adams is, well, un-American. The two patriots, “remained divided in almost every fundamental way: in temperament, in their ideas of government, in their assumptions about human nature, in their notions of society, in their attitude toward religion, in their conception of America, indeed in every single thing that mattered.” Wood presents the two men as ideological types, though he does not completely ignore their personal stories. My favorite part of Friends Divided might be its close reading of Rush’s efforts to reconcile his two old friends, after Jefferson retired from the presidency in 1809. Rush’s epistolary diplomacy consisted of saying A to Jefferson and B to Adams, or quoting X but not Y from Adams when writing Jefferson. Wood’s inner humanist shines through in these meticulous, inspired interpretations of people, events, and writings, interpretive passages that are unsurpassed in his formidable body of work. Yet Wood’s bias as a historian is cultural or ideological. Hence his focus is not on the Adams-Jefferson friendship or even on their famous correspondence, but, rather, on what they represent for America.

On one side wood gives us Jefferson, “the slaveholding aristocrat [who] emerged as the apostle of American democracy.” The Virginian became the “optimistic exponent of American equality and the promoter of the uniqueness of the nation and its special role in the world.” Elsewhere Wood calls Jefferson’s view “American exceptionalism.” Slavery helped. “Southern aristocrats could claim to be full-fledged republicans without fearing the populist repercussions.” On the other side was Adams, “the representative of a crusty conservatism that emphasized the inequality and vice-ridden nature of American society, a man who believed that ‘Democracy will infallibly destroy all Civilization.’” In Wood’s opinion, “Jefferson told the American people what they wanted to hear—truths about themselves that were difficult to bear.” In this, Friends Divided reaches back to the conclusion of Wood’s famous chapter on “The Relevance and Irrelevance of John Adams” in The Creation of the American Republic: “for too long and with too much candor he had tried to tell his fellow Americans some truths about themselves that American values and American ideology would not admit.”

Jefferson was America’s legislator-prophet, and Adams the nation’s cynical critic. “There was nothing inspiring” about Adams’s vision, however accurate it may have been: ‘Could Americans become the ‘one people’ that Jefferson promised in the opening paragraph of the Declaration of Independence” without the mythic Americanism that came from Jefferson’s pen? Short answer: no. “To be an American is not to be someone, but to believe in something. And that something is what Jefferson declared.” Jefferson, in other words, created America’s civic religion. For attacking it, Adams was “a heretic,” to use a term Jefferson liked to apply to people who disagreed with him.

Why did Adams and Jefferson think differently? Wood traces convictions to irrational sources, suggesting that the differences between Adams and Jefferson grew, in part, from their characters, which the book
sketches with considerable insight. Jefferson "knew more about more things than any other American." More than Benjamin Franklin? Wood sometimes follows the old journalistic chestnut: first you simplify and then you exaggerate. A self-described "enthusiast on the subject of the arts," he "loved to sing, even when he was alone." Jefferson became a talented architect. ["He] aimed at nothing less than becoming the supreme connoisseur of the best that was thought and known in the world." Adams, by contrast, was interested in the study of man, but was not sure he liked what he found. Jonathan Swift was one of his favorite authors. That said, Wood recognizes that Adams was not a dour neo-Puritan: "his bleak view of human nature and his irascibility were leavened by his often facetious joking, his droll stories, and his sense of the absurdity of things." Wood notes Adams's humane sensibility seen, for example, in his talent for caricature. Delaware's Caesar Rodney was "the oddest looking Man in the World," Adams wrote. "He is tall—thin and slender as a Reed—pale—his Face is not bigger than a large Apple. Yet there is Sense and Fire, Spirit, Wit and Humor in his Countenance." Wood describes Adams as "the most sensuous of the founders," an echo of the late Bernard Bailyn's brief for Adams's "sensuous apprehension of experience." "Unlike Jefferson, whose sensibility was predominantly intellectual," writes Wood, "Adams's was largely visual."

In Wood's view, class mattered a great deal. "Jefferson never felt snubbed in his life," Wood notes. He was "the connoisseur informing his college friends what was to be considered fine in the world and what was to be dismissed as 'indifferent.'" In Paris Jefferson was a great shopper, spending a fortune to bring the best of the Old World to his American home. "As a good aristocrat, Jefferson inevitably had expensive tastes, and he denied himself few comforts." Jefferson was above caring much about the bottom line. Adams, by contrast, "never felt himself to be fully part of the Massachusetts aristocracy and thus came to criticize it ambivalently from a position of social inferiority." As a young man he "had so often felt the arrogance and pretensions of the so-called great families." John and Abigail were flinty New Englanders who tried to live within their means, even in Paris and London, perhaps to the detriment of his diplomatic work, which was inseparable from social life.

There is insight in this portrait, yet it probably pitches Jefferson a bit too high and Adams a bit low. The Jeffersons were not Tidewater but Piedmont gentry. Also, Jefferson's Randolph line was maternal, not paternal, another distinction that mattered in that milieu. Perhaps his tastes, manners, and ambition grew from a desire to move to the top rung. In The Radicals of the American Revolution, Wood notes that Jefferson "was the son of a wealthy but uneducated and ungenteel planter from Western Virginia" and was "the first of his father's family to go to college." He was not, in short, to the manor born. Conversely, Adams's father did indeed make shoes in the winter—Puritans and idle hands—but he was a deacon in the local church and was elected several times to serve as town selectman. Deacon Adams was, Wood recognizes, respectable enough to marry into the Boylston family. Some scholars argue that within the small world of the New England town, the Adamses were as prominent as Albemarle County's Jeffersons. Though probably an exaggeration, that's not entirely off the mark.

It is worth noting that what Jefferson supported was modern exceptionalism, and not American exceptionalism. Jefferson's early enthusiasm for the French Revolution suggests a vision not confined to one nation or continent. After the French Revolution crashed (as Adams had predicted it would), Jefferson said, in an 1816 letter to Adams, "old Europe will have to lean on our shoulders." The notion that there is no such thing as a unified, worldwide modernity was foreign to his point of view. As Wood presents him, Jefferson wished to be in the vanguard, pushing international progress. America, no less than Virginia, was to be his vehicle. In foreign policy, Wood notes that Jefferson hoped that economic coercion and, ultimately, embargo could render war unnecessary, or, at least, extremely rare. (In his volume for the Oxford History of the United States, Empire of Liberty: A History of the American Republic, 1789–1815 [2009], Wood downplayed the radicalism of the Jeffersonian vision.) Adams, like George Washington, believed that so long as humans roamed the earth there would, from time to time, be war. While Jefferson believed in transformative progress in politics, Adams was skeptical about man's potential for progress. He was skeptical of any global theory of historical movement. It is perhaps not a coincidence that it was Joseph Stalin who put the term "American exceptionalism" on the map, calling it a "heresy"—the heretical idea that Marx's idea of History was false. Like the Baron de Montesquieu and most men of the Enlightenment, Adams had great respect for British liberties and the British constitution, hoping that America would retain and improve upon them.

At the end of the book Wood points to Abraham Lincoln to explain "why we honor Jefferson and not Adams." Yet Jeffersonian optimism drew close to the line that separates idealism from misanthropy. The world was tragic because we can never purge it of evil. By contrast, there was a cosmic optimism in Adams. He was freer, more content with the world as God had created it, and, hence happier. On Christmas Day 1813, he wrote Jefferson: "The fundamental principle of all philosophy and all Christianity is 'Rejoice always in all things. Be thankful at all times for all good, and all that we call evil.'" Even the tragic element of life, which we call evil, was somehow part of the goodness of Creation. There is, in some ways, more Adams than Jefferson in Lincoln.

The challenge Adams presents Wood comes through in his treatment of John Locke. Wood pays little attention to Locke's Two Treatises of Government and doesn't note that Jefferson paraphrased it in the second paragraph of the Declaration. Instead, in Friends Divided he focuses on the Essay on Human Understanding. In Wood's summary of Locke, "the mind originally was a white Paper, void of all Characters, without any Ideas," and it was filled up through time by 'Experience.'" That conclusion, Wood argues, pointed to human equality. Hence, "[i]f all human beings were indeed equal at birth... what separated one person from another was simply cultivation and education." Adams was perfectly willing to deny there are innate ideas. But at the heart of his politics was the conclusion that human nature is a robust and important force in history. Moreover, Adams had an institutional streak. Political culture is often an artifact of the regime. The latter conclusion grew from the former. Input human nature into a particular circumstance and the result is often predictable. That baseline of human nature as a cause is absent from Wood's brilliant body of scholarship.

In his view, Adams moved from agreement with Locke to disagreement. The evidence, however, is wanting. Wood notes that a young Adams wrote his friend Jonathan Sewell that Locke had "discovered a new World." According to Wood, Adams learned from Locke "the idea that only cultivation separated one person from another." That was, "he [Adams] said, 'the true sphere of modern genius.'" Is that a fair reading of the words in context? Adams wrote Sewell:
In Metaphysicks, [Locke] has steered his Course into the unenlightened Regions of the human Mind, and like Columbus has discovered a new World.... But in Mathematicks, and what is founded on them, Astronomy and Phylosophy, the Modern Discoveries have done Honour to the human Understanding. Here is the true sphere of Modern Genius.

Adams’s reference to “modern genius” seems to have much more to do with “mathematicks” and such other disciplines as Astronomy and “Phylosophy,” which he seems to be saying are “founded on” mathematics. Note that Adams seems to be contrasting “Modern Genius” with ancient genius, which he also respected. The passage doesn’t prove that Adams accepted a radical construction of the tabula rasa.

What about Adams’s idea of equality? Wood quotes his statement in a 1767 newspaper essay that “all men are born equal.” When Adams used the phrase “all men are born equally free and independent” in his draft Declaration of Rights for Massachusetts, it represented, in Wood’s view, a change. Perhaps. But it’s conjecture. The latter phrase, after all, is from the 1776 “democratic” constitution of Pennsylvania, and was itself a reworking of language from the Virginia Declaration of Rights. Wood’s evidence for what he takes to be Adams’s earlier position is thin. Here is the full sentence from 1767: “All men are born equal; and the drift of the British constitution is to preserve as much of this equality as is compatible with the people’s security against foreign invasions and domestic usurpation.” As in The Radicalism of the American Revolution, Wood highlights Adams’s resentment of the would-be elite of his home state who looked down on him as the son of a shoemaker. “He had so often felt the arrogance and pretensions of the so-called great families.” Adams held that the “meanest and lowest of the people,” “were ‘by the unalterable laws of God and nature, as well intitled to the benefit of the air to breathe, light to see, food to eat...as the nobles or the king.’” Similarly, Adams held, they should not be “ridden like horses, fleeced like sheep.” All that is hardly incompatible with the 1776 Pennsylvania language. It is much more likely that Adams preferred it because it clarified the meaning of “all men are born equal.”

Wood’s bias is to trace ideas to sub-rational sources. He points to Adams’s tendency to “borrow heavily from writings that seemed to answer his emotional needs at the moment.” Hence he seldom presents Adams explaining or elaborating, or, ultimately, thinking. He does, however, recognize his insight. Of Adams’s extract from Adam Smith, Wood notes that his “account of the passion for distinction seems actually richer than Smith’s treatment.”

Wood’s account of Jefferson’s radical egalitarianism is similarly wanting. Wood maintains that Jefferson believed “what separated one person from another was simply cultivation and education.” Even so, when discussing 1776, Wood recognizes that Jefferson suggested that biological differences between men from Africa and men from Europe were significant, a rather radical limitation upon the tabula rasa. Meanwhile Wood waits nearly a hundred pages to concede that “Jefferson knew that people differed from one another.” He does not mention until much later in his book the educational scheme that Jefferson suggested in the Notes on the State of Virginia, according to which, in Jefferson’s words, “twenty of the best geniusses will be raked from the rubbish annually.” When Wood turns to study Jefferson’s 1813 letter
to Adams on natural aristocracy, he conveniently skips over Jefferson's comment that "experience proves that the moral and physical qualities of man, whether good or evil, are transmissible in a certain degree from father to son." Read closely, the letter as a whole suggests a troubling eugenic streak in Jefferson's thought.

On the other side, Wood recognizes Adams's belief that "in America there were no political and moral inequalities of rights and duties. Everyone was equal before the law." But, Wood argues, "these were superficial equalities. What really mattered in America, and, in fact in every nation, said Adams, was the overwhelming presence of real and fundamental inequalities—inequalities of wealth, of birth, of talent." Even so, Wood allows that Adams never wanted "to follow Aristotle...in excluding working people from citizenship." Adams was emphatic on the point in his Defense of the Constitutions (1787):

The moral equality that nature has unalterably established among men, gives these an undoubted right to have every road opened to them for advancement in life and in power that is open to any others.... The dogma of Aristotle, and the practice of the world, is the most unphilosophical, the most inhuman and cruel that can be conceived. Until this wicked position, which is worse than the slavery of the ancient republics, or modern West Indies, shall be held up to the derision and contempt, the execration and horror, of mankind, it will be to little purpose to talk or write about liberty.

When he quotes this passage, Wood skips Adams's brief for the "moral equality" of men and his comments about the "right to have every road opened to them for advancement." He also cuts Adams's reference to slavery. Elsewhere he mentions Adams's opposition to slavery, but says it is relatively unimportant. Wherefore these omissions and distortions?

Early in the "discourses on Davila," which Adams penned during his vice presidency, he turned, "to the constitution of the human mind." Thirteen essays later Adams began his extracts from and commentary on Davila's history. According to Wood the prefatory essays "had nothing to do with Davila." A revealing reading. It is one thing to believe that history is not philosophy teaching by example, but quite another to be unable to recognize philosophy and examples when staring them in the face. Wood quotes Adams's reply to Jefferson in which Adams notes "the existence of Inequalities, not of rights, but of moral intellectual and physical inequalities in Families, descents and Generations." Yet Wood ignores the context. There is a great deal of room in Adams's letter for the view that a moral man is more likely than an immoral one to raise an honest child. What's more, Adams's main point was political. In the next sentence he suggests that "descent from, pious, virtuous, wealthy literary or scientific Ancestors is a letter of recommendation...in a Mans favour." He continues: "Aaron Burr had 100,000 Votes from the Single Circumstance of his descent from President Burr and President Edwards." Aaron Burr was, as it were, New England royalty. His grandfather was the great New England divine Jonathan Edwards, and his father, Aaron Burr, Sr., had been the president of Princeton. In The Radicalism of the American Revolution Wood quotes Paine on the subject: "Virtue...is not hereditary." Adams's point was that history demonstrates that men will nonetheless often act as if it is. That will never change, Adams thought. Statesmen, therefore, had to account for it.

The real question with regard to Wood, Adams, Jefferson, and Locke, therefore, concerns history and human nature, not equality. Wood's approach to the study of history takes the tabula rasa as a premise. Actually, he comes close to treating human nature, and not merely the mind, as a blank slate. Given that premise, history becomes the study of the evolution of "culture." And that explains Wood's decades-long wrestling match with Adams. Adams believed that history was the school of statesmen precisely because it allows us to study human nature in action, to anticipate how the underlying constants would present themselves in different circumstances. Wood suggests in The Radicalism of the American Revolution that the rise of republican ideas in the Enlightenment weakened monarchy. "All those French nobles who in 1785 flocked to the Paris salon to ooh and aah over Jacques-Louis David's severe classical painting The Oath of the Horatii had no idea they were contributing to the weakening of the monarchy and their own demise." Given the history of such experiences, and given how common they are across time, Adams thought, history can teach us to recognize precisely such things. Wood does not. (History also teaches that few will be wise in that way.) Wood recognizes that Adams had real insight. In The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (1997), German philosopher Ernst Cassirer notes the challenge Blaise Pascal (one of Adams's favorite writers) presented the philosophes: "French philosophy of the Enlightenment recurs to Pascal's Thoughts again and again as if it were impelled from within, and that it repeatedly tests its critical strength on this work." Adams presents Wood with a similar challenge.

In the final chapter of friends divided, Wood notes that Jefferson grew depressed as his retirement years passed, drawing inward and retreating to an ever smaller political circle. He read only Thomas Ritchie's Richmond newspaper, the one most congenial to his politics. Meanwhile, he looked on as his beloved "country," Virginia, diminished in importance, and the rise of market farming, cities, banks, and stock-jobbing betrayed his republican vision. Under a mountain of debt, he realized that there was precious little of his patrimony to pass on to his heirs.

Adams, by contrast, grew much more content. That his son rose to the presidency didn't hurt. He was not heavily in debt, either. Although he, according to Wood, shared Jefferson's dislike of banks and financial speculation, he was much less surprised and worried about the future than his Virginia friend.

And that returns us to Wood's history. In his essay on Theodor Mommsen (CRB, Spring 2018), Joseph Epstein noted that the greatest historians, those whose work endures, are philosophic in the sense of being interested in human nature as it plays itself out on the ample fields of political and military affairs, of culture and economics." Gordon Wood is the most talented historian of his generation. The misfortune is that, for all his accomplishments and accolades, his method presumes that there is not a robust or transhistorical human nature. From that perspective the classic understanding of history—as philosophy teaching by example—remains unintelligible or is reducible to "ideology." Given Wood's premises about the nature of history, the line from his work to the postmodern methods he often deplores is much shorter than he would like to admit. Indeed, it is precisely the turn that a wise student of history, and human nature, would expect.

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A mong those designated as "founding Fathers," perhaps the least appreciated (at least compared to his importance) is John Marshall, the nation's fourth and most famous Chief Justice. Perhaps the reason is that discussion of his fame lies mainly within the province of legal specialists and, although what they say is for the most part praiseworthy, they often tend to concentrate on recondite legal issues at the expense of grander themes of the sort articulated by, say, The Federalist. Or perhaps the reason is that Marshall's accomplishments are largely derivative in nature, because they rest upon a constitutional foundation erected by others—indeed they postdate its establishment by years, even decades. Whatever the explanation, the great man's statesmanship seems to be overshadowed by the deeds of others. It shouldn't be.

Justice Joseph Story's brief, affectionate A Discourse of the Honorable John Marshall, written shortly after his senior colleague's death in 1835, sought to capture his enduring greatness. More than eight decades would pass, however, before another prominent authority seconded Story's assessment, in the form of Senator Albert J. Beveridge's massive four-volume biography, published between 1916 and 1919. An additional half-century (and more) would pass before other biographers ventured to imitate the spirit that animated Beveridge's writing. Among them, Jean Edward Smith's John Marshall: Definer of a Nation (1996) comes closest to capturing the reasons behind Justice Story's admiration.

A number of interesting historical monographs have appeared in recent years that pay special attention to Marshall's legal craft. This flowering interest in his thought has helped to redress the relative neglect of earlier decades. Like the vast legal literature on Marbury v. Madison (1803) and judicial review, however, it tends to sidestep analysis of Marshall's statecraft. Two notable exceptions deserve special praise in that regard: R. Kent Newmyer's John Marshall and the Heroic Age of the Supreme Court (2001) and Charles F. Hobson's The Great Chief Justice (1996). The former (from a scholar who is also a close student of Justice Story's thought) succeeds in capturing traits that mark Marshall's transcendent greatness. The latter, by the editor of the Marshall Papers, packs more insight into 200 pages than can be found in much lengthier works. Moving seamlessly among the various facets of his subject's thought, Hobson, like Newmyer, has an eye for philosophical issues that often escape the attention of historians. But even after 50 years the best study of Marshall remains Robert K.

Book Review by Michael M. Uhlmann

THE LAST OF THE FOUNDERS

Mention should be made, too, of less favorable opinions about Marshall during the late 19th and early 20th centuries—the defining paradigm here is predominantly historicist and decidedly mixed in its assessment. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., while Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, delivered an address commemorating the centenary of Marshall’s appointment as Chief Justice in 1801. After acknowledging his superior intellect, character, and leadership, Holmes then damns Marshall with faint praise, arguing that his fame largely rests on his “being there” during events of great historical moment. Many Progressive thinkers, ever reluctant to believe that anyone’s thought (save perhaps their own) could transcend the circumstances of one’s age, likewise tended to make Marshall a creature of his times. In that context, the Chief Justice’s views were often said to reflect his ideological interest as a member of the Federalist Party.

Regarding the substance of the Court’s rulings, Progressives exhibited somewhat schizophrenic views on judicial power: although suspicious of Marshall’s political and partisan motives, they admired the nationalist thrust of his opinions, which they recast to suit contemporaneous concerns; and they certainly had second thoughts about judicial review when federal judges overturned Progressive reform legislation. Their misgivings about judicial power, animated by what has come to be called “Lochnerism”—after the landmark labor law case Lochner v. New York (1905)—reached a peak in the mid-1930s. Earlier reservations abated after Franklin Roosevelt stacked the Court with New Dealers, who beginning in 1938 decided to give a pass to Congress on economic and social reform legislation. Thereafter, Progressives gradually became champions of judicial power, and doubled down when the Warren Court and its successors found previously undiscovered penumbras of constitutional text that lent support to their ideological preferences. By then, of course, anything remotely resembling the jurisprudence of John Marshall had disappeared from sight.

The Chief Justice, who worked hard to insulate the Court and the rule of law against the winds of political fashion, would not be happy with this Janus-faced disposition on constitutional questions. The Constitution, he believed, should be a text for all seasons, and he sought to make it so. Richard Brookhiser would agree, as he makes clear in John Marshall: The Man Who Made the Supreme Court, the latest addition to his series on leading American statesmen that began in 1996 with Founding Father, his highly praised study of George Washington. Since then, the National Review senior editor has added monographs on Alexander Hamilton (1999), the Adamses (2002), Gouverneur Morris (2003), James Madison (2011), and Abraham Lincoln (2014). All of these, most weighing in at about a readable 300 pages, are written for the general reader, but only a snob would deny their appeal to those possessing academic credentials. Collectively, they constitute a mini-library on the lives of great Americans and why their lives should matter to us, an admirable reversion to an older style of literature that has, alas, largely disappeared. The new Marshall book is one of Brookhiser’s best: it is wonderfully written and at times eloquent, admiring of its subject without being hagiographical. As in his earlier books, Brookhiser has a gimlet eye for details that reveal the human person behind the reputation.

The opening section describes Marshall’s early life, education, and public career before donning the robe. There then follow 13 concise chapters on the major cases and controversies that riveted the Chief Justice’s attention and eventually solidified his fame. Summarizing the likes of Marbury, the Burr treason trial (1807), Dartmouth College v. Woodward (1819), McCulloch v. Maryland (1819), Cohens v. Virginia (1821), and Gibbons v. Ogden (1824), to name the topics of only six chapters, is no easy task. A writer must sail between the Scylla and Charybdis of over- and under-inclusion; Brookhiser, a skilled literary helmsman, manages to avoid both dangers. Only a pedant would fault him neatly abridged summaries of the cases under review, which manage to be generally accurate without sacrificing anything of critical importance. He never lets the reader forget how much Marshall’s self-discipline, creative imagination, and political prudence resolved controversies that might have flummoxed or defeated a lesser man. All in all, Brookhiser has given us an engaging assessment of what made a great man great, and why his virtues should be applauded. It makes one look forward to the author’s next venture.

Well, what about Marshall’s status as a first-tier founder? It is true that he was not a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, but among other important public duties during the nation’s first decade, he did take a leading part as a delegate to Virginia’s ratification convention. As he would have been the first to acknowledge, Marshall lacked the intellectual depth and sophistication of men like John Adams, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson. But few men had a surer grasp of what happened at Philadelphia or in the state ratifying conventions, and why it mattered. Moreover, his judgment in practical matters was at least the equal of, and arguably superior to, that of these intellectual titans. (It is worth noting that in at least four important political confrontations with Jefferson—the Marbury matter, the Burr trial, the constitutionality of the national bank, and Jefferson’s perpetual flirtation with Anti-Federalism—Marshall beat the Sage of Monticello every time.)

Even on a conceptual level, no one (except perhaps Hamilton or Oliver Ellsworth) thought more deeply about the judiciary’s role in sustaining republican principles or, more importantly, how to effectuate it. On these and related matters, Marshall’s understanding was in its way as bold and creative as Publius’s conception of the extended republic, or the presidency as conceived by Hamilton, James Wilson, and Gouverneur Morris. Indeed, one wonders whether the federal judiciary would have become a fully independent and co-equal branch at all without Marshall’s statesmanship. Article III of the Constitution is, compared to Article I especially, quite spare; indeed it is the least elaborated part of the structural Constitution. It establishes “one supreme Court,” and provides a barebones description of its jurisdiction, but not much else. Most of the important missing details were left to the discretion of Congress, which filled in some of the blanks in the Judiciary Act of 1789. The legislation temporarily fixed the size of the Supreme Court at six, created a limited number of lower federal courts, and addressed the Court’s appellate jurisdiction.

By providing the nation with a provisional sketch of the federal judiciary’s operational map, the Act performed a singular service. But it left many questions unanswered, the most nettlesome of which concerned the delicate issue of competing jurisdictional claims between federal and state courts. These were but one subset of a larger universe of federal-state disputes that lay at the heart of opposition to the Constitution but had been only partly and ambiguously resolved during the battle over ratification—they would not be fully resolved until the Civil War. It was one thing to declare, as Madison famously did in The Federalist, that ours was a “compound” republic, neither wholly national nor wholly federal. It was quite another to delineate what precisely that formula meant when conflicts arose. Much of that task fell to the Supreme Court under Marshall, who over the course of three decades articulated the constitutional metes and bounds of federal-state relations better than almost anyone, including Madison himself. For that accomplishment alone, Marshall deserves a position of high honor in the founders’ gallery.

Delineating the constitutional topography of federalism was only one of his signal accomplishments. The achievement of that goal necessarily entailed careful explication of (among other important provisions) the Commerce
Although the Chief Justice did not generally would be able to bring his colleagues together unanimously on all of these significant issues. Clearly he was a man of clever wit and extraordinary charm, who put both to good use on the Court. Oliver Wolcott, who had worked with Marshall, captured a remarkable trait when he wrote to a friend that the Chief Justice had a way of “putting his own ideas into the minds of others, unconsciously to them.”

Although the Chief Justice, who wrote quickly and well, authored the Court’s opinion in almost half of these. With but one exception, he performed a similar labor in virtually all of the great constitutional cases for which his Court is chiefly remembered. Again, he did so with relatively few dissents from his colleagues, most of which came late in his tenure when changing politics had altered the composition of the Court. And such was his influence with his colleagues, he found it necessary to dissent only once, in Ogden v. Saunders (1827), involving the enforcement of contracts.

Other noteworthy achievements lay claim to thoughtful attention:

(1) He took over a judiciary that after twelve years had yet to secure a well-defined place within the national constitutional structure. The Supreme Court, for its part, had decided only a relative handful of cases, which were argued in a basement room of the Capitol. The justices, most of whose time was devoted to adjudicating cases while riding circuit, held their conferences in the parlor of a rooming house. And many public-spirited lawyers sought honors elsewhere to satisfy their ambition. All that had changed by the time Marshall died in 1835: no one (whether friend or foe) could doubt by then that the Supreme Court had become a respected, co-equal branch of the federal government. At almost every turn, from the beginning of his tenure to his last years, this goal was accomplished without benefit of historical precedent and despite persistent opposition.

(2) Before Marshall became Chief Justice, a form of what would later be called judicial review (he never used the phrase, which was not coined until 1910) was recognized in principle, although sparingly and gingerly deployed by state judiciaries. Marshall was nothing if not prudent, and after Marbury v. Madison his Court would never again find an Act of Congress unconstitutional. (The next occasion would be Dred Scott v. Sandford in 1857, under his successor, Chief Justice Roger Taney.) Although the Chief Justice did not generally search for dragons to slay, he was not at all shy when policing state actions that challenged the national government’s constitutional powers. Even then, however, states (not the federal government) were almost always the aggressors. States were not happy to see their laws second-guessed by the federal judiciary, but their constitutional claims (resting on the state-compact theory of the Constitution) never acquired intellectual traction in the court of public opinion, nor sometimes even in their own jurisdictions. Over time, the power of Marshall’s counter-arguments proved persuasive to all but the most dyed-in-the-wool advocates of states’ rights. His great opinions, especially as set forth in McCulloch, Cohens, and Gibbons are compelling miniature treatises on the meaning of the compound republic. In the same vein are the pseudonymous essays he wrote following McCulloch in which he elaborated the Court’s reasoning on the Necessary and Proper Clause, implied powers, and the Supremacy Clause.

(3) One rarely noted feature of Marshall’s jurisprudence is the way in which he read the Commerce Clause and the Contract Clause as integral parts of a conceptual whole. The whole was the development of a truly national market secured by a rigorous defense of property rights and the elimination of barriers to freely flowing interstate commerce. Marshall’s understanding of political economy not only contributed significantly to economic growth; it helped to minimize the political mischief of faction within state legislatures, which, as Madison rightly believed, were endlessly flowing fonts of what we now call crony capitalism. In this, as in most things, the Chief Justice was sensitive to the spirit that lay behind the Constitution’s relatively spare text. He used these two clauses as best he could to minimize state interference with a national commercial market and to prevent states from favoring powerful local interests at the expense of what Madison called “the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”

(4) Time and again, Marshall sought to make clear that when the Court spoke, it was really the Constitution speaking, not just the opinion writer or a group of Justices. That is why he changed the previous custom by which the Justices, following English practice, would often issue seriatim opinions when announcing the ruling in a case. Henceforth, there would be simply the ruling of “the Court.”

(5) Not least, Marshall constantly emphasized the idea, not fully understood at the time, that the Constitution was fundamental law, i.e., a social compact expressing the definitive voice of the people in their highest deliberative capacity. The Chief Justice deployed this understanding to good effect, especially when beating back misguided arguments about the meaning of what happened at Philadelphia or the state ratifying conventions. The Constitution considered as fundamental law informed his reflections on the Supremacy Clause and the logic of implied powers, and greatly strengthened his effort to make clear that when the Court spoke, it spoke not just as one branch of government, but as a representative of the people in their sovereign capacity.

Finally, (6), no assessment of Marshall’s accomplishments would be complete without mentioning his extraordinary efforts in composing The Life of George Washington, his multi-volume paean to the virtues of the nation’s most indispensable man. Dissatisfied with the first printings (which appeared between 1803 and 1807) Marshall frequently revised and improved the text until almost the day he died. Clearly, he wanted to get Washington right for the sake of posterity. The work is only partly a biography of Washington. It is chiefly a biography of the importance of statesmanship to the nation’s founding, and a commentary on the need for virtue in our public officers. Consider this excerpt from the concluding paragraphs:

Respecting as the first magistrate in a free government must ever do, the real and deliberate sentiments of the people, their gusts of passion passed over without ruffling the smooth surface of his mind. Trusting to the reflecting good sense of the nation, he had the magnanimity to pursue its real interests in opposition to its temporary prejudices; and in more instances than one, we find him committing his whole popularity to hazard, and pursuing steadily the course dictated by a sense of duty, in opposition to a torrent which would have overwhelmed a man of ordinary firmness.

Those words might have been written about Marshall himself.

These are extraordinary achievements that left an enduring mark on the development of American constitutional thought and institutions. That not everything worked out in quite the way Marshall wished was hardly his fault. As previously noted, his accomplishments were all the more remarkable because they were frequently undertaken in the teeth of entrenched and powerful opposition. The Great Chief Justice was not present to sign the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, but among those who were, few can lay better claim to achieving their noble purposes. We are indebted to Richard Brookhiser for reminding us.

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Securing the Constitution and Union

Book Review by David F. Forte

John Marshall and the Cases that United the States of America: Beveridge’s Abridged Life of John Marshall, edited by Ronald D. Rotunda. Twelve Tables Press, 642 pages, $38.95

Ronald D. Rotunda, the prodigious legal authority who died last year at the age of 73, wrote the widely used course book American Constitutional Law, co-authored the six-volume Treatise on Constitutional Law, and wrote several other books and hundreds of articles over his career. A scholar of the first order, he was a friend to many in his field.

Fittingly, his last book is a tribute to Albert J. Beveridge’s Life of John Marshall, the seminal analysis of the Great Chief Justice, the first of whose four volumes appeared in 1916. As a U.S. senator from Indiana between 1899 and 1911, Beveridge supported American expansionism, as well as national legislation on child labor and food inspection. A progressive Republican, he broke with the GOP in 1912 to support Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party’s presidential nominee. He attempted to re-enter electoral politics after Roosevelt’s defeat, but never again held office. Instead he turned to history. But his progressive nationalism remained his guide, and it fueled his study of Marshall.

Beveridge’s Pulitzer Prize-winning biography marked his finest and most lasting contribution to American public life. Rotunda’s parting gift is to re-present Beveridge’s classic work to us in a finely crafted abridgement and a beautiful specimen of the bookmaker’s art, gracely laid out on substantial stock with ample margins for notes. It invites the eyes and the hands. Rotunda enhances Beveridge’s text with informative introductions and explanatory footnotes, but leaves the dramatic rhythms and flow of Beveridge’s style entirely intact.

In his treatment of Marshall, Beveridge replicates his own roiling political battles in which he pitted his progressive nationalism against a stubborn states’ rights parochialism. He fashions Marshall’s struggle into a dramatic narrative, where the stakes were of the highest order. With the pen as his sole weapon and against the onslaught of President Thomas Jefferson, Marshall placed the judiciary in an unrivaled position of authority, which Beveridge asserts saved the republic.

Without Marshall, Beveridge argues, the judiciary would have been a withered branch, unable to constrain either the executive or the Congress. John Jay had refused reappointment to be Chief Justice because he “had no desire to preside, yet again, over a Court lacking ‘essential’ attributes of ‘Energy, weight, and Dignity.’” Without Marshall, the Jeffersonian notion of the Constitution as a compact of states would have taken root, leaving the Union without any principled basis to resist secession and disintegration.

Beveridge shapes his narrative as an epic contest between Marshall and Jefferson, in which his hero snatches an unexpected victory. With Jefferson as the foil, even Aaron Burr receives sympathetic treatment. When Burr and Jefferson received an equal number of electoral votes in the election of 1800, the decision of who would be president was thrown to the House of Representatives. There is a touch of real regret for Beveridge that Burr wasn’t chosen over Jefferson. Beveridge claims that had Marshall, who was then John Adams’s secretary of state, “openly worked for Burr, or even insisted upon a permanent deadlock,” the Federalists would have achieved their main purpose in denying Jefferson the presidency, and Marshall would have stayed on as Burr’s secretary of state. Beveridge also speculates that if there had been a deadlock, Marshall might have been chosen by the House as president or acting president, a possibility Jefferson himself nervously contemplated. But in the end, “[c]he proof is over-
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–Marco Mancini, Bristol-Myers Squibb
whelming and decisive,” writes Beveridge, that Burr’s adamant refusal to co-operate with the Federalists and Jefferson’s promises to Representative James Bayard and others that he would not turn out Federalist office holders gained the Virginian the presidency. In fact, although Beveridge doesn’t say so, Bayard’s forcing the Federalists in the House of Representatives to concede the election to Jefferson almost certainly averted a civil war.

And so, the two Olympian protagonists strode upon the pitch, each fated to be there by an odd concatenation of circumstances. Marshall became Chief Justice on the surprise resignation of Chief Justice Oliver Ellsworth in December 1800, and after John Jay had declined the post; Jefferson became president by the politically deft skills of a man against whom Jefferson would later turn the full fury of his wrath.

The centerpiece of the contest between Marshall and Jefferson was, of course, Marbury v. Madison, and Beveridge constructs a dramatic narrative to highlight Marshall’s unexpected triumph. He begins with the Federalist Party’s self-immolation in the 1800 election, both at the polls and in the House of Representatives. In 1801, the Federalists’ loss was seen by few as permanent and the party fully expected that if it could hang on Jefferson charges of incompetency, partisanship, and revolutionary design, it would return to power. Only in hindsight can we see that their cause was doomed. But Beveridge, descending into melodrama, anachronistically sees the Federalist defeat in the light of their eventual withering away:

So it came about that the party of Washington...went down forever in a welter of passion, tawdry politics, and disgraceful intrigue. All was lost, including honor. But not! All was not lost. The Judiciary remained.

The judiciary had, in fact, been strengthened by the Judiciary Act of 1801, passed in the final weeks of John Adams’s administration. The new statute established separate circuit courts staffed by new circuit court judges, abolished circuit riding by the Supreme Court Justices—a relief begged for from the start—and reduced the Supreme Court to five members. The reduction in number was not, as Jeffersonian newspapers charged, to deny the incoming president an appointment when the first of the six remaining Justices resigned. Rather, the original number of six, contrived so there could be two Justices manning each of the original three circuits, was no longer necessary with the cohort of independent circuit court judges. Moreover, having an odd number of Justices prevented tie votes, so that Court rulings would settle disputes and clarify the law.

By establishing a separately staffed system of six circuit courts with 16 judges, the 1801 Act also relieved Supreme Court Justices from the ethically awkward duty of reviewing cases on which they had previously sat as circuit court judges. In addition, the law expanded federal jurisdiction in order to counter the Jeffersonian Republicans’ growing commitment to states’ rights. As Adams’s closest adviser, Marshall had a primary role in recommending the men who were to fill the new judgeships. All were Federalists.

Personally, politically, and ideologically, the Judiciary Act and its cohort of exclusively Federalist circuit court judges enraged Jefferson. He resolved to repeal the law and bring the judiciary—the Federalists’ last “stronghold,” as he put it—to heel. Beveridge writes that Jefferson was confident of success. He understood how disciplined and loyal his party was in Congress, and how disorganized and ill-led the Federalists were. Although the 1800 election had been very close, the Republicans swept to a decisive victory in the House of Representatives and gained a majority in the Senate. What’s more, Jefferson was a skilled political leader and had a highly competent cabinet, which, unlike the one Adams had inherited from Washington, was utterly loyal to their chief. The new president was a real threat to Marshall and the judiciary. “Thus, the Republican programme of demotion was begun,” writes Beveridge. “Federalist taxes were, of course, to be abolished; the Federalist mint dismantled; the Federalist army disbanded; the Federalist navy beached.” In fact, Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin maintained the Hamiltonian financial structure; John Adams had already kept the army small; and Jefferson reduced the navy but kept its core and used it assertively against Barbary. Meanwhile, according to Beveridge, Marshall demonstrated his “audacity” by establishing “for the first time” the custom of announcing the court’s decision as a single opinion—although, as Rotunda points out, it was Ellsworth who had originally attempted that reform. Marshall did, however, initiate the custom of the judicial conference after argument, through which a consensus could be formed.

Jefferson’s bitterness towards the judiciary lay in the quite plausible belief that Federalist jurists had vigorously enforced the Sedition Act of 1798 in order to stifle Republican newspapers and keep him from winning the presidency. He pardoned those who had been convicted under the Sedition Act (and had Congress later remit the fines), and replaced federal marshals. Marshals impaneled grand juries, and grand juries brought indictments, including politicized indictments. By that act, whether he realized it or not, Jefferson helped to depoliticize the judiciary, something that his adversary Marshall would also press for as Chief Justice.

In December 1801, when his new Republican Congress met, Jefferson disarming suggested, “The judiciary system of the United States, and especially that portion of it recently erected, will of course present itself to the contemplation of Congress.” Everybody knew what was coming. For months, Federalists had been penning essays defending the independence of the judiciary. Many thought Jefferson might try to impeach Justices. Beveridge darkly intones, “Thus by progressive stages the Supreme Court would be brought beneath the blade of the executioner and the obnoxious Marshall decapitated or compelled to submit.”

In the debate over Republicans’ plan to repeal the 1801 Act, the courts’ ability to check the other departments of government was the central issue, even though the Act had said nothing about such a power. Senator Stevens Mason of Virginia disputed that the courts had that authority and feared that “this independence of the Judiciary” would become “something like supremacy.” Senator John Breckinridge denied the right of judicial review altogether: “The Legislature have the exclusive right to interpret the Constitution, in what regards to the law-making power, and the judges are bound to execute the laws they make.” James Bayard, now the Federalist leader in the House, threatened civil war if the independence of the judiciary were destroyed. The repeal bill, with every Republican vote behind it, passed in early March 1802. Because the question of judicial review had been central to the debate, the Republicans changed the calendar of the Supreme Court in order to deny it the opportunity to exercise what putative power upon the Repeal Act itself.

In December 1801, shortly after Jefferson’s message to Congress, Charles Lee, John Adams’s former attorney general, had brought the case of Marbury v. Madison. The suit contested Jefferson’s decision, taken immediately after his inauguration, to withhold commissions from federal justices of the peace who had been appointed by Adams.
O

n his way to describing the centrality of Marbury v. Madison, Beveridge makes a number of historical errors. He states that Jefferson had told Secretary of State James Madison not to deliver the Justice of the Peace commissions, when it was Levi Lincoln, Jefferson’s attorney general, who was acting as secretary of state at the time. He blames Marshall for having failed to deliver the commissions: “Instead, he had, with his customary negligence of details, left them on his desk.” But Marshall had followed normal procedure in leaving it to his chief clerk to deliver the commissions the next day, the day of Jefferson’s inaugural. But by then, Marshall would only later learn, it was too late. Beveridge misses entirely the significance of the case being brought barely a week after Jefferson’s message signaling the attempt to repeal the 1801 Judiciary Act. Marbury’s suit was, in fact, not personal. It was designed to help stymie Jefferson’s plan.

Missteps aside, Beveridge brings the tale of Marshall’s success in Marbury v. Madison to its triumphant conclusion in a way that is now known to every student of constitutional law. He notes the Chief Justice’s chagrin in having to enforce the Repeal Act while on circuit in 1802, contrasting that with his catapulting Marbury, a case of “no consequence,” into totemic significance. He “praises” Marshall for devising a “pretext” for annulling section 13 of the Judiciary Act of 1789 (it was actually only a few words in that Section that Marshall found wanting). He also asserts (questionably) that Marshall’s interpretation of Section 13 ran counter to the understanding of “the whole bench and bar.”

Although scholars today can emphasize how much judicial review was expected at the time, how it had been explicitly defended by Hamilton in The Federalist, Beveridge persuasively argues that because the Repeal Act had been passed as an attack on the notion of judicial review, without Marbury v. Madison the power of the Supreme Court to annul acts of Congress probably would not have been insisted upon thereafter... [H]ad he not then taken this stand, nearly seventy years would have passed without any question arising as to the omnipotence of Congress. After so long a period of judicial acquiescence in Congressional supremacy it seems likely that opposition to it would have been futile.

Beveridge’s overpraise of Marshall comes very close to saying that by deliberately distorting the understanding of the Judiciary Act of 1789 in order to assert judicial review, Marshall made the Court the “ultimate arbiter as to what is and what is not law under the Constitution.” In this reading, Marshall’s opinion was, as Jefferson would claim, actually a usurpation: “Thus, by a coup as bold in design and as daring in execution as that by which the Constitution had been framed, John Marshall set up a landmark in American history so high that all the future could take bearings from it, so enduring that all the shocks the Nation was to endure could not overturn it.”

In Beveridge’s era, “legal realism” was already well established in the law schools and inflicting the judiciary, and may have influenced him. If, as he indicates, even the institution of judicial review was “made up law,” why could not present-day courts enact their preferences with the same confidence and determination?

I

n the remaining chapters of Rotunda’s abridgement, Beveridge continues to drive home his theme of judicial independence at the service of the nationalization of the Constitution. Politically, the impeachment and failed conviction of Justice Samuel Chase in 1805 was the turning point. John Quincy Adams wrote to his father that the articles of impeachment brought against Chase “contained in themselves a virtual impeachment of not only Mr. Chase but all the judges of the Supreme Court.” Senator William Giles, leader of the Republicans in the Senate, determined to use impeachment to punish Marshall and the Court for its effrontery in declaring unconstitutional an act of Congress, prompting Quincy Adams to write that the plan was to “have swept the supreme judicial branch clean at a stroke.” In fact, the plan of impeachment had been set even before Marbury had been decided. Even so, Jefferson thought the federal impeachment process too dilatory, and desired an amendment that would allow the president to remove a judge from office simply “on the address of the two Houses.”

Beveridge reminds us how real the impeachment danger was, and we now know that Jefferson was behind the whole business. In December 1803, when the House impeached District Judge John Pickering, who suffered from alcoholism and mental illness, the president rewarded three of the witnesses against Pickering with federal offices. Inside of an hour after the Senate convicted Pickering, the House passed articles of impeachment against Chase.

In his description of Chase’s trial, Beveridge again praises Senate President Aaron Burr, serving out his last weeks as vice president. Despite the coy attempts of Jefferson and the Republicans to cultivate him, Burr, the despised assassin and indicted murderer of Hamilton, “conducted [the trial] with the dignity and impartiality of an angel, but with the rigor of a devil,” a Washington newspaper reported. Beveridge describes the trial with the page-turning intensity of a modern suspense novel. When it came time for the vote, for the first time the Republican ranks in the Senate broke and Chase was acquitted. John Marshall, at last, was secure in his post.

Beveridge moves on to complete his view of Marshall’s nationalization project, pausing in a chapter on Marshall and his colleague Associate Justice Joseph Story to describe in delightful detail Marshall’s personality and political skills. Jefferson was succeeded by presidents who had opposed Marshall at one time or another—Madison, James Monroe, and Andrew Jackson—but the Chief Justice stayed on the Court for nearly 35 years. His persuasive personality and his immense power of reason turned virtually all new appointments to the bench into allies. He moved on to stabilize the nation’s financial structure by strengthening the Contract Clause, enhance federal power by an expansive interpretation of the Necessary and Proper Clause, and free up commerce by disallowing state monopolies of transportation.

Through it all, Beveridge insists, Marshall kept his sights on preserving the Union. In Beveridge’s eyes, he was the first progressive nationalist. Time and again, Marshall disputed the wrongheaded notion—launched by Jefferson in the Kentucky Resolution of 1798—that the Constitution was a compact of states. Even in the age of Jackson, Marshall upheld the rights of the Cherokee Indians against Georgia’s predatory claims, while affirming national control over Indian affairs. Having feared that the Union was on the verge of dismemberment, Marshall rejoiced, however, at Andrew Jackson’s strong opposition to South Carolina’s Ordinance of Nullification.

At his death, John Marshall remained gloomy over the prospects of the Union. He would not have known, of course, how the Supreme Court would be turned by his successor, Roger Taney, into an instrument for its dissolution. Only a man even greater in wisdom, vision, commitment, and political astuteness than Marshall could have saved the Union then.

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Essay by Algis Valiunas

Battle for a Continent

To establish civilization in the North American wilderness required heroic energy, courage, sacrifice, and dauntlessness, from both ordinary and extraordinary men and women. The annals of discovery, exploration, settlement, and conquest recount prodigies of boldness and perseverance that the comfortable modern reader can scarcely imagine.

Americans used to take pride in the achievements of those forebears, who made possible the sweet, comfortable, civilized life most of us enjoy. Such pride has of course become unfashionable, not to say “racist.” The ugliness in America’s origins, and our complicity as the beneficiaries of the ancestral crimes, is all we are allowed to see of our beginnings; and we are admonished to be appropriately horrified and revolted. Now that the wilderness has itself become holy—for many, the last sanctuary of holiness—the fact that large cities and their suburbs sprawl where primeval forest or drear desert once stood is desecration. And with the destruction of the wilderness came the dispossession of the land’s rightful possessors, in the perfection of their Neolithic innocence: the indigenous peoples who would have lived in peace, but were defeated in unjust, even genocidal war.

All nations’ origins have their ugliness, and it is right that the truth be told. Without candor and a sense of proportion, however, the whole truth about the encounter of civilization with barbarism in North America has degenerated into a Hollywood fantasy of unforgivable evil-doing on the part of white invaders who, professing to bring salvation to savagery, had proved to be themselves the real savages.

A corrective to this woke narrative can be found in the writings of Francis Parkman (1823–1893), the supreme historian of that fateful encounter, which was really a world-historical collision. Parkman was the author of The Oregon Trail (1849), and of the seven-volume France and England in North America (1865-92), along with the two-volume The Conspiracy of Pontiac and The Indian War after the Conquest of Canada (1851), a coda to his masterwork that was actually written before it. (These major works are now available in three volumes by the Library of America.) He was honestly ambivalent, as many Americans are today, about the inexorable advance of white civilization across North America. He appreciated the cruelty of the loss. His enthusiasm, especially in his youth, for wild places and wild Indians far overflowed the bounds of Boston Brahmin propriety, in which he
had been steeped. Yet his appraisal of Indian virtues and vices was sober and, when necessary, unsparing, which has largely discredited Parkman in modern eyes.

The late Peter Matthiessen—the most beautiful nature writer of his generation and a subscriber to all liberal pieties, chief mourner of vanished wilderness and of Native American moral superiority to the white violators—believed he had made the definitive case against Parkman with a single sentence in his book *Indian Country* (1984): “The historian Francis Parkman described these formerly admired people as ‘man, wolf, and devil, all in one’ (he wrote of the homicidal fury of the Iroquois, whose Six Nations parliamentary system, so admired by Benjamin Franklin and the Founding Fathers, was incorporated in his country's constitution).” But Parkman was frank about Indian viciousness, while Matthiessen stretched the truth about the founders’ admiration for the Indians’ political science. Franklin at the Albany Congress in 1754 was not quite so complimentary: “It would be a strange thing...if six nations of ignorant savages should be capable of forming such a union [a confederation of tribes] and be able to execute it in such a manner that it has subsisted for ages and appears indissoluble, and yet that a like union should be impractical for ten or a dozen English colonies.” Matthiessen’s cant may capacious of scorn and indignation at whites’ connection that allowed Parkman to spend three weeks of the year in wild regions of northern New England where only Indians and some few white hunters had preceded them.

His studies—under the direction of Professor Jared Sparks, the first academic historian to specialize in American history, who would write biographies of the French explorers Father Jacques Marquette and Robert de La Salle—dovetailed nicely with his adventures. During his sophomore year Parkman conceived the momentous project, as he later recalled, of writing the history of “the whole course of the American conflict between France and England, or, in other words, the history of the American forest; for this was the light in which I regarded it. My theme fascinated me, and I was haunted with wilderness images day and night.” Driven himself hard to ready mind and body for this great undertaking, he broke down: heart trouble, brought on by over-exertion in the college’s new gymnasmium, he believed, though Doughty is inclined to suspect nervous collapse long coming, and destined to recur with terrible force in future years.

**Books discussed in this essay:**


**All Respectable Ceremoniousness**

Francis Parkman, born on Beacon Hill, was heir to a considerable fortune, earned by his paternal grandfather in the China trade; to Unitarian orthodoxy, for his father was the pastor of Boston’s New North Church, and with the entrepreneur grandfather the beneficiary of the Parkman Professorship of Pulpit Eloquence and the Pastoral Care at the Harvard Divinity School; and to all the respectable ceremoniousness that such distinction entails. He made good use of the family money, rejected the paternal religion in favor of what he called “reverent agnosticism,” and was known to stand abruptly on ceremony when grossness intruded, as it would in post-Jacksonian America. But for all that, he discovered his soul’s true need while living from age 8 to 13 at his maternal grandfather’s farm and roaming the Middlesex Fells, which Howard Doughty describes in his biography, *Francis Parkman* (1962), as “a little enclave of sufficiently primeval wilderness within eight miles of the heart of Boston.” Reading Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, and Lord Byron made Parkman see how a life of adventure might be joined to a literary vocation. Summer vacations from Harvard found him on daring expeditions with rather refractory classmates in wild regions of northern New England where only Indians and some few white hunters had preceded them.

His studies—under the direction of Professor Jared Sparks, the first academic historian to specialize in American history, who would write biographies of the French explorers Father Jacques Marquette and Robert de La Salle—dovetailed nicely with his adventures. During his sophomore year Parkman conceived the momentous project, as he later recalled, of writing the history of “the whole course of the American conflict between France and England, or, in other words, the history of the American forest; for this was the light in which I regarded it. My theme fascinated me, and I was haunted with wilderness images day and night.” Driven himself hard to ready mind and body for this great undertaking, he broke down: heart trouble, brought on by over-exertion in the college’s new gymnasmium, he believed, though Doughty is inclined to suspect nervous collapse long coming, and destined to recur with terrible force in future years.

After he graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1844, at his father’s insistence Parkman entered Harvard Law School. He made the most of his confinement, devoting one hour each day to his formal studies and the rest to his “own notions.” These included a comprehensive reading course in the master European historians—Edward Gibbon, William Robertson, François Guizot, Leopold von Ranke—and, nearer to home, preparation for writing *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, his account of the 18th-century war waged by a coalition of Indian tribes against British settlers in the Great Lakes region. He was wearing himself thin again, however, and suffered from sleeplessness, digestive trouble, and impaired sight that sometimes made reading impossible. He got his law degree—his sister read William Blackstone to him when he could not—and immediately set to serious documentary research on Pontiac, but his health so deteriorated that another urgent respite was called for.

**Among the Indians**

This time he lit out for the territories, following the California and Oregon Trail in the company of his cousin Quincy Shaw and two formidable French-American mountain men. *The Oregon Trail* (1847), the only book of his that is much read or even known today, is not a history but a personal narrative. Manifest Destiny was the rallying cry of westward expansion, but such jingo romance is not to be seen in these pages. For him the appeal of the West was visceral; even in the Platte River valley, where nature was neither majestic nor beautiful and small lizards were the only sign of life, wildness had its allure, more moral than aesthetic: “And yet stern and wild associations gave a singular interest to the view; for here each man lives by the strength of his arm and the valor of his heart. Here society is reduced to its original elements, the whole fabric of art and conventionality is struck rudely to pieces, and men find themselves suddenly brought back to the wants and resources of their original natures.”

Parkman went west largely because he wanted to live among Indians. His companion Henry Chatillon, hunter and trapper, was married to the daughter of a Sioux chief, a connection that allowed Parkman to spend three weeks in an Indian village. So he got his wish. He found the Indians curious about “subjects within their ordinary range of thought,” but that orbit was severely limited. “They will not trouble themselves to inquire into what they
Indian spiritual beliefs did not attenuate his what was in store for him; and he watches with mystic influence. Among those mounds not a wild beast was prowling, a bird singing, or a leaf flitting, that might not tend to direct his destiny, or give warning of what was in store for him; and he watches the world of nature around him as the astrologer watches the stars. His respect for Indian spiritual beliefs did not attenuate his clear insinuation that they were primitive superstition after all.

At the same time, Indian beauty evokes the most superb forms of Greek sculpture. “With his free and noble attitude, with the bow in his hand, and the quiver at his back, he might seem, but for his face, the Pythian Apollo himself. Such a figure rose before the imagin-ation of [the painter Benjamin] West, when on first seeing the Belvidere in the Vatican, he exclaimed, ‘By God, a Mohawk!’” And the Sioux’s ferocity fascinates Parkman. “War is.exclaimed, ‘By God, a Mohawk!’” And the Sioux’s ferocity fascinates Parkman. “War is the breath of their nostrils. Against most of the neighboring tribes they cherish a deadly, rancorous hatred, transmitted from father to son, and inflamed by constant aggression and retaliation.”

But he is rightly appalled as well as fascinated. He relates a celebrated warrior’s brag-gadocio about tortures not merely savage but downright diabolical, administered to a captive Snake Indian—scraping him alive, then slicing the tendons of his wrists and feet and throwing him into a fire. “He garnished his story with a great many descriptive particulars much too revolting to mention.” The warrior gazes at Parkman with a childlike innocence as he details his malign handiwork. The Indian fondness for inflicting ungodly pain on their enemies before killing them is a recurring motif in Parkman’s writings.

Parkman clearly thought it a rare privilege to live among “one of the wildest of the wild hordes.” These men were thorough savages. Neither their manners nor their ideas were in the slightest degree modified by contact with civilization. They knew nothing of the power and real character of the white men, and their children would scream in terror at the sight of me. He strikes the elegiac note for a way of life destined to pass away, as the whites’ movement westward kills off the buffalo on which the nomadic Indians depend for sustenance. “The Indians will soon be corrupted by the example of the whites, abused by whisky, and overawed by military posts; so that within a few years the traveler may pass in tolerable security through their country. Its danger and its charm will have disappeared together.”

Although Parkman was right to foresee the extinction of the traditional life, the disappearance would take longer, and cost both conqueror and conquered more, than he anticipated. He gives a dark hint of what is eventually to take place. The fearsome Arapahoes whom Parkman’s party encounters are tamer than usual because General Stephen Kearny, at the head of the Army of the West, had recently informed them that “if they ever again touched the hair of a white man’s head they would exterminate their nation. This placed them for the time in an admirable frame of mind, and the effect of his menaces had not yet disappeared.” Such menaces would be made good in time, over and over again.

The western adventure, intended to restore Parkman to health, ravaged him instead—dysentery, eye trouble, near prostration—and
the return home worsened his condition. Parkman’s eyes were so sensitive to light that he wrote with them closed. It was not his eyes, though, but his dervish mind that frightened him most. He was to endure this host of symptoms for many years, with only occasional remissions. Psychic distress exacerbated the disease. Somehow, with a thrust of will heroically sustained, his immense seven-volume history was completed.

Father of New France

The particular heroes of France and England in the New World are figures of outstanding moral and physical bravery: Samuel de Champlain in the first volume, Pioneers of France in the New World (1865, revised 1885); Father Jean de Brébeuf and his priestly brethren in the second, The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century (1867); and René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle in the third, La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West (1869, under a different title; revised 1879 and 1893).

Champlain, explorer of the West Indies, founder of Quebec City in 1608, “the Father of New France,” was an intrepid adventurer for whom the known world was not sufficiently wondrous to hold him. Faith in the sacred civilizing mission of Catholic France was paramount—a belief that the staunch New Englander Parkman, standing in his mind for liberty against absolutism, considers chauvinist and misguided:

he gave himself with a loyal zeal and devotedness to the profoundly mistaken principles which he had espoused. In his mind, patriotism and religion were inseparably linked. France was the champion of Christianity, and her honor, her greatness, were involved in her fidelity to this high function. Should she abandon to perdition the darkened nations among whom she had cast the first faint rays of hope?

Champlain ran perhaps a greater risk than he knew by enlisting Huron and Algonquin tribes against the Iroquois, who were their traditional enemies and the most warlike and terrible of all Indians; but thereby he seized the chance to “make himself the indispensable ally and leader of the tribes of Canada, and at the same time fight his way to discovery in regions which otherwise were barred against him. From first to last, it was the policy of France in America to mingle in Indian politics, hold the balance of power between adverse tribes, and envelop in the network of her power and diplomacy the remotest hordes of the wilderness.”

In the first battle against the Iroquois, on the shores of what would be known as Lake Champlain, superior European military technology that the enemy had never encountered before won the day: Champlain fired his arquebus (forerunner to the rifle), loaded with four balls, at the Iroquois chiefs, and killed two and wounded another with one shot. Consternation ensued. “Camp, canoes, provisions, all were abandoned, and many weapons flung down in the panic flight. The victory was complete.” The victory celebration of the Indian allies sickened Champlain, as they scalped an Iroquois prisoner in preparation for burning him alive. At first the Indians refused Champlain’s entreaty to let him shoot the victim, but when he walked away in disgust, they called him back and allowed him to do the merciful thing. “The scene filled him with horror; but, a few months later, on the Place de Grève at Paris, he might have witnessed tortures equally revolting and equally vindictive, inflicted on the regicide Ravaillac by the sentence of grave and learned judges.”

Parkman is never confused in the modern liberal manner about who was civilized and who savage.

So the Europeans were hardly free from moral taint in Parkman’s eyes. In The Conspiracy of Pontiac (1851) Parkman cites the correspondence in 1763 between Sir Jeffery Amherst and Colonel Henry Bouquet in which the two Englishmen discuss the scheme of using contaminated blankets to spread smallpox among the Indians or hunting them with dogs. “[T]o exterminate this execrable race” was Sir Jeffrey’s stated intention. Parkman states with relief that there is “no direct evidence” the “shameful” biological attack was put into effect, but he notes that a few months later a smallpox outbreak “made havoc among the tribes of the Ohio.” Parkman loathes barbaric violence and perfidy wherever he sees it. But that doesn’t mean he considers the Europeans generally as barbaric as the Indians. The evidence tells him otherwise.

Missionary Zeal

The Jesuit priests were part of the French imperial vanguard, and in their missionary zeal pushed into the depths of the wilderness and the very heart of barbarism. Parkman finds much to fault in the Jesuits and in the entire Church of Rome—“now breathing charity and love, now dark with the passions of Hell; now beaming with celestial truth, now masked in hypocrisy and lies.” Yet the missionaries’ “enthusiastic exaltation” and austere purity of intention earn his respect. “That gloomy wilderness, those hordes of savages, had nothing to tempt the ambitious, the proud, the grasping, or the intolerant. Obscure toil, solitude, privation, hardship, and death were to be the missionaries’ portion.”

Before the Europeans arrived, the Indians suffered the predations of “chronic warfare,” dwelt “[i]n the midst of Nature” yet “knew nothing of her laws,” and felt the “perpetual fear” bred by animist superstition; even had the most capable of them, the Iroquois, been “left under their institutions to work out their destiny undisturbed, [they] would [never] have developed a civilization of their own.” Parkman understands civilization after the manner of a modern American democrat: Christian in sentiment if not necessarily in profession of faith. In his view, the Indians had not begun to show the buds of philosophy and science, to demonstrate the systematic use of reason to see beneath the surface of nature, and thus to assert some human mastery over it. Nor had they imagined on their own a God whose example of mercy and love sweetened human life, encouraging peaceable ways and making tender-heartedness estimable rather than contemptible. Jesuit care of Indian souls was part of the general French solicitude. “Spanish civilization crushed the Indian; English civilization scorned and neglected him; French civilization embraced and cherished him.” Parkman leaves little doubt, however, that for all the benefits of Christianity the Jesuits’ mystical transports were no less preposterous to him than the beliefs of the Indians.

When the time comes for Brébeuf actually to face death, in its most awful manifestation, there is no trace of Parkman’s deadpan irony. The priest had led the mission to the Hurons, the tribe most receptive to the Christian teaching. In 1649 the intractable Iroquois waged devastating war on the Hurons and took Brébeuf prisoner. They bound him to a stake, and when he loudly exhorted the Hurons converts also captive to think on Heaven, the torturers “scorched him from head to foot,” then “they cut away his lower lip and burned it” in their attempt to force him to renounce his Christian teaching. “That gloomy wilderness, those hordes of savages, had nothing to tempt the ambitious, the proud, the grasping, or the intolerant. Obscure toil, solitude, privation, hardship, and death were to be the missionaries’ portion.”
of red-hot hatchets, poured boiling water over his head in a parody of baptism, then "cut strips of flesh from his limbs, and devoured them before his eyes." He was of course scalped, and when he was nearly dead and still imperturbable they ripped his chest open and the crowd drew near to drink "the blood of so valiant an enemy, thinking to imbibe with it some portion of his courage. A chief then tore out his heart, and devoured it."
The sacrifice of men such as Brébeuf was not pointless suffering. In time Christian civilization had a softening effect on Indian manners:

In the wars of the next century we do not often find those examples of diabolic atrocity with which the earlier annals are crowded. The savage burned his enemies alive, it is true, but he rarely ate them; neither did he torment them with the same deliberation and persistency. He was a savage still, but not so often a devil. The improvement was not great, but it was distinct; and it seems to have taken place wherever Indian tribes were in close relations with any respectable community of white men.

Daring and Freedom

La salle extended the French imperial reach into the Mississippi Valley in the 1670s. "Neither the English nor the Jesuits should conquer that rich domain: the one must rest content with the country east of the Alleghanies, and the other with the forests, savages, and beaver-skins of the northern lakes. It was for him to call into light the latent riches of the great West." The arduousness of La Salle’s expeditions, the indomitable will that overcame misfortune heaped on disaster piled on calamity, roused Parkman to magniloquence; his prose turns as purple as fatal apoplexy, and one is grateful that 19th-century taste allowed such excesses, for they are appropriate to the man and the occasion: "He was a tower of adamant, against whose impregnable front hardship and danger, the rage of man and of the elements, the southern sun, the northern blast, fatigue, famine, and disease, delay, disappointment, and deferred hope emptied their quivers in vain." Yet in the end La Salle dared too much, proposing to gather an immense force of Indians to invade Mexico: "a wild project of leading fifteen thousand savages for an unknown distance, through an unknown country to attack an unknown enemy,—was something more than Quixotic daring.... It is difficult not to see in all this the chimera of an overwrought brain, no longer able to distinguish between the possible and the impossible." Catastrophe was in the cards, and La Salle was shot and killed by one of his own men, as his party, reduced to a handful, floundered in malarial swamps.

It was for dominion of the great West that France and England, and New France and New England, fought a world-altering North American war nearly a century after La Salle’s explorations. In Montcalm and Wolfe (1884), the concluding volume of the history, which treats the Seven Years’ War of 1756-63 (known in America as the French and Indian War, though Parkman never calls it that), westward expansion is seen as crucial to the English colonies’ securing increased independence from the mother country, and becomes the impetus for war on French Canada. "Their first necessity was to rid themselves of the French, who, by shutting them between the Alleghanies and the sea, would cramp them into perpetual littleness. With France on their backs, growing while they had no room to grow, they must remain in helpless wardship, dependent on England, whose aid they would always need; but with the West open before them, their future was their own."

The American future looked more promising than the Canadian because in the one the experience of freedom encouraged energies in ordinary people that centralized paternalistic absolutism in the other killed in the cradle. In his fourth volume, The Old Régime in Canada (1874; revised 1893), Parkman explains why the English colonial power flourished while the French withered:

Perpetual intervention of government,—regulations, restrictions, encouragements sometimes more mischievous than restrictions, a constant uncertainty what the authorities would do next, the fate of each man resting less with himself than with another, volition enfeebled, self-reliance paralyzed,—the condition, in short, of a child held always under the rule of a father, in the main well-meaning and kind, sometimes generous, sometimes neglectful, often capricious, and rarely very wise,—such were the influences under which Canada grew up. If she had prospered, it would have been sheer miracle. A man, to be a man, must feel that he holds his fate, in some good measure, in his own hands.

Had the Canadians been given freedom they would not have known what to do with it. "Freedom is for those who are fit for it; the rest will lose it, or turn it to corruption. Church and State were right in exercising authority over a people which had not learned the first rudiments of self-government." The success of the English colonies and the failure of the French had their origins in deep-rooted political traditions that respectively enhanced and inhibited intellectual and moral independence. "The cause lies chiefly in the vast advantage drawn by England from the historical training of her people in habits of reflection, forecast, industry, and self-reliance,—a training which enabled them to adopt and maintain an invigorating system of self-rule, totally inapplicable to their rivals."

Great men are prominent in Parkman’s account, but as the history approaches the epoch of the American Founding, the life of the common people increases in significance. How the actions of political and military leaders affect the condition of ordinary men and women becomes his primary concern. The best thing that happened to Canadians, he declares, was James Wolfe’s victory over the Marquis of Montcalm on Quebec’s Plains of Abraham.

This English conquest was the grand crisis of Canadian history. It was the beginning of a new life.... England imposed by the sword on reluctant Canada the boon of rational and ordered liberty.... A happier calamity never befell a people than the conquest of Canada by the British arms.

Many modern French Canadians fail to partake of such happiness, however. Even so, one awaits the day when Native Americans will be willing to say that the happiest calamity to befall their peoples was their conquest by the arms of the white man. It is likely to be a long wait. In the meantime, one can educate oneself in the mostly forgotten, or misremembered, history of that world-shaking collision by reading Francis Parkman.

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The Biblical text is on the upper right, the ancient Aramaic gloss to its left; Rashi’s commentary is under these. The English language portion is Joseph Soloveitchik’s commentary.
Judaism and Christianity are two religions separated by a common Scripture. Both observant Jews and believing Christians agree on the divine provenance of the Tanakh—the acronym for the Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings. For Christians, the Hebrew Bible foreshadows the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth; for Jews, it recounts the Election of Abraham and his family, the redemption from Egypt, the foundation and loss of the Jewish kingdom, and the constancy of God’s promise to his people.

Observant Jews hear the entire Pentateuch read aloud in an annual cycle, in order to recreate the giving of the Torah at Sinai. It is a commonplace that Judaism places more attention on this world and Christianity on the next, but that requires qualification. The Jewish engagement with Scripture aims at an existential fusion of past and future into a present. This fusion brings the past to life and “plants eternal life among us,” according to the concluding blessing of each section of the weekly Torah reading.

Chumash Mesoras HaRav: The Pentateuch Annotated with the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik is the first Orthodox Jewish presentation of the Pentateuch likely to interest a broad audience. Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik (1903–1993) is a unique figure in the religious world. He’s the only traditional Jewish thinker to have gained a substantial following among Christian readers, initially through the essay “The Lonely Man of Faith” (1965), his only work composed for a Christian audience. Soloveitchik speaks vividly to today’s believers, who find themselves surrounded by a world “technically minded, self-centered, and self-loving, almost in a sickly narcissistic fashion…seeing in the here-and-now sensible world the only manifestation of being.”

Soloveitchik was the undisputed 20th-century leader of the wing of observant Judaism that embraces secular knowledge. What today we call Modern Orthodoxy would be unimaginable without him. In the observant world Soloveitchik is known simply as “the Rav”—the rabbinic authority. The scion of one of eastern Europe’s great rabbinic dynasties, Soloveitchik taught the advanced Talmud seminar at Yeshiva University for more than four decades and ordained more than 2,000 rabbis. Hundreds of scholarly articles and books expound his teaching, and a dedicated group of his students has translated and published more than a dozen volumes of his writings.

Rabbi Soloveitchik completed a doctorate in philosophy of science at the Friedrich Wilhelm University (now Humboldt University of Berlin) in 1930 before immigrating to the United States. He could employ the language of Western philosophy as fluently as the idiom of traditional Jewish sources, often citing the existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard in his own religious teaching. He also had profound insights into the foundational issues of mathematics and physics.

Both Christian and Jewish readers will find Soloveitchik’s Pentateuch commentary accessible. This compilation of thousands of comments on the Five Books of Moses was curated from published writings, transcribed lectures, and classroom notes. Arnold Lustiger, a yeshiva-trained scientist who edited several volumes of Soloveitchik’s transcribed lectures as a labor of love, released the Genesis volume in 2013, Deuteronomy appeared in July 2018. Some of the material repeats traditional interpretations, but many annotations contain challenging, even disturbing insights that compel the reader to engage the deep implications of the human confrontation with the divine.

Two leading themes recur throughout the commentary: God’s summoning of “majestic” man to partnership in creation, and God’s consoling of “covenantal” man in his humility and distress. These ideas are well grounded in Scripture and classic Jewish sources. Soloveitchik adds a new dimension—an original phenomenology of religious consciousness.

Soloveitchik observes, for example, that the first commandment God gave the people of Israel as they prepared to leave Egypt “was to mark time” (Exodus 12:12):

“The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron in the Land of Egypt, saying, ‘this month shall be to you the head of the months, to you I shall be the first of the months of the year.’” Freedom arises from the creation of time: “The slave lacks time experience. To the slave, time is a curse; he waits for the day to pass. The slave’s time is the property of his master…. Life, to the slave personality, is motionless. To live in time means to be committed to a great past and to an unborn future. Time-awareness also contains a moral element: responsibility for emerging events and intervention in the historical process. Man, according to Judaism, should try to mold and fashion the future. That is exactly why he has been created as a free agent.

Time-awareness, the rav explains, has three components: First, retrospection; without memory there is no time. Second, the exploration or close examination of things yet unborn and the anticipatory experience of events not yet in being. Third: appreciation or evaluation of the present moment as one’s most precious possession.” Christian readers will note the similarity of Soloveitchik’s presentation of time to Augustine’s in Confessions, Books XI-XIV, but there is an important difference. Augustine believes the past is gone, the present is insubstantial, and the future has not arrived. “What, then, is time? If no one ask of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not.” Time, for Augustine, is a paradox. In contrast, for Soloveitchik, man is himself a creator of time by virtue of being God’s partner in creation. Memory is not simply the imprint of past events, but a willful act of reconstruction. The commanded act of making a calendar that commemorates the Passover in perpetuity begins this act of reconstruction. The future is not a point on an infinite horizon, but the self-created destiny of God’s people in its journey to redemption. This idea is implicit in the Biblical account of Creation. Soloveitchik comments:

The Midrash [commentary] states…He created worlds and destroyed them…. At first glance this Midrash seems almost absurd. When man builds something, he may be dissatisfied with his
initial design, destroy it and start over. Why would omniscient God need to engage in such experimentation, building worlds and then destroying them? This Midrash speaks to the imperative...and you shall walk in His ways” (Deuteronomy 28:10). Just as God builds and destroys, so must we.

About Genesis 2:2, “And God completed on the seventh day His work that he did,” Soloveitchik writes:

“And God completed” means that God finished His work, though the world remained incomplete. When God created the earth from [formless matter], He did not replace the chaos entirely. Some of this primordial entropy was allowed to remain, so that man, through his own effort, could strive to eliminate it. Man was given the great assignment of completing creation.

Some scholars see the Rav as a modernizer who injected 20th-century perspectives into traditional interpretations. I do not agree with this; the assertion that man is God’s partner in creation, and that this partnership begins with the creation of time, dates to the composition of the Talmud in the first centuries of the Common Era. Man’s first act of sanctification of time is to observe the Sabbath (literally “cessation”), and the act of dividing the six profane days of the week from the seventh is understood to be a God-like act of creation: “A person who recites [the Sabbath evening blessing] Vayehi [the text of Genesis 2:1-3] on eve of Shabbat is considered as if he were a partner with God in the work of creation.”

The re-creation of time also manifests itself in the traditional layout of the Pentateuch for synagogue use, which this edition follows. The material is organized by weekly portion, to be declaimed aloud in a yearly cycle. To the left of the Hebrew text appears a 1st-century A.D. Aramaic gloss; below the Hebrew and Aramaic texts is the classic 12th-century commentary of the Provence sage Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki). Two and a half millennia separate the original biblical text, the Aramaic gloss, and Rashi’s interpretation. Their juxtaposition embodies the colloquy across nearly a hundred generations through which the present enlivens the past.

Soloveitchik explains in a comment on Exodus 19:13: “The purpose of reading the Torah aloud in the synagogue is not solely to teach the congregation, but also to arrange an encounter with God, as experienced by our ancestors at Mount Sinai. Every act of reading from the Torah is a new giving of the Torah, a revival of the wondrous stand at the foot of the flaming mountain. The reading of the Torah is a ‘staging’ of the giving of the Torah and a renewal of the awesome, sublime experience.” He quotes a maxim in the Talmud: “Just as at [Mount] Horeb there was dread and awe, trembling and fear, so too here [with respect to the study of Torah] it must be done with dread and awe, trembling and fear.” Man strives to become God’s partner in creation, but does so in profound awareness of his mortality and the fragility of his existence.

If Jewish time-consciousness begins at the Exodus, what determined the timing of humanity’s rendezvous with the one Creator God? Man, not God, set the time: “God was ready to bring about the redemption,” Soloveitchik comments on Exodus 3:1, “[but] Moses however was not yet ready for his mission, so God waited. That God functions primarily through man is a basic Jewish concept. Redemption is always achieved through an agent.” As the ancient rabbis argued, God chose Abraham because Abraham had already discovered God’s existence in contemplating nature.

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Egyptian overseer who beat a Hebrew slave, was a triumph; but entry into the Promised Land was in some ways tragic. Moses, writes Soloveitchik, should have led the people into the Promised Land; had he done so, he would have been the Messiah, and the subsequent tragedy of Jewish history would have been averted. But the people of Israel weren't ready for redemption. Their failure to join Moses in his plea to enter the land betrayed their inadequacy. They preferred Aaron, the peacemaker who acquiesced in their desire to make a golden calf, to Moses, their admonisher. Soloveitchik infers this from the Biblical report that Aaron was mourned for a longer time than Moses. God forbade Moses entry into the land as punishment for striking rather than speaking to a water-giving rock. He comments (on Deuteronomy 3:22):

When he was told that he would not enter Eretz Yisrael, Moses pleaded for forgiveness. Had the people joined him in prayer, the Holy One would have been forced to respond. But they did not join. Thus, we read that with tears in his eyes Moses tells them, "Va'eschanan," I prayed alone. It was not vanischan, we prayed…. But God became angry and did not listen to me, "lema'enchem," because of you.”

Soloveitchik’s interpretation is bold and original: because Israel failed to unite in opposition to God’s decree against Moses, it failed to achieve its final redemption. Man is God’s partner in the completion of Creation, and entitled to contest the judgments of the senior partner in the covenant. This interpretation is consistent with Scripture: Abraham argued with God about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Moses changed God’s decision to destroy the Jewish people after the golden calf incident. But it assigns a striking degree of weight to the human element in the divine-human partnership.

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The concept of a slow historical process that was popular among the peoples who lived under the influence of Greek philosophy, the endless morphological evolution from matter into form, from a lower to a higher eidetic stage, carries weight and significance so far as time is lived through quantitatively. Then the forces of history move with an extremely slow pace; years, decades, and centuries are nothing but drops in the sea of eternity. The Jews have inherited from Abraham the alternative to minyan hashanim [quantitative years]. The prophecy of the “generations” challenges man, not to live in time, but to mold it, to give to the indifferent chronos new aspects and new interpretations. Time is computed according to man’s own creativity and self-determination. A qualitative time experience enables a nation to span a distance of hundreds and thousands of years in but a few moments.

Man as object is subject to fate, Soloveitchik writes; man as actor creates his own destiny:

In the life of a people (as in the life of an individual) destiny signifies an existence that it has chosen of its own free will and in which it funds the full realization of its historical existence. Instead of a passive, inexorable existence into which a nation is thrust, an Existence of Destiny manifests itself as an active experience full of purposeful movement, ascension, aspirations and fulfillment. The nation is enmeshed in its destiny because of its longing for an enhanced state of being, an existence replete with substance and direction. Destiny is the font out of which flow the unique self-elevation of the nation and the unending stream of Divine inspiration that will not run dry so long as the life of the people is demarcated by the laws of God.

It is instructive to contrast Soloveitchik’s characterization of the transformative moment with that of Kierkegaard, whom Soloveitchik cites often and for the most part sympathetically. In his disquisition on the decisive moment, Kierkegaard compares the Savior to the teacher in Plato’s dialogue Meno who awakens a memory of a truth that lay dormant in the mind of the pupil. This Savior appears “in the fullness of time,” but he does not appear as a result of any action on the part of his pupil. On the contrary, the pupil is incapable of initiating his own salvation, because he is paralyzed by the Meno paradox: one does not seek the truth if one already knows it, and can-

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not seek the truth if one does not know it, because one doesn’t know what to seek. The Savior intervenes by an ineffable act of grace, but there is no way to explain why the “fullness of time” comes about at one point in time rather than another. For Plato as well as Kierkegaard, the pupil is incapable of activity until the teacher initiates the process of recall. Time thus remains a logical conundrum for Kierkegaard, and his discussion of the significance of the moment in the Philosophical Fragments remains incomplete and somewhat confusing.

This creative capacity of man to achieve partnership with God makes him dangerous, Soloveitchik warns:

This concept of the obligatory nature of the creative gesture, of self-creation as an ethical norm, an exalted value, which Judaism introduced into the world, reverberates with particular strength in the world views of Kierkegaard, Ibsen, Scheler, and Heidegger. These ideas, which were pure and holy at their inception, were profaned and corrupted in modern culture. The will was transformed by Schopenhauer into a “blind” will, while for Nietzsche it was embodied in the “superman.” Similarly, the longing for creation was perverted into the desire for brutal and murderous domination. Such views have brought chaos and disaster to our world, which is drowning in its blood.

Our creative impulse must be anchored to God’s will. Jewish tradition depicts a tension between what Soloveitchik calls “majestic man”—the nature-transforming creator—and “covenantal man”—the humble member of the Lord’s congregation who approaches the divine in fear and awe. He quotes a famous homily attributed to Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Korzk (1787–1859), which states that everyone should carry in their pocket two pieces of paper. One should state, “I am dust and ashes”; the other, “The world was made for me.” Wisdom, Mendel added, is knowing when to take which one out.

Fear is fundamental to the Jewish religious experience; Soloveitchik, following Moses Maimonides, insists fear and love of God are inseparably intertwined:

Maimonides refused to accept the view that severs fear from love. For him, the higher kind of fear is both inseparable from the love of God and dialectically related to it. “And what is the way to the love of Him and fear of Him? When a person contemplates his great and wondrous works and creatures and discerns from them his wisdom, which is without measure and without end, he will straightway love him…. And when he considers these very same matters he will straightway recoil and he will be afraid and fearful and will know that he is an insignificant creature, lowly and turbid, standing with slight and slender knowledge before Him who is perfect in knowledge.”

Some of the most affecting parts of Soloveitchik’s commentary address the fears and limitations of mortals in the face of the Divine. He illuminates some of the most ancient and forbidding portions of the biblical text, for example the sacrificial service, showing their purpose in the context of the human condition. A striking example is the ancient service of the Day of Atonement. Self-transformation through repentance (teshuvah—literally, “return”) is a central concern of the Hebrew Bible, both for Israel as a nation and for each individual Jew. The original divine service for the forgiveness of Israel’s sins (depicted in Leviticus 16) requires the high priest Aaron to cast lots over two goats, one to be driven into the wilderness (the scapegoat) and the other to be sacrificed at the tabernacle in the desert. Soloveitchik explains the purpose of these obscure actions in terms of man’s existential predicament:

There is a profound idea behind the casting of lots in this ritual of atonement. The penitent argues that his moral directions were influenced by forces beyond his control, that his sinning was not entirely a free and voluntary choice. The Almighty can evaluate the extent of human culpability in situations that are not entirely man’s making. Only God knows to what extent a man was a free agent in making his decisions. The casting of lots is thus a psychodramatic representation of the penitent’s state of mind. The compelling intrusion of the unknown and irrational is basic to man’s existential condition, and his weakness in the face of such intrusion qualifies him to reserve God’s compassionate forgiveness on Yom Kippur. Only by entering such a plea can man be declared not guilty.

Man has free will, but never knows to what extent his will is free. The penitent cannot know the full extent of his guilt. He cannot escape “the unknown and irrational” because his powers are limited. He is declared not guilty when he accepts that ultimate knowledge and power reside in God. God not only summons man to partnership, he consoles him in his lowliness.

Soloveitchik’s commentary will change the way that many Jews read the Bible, and many Christians as well. His frequently inspiring reading sheds light on ancient texts in a unique and powerful way. The appearance of this Pentateuch is a milestone in the literature of religion, and a window into both the ancient world and Jewish observance that will be of value to a broad audience.

Book Review by James V. Schall, S.J.

Ye Shall Be as Gods
Encounter Books, 163 pages, $23.99

MONSIGNOR ROBERT SOKOLOWSKI, AT the Catholic University of America, has long maintained that the ‘religion of humanity,’ as described by John Stuart Mill in his Three Essays on Religion (1850-70), has replaced Christianity in the West as the key explanation of reality. In The Idol of Our Age, Daniel Mahoney brings this theme up to date.

To illustrate his point, Mahoney, who teaches politics at Assumption College, draws on an impressive roster of thinkers, including Orestes Brownson, Aurel Kolnai, Jürgen Habermas, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Pierre Manent, Alain Besançon, Raymond Aron, and Eric Voegelin. The particular version of the religion of humanity that he examines comes from Auguste Comte, the early 19th-century philosopher and sociologist who tried to develop a new moral force for secular societies that could provide the cohesive bond Christianity once had. For Mahoney, “Comte takes the place of Christ, just as ‘the love of Humanity,’ the jealous Grand-Étre, takes the place of ‘love of God.’” In this sense, Comte has divinized his own existence, making himself the herald of a new Humanity worshipping itself.” Man’s ‘self-deification’ by man is the antithesis of man’s final destiny in his encyclical Spe Salvi and in his earlier book Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life (1977).

What are the dimensions of this religion of humanity? First, it is based on the view that the nation-state is either obsolete or hinders man from achieving himself. Second, evil is not abiding but is subject to human or technological elimination. Third, man’s goal is to keep his species, if not every individual, alive and flourishing in this world for as long as possible.

TO SHOW HOW CHRISTIANITY HAS, IN turn, been influenced by humanism, Mahoney focuses on the intellectual incoherence of the Catholic Church during the reign of Pope Francis. “We have a pope,” he writes, “who is half-humanitarian and thoroughly blind to the multiple ways in which humanitarian secularized religion subverts authentic Christianity.” Particularly in the areas of ecology, economics, and social order, Francis invariably sides with modern political leftists. When it comes to abortion—in many ways the real touchstone of modernity—the pope has remained orthodox, though he has downplayed its relative importance, making it seem equal to other social issues. But once Catholicism sounds pretty much like other modern ideologies, what good is it, frankly? Mahoney notes that Francis favors global ideas and institutions—the United Nations is his preferred arena of action—while disregarding constitutional means to limit state power. “Instead of self-satisfied humanitarian affirmations,” Mahoney writes, “[w]e must make more of an effort to see virtue in all its amplitude, in the person of the hero and the statesman as well as the saint. In the modern world, heroes and saints stand or fall together.”

A political realist, Mahoney applauds Christianity for not rejecting the validity of nation-states even when they persecuted Christians.

He warns that “the idea [that] political authority has no natural or divine authority other than human agreement, can place no limits on the arbitrary will of the few or the many.” Arbitrary will is tyrannical. It stands behind not only the legal thinking of Islam, but modern positivist and historicist thought throughout the West.

Today, war or violence is often presented as an unmitigated evil that should be eliminated. Mahoney sees the dire consequences of such a view. “[Russian philosopher Vladimir] Soloviov was not a pacifist. He believed that war was a necessary instrument for the exercise of charity and the protection of the common good.” Similarly, “Solzhenitsyn [was] so hard on the pacifistic distortion of Christianity” because he knew “evil is real, rooted in fallen human nature, and must be resisted if the things of the soul are to be preserved.”

If war is “an instrument, not of inhumanity, but of the common good,” Mahoney concludes, evil cannot be eliminated by technical, political, religious, or economic means. “Christianity has nothing to do with unlimited faith in progress, or a false and naïve confidence in moral optimism.”

To try to understand modern political thought as if it had no antecedents in Christian theology is to render it unintelligible. Readers of René Descartes’s “Cogito, ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am) are often surprised when they come across Augustine’s “Fal-lor, ergo sum” (I err, therefore I am). If man’s very being depends on his will alone, however, there’s no reason why we ought to remain what we are. This belief that man can make a better man than the one God created is what prevents us from appreciating what we are.

WHAT IS PERHAPS MOST STRIKING about The Idol of Our Age is that when it comes to explaining and defending what it is to be Christian today, Mahoney instinctively turns not to the current pontiff but to Benedict XVI and John Paul II. Pope Francis has spent a good deal of time dissociating himself from his two most recent predecessors, not to mention the Church’s long intellectual tradition. By doing so, he has uncritically accepted, in Mahoney’s view, many of humanism’s aberrant tenets.

“Christianity itself does not eschew philosophical inquiry or in any way endorse irrationality,” Mahoney summarizes. “Like his predecessor Pope John Paul II, Benedict believes that there is something ‘providential’ in the encounter between Greek philosophy and biblical religion. Christianity is nothing if it is merely a ‘humanitarian moral message,’ an invitation to this-worldly amelioration or revolutionary transformation.” Under Francis, in Daniel Mahoney’s view, Christianity has failed to distinguish itself fully from “the idol of our age.”

James V. Schall, S.J., taught political science at Georgetown University, and is the author of over 30 books, including, most recently, of The Universe We Think In (Catholic University of America Press).
Is the Pope Catholic?

E ven when, as at present, the Catholic Church exercises very little direct political or social power, its continued witness to the world after two millennia retains a compelling grandeur. Empires rise and fall, revolutions come and go, but the Church—miraculously—endures, despite great internal troubles, a great pre-modern bulwark in the modern day against shallow rationalism and moral relativism. And so when the Catholic Church seems to have become unsure, or divided, about its own meaning—as it has been since Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis in March 2013—the world notices.

In one of the early, defining moments of his papacy, Francis told the 3 million young people assembled in Rio de Janeiro for World Youth Day 2013, “hagan lío,” a phrase from his native Argentina that means “raise a ruckus” or, more literally, “make a mess.” He presumably wanted them to bring fresh energy into the daily life of the Church and the world. The prudence of asking young people to do what they are already inclined to do anyway—knowing little, as they do, of the Church or the world—is debatable. But there’s no question that in his various efforts to stir things up, Pope Francis has in many ways, figuratively and literally, made a mess of the stewardship entrusted to him. Several recent books help us to understand that mess and its broadening repercussions.

Enigmatic Figure

The British journalist Austen Ivereigh published the earliest and, despite the flood of books since, still the most important biography in English of the new pope, The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope (2014). Francis is the first pope from Latin America, and Ivereigh has an advantage over other commenters because he wrote his doctoral thesis at Oxford on Argentine history, a notoriously treacherous subject, which was later published as Catholicism and Politics in Argentina, 1810–1960 (1995). He also worked for the late Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor, archbishop of Westminster and one of several bishops who, as Ivereigh himself admits in the book, collaborated to elevate Bergoglio to the papacy, unsuccessfully in 2005 when John Paul II died and then in 2013 when Benedict XVI stepped down. Ivereigh did serious research on Bergoglio for his book and conducted numerous interviews with people who knew the future pope in his earlier life. All this enabled the author to situate a basically unknown figure at the time of his election within the various social, political, and religious currents of his native environment.

The great disadvantage of Ivereigh’s work, however, is already clear from the title. It would be wrong to say that the book is pure hagiography; it admits Bergoglio made mistakes. But even the most admiring biographer cannot make much of a case that the future pope was highly successful—as a reformer or anything else—in Argentina. Francis is the first Jesuit pope. When he became the provincial superior of the Jesuits in Argentina during the 1970s, he was so divisive a leader that his tenure ended after only six years. He then held various positions and pursued studies intermittently, in and out of Argentina, but remained so controversial that
in 1992 he was asked not to reside in Jesuit houses any longer.

Through friendship with Cardinal Antonio Quarracino of Buenos Aires, he was recalled from a kind of internal exile, made an auxiliary bishop in the capital, and later succeeded his patron as archbishop. There certainly wasn’t much evidence of his carrying out reform, great or otherwise. Vocations were few and Church initiatives modest, though he did start sending more priests into poor areas to minister to the marginalized. When the Vatican was considering making Bergoglio a cardinal in 2001, then Jesuit Superior General Peter Hans Kolvenbach wrote a letter to John Paul II advising against it because of the controversies Bergoglio had provoked over many years and, it is said, because of psychological instability. (The letter, it is also said, has disappeared from the archives.) The basic facts here are not in dispute. Francis has admitted that he saw a psychiatrist during a troubled period in his life, and he did not really repair his relationship with his religious order—which remained broken for 37 years—until he became pope.

What Bergoglio became famous for—and Ivereigh does a good job in highlighting, while remaining silent about the lack of achievements—was his presentation of himself as a man who lived simply and, quite conspicuously, did not embrace the usual perquisites of a prince of the Catholic Church. People all over the world have learned of how he took the subway and not a limousine (often not even a car) to meetings, lived in a modest corner of the episcopal palace in Buenos Aires, and gave personal attention to ordinary people he encountered. He is the first successor of Saint Peter to take the name “Francis”—after il poverello, the little poor man, as Francis of Assisi is affectionately known in Italy. Although amplified to mythic proportions by an enthralled media, the new pope’s emphasis on simplicity and humility is genuine, as is his warm affection when interacting with the homeless, disfigured, or otherwise marginalized, and both traits go a long way toward explaining the enthusiasm that greeted the first days of his pontificate.

Whatever his track record in Argentina, Francis was elected to be a reformer, yet in the six years since he became pope, the rot in the Church has only become worse. Vatican finances, despite promises and early steps to make them more transparent, are still a murky—sometimes criminal—mess. The Roman curia (the Vatican offices charged with running a church of 1.2 billion people all over the globe) tell any visitor willing to listen these days that they are confused about their mission. The pope has shown himself quite willing to blur several Catholic teachings in order to meet halfway some of the worst developments in modern culture—a popular move with liberals and non-Catholics, but a betrayal for serious Catholics. And in several countries as well as the Vatican itself, the Church has been engulfed (again) by a lurid scandal of largely homosexual predation and cover-up, which—judging from the unhurried bureaucratic responses ranging from clumsy P.R. spin to stony silence—shows little sign of being seriously dealt with in Rome. This latest disgrace has damaged Catholicism’s moral credibility, him to form factions for or against him. He came of age while Juan Perón dominated Argentine politics, and later, after the military coup in 1976, had to try to protect his people while the generals who had taken control of the government conducted their guerra sucia or “dirty war,” sending death squads to silence political dissenters. Bergoglio learned to speak ambivalently in public. Like Perón, he boldly tells different groups what they want to hear, even if he often contradicts himself.

This characteristic lack of precision and consistency can be found, for example, in Francis’s recent rewording of The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which now makes it appear as though sacred Scripture and the entire history of Christianity can be waived aside when it comes to the permissibility of capital punishment. For many people inside and outside the Catholic Church this has raised the question: are other moral teachings also now up for grabs, or just the ones liberals don’t like?

Perhaps nowhere is his studied ambiguity more evident than in the notorious 2016 apostolic exhortation, Amoris Laetitia (“The Joy of Love”), which among its 261 pages (it is the longest single document ever produced by a pope) buries in a footnote deliberately vague language in order to give the impression that adultery no longer bars one from receiving Holy Communion. Bishops, priests, and laypeople throughout the Church issued open letters, begging the pope to bring much needed clarity to the matter, without success. In politics a certain amount of studied ambiguity can be a useful tool. But in religion—especially when it comes to some of the most burning current issues—ambiguity can look like confusion, or even surrender.

Books discussed in this essay:


High-Handed Manipulator?

The most critical assessment of Pope Francis, and in some ways the most insightful (though perhaps not entirely accurate) is The Dictator Pope: The Inside Story of the Francis Papacy by Marcantonio Colonna. The author’s name is a grand Renaissance pseudonym; the original Marcantonio Colonna served as one of the victorious admirals at the 1571 naval battle of Lepanto against the Ottoman Turks, a turning point in repelling the Muslim threat to Christian Europe. Before the book was revised for print, after first appearing in an online version, the author was revealed to be Henry Sire, an Oxford-trained historian who had been living for years in Rome. Sire makes a damning case that—notwithstanding Francis’s public image as a humble and holy man—the pope is a kind of peronista,
high-handed in his methods and cunning in employing the kind of populist manipulation he learned by watching Juan Perón. Francis himself has admitted that as a young Jesuit superior he was overly authoritarian, and the three synods he has called in the past four years, which are meant to be episcopal assemblies for assisting and advising the pope, certainly had the appearance of having been stage-managed to predetermined outcomes.

Francis also indulges a fiery Latin temper in private—and, often enough, in public. His many colorful insults (“fomentor of coprophagia,” “museum mummy,” “creed-reciting, parrot Christian,” “sourpuss,” etc.)—so many, in fact, that a “Pope Francis Little Book of Insults” has been compiled online—are amusing in a way, if you aren’t Catholic or don’t think they ill befit the vicar of Christ. But they also contradict the much celebrated softer, gentler side of the pope: he frequently preaches that to insult a person violates his or her dignity. The authoritarian characteristics get little notice, however, by media who think they’ve found an ally.

A good portion of Sire’s animus stems from Francis’s rough handling of the Knights of Malta in 2016, an episode he sees as emblematic of much of the Vatican’s activities under this pope. It had been discovered that a high official of the Order, Baron Albrecht von Boeselager, had allowed contraceptives to be distributed by one of its charitable agencies, a violation of Catholic moral teaching. He was swiftly removed from his position.

In the power struggle that ensued, Francis ignored the Order’s sovereign independence and roughly took personal control, reinstating von Boeselager and improperly requiring the Grand Master of the Order to step down.

The pope even injected his personal representative into the mix, sidelining Cardinal Raymond Burke, the Order’s officially designated “patron” (who already under Francis had been removed as the head of the Vatican’s highest court and shifted to this largely ceremonial position). After The Dictator Pope was published, Sire himself was first suspended and eventually expelled from the Order.

The episode with the Order of Malta is consistent with several trends within the Francis papacy, from his appointment of dubious prelates around the world to his inner circle (three of whom resigned under a cloud of scandal at the end of 2018), to his restructuring of the former John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, appointing officials at best indifferent, if not openly hostile, to what the Church teaches on conjugal love. At the same time, Francis has been seeking to decentralize decision-making from Rome to the various regional episcopal conferences within the Church (not to mention the accord he signed with Communist China that gives the government a role in the appointment of bishops).

Leftist Politics

Sire’s observations largely agree with George Neumayr’s relentlessly ideological reading in The Political Pope: How Pope Francis is Delighting the Liberal Left and Abandoning Conservatives (2017). A contributing editor (and former executive editor) of the American Spectator, Neumayr views Pope Francis mainly as a Marxist, which is not entirely mistaken but too systematic for such a freewheeling figure. We know that in Argentina Bergoglio opposed Jesuits who had embraced Marxist forms of liberation theology, alienating that wing of the Order. He believed God’s people wanted justice and relief from poverty and oppression, not class struggle. At the same time, he absorbed some of the Marxist tropes common for decades in Latin America—and often a proxy for anti-Americanism.

It’s important to realize the unique history of Argentina, even within Latin America, as a powerful influence on the pope. The Peruvian novelist and Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa is said to have written:

There are countries that are rich and countries that are poor.

And there are poor countries that are growing rich.

And then there is Argentina.

There is almost no parallel to such a country, which once had one of the world’s largest economies, becoming—by mismanagement and corruption—an ongoing story of decline. At present, Argentina is going through another round of runaway inflation, after several years when its GDP actually shrank. It’s no surprise that other Latin Americans often speak of Argentineans as both arrogant and resentful.

From the very beginning, Francis spoke about globalized capitalism as an “economy that kills”—not noticing that it has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty. With his first full encyclical, Laudato Si’ (subtitled “On care for our common home”), he made extreme, unrealistic environmentalism a kind of touchstone of his papacy. And he has pushed immigration—essentially open borders—in ways that, combined with his insistence that Islam is a religion of peace, have cost him respect in Europe. And not only in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, and countries that are poor. And there are rich countries that are growing rich.

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and Brexit Britain, but even in Italy, where 50% youth unemployment has made utopian schemes for resettling large numbers of mostly poor Middle Eastern and African immigrants deeply unpopular. Francis’s positions are unfailing couched in terms of “mercy”—a slippery word often invoked in this pontificate that has taken on ideological as well as traditional meanings.

Perhaps the most egregious example of this kind of politics was the 2016 conference celebrating the 25th anniversary of John Paul II's encyclical Centesimus Annus. Modern Catholic social teaching dates from 1891, when Leo XIII wrote Rerum Novarum, the first attempt by a pope to respond to the Industrial Revolution and modern societies' changed economic conditions. Leo rejected socialism as incompatible with human nature and good social order, but accepted modern capitalism and industry insofar as they acted responsibly and in harmony with moral principles. Instead of the revolution-class struggle, he called for cooperation between business owners and workers, even allowing a proper role for labor unions—long thought in Europe to be socialist tools—partly inspired by American models.

Centesimus Annus (“The Hundredth Year”) celebrated the anniversary of Leo’s great encyclical, but also the anni mirabilis, the miracle year 1991, when Communism in the Soviet Union and its satellites finally fell. You might have expected that the Vatican would invite figures central to that struggle like Lech Walesa to its conference—Catholics who had fought for the rights of workers and all citizens under Communist oppression. Instead, the main speakers included Bolivia’s Evo Morales and Ecuador’s Rafael Correa, both essentially Latin-flavored Communists; Jeffrey D. Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia and a United Nations stalwart; and, in an American election year, socialist presidential candidate Bernie Sanders.

The Vatican under Francis has a very poor working knowledge of the United States, and, given Hillary Clinton’s campaign $100,000 given to the movement to normalize relations with Cuba and anyone looking for a blueprint on how a pope might be used to construct a radically different Catholic Church could do worse than political Catholicism could do worse than to start with him. He deplores the way the Church allegedly became part of the “culture war” in America under John Paul II and Bene-

Partisan Spirit

A great enthusiasm drives John Gehring’s The Francis Effect: A Radical Pope’s Challenge to the American Catholic Church (2015), which focuses on what he regards as a strong spirit of renewal that the pontiff has injected into the Church and society in general. He quotes a Boston pastor: ‘I’m telling you, brother, if you focus on the numbers, you’re missing the story... There’s an energy, a feeling, a spirit here. It’s like a healing balm.’ The emphasis here has to be on the spirit of renewal because the expected bump in the number of people participating in Church, the sacraments, and religious activities of all kinds has not happened: in fact, the numbers continue to worsen. Part of the ‘Francis effect’ is to have exacerbated existing divisions and tensions within the Church, sometimes producing strong opposition to the Holy Father among Catholics themselves. Attendance at the pope’s Wednesday audiences in Saint Peter’s Square and visitors to the Vatican more generally are at record lows compared to his two predecessors.

Perhaps it’s worth noting that Gehring works at Faith in Public Life, one of the many liberal Catholic organizations that have benefited from the largesse of George Soros’s Open Society Foundations. As the world learned thanks to Wikileaks and Hillary Clinton’s hacked emails, Soros, through well-known Democratic operatives like John Podesta, supported a whole network created precisely to infiltrate the Church in America, in other countries, and in Rome itself. Faith in Public Life is a spinoff of Podesta’s Center for American Progress.

There’s no law, of course, against people financially supporting causes in which they believe. Using non-Catholic funds in an attempt to undermine the Church’s teaching, however, is a twist that deserves serious scrutiny. Still, it’s unlikely that even Francis shares all the leftist goals of Faith in Public Life. For instance, he called the movement to normalize the recent ‘transgender’ craze a form of ‘ideological colonization.’

Gehring writes with conviction and verve, and anyone looking for a blueprint on how a pope might be used to construct a radically political Catholicism could do worse than to start with him. He deplores the way the Church allegedly became part of the ‘culture war’ in America under John Paul II and Bene-
dict XVI—the "Republican Party at Prayer," he acidly calls it, repurposing the old quip about Episcopalians. He prefers the progressive strain within the Church that has taken liberal stances on welfare, poverty, immigration, war and peace, and much else. The history here is relatively well told, but it reads Catholicism almost exclusively through partisan political lenses, describing the pope's appointment of bishops, for example, as "Francis Builds His American Base." In a funny way the arch-conservative Gehring and the arch-conservative Neumayr agree on at least one thing: the Church under Francis has become much more focused on progressive political coalitions and community organizing.

Theology on the Fly

PHILIP LAWLER'S LOST SHEPHERD: HOW Pope Francis Is Misleading His Flock is the best brief study for anyone who wants to understand the specifically religious—that is, the theological and ethical— aberrations of this papacy. A longtime distinguished Catholic journalist, Lawler was an early enthusiast for the new pope, but had a conversion experience when he noticed one day that the pope was inverting the meaning of the day's Gospel, not just being unclear (as he often is when speaking off the cuff), but actually contradicting what Jesus was saying and what had been the Catholic Church's teaching for two millennia: that no man may put asunder what God has joined together in marriage, and that to do so is remarriage is adultery. And this was not just a passing blip. The pope has pushed about as strongly as he can, without provoking an open schism, the idea that divorce and remarriage are not obstacles for a Catholic to receive Communion. This may seem a trivial question to non-Catholics or something that should have been superseded long ago, but Catholics take seriously Jesus' prohibition of divorce recorded in the Scriptures. It so shocked his listeners, even his own disciples responded: "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."

Lawler makes clear that this is not the only way in which the pope has been confusing people. Contrary to what many people, even many Catholics, now believe, the Church does not teach that a pope is simply infallible in his every action or utterance. He's an infallible authority on faith and morals when he teaches what he and the rest of the Church have received from Christ and the Apostles. He cannot merely make things up as he wishes. What's more, Pope Francis was elected specifically as a reformer—of the curia, the abuse crisis, Vatican finances—not a modernizer or innovator. Nonetheless, he sent out early warning signs that he wasn't much interested in fighting the culture war, for example, when he denounced "rigid" Catholics for "insisting" and "obsessing" on questions like abortion and homosexuality. As Lawler notes, "it hardly seemed necessary to complain about an 'obsession' with issues that are rarely even mentioned in a typical parish."

To many people, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, who have sacrificed time and treasure over decades to defend family, marriage, and unborn human life, the remark was taken as a gratuitous insult.

It did not help when, on a flight back from Brazil, Francis pronounced one of the most repeated lines of his papacy. Queried by a reporter about homosexuals, specifically the rumored escapades of one of his closest collaborators, the pope responded, "If they accept the Lord and have good will, who am I to judge them?" He did not say that homosexual behavior was okay, as many do when they use the phrase. In fact, he's often said quite the opposite. But the world heard what it wanted to hear—a perhaps deliberate ambiguity that made him "Person of the Year" on the cover of the Advocate magazine.

There are probably only two people in the world who ought to watch every word they say: the American president, who can inadvertently start a war, and the Roman pontiff, who may weaken the whole moral structure of society. Soon after his election, Francis remarked, "The most serious of the evils that afflict the world these days are youth unemployment and the loneliness of the old." Sure, these are problems, especially in the developed world, but even there can they be the 'most serious of the evils'? Here Lawler puts his finger on the problem with this pope: his inability to speak, and even think, clearly. Even on relatively non-controversial subjects like these, he sends out strange messages. On other occasions, he seemed to deny the reality of Hell or mused about changing the wording of the Lord's Prayer. And no one has been able to persuade him not to speak so recklessly. The Vatican press office has frequently had to issue retractions, qualifications, or even denials.

Change Agent

SO WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR THE Catholic Church and the world in the 21st century? Ross Douthat initially believed the pope was only presenting a more welcoming face of Catholicism, while quietly remaining traditional. In To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism, the New York Times columnist argues that this papacy raises questions not only about the direction of the Church, but about our civilization:

People in France and Britain and the United States fear Western Christianity’s eclipse, they fear the collapse of community outside the posh megacities and the disappearance of the natural family everywhere, they fear what global capitalism, elite secularism, and Islamic self-assertion will mean for what remains of Christian civilization in Europe. These fears are not irrational, and recent trends have sharpened them, which is part of why Western politics has moved in a more populist and nationalist direction. But under Francis Rome has moved the other way, so that instead of a fully Catholic alternative to right-wing nationalism the Vatican seems to be offering conservative Catholics only judgment on their shortcomings, their chauvinism, their anxieties and lack of charity toward all.

Douthat puts his argument in the context of a much more balanced, less partisan reading of recent Catholic history than Gehring’s, focusing especially on the divisive watershed of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and its aftermath. Francis, it is worth noting, is the first pope to have been ordained a priest after the council.

In Douthat’s reading, the Council gave rise to three main currents in the Catholic Church (with parallels in Western culture more generally). The first, rooted in the actual conciliar documents, was moderately conservative, opening up to modern democracy (there had already been a substantial history of Christian Democrat parties in Europe) with a greater emphasis on human liberty, but in continuity with the Church’s pre-modern and natural law principles concerning human nature and society.

That moderation was mostly swamped by the radical cultural currents of the 1960s, even within the Church. Priests and nuns
abandoned their religious vocations in droves (membership in Francis’s own Jesuits is now only about a third of what it was in 1960.) Ancient liturgies, Church architecture and ornament, and devotional practices were swept away by an alleged “spirit” of Vatican II. The radical current in Catholicism subsided somewhat, as did the radical shifts in all of Western culture, and settled into what Douthat sees as a moderately liberal faction.

There was a partial recovery of a more confident, faithful Catholicism under the long pontificate of John Paul II—by any measure one of the great moral figures of the last quarter of the 20th century. He not only reined in the centrifugal forces in the Church, but in a large corpus of encyclicals and books over a papacy that lasted 28 years, he set a different tone—both morally and intellectually—for the Church as a whole. He was followed by the mild, scholarly Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), a former member of the Académie française and at 91 still perhaps the greatest living Catholic mind.

Until quite recently, a fair observer would have said that the Catholic Church is a basically conservative institution with a substantial liberal segment among active Catholics, all living within what Douthat sees as a kind of cultural truce. But the instability of that arrangement quickly appeared after Pope Benedict resigned in 2013, claiming that he was too old to deal with the massive reforms needed in Rome. This almost unprecedented move—the last pope to resign was Celestine V in 1300—sent shockwaves through the Church. The cardinals who met to elect the next pope were seeking a bold reformer to clean up the sexual and financial scandals in which the Church found itself mired. What they got instead, observes Douthat, is someone who wishes not to renew but to change the Church—vaguely but radically—in several respects.

The “change” that Francis is pursuing necessarily involves dismantling the work of his two great predecessors, especially their efforts to restore an emphasis on truth and natural-law thinking. Douthat believes that conservatives were too optimistic to think that the 35 years of the John Paul and Benedict papacies had permanently tamed the cultural radicals. The Church has long been the most significant alternative to modernity’s emphasis on personal feelings and situational ethics. Under Francis, it has not exactly abandoned the old truths, but they’ve been hedged in with a studied uncertainty that threatens to make them virtually ineffective. As clear affirmations of truth and justice recede, “dialogue” and “openness” become ends in themselves.

The central battle in the past two years has been over—what else—sex. Catholicism presents a very clear, cogent view on all forms of sexual activity. True love expresses itself as a total, faithful, fruitful, lifelong union, modeled on Christ’s love for his Bride, the Church. That means no sex outside of marriage, and marriage between a man and woman, for life. Jesus’ own words on marriage as an indissoluble covenant between one man and one woman were the undisputed standard of all Christian communities for centuries. This established doctrine clashes with essentially everything that has emerged from the sexual revolution: artificial contraception, easy divorce and remarriage, cohabitation, same-sex “marriage,” transgenderism.

These may seem secondary matters compared with the essential truths of the faith; but as Douthat carefully shows, the debate here is not only over moral principles but also over two fundamentally opposed views of what it is to be human. The first pages of the Hebrew Scriptures say human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. And right after, “male and female He created them.” Douthat says that if Jews and Christians got that wrong from the start, you could argue—and many have—that they’ve gotten everything else wrong since. Foundational notions about the human person and the family that have fostered our civilization are put in jeopardy. The most radical shifts on sex lead to today’s toxic identity politics.

For Douthat, this would have been an ideal moment to raise the church’s banner, to offer a distinctively Catholic sort of synthesis—one that would speak to the right’s fear that the West’s civilizational roots are crumbling and to the left’s disappointment with the rule of neoliberalism; one that would offer a Christian alternative to the aridity of secularism, the theocratic zeal of Islamism, and the identity politics of right and left.

Francis has done none of that: instead he has riven the only institution that might have elaborated such an alternative.

As the books reviewed here make clear, Pope Francis seems more a product of the crisis of confidence that pervades the West than someone who can alleviate it. Douthat’s conclusion in particular is harsh but warranted: “Hagan lío! Francis likes to say. ‘Make a mess!’ In that much he has succeeded.”

Robert Royal is president of the Faith & Reason Institute and author, most recently, of A Deeper Vision: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Twentieth Century (Ignatius Press).
Book Review by Glenn Ellmers

Soul, Man

De Anima (On Soul), by Aristotle, translated by David Bolotin.
Mercer University Press, 164 pages, $45 (cloth), $18 (paper)

The soul is the most difficult and paradoxical thing in the world. In classical thought the soul is our form, which activates and animates the matter of our bodies and makes us rational and free beings. It thus provides our access to metaphysical being itself—the understanding of everything that is. The soul is the space where the light of philosophy shines.

In Christianity the soul came to be understood as the spark of the divine or the image of God, and also immortal. (This latter view is ascribed to Aristotle by the disciples of Saint Thomas Aquinas.) A bit later, with the birth of modern science, the soul vanishes altogether. We speak today of the soul largely metaphorically and call the hard sciences “soulless”—by which we mean that chemistry, physics, and information technology are cold, deterministic, and heartless. (The soul is not the same as the heart, but they go together.) In a more than metaphorical sense, however, modern science emerged specifically in opposition to any notion of the soul as the completion of the body.

The ancients thought the soul the opposite of a metaphor; it makes the body real—but it does so in a way technology cannot grasp. Modernity sets aside the soul as irrelevant, outside the scope of scientific measurement, and, hence, a non-entity. But even modern science admits it has difficulties explaining consciousness—the residue of the soul in beings that think.

David Bolotin, retired after a distinguished career at St. John’s College in Santa Fe, believes Aristotle can provide useful instruction here. Indeed, he takes the philosopher so seriously on this matter that he has performed the monumental task of translating Aristotle’s short, dense treatise On Soul, plumbing the deepest wellsprings of the manuscript tradition in order to reconstruct what he believes to be a more faithful rendering of the original.

Though hardly as popular as the Nicomachean Ethics or Politics, On Soul already has several other English translations (often titled with the Latin formulation De Anima). Hippocrates Apostel’s version, the preferred edition through the 1980s and ’90s, was a great improvement in its fidelity to Aristotle’s intentions over Sir David Ross’s supercilious standard. But it retained many of the Latinized terms originated by the Scholastics, e.g., “substance” for ousia, “actual” for entelechia. This deference to the medieval tradition has fallen out of favor, with Latinized terms being viewed as too burdened with the accretions of Thomistic philosophy, obscuring the meaning of the original Greek.

The more popular current translation seems to be that of Joe Sachs, which leans very much in the other direction. Sachs, whose interpretive approach has been influenced by Martin Heidegger, opts for cumbersome Anglo-Saxon neologisms: “thinghood” for ousia, “being-at-work” for energia, and, almost ludicrously, “being-at-work-staying-itself” for entelechia. Many commentators find these Teutonic compounds artificial and distracting. Sachs does, however, provide very welcome bonuses for the beginning student: a lengthy interpretative introduction, index, and glossaries in English-to-Greek.
Bolotin’s translation steers a moderate course of virtuous elegance, where possible, relying on copious footnotes (happily, not endnotes) to add connective muscle to the joints of the text. These notes take the place of a separate introductory commentary, discussing his diligent examination and weighing of the source material as it has come down to us. In terms of word choices, he renders ousia simply as (the noun) “being,” and entelechia as “completion.” While generally eschewing Latinisms, he is not dogmatic on the point, and in a lengthy footnote explains why he settled on “actual” or “actuality” for energeia. At times he is confident enough to be inconsistent: “The Greek word that I have translated as ‘capacity’ is dunamis, which I earlier translated as ‘potentiality.’ I will on occasion also translate it as ‘power.’” Throughout, wherever the text requires some explanation, a note supplies helpful commentary, even providing in some cases tantalizing hints at what he implies may be Aristotle’s more subtle intentions.

But why does any of this matter? Such is our modern confusion that many readers may be completely unaware even of the existence of a pre-Christian conception of soul, and wonder further why Aristotle’s commentary on this subject would be relevant to us today. Perhaps the answer lies in the most vital question one can ask of oneself: why am I alive? This can be understood as several different questions: In what sense am I a living creature, as opposed to a lifeless mass? Why is anything alive; how did life in the universe come to be at all? What am I alive for, to what end or purpose? Each of these inquiries—biological, ontological, and philosophical—can find answers, or at the least the beginnings of answers, by looking to the soul.

Aristotle, the first biologist who minutely examined the anatomy of cuttlefish, was no disparager of the body. Yet for all its astonishing complexity, the body is inert without the soul, which is the “source of motion,” the animating principle of our desires, choices, and actions. Motion, which includes growth and reproductive generation, is for him an essential feature of life. Generation points to every soul’s longing “to make another like itself [to] share in the eternal and divine insofar as they are able; for all things reach toward that.” This stretching toward “the immortal and everlasting” appears also in the soul’s capacity for contemplation, by which the soul is connected somewhat mysteriously to the “thinking” that is evident in the universe. Quite apart from any particular conception of God or an intelligent designer, the universe exhibits a coherent order, including the regular paths of the heavenly bodies and the various species of living organisms that eat, move, and perpetuate themselves in orderly ways. Aristotle considers all this to be evidence of a kind of cosmic “thought” in which the soul somehow shares or participates.

All these matters and more—including the crucial relationship between perception and imagination—are addressed in Aristotle’s compact treatise, which no translation, however able, can render simple or easy. In fact, the one significant criticism one can make of Bolotin’s effort is that other than the footnotes (which sacrifice in comprehension, at times, what they make up for in precision) he offers little supplementary aid to the novice. Without a commentary or interpretative essay, glossary, or index, it seems unlikely that this edition will displace Sachs’s as the preferred choice for the beginner. But David Bolotin’s probing and fresh reappraisal of the source material, which admirably serves his intention of treating Aristotle with the utmost philosophic seriousness, will be a delight and treasure to scholars investigating the enduring puzzles and perplexities of the human soul.

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Book Review by Khalil Habib

SEVEN SHADES OF GRAY

*Seven Types of Atheism*, by John Gray. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 176 pages, $25

John Gray is a prominent English philosopher whose major books include *Straw Dogs* (2002), *Black Mass* (2007), and *The Silence of Animals* (2013). Gray is a provocative thinker who has written on a wide range of thinkers and subjects. He has written on Friedrich Hayek, but he is not exactly a libertarian. He attacks modern atheism, but he is clearly not a conservative either. He is a serious thinker who clearly enjoys provoking the academic establishment by unmasking their hidden progressive pieties. His latest is *Seven Types of Atheism*.

The title is a nod to William Empson's 1930 book, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Like poetry and language (the focus of Empson's book), atheism has many different forms. Gray's purpose is not to persuade the reader to believe or not to believe in God, but to explore modern atheism and the problems with it. In an age when prominent atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens—affectionately referred to as the ‘Four Horsemen of New Atheism’—are celebrated for their sophisticated disdain for religion and commitment to progress, Gray's book arrives on the scene like an uninvited guest to a premature celebration of the death of God. Gray is a unique thinker who clearly enjoys provoking the academic establishment by unmasking their hidden progressive pieties. His latest is *Seven Types of Atheism*.

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Scratch a contemporary atheist or a modern secular humanist, he argues, and you’ll find a confused rebel who is essentially religious. Modern atheism is religion in a new garb. These atheists “think they have left religion behind, when all they have done is renew it in shapes they fail to recognize.” They substitute faith in humanity and progress for belief in God, and are driven by the desire to serve nature, humanity, history, or progress. This is not to suggest that Gray is a critic of atheism and a defender of religion. An atheist himself, he is a critic of both. He believes science and religion are two separate human activities, though not as distinct as many presume, and that modern atheism is prone to utopianism and self-deification.

To take one extreme example: the Marquis de Sade’s originality, according to Gray, lies not in Sade’s atheism but in his nightmarish vision of nature as a malevolent goddess with an insatiable appetite for destruction. ‘Nature has elaborated no statuses, instituted no code; her single law is writ deep in every man’s heart: it is to satisfy himself, deny his passions nothing, and this regardless of the cost to others,’ wrote Sade. Nature sanctions egoism and inspires in humans a lust for motiveless destruction and cruelty.

For Sade, every impulse of nature and everything that humans do and desire to do is natural. In the *Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man*, Sade rails against God and accuses religion of corrupting natural humanity. Yet, as Gray points out, “if everything human beings do is natural, how can religion be singled out as being contrary to Nature?” Moreover, “[i]f everything humans do is ordained by Nature, they are following Nature when they obey morality and convention.”
According to Gray, Sade’s ruling passion is not atheism but hatred of God. Sade is “the greatest modern prophet of misotheism—the current of thought that hates God as the enemy of humanity.” The hatred of God within Sade’s soul is in conflict with real disbelief in God. Simone de Beauvoir got it wrong, then, when in her essay “Must We Burn Sade?” she declared that “Sade’s nature was thoroughly irreligious.” To the contrary, says Gray, Sade’s hatred of religion and his desire to convert his readers away from God shows he never abandoned religion, but exchanged one deity for another: “Rejecting the Christian God as evil, he turned to Nature; but evil returned in the form of the dark goddess he had invented. His solution was to rebel against Nature even as he obeyed the destructive impulses it had implanted in him.” For atheists who truly believe that the cosmos is godless and that humanity lacks cosmic significance, there is no problem of evil, nor is there any sense in railing against (a nonexistent) God.

Gray insists that not all atheism is a flight from a godless universe and at odds with a world bereft of significance. There have been some atheists “who stepped out of monotheism altogether and in doing so found freedom and fulfillment. Not looking for cosmic meaning, they were content with the world as they found it.” Epicurean atheists in antiquity were more dispassionate than their modern counterparts. They promoted an ethics in which the simple but noble pleasures of peace of mind are the authentic ends of human existence. Resisting the beguiling illusion of human progress, Epicurean thinkers such as Lucretius insulated themselves from the sorrows and madness of their fellows. Perched calmly above the noise and misery of those drowning in their disappointed hopes, Epicureans were content in the tranquil sanctuary of their secluded gardens.

An example of ancient atheism in the modern world is George Santayana, whom Gray clearly admires. Santayana was an atheist who rejected any idea that civilization was improving, and found happiness and tranquility in detaching himself from the world. He made a conscious decision to renounce love and academic prestige for the sake of peace of mind, fearing the loss of independence and tranquility that is the price of love and vanity. For Santayana, unlike modern atheists and secular humanists, the realm of perfection and progress lies neither in politics, nor humanity, nor history, but in technology and the mechanical
he deplored monotheism when it was militant and evangelical. The cardinal error of Christianity came from Platonism, which (for Christians who adopted it) conceived the Good to be a power in the world. Having identified itself with this power, the Church inevitably became repressive of human variety.

Santayana was a materialist who found freedom in the godless flux of matter. It is unclear how he was able to grasp the godlessness of the cosmos and yet ground in materialism the life of the mind he enjoyed, but he at least believed that he found peace of mind and happiness in his pursuit of equanimity.

Arthur Schopenhauer is, like Santayana, an atheist whom Gray respects. Believing human beings to be incurably irrational, Schopenhauer argued that all human troubles come from the will’s insatiable and irrational cravings. The universe, like humans, is inscrutable. He rejected Christianity and dismissed Hegel’s view of history as Christian theodicy masquerading as philosophy. Hegel’s philosophy paved the way for modernity to replace God with humankind and created the illusion that history contained some sort of meaning. For Schopenhauer, history has no meaning. No act of will can bring sense to the senseless drift of human events. Only by renouncing the world and denouncing it as an illusion can one shed the false hope in history and mankind. Even the human mind is “itself nothing, and in looking beyond itself it is seeking to pierce the veil of \textit{maya}—universal illusion—and come nearer to reality.” Schopenhauer’s rejection of reason and meaning in the world eventually led him to mysticism.

The point of Gray’s reflections is to show that monotheism’s God did not die, but has only reappeared in the different guises of surrogate deities. “A free-thinking atheism,” he maintains, “would begin by questioning the prevailing faith in humanity. But there is little prospect of contemporary atheists giving up their reverence for a phantasm of humanity.” Science will never replace religion because without the illusion of progress and reverence for humanity, human beings cannot make sense of their lives and will fall into panic and despair. So how ought we to live in the godless world described by John Gray? Despair? Not necessarily. Gray says he’s an atheist who maintains a reverence for a universe he claims is godless and mysterious. Yet his reverence and awe somehow escape the charges he levels against the modern atheists. Nevertheless, he prefers atheism without the belief in progress, as opposed to the atheism of secular humanism, because the former is ultimately more humane and free from deluded visions of improvement. One cannot but wonder whether Gray himself escapes a hidden belief in Christianity.

Although he writes in a clear, engaging manner, and his book is interesting and informative, Gray rarely applies the same scrutiny to those whom he admires, like Santayana. Why is Santayana, who has all the otherworldliness of a saint, for example, not perceived as a repressed religious ascetic, while others, such as Mill and Friedrich Nietzsche, are reduced to deluded faux atheists? Why is Schopenhauer’s “managed hedonism” “refreshing,” while his turn to Indian philosophy as a means to gaining salvation by destroying the illusion of selfhood not viewed as a version of Christian salvation in Indian garb? Perhaps—and this is just a hunch—the answer lies in Gray’s disdain for the self-deification of atheists and humanists who harm humanity with their revolutions and don’t pause from the noise of their deluded hopes to pay their proper respects to a mysterious universe.

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Book Review by Mark Blitz

**Morality and Happiness**


Science and the Good: the tragic Quest for the Foundations of Morality is a serious work, useful for its thoughtful overview of what today’s neuro and evolutionary scientists teach us about morality. Its title, of course, overpromises—how could it not? Authors James Davison Hunter and Paul Nedelisky insufficiently analyze “the good,” and ways of knowing (‘science,’ generally) other than modern natural science are largely ignored. The book’s protagonists, moreover, are not “tragic” figures but mostly earnest academics and the occasional publicity-hound. Some are vain; none is pitiable, and reading Science and the Good is not cathartic but, at best, soberly educational.

Hunter and nedelisky’s interesting historical discussion is, unfortunately, unreliable. It runs from Hugo Grotius and Thomas Hobbes to Charles Darwin and his followers, via David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill. Immanuel Kant, for whom the relation among nature, natural science, and morality was a central conundrum; G.W.F. Hegel, who believed he had solved this and all other seemingly intractable problems; and Friedrich Nietzsche, the psychological wizard who plumbed The Genealogy of Morals, make no appearance. Most of the book’s historical account is devoted to Hume and Bentham because they seem closest to current views of pleasure and moral psychology, and because Hume’s notion that we cannot derive an “ought” from an “is” plays a large role in the authors’ thinking.

The book’s second part is characterized by Hunter and Nedelisky’s healthy skepticism of the inflated claims of sociobiologists, philosophy professors, publicists, neuro-economists, neuro-psychologists, and social psychologists. In the authors’ view, the modern scientific approach to morality does not and cannot tell us what we ought to do. It can indicate something about the sentiments or neurochemistry that accompany morality, and the evolution of these sentiments—but even there, not much has been discovered. The authors do not exaggerate these findings, although scientists sometimes do.

One finding is that oxytocin is central to trust; the study behind this claim has not...
been replicated. Another is that moral judgments are tied to two different parts of the brain, one that calculates in a utilitarian manner, and one that intuitively “deontological” matters such as rights’ violations. But this discovery rests on experiments involving small numbers of today’s Ivy League students—hardly a representative group—and the conclusions rest on a far-fetched example about whether and how you would kill one or a few to save many. A third finding involves (perhaps) discovering empathy in other primates, but with no indication that this involves moral choice. A fourth lists some general areas, or “receptors,” that call forth a spectrum of moral behavior, but with no sign of which behavior one ought to choose.

Several of the scientists discussed apparently understand that their methods cannot tell us if the behavior they study—“loyalty,” but to whom?, “equity,” but judged how?, “empathy,” but for the innocent or the criminal?—is in fact morally choice-worthy. But all submit to “the proclivity to overreach” and treat their half findings as telling us what we ought to do. When they do recognize their limits they tend to stop treating morality as a “mind-independent reality” and (silently) embrace “moral nihilism.”

One reason they overreach is because they do not understand the phenomenon of morality sufficiently. As the authors say, the scientists fail to “define” it, so they can hardly demonstrate much about it. Modern science’s “disenchanted naturalism” tries to discover laws based on hypotheses about and observations of the rudimentary elements to which things can be reduced. Such “naturalism” is inadequate for determining what we ought to do.

In making this criticism the authors are on the right track. After all, a key difficulty in chemical, neurological, and similar studies of complex human phenomena of consciousness, ethical action, politics, art, and thought is failing to examine sufficiently the phenomenon being explored, on their own terms. The little that is amenable to science’s methods stands in for and narrows the phenomenon as a whole. This is not only a difficulty for natural science: could one understand the conditions of “leadership” if one had never heard of Abraham Lincoln, but only surveyed a sample of human resources professionals?

Unfortunately, the authors themselves suffer from these faults. It would be unfair to expect them to provide a fully developed description of moral phenomena. Nonetheless, their purportedly more adequate standpoint relies on an excessively compressed discussion of “re-enchanting” phenomena (without making them irrational). They also assert, but insufficiently defend, criticisms of contemporary life that seem based on Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and other Frankfurt School writers. There is an “elective affinity,” they claim, between “the new moral science,” “instrumental and technical rationality,” and “the cultural and structural dynamics of power at the heart of the contemporary world.”

The authors’ broader problems of definition begin with an imprecise statement of their subject. Often they seem to identify, or to act as if their subjects identify, morality, happiness, and what is good. Other times they differentiate them, and act as if the moral scientists’ question is whether morality serves human happiness. They also largely ignore the connection between justice and punishment, a significant omission when a major issue for them is what “science” says about why and whether we direct ourselves to others’ good.

Hunter and Nedelisky, that is, fail to make distinctions central to their topic—such as between “morality” and what is good. We cannot treat our direction (or its lack) toward morality as identical to our direction toward what is good. Kant, for example, distinguishes morality and happiness because happiness involves natural desire and, therefore, what is naturally or materially caused, and morality involves freedom or self-legislation that is not subject to nature.

The question of whether correctly distributing goods and mandating certain actions—justice—is natural or conventional has been fundamental since Plato and Aristotle. Something’s nature means, for Plato and Aristotle, what about it we do not make, what is essential to it, what covers all its instances (if not equally), and what in it is understandable by reason. Speech, for example, is a (or the) pre-eminent natural human ability. We cannot well address the possible connection between understanding “nature” and morality by leaving matters with modern natural science. Nor can morality be reduced to altruism, as the authors tend to do, if we wish to understand its connection to happiness. Just and responsible behavior, after all, may benefit oneself as well as others, and, as Aristotle suggests, virtuous actions such as courage, generosity, and friendship that help others are central to one’s own happiness.

Another notion the authors explore insufficiently is human “flourishing”—which many
The complications uncovered in fully analyzing happiness and what is good complicate morality and law. But these complications do not disprove the fact that happiness involves a certain group of activities in relation to a certain group of abilities. And we cannot all flourish equally unless our abilities are equal and sufficient resources exist to allow equal flourishing. This is not the case when one considers the greatest political efforts, and some of the greatest artistic ones.

The authors seem too wedded to an undefined equality, or universality, when discussing the place of equality in morality and happiness. Their useful discussions of Grotius, Hobbes, and John Locke too quickly pass over the substance of natural equality as these thinkers see it—as equality in rights. Hunter and Nedelisky say little about what rights are, their link to equal will or choice, and their connection to property and religious toleration as ways to reduce conflict. This is unfortunate, because reducing conflict appears to be one of their and their subjects’ chief goals. Much that Hobbes and Locke tried to uncover about the link among happiness, pleasure, and desire is inseparable from their view of equal rights and the need for a commonwealth with punishing power and control of religion, or its redirection through toleration. Happiness as pleasurable satisfaction is, for Hobbes and Locke, inseparable from equality as equal rights—not a mysteriously undefined equality—and from common obedience—not as free-floating morality or altruism, but obedience to law.

The authors believe that “twenty-five hundred years of philosophical debates” have “not given us a consensus on moral questions.” They appear to desire such a consensus. But perhaps “moral” questions are inherently disputable, even if one can understand them rationally. Perhaps we cannot achieve “consensus” apart from an explicit effort, such as that advocated by Hobbes and Locke, where agreement is won through legal effort and persuasion, and justice and happiness are pursued in a particular manner.

To see what we can discover about happiness through the methods of modern natural science we must first consider carefully what the human good and morality are on their own terms. This will also clarify the limits of the scientific effort. Although Hunter and Nedelisky insufficiently explore this problem, they properly make the issue of “definition” a centerpiece of their questioning. In general, they have produced a thoughtful summary and able criticism of the contemporary scientific quest for morality’s foundations, and brought to light important matters.

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When I was finishing graduate school at UCLA in the late 1980s, a British scholar, unquestionably liberal, came to campus to discuss his paper on "Male Feminism." Modest and earnest, he summarized his paper's account of how men could participate in feminist critique. The feminist Romantic scholar who responded to his presentation, however, proceeded to explain, impatiently and peremptorily, how this clueless fellow did not know what he was talking about. It wasn't a refutation; it was a rebuke. I can't recall what the guest speaker said in his feeble reply, but neither he nor anyone else in the room dared challenge her. The graduate students and untenured professors in attendance took it as a brutal career lesson: never expose yourself to this sort of takedown. In particular, never even hint that there might be some basis in nature for differences between men and women.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that for 30 years women have earned a majority of all doctoral degrees in English and foreign languages. Feminists had good reason to be confident. But here was the opening sentence of Sexual Personae (1990): "In the beginning was nature." With that heresy, Camille Paglia burst into public life. While her first book climbed the bestseller lists, humanities professors in seminars and at conferences, in editorial meetings and on hiring committees, were meting out justice to any heretic committing the old sin of explaining disparate outcomes and conditions for men and women in terms of nature, rather than ascribing them entirely to patriarchy and heteronormativity. In those years, Marxism was coping with the collapse of Communist governments, and deconstruction struggled with the revelation that its leading American figure, Paul de Man, had written anti-Semitic articles for a Belgian collaborationist periodical during World War II. Feminism, by contrast, seemed untouched by political guilt or failure.

Red in Tooth and Claw

Yet according to Paglia, who teaches at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Western civilization was erected as a bulwark against the dark, destructive forces of existence, including our base instincts. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and William Wordsworth had envisioned nature as maternal comforter, and individuals in a natural state as innocent. Their descendants are liberals and feminists who think we can expel aggression and inequality from the world if only we get our heads straight and our institutions right. Paglia sees nature, especially human nature, undercutting them at every turn. Sexual Personae describes our nightly descent "to the dream world where nature reigns, where there is no law but sex, cruelty, and metamorphosis." Nature, she says, "is Pandemonium, an All Devils' Day." To contemplate it is to grasp "the dehumanizing brutality of biology and geology, the Darwinian waste and bloodshed."

A subsequent collection of essays, Vamps & Tramps (1994), argued that "everything great in human history has been achieved in defiance of nature." Life begins in fear and necessity, so human beings compensate with laws and norms, art and technology. While her deconstructionist contemporaries characterized society as a mode of subjugation and surveillance, Paglia relied on an older cultural
anthropology to conclude, “Society is our frail barrier against nature.”

An even greater provocation was her insistence, against the imperious feminist consensus that had formed before the end of the 20th century, that nature divides us by sex. Male and female biologies are distinct, and men and women experience and act upon their desires differently. Because gender begins in our bodies, it is different from and more fundamental than a “social construct.” Women give birth and menstruate, which links them to organic nature in a way no man can ever experience. She is “bound to nature’s calendar.” He isn’t. She accepts nature’s round of life and death more easily because she participates in it more fully than he does.

A man owes his very existence to a woman’s body, too, and that origin threatens him endlessly. Sex, Art, and American Culture (1992) quotes literary scholar Harold Bloom, who supervised Paglia’s doctoral dissertation at Yale University: “Woman is born of woman. But man is born of woman and never recovers from that fact.” She gives birth, and that can be her response to nature’s malice. He doesn’t, and so responds by “projecting” himself through sexual acts with women or cultural acts with objects: building churches, composing songs, conducting experiments, writing poems, forming governments, and painting pictures. Hence, Paglia notes, “All the genres of philosophy, science, high art, athletics, and politics were invented by men.”

She asserts these propositions against the logic of feminism, which denounces vicious social conventions that victimize women. True, Paglia says, “nature’s burden falls more heavily on one sex,” but you can’t change that fact by pretending it results from social injustice. War, crime, the battles of the sexes, and decadence are all natural to the human condition. When epic heroes enter the underworld, they confront the actual record of nature’s capacity and human depravity. Among the “errors of liberalism,” Paglia believes, is the expectation that we can keep those primal turbulences underground.

That’s the theory. Men cling to their singular being, striving against absorption back into their mothers—i.e., nature—and so they create forms and rules, beauties and truths that resist the mother/nature that would swallow them up. Some great artists produce Apollonian works of order, permanence, and light such as the Acropolis and the Apollo Belvedere; others allow Dionysus his say, for example, Georges Bizet in Carmen and the Marquis de Sade, for whom, as Paglia writes in Sexual Personae, “getting back to nature... would be to give free reign to violence and lust.”

At the core of art are sex and violence, contained or released, particularly in their deviant and decadent manner. In Sexual Personae and subsequent writings, Paglia interprets artworks into these elements: mythic and chthonic, lusty and cruel. Marc Antony’s abandonment of his soldiers at Actium is one of the touchstones of Western military history. Paglia, reading Shakespeare’s version, sees Cleopatra as the water-Venus luring sex-addled Antony from the earth, “the foundation of his illustrious career,” into a fatal conflict at sea. Emily Dickinson is not the shy “belle of Amherst,” but “a virtuoso of sadomasochistic surrealism.” Romantism, Paglia says, is not the loving experience of sublime landscapes or the glorification of childhood. It is “a return of the Great Mother, the dark nature-goddess whom St. Augustine condemns as the most formidable enemy of Christianity.”

Contra Mundum

Paglia’s anti-postmodern, anti-feminist turn enthralled lay readers and made Sexual Personae a sensation. Women’s studies professors, unaccustomed to such vigorous, explicit dissent, were at a loss. These scholar-activists were good at expressing contempt for anything they deemed sexist, but weren’t used to having their own smug certitudes contemptuously dismissed by others.

And she wouldn’t let up. A 1990 op-ed, “Madonna—Finally, a Real Feminist,” infuriated them. Madonna, Paglia declared, “exposes the puritanism and suffocating ideology of American feminism, which is stuck in an adolescent whining mode.... The academic feminists think their nerdy bookworm husbands are the ideal model of human manhood.” Annoying, to be sure, but 20 years later the New York Times counted it among the most noteworthy entries in the 40-year history of the op-ed genre.

In 1991 she denounced the campaign against date-rape, saying it was driven by “propaganda churned out by the expensive Northeastern colleges and universities, with their overconcentration of boring, uptight academic feminists and spoiled, affluent students.” Later that year she wrote, “Anita Hill is not a feminist heroine.” Rather, the Senate hearings on her allegations against Clarence Thomas were “an atrocious public spectacle worthy of the show trials of a totalitarian regime, [where] uncorroborated allegations about verbal exchanges ten years old were paraded on the nation’s television screens.” As a guest on Bill Maher’s Politically Incorrect show in 1994 Paglia asserted that “feminism lurched in a kind of Stalinist direction in the 1970s.”

Outrageous as her arguments were, ostracism didn’t silence them. True, Paglia worked outside the prestige zones. Faculty lounge lizards dismissed her as an associate professor at a small Philadelphia art school. Paglia acknowledged in the introduction to Sex, Art, and American Culture “the disastrous twenty-year history of my career, the job problems and rowdy incidents, the isolation and poverty, the frustrating inability to get published.” (Seven publishers rejected Sexual Personae before Yale University Press finally took it.)

The sexuality scholars of the time fancied themselves edgy characters exploding bourgeois norms. They took pleasure in deriding older scholars, the “dead wood” who devoted their careers to such square projects as the Standard Edition of John Dryden. They, by contrast, wrote books with such titles as Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault; Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities; and Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety. The key words of the day were “subversive” and “transgressive.” Paglia showed them what subverting and transgressing really looked like, mocking the tenured radicals’ bogus cultural politics—bourgeois lives in leafy college towns and hip urban neighborhoods—and inept handling of bohemian, illicit material. In a review of Vested Interests by Harvard’s Marjorie Garber, Paglia criticized her for bringing “cutting-edge pretensions” and “lumpish patches of tedious Lacan jargon” to an important subject, transvestitism, which Paglia claims arises...
at moments of cultural collapse. “Are we in a decadence, like that of imperial Rome?” she asks. Garber can’t answer because the book is “inadequately researched,” “carelessly reductive,” and “totally neglects Western antiquity, where there is a staggering amount of literary and anthropological material crucial to her subject.”

“Im challenging their scholarship,” she declared in a speech, “which I think is absolutely amateurish.” Amateur? This was worse than political accusation. You didn’t talk this way, not about figures at the very top of the field. After 20 years of recondite theory and relentless demystification of “late-capitalism,” “the body,” “orientalism,” and “sexual politics,” literary studies had convinced itself it was an arena of genius. Junior and senior theorists wielded the most sophisticated conceptual machinery in esoteric language. Everybody was brilliant. It was taken as a sign of profundity, not incoherence, that few people could untangle sentences such as this from Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990):

Once the incest taboo is subjected to Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis in The History of Sexuality, that prohibitive or juridical structure is shown both to instate compulsory heterosexuality within a masculinist sexual economy and to enable a critical challenge to that economy.

Rather than labor to translate such a sentence into English, Paglia mocked it. Why take these writers’ half-baked ‘readings’ and low standards seriously, she asked. They come from dilettantes, not creative minds.

In 1990, Paglia attended a University of Pennsylvania lecture given by Diana Fuss, a rising Princeton feminist, who spoke on women and fashion photography. “It was awful,” Paglia said. Fuss showed a Revlon image of a woman in a swimming pool, her head above the shimmering surface and sunlight illuminating her cheeks. “This was a beautiful ad,” Paglia noted, but “Fuss was going, ‘Decapitation—mutilation.’” It drove Paglia crazy to watch 200 young women gushing over Fuss’s brilliance, even though they “didn’t understand a word of what she was saying.” Speaking to Fuss privately made clear to Paglia that she “knew nothing about art. And I also could tell she knew nothing about popular culture.”

In 1991 Paglia spoke at Harvard, where she accused the university of hiring “trendy people in cultural studies centers who believe that the world was created by Foucault in 1969.” (The Harvard Crimson noted that students gave her “thunderous applause.”) Later, the Crimson published Paglia’s “Open Letter to the Students of Harvard,” which warned them against “opportunistinc trend-chasers in your classrooms,” i.e., the literature faculty. “Under its hip varnish,” she advised, “their work is shoddy and shallow.” Since those professors were too ensconced and comfortable to improve, or even to carry out the basic pedagogical duties, the students must take charge of their own education:

First, make the library your teacher. Rediscover the now neglected works of the great scholars of the last 150 years, who worked blissedly free of the mental pollutants of poststructuralism. Immerse yourself in the reference collection, and master chronology and etymology. Refuse to cooperate with the coercive ersatz humanitarmism that insultingly defines women and African-Americans as victims. Insist on free thought and free speech.

The critique struck home. Under Paglia’s raillery, the theorists of sex and politics looked like small ignorant figures in spite of their knowing demeanor. All they really understood was academic politics, which they played very well. Paglia demonstrated that they had erected a social network that operated on cronyism and prestige, which would collapse as soon as a few genuinely erudite and courageous critics challenged them.

Telling Truths

NEW PAGLIA VOLUME, PROVOCATIONS: Collected Essays, has 600 pages of commentaries, reviews, and speeches, plus a 100-page “Media Chronicle,” which contains snippets of occasional pieces such as a Rolling Stones concert review and an interview with Raquel Welch. (Welch requested her.) The other part of the Chronicle consists of others’ remarks about her in the press, some nasty (Gloria Steinem) and some laudatory (David Bowie). Provocations contains astute assessments of political questions, as well. In 2013, for example, Paglia wrote, “It remains baffling how anyone would think that Hillary Clinton (born the same year as me) is our party’s best chance.”

Paglia is no more conciliatory today than when she first became famous. Academic feminism is still useless. She advised that “young American women aspiring to political power should be studying military history rather than taking women’s studies courses.” In 1999, a Massachusetts middle-school teacher post-
ed an exhibit of 14 gay figures, including Alexander the Great, Shakespeare, and Eleanor Roosevelt. "Proclaiming Eleanor Roosevelt gay is not only goofy but malicious," wrote Paglia, who favors gay rights. "Those who promote Shakespeare’s homosexuality for their own ideological agenda conveniently overlook the fact that none of his thirty-seven plays address homosexuality or allude to it except in negative terms."

Alongside the assault on false idols (Michel Foucault, feminist puritanism), Paglia celebrates the same heroes (Alfred Hitchcock, Michelangelo, Bob Dylan—"[t]he postmodernist allegation that all canons are the product of political ideology is malicious propaganda," though she has changed her opinion of Madonna, who she says "is addicted to pointless provocations like her juvenile Instagrams" and can’t accept that her "sassy street urchin" persona of the ’80s doesn’t suit a 58-year-old). She maintains her belief that the long view of history is more necessary than ever. "The worst crime of political correctness," Paglia wrote in 2016, "is that it has allowed current ideologies to stulten our sense of the past and to reduce history to a litany of inflammatory grievances." Feminists hated her for contending in Sexual Personae that the majority of world-historical figures will always be men: "If civilization had been left in female hands, we would still be living in grass huts." She would still like to add more women to the artistic canon, but admits that she spent five years trying, and failing, "to find a good feminist poem."

Since Sexual Personæ appeared, however, the strains of liberalism Paglia criticized as anti-nature and anti-religion have only grown more assertive. As a teacher’s daughter in upstate New York, living on farms as a kid and working while a student as an emergency room secretary in Syracuse, Paglia instantly detects the "dismaying snobbery by liberal middle-class professionals who were openly disdainful of the religious values of the working class whom liberals always claim to protect." Though an unbeliever herself, Paglia has no patience for those secularists "fixed in an elitist mind-set that automatically defines religion as reactionary and unenlightened." Without a genuine social gospel, liberal policy-making becomes "a sterile instrument of government manipulation, as if social-welfare agencies and federal programs could bring salvation."

You don’t have to believe in God, she says, but you must understand that religion is "a higher poetry," the first and fundamental response to nature. "Liberalism lacks a profound sense of evil," she writes, and so it models sexual relations on all-rational interpersonal actions that dispel the complications of body language, seduction, unconscious desire, and male-female difference. Because feminism cannot "look honestly at the animal savagery and lust in all of us," it reeducates men out of their "toxic masculinity"—a futile crusade.

It is religion’s proper recognition of dark nature and the power of sex that often makes Paglia sound like a conservative. She affirms a naturalist version of Original Sin. In the op-ed praising Madonna, Paglia also approved of MTV for censoring one of her more salacious videos: "Parents cannot possibly control television." In discussing the ways in which sex education misleads boys and girls about gender difference and sex educators resist abstinence-only lessons, Paglia remarks, "But perhaps a bit more self-preserving fear and shame might be helpful in today's hedonistic, media-saturated environment." In Sexual Personæ, in the midst of detailing the fecund muckiness of nature, Paglia acknowledges, "Happy are those periods when marriage and religion are strong."

This is how a loudly bisexual, solidly Democratic, pro-pornography, free speech-absolutist, rock ‘n’ roll art professor became the most dynamic critic of progressive ideas on sex, gender, and education. She attacked all of modern liberalism’s deepest convictions: gender is socially constructed, men and women are the same, religion is hidebound, the past has passed, professors are wise. Defending those twisted dogmas has made liberalism at the present time more repressive than conservative Christianity, more inquisitorial than Puritanism.

In Provocations Paglia declares that the heart of the ’60s movements was “a new religious vision,” whose votaries cared about political reform, but were also seeking the truth about life outside [existing] religious and social institutions. The truth came before politics, sex, rebellion, or drugs. The truth Paglia identified long ago is that in all human beings there is an "emotional turmoil that is going on above and below politics, outside the scheme of social life." Great art touches it, and so does religion. Individuals who respond to art and religion understand that when politics and social life presume to replace them as right expressions of that turmoil, they falsify it instead…and Paglia won’t countenance a lie. That puts her at odds with every institution liberals have managed to seize, from academia to the Democratic Party. But if you mentioned that to her, she would shrug and get on with the truth-telling. She has nature on her side.

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SHADOW PLAY
by Martha Bayles

The Goddess in the Mist

Who is Elena Ferrante? To this question there are three main responses: The first, found among 99% of humanity, is, “I don’t know, and I don’t care.” The second, found among millions of avid Ferrante readers, is, “I know ‘Elena Ferrante’ is a pseudonym, but her publishers say she is a woman from a rough working-class neighborhood in 1950s Naples who struggled to acquire a classical education—and I believe them, because no writer from a different background, especially no male writer, could possibly express so powerfully the deepest and most forbidden emotions felt by every woman on the planet!” The third response, found among an indeterminate number of sceptics, is, “I don’t know, and though mildly curious, I don’t much care.”

Until recently I belonged to the first group, the 99% who neither know nor care. But then I watched the eight-part HBO adaptation of My Brilliant Friend, the first of four “Neapolitan Novels” published between 2012 and 2015, and finding it quite extraordinary, I delved into the novels and the voluminous body of criticism about their mysterious author. But instead of joining the fans, I joined the sceptics. This is because, with very few exceptions, Ferrante fandom overlaps with Ferrante criticism in ways that are not only politically tendentious and emotionally self-indulgent, but also obsessively invested in defining the author as a latter-day Cassandra, or perhaps Medea, whose entire purpose is to channel what is presumed to be the volcanic, hidden, and universal truth of female agony and rage.

Fortunately, this obsession seems not to have affected the TV series, which despite certain production challenges turned out to be both addictively watchable and refreshingly un-Hollywood. The initial production challenge was forging the original deal, which brought HBO together with a new generation of Italian producers and directors, including (among others) Lorenzo Mieli, Paolo Sorrentino, and Saverio Costanzo, who directed the series. There followed the challenge of adapting the novel, which was accomplished by Costanzo in consultation with the American screenwriter Jennifer Schuur and (through intermediaries) the reclusive author. Then there was the challenge of building an elaborate, historically accurate set on an acre of land in the city of Caserta, about 25 miles north of Naples.

The most daunting production challenge was the casting, because in the entire eight hours there is hardly a frame not tightly focused on the two main characters, Elena “Lenù” Greco and Raffaella “Lila” Cerullo. And this requires four actresses, because the story begins with Lenù and Lila as young girls meeting in primary school and encouraged by their teacher to become academic rivals; then it continues with the pair as teenagers taking divergent paths: quiet, studious Lenù continuing her education, and rebellious, mercurial Lila dropping out and becoming a shoe-maker like her father. Not only that, but it was decided from the outset that all the characters would speak both standard Italian and the Neapolitan dialect; and that the starring roles would go to non-professionals. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the casting took eight months and over 9,000 auditions.

It was worth it. Remarkable as it sounds, not one of the chosen four—11-year-old Elisa Del Genio (young Lenù), 12-year-old Ludovica Nasti (young Lila), 15-year-old Margherita Mazzucco (teenage Lenù), and 14-year-old Gaia Girace (teenage Lila)—sounds a single false note. Compared with the hyperactive, hyperemotional, hypersexualized adolescents populating the American screen, these characters and their schoolmates may seem reticent, formal, even stiff. But that only makes them more authentic. Living in a neighborhood where violence can erupt at any moment—not least from the Camorra (Neapolitan mafia)—young people hoping for a better future must watch every step.

Men Who Are Not Monsters

Note that I said “young people,” not “young women.” Here we encounter a subtle but highly significant difference between the novel and the TV series. The novel contains numerous male characters, some drawn with sympathy. But without exception, they all morph at some point into an alien species whose nature is to betray and injure females. For example, Lila’s older brother Rino, who defends his sister against everyone, including their ill-tempered father, is described in the book as “the person who was closest to her, the person she loved most.” But this changes at a fireworks display, where Rino gets carried away trading insults with Marcello and Michele Solara, the arrogant sons of the local Camorra family. On this occasion, Ferrante describes Lila as having a nightmare vision of her brother “as he really was: a squat animal form, thickset, the loudest, the fiercest, the greediest, the meanest.”

It doesn’t happen quite this way in the TV series. On the screen, Rino (played compellingly by Tommaso Rusciano) is ill-tempered...
like his father, who is in turn routinely humiliated by other men more powerful than he. This holds true for most of Rino’s peers, but perhaps because the camera shows us their all-too-human faces, most of these onscreen male characters do not morph into monsters the way their on-the-page counterparts do. With the exception of Nino, the spoiled son of a lecherous philanderer, and the arrogant Solara brothers, the TV series shows the boys and men of this struggling neighborhood less concerned with oppressing girls and women than with being able to make a decent living as shoemakers, grocers, and street peddlers—occupations that stood out as middle class against the extreme poverty of postwar Naples.

In a *Time* magazine article about Naples, historian Paola Gambarota states that because of the heavy Allied bombing and the destruction of the city’s port and infrastructure by the retreating German army, Naples emerged from World War II so devastated that “[m]aybe only Berlin in 1945 can be compared.” On top of that, the city has been dominated since the 17th century by the Camorra, a now global criminal organization that has never hesitated to eliminate anyone standing in its way. Ferrante’s novel devotes a few pages to this history when describing the Carracci family, whose thriving grocery store depends on the protection of the mob-connected Solara family. But neither the novel nor the TV series provides more than a cursory sketch of this history. And the topic seems to hold very little interest for Lenù and Lila.

This omission may seem odd, but it is best explained by the novel’s central preoccupation with female suffering. As suggested earlier, both critics and fans of Ferrante carry this preoccupation to the point of obsession, extolling the mysterious author as a Cassandra, or Medea, crying in the wilderness about the monstrous nature of the male sex. These tragic myths do lend a dark resonance to My Brilliant Friend, most notably at the end, when in the midst of Lila’s wedding to the grocer Stefano Carracci, the Solara brothers appear—unwanted guests whose arrival forces Lila, in a terrible moment of recognition, to see that her new husband is hopelessly in thrall to the Camorra and that her efforts to outwit fate have failed. But not even the misogynist Greeks took these myths as a complete portrait of womanhood.

**Wives Who Thrive**

When asked (through intermediaries) which authors she admires, Ferrante often cites Christa Wolf, the East German novelist whose books include elaborations on the tragedies of Cassandra and Medea. I mention this because, along with being a feminist, Wolf was a happily married woman whose work thrived in part because of the love and support of her husband. Here are two excerpts from a 2005 interview with *Die Zeit*:

DZ: “When do you know you’re on the right track with something you’re writing?”
CW: “Once my husband’s read it…. He’s got a very accurate feel for my manuscripts. If I haven’t done the best I can, he says it.”
DZ: “Does that annoy you?”
CW: “And how!”

After our second interview in Mecklenburg, we all sit together in their big kitchen. Herr Wolf has prepared soup with fish from the nearby lake. “Do you admire your wife?” we ask. Christa Wolf says: “Woe betide you if you open your mouth now.” He smiles and is silent.

Scenes like these, revealing of a deep intellectual as well as emotional bond between wife and husband, do not occur in Ferrante’s fiction. The novels contain blissful interludes of romance and sexual passion, but these are invariably cut short by rapes, betrayals, affairs, and beatings, not to mention the burdens of motherhood (depicted as nearly intolerable). One could argue, of course, that these unrelenting miseries reflect the lived reality of the author. But surely there is considerable irony in the fact that Ferrante’s searing descriptions of female suffering are invariably praised for their “honesty” by people who do not even know who the author is. And in recent years the irony has only increased, as a fair amount of evidence has come to light suggesting that the real Elena Ferrante is that presumably impossible thing: a happily married couple.

The evidence is not dispositive, but in 2016, Italian investigative journalist Claudio Gatti published a lengthy article in the *New York Review of Books* suggesting that the author of the Ferrante novels is Anita Raja, the daughter of a German mother and a Neapolitan father who has worked as a translator at Ferrante’s Rome-based publisher, Edizioni e/o, since the 1990s. What Gatti did was simple: he followed the money.

Edizioni e/o’s annual revenues for 2014 were €3,087,314, a 65 percent increase from the previous year. In 2015, revenues went up another 150 percent, reaching €7,615,203. These extraor-
dinary increases appear to be a direct result of Ferrante’s sales; the publisher had no other comparable bestsellers during these years. The growth in the publisher’s revenues are also closely paralleled in the growth of Raja’s own payments from Edizioni e/o over the same period, which I obtained from an anonymous source. In 2014, Raja’s compensation increased by almost 50 percent, and in 2015 it grew again by more than 150 percent, reaching an amount that was about seven times what she received in 2010, when the market for Ferrante’s books was still confined to Italy.

To complete the picture, Gatti cites the efforts of “literary critics, who sought to use philological techniques and stylistic analysis to compare Ferrante’s work with that of several of the writers proposed as candidates.” One of the names that came up with a “high probability” was Domenico Starnone, described by the American critic Rachel Donadio as “a self-aware postmodernist in the era of the writers proposed as candidates.”

Oh, and here’s the happily married part: as noted by Gatti, Domenico Starnone is the husband of Anita Raja, and the success of “Elena Ferrante” seems to have benefited them both:

Public real estate records show that in 2000, after Ferrante’s first book was turned into a successful movie in Italy, Raja acquired in her own name a seven-room apartment near Villa Torlonia, an expensive area of Rome; the following year she bought a country home in Tuscany.

But the real commercial success of the Ferrante novels began in 2014 and 2015, when they conquered the international market....

Records show that in June 2016 Raja’s husband, Domenico Starnone, bought an apartment in Rome, less than a mile away from the one registered under his wife’s name. It is a 2,500 square foot, eleven-room apartment on the top floor of an elegant pre-war building in one of the most beautiful streets of Rome, also near Villa Torlonia, with a value estimated between $1.5 and $2 million.

The Magnificence of Penelope

When teaching The Odyssey to undergraduates, I highlight the virtues that, along with physical prowess, make Odysseus a great hero: courage, endurance, toughness, resourcefulness, alertness, shrewdness, cunning, boldness, patience. When he finally returns to Ithaca, where a gang of unruly suitors are vying to marry his wife, Penelope, I start hinting that these same virtues can be found in her. But the students do not take these hints. They admire Cassandra’s cursing of Apollo, Agamemnon, and all the other males who have been deaf to her prophecies. They praise Medea’s murder of her own children to punish the faithless Jason. But they disdain Penelope’s steadfastness. Indeed, they insist on seeing Penelope as a weepy, subservient cipher who (maybe) gets a kick out of having a bunch of young guys around, but is too dutiful and boring to do anything about it.

At that point it is the professor’s privilege to show them how wrong they are. I do this with the help of the American poet Robert Fitzgerald, whose translations of Homer are in my judgment the finest. In a Postscript written in 1962, Fitzgerald offers a close analysis of the drama that unfolds between Odysseus, who enters the palace disguised as a beggar because he doesn’t know whom he can trust, and Penelope, who likewise must dissemble in a house full of greedy interlopers and treacherous maidservants. Speaking in code because of the spies lurking in the shadows, husband and wife test each other’s veracity, loyalty, and fidelity until, having achieved a modicum of trust, they devise an equally encrypted plan of attack. Once the students get the hang of this analysis, they find these otherwise baffling scenes quite riveting. And most agree with Fitzgerald that it would be a mistake “to underrate the high and beautiful tension of [these scenes] and the nerve, the magnificence, of Penelope.”

There was one notable exception: a straight-A student who flatly refused to consider Fitzgerald’s analysis. So extreme was her refusal, and so unconvincing her arguments, that neither I nor her classmates could believe she was serious. Eventually, after a long and contentious discussion, she blurted out her reason: “I’m a feminist!” At the time, I was puzzled. But I have since worked out the connection between this extreme view and the initial failure of all the students to see anything resembling virtue, nerve, or magnificence in Penelope. Both stem from a deeply ingrained, largely unwitting, but stupendously arrogant assumption that no loving wife and mother, especially one drawn by a male author, could ever be magnificent. It now appears that this assumption is alive and well in Italy, where like the mist that envelops Athena when she does not wish to be recognized, the mist of anonymity envelopes the real “Elena Ferrante” as she laughs all the way to the bank.
Making the Presidency Great Again

When the American people elevated George Washington to the presidency, they knew that because of his achievements, character, and virtues, they were elevating the presidency to him. Just as music has degenerated from Mozart to rap, so has the presidency since the election of the last adult president 30 years ago, and now the final stages of competition for the highest office are given over to demagogues, dynastics, and dolts.

To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, the presidency rises to our standards when we improve, and sinks to them when we decay. Which is another way of saying that in a democracy and even a democratic republic the fish rots not from the head down but from the body up. Though likely hopeless—because the ability to become president diverges so radically from the ability to be president—it should not be unreasonable for citizens to demand a higher standard and lay out its elements. Among 330 million people, you would think there would be at least one in whom these two abilities would coincide.

The skill to politic, manipulate, obfuscate, and evade, and talent in raising money, using people, tossing them overboard, and eating one’s young are assumed—unless a president obtains his position after a turnip truck overturns on Pennsylvania Avenue or a circus cannon accidentally shoots him through a window of the Oval Office (this may actually have happened). Keeping in mind that implied deficiencies fully pertain to both parties, consider some qualities a president should embody:

Reticence and Restraint. A president must strengthen the currency of his remarks by speaking rarely and concisely. Should he be royally enchanted by his own voice, as happens, he poisons the natural order of precedence in a republic. Should he activate his powers indiscriminately, promiscuously, on impulse, or without careful economy, it means he doesn’t comprehend either the risks or the correlation of forces in the challenges he faces. If because he mismanages valid powers he then exceeds his constitutional limitations due to what he presents as the force majeure of superior morals acting upon a flexible Constitution, he is doubly guilty.

Humility. The nation’s capital reeks of false humility the way it once did of tanneries. This is because politicians are actually an inferior species that, though it knows it is expected to have genuine humility, does not. They learn from their successes that they are great, and from their failures that the world is insufficiently appreciative of their brilliance. In my view, this makes nearly all of them certifiable, which in turn makes accusations in this regard against President Trump moot other than as a matter of degree. (That no such accusations were leveled against President Obama was like a reverse miracle of the loaves.)

In regard to anyone who upon lifting his finger can move armies and fleets, humility enables the recognition that no matter what he does or decides, some or many will suffer and some or many may die; that his judgments may be wrong, and yet he must make them; that the matters he judges have passed through filter after filter until the flesh and blood from which they are pressed appear as merely abstract; that life is tragedy, unavoidably; and that if, like so many of his predecessors, he does not suffer what Winston Churchill called “stress of soul,” not only has he failed, but he is dangerous.

Deep and disciplined learning, as the academy has proven beyond a doubt, learning is neither wisdom nor intelligence nor common sense. These qualities, however, are wonderfully amplified by an internally held stock of knowledge and practice in judging its truth and value. Although he may be an expert in one thing or another, a president must have more than a passing acquaintance with history, economics, the Constitution, law, military strategy, science, and, yes, literature, for it is the glass of human nature. And familiarity with it might also prompt a chief executive to murder in their cradles the products of painfully mediocre speechwriters, whose groaning platitudes and clichés cheapen discourse, numb behinds, and circle about the point like a drunk trying to thread a needle.

When a president wildly misstates facts, cannot speak grammatically, repeats himself like an obsessive compulsive parrot, and draws a blank at the mention of arcane historical examples such as the American Revolution or the Second World War, one begins to wonder, breathlessly. Woodrow Wilson was a chronically supercilious scholar, and it didn’t do the nation any good. A president need not be a scholar, but only to have been curious early on about what is in the world and how it works, and to have labored long and hard to satisfy that curiosity in the light of truth. Only that will augment his other qualities sufficiently to deal with the great array of problems he faces at the highest level.

Courage. Courage is in many ways its own learning of the other virtues. It enables one to see and follow truth when immense pressures and forces are arrayed against it. It allows adherence to sound and fundamental principles that have been abandoned or betrayed, and it blesses defiance of external, spiritual, and circumstantial enemies that inspire others to surrender. Perhaps most of all, courage enables a president to reckon with the most important thing he must know: that his is a sacrificial office. For a president cannot be worthy or good unless he understands that despite his personal privileges, the fawning, and the awe, in light of his responsibilities his person has been reduced to nil. To see clearly, he must in his own eyes account for nothing. This, the true mark of greatness, is most difficult, we have not seen it in a long time, we are not likely to see it soon, and we certainly do not see it now.
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