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Larry P.
Arnn:
**Crisis of
the Two
Constitutions**

Daniel
McCarthy:
**Who Counts as
Conservative?**

Charles
Moore:
**Hitler's
Downfall**

David P.
Goldman:
**Judaism
Straight Up**

Martha
Bayles:
**Life and
Fate**

The Unmaking of a President

Essays by
Andrew E. Busch
William Voegeli
Michael Anton
Charles R. Kesler



Christopher
DeMuth:
**The Old
Electoral
College Try**

James
Hankins:
**Facing
China**

Arthur
Herman:
**McCarthyism,
Then & Now**

Helen
Andrews:
**Eleanor
Roosevelt**

Spencer A.
Klavan:
**Aeneas
& Us**

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Schooled for Sex

Matthew Crawford is right to highlight the unnatural treatment of sexuality meted out by our culture, especially by the morally confused bureaucracies of our universities (“Fixing Men,” Fall 2020). The lamentable result is the creation of a “rape culture,” in which young women are taught to fear all young men as potential rapists, and young men to loathe themselves as irredeemables seething with criminal desires. In such a climate of alarm, how is it that natural human romance between a young man and a young woman could ever blossom?

Our universities are not just nay-saying sexual nannies that sound the Puritan fire alarm at every possible sputtering flame of romance. Long before they took upon themselves this negative task, they were the great advocates of sexual bacchanalia for their students. They were the ones that brought the sexual pot to boil, and now (striking a self-righteous pose) the ones slamming a lid on it. The celebration of condom use, sexual experimentation, masturbation, anal intercourse, group sex, homosex-

uality and lesbianism, and now transgenderism that started in our universities has made its way to the kindergarten classrooms of our public schools. The entire culture stirs nearly anything into the already boiling sexual pot, and our current batch of college students has been stewing in it all their lives. Add to this the unprecedented availability of ever-more disturbingly unnatural and violent pornography, which by all accounts has saturated nearly the entire generation of those now entering college.

By the time our students show up at our universities, their sexual desires have been so malformed that there is little left of any natural sexual desire that could bloom into romance, *even if* the universities’ platoon of sexual nannies would allow for some momentary breathing room. The pre-university culture has nurtured them for almost two decades in a sexual Hobbesian state of nature, where there is no sexual good or evil, only the right to satisfy any and every sexual desire. Since this creates a sexual state of war, the liberal mindset can only revert to the notion of “consent”—as in, you have a right to do *anything* sexually as long as the other person (or persons) consents to what you are doing. But such a notion (as Hobbes well understood) requires an arbitrary and absolute sovereign to enforce consent, and so the university bureaucracy becomes the enforcing Leviathan.

One almost feels sorry for the universities. In one sense, they can’t be blamed, because our culture has handed them an impossible task. The only thing making it somewhat easier on them (as Crawford points out) is that one of the effects of our porn-saturated culture is that young men and women are increasingly avoiding actual members of the opposite sex, and holing up in their rooms to watch porn by themselves. But in other ways, universities share a

heavy load of the blame, for they were at the forefront of liberating sexuality from any restraint, touting the foolish belief that the flimsy notion of “consent” could save us from the real effects of sexual anarchy.

The truth is—and it is not one our culture is willing to accept—that male and female sexuality can bloom into romance, and hence be properly domesticated, only if it has the natural sexual union of male and female in marriage as its end. That is why the rejection of any defined natural end for sexual desire has led to the rejection of any defined natural beginning in male and female. From this arises the attempt to “fix” men by emasculating them and “fix” women by masculinizing them, and then finally the rejection of gender itself as merely an ever-malleable social construct.

Benjamin Wiker

Franciscan University
Steubenville, OH

Matthew B. Crawford replies:

Professor Wiker points to a connection between the sexual regime overseen by universities and the wider moral backdrop to modern life—a Hobbesian dispensation of loveless competition. This seems right. I disagree with his suggestion that universities have previously been “advocates of sexual bacchanalia,” and that the current bureaucratization of relations between students should then be understood as a course correction. The program seems more steady to me, and certainly more dreary than a proper bacchanal. They have consistently promoted “safe sex,” which has a psychic as well as a medical meaning; indeed it seems to imply a metaphysics. Intimacy here means an exchange of quanta of gratification among two or more gender-units, of more or less indeterminate sex, whose

utility curves momentarily intersect. The immolating frenzy of love, which cannot be parsed in such economic terms, must be debunked. Sexual love threatens to be life-shaping; it may lead one to shed options, get serious, and assume confining responsibilities. This does not sit well with the liberal ideal of autonomy, in which the space for choice must be kept permanently open. Most dangerous of all, to the project of forming atomized souls, are the realities of *male* and *female*, those given facts of the animal body that locate us in mutual need, and thereby in community. Ultimately, I think Prof. Wiker and I are working toward the same insight.

Pierre Manent has written that liberal society “wants to be a dis-society” and requires an ongoing abstraction from the body. For all our society’s apparent sensualism, he suggests, its ideal is an anti-corporeal order of “angelic,” free-floating wills that may come together momentarily as symmetrical equals, so long as there is no subordination. The problem this ideal runs into is that when mutual sexual desire emerges it is reciprocal rather than symmetric. “The dissymmetry resides in the fact that on the feminine side modesty comes first, while on the masculine side initiative does.” This seems to be an intractable fact, a thorn in the side of our more militant angels.

To invoke female modesty is likely to elicit guffaws on campus. To my ear, this guffawing has the sound of cultural police work. The dissymmetry Manent refers to is an embarrassment to liberal anthropology, which tacitly posits sexlessness. The “hetero” in heterosexuality is thus on constant trial, and the lust for enforcement has lately blossomed. We get a hyperbolically punitive stance toward male sexuality in which their initiative is recast as basically criminal, which requires a corresponding infantilization

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of women as passive victims. It's almost as though the campus bureaucracy is projecting an exaggerated caricature of sexual difference onto students in order to bring them into a dragnet of administrative control—the point of which control is to erase the difference. It's all very paradoxical; the dishonesty of it would appear to be structural. Note that female sexual prudence and self-command (modesty, roughly) would throw a wrench into the works, and undermine the police mandate. It's almost as though the system needs jailbait.

Our Best Immigration Policy

In his otherwise properly laudatory review of Mike Gonzalez's excellent book, *The Plot to Change America: How Identity Politics Is Dividing the Land of the Free*, John Fonte mystifyingly objects to Gonzalez's criticism of "conser-

vative" immigration restrictionists ("Identity Theft," Fall 2020). Gonzalez argues in the book that newcomers will "naturally gravitate toward the mainstream" if their assimilation isn't obstructed by government policies that aim to divide Americans by race and ethnicity, hence fracturing rather than unifying our country. Curiously, Fonte argues that "the immigration restriction legislation of the 1920s fostered the patriotic assimilation of Ellis Island immigrants justifiably celebrated in World War II movies." But how could severely *restricting* immigration encourage anyone's "patriotic assimilation" to a country that never admitted him (or his parents or grandparents) in the first place?

The patriotic unity of citizens of diverse ethnic origins that we see portrayed in those World War II films was the product not of keeping immigrants *out* but of welcoming them *in*. Throughout the 19th century and until the near-clampdown on legal immi-

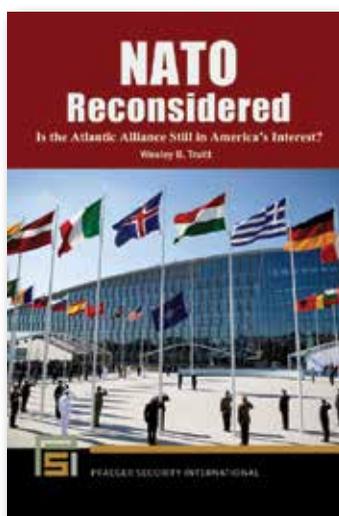
gration in the 1920s, this country benefited by welcoming waves of immigrants from numerous European countries as well as China and Japan. Their labors boosted the U.S.'s economic growth even as their patriotism contributed to success in our country's wars. By contrast, the nativist spirit of the '20s reached its shameful nadir in our refusal to admit any but a tiny fraction of European Jews desperately fleeing massacre at the hands of the Nazis.

Although the United States government has properly sought to deter illegal immigration, this nation has a strong interest in welcoming *legal* immigrants, rich or poor, who come here seeking a better life than was available in their countries of origin, aiming to advance through their own labors and thereby benefit their new homeland as well as themselves. Unless government *obstructs* their assimilation through policies like racial and ethnic preferences, bilingual and "multicultural" education, overly liberal welfare poli-

cies, and bilingual ballots, today's immigrants promise to become no less "mainstream" Americans than those of the past. Indeed, their arrival should help remind the rest of us of why our country merits our continued patriotic devotion. They deserve a generous welcome.

If I may add a personal note, my own father arrived in this country just before the enactment of the restrictionist legislation that Fonte celebrates, which might well have excluded him. He came through Ellis Island from Russia knowing, so far as I am aware, barely a word of English (though he later spoke perfectly unaccented as well as grammatical English with no sort of official bilingual education), and practically penniless. Though a bright man, he was compelled to drop out of high school (as was common among immigrants in those days) in order to help support his parents and younger sister. My dad worked extremely hard, at considerable physical cost, for 55

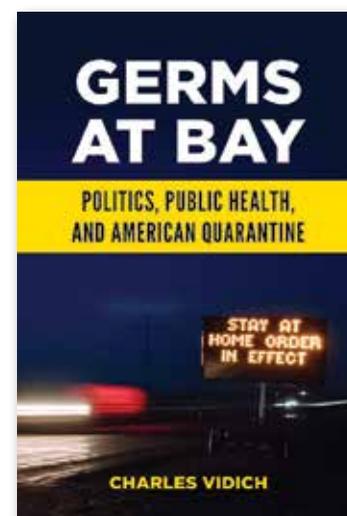
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years, so as later (with my mom's help) to enable my sister and me to attend colleges of our choice and then pursue rewarding professional careers.

It would be hard to find a couple prouder or more grateful for being American citizens than my dad and mom (whose own family had arrived here from Ukraine at the very time and place in which the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* is set—like my father's family, as persecuted Jews—just a couple of years before her birth). And they certainly imbued their children with that same deep sense of patriotism.

My family's story isn't exceptional, but typical—and still highly relevant today, especially if our federal and state governments will desist from their efforts (intentional or not) to deter assimilation.

David Lewis Schaefer
College of the Holy Cross
Worcester, MA

John Fonte replies:

I thank David Schaefer for giving me the opportunity, first, to congratulate him on his seminal work dissecting the malignant influence of John Rawls and, second, to examine (once again) how Ellis Island nostalgia warps a realistic understanding of contemporary immigration policy among many conservative intellectuals.

Professor Schaefer tells us that just as in the days of Ellis Island more immigrants ("rich or poor") arriving today will "benefit" America "[u]nless government *obstructs* their assimilation through policies like racial and ethnic preferences, bilingual and 'multicultural' education, overly liberal welfare policies, and bilingual ballots." But that is exactly what's been going on for the past half-century. With some anti-Communist exceptions (Cubans, Venezuelans, older Vietnamese), newcomers are, unfortunately, being "integrated" into woke identity politics.

The immigration restriction legislation of the 1920s cut off the continuous replenishment of ethnic neighborhoods and, thus, by necessity, facilitated the economic and patriotic assimilation of newcomers into the American mainstream as they learned English, intermarried, and embraced American political culture. President Calvin Coolidge wrote (correctly) in 1923: "New arrivals should be limited to our capacity to absorb them into the ranks of good citizenship."

Schaefer implies that immigrants are as, or even more, patriotic than native-born citizens. As a generalization this is empirically false. Harris Interactive surveys in 2008 and 2014 revealed that American-born citizens have a much higher degree of patriotic attachment than naturalized citizens on core issues. For example, by 31 points (85% to 54%) American-born citizens are more likely than naturalized citizens to consider themselves American citizens rather than "citizens of the world." By 27 points (69% to 42%) American-born citizens are more likely than naturalized citizens to believe the U.S. Constitution is a higher legal authority for Americans than international law. By 31 points (81% to 50%) native-born citizens are more likely than immigrant citizens to believe that schools should focus on common American citizenship rather than ethnic pride.

Schaefer seems to believe that everyone benefits from continuing mass migration. But there are winners and losers. Big business gets cheap labor, the federal bureaucracy gets more clients, the progressive Left gets more voters (in formerly conservative states turned blue, such as California, Arizona, and Nevada), and yes, overall GDP goes up (more people equals higher GDP) and consumers get cheaper goods from China, and a few cents off produce from the supermarket.

On the other hand, low-income native-born Americans are among the losers as increased

immigration expands the labor market and drives down wages. Harvard professor George Borjas (described by both the *Wall Street Journal* and *Bloomberg Businessweek* as "America's leading immigration economist") has concluded that "immigration turns out to be just another income redistribution program" with the "losers—the workers who compete with immigrants, many of those being low-skilled Americans—sending a roughly \$500 billion check annually to the winners. Those winners are primarily their employers."

American taxpayers at large are also losers in this scheme. Heritage Foundation scholar Robert Rector testified before Congress that "low-skill immigrants increase poverty in the U.S. and impose a burden on taxpayers that should be avoided." Steven Camarota of the Center for Immigration Studies found that 51% of all households headed by an immigrant used at least one welfare program compared to 30% of native households. In short, the economic benefits of immigration Schaefer touts are met by an equal or greater number of detriments.

My father, grandparents, and numerous cousins came through Ellis Island from Sicily; others were blocked by the restrictive legislation. Like Schaefer's relatives they turned out to be patriotic—although the socialists among them were, in my view, not sufficiently grateful to the United States and the opportunities it afforded. As in the Ellis Island past, there are ungrateful immigrant radicals today who are hostile to the American way of life (Congresswoman Ilhan Omar comes to mind), who, I presume, do not meet David Schaefer's (or my) conception of patriotic assimilation.

We now live in the world of globalization; perpetual mass low-skilled immigration to a nation with less social mobility; corrupt elites in culture, media, and education that promote

the lie that America is a land of "systemic oppression." In these changed circumstances, continuing mass low-skilled immigration feeds the woke progressive political machine. Does Prof. Schaefer want California to be our political future?

Americans today need the best immigration policy for 2021, not an endless repetition of Ellis Island nostalgia. Reducing immigration will assist assimilation and, most importantly, lighten the burden on American patriots (both naturalized and native-born) resisting those forces bent on "fundamentally transforming the United States of America."

Free-Market Economists

In "When Market Economists Fail" (Fall 2020), Oren Cass sets up a strawman version of free-market economics, which he proceeds to burn up in a blaze of rhetoric. Here is a version that I believe would be more recognizable to free-market economists:

- The challenge for an economy is to achieve coordination and improvement. Government and markets are two *processes* for doing so.
- For coordination, central planners lack the information to coordinate sensibly in the absence of a price system. Regulators who operate on top of the price system face the same calculation problem. In the end, regulators are as blind as the director of a totally centrally planned economy. As an example, consider how financial regulators in the early 2000s, in what was known as the "recourse rule," reduced the bank capital requirements for holding mortgage securities with AA- and AAA-ratings, thinking that they were steering banks toward assets with lower risk. Oops.



✦ For improvement, we need a process that experiments, evaluates results, and evolves by discarding failure and retaining success. For each of these, markets are better suited than government. Markets are conducive to more experimentation, because innovators do not require bureaucratic approval to attempt ideas that go against conventional wisdom. Markets evaluate more rigorously, using the profit and loss system rather than impressionistic estimates of benefits and costs. Finally, markets discard unsuccessful and outmoded operations, while ineffective and anachronistic government programs persist.

✦ Market failure is real. In theory, if government officials could solve the calculation problem, they would provide incentives to increase or decrease the relevant activity to some theoretically optimal level. In practice, government does not steer the market to right quantity. Instead, government typically subsidizes demand and restricts supply, with countervailing effects on quantity but creating rents for narrow interest groups. This is true in housing, higher education, and health care.

✦ In the absence of government intervention, markets are

not stuck in failure. Often, a market failure creates an opportunity for an innovator to profit by building a business that produces a better outcome. In many areas where government claims success, it has stifled private solutions that worked better.

In short, the free-market economist says that economic outcomes, like all human phenomena, are imperfect. But we claim that the processes of coordination and improvement work better with less government intervention.

Arnold Kling
Silver Spring, MD

Oren Cass replies:

I would thank Mr. Kling for his reply, if it were to my essay. That essay was a discussion of “public choice theory,” the economic analysis of the incentives facing public actors like elected officials and bureaucrats and the effect of those incentives on their ability to formulate and implement policy. Public choice’s vital insights counsel humility, check grandiose ambitions, and offer guidance for effective policy design. A certain class of economists, of which Kling appears to be a proud member, unfortunately mistakes these insights for baseless pronouncements that markets are generically superior and public policy unhelpful in

virtually all circumstances. This, as the essay’s title suggests, is a case of market economist failure.

Kling makes no reference to public choice in his reply, nor does he quote so much as a word from my essay. Instead, he expounds upon the “coordination” problem, which is itself important but analytically separate. (For a good discussion of why his pronouncements on coordination are incorrect, I would refer readers to Julius Krein’s fine essay, “Planning for When the Market Cannot,” in American Compass’s *Rebooting the American System* collection.)

Kling’s misfire is most obvious when he goes beyond merely ignoring public choice to running far afoul of its core tenet. “In theory, if government officials could solve the calculation problem, they would provide incentives to increase or decrease the relevant activity to some theoretically optimal level,” he writes. But public choice theory explicitly, and correctly, refutes such a claim. The problem of policymaking is not merely one of knowledge and calculation but also one of the policymakers’ own interests. Even with perfect information, government officials do not necessarily pursue policies that achieve “some theoretically optimal level” of anything. Of course, as my essay notes, private actors also encounter many situations in which their own incentives produce outcomes that diverge from “some

theoretically optimal level.” Thus my argument that most public challenges and goals “call for some combination of public and private action, neither of which will accomplish everything we might wish, but the combination of which can accomplish more than either on its own.” The reply furnishes a classic illustration of the market economists’ failure to grasp or think critically about these tradeoffs, which was my point.

It is ironic, then, that Kling accuses me of “set[ting] up a strawman version of free-market economics.” Still, I have become accustomed to such complaints—market fundamentalists tend to become quite irritated when their dogmas are presented forthrightly for scrutiny, and to disclaim responsibility for preaching them—which is why I frame the essay’s critiques with lengthy quotations from prominent public-choice scholars and free-market economists, including: the former president of the Public Choice Society, the editor-in-chief of the journal *Public Choice*, a George Mason University professor speaking at an F.A. Hayek Program, and the director of economic studies at the American Enterprise Institute. I am pleased if Mr. Kling finds their views as unmoored from solid theory as I find them, but in that case he should really take up the matter with those gentlemen directly.

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