

VOLUME XXIII, NUMBER 4, FALL 2023

CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship

Joseph M. Bessette:
COVID, a Constitutional Crisis

Charles Moore:
The Tories After Thatcher

Harvey C. Mansfield:
Leo Strauss's Legacy

Randy E. Barnett:
Cass Sunstein

Christopher Flannery:
Shakespeare's First Folio

Jeffrey H. Anderson:
Election 2024

Christopher Caldwell:
Desperate Germany

Allen C. Guelzo:
Woodrow Wilson's Red Scare

David P. Goldman:
Why Sparta Won

Michael Anton
Harvey C. Mansfield

William Voegeli:
The Roots of Woke



Mark Helprin:
ISRAEL
at the Precipice

Michael S. Kochin:
Israel's Declaration of Independence

Ruth Wisse:
Israel's Heroes

A Publication of the Claremont Institute

PRICE: \$9.95
IN CANADA: \$14.95



Essay by Charles Moore

AFTER THATCHER

The decline of the Tory Party.



THIS PAST JULY, BRITAIN WAS HIT BY AN unusual banking scandal. It was not the usual terrifying stuff about credit crunches and being “too big to fail.” On the face of it, it was about only one man and only one bank.

The man was Nigel Farage, the most successful nonmainstream politician in modern Britain. Despite not belonging to a conventional political party and never having been a member of Parliament, Farage played an important role in achieving Brexit. As a “populist” and friend of Donald Trump, he is cordially disliked by the British establishment.

The bank, Coutts, is perhaps the oldest and grandest name in British banking. Since the 17th century, it has specialized in looking after the money of those who have a great deal of the stuff (£3 million is the current minimum required for new customers to open a deposit account). Clients include many members of the British royal family, led by the present king, and the landed aristocracy. The bank prides itself on its Rolls-Royce private banking and therefore on its absolute discretion.

Farage, however, announced a discovery he had made about his accounts. Coutts, of which he had been a customer for several years, had

“de-banked” him. The reason, he claimed, was that the bank did not like his political views. Coutts is wholly owned by NatWest, the third-biggest bank in Britain. NatWest denied Farage’s accusation. In an off-the-record briefing at a charity dinner, NatWest’s chief executive, Dame Alison Rose, told the BBC that Farage’s claim was false. His accounts had been closed, Rose said, because he did not have enough money.

Farage put in a “subject access request” to Coutts to see the bank’s internal correspondence about his affairs. Out came 40 pages of accusations against him. These made it clear that the bank’s anxiety was not, despite what Rose had said, about the state of his accounts but the state of his opinions. The decision to “exit” Farage was “one centred round inclusivity and purpose,” the records said. His views failed to “align with our values.” The Coutts dossier consisted largely of press cuttings, accusing him of supporting free-speech rights for Christians and Muslims who disagreed with same-sex marriage, opposing illegal migration, and so on. One item said Farage had expressed “Thatcherite beliefs.” He had indeed been de-banked for political reasons.

Having been caught out both in betraying client confidentiality and in repeating un-

truths, Rose was forced to resign. The chief executive of Coutts followed her out the door. Farage’s complaint was vindicated. It subsequently emerged that many other people and groups have been de-banked for comparable thought crimes.

This story tells you quite a lot about the strange state of politics and culture in modern Britain. On the one hand, fairly normal conservative opinions are treated by many in authority as semi-criminal. Thus, Farage’s admiration for the beliefs of Margaret Thatcher, Britain’s longest-running and most notable peacetime prime minister in the era of universal suffrage, forms part of the charge sheet laid against him by some of the country’s most influential capitalists. In this sense, Thatcherism, a most doughty defender of capitalism, could hardly be more out of fashion.

On the other hand, the Farage case is testament to the fact that Thatcherism will not lie down and die. No other British prime minister, not even Winston Churchill, has an “-ism” as his or her legacy. The routing of the woke bankers in the Farage case is confirmation of one of the most famous dictums associated with Mrs. Thatcher, said to have been first expressed during her time as leader of the opposition before she won her first general election

in 1979: “The facts of life invariably *do* turn out to be conservative.”

The Iron Lady

THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS HAS analogs with how the era of Thatcher’s best overseas friend, Ronald Reagan, is seen today (though Reagan is less controversial in the United States than Thatcher is in Britain). How has it come about?

Part of the explanation is specifically British; part wider. It is important to understand that, even before Thatcher had arrived in office, there was no consensus about her in Britain. She probably did not mind that, because she loved to say how much she disliked consensus: “The Old Testament prophets didn’t go out into the highways saying, ‘Brothers, I want consensus.’ They said, ‘This is my faith and my vision!’... And they preached it.” But it meant that there was already a battle over her legacy, almost before she entered the office which she held for eleven and a half years.

In the first volume of *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography* (2013), I devoted a whole chapter to reactions to her, because they were so unusually strong. Differing attitudes to her embodied a culture war. One would have expected the first woman prime minister to have aroused opposition in conservative circles because of her sex. This did happen to some extent, most notably, for example, in her Tory predecessor, Edward Heath. But the hostile reaction to her sex came much more from the Left, many of whom seemed repelled at the idea that a woman could be a strong leader in politics and yet hold the “wrong” views. When Lady Thatcher died in 2013, the House of Commons gathered to commemorate her. By far the harshest contributor, in what was naturally expected to be a respectful occasion, was the distinguished actress and Labour M.P. Glenda Jackson. She spoke of the “extraordinary human damage” Thatcher had done, and concluded, “To pay tribute to the first Prime Minister denoted by female gender, okay, but a woman? Not on my terms.” It was as if a woman not on the left was an unnatural creation. Thatcher’s sex had a big influence on how she was received and made reactions toward her much more emotional than if she had been a man.

From the start, large minorities lined up for or against her. About a quarter of the population saw her as a national savior; roughly the same number, as the devil incarnate. She easily won all three general elections into which she led her party because she succeeded in persuading enough of the voters in the middle that, though not necessarily agreeable, she

was somehow necessary—that she knew what needed doing and how to do it.

This is evidenced by the fact that all her central policies were fiercely opposed, but almost none of them, once implemented, was reversed. (The great exception was her property-based “poll tax.”) Her fight against inflation, her reforms of labor union law, her privatizations, her tax cuts, her ending of exchange controls and freeing up of financial markets, her nuclear rearmament with Reagan to reassert NATO security in Europe and her subsequent friendly approaches to Mikhail Gorbachev to help end the Cold War mostly endured. Even today, they are the backdrop against which many political disputes take place.

The British politician who best understood the importance of Margaret Thatcher was not a Conservative, but Tony Blair, who became Labour leader in 1994, fewer than four years after she had left office. As a new M.P. during her premiership, he had observed his own party’s failure to oppose her effectively. Blair criticized his predecessors for having believed that just by stating hysterical opposition to what they saw as Thatcherite wickedness they would persuade voters to back them. He felt that if Labour were to win again, it must learn from Thatcher to persuade people that it was capable of governing. Indeed, he told me that his way of gauging if his party really had changed for the better was whether it could appreciate the scale of her modernizing achievements. Blair was against her in significant ways—he disliked what he saw as her harsh social policies and “nostalgic” British nationalism which made her hostile to the European Union—but as a man very interested in success, he carefully studied why she had succeeded. He wanted to reproduce her qualities of reforming leadership. He duly won the 1997 general election with a landslide after the 18 years of Tory rule she had inaugurated. Thatcher herself liked to say that one of the things of which she was most proud was that she had changed the Labour Party.

Misdiagnosing the Problem

HER LEGACY TO HER OWN PARTY IS much more complicated. This is related to the way she lost office in 1990. She was not pushed out by voters, but by her parliamentary colleagues. The coup against her led to extreme acrimony, made worse by the fact that the main issue which had lost her the support of much of her Cabinet was an intensely controversial one. She had become disillusioned by the European Union and seriously alarmed by the determi-

nation of the president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, to create a European single currency and consequently, as she saw it, pan-European government. She supported the European Community, but not the European Union into which it was developing. Her position was quite popular with the electorate but not with the Tory grandees.

Thatcher was the first party leader, since the vote in 1975 which confirmed Britain’s place in the European Community, to propose a referendum on a European issue—on plans to abolish the pound sterling, to be precise. She first advocated this publicly shortly before she was forced to resign in November 1990. After her fall, this suggestion morphed, but never went away. In 2016 (to his eternal regret), Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron fulfilled his promise of a referendum on Britain’s membership in the European Union. He lost. In the largest vote on one side ever cast in British history (17.4 million people), the electorate chose Leave. The Leave victory did not lead Remainers to end the quarrel, but to continue it by other means. They attempted to frustrate the passage of Brexit through Parliament. Ultimately, thanks to Boris Johnson’s election victory in December 2019, they failed. To this day, however, Tory peace on Europe has not broken out, and therefore Thatcher’s legacy is still disputed within her party.

There were additional reasons why the Conservatives wanted to distance themselves from their most successful postwar leader. Despite the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the credit crunch of 2008-09, the early 21st century was a time when life in the West seemed easy. Thatcher’s combative seriousness appeared out of date. “Let sunshine win the day,” said David Cameron, avoiding the language of struggle at which Thatcher had excelled.

And although Cameron was a genuine admirer of her achievements, he wanted to repair the Conservative reputation on the social side of the agenda which he thought Thatcherism had damaged. “There *is* such a thing as society,” he liked to repeat—a deliberate contradiction of her phrase, “There’s no such thing as society.” What she had actually said was,

There is no such thing as society: there are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people.... It’s our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours.

Her point was not to dismiss the idea of “society” but to anchor it in the responsibilities of



each person. It is a pity that so many people misconstrued what she said, and that some deliberately misunderstood it. If she had got her message through more successfully, she would have done much to build the moderate social conservatism in which she believed.

When Lady Thatcher died, Cameron paid generous tribute to her, but he also insisted on describing her as “divisive.” He was convinced that the Conservatives could never win back floating voters unless they softened themselves compared with her. The Brexit result, which finished his political career, might suggest that he had misdiagnosed the problem: could it be that the electorate were less concerned with how nice the Tories seemed than with how well they understood the problems of lower-middle-class families in an age in which living standards were stalling? As Britain’s next general election approaches (it is due at the latest by December 2024 and will probably happen sooner), this unanswered question is becoming ever more insistent. The country’s latest Tory prime minister, Rishi Sunak, is a very able man, but he has little time left to answer it.

The Peace Dividend

THE WIDER REASONS FOR THATCHERISM’S disputed afterlife beyond the confines of her party or country also relate to the West’s move from easy times after the end of the Cold War to the much trickier situation in which we now find ourselves.

One could argue that the Reagan-Thatcher era was a victim of its own success. Once the worst problems of inflation, strikes, and unemployment had been overcome and economic growth had recovered, the subject of political debate altered. The eventual effect of globalization was, curiously, to neglect the importance of securing prosperity. If wealth could be effortlessly generated by the triumph of free markets, many felt it was time to concentrate on its distribution rather than its creation. What used to be called “bread-and-butter” issues were superseded by debates about different issues—equality, “equity,” race, identity, sexuality, and, more recently, gender. Talk about “the cost of living” was replaced by talk about “the quality of life” or “general well-being.” Thatcherism began to hold less appeal for the complacently developed world and more for emerging economies overcoming totalitarianism or backwardness—in the former Communist bloc, for example, or in the Far East. It seemed too strenuous a creed for a generation which had never known war or hardship. As I write, there is a plan to erect a public

monument to Margaret Thatcher in Warsaw. There is no such plan in Britain.

Interest in quality of life involved, obviously, the environment. On this subject, Thatcher was a pioneer. A scientist by her education at Oxford, she became convinced by the theory of global warming. Her speech in 1988 to the Royal Society, Britain’s oldest scientific body, was the first classic enunciation of the theory by any national leader of world renown. “It is possible,” she warned, “that...we have unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the system of this planet itself.” She encouraged international action, coordinated by the United Nations, to address the problem of CO₂ emissions. But as the issue grew in importance in the 1990s, after she had left office, it came to be dominated by a Green ideology which was hostile to the very idea of economic growth, to modern industrial society, and, in particular, to the role of the West, which was seen as the great plunderer and polluter of nature. Thatcher had no sympathy with these aspects of the Green movement and the Green movement

There is a plan to erect a public monument to Margaret Thatcher in Warsaw. There is no such plan in Britain.

had none with her. She was obsessed with achieving energy security from a diversity of sources (one nonscientific reason she was interested in reducing dependency on fossil fuels was so that Britain could never again be held to ransom by striking coal miners). Climate-change activists saw energy security as achievable only by complete decarbonization.

Reagan’s and Thatcher’s success in winning the Cold War also had the curious effect of marginalizing what they had stood for. This was particularly true in her case because her demeanor was always combative. Thatcher was first called the “Iron Lady” by the Red Army newspaper, *Red Star*, three years before she came into office. The paper had meant the phrase as a sexist insult, but she cleverly seized it as a compliment from her foes. It defined her in her confrontation with Soviet Communism and helped attract adulation for her among the oppressed peoples of the Communist bloc to whom she reached out. Her visits to Moscow in 1987 and Poland in 1988 were emotional victory parades for her and her ideas. The great defender of free-market capitalism was hailed

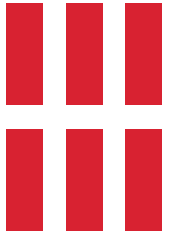
by enormous working-class crowds, especially in the Lenin Shipyards of Gdańsk.

Thatcher’s Iron Lady persona also paid off when persuading Western electorates to install cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe, and it paid off again when she began the rapprochement with Gorbachev which helped start the train of events that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. But once Communist doctrine appeared to have perished and the End of History had been proclaimed, there seemed little need for such strenuous politics. As George H.W. Bush and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl tactfully managed the reunification of Germany, Thatcher began to appear a bit of a block to the heady optimism in the air. The “peace dividend” was, in the short term, real. In Cold War times, she had loved to say, “Peace, yes—but peace with freedom and justice,” making an argument about the importance of nuclear deterrence. By 1990, it seemed that peace with freedom and justice was on its way. Many felt they no longer needed her around to make sure it happened.

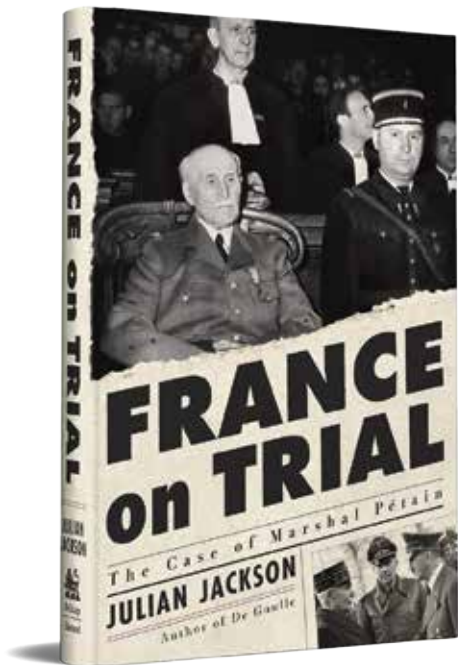
Darkening Skies

THEY WERE NOT COMPLETELY WRONG. Each era has its distinctive tone. Bill Clinton won the 1992 presidential election with supporters singing “yesterday’s gone” along to Fleetwood Mac. Tony Blair swept to power in Britain in 1997 with the slogan “Things can only get better.” Thatcher (born in 1925) was of the wartime generation, so her tone was quite different—much sterner and therefore old-fashioned. Clinton and Blair were baby boomers. They were entitled to the day in the sun that their parents’ generation had won for them.

In the early 21st century, however, clouds began to appear. The attacks on the World Trade Center came literally out of a clear blue sky. From then on, the picture grew darker. The ensuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were intensely controversial and, though they succeeded in immediate military terms, they both failed politically. Despite coming from the Left, Blair followed a Thatcher-style path of keeping close to the U.S. government and framing the wars as struggles to bring democracy to a turbulent Muslim world. Lady Thatcher herself, who had carefully prepared her country for the Gulf War of 1990-91 but left office before the fighting began, was too old to take part in public debate when the Iraq War began more than ten years later. In private, however, she liked to repeat one of her favorite pieces of military wisdom—“Time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted.” Blair

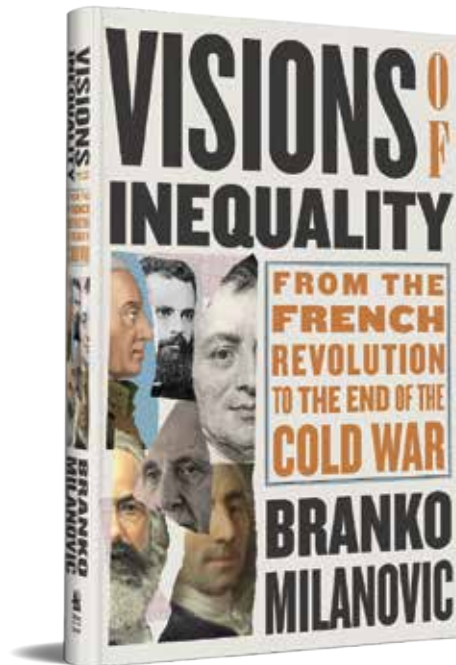


Harvard



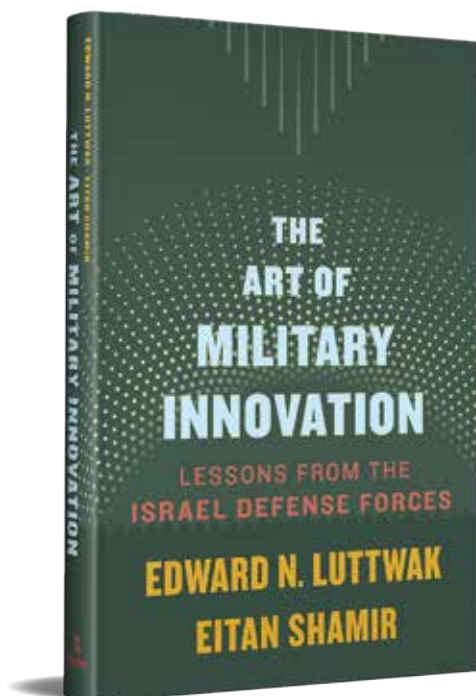
“This is a finely tuned history . . . For those who want to understand contemporary France and its intricate politics, *France on Trial* provides . . . a vibrant analysis of a trial and verdict that remain contentious almost eight decades later.”

—**Ronald C. Rosbottom**, *Wall Street Journal*



“Fascinating and often surprising, offering new insight into iconic figures like Smith and Marx and unexpected perspectives on their work. Branko Milanovic shows that the writings of centuries past have much to teach us about inequality, especially about class and power. A truly important book.”

—**Angus Deaton**, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences



“A compelling and important book. In wartime, armed forces must learn and apply what they learn in combat. In between wars, they must learn from the past and anticipate the future. The IDF is the perfect subject for drawing lessons important to developing military organizations that fight and win; Luttwak and Shamir are the perfect authors to illuminate those lessons.”

—**Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster**, US Army, Ret., author of *Battlegrounds*



was never as interested in reconnaissance as she was.

In Britain, the Conservatives—out of office from 1997 to 2010—could not rely, as they had in the Thatcher era, on their reputation for economic competence to get them back into power: Labour seemed capable of maintaining prosperity, at least until the credit crunch of 2008-09. Particularly under David Cameron (who became party leader in 2005 and prime minister in 2010), the Tories therefore wanted to show how well they understood social problems and to cast off the “uncaring” image which critics of Thatcherism had fashioned. The Conservative leadership spoke (half-echoing Lyndon Johnson) of the “Big Society” and positioned itself as enlightened on issues such as same-sex marriage.

In more recent times, Cameron’s ill-fated successor, Theresa May, associated herself with the trans cause and even said—though she did not act on it—that change of gender should be legally recognized by self-certification alone. When, having failed to get her Brexit deal through the House of Commons, May was forced to resign, her successor, Boris Johnson, though more demotic in his style, remained in the liberal camp on such issues. In general, in a society where public discourse was dominated by talk of rights (particularly “group rights”) Thatcherism’s greater emphasis on the obligations and duties of individuals seemed unappealing.

Even the vote for Brexit, a cause of which Thatcher—though she did not live long enough to hear the word—had been the main forerunner, did not make Thatcherism fashionable once more. Many of Brexit’s leading supporters wanted to use the recovery of national sovereignty to make Britain the sort of freer and more competitive economy which Thatcher had done so much to advance in the 1980s, but the dominant economic interpretation of the Brexit victory was different. It was that the neglected lower-middle and upper-working classes of provincial England (Scotland voted the other way) saw themselves as the victims of globalization and wanted more protectionism, not less.

There is also dispute about whether Thatcherism gave birth to globalization. Some say her “Big Bang” in the City of London in 1986, which opened British financial services up to global capital, created the conditions in which bankers could become “masters of the universe,” subject to no democratic control. Others pointed out that Thatcher was devoted to freer markets not because she wanted nation-states to wither away, but because she wanted a recovery of Britain’s national greatness through freer commerce and industry.

It is true that she never subscribed to the Davos-style worship of bankers and central banks. In 1997, Tony Blair and his chancellor of the exchequer, Gordon Brown, to show how responsible they were with the economy, announced the “independence” of the Bank of England, returning to it the power to set interest rates which had long ago been ceded to politicians. Rather to the surprise of her more doctrinaire free-market supporters, Thatcher was against this. She considered interest rates, because of the importance of their effects on people’s lives, ultimately something for which elected politicians should be held responsible. This view looked crude in 1997. After the long, slow disaster for ordinary citizens which the era of low interest rates and famous bankers has brought about, it looks quite prescient.

Having None of It

TO UNDERSTAND THATCHERISM’S CONTINUING relevance today, it is helpful to remember that it is not a formal political philosophy, although it is grounded in both conservative and (some) liberal philosophical traditions. It is better seen as a disposition. The disposition of much conservatism, particularly in the age of universal suffrage and particularly in Britain, had been declinist—even defeatist. It had tended to cede moral advantage to socialism while suggesting rather politely that some socialist policies would not work very well. It shunned confrontation because it feared it lacked popular legitimacy.

Thatcherism would have none of that. It asserted a commonsense view that people would probably be better at running their own affairs than governments would. It expressed pride in national historical achievements and confidence about the nation’s ability to flourish in the competitive modern world. It sought to emancipate men—and, even more, women—as economic actors and therefore as freer people. That emancipation would reflect and enhance the fact that more wisdom resides in the ordinary citizen than in ruling elites. And in international affairs, Thatcherism believed strongly in being loyal to friends and standing up to enemies. This was strikingly reflected in the personal friendship between Reagan and Thatcher, and in the way that they could combine to defeat Soviet Communism peacefully.

In the 21st century, much of that disposition has been in abeyance. The United States and Britain, each preoccupied with their internal divisions, and with opposing versions of their respective histories, have turned inward. It may be some comfort to recall that something similar happened in both countries in the troubled 1970s, and both came out of it strongly in the 1980s.

Thatcherism is a disposition always alert to threat. A country might be free, but it won’t stay free if it is not prepared to fight. Recent years have stripped away many of our illusions about peace and prosperity. Since February 24, 2022, we have known that the authoritarian leader of a European nuclear state is prepared to fight a full-scale war (though he still does not call it that) to claim imperial rights he does not possess. After years of indirection, NATO has suddenly drawn closer together—and expanded—in response. Now that the stakes for maintaining free societies have again grown higher, Thatcherism’s hour might be coming round once more.

Charles Moore is former editor of The Daily Telegraph, The Spectator, and The Sunday Telegraph, and author of the three-volume Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography (Alfred A. Knopf).

The CLAREMONT REVIEW OF BOOKS is a publication of the CLAREMONT INSTITUTE
FOR THE STUDY OF STATESMANSHIP AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY.

Subscribe to
the *Claremont Review of Books*

*“The Claremont Review of Books is
an erudite, beautifully designed,
and essential publication for the
contemporary Right. In every issue,
our nation’s great minds confront our
nation’s great challenges and point the
way forward.”*

—Christopher F. Rufo

Subscribe to the *CRB* today and save 25%
off the newstand price. A one-year
subscription is only \$19.95.

To begin receiving America’s premier
conservative book review, visit
claremontreviewofbooks.com
or call (909) 981 2200.

CLAREMONT
REVIEW OF BOOKS

1317 W. FOOTHILL
BLVD, SUITE 120,
UPLAND, CA
91786

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 504
UPLAND, CA