

THE LAMP

A CATHOLIC JOURNAL OF LITERATURE, SCIENCE, THE FINE ARTS, ETC.



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Why ask to know what date, what clime?
There dwelt our own humanity,
Power-worshippers from earliest time,
Feet-kissers of triumphant crime,
Crushers of helpless misery,
Crushing down Justice, honouring wrong,
If that be feeble, this be strong.

Our corn was garnered months before,
Threshed out and harvested with gore;
Ground when the ears were milky sweet
With furious toil of hoofs and feet;
I, doubly cursed, on foreign sod,
Fought neither for my home nor God.

E. Brontë



THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

“New needs always create new forms,” Metternich says, and so the arrival of a new baby in our household has demanded from us a new kind of knowledge: chiefly that of baby toys. Newborns do not have many extracurricular interests at first, but as they begin to recognize the world and their place in it, their interest in it correspondingly grows. And so we give them toys. Toys fascinate, amuse, entertain, intrigue, surprise, and teach both children and their parents. Most of a young child’s waking time is play time, and at this age we get to know our daughter by playing.

Of all her toys, her favorites are her books. She loves *Goodnight Moon*, *Madeline*, *Goodnight Gorilla*, *Guess How Much I Love You?*, and (best of all) *Dr. Seuss’s ABC*. The rhythm of the spoken words comforts her and alerts her to the importance of the object in front of her; she knows that she is being spoken to, and that the book is being spoken about (see Sister Carino Hodder’s beautiful meditation on the subject, page 56). She carefully inspects the pictures, and one can see her satisfying herself that the fiffer-feffer-feff’s fluffy feathers do indeed number four ere the page is turned.

In addition to these wood-pulp-and-printer’s-ink board books, she has two books made of fabric. One tells the story of the Itsy Bitsy Spider in interactive detail. In the other our daughter peruses a series of animal portraits whose moveable ears and arms first cover up and then (with Dad’s help) reveal their smiling silly faces to her. To a child of four months this is riveting stuff. Where does the dog go when his floppy ears obscure his face from view? Nowhere; he simply drops out of existence. His reappearance is not just an unexpected cause for celebration, but a kind of “black swan” event, unpredictable, like seeing him again for the first time. Eventually she will obtain object permanence and this game of peek-a-boo will lose some of its fun, but for now she is enthralled by the unknowns her future brings to each passing minute.

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No predictors or forecasters will bother to ruin her fun as yet (I direct the reader's attention to Sam Kriss's investigation, page 30).

Our girl knows, however, that there is more to life than intellectual pursuits, and she equally enjoys a good gnaw on a teething toy. Rattles and rubber rings she judges best suited to this purpose, but any reasonably firm object will do—a pillow, a finger, her squeaky toy Sophie the Giraffe. She likes the sound of running water, the green leaves of the trees overhead in summer, and being taken on many, many afternoon tours of her home (see Colin Redemer, page 12).

One kind of amusement is forbidden her categorically, but she doesn't mind: no screens. No T.V., no tablets, no video games, and definitely no cell phones. This is no real burden to her, since she cannot yet recognize the images that electronic devices create as pictures or representations of anything real. I have lately read that the biggest profiteers in "big tech"—Gates, Jobs, Zuckerberg—all limited or proscribed the use of technology among their own children. I doubt our household will be tech-free forever, and I look back fondly on the time (well, some of the time) I wasted as a child playing *Zelda* on our Nintendo 64 (Harrison Lemke, page 18). Maybe, down the road, when she's older, we will consider an exception.

Some day our daughter may add superheroes to her toy collection. I remember pestering my mother for toys and costumes with (hugely important) "capcs" (for Nic Rowan's encounter with a certain caped crusader, see page 41). Or perhaps some of the Disney figures of my childhood will charm her as they did me and my siblings; will *Aladdin*, or *The Little Mermaid* (I recommend David Bentley Hart's article on mer-kind, page 49), or *Toy Story*, or *The Iron Giant* speak to a new generation? I hope so.

Each week brings a new fascination, and the joy of her newfound loves is the only thing that can diminish the sad realization that she just isn't as amused now by that toy she adored last week. Hence, I suppose, the adult appetite for journalism.

CORRESPONDENCE

Over the transom comes the latest attempt to establish a serious “Catholic journal.” *The Lamp* follows the U.S. edition of the *Catholic Herald*, launched with great fanfare in late 2018. The aim was obviously to create a Catholic “big tent” publication—“orthodox” yet “inclusive”—but also offering incisive reporting and commentary on the state of the Church. Things fell apart from the very start as one “Catholic” would-be contributor first denounced the magazine’s management for alleged contacts with Steve Bannon and then indicted one of the magazine’s own writers for “antisemitism”—other contributors of course felt compelled to join the latter attack (Taki, the gentleman in question, has contributed more good writing over the years than all of them put together). Next, Damian Thompson, the U.K. editor largely responsible for the recent rise in visibility of the *Herald*, was out the door, followed by the U.S. editors (I gather Thompson’s caustic commentary on the current state of the Church did not endear him to the ecclesiastical establishment). The U.S. edition folded (replaced by an online presence) and even the U.K. parent underwent a drastic crisis. What survives in hard copy is a U.K. publication featuring admonitions to piety, harmless articles on the past glories of “Catholic culture,” and otherwise nothing that would give offense to the Catholic powers that be.

Into the resulting gap comes *The Lamp*. Its focus is cultural commentary—in particular, consideration of literary topics rather than reporting on current events. We applaud the attempt to avoid polemics and to explore the “Catholic” aspects of life in all their many manifestations. The editor—at least as a matter of intellectual conviction—is laboring under no illusions regarding either the dire situation of the United States and of the Church today, or of his magazine’s capacity to single-handedly save the day. That’s refreshingly realistic. We note further in places a curious Germanophile flavor of this publication. A poem of Goethe introduces the first issue; there is a “Feuilleton” section and a final piece, “Pestsäulen,” on a visit to Vienna. Most intriguingly of all, William Marshner—presumably he of the original *Triumph* team—is listed as “Kapellmeister”!

I regret to report, however, that the first issue falls short of the editors’ ambitions and would-be Catholic radicalism. I frankly didn’t find most of the contributions provocative, compelling, or stimulating reading. They generally rambled over assorted unin-

teresting topics—for example, a lengthy review of a new translation of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea(s)*, which gives the reader no idea why John Senior included it among his “Thousand Good Books.” More modest yet more successful is P.J. Smith’s informative story of the beginnings of one Midwestern parish. Michael Hamill expounds to us how popes (at least more recent ones) are never wrong and when problems crop up it’s because the hierarchy, the clergy, and the elites failed to support them. J.D. Vance tells us how, as a “conservative Catholic” writer defended his criticism of the pope, said gentleman was abruptly silenced when “a wine glass seemed to leap from a stable place behind the bar and crashed on the floor in front of us.” Thus Pope Francis is triumphantly vindicated.

I was also struck by a certain artificiality of style. “We were drinking white wine spritzers at a restaurant run by Jesuits,” writes Susannah Black of a recent visit to Vienna. In view of the current state of the Church—especially in that city—it’s like enjoying sherry with the vicar in the rectory while the parish church burns down. For it’s hard to read of such things when in our country Catholic churches are (literally) burning, statues of Catholic saints are being smashed, and the most violent anti-Christian rhetoric is endorsed by the secular media and educational powers. Here and abroad, governments freely order churches closed and regulate and even prohibit the administration of the sacraments. Unresolved sexual and financial scandals continue to percolate. Both the Vatican and the local hierarchies seem incapable of exercising leadership. And while all this is going on, the number of practicing Catholics, of priests and religious, of schools and parishes, continues to plummet. Yes, there is much to write about today—but a Catholic can hardly comment on these things dispassionately.

In the online introduction to the new journal the editor claims kinship with the above-mentioned *Triumph* magazine. But *Triumph* was virtually the polar opposite of *The Lamp* both in style and substance. At a time of upheaval much like our own, *Triumph* was forceful in its language and confronted directly the major issues of state and Church, regardless of the popularity of the views it expressed. The contributors to *Triumph* displayed passionate intensity and a willingness to take clear and even radical political positions. Not that everything they said was right or that all of their practical policy initiatives were sound. Yet their analysis of our age has stood the test of time far

better than that of the establishment Catholic journals—or of their secular equivalents.

I hope these comments don't discourage the reader from giving *The Lamp* a try. A good Catholic journal is so desperately needed! And the editors' vision and statement of principles are admirable. But in this case more focus, more passion and more engagement with the reality exploding about us will do the publication good.

Stuart Chessman,
The Society of Saint Hugh of Cluny



The publisher and editor reply:

We thank Mr. Chessman for his interesting letter. We are also confused by it. While we share his unease about certain events that have taken place since our first issue went to press, we cannot see how our failure to comment on them should be held against us. We also ask ourselves whether he really thinks that the issue would have been improved if we had allowed a non-Catholic society gossip writer to publish a scurrilous attack on the Holy Father in place of, say, Brandon McGinley's profile of Jeffrey Cristina or B.D. McClay's review of a very fine book by Adam Sisman. We wonder, too, whether it is really true that the author in question (who handles the "High Life" column for the *Spectator* of London) has given the world "more good writing" than all the other contributors to the *Catholic Herald* combined. (We think it likely that the aforementioned Mr. Theodoracopulos would be the first to disagree.) We pass over in silence Mr. Chessman's copious employment of scare quotes, but we certainly agree with him that the temporal power does not have the authority to close churches. The bishops, however, have. (Our editor's bishop was the last to do so in the United States and among the first to re-open them.)

While we are flattered by Mr. Chessman's comparison of our endeavor to *Triumph*, we do not recognize either journal in his descriptions. The editors of *Triumph* took radical positions, to be sure. But from the beginning they also emphasized the importance of wit, urbanity, and good humor, to say nothing of the value of art and literature for their own sakes, as opposed to culture-war syllabus items. As to his other concerns: we freely confess that we do not share the (widely held) view that Catholics should see the Church through a kind of post-Watergate lens (scandal! corruption! sticking it to the man, man!).

Finally, we note that "Feuilleton" is French.

What can I say? Wonderful first issue. It was made all the better by arriving digitally in mid-May while the print copies languished in some forlorn postal service truck. I especially thank Mr. Hitchens for his apologia in "Cranmer" and the wonderful poetic prayers that our own tradition seems to have lost the will to write or ability to translate. My only complaint is that now I would like to find a Little Office using the Coverdale and King James. With the best compliments,

Trevor Sliwkanich
Mundare, Alberta
Canada

Though I missed the deadline to receive the initial issue, I am now subscribed and anticipating the second.

Many subscribers have messaged me with comments describing the issue as "What *First Things* should be" and "A blessing to read." My response is that it makes sense given the pugnacious personality of the current Catholic editor, Mr. Walther.

As a long time reader of *First Things*, I can only hope that this publication will be able to advance the cause of light, life, and Christian reason in an increasingly ignorant and barbaric culture.

Justin Redemer
Hayward, California



The editor replies:

I am not pugnacious on Sundays.



FEUILLETON



❖ The Vatican website is in our opinion the most attractive in existence. It is also a wonderful source not only for major encyclicals and other papal documents but for what can only be described as the random beauties of the Ordinary Magisterium. Here, for example, is a speech given by Saint Paul VI upon the quadricentennial anniversary of Shakespeare's birth:

We feel it our duty to thank the promoters of this commemoration of the fourth centenary of the birth of William Shakespeare, for the kind invitation which they have extended to this admirable evocation of the life and art of the great poet.

We also express Our pleasure to the British Catholic communities in Rome for this undertaking, and We are happy to note the generous collaboration given by friends, by artists and by the Italian authorities. Particular praise is due to the directors and actors of the Royal Stratford Theatre for their presentation of scenes and recitations from the works of Shakespeare, which we have all enjoyed and appreciated.

This brief spectacle brings many thoughts to Our mind, starting with the visit We made about thirty years ago, as an enquiring and hasty tourist, to the city and the home of Shakespeare in Stratford-on-Avon, and continuing with the impression of fantastic riches and psychological truth which We experienced through the limited knowledge which school lessons and private reading gave Us of the work of the great poet; and concluding today with the thought that this commemoration is particularly adapted to Rome, always avid and prompt as she is to honour the high achievements of the human spirit, and happy as she is today to celebrate, in this supreme writer, the magnificent cultural tradition and artistic genius of the English people. We take especial pleasure in noting how the profound humanity of Shakespeare, ever open to adventurous and poetic exploration, leads to the discovery of the moral laws, which make life great and sacred, and lead us back to a religious understanding of the world.

His lofty genius and powerful language induce men to listen with reverence to the great verities he expounds, of death and judgment, of hell and heaven. The plots of his plays are a salutary reminder to modern man that God exists, that there is a life after this life, that evildoing is punished and good rewarded.

Our enjoyment of the poet's vision of humanity should not make us overlook the high moral lessons

and admonitions contained in his works. With the prayer that meditation and consideration may bear this valuable fruit, We gladly bestow upon the actors and their colleagues, upon all of you and your loved ones at home, Our paternal Apostolic Blessing.

Far too many books about the modern popes are written either by philistine academic historians or frenetic Italian journalists to whom such tired Anglo-Saxon conventions as "truth" or even "plausibility" appear to be unknown. We like to imagine that one day a writer of real imagination will apply his gifts to a proper *Life* of this saint. One can imagine such a book beginning with the young Montini—that product, like Cardinal Ottaviani, our last Renaissance prince, of centuries of Christian humanism—in Stratford, an image with which Saint John XXIII's famous remark about Hamlet might be juxtaposed. In the meantime, might we get an edition of Paul's letters?

❖ Speaking of worthwhile avenues for biographical (and indeed hagiographical) research, we think it unfortunate that so little is known on these shores of Mary Seacole, the Jamaican businesswoman who did so much for the relief of British soldiers during the Crimean War. (In a poll conducted in 2004, she was voted "greatest black Briton.") In 1860 Seacole was received into the Church and died a faithful Catholic.

❖ After contracting the new coronavirus earlier this year, Will Carroll, the drummer of the metal group Death Angel, went to hell. Or so he thought upon waking from a medically induced coma at a hospital in California. According to a newspaper report, the comatose musician "had dreams of visiting the afterlife. He saw himself leave his body and plummet down to hell, where Satan—a woman in his case—punished him for the deadly sin of sloth, morphing him into a Jabba the Hutt-like monster who vomited blood until he had a heart attack." Carroll told reporters that he has decided to refrain from smoking—as opposed to eating—cannabis and that he now acknowledges the existence of a "higher power." Such resolutions are praiseworthy, especially when they are followed by Carroll's other recent admission: "I don't think Satan's quite as cool as I used to." Pray for him.

❖ If you want to understand what is wrong with the conservative legal movement to which Catholics in this country have sacrificed decades of fruitless labor, look no further than a recent dissent by Justice Brett Kavanaugh of the Supreme Court, who took issue with his colleagues' refusal to grant injunctive relief to churches affected by an executive order in California:

I would grant the Church's requested temporary injunction because California's latest safety guidelines discriminate against places of worship and in favor of comparable secular businesses.

Such discrimination violates the First Amendment. In response to the COVID-19 health crisis, California has now limited attendance at religious worship services to 25% of building capacity or 100 attendees, whichever is lower. The basic constitutional problem is that comparable secular businesses are not subject to a 25% occupancy cap, including factories, offices, supermarkets, restaurants, retail stores, pharmacies, shopping malls, pet grooming shops, bookstores, florists, hair salons, and cannabis dispensaries.

"Comparable secular businesses"! This phrase appears nine times in Kavanaugh's dissent. You will seldom find a more perfect or concise expression of what the public worship of God represents in the modern conservative imagination: one species of commercial activity that competes with payday lending, online pornography, and video streaming services for the business of Americans—all enterprises toward which public authority must observe a studied neutrality. And we wonder why the culture war thing hasn't worked out.

❖ Many of you have told us that you were pleased to find a bedtime story for your children hidden in the middle of this section. Here is another favorite, the tale of "Old Sultan":

A shepherd had a faithful dog, called Sultan, who was grown very old, and had lost all his teeth. And one day when the shepherd and his wife were standing together before the house the shepherd said, "I will shoot old Sultan tomorrow morning, for he is of no use now." But his wife said, "Pray let the poor faithful creature live; he has served us well a great many years, and we ought to give him a livelihood for the rest of his days." "But what can we do with him?" said the shepherd. "He has not a tooth in his head, and the thieves don't care for him at all; to be sure he has served us, but then he did it to earn his livelihood; tomorrow shall be his last day, depend upon it."

Poor Sultan, who was lying close by them, heard all that the shepherd and his wife said to one another, and was very much frightened to think tomor-

row would be his last day; so in the evening he went to his good friend the wolf, who lived in the wood, and told him all his sorrows, and how his master meant to kill him in the morning. "Make yourself easy," said the wolf. "I will give you some good advice. Your master, you know, goes out every morning very early with his wife into the field; and they take their little child with them, and lay it down behind the hedge in the shade while they are at work. Now do you lie down close by the child, and pretend to be watching it, and I will come out of the wood and run away with it; you must run after me as fast as you can, and I will let it drop; then you may carry it back, and they will think you have saved their child, and will be so thankful to you that they will take care of you as long as you live." The dog liked this plan very well; and accordingly so it was managed. The wolf ran with the child a little way; the shepherd and his wife screamed out; but Sultan soon overtook him, and carried the poor little thing back to his master and mistress. Then the shepherd patted him on the head, and said, "Old Sultan has saved our child from the wolf, and therefore he shall live and be well taken care of, and have plenty to eat. Wife, go home, and give him a good dinner, and let him have my old cushion to sleep on as long as he lives." So from this time forward Sultan had all that he could wish for.

Soon afterwards the wolf came and wished him joy, and said, "Now, my good fellow, you must tell no tales, but turn your head the other way when I want to taste one of the old shepherd's fine fat sheep." "No," said Sultan, "I will be true to my master." However, the wolf thought he was in jest, and came one night to get a dainty morsel. But Sultan had told his master what the wolf meant to do; so he laid wait for him behind the barn door, and when the wolf was busy looking out for a good fat sheep, he had a stout cudgel laid about his back that combed his locks for him finely.

Then the wolf was very angry, and called Sultan "an old rogue," and swore he would have his revenge. So the next morning the wolf sent the boar to challenge Sultan to come into the wood to fight the matter. Now Sultan had nobody he could ask to be his second but the shepherd's old three-legged cat; so he took her with him, and as the poor thing limped along with some trouble, she stuck up her tail straight in the air.

The wolf and the wild boar were first on the ground; and when they espied their enemies coming, and saw the cat's long tail standing straight in the air, they thought she was carrying a sword for Sultan to fight with; and every time she limped they thought she was picking up a stone to throw at them; so they said they should not like this way of fighting, and the boar lay down behind a bush, and the wolf jumped up into a tree. Sultan and the cat soon came

up, and looked about and wondered that no one was there. The boar, however, had not quite hidden himself, for his ears stuck out of the bush; and when he shook one of them a little, the cat, seeing something move, and thinking it was a mouse, sprang upon it, and bit and scratched it, so that the boar jumped up, grunted, and ran away, roaring out, "Look up in the tree, there sits the one who is to blame." So they looked up, and espied the wolf sitting amongst the branches; and they called him a cowardly rascal, and would not suffer him to come down till he was heartily ashamed of himself, and had promised to be good friends again with old Sultan.

❖ We recognize that Sultan's story is not nearly as long as "The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids." In recompense we offer the following joke suitable for the five-and-under set (get them while they're young!) courtesy of our editor's daughter: "What time is it when an elephant sits on a fence? Time to get a new fence." We believe but cannot confirm that the source was a popsicle stick.

❖ Less than half a decade after promising to spend some two billion dollars providing "relief" to American homeowners, Goldman Sachs is continuing this no-doubt valuable work by foreclosing on thousands of homes, the profits from the sales of which they use to fund their federally mandated altruism. We presume that in turn many of those families currently benefiting from the so-called relief efforts will find their homes seized and sold in order to make possible a continuation of Goldman's philanthropy. With charity like this, who needs covetousness?

❖ We pass along the following lines from a recent article by a Catholic author in the former *Atlantic Monthly*:

I am a believer in the power of higher education to change lives and create opportunity, and am proud to teach at one of the greatest universities in the world. College is absolutely the right choice for many. But my son reminded me of a fundamental truth, which is that each of our lives is a start-up enterprise, and there is not just one path to success.

Is this true, fundamentally or otherwise? We would be hard pressed to think of a more impoverished description of human life, even engaged as we are in what can only be described as a kind of "start-up enterprise." We say this not only because the language of the entrepreneurship cult is so all-encompassingly banal, but because it is not Christian anthropology. *Sub specie aeternitatis* there is, in fact, only "one path to success." God made us to show forth His goodness

and to share with us His everlasting happiness in heaven, not, as it were, to "break sh—."

❖ In a press conference in which a New York franchise of the nation's largest human abattoir chain announced that it would remove the name of the company's eugenicist founder from its building:

The removal of Margaret Sanger's name from our building is both a necessary and overdue step to reckon with our legacy and acknowledge Planned Parenthood's contributions to historical reproductive harm within communities of color.

We cannot think for the life of us what the phrase "historical reproductive harm within communities of color" is supposed to mean. This is not because we are unaware that "reproductive harm" is a euphemism for the murder of infants, but because the eugenicist ambitions of Planned Parenthood's founder are not in any sense "historical." As we write this, more black children are being aborted than born in New York City. In many states throughout the country, practically the only places in which it is possible to obtain abortions are those in which there is a sizeable African-American population. This is why we cheer for those brave souls who wave signs emblazoned with "KLANNED PARENTHOOD" and similar slogans outside the Chinatown metro station in Washington.

❖ Speaking of the Vatican website, just as we were preparing to go to press, we read a statement released by one of the pontifical academies on the subject of this year's lockdown measures. It is a very important piece of writing, one that demands close study. We were especially taken with the following paragraph:

The pandemic has given us the spectacle of empty streets and ghostly cities, of human proximity wounded, of physical distancing. It has deprived us of the exuberance of embraces, the kindness of hand shakings, the affection of kisses, and turned relations into fearful interactions among strangers, the neutral exchange of faceless individualities shrouded in the anonymity of protective gears. Limitations of social contacts are frightening; they can lead to situations of isolation, despair, anger, and abuse. For elderly people in the last stages of life the suffering has been even more pronounced, for the physical distress is coupled by diminished quality of life and lack of visiting family and friends.

Unlike the vast majority of commentary we have read on this topic, the document entitled *Humana communitas in the age of pandemic: untimely meditations on life's rebirth* acknowledges the genuine human and spiritual costs of the actions taken by most of the world's governments in response to the new corona-

virus. It draws our attention to “prevailing metaphors now encroaching on our ordinary language [that] emphasize hostility and a pervasive sense of menace,” to “our pretensions to monadic solitude,” themselves founded upon “an atomistic social philosophy” and “an ethics of calculative rationality bent toward a distorted image of self-fulfillment, impervious to the responsibility of the common good on a global, and not only national, scale,” and to “the seeds of hope [that] have been sown in the obscurity of small gestures, in acts of solidarity too many to count, too precious to broadcast.” What we like most about it, though, is its call for a return to politics properly understood: “Coming back to life, after savoring the ambivalent fruit of its contingency, will we not be wiser? Will we not be more grateful, less arrogant?” One can only hope so.

❖ We are fascinated by Nick Kapur’s list of literal translations of names in various languages for the insect called the praying mantis in English. Our favorites include “the Prophet’s mare” (Arabic), “the praying beggar” (Icelandic), “the little horse of the Virgin” (Greek), “the devout elf” (Hungarian), “the camel of Solomon” (Hebrew), and “the demon of death” (Korean).

❖ Admit it: when you were five you thought the line was “Dirty Deeds / Thunder Chief.”

❖ Of the making of books there is no end, especially when the books in question are entitled *The Next Pope*. We are not especially interested in these discussions about who will succeed the present occupant of the Holy See, whom we revere. We are, however, very interested in arguing about who will win the next Super Bowl. Here are the quarterbacks most worth rooting for in the National Football League this year.

- i. Philip Rivers: If he and the Colts don’t go all the way this year, Pope Francis should put the whole country under interdict.
- ii. Cam Newton: The only thing more fun than watching Bill Belichick prove once and for all that it was always him and not the health-obsessed would-be C.B.A. with six rings to his name will be watching him do it with the funniest quarterback in the league.
- iii. Lamar Jackson: A real-life combination of the *Tecmo Bowl* incarnations of Bo Jackson and Dan Marino.
- iv. Josh Allen: W.H. Auden says somewhere that Tennyson had the best ear of any English poet and was also the stupidest. Allen has the best arm of

any N.F.L. quarterback and is, if not the stupidest, the one whose S.A.T. scores probably had the least to do with his admission to his alma mater.

- v. Patrick Mahomes: The guy is basically the Thunder Chief.
- vi. Gardner Minshew: Just look at the man.
- vii. Kirk Cousins: Can a boring white quarterback genetically engineered from the D.N.A. of every other former Michigan State Spartans signal caller who throws medium-distance completion after medium-distance completion off play-action while relying on his team’s run game win a ring?
- viii. Ryan Tannehill: Cf. vii. minus the M.S.U. bits.
- ix. Ryan Fitzpatrick: Cf. vii. minus both the East Lansing origins—one wonders how his salary compares with that of the average person in his graduating class at Harvard—and the line about being good off play-action. We honestly have no idea how Fitzmagic works, but it’s real.
- x. Dwayne Haskins: We do not have a terrible amount of sympathy for former Buckeyes in these pages, but we also really want to see a franchise known for destroying the careers of so many talented quarterbacks do right by somebody.
- xi. Derek Carr: The autumn wind is no longer a Raider.
- xii. Drew Brees, a.k.a. Captain Checkdown.
- xiii. Tom Brady.

BRASS RUBBINGS

MY GRANDPARENTS' WEDDING

—BY MICHAEL HAMILL—

When people complain to me that the churches shouldn't have been closed because of the coronavirus, I've taken to saying, "I'm not going to stand here and listen to you insult Cardinal Dougherty." All my life I've expected the churches to be closed for an epidemic. This is why.

My grandparents were married in Saint James Church at Thirty-Eighth and Chestnut in West Philadelphia, in 1918, during the flu epidemic. Just like this time, theaters and churches—virtually all places where people congregate—were closed for fear of spreading infection. The priest who presided at the wedding had been an Episcopal minister. Five or six converted at one time and he was one of them.

Marriages were being conducted in rectories, but the priest said it would be a shame for such a devout couple to be married in the rectory. He told my grandfather that he would marry them in the church, and would leave the side door open for them. Only the wedding party was to attend, though, just as if the wedding were being held in the rectory, and they were to tell no one that they were being married inside the church.

When they got there on the day of the wedding, the church was filled up. My grandmother said she looked out, saw all the people, and was never so embarrassed in all her life.

The people were there to visit the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. They were not there for Mass. This was before nuptial Masses were common. In those days, other than during an epidemic, Catholic churches were never closed. People visited the Blessed Sacrament at all hours. Consider this from Christopher Morley's essay "The Parkway, Henry Ford and Billy the Bean Man," published in 1920 in his book *Travels in Philadelphia*, originally written for his column in the *Public Ledger*:

The great churches of the Roman communion are always an inspiration to visit. At almost all hours of the day or night you will find worshippers slipping quietly in and out, generally of the humblest classes. I slipped into the Cathedral for a few minutes and sat there watching the shimmer of color and blended shadows as the vivid sunlight streamed

through the semicircular windows above the nave. The body of the church is steeped in that soft dusk described once for all as "a dim religious light," but the great cream-colored pillars with their heavy gold ornaments lift the eyes upward to the arched ceiling with its small tablets of blue and shining knots of gold. In the dome hung a faint lilac haze of intermingled gentle hues, sifting through the ring of stained windows. The eastern window over the high altar shows one brilliant note of rich blue in the folds of the Madonna's gown. Over the gleaming terrace of white marble steps hangs a great golden lamp with a small ruby spark glowing through the twilight. Below these steps a plainly dressed little man knelt in prayer all the time I was in the church. The air was faintly fragrant with incense, having almost the aroma of burning cedar wood. A constant patter of hushed footfalls on the marble floor was due to the entrance and exit of stealthy worshipers coming in for a few minutes of silence in the noon recess.

George Barton observed the same thing about Old St. Joseph's church in *Little Journeys Around Old Philadelphia* in 1923. Here he is with his own quotation from the *London Magazine* in the 1730s:

"A small specimen of a notable step which the people of that profession have taken toward the propagation of Popery abroad has come to my notice, and I have it from a gentleman who has lived for many years in Pennsylvania, I confide in the truth of it. In the town of Philadelphia, in that colony, is a public Popish chapel, where that religion has free and open exercise and in all the superstitious rites of that church are as avowedly performed as those of the Church of England are in the Royal Chapel of St. James. And this chapel is not only open upon fasts and festivals, but is so all day and every day in the week, and exceedingly frequented at all hours either for private or public devotion..."

It is interesting to note that old St. Joseph's is still open "all day and every day in the week." . . . As the gossipy and not altogether good-natured correspondent of the London newspaper wrote nearly two hundred years ago it is frequented at "all hours"

by those who wish a few minutes of solitude and prayer. The old-fashioned galleries, and the plain pulpit bespeak earlier generations, but the tranquility found there is the atmosphere that has always been characteristic of the place. The red lamp burns always before the tabernacle, and the wayfarer who enters here finds himself far removed from the noise and bustle of the modern world.

When I first heard the wedding story, the explanation was that people saw that the church was open, and they just went in. Eventually I heard a different theory, that some member of the wedding party, despite the priest's instructions, talked. A certain uncle

was suspected. Some indignantly rejected this explanation. If you imagine Saint James Church closely surrounded by row houses, that theory sounds more plausible than if you only considered what that neighborhood is like now.

My family's attitude was that those people who filled the church did a good thing for a good reason, but that the better thing, the more Catholic thing, was to cooperate with the priest's attempt to obey Cardinal Dougherty's ruling, and neither to go into the church under those circumstances, nor to tell anyone of the opportunity.

Michael Hamill writes from Philadelphia.

THE
JUNGLE

ON HOMES

BY COLIN
REDEMER

It is one thing to read about the Bay Area's homelessness crisis and another to dwell near it. To live here, to attempt to make one's home near it, is almost too much. Exiting the highway almost anywhere one is bound to drive past these economic refugees sheltering under overpasses and on the unused triangles of land that guide cars on and off the main roads. But homelessness is common to the American cityscape and if it seems slightly more common here, well, we tell ourselves, it just is. The alarm bells have not gone off yet. Occasionally though, if you drive enough, you will pass by one of the industrial-sized encampments city governments have encouraged by simply putting the word out that *this* plot of land is designated for the homeless.

It starts with a few homeless folks on what had been a previously unoccupied bit of grass. There is an auto shop across the street and an overpass looms as a backdrop. At night the streetlights and moving headlights ensure it is well lit. It is the stage for modern urban tragedy. These sorts of patches often already have evidence of a homeless person nearby. A shopping cart in the back of the lot by the hole in the chain link fence, or a slight trail through the Boston ivy leading to some bushes in a corner.

The local homeless advocates lobby—or sue—the city into allowing this patch to become a designated emergency shelter area. At once rumor runs through the great city. The homeless rush to the land and throw together the shelters they can. Blue tarp and cardboard feature prominently in their building materials. The more resourceful manage to find camping tents or plywood. After a few months, decrepit cars sprout on the plot like oversized mushrooms and

trash litters the streets. The grass is mud. Through it all, good-hearted people devote more and more resources. There is no exit strategy.

The peculiar thing about the encampment I drive past as I leave my home for the freeway is that recently someone there has begun constructing small houses. Each one is framed in pine two-by-fours with a window and a door and a slightly sloped roof. They look to be around a hundred square feet, room for a mattress with just enough space to walk around it.

These sorts of tiny houses have been a millennial obsession since the so-called "Great Recession," which has persisted unflinchingly to the present. The tiny house movement is praised as environmentally friendly, economical, and socially conscious. I put little stock in this altruistic vision of the movement. It seems much more a product of millennials' inability to afford a home. And they're far from being able to afford one in the neighborhoods and of the size they'd like. This extreme economic pressure has guided a generation to obsess about finding a hundred square feet of unused land and then throwing up a shack to live in, forever.

But the grimly amusing reality is that while many young persons write, and speak, and read, and watch, and click on photo galleries about these miniature houses, surprisingly few actually live in one. Those who do buy a house are surprisingly traditional. They want a home rather than a one room wheel-less trailer. They want craftsman homes covered in clapboard, or beige stuccoed McMansions, or whatever architecture normal people in less anxious times built and lived in. While the tiny house movement is praised for being ecologically sound, it is the actions of a gen-

eration—rather than its words—that tells the truth. Tiny homes almost uniquely reduce the value of the lot they are built on. Perhaps millennials are better with money than they let on.

It isn't just tiny houses though. Young people are interested in smallness of all sorts. Internet videos of tiny hamsters eating tiny burritos is an interesting case. There is a pleasure in the very limited extravagance being given to this rodent. The feeling of control, the silliness of its tiny life. Or take the “pop up” store. A business that consciously can't make it long-term exists for a brief moment, often only a single day. Normal businesses open and close all the time, but there is a kind of transient thrill in watching it all happen, purposefully, in a matter of hours. We hear a great deal, too, about the small life of childlessness as radical and praiseworthy, even though most millennials will still have a kid or two. And I need not go into detail about Marie Kondo.

Horror at foreshortened prospects (which have often followed chaotic upbringings) is expressing itself in our desire to observe others who are even worse off. We watch small things to avoid the very thing they could tell us about ourselves. I am the hamster. My job is a pop-up. My house is a shipping container of goods fresh off a ship from Shanghai. All of this is a recoiling from our own reality by seeing that reality writ ever smaller.

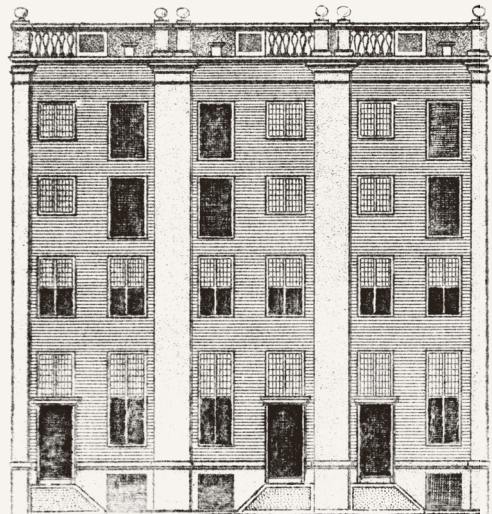
However much we would like to curl up into an existential ball and lick our ontological wounds, there is a point where fantasies of urban yurt-dwelling hit the hard-nosed reality of the possible. Some things make better Instagram photos than they do lives. Tiny houses fit into social media feeds; humans have little desire to fit into tiny houses. The virtual self is not yet the real one, thank God. But millennials who don't like living in a tiny house still have a desire to see one. We want to see it on Facebook, but we want to see it down the street too. To that end, like a twisted scientist who experiments on the homeless, we are offering land to the homeless and building them tiny houses which we ourselves want to see, but not to live in. It makes sense that we don't live there ourselves. The logistics of cooking and sleeping in close quarters are liable to be dangerous. There is a reason that even now in the lamentable age of the open floor plan, the kitchen is still mostly distinct from the rooms draped with flammable fabrics. The tiny houses for the homeless encampment near me have burned down twice in the past year. The good news is that when the fire department put the fire out and entered the encampment, the fires hadn't killed anyone. The bodies they found had died several days before.

The homelessness crisis is not just something afflicting the house-less. Any package from Amazon is *housed* on a shelf for some time. Dogs or birds or other animals may be housed in kennels or cages or stables. Humans *house* products, or livestock, but we

are not ourselves *housed*. Housing-first and tiny house solutions are inhuman because they treat humans like Bezos's wares. If the problem of *housing* is only an issue of where to put people while they are not working, then the solutions would be straightforward: Khrushchyovki, office sleeping pods, and worker dormitories. These arrangements are all illustrations of conflating homelessness with houselessness. Company towns are not a new concept; they house workers but they are not necessarily homes. The housing crisis is not the same as the homeless crisis, though both are real. But the crisis of homelessness is far deeper than we realize. The economic refugee camps in Oakland are a dark and tragic mirror image of corporate wanderlust. Casting the housing crisis as merely a conflict between gentrifying tech workers and the natives who are forced out of homes is far too simple. The truth is both the mobile worker and the tenant forced to the street are economic refugees; one ends up housed while the other, tragically, is houseless. But both are homeless.

Any object can be housed, but humans need a home. Homes are places in which we dwell. They are places where our deep longings are fulfilled. We want to linger there and enjoy a meal, or return there to open the door into a room filled with light and the greetings of loved ones. Homes carry the memory of festal laughter. Thanksgiving with parents, grandparents, children, and grandchildren. Home requires leisure to decorate, and permanence in a location, and people who will *be* there. Home is a place we long to return to. Seen in this light the homelessness crisis is worse than we ever imagined. The causes of homelessness are far more than economic. Mass homelessness indicates a breakdown in social and political structures as well. Homes never exist in isolation. They exist, wherever they have existed, in communities and networks of homes.

Somehow we have so far avoided the question: What is a home exactly? Clichés multiply: Home is where the heart is. Home sweet home. Even the An-



glos here in California have signs by their front doors reading, “Mi casa es su casa.” When we must risk courageous action, we say that it is “for hearth and home.”

I wonder whether these lines are so far wrong. Whatever homes are they are worth a bit of repetition. Homes home us as well as house us. The home to dwell in is a focal point of our affective nature. Home is a thing we love, albeit with embarrassment. “Home-town boy makes good” is a phrase to put someone back in his place. Bringing a date over to meet one’s parents is always an anxious experience because our homes are intimate spaces. Homes feel homey when they are lived in; they are not homey when they’ve been cleaned of all signs of life for the important guest. When the intimacy of a home disappears we lose the home. The homeless child who flees his parents’ house is a sign of this. Even were the child to be locked inside with those parents whom he longs to flee he would still be homeless. Home involves loving relations in a fixed place. The family, when well constituted, is virtually incapable of failing to make a home. They live together, they enjoy one another, suffer one another, and celebrate and mourn together. They build one another up in love and move through life towards an ever-deepening realization of this goodness, which becomes the seed of contemplation. This is why families tell the story of their family to one another. Aristotle knew something of this when he counseled that friendship requires proximity. Friendship is the capstone of virtue and the building block of the political community, and a home is where the friendship takes root and dwells. For this reason if the homeless child finds a friend who has a home, the friend’s parents become surrogate parents, the home naturally extends to the homeless friend in whatever way it can. The home naturally extends to the homes of one’s friends. Home has something to do with possessions; is it strange that we risk our lives for our hearths? The hearth seems to be mere masonry, but the hearth has a mantle upon which to place gods, and a hearth may contain a fire to light a dark night and provide warmth against the cold. Virgil knew something when he depicted Aeneas carrying the hearth gods under his arm as he walked out of burning Troy to go and found a new city. Our hearth gods may be a simple cross flanked by pictures of grandchildren, but Aeneas’ instinct is still with us. If the fire in the hearth gets out of control we will know ourselves by what we risk our lives to take with us. We can only dwell in homes if they are maintained by virtuous action. The war I fight in defends not just my house but the home I share with my comrades in arms, my friends. There is no home without virtue. And virtue is the sweetness of life. Who could live in a mere house if a home were offered? To speak formally, the home is a final cause of all human activity; our building, our earning, our fighting and even our dying. All this in an effort to dwell at home.

Let us talk no longer of housing the homeless. As if a yellow Amazon crate, however large, could ever match our deepest longings. Humans are not stuff. This is why certain French bureaucrats are right to embrace the arch-technocratic term *san domicile fixe* as opposed to *sans abri*. The technocrats display admirable humility: they recognize houselessness because they are ignorant of homes. Similarly in the Bay Area when the coronavirus panic descended a “shelter in place” order was issued. I suspect it is, in part, because the bureaucrats know nothing of homes and thus couldn’t issue a “stay at home” order. But we who know of homes must, if we are to solve the crisis, speak of *homing* the homeless. And the start of that task is to contemplate, in the deepest sense, what it is that a person *is*. To do this we must not think of the homeless as people different from ourselves. We must rather think about ourselves. What do I desire, and need, and love? We will see that the solution to the longing for home is much harder than we imagined, perhaps impossible in this world, where our aspirations and desires always outrun our circumstances. But at least, by realizing the true depths we sound in thinking of home, when we act we will not be naive. And when we act to solve only one problem, the problem of housing, we will have done nothing about the second, greater problem.

The unhoused homeless are, of course, always working to solve this great problem themselves. The problem of not getting rained on is solved by that blue tarp. But this is merely practical—they know more than this. The hole cut in the chain link fences allows for them to dwell on the other side because privacy, however limited, is a goal of home. The trail through the Boston ivy as it reaches the bushes where they dwell is littered with the gathered debris of life, because home is where our stuff is. We, the homeless who have housed ourselves, would do well to attend to this honesty about human longings for home. Perhaps the homeless can only gesture towards home. But we must gesture to remain human in this homeless world.

The encampment near my house was evacuated on the city’s orders recently. The residents were offered an option to move on. (Where to? They never say.) Either that or go to the city’s newest “planned” community, a group of plastic tool sheds on an abandoned lot. In a news interview with one of those being evacuated, I watched a young woman with the rough look of someone who has been homeless for some time. When asked where she planned to go now that her tiny house was demolished she responded, “I have no choice but to go to the Tuff Sheds.”

Tuff Sheds, not homes.

Colin Redemer is vice president of the Davenant Institute.

HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA

JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM

BY MINOO DINSHAW

Louis IX, that peculiar paragon of all monarchs of France, uniquely among them, and less than thirty years after his death, canonised as Saint Louis, was born in 1214. That year power in western Europe passed decisively from the House of Anjou—belli-cose, arriviste, magnificent kings of England—to that of Capet—cautious, long-established, austere kings of France. Louis was, in fact, a product of both dynasties. His mother, Blanche of Castile, had been hand-picked as French consort by her own notorious grandmother: Eleanor of Aquitaine, successively and controversially Queen of France and of England. In Louis IX, the attributes and destinies of his grandfather Philip II “Augustus” of France, a great king but a tepid crusader, and Richard I “the Lionheart” of England, a legendary crusader and unfortunate king, were strangely intermixed.

His father, Prince Louis of France, briefly king as Louis VIII, himself fearsomely nicknamed “the Lion,” did not fulfil the promise of that sobriquet. Against the advice of the wiser Philip II, Prince Louis in 1216 accepted the crown of England on his wife’s behalf, from a faction of dissatisfied barons who had occupied London. The French prince achieved some success against the hated King John, but after John’s death later that year, he failed to dislodge the ten-year-old Angevin heir, Henry III. The English business came close to the younger Louis’s childhood world; his formidable mother extracted war funds from her reluctant father-in-law by threatening to hand Louis and his brothers to her creditors as hostages.

Louis VIII’s short reign from 1223-26 was dominated by his involvement in the Albigensian Crusade, that disreputable enterprise in the Languedoc from which his father had always maintained a deniable distance. The king’s fatal dysentery elevated his twelve-year-old eldest son to the crown of France, and his wife, Queen Blanche, to its regency. Louis IX’s own life and education, entirely at his mother’s disposal, changed but little. The regent bloodlessly and profitably ended the Albigensian Crusade, and es-

tablished her younger sons in appanages once fundamental to Angevin power, Poitiers and Anjou. Strong emotion, piety, and educational rigour characterized the upbringing of her sons.

Between 1234 and 1245, the four proverbially beautiful, accomplished and rich daughters of the Count of Provence found themselves propelled by Queen Blanche’s initiative, their family’s horse trading, and the envy of the English into marriage to Louis IX, Henry III, and the young kings’ respective younger brothers, Richard and Charles. After Louis’s victory over Henry in the field at Taillebourg in 1242, there was, effectively from 1243 and formally from 1259, a stable peace between France and England; the first for a century, and distinctly on French terms. As Louis IX himself put it:

Our wives are sisters and consequently our children are first cousins. That is why it is most important for us to be at peace with each other. Besides, I gain increased honour for myself through the peace I have made with the King of England, for he is now my vassal...

For Louis, personal morality and political strength were, even in private and to an extent proverbially unusual among medieval rulers, truly interdependent.

The results of Louis’s axiomatically Christian conduct were both visible and tangible. To his charity towards the amiably pathetic exiled Latin Emperor of Constantinople, France owes the Sainte-Chapelle, built between 1242 and 1248 to house the part of the Crown of Thorns, once a Byzantine relic, which Louis had acquired from his emperor-pensioner. Out of Louis’s genuine friendship with the humbly born chaplain Robert de Sorbon there emerged in 1253 the most renowned college of the University of Paris. Though privately amused by Robert’s proud manners, Louis always defended him from the sneers of lords and princes.

In 1240 Louis IX delivered a severe and to modern ears unsympathetic judgment. The controversy that

culminated in the Disputation of Paris was fomented by Nicholas Donin, a Jewish scholar turned Franciscan friar. Donin sought to demonstrate the inferiority of the Talmud in relation to the Torah by translating the most controversial passages of the former from Hebrew into Latin and bringing them to the attention of the Christian authorities. The ensuing theological tournament pitted Donin and three other Christian theologians against the four most distinguished rabbis of France. The rabbis did not gain a sympathetic hearing from their dogmatic young king, who condemned the Talmud to the flames, and French Jewry to an ever uneasier status.

In 1244 Jerusalem, which had for fifteen years been under precarious Christian control, fell to a mercenary band of Khwarezmian Turks, loosely employed by one of the squabbling Ayyubid rulers. The news found Louis lying seriously ill; he vowed that, should he recover, he would win back the Holy City. He chose for his regent the best qualified candidate, his mother. After arranging her son's marriage, Queen Blanche had quarrelled continuously with her daughter-in-law and jealously monopolized the influence and regard of the court. In leaving Blanche as regent for the second time while undertaking his crusade, Louis provided his people with a governor of proven ability, fulfilled his duty as a Christian monarch in the most spectacular fashion, and came of age as both man and monarch.

Louis IX put meticulous efficiency before impetuosity, spending four years in exemplary logistical preparation. The army he raised was not enormous, but its quality was extremely high: made up of the French nobility at its chivalric summit, supported by the best professional crossbowmen the king could purchase. Louis deliberately left crowds of devoted but untrained volunteers behind at his purpose-built harbour of Aigues-Mortes. So far the strategist had, throughout, overruled the saint.

Acting upon the long-remembered recommendation of the Lionheart, thirteenth-century crusaders aimed to strike at the source of Muslim power and riches, Egypt, as a prelude to either dominating the whole region or at least regaining formerly Christian territory, including Jerusalem, by treaty. Louis followed in this path, evidently deciding that execution rather than method accounted for recent crusading misadventures. His army was united upon its difficult but coherent course; their enemies were also more divided than any in the Christian camp knew.

The army of the crusade gained the crucial Egyptian port of Damietta by assault with astounding ease. Many crusaders had heard directly from veterans of the Fifth Crusade how long and bitter had been the city's last siege by Christian forces, in 1218-19. In fact Louis' swift victory was due to the fact that the emir in charge of Damietta's defence, Fakhr al-Din, had withdrawn to make a play for his ailing sultan's throne,

while the regiment he had left to bolster the defenses, finding itself thus unsupported and exposed, had deserted in disgust.

Chance had delivered to Louis a great prize at little cost. In 1219 the Ayyubid sultan had offered the crusaders Jerusalem in exchange for Damietta; at this point the fractious Cairene court of 1249 would surely have considered a similar arrangement. But the French king felt called by God to battle, not compromise. He led his forces on a perilous advance down the Nile.



Outside the town of Mansourah, they were confronted by the enemy in the field. Like Richard the Lionheart at Arsuf in 1191, Louis IX had to reckon with the indiscipline as well as the strength of the cult of chivalry, but he lacked his great-uncle's terrifying instinct for battle. Due to the rash actions of Louis' favourite brother, Robert of Artois, the crusaders after an initial success (which included the killing of the treacherous Emir Fakhr al-Din) lost six hundred of their most experienced knights, among them, to Louis's grief, Robert. Rightly considering that retreat now would be fatal to his army's morale, Louis attempted to hold his dearly won bridgehead before Mansourah, but before long he found himself trapped upon the Nile, just as previous crusaders had been in 1221. Too late, Louis now made the offer to exchange Damietta for Jerusalem, which was ignored by the sultan's newly arrived heir. After an impossible fighting retreat, army and commander alike wracked by starvation and dysentery, in early 1250 Louis was forced to surrender himself into Muslim hands.

The king's captivity was brief, as the Ayyubids, already in the midst of the palace revolution that would sweep them away, considered Damietta's restoration a fair price for Louis' release. As soon as he was at liberty, Louis made a decision that appalled his counsellors. He would not slink from the dangerous site of his humiliation back to the urgent demands of his patrimony, the greatest kingdom in Europe. Instead he insisted upon staying in the miserable coastal strip still left to the Franks of the East. For four years Louis toiled to remedy his crusade's conspicuous failure, by dogged activity, incessant diplomacy, and heavy expenditure in the impossibly outnumbered defence of "Outremer."

The last mainland Frankish possessions would, as it turned out, be exterminated in 1291, just over twenty years after Louis' death. The Lord of Joinville, a nobleman from Champagne who during the crusade became one of the king's closest friends, remembering Louis's heroic defence years after that final catastrophe, was in retrospect amazed that the end had not come sooner upon Louis and his surviving soldiers in the early 1250s. Their force had been (according to Joinville's wild estimate) a thirtieth of the size of the defending garrisons overcome in 1291. For Joinville the only possible explanation was

The love that God had for the king put such fear in the hearts of our enemies that they did not dare attack us.

A more prosaic or better informed commentator might have pointed to the turbulent internal state of Egypt, whose brutal but new-minted Mamluk slave-soldier elite had doubtless preferred domestic consolidation to further conquest for the immediate future.

Louis IX returned to France defeated, yet the most respected and powerful sovereign in Europe. It was a

Europe rent by the conflicting ambitions of the papal and imperial parties—Guelf and Ghibelline—and in these conflicts Louis played a judicious, honourably neutral role. While Louis's younger brother, Charles of Anjou, from 1266 built a Mediterranean empire by arrogating to himself the role of the Church's champion, Louis IX stood aloof, avoiding any infringement of the rights of brother monarchs or risk to the peace of Christendom.

In 1270 Louis IX perished, according to the latest research of scurvy, in a manner he would have wished for: engaged in a fresh crusade, with the words "Jerusalem, Jerusalem" upon his lips. Unfortunately this North African expedition, to convert the secretly amenable (or so he was told) Emir of Tunis at sword point as a prelude to yet another joint assault on Egypt, was so patently futile that even the faithful Joinville refused to take part. The Tunis exploit had in fact been encouraged by that sinister, acquisitive monarch Charles of Anjou, who, though he really aimed at seizing Constantinople from the rump of the Byzantine Empire, settled upon an African expedition that might enrich Sicily, a kingdom which he had recently seized. Charles' kingdom was entirely of this world; like so many similar figures before him, he paid for it dearly even before his death.

Louis IX always held himself to different and higher standards, and thus excelled, as it were incidentally, as one of France's greatest earthly kings. His qualities, as a man and a Christian, are best summarized by a somewhat forbidding precept of his mother's, which he revealed to Joinville. Queen Blanche was apparently in the habit of saying to Louis as a child

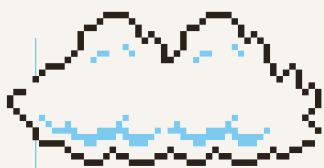
I love you, my dear son, as much as a mother can love her child; but I would rather see you dead at my feet than that you should ever commit a mortal sin.

To Joinville Louis transformed this slightly cold orthodoxy into something aflame with love. Joinville had, understandably, expressed a preference for a state of sin over the then-incurable condition of leprosy. Louis was unsurprised but urgent in his fatherly reprimand:

I beg you, as earnestly as I can, for the love of God, and for love of me, to train your heart to prefer any evil that can happen to the body, whether it be leprosy or any other disease, rather than let mortal sin take possession of your soul.

As Louis's physical and mental courage was unflinching, so his faith, like his friendship, was affectionate, warm and, indeed, infectious. He stands apart as the best moral example of his iron rank and unbending age.

Minoo Dinshaw is the author of [Outlandish Knight: The Byzantine Life of Steven Runciman](#).



GOD AND

APOLOGIA



My first memory of *Dragon Warrior III* (*Dragon Quest III* in Japan) is of watching a friend play on some gloomy afternoon near the end of college. I remember becoming mesmerized by the repetitive yet elegant gameplay, the heraldically simple NES sprites marching purposefully across a vibrant luminous CRT landscape. In retrospect, it's easy to see this as symbolic. I was on the verge of graduating, with no realistic career goals and a degree I wasn't sure I wanted after all and a fragile network of friends, that was just about to fall apart completely. I was about to be tossed (or so it seemed) from the edenic climes of the artificially long American childhood, land of schedules and extracurriculars and walkable distances, into the outside world of traffic and one-bedroom apartments and toil, anxious toil. I was newly awake to the necessity of much I had thus far taken for granted: of order, of purpose, of repetition — in short, of ritual. And this explains something of what I saw in a game that formerly would have held little interest for me.

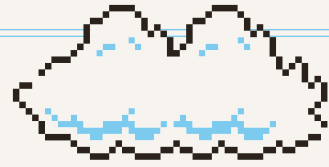
A basic summary of *Dragon Warrior III* is as follows: the hero and his companions are given a monomythic quest to defeat a nebulous villain, a stand-in for evil itself; within this quest, however, are a series of smaller, more immediate goals, typically revolving around braving some dungeon or crossing perilous countryside to reach a new town, all the while fending off ambushes from steadily more threatening monsters. The main drama of the game is in gauging how far from safety one may venture into a brutal unknown and still make it back in one piece.

There's a musical structure to the gameplay: the short measures of individual battles, similar but not the same, fitting into the longer phrases of leaving a town, the archetypal safe haven, and returning to it—and then, on a grander scale, the slow crescendo of quest after quest, all miniatures of the singular Quest, leading up to a finale that reprises and completes all that came before. Put another way, it's a kind of

fractal, the same drama playing out on multiple scales, slotting like days into weeks into liturgical years into the whole cosmic march toward the eschaton, wherein our hero, having never fainted or grown weary of doing good, will do final battle with the Arch-Fiend, the very emblem of evil. There's something lifelike and yet numinous about this, like the way the canonical hours and liturgical seasons elevate each day and year into a microcosm of a whole human life and indeed the life of the entire universe, everything that is and ever was, ordering every moment toward our first and final end. (It's surely no coincidence that I was undergoing the beginnings of a religious conversion at the time I first encountered the game.) This sense of ritual extends even to something so quotidian as the progress-saving mechanism, a designedly cumbersome process of finding and speaking to a king or other official. This rote act becomes tactile, semiotic, as much a part of the rhythm of play as the game itself might be in a player's life; a slow breath of sabbatical order within a chaos of random battle, with dragons and slimes or with loneliness and the uncertainty of wage slavery.

As a child I recall having trouble understanding in what sense a game like this entailed “role-playing.” I wasn't into Japanese role-playing games, which I thought too turn-based, too rigid and predetermined. Instead I was fascinated by western games, such as *Baldur's Gate* and *The Elder Scrolls*, with their promises of explosive real-time action (!) in a world I could shape and mold (!!) and in which I could make Real Moral Choices (!!!). Even if somehow I always ended up playing the same anxious-to-please do-gooder, it was my choosing, I thought, that gave the games meaning. I wanted freedom, and this was freedom.

After all, the player in *Dragon Warrior III* and similar games has no power to shape the story but is instead coerced into a heroic role and in many cases powerless to deviate from it. By contrast, western



NINTENDO

BY HARRISON LEMKE

RPGs (*Skyrim* or *Fallout*, for example) enshrine this sort of agency; their players are like gods, discerning good and evil. At their best the western RPG may convey a sense of moral weight, constructing costly (and, of course, contrived) dilemmas, but the sense of freedom they embody is Nietzschean, that of a disembodied will forcing itself upon the world around it, unencumbered by any notion of vice or virtue. As a result, these games have often left me feeling like a cipher to myself, perhaps a hero, perhaps a villain; a maker of weightless decisions that might shape the world, but never the self. In *Dragon Warrior III* and other JRPGs of its generation, however, there's a different kind of freedom on display. This is a freedom bound by duty, the freedom of having a certain and unwavering goal: to uphold the good and reject evil. This is an ideal of freedom more in line with Saint Augustine than with Nietzsche. And it is freedom indeed: the good may be a fixed point, but it would be a mistake to say that this fact leaves a player with no choice. There is one crucial choice: to play, or not to play. It's even a trope in such games to make this choice explicit, the first quest-giver asking the player to accept the quest, even though, should they refuse, there would be no game. And in the case of *Dragon Warrior III*, the choice is renewed, in a sense, every time the player saves their game and is asked a crucial question: "Do you wish to continue?"

But this isn't all; once one has chosen to play, still, there is freedom. One may proceed daringly or cautiously, quickly or slowly. In fact, despite *Dragon Warrior III*'s apparent restrictiveness, its fans tend to replay it many times, trying out various party configurations, even going it alone, walking the high and hard path like Saint Anthony in the desert. But of course, the game is best enjoyed as it was intended to be: with a party of four, each hero with his own unique and necessary role, an archetypal community. They hold all things in common. They keep monkish

silence, their only vocabulary one of pure action, and a limited one at that: fight, run, hurt, heal, sleep, wake up. Proper ascetics, they don't even eat. They are able to do only that which accords with their purpose; free to do good all the day long.

The role-playing, then, is one of inhabiting a mode of being, like imaginative games I might've played in the backyard in childhood, caught up in the sheer abstract romance of knighthood, arctic exploration, whatever. The mode of being, in this case, is that of a heroic struggle against evil, grandiose and yet not without a curious element of drudgery — the endless cycle of random ambush and the treating of wounds, all inching toward a lofty goal, a terrible confrontation, hoping through long weary effort to become worthy of it. There is a near-contradictory tension here between the quotidian and the cosmic, and yet no more so than in life itself. In a mysterious way perhaps this defines our very nature, timebound creatures, our hearts yet set on eternity.

Is it silly to read such significance onto a video game, a few hundred kilobytes of machine code and poorly translated English? Perhaps it is. Yet when I try to approach the subject, the vocabulary that comes to mind is always religious. And maybe this is not so inappropriate; maybe there is something intrinsically incarnational about a video game, the way it demands that a player enter into a lower plane of being, accept the strictures of some little universe for the sake of its salvation. Maybe no other medium has quite the same power to habituate its audience—their bodies, their imaginations, their desires—for good or for ill. Maybe these are only faint glimmers of light in the dungeon-dark of a wicked age. Then again, a glimmer may sometimes be enough to keep a traveler going in the dark.

Harrison Lemke writes from Texas.

AGAINST THE NEW NATIONALISM

BY EDMUND WALDSTEIN



I first visited Ukraine in November of 1998, just a few days before my fifteenth birthday. I was travelling with my family to a Byzantine Catholic priestly ordination. We took a Soviet-era train (with red velvet upholstery) from Vienna to L'viv. At the border between Slovakia and Ukraine, the train was hoisted upon cranes and the wheels changed. The reason, we were told, was that Stalin had had the gauge of train tracks in the Soviet Union widened to discourage invading armies.

Crossing the border into Ukraine in the nineties was like going back in time. As the train rattled through the Carpathians, we looked out on women in headscarves washing clothes in icy rivers and horses pulling sledges and wagons. The wagons had car tires on their wheels, but otherwise we could have been in the nineteenth century.

At the train station in L'viv we were met by an old man in a towering fur hat, who was to drive us to the house where we were staying, and by a young student who spoke English. The student told us that the old man had spent years in a Siberian labor camp during the Soviet persecution of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. We gaped at this Solzhenitsyn character come to life.

What struck us most about L'viv, however, is how Austrian it looked. L'viv had been a part of the Austrian province of Galicia from the partition of Poland in the eighteenth century till the First World War, and its architecture is strongly reminiscent of Vienna. Even the Greek Catholic cathedral is Austrian Ba-

roque, with an iconostasis that looks for all the world like the reredos of an Austrian church. And we found there was a great deal more nostalgia for the Austrian Empire than we had expected.

Our friends in L'viv were fiercely patriotic, but they admitted to a certain disappointment with the results of Ukrainian independence. In Soviet times they had had an image of Ukrainian independence as a return to an arcadian past of free peasants singing folk songs and reciting Taras Shevchenko. The reality of Leonid Kuchma's deeply corrupt post-Soviet regime was very different. Infrastructure crumbled, unemployment sky-rocketed, industry and agriculture declined. Ukraine's real gross domestic product is said to have fallen by more than eighty-eight percent between Kuchma's election in 1994 and our visit in 1998.

Even as visitors we noticed the hardship this caused. We thought we were used to cold weather, coming from Garming in the Limestone Alps. But in Austria when one came in from the cold one would soon warm up in the well-heated buildings. In L'viv after being thoroughly frozen during the long Byzantine liturgies in totally unheated churches, we would go into houses and restaurants only to find that economizing on fuel meant that they too were barely heated. We never got warm. We took to wearing all the clothes that we had brought along both indoors and out, and we were still cold. We stayed with a family for whom a meal meant to serve twelve persons would consist of a large bowl of mashed potatoes with a single sausage cut into very thin slices strewn over the top.

But the dissatisfaction with Ukrainian independ-

ence that many in L'viv felt went deeper than economic discontent. There was a feeling that they had overestimated the cultural unity of Ukraine. The politically dominant central and eastern parts of the country were too Russified. They had exchanged a set of Russian tyrants in Moscow for a set of Russified Ukrainian tyrants in Kiev. The true Ukraine seemed to them to be the part that had been in the Austrian Empire.

The partition of Poland had been a catastrophe for the Poles, but for the Ukrainians and Ruthenians of Galicia it was a liberation from Polonization. Austria gave Ukrainian culture a measure of room to develop. This was certainly in part to counter-balance Polish nationalism in Galicia, but it also stemmed from the traditions of Catholic empire as uniting many nations without destroying their national identities. Of course, the Habsburgs' understanding of their imperial mission took different forms at different times, and at any given time included elements that were in tension with each other—Joseph II's rationalist absolutism, for example, was in tension with more traditional Catholic understandings of empire— but the traditional understanding always played a part.

The Peace of Westphalia in 1648, often seen as the inauguration of the modern European system of sovereign national states, may have actually *prevented* the Habsburgs from becoming a national dynasty. The Holy Roman Empire had always aspired to unite many nations, but over the course of its history it had come more and more to be associated with the German peoples. The Emperor was always a German, and the Imperial Diet, representing the estates of the Empire, was composed almost entirely of Germans—as was the Electoral College, which elected the Holy Roman Emperor. Between election and coronation, the Holy Roman Emperor was informally known as “the German King.” But the Thirty Years War ended hopes of a restoration of Catholic unity in Germany, and thus seriously compromised the Emperor's ability to exercise his authority in German lands. Beginning with the Emperor Ferdinand III, at the time of the Peace of Westphalia, the Habsburgs moved the focus of their rule from the Empire to the Slavic, Magyar, and Italian lands to the East and South—lands which were outside the juridical framework of the Empire, and not represented in the Imperial Diet. This eventually led to the establishment of the so-called “Austrian Empire,” consisting of the crown lands of the Habsburgs, in 1804, and to the (arguably illegal) abolition of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806. As a system of various kingdoms, duchies, peoples, and estates, bound together through relations of fealty to the Emperor, the new Austrian Empire constantly looked back to an older ideal: Christendom as a unity of many kingdoms and nations. It was partly because of this ideal that the Habsburgs allowed Ukrainian identity to flourish in Galicia. And the Ukrainians were so

grateful that they came to be known as “Tyroleans of the East” second only to the countryman of Andreas Hofer in their loyalty to the Emperor.

What exactly is the Catholic ideal of empire, and how much basis does it really have in Scripture and tradition? The ideal of empire has recently come under attack by “National Conservatives,” reacting to the regime of neoliberal globalism. In *The Virtue of Nationalism*, the Israeli philosopher Yoram Hazony argues that the Hebrew Bible is consistently anti-imperialist, amounting to an argument for a system of independent nations inspiring each other through example, as the best way to order human life. Hazony argues that Catholicism, infected by the pagan ideology of Rome, actually promotes an anti-biblical imperialism:

For more than a thousand years, Christianity thus aligned itself, not with the ideal of setting the nations free as had been proposed by the Israelite prophets, but with much the same aspiration that had given rise to imperial Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia: the aspiration of establishing a universal empire of peace and prosperity.

Hazony is particularly harsh towards the House of Austria. He sees the Emperor Frederick III's cryptic motto A.E.I.O.U., which he reads as a call for Austria to subdue the entire world to her rule, as an inspiration for Adolf Hitler. He sees Hitler's “Third” German Reich as being basically in continuity with the ideals of the “first” German Reich: The Holy Roman Empire. Thus, on Hazony's reading National Socialism was not really a nationalist, but an imperialist movement.

Hazony sees Protestantism, with its principle of *sola scriptura*, as rediscovering the anti-imperialist teaching of the Old Testament. For Hazony therefore, the peace of Westphalia, and the establishment of a system of sovereign states to which it led, was not the tragic end of the unity of Christendom, but rather a new dawn of a truly biblical politics.

Surprisingly, certain Catholic writers have agreed with Hazony's assessment. At a conference organized in Washington, D.C., in 2019 by Hazony, R.R. Reno of *First Things* argued that while Christianity is not tied to any political form—being able to adapt to empires, kingdoms and republics—nevertheless, Christianity is opposed to “any political project that pretends to a universal mission or dominion.” The only universal community for Christians, Reno argues, is the Church herself: she alone “can overcome divisions and restore unity to the human race.”

I think that there is an element of truth to the arguments put forward by Hazony and Reno. They offer a useful critique of secular globalism in our time. But I think that they are wrong in identifying the problem with imperial universalism *as such*. Hazony is unable to give a clear criterion by which empires and nations could be distinguished. He fails to see that the real point of the biblical critique of pagan

empires is not that they are empires, but that they are pagan. Any complete human community that does not give the one God the worship that is His due and submit itself to the spiritual authority that He has established will inevitably tend to idolatrous totalitarianism—whether it sees itself as a universal empire or only a single nation. Reno is right to see the only truly universal community as the Church. Any program of universal dominion outside of the Church will necessarily be unjust. But he neglects the perennial truth that temporal political life can be “baptized,” thereby being included in the Church. Christendom ought to be the Church herself seen under her temporal aspect. The lay estate within the Church is called to subordinate temporal affairs, the natural goods of political peace, to the supernatural end of the Church. By opposing the Church to political projects, Reno is being simultaneously too clericalist and too laicist. Clericalism and laïcité are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. When politics is secularized, and political communities are no longer seen as part of the Church, then the Church will naturally be identified with the clerical estate. But in reality there are three estates within the Church—clerical, religious, and lay. To the lay estate is given power over temporal matters, but a power that it must submit to the judgements of the spiritual power entrusted to the clergy, and which is always in need of the prophetic witness of the religious.

There is no denying that Scripture does severely condemn the pretensions of the empires of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia. In the Books of Maccabees this condemnation is extended to the Hellenistic Empire of Alexander the Great. And in the New Testament it is extended to the Roman Empire. The Apocalypse of Saint John portrays Rome as the Seven-Headed Beast on which the Whore of Babylon sits, drunk on the blood of the Martyrs of Christ.

And yet, there is another thread out of which the text of Scripture is woven. This thread sees the pagan empires as a providential preparation for the Kingdom of God, which will in some way include all that was good in them, making true their false promise of universal peace. As Peter J. Leithart has pointed out, Jeremiah speaks of God giving the King of Babylon universal rule in the language of messianic prophecy:

My strength it was, the exertion of my power, that made earth, made man and beast to walk on it; and I give dominion over it to the man on whom my choice falls. And all these countries I have handed over to my servant Nabuchodonosor, king of Babylon, making even the wild beasts subject to him; all the world must obey him, and his son and his grandson after him, until the time has run out, for him and for his land both; nations a many and great kings shall pay him their homage. Nation or people that will not be vassal to Nabuchodonosor, will not

bow to Babylon’s yoke, I will punish with sword and famine and pestilence, until the last of them is left at his mercy.

And Isaias applies Messianic titles to the King of Persia:

Thou art my shepherd, and thou shalt perform all my pleasure... my anointed Cyrus, whose right hand I have taken hold of, to subdue nations before his face, and to turn the backs of kings, and to open the doors before him, and the gates shall not be shut.

In the mysterious workings of divine providence, the pagan empires were a preparation for the coming of the true empire of God. This is most fully expressed by the famous vision in Daniel of a statue with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay, which is destroyed by a stone that grows to fill the world. Daniel interprets the vision as referring to a series of empires, beginning with the Babylonian empire of his own time (the head of gold). The Church Fathers see the iron empire with feet partly of clay as a prophecy of Rome. Daniel goes on to say that the stone which destroys the statue is the empire of God, which is truly what the pagan empires only pretended to be: “And while those empires yet flourish, another empire the God of heaven will bring into being, never to be destroyed, never to be superseded; conqueror of all these others, itself unconquerable.” That empire will only be fully established at the Second Coming, but it is present already now in the Church. Jesus chooses Caesarea Philippi, named after Caesar Augustus, to declare Peter the rock on which He will build His Church; when He confirms Peter’s mission to feed His sheep, He chooses the shores of the Sea of Tiberias, named after another Caesar. As Vladimir Soloviev observed:

In the borders of Cæsarea and on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus dethroned Cæsar... He dethroned him because He had created a new and better center of unity, a new and better sovereign power based upon faith and love, truth and grace. And while dethroning the false and impious absolutism of the pagan Cæsars, Jesus confirmed and made eternal the universal monarchy of Rome by giving it its true theocratic basis. It was in a certain sense nothing more than a change of dynasty; the dynasty of Julius Cæsar, supreme pontiff and god, gave place to the dynasty of Simon Peter, supreme pontiff and servant of the servants of God.

In the foundation of the new, spiritual Rome Peter is helped by Paul. Paul is not only a Roman citizen, but also a son of Benjamin, “the wolf;” and his temperament has something of Rome’s wolf-like violence. Like Rome itself he is highly gifted and full of zeal for justice and law, and, like Rome, he for a

while persecutes the Church. But after his conversion he becomes a great missionary, spreading the truth throughout the earth. It is he who formulates most clearly how Christ dissolves the barriers between Israel and the nations: “He is our bond of peace; he has made the two one, breaking down the wall that was a barrier between us.”

The new Rome, founded not on Romulus and Remus, but on Peter and Paul, is a spiritual empire. And yet it is one to which temporal kings and emperors are bound to subordinate themselves. As Saint John Henry Newman argues, when the persecuting powers were converted they had to submit themselves to the Church: “There was no middle term; either they must deny her claim to divinity or humble themselves before it.”

By submitting themselves to the Church, temporal powers establish a unified juridical community among themselves: Christendom. While the unity of Christendom was always incomplete and dissensions remained, it was more than a mere idea, as Lord Acton observed: “The period of [the Church’s] undisputed supremacy was that in which all Western Europe obeyed the same laws, all literature was contained in one language, and the political unity of Christendom was personified in a single potentate.” In the darkest days of World War I, the great Austrian theologian and politician Ignaz Seipel looked back upon that unity with nostalgia: “Those times were surely not the worst in which the Lombard Peter, the German Albert the Great, and the Neapolitan Thomas Aquinas all taught at the University of Paris; nor those in which the Spaniard Caramuel y Lobkowitz was successively Abbot of Melrose in Scotland, Professor at Louvain, and imperial minister in Vienna.” The unity of Christendom did not destroy the particular loyalties of Lombardy, Germany, Naples, or Spain; it ennobled them by ordering them to a higher unity.

Hazoni and Reno are certainly right to criticize the liberal globalism of our time. Hazoni argues that imperialism is based upon “abstract categories” which are “detached from the circumstances and interests, traditions and aspirations of the particular clan or tribe.” While he is wrong to accuse imperialism in general of this fault, he is correct to find it in contemporary liberalism. There is something inhuman about such detachment, because it is natural for human beings to be bound together by loyalties that begin with their family relations and extend outward to wider communities which they see as extensions of themselves. Liberal globalism, insofar as it has contempt for such bonds, and effectively dissolves them, provokes a very natural reaction.

Reno, for his part, argues that the love of particular nations and peoples for their communities is a training in the overcoming of disordered self-love and thus a preparation for the more universal union of loves in the City of God. The proponents of liberal

globalism “imagine justice without virtue and peace without love.”

But Reno and Hazoni are wrong to turn to nationalism as the solution. To see the populism of Brexit and Trump as an effective form of resistance to liberal globalism is possible only from a superficially pragmatic point of view. This resistance does not call into question the secular presuppositions of the modern state. It is intrinsically doomed to failure.

Secular nations are destructive of human bonds, as are empires. Take, for example, the homogenization of France in early modernity, which destroyed local cultures, languages, and jurisdictions. Indeed, Hazoni’s book gives unwitting testimony to this problem in the difficulty that it has in distinguishing between nations and empires. Hazoni remarks that a nation needs not only some kind of religious or linguistic unity but also the military power necessary to protect itself. Hence many groups which consider themselves to be nations are condemned to be protectorates of larger nations:

A nation or tribe that does not have [military strength] can only hope to live in peace by seeking an alliance with a powerful neighbor, which is to say, as a protectorate. This is perhaps not what everyone would wish for. But a federated or protectorate state with some measure of delegated authority is, for most peoples on earth, the greatest degree of collective self-determination that can be attained.

How is such a protectorate state different from an empire? And what will prevent the larger nation from destroying the local traditions of its protectorates?

But the dissolving powers of the secular nation state go much further. As Patrick Deneen put it in his speech at Hazoni’s National Conservatism Conference last year, nationalists have often had “a stance of hostility to the local, the communal, the particular, and... the family.” Deneen identifies a kind of totalitarian tendency in nationalism, but he does not go far enough.

Charles de Koninck, in his masterpiece *On the Primacy of the Common Good: Against the Personalists*, did. Human beings are political animals, and this means that they are ordered to the common good of the complete communities to which they belong. Common goods are ends pursued in common. But ends are only truly good if they are ordered to the absolutely final end: God as the end of all creatures. As a rational being, man is able to attain that final good, and he thus has a dignity that is violated when he is ordered to any good that is not itself ordered to that more ultimate end. In human choice, the first principle is the last end. When the last end is removed, all other ends are hollowed out:

Man cannot be subordinated to the good of political society alone; he should order himself to the good

of the perfectly universal whole to which every lower common good should be expressly ordered. The common good of political society should be expressly ordered to God, both by the chief citizen and by the citizen who is a part, each in his own way. The common good requires, of itself, this ordination. Without this express and public ordination, society degenerates into the “State,” frozen and enclosed in itself.

Thus, de Koninck can ask rhetorically, “Is not society corrupted in its very root when those who have charge of the common good do not order it *explicitly* to God?” A political or imperial community that orders its common good explicitly to God is able to preserve the common goods of smaller communities such as nations, tribes, and families because it can see how they tend to the final good. But the modern secular state, not being ordered to the true common good of human beings, will inevitably enter into competition with the goods of smaller communities. It has an inevitable tendency to set itself up as an idol, to which everything else is sacrificed. As de Koninck shows, the so-called “liberal” state of modernity is essentially totalitarian:

The common good has lost its distinctive note, it becomes an alien good. It has been subordinated to that monster of modern invention that is called the “State,” not the state taken as synonymous with civil society or the city, but the “State” which means a city elevated into a sort of physical person.

De Koninck was writing during the Second World War. In the period following the war there was a strong movement among Catholics to establish international authorities for the sake of peace. In a speech to the members of the Universal Movement for World Federation in 1951, Pope Pius XII said: “Your movement, gentlemen, aims at bringing into being an effective political world organization. Nothing is more in line with the traditional doctrine of the Church.” Yet there was a key element of the Church’s traditional teaching on world government that such movements neglected.

As Alan Fimister has shown, the founders of the European Union were in part inspired by the teachings of Pius XII. And they hoped through European unification to achieve a “new Christendom.” But their fatal flaw was that they thought this Christendom could be an “anonymous” Christendom, lacking explicit ordination to God, and thus lacking explicit subordination to the spiritual authority of the Church. De Koninck could have told them that this was a fool’s errand. In the European Union of today the illusion has become a nightmare. As Adrian Papst put it, the EU is now “abstract, administrative and alien vis-a-vis its citizens.” This is the fate of any community—whether national or imperial—which does

not explicitly order itself to that ultimate good to which we can only be led by divine love, or Christian charity. This is the perennial wisdom of the Church. Modern Catholic social teaching has again and again emphasized this point. Pope Leo XIII said that it is a sin for the state not to order subordinate itself to the true religion. Saint Pius X taught that unless all wills are united in “the love of God and His Son” true human solidarity will not be achieved. And even Pope Benedict XVI wrote that a universal brotherhood of nations is not possible “by human effort alone;” it can only be achieved by “a transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first, teaching us through the Son what fraternal charity is.”

This is the program of integralism, which seeks to preserve and perfect human bonds by ordering the temporal common good explicitly to the eternal common good. Integralism can seem wildly impractical, insofar as it seems unlikely that an electoral majority could be found for it in major Western countries. But in reality integralism is the only truly practical program, because it is the only program that is unequivocally committed to the true common good of human beings. The Kingship of Christ did not seem a very practical program at the time of the persecution of Diocletian, and yet soon the Roman emperors were to submit themselves to it.

In 1363, Countess Margaret of Tyrol, decided to bequeath Tyrol to her late son’s brother-in-law, Duke Rudolph IV of Habsburg. This was typical for the way in which the Austrian crown lands were acquired—not chiefly through the sort of wars of conquest that Hazony associates with imperialism, but through the building of networks of fealty through dynastic marriage. As a mocking proverb has it: *Bella gerant alii, tu felix Austria nube. / Nam quae Mars aliis, dat tibi diva Venus.* (Let others wage war, but do thou, happy Austria, marry. For what Mars gives to others is given to thee by divine Venus).

The “princely” County of Tyrol was to become the most loyal of all the Austrian crown lands. When it was conquered by Bonaparte, a simple Tyrolean innkeeper, Andreas Hofer, led a popular uprising. Dedicating themselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Tyroleans fought for the Catholic Faith and the old Empire against the Enlightenment rationalism of Napoleon’s new world order. Against the secular ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality, they set the true liberty, fraternity, and equality that come from union in the Sacred Heart, the furnace of Divine Love and Desire of the Nations.

If a politics of the love of Christ was opposed to the rationalist universalism of the French Revolution, it was equally opposed to the romantic neopagan nationalism of Hitler. A retired abbot of my monastery, Abbot Gerhard, was a teenager during the Third Reich. I once heard him recount how in the early days after the *Anschluss* he participated in the Catholic

Youth Movement's Christ the King celebration. At the end of the celebration they sang a hymn to Christ the King by the Silesian Jesuit theologian Erich Przywara. At the following words all the youth held out their arms with three fingers raised in a gesture of oath-taking:

Christ my great King, to Thee alone
I pledge my love strong and pure,
Even to death my faithfulness.

Fidelity to the Highest King meant rejecting the totalitarian claims of the *Führer*. It meant having the true freedom and happiness of being ordered to the one common good of human life. That is integralist politics. That is the politics that was necessary then, is necessary now, and will continue to be necessary in the future.

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OUR POST-POLITICAL FUTURE

BY MICHAEL HANBY



Though it seems all but a self-evident truth now that the “American experiment” in ordered liberty ends in conflagration, the meaning of this “end” still calls for some reflection if we hope to understand our historical moment and anticipate some of what lies in store. There has been some chatter of late in postliberal circles about whether Ross Douthat’s “stagnation” thesis or Patrick Deneen’s “catastrophism” offers the more likely scenario. It is probable that both are right and that we are in for a long combustible period of “catastrophic stagnation,” with warring political factions locked in a self-escalating cycle of lawlessness and reactionary violence, spread like a contagion by comfortable radicals from behind their keyboards, spiking occasionally after the manner of a fever.

Whatever one wishes to call the prevailing liberal-capitalist-technocratic-secular order, it has succeeded spectacularly in eliminating all theoretical and practical alternatives to itself, leaving the revolutionary impulse devoid of imagination, and thus mostly

negative and destructive. Yet many are the ties that bind, despite appearances. The American empire still possesses unprecedented police and surveillance powers, though these are no longer concentrated solely in the hands of the state and its police forces and are often used against them. The nation is still duct-taped together by vast and intricate physical and digital infrastructures, a labyrinthine system of commerce and finance, and an omnipresent social media system that is now the gateway to the social and political spheres, replacing the real spatio-temporal public square of political deliberation with a virtual public square of immediate stimulus and response and suspending its participants in a permanent state of anxiety, agitation, and rage between provocations. And then there is still the wealth. It is a convenient discovery of post-Sixties activists that one can be radical and rich at the same time. The suburbs north of D.C., for example, are full of seven-hundred-thousand-dollar homes with signs professing faith in love and science posted on their professionally manicured lawns, rainbow and Blacks Lives Matter flags flying from the porches,

and a BMW or two in the driveway. Careers can be made, or at least prolonged, by affixing the obligatory slogans to one's Twitter handle or sharing a photo of oneself holding a sign at a rally. Even corporations have discovered that "revolution" will be acceptable to customers if they get the branding right—and devastating if they fail to get on board. This may not be the first revolution in history undertaken by the governing and merchant classes, but it is certainly the first to enjoy corporate sponsorship.

Given the sheer inertial force of all this, it is unlikely that "end" means "fall" in quite the way that other historical regimes have collapsed and faded into nonexistence. "Natural conclusion" or "logical terminus" would be perhaps closer to the mark, but the dramatic social breakdown and realignments we are witnessing seem to indicate something still more significant, perhaps without historical precedent or analogy. America will obviously persist as a geographical entity and likely even a techno-commercial empire, but a perpetual state of "catastrophic stagnation" signals not only the end of the illusion that America is a political community in any meaningful sense but the transition from what we might call a "political" to a "post-political" age. The political age is characterized, at bottom, by the conviction that human agency can master *fortuna*, even if this means learning to manipulate the invisible hand that contrives unintended consequences from the aggregate of intended human actions. It coextends with the modern political project in its various forms and still determines the horizon of the secular imagination even as it fades into history. And it is defined by the triumph of politics over both ecclesiastical and natural order, the ascendance of political philosophy to the highest and ultimately *only* public philosophy, and a kind of this-worldly faith in the salvific power of political action, albeit with transcendence now transposed horizontally into the future rather than vertically into eternity. Whether this will involve an actual utopia or merely interminable progress—a utopianism without a utopia—depends upon whether it took a classically liberal, progressive, or Marxist form. The tragic irony of this grand vision, as Augusto Del Noce and others have recognized, is that the absolutization of politics concludes by destroying the conditions of possibility for genuinely political community.

The post-political age, by contrast, is marked by the triumph of technological society over political society and is ultimately "governed" by technologically driven processes deeper and more extensive than the rule of law, processes which simply bypass rather than destroy the hollowed-out institutions of a decadent political society. Post-political rule is marked by new forms of social coercion and political action exercised outside the bounds of these institutions and institutionalized processes of political deliberation and by new forms of political causation without deliberation

and attributable to no particular agency. Who, exactly, can be held responsible for the riots we have seen or the phenomenon known as "canceling"? And who can decide to stop them, whoever they are? Post-political society operates principally through a self-organizing system of political causation without any real bearers of political responsibility. With "smart" devices as prosthetic attachments and social media mediating our relation to the world, this system operates internally upon our psyches as well as externally upon the world—indeed it blurs the boundary between interiority and exteriority—without a controller pulling the levels of power. Aldous Huxley, prophetic though he has turned out to be in so many ways, apparently could not imagine that his *Brave New World* would not need a Mustapha Mond, still a character from the political age. Even the *New York Times*, the source of so many inputs into the system and a great manipulator of it, must ultimately bow to its exigencies. Post-political rule is "the rule of nobody," to borrow Hannah Arendt's phrase, which should not be confused with the absence of rule. Those in today's "resistance" who have staked their eschatological hope on the overthrow of Donald Trump may be surprised to discover that the most powerful tyranny of all, and the most difficult to overthrow, is the tyranny without a tyrant.

It is important to see that this would still obtain even with a functioning government, which we have not had in quite some time, and without violence in the streets, which looks to be a semi-permanent feature of American life moving forward. Technology does not wait upon politics, which is almost wholly reactive to technological possibilities that can scarcely be imagined until they are an accomplished fact. The virtual mob, an omnipresent reality immediately responsive to every "outrage," can organize itself into an actual mob at multiple points around the globe simultaneously before our politicians have the time to brush their teeth in the morning. Even so, the end of political society marks a signal moment and weakens a crucial barrier to its totalitarian advance.

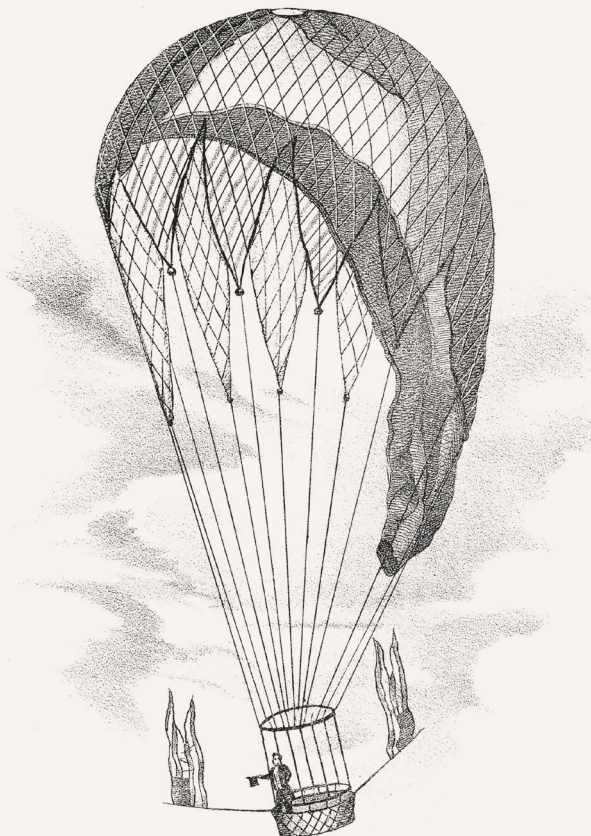
Politics, as the shared deliberation about the means to given ends, presupposes something deeper and more basic than civil society or the little Burkean platoons typically championed by conservatives. It presupposes a given order of reality into which we were received and to which we all belong, which makes a shared conception of the common good, the human person, and human reason possible. Through the long history of what has come to be known as "the West" this was given by the metaphysical and religious vision formed from the synthesis of Rome, Athens, and Jerusalem—which continued to provide intellectual, moral, and cultural foundation both to those who opposed this synthesis from within and even those who were unjustly beaten down by it. Recent events simply hasten the destruction of the edifice built upon

these foundations, a process that was already far advanced before rioters began setting America's cities alight.

The causes of this devastation are legion. Disintegration is arguably a feature and not a bug of liberal order—the multiplication of factions and all that—and a logical consequence of the liberal conception of freedom as the power to define reality, which inevitably atomizes and disempowers the citizenry while insinuating state and bureaucratic power into every facet of life. Both capitalism and technological culture set in motion interminable processes of “creative destruction” that exacerbate this atomization, negating antecedent forms of order and leaving whole classes and generations of obsolete people in their wake. And who knows whether this disintegration is the inevitable consequence of America's original and seemingly inexpiable sin—or even indeed the true and righteous judgment visited upon it, if we heed Lincoln's Second Inaugural. The social inequities exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the brutal killing of George Floyd, and the righteous anger and anguish provoked by these events have made it undeniably clear that its lasting effects extend unto the nth generation, like the *tradux peccati* of traditional Christian theology.

I am presently concerned with the meaning of this moment, however, not its causes. And this meaning cannot be comprehended by the compulsory pieties that woke ideology imposes on the interpretation of events and the Manichean division of the world into racists and anti-racists, however self-consoling this may be to a nation desperate to be absolved of its history and frantically seeking rites of ablation. It is not a denial that racial injustice is endemic to American history, experience, and social structures or an insult to the memory of George Floyd to acknowledge the obvious. The full meaning of this historical moment cannot be derived from the igniting event of his brutal murder any more than the whole meaning of the First World War can be derived from the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand. The conditions whereby the Archduke's assassination could become an igniting event were prepared, in part but substantially, by a spirit of nihilism that had pervaded Europe, as any reader of Dostoyevsky or Nietzsche will recognize.

Our conflagration is undeniably fueled by righteous anger over Floyd's death and the whole history of systematic racial injustice that lay behind his murder. They underscore the vastly different experiences of white and black Americans and expose a clear need for police reform. But this does not suffice to explain the frenzy of destruction we see in the streets, the repression unleashed in the virtual public square and in the real economy, or the impotence of our public authorities in the face of these events. There has been a great deal of discussion about Ivy League radicals and trust-fund revolutionaries exploiting the killing of Floyd and centuries of African American suffering to



act out woke ideology, a more malevolent expression of the sentiment expressed by the suburban yard sign that appropriates the epistemic authority of science and the moral authority of the struggle for black civil rights to legitimate the progressive vision of an androgynous technocratic society. Yet these phenomena are significant not because of the obvious hypocrisy at work in them, but because they exemplify the nihilistic spirit that now animates so much of American life.

There is no greater sign of this descent into nihilism than the ascendance of “identity” to a first principle of American life and thought, whatever its utility as a tool of criticism for uncovering unconscious structures of oppression or bringing to light the almost incommensurable differences in the experience of white and black Americans. The absolutization of identity destroys any presupposition of a shared order of reality, negating both our common human nature and the concrete history and experiences that complicate attempts at categorization. It even attacks the very language by which we recognize a common world. That is the real meaning of the pronoun wars raging in academia and the media and wending its inevitable way through the courts, which are conveniently discovering new “principles” to give legal and constitutional force to a social *fait accompli*. The absolutization of identity (a=a) effectively makes every individual its own abstract disembodied essence—like an angel—known solely to zirsself. The assertion of identity thus functions as a conversation stopper, to put the matter politely. It draws the line beyond which any further analysis or criticism or even speech becomes impossible, illegitimate, and violent. Reason is thereby renounced, indeed denounced as a construct that merely masks the will to power. Words and ideas cease to express the truth of our shared world and instead become instruments for manipulating it and defeating one’s enemies.

Animated by this spirit, “politics” can only be what our politics have in fact become: the attempt to conquer one’s enemies and impose one’s will upon them by whatever means necessary—political, legal, bureaucratic, economic, rhetorical, or otherwise—and the guerilla efforts of the defeated to resist and sabotage the rule of the victors whom they regard as illegitimate. Nihilism becomes the law, enforced both by the extra-legal mechanisms of post-political rule, which can call down the furies on anyone, anywhere, at any time, and by ordinary legal mechanisms through the courts. The absolutization of “identity” turns traditional American legal principles such as equal protection and substantive due process into instruments of annihilation for destroying in law distinctions and differences that matter in reality.

Still, nature abhors a vacuum. In the void left by the negation of a common order of reality, all that remains of human nature and the common good is our

bare biological functioning—what Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life” (*zoe* rather than *bios*)—and those activities that imitate and sustain it, labor, rather than work or action in Hannah Arendt’s analysis. All that remains of the human reason once revered as wisdom is technical, instrumental reason and pragmatic truth. Those yard signs declaring a creed of love and science succinctly express this logic, whose essence Del Noce grasped in recognizing that contemporary eroticism and scientism were but two aspects of the same phenomenon. Post-political rule, premised upon the annihilation of the natural precondition for politics, is inevitably technocratic rule. Hence the chorus of progressive voices exhorting the nation to submit to the governance of “science” at the height of the pandemic, a transparent attempt to consolidate political power while renouncing political judgment and responsibility. It does not matter that “science” rarely speaks with one voice, or that it advances by its errors, or that it is infused from top to bottom with unarticulated philosophical assumptions. Nor does it matter that there is apparently no action—or its opposite—that cannot be justified in the name of “science” and “public health.” The last century serves as a warning of where that can lead.

Combine the aggressive advance of post-political rule with the decadence of its media enforcers, add in the contempt of both political parties for the working class each claims to represent, and you have the conditions in which roughly half the voting population could be driven into the hands of the would-be strongman Donald Trump, deceived into believing that he would be the “Great Delayer” of this fate. This has turned out to be fool’s gold. While the Trump years have been an invitation to white nationalists and assorted crazies on the far-right fringe to crawl out into the sunlight like grub worms under a dung pile, they have been an even greater gift to the left, adding fuel to the flames, justifying all necessary means of “resistance” and confirming everything progressives believe about themselves. The continual denunciation of Trump as a fascist says more about the role of anti-fascism in progressive rituals of ablution than it does about our historical moment. It is absurd to think that a carnival barker who cannot distinguish between reality and reality T.V. and who lacks the capacity to refrain from tweeting half-literate diatribes against cable news talking heads possesses the capacity to subscribe to any coherent ideology. Trump is rather a tyrant in the classical sense, a man utterly at the mercy of his basest impulses, which he has aplenty. He is weak not strong, obsessed with his “ratings,” and incapable, even in the gravest moments, of pretending to the statesmanship required of his office. His inevitable failure only serves to intensify and legitimate the disintegration and the coming retribution against those who enabled and supported him. Donald Trump is neither the cause of American nihilism

nor a bulwark against it. He is merely an accelerant of a downward spiral into nihilism that was already well under way, one that will persist long after he has disappeared from public life.

Many have taken to describing this nihilism as America's new civil religion. This is a helpful way of thinking about it, but two points should be made which have perhaps been underemphasized thus far. First, to the extent it is a form of religious faith, it is a replacement for the Black Christianity that formed the soul of the historic civil rights movement. The authorized history of the civil rights era helped pave the way for this, underemphasizing the role of the Black Church, treating Martin Luther King's Baptist faith as incidental, and regarding racial progress as the natural outworking of America's founding principles and modernity's progressive self-overcoming. But the truth is that America owes the Black Church, whose very existence is a miracle of divine grace, a debt it can neither comprehend nor repay. The Black Church gave the descendants of slaves the fortitude to endure and the hope to transcend a history beyond anyone's power to erase, helping them to build a culture of great beauty out of almost nothing. Yet even more remarkably, the Christianity of black Americans gave them the grace to live and to act among the sons and daughters of those who enslaved and oppressed them with what can only be described as a supernatural humanity. Any white man who has had a black mentor or been received into a predominately black gathering knows firsthand the grace whereof I speak. It remains one of our few sources of hope even now.

Second, unlike its predecessor, our new civil religion offers no possibility of redemption, no atonement but the annihilation of the sinner and all traces of his memory. Those who sin against this faith by existing are permitted neither speech, nor silence, nor contrition. Not even the rituals of ablution demanded of its devotees, those public acts of self-abasement continually performed over the internet before the eyes of the world, suffice to wash out, out the damned spot of "privilege" or whatever mistaken utterance or misplaced expression of human solidarity happens to cause offense. No apology can be abject enough to atone for the sin of being or powerful enough to erase all the effects of having been. Infinite guilt requires infinite annihilation. And since "privilege" has left its stain on everything, there is always something more to destroy.

Here we come to the dirty little secret of this and every form of nihilism. It is essentially parasitic. It lives out of what it opposes, just as the anti-racism of the trust-fund revolutionary lives off the destruction of black property, or suburban progressivism lives off the moral authority of Black Christianity and the civil rights movement. Our new progressive civil religion needs racism, patriarchy, "homophobia," and all the rest of it as fuel for its interminable conflagration,

just as fire needs oxygen and technological progress needs present limits as an obstacle to overcome. It secretly celebrates the evil it claims to oppose as the occasion for the exercise of its own virtue.

Just as our new civil religion does not promise atonement and redemption, neither does it offer real hope for the restoration of political community. Del Noce perceived this when he called the new totalitarianism a "totalitarianism of disintegration" bent not on imposing a new order on the world but destroying all traces of the old one. The fundamental question at this point of our history is not whether political rule can be restored, but whether this interminable process of disintegration can somehow be arrested before it destroys what is left of the last properly human civilization we are likely to have. It is not clear that this process can be stopped. It is clear, however, that politics cannot save us, and certainly not the sophistic parodies of politics characteristic of our post-political age. The broken political mechanisms at our disposal might still be used to provide some redress for social and economic inequalities. They could still be used to enforce civil rights, to protect civil liberties, or to enact police reform. They could even be marshalled to break up the tech giants and their ever-tightening grip on the flow of information, though it is doubtful this would lessen the ability of the press to mediate reality or stop the virtual public square from replacing the real one. But political instruments cannot fix a ruined system that has mistaken ignorance for education and renounced all but pragmatic conceptions of truth. They cannot liberate us from our technological regime of necessity, which carries all of us along by its own momentum. They cannot undo the conditioning of whole generations attached to the internet from birth and trained by social media to exhibit their interior lives exteriorly and perform their virtue virtually before the world. They cannot put the surveillance genie back in the bottle or constrain the power to call down violence (rhetorical or otherwise) on anyone at any time. One cannot solve a humanistic crisis by technological and political means, and politics cannot cure the sickness of mind and spirit that has infected us. It cannot heal our self-hatred or end the desperate and futile attempt to absolve ourselves of the guilt of being. The dream of mastering *fortuna* by political and technical means was an illusion that has left us enslaved and sickened. The burning flames of our civilization are fueled by an intellectual and spiritual fever for which we possess no cure.

Yet the West was once defined by its belief in a power not our own that did not need our wickedness to show its generosity, a power that created our nature with an essential goodness our wickedness cannot unmake, that recreates us without destroying us or, impossibly, erasing the past: a power Whose image we bore in the reason we all share, a power that could—and did—effect the atonement that we are

powerless to provide for ourselves, that frees us to live with ourselves and each other. If this was ever true, then it must be true even now, however deeply we or our ancestors have betrayed these convictions. And so, this truth must perdure even beneath the abyss of our nihilism, showing itself in the resilience of nature and in human and superhuman acts of courage, charity, forgiveness, and forbearance that mostly pass beneath the gaze of the social media panopticon.

The question of whether we can be rescued from the spirit of nihilism that we have unleashed is ultimately the question of whether this power and its truth can somehow be rediscovered from within an anti-culture premised on their attempted annihilation.

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PREDICTION VERSUS PROPHECY

BY SAM KRISS



Like every other idiot out there, I failed to see the new world coming. Some time in January, on a bright cold sunny day in New York, I distracted myself with news from distant places. Empty streets in a Chinese city I'd never heard of. An unimaginable crisis very far away. "Are you worried about this coronavirus thing?" I asked my girlfriend. "It's weird, I can't really bring myself to freak out about it." I couldn't imagine that the world would actually change. She wasn't too worried either. I flew back across the Atlantic at the end of the month, and we decided to meet again in London, maybe some time in March. We decided what the future would look like. We predicted that there would be international flights, and restaurants, and pubs, and maybe something interesting on at the Tate Modern, and all the mild miseries of the twenty-first century. We were wrong.

Now, I spend my days counting the dead. Glued to the data, neurotic and mesmerised. The numbers

are read out in daily press conferences from Downing Street. Sometimes there are names, but mostly it's a sequence: three-hundred forty-six corpses yesterday, six-hundred twenty-six the day before, five-hundred thirty-nine the day before that. We're looking for a pattern; something in the numbers that can tell us what the world will look like next week, next month, or next year. According to the government, these numbers should be falling, and sometimes they do fall. Sometimes they rise sharply again. Lines on charts coil around the projections, the mathematical curves, the inferences—and then uncouple again.

Some of my friends think this will be over soon, and it'll be followed by joy. We'll return to each other in the streets, without digital mediation, without fear, in a new Summer of Love. Others predict that the state of exception will become permanent. We'll simply *never get out of lockdown*: the world will stop being something you physically live in, and start being something you access through your computer. Both predictions seem equally possible. None of our predictive apparatuses seem to be working. Common

sense fails. Statistics are shaky. Hope is out of the question.

There's only one thing left. There's one power that seems to have predicted everything that happened. It saw the future where I couldn't, because its powers were greater than mine, and not human. For those of us lost in time, this is a comforting thought. There's a vaster plan, a higher symmetry, behind the chaos of the world. Everything we're suffering was set down in a half-remembered past, in half-remembered texts.

I'm talking, of course, about *The Simpsons*.

Once, *The Simpsons* was an excellent cartoon for balding millennials. Over the last decade, it's turned into something else: the yellow and ageless creatures of Springfield have become an oracle, probably the most powerful of our time. In "Bart to the Future," an episode from 2000, a newly elected President Lisa is shown meeting with her advisors. "As you know," she says, "we've inherited quite a budget crunch from President Trump." For about a decade and a half, this was a joke. Then, very suddenly, it wasn't.

There's more. From 1992 to 1994, the show correctly predicted the Super Bowl winners three years running. In a sight gag from 1998, it predicted the eventual Disney-Fox merger. In 1997, it even hinted darkly at the attacks of September 11, 2001. (There's a brief shot of a brochure advertising bus tickets to New York for nine dollars. The Twin Towers themselves, silhouetted to the right, form the eleven. Even the showrunner Al Jean, who dismisses most of the show's oracular powers as coincidence or good guesswork, was baffled. "That one," he told the *New York Times*, "is a completely bizarre, strange thing.") And when Covid-19 started to spread, it turned out that this too had been prefigured. The season four episode "Marge in Chains" depicts an outbreak of Osaka flu in Springfield. A mob masses outside the medical centre, furiously failing to observe social distancing, and demands a cure. Then there's the following exchange:

MOB: We need a cure! We need a cure!
 DR HIBBERT: Why, the only cure is bed rest.
 Anything I'd give you would only be a placebo.
 WOMAN: Where do we get these placebos?
 MAN: Maybe there's some in this truck!

The mob knock over the truck, and a crate full of killer bees bursts open in their stupid faces. The first recorded coronavirus outbreak in America was in Washington state around the beginning of 2020. At exactly the same time, in exactly the same place, Asian "murder hornets" were discovered to have spread to the United States. It was written. It was foretold.

This strange vatic power is often commented on—if you search Google for the phrase "predicted the future," almost every result will be about *The Simpsons*—but as far as I can tell, nobody's made any serious attempt to explain it. Two broad theories suggest themselves. Hypothesis one: the show's floating

timeline has caused it to come unstuck within history. Bart Simpson is ten years old; in the show's golden age in the Nineties, his birth was depicted in the early Eighties. Thirty years on, and Bart—like the Sibyl at Cumae—diminishes but does not die. His form and movements are cheap and plasticky now, but he's still ten years old. He was born in 2010—several decades after he'd already become a major global pop-culture icon, and then faded away. He lived before his birth. He is always within his own future. Bart Simpson floats, anguished and unborn, into the swelling catastrophe of time.

Hypothesis two: *The Simpsons* predicted the future because it's not a piece of entertainment, it's a Lull machine. It's an analogue computer from the thirteenth century.

The Lull machine is made of three concentric paper circles, each with a series of nine letters written around the outer edge. Spin the circles, and you can quickly arrive at any possible combination of the letters. It was the invention of Ramon Lull, a Catalan mystic and philosopher, alternately a candidate for canonisation or proscribed as a heretic. The letters on his discs stand for the attributes of God. B for BONITAS, goodness; C for MAGNITUDO, greatness; D for AETERNAS, eternity, and so on. A certain configuration might give the statement that "goodness is great" or "glory is eternal." Lull described different rules for using the machine, to yield, for instance, questions. Is goodness so great that it is eternal? Might the truth of virtue bring glory? He believed that through this machine, the form of all possible human knowledge could be laid out. In 1314, he took his contraption to Tunis, where he hoped to use it to convert the people to Christianity. Instead, an angry crowd pelted him with stones. He died the following year. The Franciscans record him as a martyr.

Lull thought that his machine could use logical rules to make accurate and useful statements about reality. He was right. What he'd invented was the computer, along with almost all its present-day features. Hardware in paper and pins; a programming language of nine characters; software systems laid out in vast illuminated tables. The machine only needed a little refinement. Four centuries after Lull, Leibniz combined his innovations with a binary system poached from the *I Ching*—an ancient computer-text used (of course) to predict the future. After that, it was just a question of fine-tuning the machinery.

Present-day capitalism is a system of computerised forecasting. Most exchanges on the market are now made by high-frequency trading algorithms, which predict minuscule fluctuations in share prices and frantically buy and sell accordingly. Tiny fragments of the future—a second, a millisecond—nibbled away and swallowed by the present. Vast market algorithms keep production of basic commodities tied precisely to expected demand. Social media systems

sift through the vast quantities of data we shed like dead skin cells. They can accurately predict when a person will become pregnant, when she'll move home, when she might be interested in a new line of ultra-indulgent pet food products, and when she'll die. All possibilities fester in the belly of the machine. Dull fates pour from its bowels. And this monstrous synthetic god still works on the principles outlined by Ramon Llull: take all the available data, combine it in all possible permutations, and compute.

It should be said that this system isn't *entirely* novel. Two and a half millennia ago, Thales of Miletus got sick of life as a penniless philosopher, and decided to make some scratch. Aristotle: "From his knowledge of astronomy he had observed while it was still winter that there was going to be a large crop of olives, so he raised a small sum of money and paid round deposits for the whole of the olive-presses in Miletus and Chios." He had invented the futures contract. Of course, for Aristotle, this was something unusual and worth remarking on, a power particular to philosophy. Nobody in ancient Greece could imagine, like Miguel de Unamuno in the nineteenth century, time as a "nocturnal" river flowing from "its source, the eternal tomorrow." You need a bond market, a stock index, a complex and well-established traffic in predicted profits. But even so, Thales' system still depended on the outputs delivered by a computing machine. This one just happened to be vast, and made of stars.

The Simpsons does exactly the same thing. As one of its successors has pointed out, "*Simpsons* already did it." For every possible thought, or situation, or decision, there's a moment from the cartoon that pre-empted it; you could build a plausible universal language from *Simpsons* references. This is because the show belongs to a very particular genre, which is the American epic. It stands in the same tradition as *Moby Dick* or *Gravity's Rainbow*. As Hegel points out, what distinguishes an epic is its "totality of objects": it brings "together the whole sphere of the earth and human life." And it's worth noting that epic texts have been used directly as rudimentary divinatory computers. Before a battle, Brutus used the *Sortes Homericae*, in which you augur the future by reading a random passage from the *Iliad*. He drew the line "by the cruel crown of Fate I was undone," and knew who would win.

But *The Simpsons* is an epic without horizon. There's no whale to fight, no Imipolex G or Rocket 0000 to seek out, no Ithaca to return to. It only churns endlessly through the materials of the world. Springfield is a formless, plastic place. It has a seafront when it needs one, shipwreck-strewn and sleazy; the rest of the time it's landlocked. Sometimes it's an anonymous town; sometimes it's a major centre ("Eh, New York, Springfield, and if we have time, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles"). Homer Simpson has been an astronaut, a clown, a barbershop singer, a car designer,

a snow-shoveller, and a sideshow freak. For Hegel, the epic's disclosure of a total world must form a concrete unity with individual action from the heroes, their "self-disclosure as whole men in the greatest variety of scenes and situations."

Homer gets partway there. Homer Simpson completes the system, by letting it run until it fully exhausted itself with world some time around season twelve.

Imagine Llull's machine, but with faces drawn around the edges of its wheels. Homer, and Marge, and Principal Skinner, and Mr. Burns. The true esoteric language of creation.

Plausibly, this is why *The Simpsons* has been so good at prefiguring future events: it contains everything, and that includes the future. But this vastness actually makes it singularly unhelpful as an oracle. Its predictions only work retroactively; *after* something happens, you can go back to the text and see that in fact it was there all along. What you can't do is consult the text in all its bewildering totality to find out what's coming next.

This is the problem with most predictive systems. They work by gathering information about the present, and then projecting trends forwards in time. The most simple of these models, the so-called naïve approach, looks like this:

$$\hat{y}_T + h \mid T = y_T$$

Here y_T stands for the state of the data at any given time T , and h denotes the forecast horizon. In other words, this formula assumes that the future will be *exactly as the same as the past*. If today is Monday, then it stands to reason that tomorrow will also be Monday. Despite its obvious limitations, the naïve method is often strikingly accurate.

But prediction can't calculate rupture: the moment where every rule suddenly stops working and the world becomes a very different place. Trading software is very good at forecasting whether a stock will go up or down, but there's no system available that can accurately predict a coming financial crash. (If we could predict them, they wouldn't exist, and neither would the market.) Predictive systems can model the exponential curve of a viral pandemic, but they can't see it coming before it arrives. No algorithm can know the hour or the day.

But there are *two* ways of knowing about future events. Walter Benjamin observed that the Jews were forbidden from consulting oracles and soothsayers. This didn't close off the future; instead, it meant that "every second was the narrow gate, through which the Messiah could enter." There's prediction— and then there's prophecy. Prediction looks at the data, tots up the figures, and tells you: there will be a good crop of olives next year in Miletus. Prophecy is different. It roars: Awake, ye drunkards, and weep, and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, for it is cut off from

your mouth. Hath this ever been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?

In this age of uncertainty, what we need is a prophet. And we have one.

He lived in Shepperton, a scrap of medieval motorway purlieu on the fringes of London. He lived in a semi-detached house with flaking paint and he wrote things down. His name was Jim.

Did J.G. Ballard warn us about the coronavirus? Don't insult me with these questions. Of course he did. A short story from 1977 depicts a world in which everyone lives in a state of permanent social distancing. Children are conceived by artificial insemination, and brought up by parents who have never met through cooing video screens. Couples make pornography of themselves for each other. "Affection and compassion demanded distance. Only at a distance could one find that true closeness to another human being which, with grace, might transform itself into love." The world is poison: houses are fitted with gas-tight doors, and nobody goes outside. But the real danger isn't in the air; it's other people. Come too close to your elderly mother, and she might die. The characters even communicate through a "zoom." The story itself is even titled "The Intensive Care Unit." It's all there.

For most readers, Ballard is still best known as the author of *Empire of the Sun*, a mostly autobiographical account of his childhood in Japanese-occupied Shanghai, which had the misfortune of being adapted into a Spielberg film. But over his career, Ballard wrote nineteen novels and countless short stories—and almost all of them are a piece of strange, crystalline, prefigurative genius. I won't bore you with a full and exhaustive list of every single one of his fulfilled prophecies. The thing would be enormous, terrifying, but also vaguely actuarial. The best form for it might be a kind of index for an unpublished book (a form Ballard himself experimented with). Something like this:

A terrible accident occurs near the Pripat Marshes of Belarus, forcing the Soviet government to declare an exclusion zone

The Illuminated Man (1964)

Shallow, compulsory hypersexuality in an age of vanishing desire

Love in a Colder Climate (1989)

That... you know, that whole Epstein thing

Super-Cannes (2000)

The Vietnam War stops being an actual conflict and turns into a film genre, without anything really changing in the transition

The Atrocity Exhibition (1966)

Lazy suburban fascism sprawls out from shopping centres to conquer the world

Kingdom Come (2006)

Donald Trump and his enemies collaborate to found a new and all-encompassing personality cult centred on his mental and physical decline

The Secret History of World War 3 (1988)

The rental market in London and New York right now

Bilennium (1961)

British expats on the Costa del Sol furiously campaign for Brexit

The Largest Theme Park in the World (1989)

Life and love fade into a vague soup of placid entertainment and digitised violence; self-care, compulsory leisure, the gently administered spa resort at the end of time

Collected works (1962-2006), every single one of them

And so on, and so on, and so on.

But this would be entirely the wrong way to approach his work. Go back to "The Intensive Care Unit." Its idea is prescient, but not actually unique. The same theme was worked over as early as 1909, in E.M. Forster's story *The Machine Stops*. Here, humanity lives in vast underground hives: one hexagonal cell for each shapeless human organism, tiled with buttons that summon food and music and everything you need, all courtesy of the titular Machine. People speak to each other via video chat; it's all very modern. Forster quite accurately predicted the development of the telegraph into something like the internet. He saw the infrastructure. Ballard saw something else. Here's his account of a marriage under permanent lockdown:

For our honeymoon we went to Venice. Happily we shared the panoramic views of the crowds in St Mark's Square, and gazed at the Tintoretos in the Academy School. Our wedding night was a triumph of the director's art. As we lay in our respective beds, I courted Margaret with a series of increasingly bold zooms, which she countered in a sweetly teasing way with her shy fades and wipes. As we undressed and exposed ourselves to each other the screens merged into a last oblivious close-up...

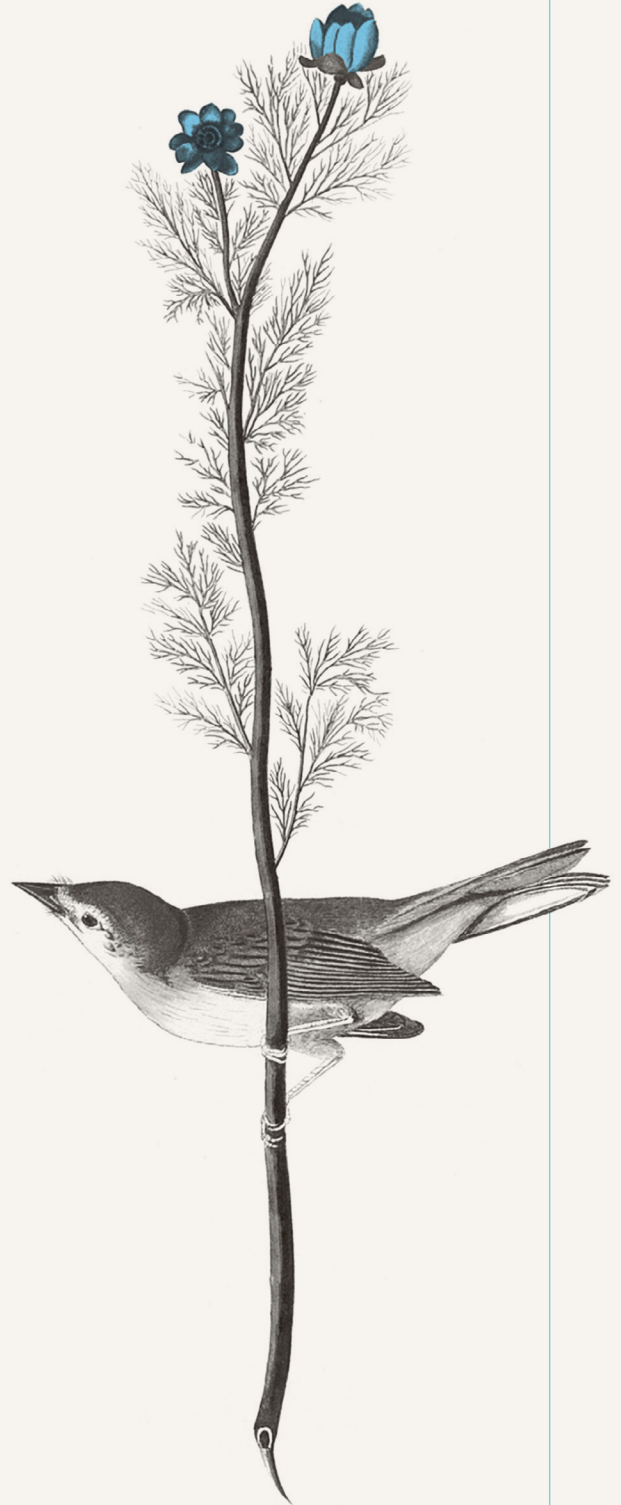
Ballard didn't quite have a handle on the new communications that were coming; his model was still the TV camera, not the annihilating nexus of digital media. Wipes and fades, not custom filters. But he understood something far more fundamental: the people of the future would be *curators* of their own lives. Our main activity consists of generating visions of ourselves to disperse to the world, built out of objects

we don't own, places we've never visited, and books we haven't read. Ballard's characters, like the digital subjects of today, exist in the methods and techniques of their self-presentation. Neurotic patients are distinguished by their "disjointed cutting, aggressive zooms and split-screen techniques." Happy couples film themselves like René Clair or Max Ophuls; boisterous young children are 'budding Godards.' In the end, Ballard's narrator decides to actually meet his wife. It's a disaster.

The figure of a small, narrow-shouldered woman stepped into the hall... Margaret's face seemed pasty and unhealthy, and the movements of her white hands were nervous and unsettled. For years I had known Margaret as a huge close-up... Even in long-shot she was usually larger than this hunched and diminutive woman hovering at the end of the hall. It was difficult to believe I had ever been excited by her empty breasts and harrow thighs... Before I could speak, she had turned and fled. When she had gone I carefully checked the locks on my front door. Around the entrance hung a faint and not altogether pleasant odour.

Years ago, I shared a house with a professional Instagram model. A few times a week, she'd disappear into her room to put on clothes she'd never wear outside, contour her features in a way that looked nightmarish from any perspective other than the camera's, and take selfies. She lived in Ballard's world. The first time one of my friends told me they were in a relationship with someone they'd never actually met, I thought it was strange; now, it's becoming a minor norm. What Ballard foresaw wasn't the brute materials and events of the future—cars driving all by themselves, or two-way video interfaces, or whatever. (Much later, he'd complain about the kind of reader who'd snort: "Why don't all those sleek people living in the future have PCs and pagers?") He didn't describe new shapes the world would take, but new ways in which we'd withdraw from it. Not the infrastructure, but the *experience* of living in the twenty-first century.

This is no small feat. Most of the high-profile cultural products available right now (your *Black Mirrors*, your Jia Tolentinoes) are attempting in some way to bear witness to our times, to present a vision of what it *feels like* to live in our present—which is to say, what it feels like to live online. And sometimes they're even convincing, for an audience as dazed by the technological now as the artists themselves. Marshall McLuhan thought that artists could act as early-warning systems for new media; they "correct the sense ratios before the blow of new technology has numbed conscious procedures." Maybe once. But you only need to look at the efforts of anyone working at "the intersection of art and technology" to see that McLuhan was wrong. Artists are *more* disoriented by digital communications than anyone else;



more mesmerised the more they try to understand it. And even McLuhan, who has his own prophetic cult, didn't really get it. He thought electronic media would be tactile and organic, communitarian, implosive; they've turned out to be relentlessly audiovisual and cruel. Only one man saw the thing in its entirety. The only person capable of describing our world circa 2020 is James Graham Ballard, circa 1977.

I'm not, of course, the first person to name Ballard as a prophet. The dust jacket on the first edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* describes it as "one of the most prophetic, enigmatic and original works of fiction of the late-twentieth century." And the man himself didn't resist the idea. For the book's 1989 reissue, he supplied some annotations to the original text, describing one of his brief sentences as a "prophetic leap in the dark." The word has been denatured by overuse, but when I say Ballard was a prophet I mean it quite literally. A figure like Jeremiah or Ezekiel, only trading the wastes and the wilderness for a small town in the south of England.

A prophet does not speak; he is *spoken through*. God tells Moses that "Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet." The word passes from God, through Moses, through Aaron, to the world. The prophet is a medium, in every sense of the word. A relay, a channel, an extension, a regime of signs and codes. Mohammed's prophecy starts with a command: "Recite!" Jeremiah describes the word that comes to him: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations." He complains: "Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child." And a hand comes forth, to fill his mouth with speech and his eyes with visions.

Ballard's texts work the same way. Take one of his most outstanding prognostications. In September 1962, J.F.K. stood in a football stadium in Texas and revealed his chilling plot to deposit a parcel of human flesh on the surface of the Moon. For a science fiction writer, this should have been an extraordinary gift: all those fantasies of rocket ships to Venus, where green-skinned alien babes writhe half-naked among the rocks, were finally becoming real. And Ballard was a science fiction writer. But three months before the "We choose to go to the Moon" speech, he conjured something very different.

"The Cage of Sand" is set in Florida, among the resorts and launch pads of the Space Coast. It's in ruins. Humanity's brief adventure in other worlds is over. All it's brought back to Earth is millions of tons of Martian topsoil, dumped out into the Atlantic as ballast, to compensate for the materials fired off into space. Now, the tides wash Kennedy's dream away:

The tireless shoulder of the Gulf Stream drummed against the soft Marian dust and piled the dunes into grotesque rococo reefs which the wind carried away

into the sand-sea. Gradually the ocean was returning, reclaiming its great smooth basin, sifting out the black quartz and Martian obsidian which would never be wind-borne and drawing these down into its deeps.

This Earth, our Earth— in blind, mute, geological processes, it devours our hopes.

The *other* thing brought home by the space programme is a dormant Martian virus. It's harmless to humans, but deadly to plants; the whole of Florida has been turned into a desert and quarantined. Only a few, strange, obsessive people remain. They forage canned food from places called "The Satellite Bar" or "The Orbit Room," half-buried in alien sand. They hide out from the authorities, who comb the beaches in full hazmat suits, trying to kidnap them back to civilization. At night, they watch new stars zip through the sky: dead astronauts, mummified in their capsules, orbiting the world forever. Twenty-four years before Challenger, forty-one years before Columbia, Ballard saw the disastrous end of the space age before it had even really begun.

And then he saw it again, and again, and again. He couldn't stop writing "The Cage of Sand." For decades afterwards, his stories were filled with half-buried motels, dead astronauts in orbit, 'the great void that lay over Florida,' and images of Cape Canaveral in ruins. The gantries at the Kennedy Space Center: "These ancient towers, as old in their way as the great temple columns of Karnak, bearers of a different cosmic order, symbols of a view of the universe that had been abandoned." The birds have reclaimed this place, "a gaudy aviary of parakeets and macaws." Nearly three millennia previously, Zephaniah proclaimed the fate of Nineveh. "The pelican and the bittern shall lodge in her upper lintels; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be at the thresholds."

This is not the result of some rational calculation, Ballard weighing up the evidence and deciding that all this outer space business will come to no good. He was a seer of visions. He was haunted by images. Critics tend to call these his "obsessions"— and Ballard himself was happy to adopt the term. ("All obsessions," he told an interviewer, "are extreme metaphors waiting to be born.") His endless reworkings of the themes from "The Cage of Sand" all *also* feature the image of an old man— nude, insane, and menacingly virile— buzzing around in an antique aircraft. Reaching for some kind of ecstatic union with the Sun, or trying to kidnap the hero's wife "Slade stepped from the cockpit. He was still naked, except for his goggles, and his white skin was covered in weals and sun-sores, as if time itself were an infective plague." For years he dreams this terrifying figure. Clearly, he's trying to scratch whatever itch this man represents, dig out the metaphor beneath his skin. Nothing works. It comes to him from somewhere else.

There are a whole host of these fixations. The Nazi bunkers on the Atlantic Wall, which at one point he describes as “older than the planet.” Car crashes; dead celebrities. (The death of the former Princess of Wales was heavily plagiarised from his fictions.) Infinite space, depopulated cities, time-sickness. Empty swimming pools.

That last one, in particular, lends itself to a slightly cynical account of Ballard’s prophetic abilities. Drained pools crop up in Ballard’s work with an almost comic predictability. In *High Rise* the pool is full of “skulls, bones, and dismembered limbs.” In *Hello America* the drained pools “seemed to cover the entire continent.” In *Super-Cannes*, he imagines an explorer, ten thousand years in the future, coming across “these empty pits... the altars of a bizarre religion.” Concrete troughs, carved into his prose; read blindly, without looking ahead, and you’ll fall into one. Why did this image prey so much on him throughout his entire career? Near the beginning of his 2008 memoir *Miracles of Life*—the last book published before his death—he lifts the veil.

Curiously, the house we moved to had a drained swimming pool in its garden. It must have been the first drained pool I had seen, and it struck me as strangely significant in a way I have never fully grasped. My parents decided not to fill the pool, and it lay in the garden like a mysterious empty presence... In the coming years I would see a great many drained and half-drained pools, as British residents left Shanghai for Australia and Canada, or the assumed ‘safety’ of Hong Kong and Singapore, and they all seemed as mysterious.

A childhood experience that he returned to throughout his life. How Freudian; how banal. In the end, was it all just a refracted vision of Shanghai, circa 1941? Were those empty, ruined cities an echo of the International Settlement? Were his infinitely large space stations the Lunghua detention camp? When nude men in antique planes buzzed his dreams, were they really flying Mitsubishi Zeroes? If his work accurately described our present, was it just because our present is just a traumatic repetition of the cruelties of Imperial Japan?

Obviously I’m biased here, but: no. What is an empty swimming pool? A hole in the ground. A lack that continually empties itself. An “empty presence”: something is here, but its qualities are unknown to this world. If we wanted, we could start thinking about bushes that burn without being consumed, or how generations of theologians from Eriugena onwards have been forced to think of God as a titanic, all-encompassing void. An empty swimming pool is a *mouth*.

In a sense, though, this is still the model for all Ballard’s prophecies. The prophet has a strange tic when he starts talking about the future *as such*. In “Now:

Zero,” which is probably a truer autobiography than any of his actual memoirs, a bitter young man discovers that everything he writes down really does happen—so long as it involves death and suffering. At this point, something unusual happens to time itself. He wonders whether he was “in some fantastic way twenty-four hours ahead of time when I described the deaths, simply a recorder of events that had already taken place.” The hero of his 1975 novel *High-Rise* finds himself surrounded by broken-down technology; fridges and washing machines now used as garbage containers, hollowed out, turned into empty spaces:

He found it hard to remember what their original function had been... Even the run-down nature of the high-rise was a model of the world into which the future was carrying them, a landscape beyond technology... Sometimes he found it difficult not to believe that they were living in a future that had already taken place, and was now exhausted.

If Ballard could see the future, it might be because *there is no future*; it’s already taken place. The present is not the materials for what is to come; it’s the wreckage, the ruins left behind by a catastrophe we can’t yet see. A drained swimming pool is this concept in its most immediately visible form. Seen only slightly differently, in its nullification of empty homogenous time, it is an image of eternity.

Sam Kriss is a British writer and dilettante.

This essay was written in May 2020, before the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent global protest movement. I wrote that some of my friends were predicting that we would “return to each other in the streets, without digital mediation, without fear, in a new Summer of Love,” while others thought we’d “simply never get out of lockdown.” In a way—and maybe this was inevitable—all of them were right. We really did return to each other in the streets. But it didn’t mark the end of social distancing, which is now being reimposed as cases soar. This might be what the future will look like: months of seclusion, occasionally broken by the nocturnal intimacy of the riot, the only way we can touch.

A CATHOLIC ECONOMICS

BY JOHN PAUL MAYNARD KEYNES



he problems that Catholicism and economics face are perfect opposites. Economics has a well-developed framework for understanding human society and for crafting policy, but it lacks any sense of moral direction and hence any *telos*. It is like one of the wily contraptions from a Dr. Seuss story: so much extravagant sophistication, all to no purpose. Catholicism, on the other hand, has the most perfectly developed framework to understand man and his place in the world ever conceived, but utterly lacks any means by which to realize this vision. It is like an overflowing cistern with a blocked tap: so much to give and so little means to give it.

That would be the polite way of putting it, the way I might put it if I were trying to throw a dinner party for Catholic economists. If I were not playing host, however, I would point out that mainstream neoclassical economics is inherently evil and totally at odds with Catholic social teaching; I would further point out that the lack of a Catholic response to this moral abomination is the reason that Catholic social teaching has been torn to shreds in country after country by neoliberal market dogma.

Let us start with the latter so we can end up with the former. Consider an indifference curve. Most of us have seen one. It looks like a sideways smile. On the left-hand side and along the bottom, two products are listed. These are typically benign, like something out of a children's arithmetic textbook. Apples and oranges, perhaps. The indifference curve tells us the point at which we would be indifferent between a certain number of apples and a certain number of oranges. We might be just as content with three apples and six oranges as we are with two apples and eight oranges. We are then told the overall budget to be spent on

our fruit basket and we economists can figure out exactly what the "utility-maximizing agent" in question will do.

What should immediately strike us here is that this is the morality of the stomach. Our little indifference curve is giving us a deterministic account of human behavior. It predicts that, provided we are told how much money is available to be spent and the relative price of the two goods, a person will behave in a certain way. It does not make any claim to predict the particular appetites of the particular stomach, but once these are settled the little machine gets to work.

Put away our childish tales for a moment and let us introduce the curiously well-named indifference curve to the adult world. The X-rated version of the indifference curve no longer lists apples and oranges, but hardcore pornography and prescription opiates. The economist will protest. He will say that his indifference curve should not be despoiled by our fetid imaginations. But he is in denial. The mechanistic morality that he promotes is taken by his many students and applied all the way down to the depths of human depravity—typically to turn a buck.

Turn to a website like MarketWatch. This is where the economic graduates who now work in the lucrative world of investing commune to discuss ideas. "For virtual reality to become a viable business, pornography, which tends to rank among any new technology's earliest and most eager adopters, will need to play a starring role, analysts say," an article tells us matter-of-factly. "Will need to," the article tells us: the phrasing gives the game away. The author passes no judgement upon the matter beyond the implicit one that rapid technological change must occur—and if it occurs more efficiently through a medium tied up with human trafficking, then so be it. This is, unfortunately, the mindset of the economist.

If the grotesque rationale of the economic mindset can be seen on the x-axis, the consequences can be seen on the t-axis. As prescription opioid sales increase, opioid deaths increase in lockstep. The heart does not always know what it wants; it often seeks out death. Alfred Marshall, who helped popularize the indifference curve, saw this long ago, but it was relegated to a footnote in the textbook and then later, when newer textbooks were written, disappeared without a trace:

There is however an implicit condition in [utility theory] which should be made clear. It is that we do not suppose time to be allowed for any alteration in the character or tastes of the man himself. It is therefore no exception to the law that the more good music a man hears, the stronger his taste for it likely becomes; that avarice and ambition are insatiable; or that the virtue of cleanliness and the vice of drunkenness alike grow on what they feed upon.

Catholic economists will say that none of this is inevitable. True, they will tell us, the utility framework may inculcate mechanistic thinking that overrides our moral reasoning, but this can be remedied by decent moral formation. Not so. The very framework that neoclassical economic uses is corrupt. Consider more deeply the indifference curve. The fact of the matter is that the indifference curve framework has, inbuilt within it, insatiable desire. It is assumed within the framework that a person will always want more and is only constrained by budget.

In the technical literature this is called the “non-satiation requirement.” In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* this is called “sin” and it violates the will of God:

The tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power.

Take away the non-satiation requirement and the utility framework collapses because the choice of goods is no longer strictly determined by the utility calculus but rather by some externally imposed norm. We no longer need the utility framework, as everything can be explained by the norm. The utility framework is structurally reliant upon mortal sin. It is no surprise that it produces the truly indifferentist mindset seen on MarketWatch. Exorcise the Devil and the machine stops humming; leave him be and the machine drives us mad.

One of the wonderful things about good philosophy is that it shows that what is evil is also untrue. Many who are skeptical of neoclassical economics suspect that it is untrue. They suspect that it does not describe how human beings actually make decisions. This is almost certainly true, but it is an empirical statement and thus rather difficult to prove. A much more powerful critique would show that the evil of

neoclassical economics is not merely empirically untrue but utterly vacuous and, in fact, a parody of science and the scientific method.

To see this, we turn to the most basic “law” of neoclassical economics: the law of demand. The law of demand states that as the price increases for a good, the demand for that good falls. This is key to just about every axiom in neoclassical economics. Without the law of demand, the edifice—a large pile of supply and demand diagrams—collapses.

The law of demand is for economists what the law of gravitation is for physicists. The problem is proving it and, from there, using it for prediction. Proving the law of gravitation is quite simple. You take an object—an apple, perhaps, favorite of the physicists and the economists alike—and you drop it repeatedly, measuring the speed at which it hits the ground. You can then vary the distance of the object to the ground to further assure yourself that the mathematics of gravitation conform to reality.



What about the law of demand? Can it be tested in such a way? No. The problem is that the law of demand makes a prediction about human behavior—namely, that we will want less of a good as the price for it rises—while assuming that the underlying desire for the good remains static through time. The economist Joan Robinson explains:

We can observe the reaction of an individual to two different sets of prices only at two different times. How can we tell what part of the difference in his purchases is due to the difference in prices and what part to the change in his preferences that has taken place meanwhile? There is certainly no presumption that his character has not changed, for soap and whisky are not the only goods whose use affects tastes. Practically everything develops either an inertia of habit or a desire for change. We have got one equation for two unknowns. Unless we can get some independent evidence about preferences the experiment is no good. But it was the experiment that we were supposed to rely on to observe the preferences.

This means that we can always second guess the results. Let us say that I secretly follow you to a market every day. You buy the exact same product day in, day out—say, five bananas that cost sixty cents each. Now, I set it up so that the banana salesman raises his price one day by thirty cents per banana. Assume that you then go ahead and buy the five bananas—even if you curse the price increase.

I may then turn to the economist and say that his precious law of demand is disproven. But he will have an escape clause. He can simply say that your preferences happened to change on that very day. “Yes,” he tells you, “up until that day when my interlocutor changed the price of the bananas, your preferences for bananas over other goods was constant, but by total coincidence on that very day he became even more enamored with bananas and so he bought the same amount at a higher price.” I cannot disprove what the economist is saying for the simple reason that your preferences are not visible, just as I can never definitively disprove that Bigfoot does not exist.

Philosophers of science were quick to recognize that this rendered neoclassical economics non-falsifiable and hence pseudoscientific. The scientific get-out-of-jail-free card was buried in a phrase popular with neoclassical economists: *ceteris paribus* or “all else being equal.” Economic laws only held when all else was equal. Hence, if empirical observation disagreed with them, economists could simply explain away the results by explaining that all else was not, in fact, equal. As the philosopher of science Hans Albert explains:

The law appears *prima facie* to predicate a relatively simple and easily testable relationship and thus to have a fair amount of content. However, upon

closer examination, this impression fades. As is well known, the law is usually tagged with a clause that entails numerous interpretation problems: the *ceteris paribus* clause. In the strict sense this must thus at least be formulated as follows to be acceptable to the majority of theoreticians: *ceteris paribus*—that is, all things being equal—the demanded quantity of a consumer good is a monotone decreasing function of its price. The *ceteris paribus* clause is not a relatively insignificant addition, which might be ignored. Rather, it can be viewed as an integral element of the law of demand itself. However, that would entail that theoreticians who interpret the clause differently *de facto* have different laws of demand in mind, maybe even laws that are incompatible with each other. Here, through an explicit interpretation of the *ceteris paribus* clause, the law of demand is made into a tautology.

The core axioms of economics are not products of *a priori* logical reasoning, as are the core axioms of metaphysics. Rather they have always claimed to be scientific and thus to provide the potential for prediction. But examined carefully they are in fact *a priori* constructions that are immune to empirical proof or disproof. Unlike the carefully worked-out precepts of good metaphysics, however, they are no more than empty tautologies—bad, untested psychology and crude un-Christian anthropology cast in the language of spatial mathematics.

Where does this leave us? We should be able to agree that the neoclassical utility-maximizing framework is both evil and empty—synonyms, as we know from our metaphysics. Let us take a step back. When did this demonic pseudo-psychology start calling itself economics? Probably some time between Mandeville’s publication of *The Fable of the Bees* in 1714 and the appearance of Marshall’s *Principles of Economics* in 1890. There has, however, always been a parallel track of economic thought that shunned such cynicism.

Students are often taught when they enter an economics class that economics is the science of resource allocation. But from this promising start they are then quickly dragged toward the pseudo-psychology of utility theory and have their minds locked in the dungeon of normative *laissez faire* assumptions. We should take the above description seriously, however: good economics is the science of resource allocation. We must also be careful, for it is not a science in the sense that it will give us a final answer to the question of how we, as a society, should allocate resources. Rather at its best economics can teach us how, given extra-economic judgements, we might be able to allocate resources without tripping over our own feet. This is domain of what is typically today called “macroeconomics.”

Good macroeconomics knows no psychology because it is not interested in psychology, pseudo or

otherwise. Good macroeconomics is an exercise in logistics, more quartermaster than quack physician. In modern societies resources are allocated using money and prices. Neither of these are immutable. We can change either if we want. But they are powerful tools and, handled with care, they can do a lot of the heavy lifting for any social project we may wish to undertake.

The simplest and most familiar example is that of using taxation to penalize vice. If there is a certain vice that perhaps is not so bad that we should want to see it banned but merely discouraged or rendered more costly than we might raise its price through taxation. The revenue thereby raised can be channeled into an activity we judge more in line with the common good. If we abstract from this, we can see that this is an exercise in social logistics deployed to achieve a result that we arrive at through moral reflection.

But this is only the beginning of the potential for a macroeconomics of the common good, a properly Catholic economics that assumes an integral rather than an indifferentist anthropology. To illustrate the power of macroeconomics to achieve a better society let us turn to a concrete proposal recently released: Gladden Pappin and Maria Molla's fertility and family formation program.

This program aims to restructure the American economy around family formation by advocating paying people a fixed wage to have children. Many have focused on the most obvious part of the program: the channeling of money toward families to encourage their formation. This is certainly a core component of the program. But it is only when we look at the program from a properly macroeconomic point of view that we realize its true ambition. The authors have stated this explicitly, but few have paid attention: the economists, psychologists that they are, were too focused on the 'incentives' of the program.

Pappin and Molla show that the program is as much about redistribution as it is about incentivizing family formation. They outline two aspects of this redistribution that are of most interest for our purposes. The first leg "redistributes spending power toward poorer families." Pappin and Molla make a point that if the "wage" for child-rearing is fixed it will represent a larger portion of a poor family's total income than it will a rich family's. Thus, we have a de-facto redistribution of total economy-wide resources from rich to poor.

The second leg involves the impact on relative prices. Under the Pappin-Molla program, families receive extra money that will likely be spent on goods related to child-rearing such as diapers, children's clothes, home furnishings, and so on. Pappin and Molla are clear about the likely impact of this.

This rise in prices will encourage entrepreneurs to invest more heavily into these sectors to capture the rising profits. That in turn will lead to a major restructuring of the U.S. economy so that family life becomes central—even in many peoples' work lives.

This example of Catholic economics in action shows its power. A basic precept of macroeconomics is that all expenditure is income—if I spend money in your store, you get income—and, hence, that all income is expenditure. By changing spending patterns, by using the state to allocate income, we can restructure an entire society. By starving the vice industries and stoking the virtue industries, the former will proliferate, and the latter will shrink in number.

A Catholic economics is one that is explicitly oriented toward the common good, reflecting the goals of what Pope Francis calls "integral human development." Unlike socialism or communism, it respects private property. It does not seek to seize the means of production and it respects every man and woman's right to main their own castles. It even recognizes that a certain level of inequality is reasonable—the Great Chain of Being does not run from right to left, after all. It has no inherent problem with market processes per se. But it does not assume that people should be free to utilize economic resources to destroy the common good, or themselves, for that matter. Nor does it assume that a system that allows resources to accumulate in a manner that is disproportionate and driven by unbridled greed.

Is this just social democracy? No. The social democratic project is a mirror-image of the neoliberal project—the two merely disagree about how to achieve material satiation. A Catholic economics rejects the precept that man is nothing but a stomach to feed. Social democrats are motivated by airy doctrines of fairness that bend with the breezes of fashion. They have no *telos*, and so their *telos* is whatever is on the television. A social democrat in 1950 wants to prop up working-class family formation; a social democrat in 2020 wants to destroy the nuclear family and tie the mother and child to the state. The *telos* is a projection of whatever is ordering or disordering the social democrats' psychology at any given moment in time.

Catholic economics is the true realization of the encyclicals on Catholic social teaching. It takes seriously the image of a good society handed down by the Church and seeks to use modern means to achieve these goals. The plan was deposited two millennia ago. It has been articulated more and more succinctly through time. The state has now reached a sufficient level of development to realize it—and the macroeconomic framework, minus the vile utilitarian psychology, is the compass we can use to navigate these choppy waters.

John Paul Maynard Keynes is an obvious pseudonym.

BATMAN IN WARD EIGHT

BY NIC ROWAN



“We all got to get our relax on,” Bilaal Muhammed told me as he directed my attention to a table stacked with the finest collection of scents, essential oils, and all-natural soaps this side of the Anacostia River.

It was late June, and Muhammed was making a killing out in Black Lives Matter Plaza. Ever since Mayor Muriel Bowser at the beginning of the month designated the first few blocks behind the White House as a protected protest zone, Muhammed, along with a score of other vendors, claimed this stretch of Sixteenth Street. They hawked T-shirts and tote bags all day.

Muhammed said it was a good business, especially since so many of the protesters who came down here to scream at the Metropolitan Police Department were new to the game and needed guidance from old hands.

“I tell them that life is all about vibrations—and we got to be creating our own vibrations, instead of being subject to what’s coming in from the outside,” he said, gesturing toward the White House, still enclosed by a tall chain-link fence.

Down at that fence, a faithful chorus chanted “Black lives matter!” incessantly. A few bold souls yelled over the mantra to address the line of black and Hispanic police officers directly. They told the police hard truths: All cops, even black cops, are bastards. Black cops are unwitting racists. Black cops married to white women are nothing better than slaves.

Ice cream trucks parked outside the plaza refreshed the protesters with frozen treats when they tired of their lecturing.

Of course, during the peak protest days, once night fell, everything in the plaza changed. Muhammed and his crew went home. The chants multiplied and

overlapped until they became a wall of sound. Vandals redecorated the city’s walls. Protesters and police clashed. Sometimes, but only rarely, violence erupted.

One night, as I was walking through the plaza, I found myself trapped in a rather one-sided conversation with John Cheeks, a middle-aged man who mounted a disastrous campaign for a seat on the D.C. city council in 2016. Cheeks heaved deep sighs as he told me how Episcopalianism, Catholicism, Methodism, and Presbyterianism are, historically speaking, the most racist religions in the United States.

While he spoke, Cheeks pointed at Saint John’s Episcopal Church, which, as of that night, had become the “Black House Autonomous Zone” when protesters stormed its portico and spray-painted “BHAZ” on its columns. Cheeks predicted a future in which black magistrates take up residence in the church and calculate how much money each white Christian owes his black brother.

“Now y’all have to pay,” he said, jabbing the air with his index finger. “You take that back to your pastor and tell him that it’s time to pay.”

A man with a megaphone overheard our conversation and began shouting, “Pay! Pay! Pay!” Cheeks joined in. I excused myself.

But as I was exiting the plaza, Batman stopped me. Now, I am no fan of comic-book characters roaming about in public—keep it in Times Square!—but I made an exception for the Dark Knight, as well as heavy-set men dressed like him.

“I’m here in solidarity with Black Lives Matter,” he said. “But, of course, I have my own agenda.”

Batman (he refused to reveal his real name) explained that he did not think Black Lives Matter Plaza was going to usher in a new era of racial justice. More likely, he said, it’ll become a cheap symbol. Democrats and Republicans alike will satisfy their consciences by

repeating the empty slogan which Bowser ordered to be painted on the street. And all these protests, he added, pointing toward the White House, will only succeed in “soothing the consciences of Caucasian people.”

Once the seasons change, Batman added, the activist class will get bored with protesting, but the persistent problems that black people face won't go away. Schools will still suck. Families in Ward Seven and Ward Eight (the poorest parts of Washington) will still be crammed in public housing unfit for human habitation. City leaders will still ignore these families' needs in favor of gentrifying the neighborhoods near Capitol Hill.

This is just how D.C. has operated for the past few decades—and it has long frustrated Batman, who lives in Ward 8, and sees his neighbors' children struggle daily to break the cycle of poverty. When he first spoke up about the problem at public meetings, no one listened. Only when he put on his costume and showed up at protests did people pay attention.

“For some reason, Batman is a savior to these people,” he said. “I had one man—I thought he was joking—but he nearly cried. He was just so glad, he had some sense of—” He paused for the right word. “Of comfort. That something might go okay here.”

The Caped Crusader himself isn't so hopeful about the city's future. He cursed the “symbolic” plaza and lashed out at the “performative” actions that Bowser had taken since the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Nothing will change; nothing ever changes, he said.

“Bowser knows she can get away with doing nothing, and meanwhile poor families are struggling just to survive,” he said. “No one cares about them. But we have to stand for the children. We have to stand for the least of them.”

Batman's lament reminded me of an observation that Pope Francis made in a 2018 interview: “Young people suffer greatly because they were born and raised in a society that has made the culture of discarding its supreme paradigm.”

The culture of waste is readily apparent in Washington. Of course, that suffering on the margins of society—of both the young and the old—is often hard to see, simply because so few people actually care to look for it regularly. I certainly don't. But when it reveals itself, the cruelty inflicted is almost impossible to miss.

A few weeks after meeting Batman, I was standing at the base of the Emancipation Memorial in Lincoln Park. It had become, at the end of June, a subject of heated controversy. Although financed entirely by freed slaves and dedicated by Frederick Douglass, the memorial's detractors called it racist because it depicts a black man crouching beneath Lincoln. And since the statue represents the black man's condition immediately upon receiving his freedom (shirtless, still

breaking out of his chains), they said, it is an outdated understanding of black people.

Glenn Foster, a twenty-year-old Harvard student, gathered these criticisms into a coherent body of thought, which he posted on Instagram. Then, he riled up a crowd by shouting, “We are going to tear the m——er down!” at a rally. What else are you going to do when the coronavirus cancels your internship?

Foster's declaration, of course, triggered every sort of reaction. Racial justice activists flocked to his side. Gun-toting memorial protectors vowed to fight back. Tucker Carlson talked about it on Fox News. And the United States Park Police put up a protective fence.

On the day that Foster had appointed for tearing the statue down, I, along with seemingly every other reporter in the city, showed up at the memorial to see whether he'd actually do it. We were all sick with anticipation, so to calm myself, I wandered around the park and asked people for their thoughts on the memorial.

Most people had no opinion or were too busy exercising to be bothered to form one. But two middle-aged women, who lived in the neighborhood nearby, stopped in the middle of their dog walk to chat.

“It was paid for by slaves: Let it be. Who are we to read back into history what might not even be there?” said Sandy Reed, standing alongside her beautiful golden retriever. “People are so worked up by Covid that they need something to fight over.”

Her companion, Anne Bridges, restraining a jumpy black lab, pushed back: “Well, you got to look at it this way,” she said. “Even with the fear of Covid, we have to commend people coming out because they're just so passionate about this cause.”

Reed wasn't so sure.

“I don't know if it's passion or just boredom,” she said. “There's so much else that they could be doing: old, isolated people need people to call them, children need to be taken care of—but we're doing this instead.”

Reed then launched into a lengthy discourse on guns. She feared that if the statue came down, the police would get defunded, and then she'd need more firearms. Bridges started tapping her foot. Soon, her husband arrived, and saved her from the conversation.

Later, as I was looking for Foster, Bridges approached me again.

“I'm sorry, but I know you're a reporter, so I have to tell you this,” she said. “What Sandy told you back there is an *extreme perspective*. In this neighborhood, we have no problem with taking that statue down. It's offensive. And I can't imagine how it must make black people feel.”

“That's right,” her husband agreed. Then they left.

They should have stayed. Because, for the next hour, black activists with a wide variety of opinions

told everyone present how they felt. Foster led the coalition in support of tearing the memorial down. The statue, he emphasized, was an example of black “disempowerment.” Foster’s other speakers chanted in agreement.

But a sizable contingent of counter-protestors opposed Foster. They were led by Don Folden, a tour guide who specializes in Washington’s black history. Folden laughed and told Foster that he was “full of shit.” If Foster actually knew anything about the memorial’s history, Folden said, then he would be fighting to keep it standing.

Foster didn’t like that rebuke, and silenced Folden, on the grounds that he was “old” and had missed his chance to fix the problems of racism in America.

“Last time I checked, this was my event,” Foster said as he took Folden’s megaphone away.

A crowd formed around Foster and Folden as the two struggled for the invisible conch shell. Folden’s partisans told Foster to give him his megaphone back.

“Who are you to step in the way of him expressing himself?” one asked. “Even if you don’t agree with him, he’s an elder—and his opinion demands respect. At least hear him out!”

“Wait, wait, wait,” Foster replied. “We’ve got cameras out here. Don’t do this to me.”

Someone gave Folden a megaphone, and he began to speak again. But the crowd cut him short.

“No justice! No peace! No justice! No peace!” they shouted. “Black lives matter! Black lives matter!”

Now, I have to admit, when this happened, I did something that journalists—and anyone who wishes to be taken seriously in this city— should never do. I chuckled.

Immediately a protester corrected me: “Wipe that grin off your face—nothing here is funny! Stop it! This is not funny!”

But I couldn’t help myself. The chuckle became a laugh, and the laugh nearly became a bellow. Foster turned toward me with his megaphone.

“If you want to be a real journalist, be a real journalist,” he said. “If you’re not here for my story, go somewhere else.”

And soon after, the crowd decided that it was time for me to go elsewhere. As Foster once again promised to tear the memorial down at a future date, people began shooting water guns at me, as well as several other journalists present. When they began shoving us, Folden stepped in to break up the scuffle.

“Here, take my business card and call me later,” he told me as he led us away from the crowd.

Of course, Foster never did try to tear down the memorial. And why would he? He received a greater prize: fame or, as the case may be, infamy. But I wonder if he was driven to rail against that memorial by something different, and frankly more depressing, than the simple desire for celebrity.

I watched some of his old YouTube videos, posted

toward the end of his first year at Harvard, and noted three things. Foster is “single as a pringle.” He is bitter that he was not accepted into one of the school’s prestigious Final Clubs. And he has a social media channel where he feels compelled to share this information with snoops like me. Beneath that thirst for fame, or even, maybe, a sincere belief in racial justice, there seems to be a deep loneliness.

Not that Foster’s predicament is abnormal. It’s the same problem that Batman’s kids in Ward Eight face. Or anyone out protesting in the streets this summer. American society throws things and people aside, and the young people, who are still new to that experience, bear it poorly.

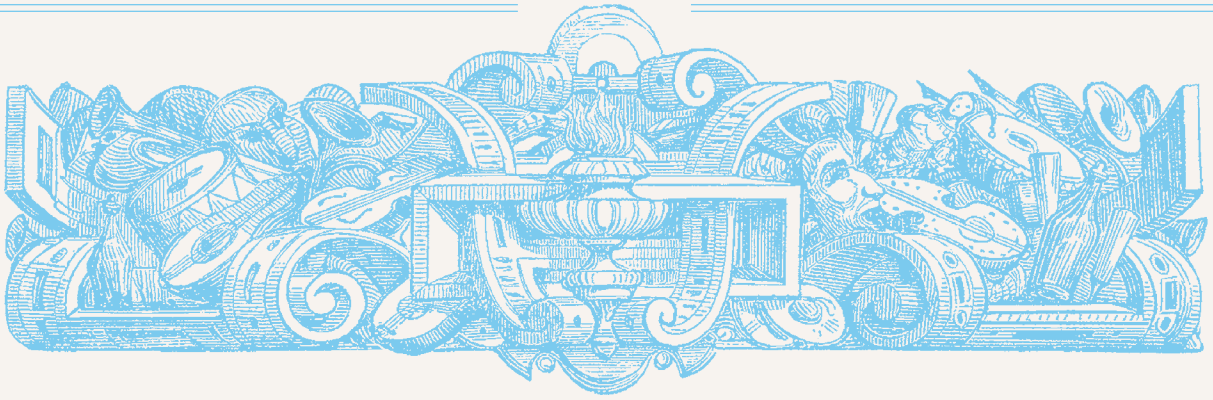
I did end up calling Folden. We met in Lincoln Park in the evening on the Fourth of July. Foster was there, too. He and Folden did a podcast together where they discussed the need for the old and the young to work together in the struggle against racism.

It was a strange sort of reconciliation, but it reminded me of another observation Pope Francis made in that old interview. The young and the old together, he said, will be the saviors of society. For they are less susceptible to the corruption of the world: the young through lack of experience, and the old through too much.

The trick to getting them together, Francis added, is for the young to trust the old, though they are undoubtedly imperfect sinners.

“Even an old penitent, who years before had been involved in corruption, can be useful to a young person’s growth,” he said. “Such an old man is, in fact, familiar with the mechanisms of corruption and can recognize them; he can show the young man how to sidestep them, by sharing his experience, and explaining how to avoid ending up like him.”

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ARTS AND LETTERS



GEORGE ELIOT'S ETHICS

SPINOZA'S ETHICS

Translated by George Eliot
 Edited by Claire Carlisle
 Princeton University Press,
 pp.384, \$26.95

BY ROBERT WYLLIE

“Take a woman’s head, stuff it with a smattering of philosophy and literature chopped up small, and with false notions of society baked hard, let it hang over a desk a few hours every day, and serve it up hot in feeble English, when not required.” George Eliot prepared the way for her literary career by throwing acid on popular women writers of the 1850s. In “Silly Novels of Lady Novelists,” Eliot lacerates three fantasies of philosophical superheroines: *Laura Gay*, *Compensation*, and *Rank and Beauty*. Her anonymous review has outlasted these long-forgotten novels. Some feminists accuse Eliot of condescending to women who write for women—disparaging “chick lit”—and even starting a “catfight” to gain the attention of a male audience. (Our lingo belies any comfort we might take in living in more enlightened times.) All this leaves more than a scratch on the author of *Middlemarch*.

Marian Evans was taking a risk in 1856 when she turned from philosophical translation to write the classic novels of “George Eliot.” Perhaps her tirade against silly “mind-and-millinery” novels, as she called them, suggests a prick of self-doubt. After all, Evans was about to create philosophical heroines of her own. And if her learning could no doubt put the

anonymous author of *Laura Gay* to shame, nonetheless such accusations can backfire. An older Eliot shows us an unforgettable example when the pedantic Causabon accuses the better-read, more talented Will Ladislaw of “sciolism.” On the other hand, Eliot does not write philosophical treatises in novelistic form. Her novels just as often hold a brief for common sense. The narrator of *Middlemarch*, for example, describes human beliefs as “natural growths” that evolve beyond any systematic confinements. But perhaps this is only the mature Eliot who, after a decade of writerly success, is confident that poets have insights into the emotional life of nations that elude those of any philosopher or savant.

Who was Marian Evans before she became George Eliot? An important piece of the puzzle is now available: her unpublished translation of Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Claire Carlisle has done the great service of preparing Evans’s translation of the *Ethics*, the first complete version in English, for publication—and only two hundred years behind schedule. In 1859, Spinoza was already becoming the central point of interest in modern philosophy, and not only by Matthew Arnold’s lights. He would remain un-Englished for another quarter century. Despite rising interest in



Spinoza, Evans's letters hint at "severely practical reasons" for her "particular wish" not to be known as the translator of the *Ethics*. Professor Carlisle's illuminating introductory essay speculates that Evans's overnight literary success that same year gave her reasons to mothball her translation. Not only did the sales of *Adam Bede* alleviate her need for the £75 offered by the publisher, but Evans had a new interest in concealing the identity of George Eliot.

We can understand how the indignation in "Silly Novels of Lady Novelists" was deeply personal for Evans. If anyone is an English philosophical superheroine of the 1850s, it is Marian Evans; her résumé is at least as impressive as those of Harriet Taylor Mill and Harriet Martineau. But unlike the silly lady novelists' philosophical superheroines who are *comme il faut* in the best social circles, the eminent Victorians did not hold Evans in universal esteem. Quite the contrary. Her father almost threw her out of his home for religious dissent. (Here she has a personal connection with the Jewish excommunicate Spinoza.) John Chapman took credit for her work at the radical *Westminster Review*—where "Silly Novels of Lady Novelists" appeared—and had an affair with Evans while she lived in his (and his wife's) home. She left in tears. Soon afterwards she came, like Harriet Taylor, to love and live with a man who was not her husband: George Henry Lewes. A *mari complaisant* with whom Evans lived in concubinage, it was Lewes who negotiated with the publishers, demanding £75 for "his" translation of the *Ethics*. Severely practical, Evans understood the disadvantages of taking credit for her own scholarly work. Respectable Victorian women, she realized, did not squander their youth owlshly translating German higher criticism, much less shack up with the men—some more well-intentioned than others—who could provide access to the world of letters. Our #MeToo generation will easily de-

tect the ways she was likely exploited and victimized, and in ways that continue to afflict women philosophers today. If Evans was exasperated by the fantastically charmed life of Laura Gay, who can really blame her?

Evans first encountered Spinoza when she was twenty-three, through the Rosehill Circle of Coventry freethinkers who met in the home of Charles and Caroline Bray, a group which at one time or another included Martineau, Robert Owen, Herbert Spencer, and—for a brief visit in 1848—Ralph Waldo Emerson. A core member of the circle and the late Coleridge's physician, Robert Brabant, gave her a copy of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in 1843. At this time, Evans was translating another book that was said to have been forged in hell: David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. (When Robert Evans threatened to throw his daughter out, it was not for village atheism.) At sixty-two, Dr. Brabant saw himself as Evans's second father—he called her "Deutera," his second daughter—but the physician's blind wife saw there was more to this relationship, and turned her out. This is the first of Evans's relationships with men whom she found intellectually attractive. Eliot scholars draw parallels from this embarrassing episode to Dorothea's infatuation with Casaubon in *Middlemarch*.

With her strong intellectual constitution, Evans is able to imbibe a powerful distillation of Spinoza's thought. But she remains sober. This is a difficult feat. Even today, as Spinoza increasingly attracts intense and highly specialized philosophical attention, the fact that there are so many Spinozas testifies to the truth of an observation that Coleridge made long ago: "I never yet knew... a single person whom Spinoza had ever converted to *his* way of thinking; but I know a half-dozen at least who convert Spinoza to *theirs*!" Coleridge never met Evans, but this would not have mattered: Spinoza never converted

her to his way of thinking. Yet, as Professor Carlisle shows us in her introductory essay, Evans understood Spinoza well.

A translation of Spinoza was one thing, Evans realized, but as she told Charles Bray in 1849, what the English needed was a "true estimate" of his system. She did not believe that her translation work gave her a deeper understanding of Spinoza's thought. Yet she had one. Evans did not share the Romantic enthusiasm for Spinoza, exuded at one time or another by Coleridge, the Shelleys, and Lewes. But neither did she entirely follow James Anthony Froude's often-emulated attempt to domesticate Spinoza by accommodating his ideas to English common sense. The younger brother of Hurrell Froude, of Oxford Movement fame, he had written of his despair of Christianity in *The Nemesis of Faith*, a novel that Evans admired. While Evans found much to commend in Froude's 1855 article on Spinoza in the *Westminster Review*, she disagreed with his conclusion that Spinoza was a "plain, practical person."

Pantheism is a byword, however misleading, for Spinoza's most infamous argument: "there can be no substance besides God." Evans's translation is more matter-of-fact than the Edwin Curley's standard rendition of Proposition 14, Demonstration: "except God, no substance can be, or consequently, be conceived." (While Evans's translation is too inconsistent to pass scholarly muster today, it reads as well as the *Ethics* possibly can.) Both Lewes and Froude already understood, like Goethe and Schelling, that Spinoza did not simply mean that God *is* the world. Spinoza's God is "naturing nature" as well as "natured nature," and always infinite causal potential beyond the actuated world. Spinoza is no pantheist, then, but a panentheist who holds the view that everything is in God. (Ironically, *Panentheismus* was originally coined as a contradistinction to Spinoza's pantheism.) Professor

Carlisle praises Spinoza for reintroducing Saint Paul's understanding of a God in Whom we live and move and have our being, and recovering an older panentheism lost during the Reformation, with its focus upon divine judgment. She also praises Froude for recognizing that the "world" for Spinoza is only one of the infinite expressions of an impersonal "God." Froude is critical of Spinoza's determinism; as for so many others, he is concerned that the denial of free will erodes any basis of moral responsibility. Yet Evans's reservations are different, I think, and center upon the practicality of Spinoza's philosophy. For Evans, the problem is that Spinoza's ideas about God, self, and world simply cannot be part of our practical lives.

What would it mean to see the world through Spinoza's eyes? Voltaire thought that Pierre Bayle offered the decisive parody. If nothing is outside of God, Bayle quips, then the result of a battle can only be described as something like "God modified into Germans has killed God modified into ten thousand Turks." For Spinoza, the knowledge of causes is the Roman road to the knowledge of God. He arrays philosophy against "theologians"—invariably political theologians—who impress our flaws and limitations upon us so that we despair of our collective, godlike potential, and accept their control and remediation. However, if we understand what determines all our actions, and everyone else's, we thus empower ourselves to the maximum extent possible. Spinoza thinks we experience empowerment as joy, and disempowerment as sadness. The philosopher who knows God, or the causes of things, discovers all the joy in the world, and so learns to love the world. Nietzsche is right to recognize a predecessor in Spinoza, another teacher of *amor fati*, the love of fate that embraces our life in all respects. Only Spinoza still calls this "God."

In Spinoza's world, tragedy is

only in view for the short-sighted, while the "wise man" sees a lovable whole. Emil Fackenheim argues with good reason that Spinoza's God is intolerable to contemplate modified into the "Muselmänner" starved and killed in the Nazis' death camps. But Evans did not need the Shoah to find Spinozism incompatible with a world pervaded by tragedy. *Pace* Nietzsche, this was not because she remained in thrall to any Christian theology of sin and redemption. From her childhood reading the ancients in the library of Arbury Hall (where her father was property manager) down to her late letters, Evans steadfastly maintains that we share the same basic experience of life as the tragic Greeks. There are some fates that none can love. The narrator of *Middlemarch* admits that we must share the fashions of our time, but only to the extent that we cannot "always" be classical. The idea that some lives are not worth living is not a Christian idea. Nietzsche argues that Eliot fails to realize that a Christian moral culture will not long survive the eclipse of Christianity. But Evans's tragic sense of life is the part of Eliot that never was Christian, and a sense in which Eliot is more Greek than the notorious German classicist.

Spinoza's philosophy is impractical, for Evans, so long as the world contains tragic possibilities. The world is a web of causes, most of them obscure to us, the hidden pathways of feeling and thought that for Eliot lead up to every moment of action. The narrator of *Middlemarch* is Spinozist enough to admit that "there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it." But Professor Carlisle is right to insist that the *Ethics* offers no skeleton key to Eliot's novels. We see the full measure of Evans's philosophical genius, instead, as a sympathetic critic of Spinoza. For she finds reasons to doubt that scientific knowledge—even that of the rare "wise man" whom Spinoza describes at the end



of the *Ethics*—can dispel religious superstition and transform the world into an enlightened, progressive, and democratic society.

In the 1850s, there was no better representative of Spinoza's progressive hope, in its broadest contours, than Herbert Spencer. Spencer tried to win Evans around the time her affair with Lewes began, and he was touchy about reports of this love affair for the rest of his life. He failed to woo her philosophically also. Nancy Paxton shows how *Daniel Deronda* rejects Spencerian notions of progress, especially when Deronda accuses Lilly of mistaking tendencies for laws, and failing to account for the mysterious parts of the human soul that resist improvement, or which for some of us seal lives of personal tragedy. We can always be doomed by the unexpected. "There are characters," the narrator of *Middlemarch* reminds us, "which are continually creating collisions and nodes for themselves in dramas which nobody is prepared to act with them." A John Raffles can always appear. The world is composed of more authors and novels than we are aware of, and it is hubris to think we ever grasp the master narrative composing them all.

If the mysterious, the tragic, and the unexpected remain ineradicable aspects of modern life, then Spinoza's God can only appear in the guise of chance. The narrator of *Silas Marner* argues that the man who loses his religion will revert to the infallible worship of chance: favorable chance is "the god of all men who follow their own devices instead of obeying a law they believe in." This is a riposte to the intellectual love of Spinoza's God no less than a hedge against Nietzsche's love of fate. If the future is unpredictable, we can only embrace the immanent world in the love of chance, not fate. And tragic possibilities cannot be excluded.

There is a strain of Victorian common sense that is already (to employ a current academic buzz-

word) "post-secular." Evans credits the influence that Thomas Carlyle, at least in his earlier historical writings, had upon the mind of her age. The narrator of *Silas Marner* echoes his post-atheist second look at the value of religion: "The gods of the hearth exist for us still; and let all new faith be tolerant of that fetishism, lest it bruise its own roots." When he poo-pooes "little moralistic females à la Eliot," Nietzsche reduces her appreciation of religion to its moral function. But it seems to me Eliot is describing the consolation that the gods of the hearth provide, that Spinoza's impersonal world-God cannot. A tragic world requires them still.

The gods of the hearth define peoples no less than persons, Evans thinks. A *volksich* Evans celebrates the resistance of the practical peasant to "intellectual proletarians" like Spinoza, Nietzsche, and (for that matter) me. In 1856, the same year she published "Silly Novels of Lady Novelists" and finished her translation of the *Ethics*, Evans contributed a glowing review of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl to the *Westminster Review*. Riehl was a folklorist who traced the intimate connections between the natural German landscape and the German people. Like Riehl, Evans celebrated rustic common sense, and appreciated how difficult it is to dislodge. Timothy the "wiry old labourer" in *Middlemarch* is a fine example. He presents the well-intentioned Caleb Garth (as he would even the greatest orator) with the difficulty known "to any person attempting in dark times and unassisted by miracles" of reasoning with "rustics," who have arrived at an "undeniable truth... through a hard process of feeling, and can let it fall like a giant's club on your neatly carved argument for a social benefit which they do not feel." The third part of Spinoza's *Ethics*, "On the Origin and Nature of the Emotions," fails to provide the basis for a social science. Because philosophy fails to map all of the hidden pathways of feeling and thought, Evans advis-

es us, some undeniable truths are only learned by encounters with hardship, misfortune, and tragedy. Philosophy is no substitute for these hard processes of feeling.

It is remarkable that Evans rejects Spinoza without being a Christian. What resists Spinoza is her tragic sensibility, her classicism, or the common sense that appears not only throughout her writing, but also in her wide reading. She is sympathetic to Christianity, not only as a cultural and political institution, beating Arnold to Matthew Arnoldism, and showing her work. She gently lampoons Arthur Brooke for reducing religion simply to "the dread of a Hereafter." Christian faith and hope address the tragic dread of the Here, directly, without promising that a proper understanding of our world dispels tragedy. Hence the narrator of *Middlemarch* again, now mustering indignation on behalf of Christianity: "What right have such men to represent Christianity, as if it were an institution for getting up idiots genteelly?"

Even if she did not share their faith, Eliot shares with two of her great philosophical contemporaries, Saint John Henry Newman and Søren Kierkegaard, a desire to ratify the hard-won beliefs of common people. After reading Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Eliot confesses a "close fellowship" with the saint's "spiritual needs and burthens," and even memorizes some of his sermons. (As an accomplished scholar of Kierkegaard, Professor Carlisle is in a unique position to appreciate Evans as a quiet critic of Spinoza.) While Newman and Kierkegaard sympathized deeply with the awe of nineteenth-century Christians, Eliot understood their dread.

A decisive answer to Spinoza appears in these literary philosophers of the mid-nineteenth century. It is no longer fashionable to understand the God-world relationship as the central question in the history of philosophy, along the lines of Leslie Stephen's *English Thought*

in the Eighteenth Century. But if we stubbornly persist, Spinoza's near-God-world-identity and the near-absolute transcendence of Kierkegaard's God are clear contraries. These two towering protestant theologians—Spinoza may not be a Christian, but he is certainly a *protestant* critic of Catholic political theology—are like the poles, and so much modish German philosophical clothing hangs on the line between Amsterdam and Copenhagen. If Spinoza most emphatically thinks philosophy should take the view *sub specie aeternitatis*—"a mode of thought," Evans translates, "that is eternal"—then Kierkegaard most decisively wrenches philosophy back to Socrates' concern with common opinions. The keenest critics, such as Iris Murdoch, set the novels of Eliot apart for a similar reason: she is interested in chance, and in the diversity and divergence of common opinion, so much so that her characters act as if they are in stories of their own composition.

If we take Evans seriously, and allow her to speak to us, she can remind us how our prejudices are shaped by our culture. We cannot avoid Spinoza, as the emblem of a world that science can understand completely. Yet Evans shows us that even if ours is no longer a Christian world, it will never be entirely Spinoza's. The world with all its hidden pathways is a gift—the Danish meaning ("poison") points us to the double significance of the etymon. It shall always contain mystery and tragedy, and this will continue to shape the emotional lives of nations, even if all the philosophers and savants deny this.

The ethics of the *Ethics*, in Parts III and IV, have never garnered the attention of the shocking "pantheism" and determinism of Parts I and II. But ethically, Evans aligns more perfectly with Spinoza, the first philosopher to step "beyond good and evil." More subtly than Nietzsche's transvaluation of all values, Spinoza collapses Saint Paul's admonition that we love

the good and hate the evil. Love *is* good, hate *is* evil. If the world is God, then everything in the world is to be embraced and loved, and the only thing to hate is hate itself. In this way, Spinoza is the original author of liberalism's prime directive to avoid cruelty, identified by Newman (as gentlemanliness) and more fulsomely in recent times by Judith Shklar. Evans takes up Spinoza's moral project of expanding our sympathies until we hate nothing and no one. At the end of *Middlemarch*, the reader is invited to reflect how unhistoric acts of kindness, such as Dorothea's, are the stuff of the growing goodness of the world. But even so, Evans has reservations. For she thinks a practical ethics will always require a few simple moral guidelines, "a few plain truths," with which to "object to what is wrong," as Arthur Brooke tells Reverend Farebrother.

If understanding the world is the path to ethical improvement, for Spinoza, what goes wrong with human beings? Simply put, envy. Envy is "nothing else than hatred, considered as disposing man to rejoice in the evil that befalls another and to be sorry for the good that befalls another." As in the scriptures, envy is the root of evil. Seeing others as obstacles to our happiness (rather than probing what causes them to be so) is the "hallucination"—Evans makes an interesting translation choice of *imaginatio* in Part III, Proposition 26—that what is evil for or hateful to another is good for or lovable to us. Spinoza thinks we are taught from "our earlier years" to become envious. These are Spinoza's only comments about education and children in the *Ethics*, and they seem to have stuck with his translator: "It is the practice of parents to excite their children to virtue solely by the stimulus of envy and vanity."

Evans considers inducements to envy and vanity an especially crippling aspect of women's education, no doubt because she reads Mary Wollstonecraft and Margaret Full-

er alongside Spinoza. This appears most clearly in Rosamond Vincy's "delicious sense" that she attracts "envious homage." Mrs. Lemon's school for girls teaches its pupils to arouse envy. Rosamond is more self-aware than Laura Gay, the eponymous philosophical superheroine of the "silly novel," when she innocently makes men jealous by quoting Cicero, Horace, and Livy from memory. But what other opportunities are there for the empowerment of the nineteenth-century woman, apart from outshining her rivals, and making others rival one another for her affections? Writing novels, Evans points out.

A world of opportunity can solve the problem of envy, Spinoza thinks, for in it our close rivals no longer appear to be insurmountable obstacles to our happiness. But as Susan James and other Spinoza scholars have pointed out, though Spinoza is the first modern proponent of democracy in the philosophical canon, he never considers its moral effects upon women. Evans sees, however, that denying women opportunities threatens to make them particularly vain and envious. She finds the cause of silliness from ladies and lady novelists here, under Spinoza's nose.

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SELKIES AND NIXIES

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF
MERMAIDS

Cristina Bacchilega, Marie
Alohalani Brown (eds.)
Penguin, pp.368, \$17.00

BY DAVID BENTLEY HART



The chief object of [Mr. Asterius the ichthyologist's] ambition, the end and aim of his researches, was to discover a triton and a mermaid, the existence of which he most potently and implicitly believed, and was prepared to demonstrate, *a priori*, *a posteriori*, *a fortiori*, synthetically and analytically, syllogistically and inductively, by arguments deduced both from acknowledged facts and plausible hypotheses. A report that a mermaid had been seen 'sleeking her soft alluring locks' on the sea-coast of Lincolnshire, had brought him in great haste from London...

— Thomas Love Peacock,
Nightmare Abbey

Note that, despite his firm philosophical convictions on the matter, Mr. Asterias longed for physical evidence to support his beliefs. This is to be expected. No rational person denies the real existence of fairies—or of, for that matter, elves, nymphs, dryads, sylphs, naiads, fauns, or any of the rest of the glittering hierarchy of the *longae-vi*—and it would be a vulgarity to search for specimens to prove the point; but mermaids and mermen fall into a more doubtful category. As far as most of us know, reports of encounters with the species come principally from sailors, who are renowned for their charming propensity for tall tales. Only truck drivers and the now-vanished breed of traveling salesmen have ever rivaled them as inveterate fabulists. So a certain degree of skepticism is simply prudent here.

Or so I had thought until now. *The Penguin Book of Mermaids* has convinced me that I have been clinging to superstition and calling it reason. *Of course* mermaids exist. Or, to be more precise, *of course* water spirits and magical marine beings of every kind are real and numerous and, in certain circumstances, somewhat dangerous. (The volume, in fact, might more accurately, if less fetchingly, have been entitled *The Penguin Book of*

Aquatic Spirits or something of the sort, since there are nearly as many mermen in its pages, as well as any number of sirens, Lorelei, selkies, nixies, river-serpent spirits, undines, and so forth, including many beings that are not even hybrid in form.) The richness of its selection, to say nothing of its global scope, renders any continued hesitation in one's will to believe absurd.

It is unclear, however, whether the editors quite appreciate what they have done. To judge from their introduction, they remain somewhat mired in the baseless assumption that the tales they have collected are without exception fictions of one kind or another—individual or collective, literary or demotic. At least, they seem certain that none of these stories is emblematic of, say, any actual experiences of preternatural dimensions really to be found in this world, and that all can be explained by one or another set of cultural or psychological forces—for instance, misogyny, or at least distrust of the feminine as irrational, or wild and indomitable, or false, or whatever. But the stories they have collected give scant evidence of any general pattern of that kind. There are fables of erotic enchantment in which, as one might expect, one lover is keeping a secret from the other or dallying with someone he or she ought not be; but the dangerous, deceitful, mercurial, capricious, and perverse fabulous beings come in both sexes—as do the kind, curious, innocent, and beneficent.

They also come from everywhere: all of Europe, the Americas, Africa, Polynesia, India, the greater Pacific, the Caribbean, Persia, the Far East, Oceania. Therein lies the real delight of this book. Its selections stretch as far back in time as Babylonian myths about Oannes, the sirens of the *Odyssey*, a Naga episode from the *Bhagavata Purana*, but they also include reports as recent as 2012. Needless to say, the specifically literary selections are by and large the most accomplished *as stories*, since folktales

can, as a rule, tend toward the tedious. Happily, however, the editors have been fairly judicious as regards the latter. Still, though, I would have preferred more of the former. The volume includes Thomas Knightley's version of the tale of Melusina, a story from Straparola's *Facetious Nights*, Lang's "Golden Mermaid," and of course Andersen's "Little Mermaid," as well as more recent stories by Yumiko Kurahashi and Genevieve Valentine. But the selection from Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine* could have been longer, and it was cruel of the editors to abbreviate "The Fisherman and His Soul" by Wilde. And there are other specimens of mer-literature (such as the chapter from *Nightmare Abbey* quoted above) that deserved inclusion. If nothing else, a few obvious poems featuring mermaids could have been included. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" immediately comes to mind, as does Elizabeth Bishop's "From the Country to the City."

That said, I am genuinely grateful for all the material that, but for the editors' diligence, I would never have discovered. The folktales, though they are often only entertainments, do speak eloquently of a human longing for the uncanny or the numinous. More fascinating yet are the modern reports of real encounters with mermaids or other water-spirits, such as two from Zimbabwe, one from South Africa, three from northeastern India, and so on. They are so ingenuous, well-attested, and credible that only a brute would refuse to believe them. And, of course, there is a real moral imperative in not dismissing such tales as lies or delusions.

Herein lies the greatest significance of a book of this kind. Before the triumph of the mechanical philosophy, it was possible to conceive of nature and spirit alike as subsisting in a web of rational relations—Aristotelian "causes," for example, though not "causes" in the impoverished modern sense—because neither the Cartesian alienation

of rational consciousness from the physical world nor the subsequent materialist reduction of consciousness to mechanism had yet occurred. Once the whole world was alive: all things were, as Thales said, full of gods; all things were pervaded by God. When one gazed out at nature, another gaze—mysterious, fitful, terrifying, enticing—met one's own. Nature was a realm of vital intelligence, of enchanting and terrifying mystery, and as such was to some real extent inviolable.

Now we look out at a world composed from mindless mechanical forces and sheer blind chance, and absolutely nothing looks back. Full modernity was achieved by silencing the world, and by converting it into a mechanical arrangement of intrinsically dead matter. Where once (as Owen Barfield often liked to say) the inner world of consciousness was a direct participation in the living spiritual interiority of all of nature, we have been taught to treat such intuitions as hypertrophies of an evolutionarily determined "intentional stance." More preposterously still, we have been taught to regard consciousness itself as an emergent effect of mechanism (though that is logically impossible).

And the result? The "age of technology," to use Heidegger's term, the "enframing" that strips the natural order of its ontological or sacramental splendor, that denies its inner dimensions, that reduces it to a reserve of mere material resources to be exploited, as our uninhibited will to power and to profit dictates. Having exorcised the countless spirits that once inhabited and animated the world, we feel free slowly and relentlessly to murder the world without remorse. And so it really would be a sign of sanity and wisdom if we could once again learn (as Stephen R. L. Clark says) how to believe in fairies—or, as the case may be, mermaids.

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HARD SCIENCE NON-FICTION

SPACEFARERS: HOW HUMANS WILL SETTLE THE MOON, MARS, AND BEYOND

Christopher Wanjek
Harvard University Press,
pp.368, \$29.95

DARK SKIES: SPACE EXPANSIONISM, PLANETARY GEOPOLITICS, AND THE ENDS OF HUMANITY

Daniel Deudney
Oxford University Press,
pp.464, \$34.95

BY JOHN WILSON



You may recall that Mark Watney, the resourceful botanist-hero of *The Martian*, kept starvation at bay by growing potatoes on the Red Planet. Would it spoil your next encounter with the novel or the movie to learn that he couldn't have done that? And who says so? Clifford Wanjek, in *Spacefarers: How Humans Will Settle the Moon, Mars, and Beyond*:

Nope. Not in that toxic dirt, and not under those lights. He did everything else right: fertilizer (human feces), water, and a little carbon dioxide. But he would have had to wash the regolith free of perchlorate salts. And those lights, designed for basic illumination, would not have provided enough energy to produce tubers.

Of course! Those perchlorate salts... (by the way, what are perchlorate salts?). Wanjek goes on to note that even if Watney had been able to grow potatoes, the mission planners shouldn't have included them on the list of supplies: sweet potatoes would have been much better. And after elaborating why, he suggests that "ideal crops to grow in Mars regolith, to complement a hydroponic system, could include cassava, sorghum, cattail, bamboo, and so-called weeds such as dandelion."

You may be getting the impression that Wanjek, a senior writer at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center from 1998 to 2006 (and an expert on nutrition, among other subjects), is mocking the credulity of science-fiction fans—the majority of us, that is, not the smaller subset, including many S.F. writers, who pride themselves (within limits) on their fidelity to Science as She Is Known. But obviously that's not what Wanjek is up to (as a glance at his subtitle makes clear); rather, along with a bit of teasing (he's very funny, and he knows the secret of timing), he's pursuing a strategy that he follows consistently throughout the book. Again and again, he'll stress the sheer in-

hospitality of the known cosmos to any human presence, let alone human civilization—only to continue with projections as to when (for instance) we will achieve "a Mars of Icelandic temperatures and livable atmospheric pressures." (Answer? The twenty-third century.)

These forecasts come at the end of chapter three ("Living in Orbit"), chapter four ("Living on the Moon"), chapter five ("Living on Asteroids"), chapter six ("Living on Mars"), and chapter seven, the last ("Living in the Inner and Outer Solar System and Beyond"): in a single paragraph, headed "My prediction," Wanjek lays out the timing of what seems likely to him to occur. I'm sure the pages on which these predictions are made will be the most-often bookmarked.

Wanjek's book is one of the best examples I've seen of a genre which, so far as I know, I am the first to identify: science-fiction nonfiction (S.F./N.F.). Books of this kind started appearing when it became absolutely certain that the "Old Mars" evoked in a recent anthology edited by George R. R. Martin and Gardner Dozois had to be consigned to the realm of fantasy and when the "visual culture" of S.F. (elaborated, for instance, by the scholar and SF writer Adam Roberts) achieved global pre-eminence, as exemplified by the *Star Wars* franchise, the endless iterations of *Star Trek*, and so on.

The rules of the S.F./N.F. genre have never (to my knowledge) been explicitly laid down, but they are clear. (I have stacks of these books in our house.) Though they may include some history of space exploration, their focus is on what lies ahead. The game requires the writer to say very little about the imaginative universe in which a strong majority of potential readers will be immersed, in which humans and a wild variety of alien species zoom about the galaxy. (*Without* that audience, most of these books could hope only for a tiny readership; in fact, most would never be published in

the first place.) The prevailing tone is sober optimism, sometimes allowing for quasi-religious awe in the manner of Carl Sagan, though there is room in the genre for witty types like Wanjek, so long as they don't dissent from orthodoxy when it comes to our destiny. Here are Wanjek's concluding sentences:

Space will be a natural extension of humanity, as was our bridging water and then air. And when that era arrives, all of humanity may prosper, and *Homo sapiens* will take the first bold leap toward the evolution of *Homo futuris*.

You may suppose that Wanjek here is merely genuflecting to faith in something or other ("the Cosmos"?), but if you read his book I think you'll conclude that he is, alas, entirely sincere. Similar sentiments are uttered in the epilogue of a book published just after Wanjek's, *How to Die in Space: A Journey Through Dangerous Astrophysical Phenomena*, by Paul M. Sutter, in a manner that incongruously combines the jokey tone of Sutter's entire book (a few levels jokier than Wanjek's) with the piety that is one of the trademarks of S.F./N.F.

For a variety of reasons—including the ambitions of SpaceX and projects from NASA, from China, and elsewhere scheduled for the summer of 2020, and perhaps the mysterious workings of chance—this publishing season includes several titles related to Mars in particular: Sarah Stewart Johnson's *Sirens of Mars: Searching for Life on Another World*; Kate Greene's *Once Upon a Time I Lived on Mars: Space Exploration and Life on Earth* (a collection of essays by a woman who lived in an earth-bound environment designed to simulate living on Mars); and Elizabeth Howell and Nicholas Booth's *Search for Life on Mars: The Greatest Detective Story of All Time*. (These are the ones I have seen; there may be even more on the way.) They are quite different from one another, and different from Wanjek, Sutter,

& Co.; but to readers like me, they beckon irresistibly.

More different still—from another universe, you might say—is Daniel Deudney’s *Dark Skies: Space Expansionism, Planetary Geopolitics, and the Ends of Humanity*, a learned, massively documented screed expressing what I think will probably soon become the prevailing view in academic circles (see pages 360–361, for example, on “*hierarchy enablement*,” one of six “Catastrophic and Existential Threats from Solar Colonization” enumerated by Deudney).

Last year, the S.F. writer Robert Silverberg put together a collection spanning his career, *Alien Archives: Eighteen Stories of Extraterrestrial Encounters* (the earliest story was published in 1954). If you are interested at all in the possibilities of human-alien contact, you owe it to yourself to read his bittersweet introduction. At the outset, Silverberg says he wrote these stories over the decades with two convictions in mind: that the “universe is full of non-human life forms,” and that we “are never going to encounter any of those alien beings.” Why then write all this stuff? Just to make a living by pandering to readers more credulous?

I remind you that these are science fiction stories, and the essence of science fiction is what if?—which is why some people like to call science fiction “speculative fiction” instead. I do indeed doubt that any of the events depicted in this book, or anything remotely like them, will ever take place. But what if—what if—

Silverberg goes on to say that recent studies from NASA and the Kepler telescope have reinforced his conviction: a “multitude of worlds ... is clearly out there. The trouble is that we can’t reach them, because the speed of light is likely always to be the limiting velocity.”

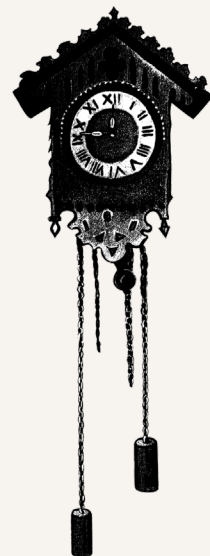
Time perhaps to pick up my battered paperback of *Adventures on Other Planets*, an anthology put

together in 1955 for Ace Books by Donald A. Wollheim, one of the half-dozen most influential editors in the history of American SF. The opening story, first published in a magazine in 1952, is Roger Dee’s “The Obligation.” Here’s how it begins: “The Kornephorian robot-ship came in low over the raging sea. Arrowing down against the full sweep of Venusian hurricane, it dropped toward the supply dome in obedience to the Surveyor’s will.” OK, go ahead and roll your eyes. The story, sardonic in the mode of much S.F. of that period, turns out to transpose elements of 1950s suburbia to Venus (in that way it’s reminiscent of Philip K. Dick), and the alien central character is different from what you might be expecting. Mere foolishness, of course (and outdated foolishness to boot), compared to whatever you are reading as recommended, say, by the *New York Times*. To each his own.

APPRECIATIONS

THE FORTRESS OF PATIENCE

BY EVE TUSHNET



John Wilson is a contributing editor for the Englewood Review of Books.

In the middle of the seventeenth century in the city of Lima, a living woman asked a dead one whether black women could go to heaven.

Ursula de Jesús, the living woman, had entered the Franciscan Convent of Santa Clara as a nun's slave—or, technically, she was the slave of *all* the nuns and only served the woman who had owned her when her work for all the others was done, this being the method by which Peruvian Franciscans evaded the ban on personal property. She had to ask her guardian angel how old she was.

Ursula had begun to experience visions, especially of souls in purgatory, and to hear voices of God, angels, and various souls. She gained a reputation in the convent as a mystic, and was freed after forty three years in bondage, twenty eight of those in the convent.

But she did not gain equality. Ursula became a *donada*, a sort of half-nun who took religious vows but acted as a servant and was not allowed full participation in the community. (Saint Martin de Porres was a *donado*.) In 1650 Ursula's confessor ordered her to keep a diary, and a series of nuns began to record the *donada's* visions but also her everyday worries, thoughts, and complaints.

This diary has received a fluid English translation, with an essay on Ursula's world and life, from Nancy E. van Deusen. In spite of at least two layers of censorship (the nuns who recorded her visions and her confessor), Ursula's diary is pungent and plainspoken—and it articulates a theology of humility in which nestle the first beginnings of a theology of liberation.

Ursula's conversion story is dramatic, like something from the life of an *infanta*, not a slave. While still enslaved Ursula, by her own account, was frivolous: "I went to the visitors' parlor beautifully adorned from head to toe. It is very true that if my stockings were not a certain rose-colored shade I would not enter." She had loaned a skirt to someone who got it dirty; Ursula

had angrily washed it and was laying it out to dry, on a plank over a deep well, when she nearly plunged to her death. She was miraculously rescued by Our Lady of Carmel.

After this miracle prompted a conversion of the heart, Ursula did all the things you'd expect a Spanish mystic to do. She sought out the humblest tasks in the convent, such as cleaning the infirmary's drainage ditches. She performed grueling physical penances. During her novitiate she wore, according to the confessor who wrote her biography, a hair shirt, iron-studded straps around her waist and arms, a barbed cross on her back, and a crown of thorns which she hid beneath her hair. She whipped herself twice a day. Even after her novitiate, when she was doing long days of manual labor, she wore a hair shirt; once she forgot to put it on, and the Lord rebuked her: "*The hair shirt is—I am not certain how he said it—the fortress of patience.*"

It can be hard to tell the difference between humility and self-harm. Catherine Addington, in an essay in *Christ's Body, Christ's Wounds: Staying Catholic When You've Been Hurt in the Church*, writes:

I thought characterizing the stories that worried me as legend, as historical, as distant, would keep them from doing much damage. I didn't think of Caterina da Siena's self-starvation when I took Lenten fasting too seriously, when I found myself cold all the time, when I chalked up my headaches to eye strain instead of my obvious hunger pangs. I didn't think of Caterina de' Ricci's holy wounds when I unconsciously channeled my anxieties into picking at my skin and the insides of my cheeks. I thought of them later, when I was working on healing myself, and praying for the strength to overcome these things. I looked up and everything I wanted freedom from was wearing a halo.

Most theology and spiritual writing is the work of privileged men. Their egos flourish, free from

racism, misogyny, and sexual or emotional abuse. That ego is their great enemy. And so they write that we need to learn that we are nothing. We need to learn to suffer in imitation of Christ. We need to view ourselves as worthless, vile, inferior to others.

I love this stuff. The one book I've re-read the most since my conversion is *The Imitation of Christ* a.k.a. "The Life-Changing Magic of Admitting You're the Worst." I too was raised in privilege, and doubtless needed some good hard kicks in the teeth. On the other hand, I'd hated myself since I was very young. What Christianity gave me was not belief in my sinfulness but the possibility of rescue. It was a doctrine of the faith that God created and sustained me out of love, and that I bore His image. I didn't like to be banned from self-hatred, but I swallowed it, on faith.

There's a story in the *Little Flowers of Saint Francis* in which Francis spends a whole night "sweetly angry and meekly perturbed" with a friar. Francis tries to get the friar to tell him, "Truly thou dost merit the deepest hell," but the friar says instead, "God will perform so many good deeds through thee that thou shalt go to paradise." Francis keeps escalating his self-reproach, calling himself "not worthy to find mercy," and the friar keeps disobediently promising him mercy and grace. At last the disobedient friar exclaims, "God maketh me to speak as it pleaseth Him, and not as it pleaseth me." You can take this as a story about the extraordinary work God did in Saint Francis, and it is; but it's also a story about things God won't let you say to yourself.

At one point Ursula asks Jesus directly: "If you are God why do you pay attention to this piece of trash, to this washrag that stays dirty, the more you clean it?"

He replies, "You are?"

After she repeats her question, he says, "When I was in Jerusalem during the time of my Passion, all the questions they asked made no sense." And that's her answer.

Conflating self-contempt and humility is a dangerous game to play no matter who you are; it only gets more dangerous when you're abused or oppressed by your fellow Catholics. And yet the imitation of Christ is not a luxury good, as if the rich young men of this world need humility but the rest of us only need exaltation. Voluntary suffering, willing acceptance of humiliation, eagerness to condemn our sins and shed our comforts and seek the lowest place are normal and good parts of Catholic life.

Ursula navigates these truths almost in spite of herself. Her greatest strength is her honesty. She is unafraid to criticize the convent, even quoting the soul of a black woman who says the abbess is overworking the servants. Ursula several times calls herself overworked as well. She criticizes herself constantly but also points out how harassed she is by others' demands. She asks the Lord sarcastic questions! And He replies with gentle directness. When her voices tell her to "thank Him for all the gifts there are," she replies, in a tone perfectly balancing tartness and humility, "Being nothing, I said, 'Yes, I already knew I was a tick.'"

She's even honest about how hard it is for her to have these visions. Although many of the nuns obviously viewed Ursula as a holy woman—at one point the abbess herself obeys Ursula's vision-borne conviction that the nuns should be publicly rebuked for various faults—others didn't like her getting above her station. One nun asked, "Does our Lord discuss these matters with vermin?"

Ursula talks frequently about her fear that what seem to be holy visions are actually lies sent by the Devil, whom she calls "that big-footed one." She says that she often doesn't understand what she's been told in a vision, and her diary records ideas about limbo and the Trinity which don't quite reflect Catholic orthodoxy.

Although mystics of this time

were often suspected of heresy and interrogated, Ursula seems to have escaped suspicion—but this freedom may also reflect a lack of guidance. She was left to sort truth from lies completely on her own. And yet I can't wish she'd had more help, since I don't trust the people who enslaved her to be good shepherds. Who in authority in that convent had the wisdom to guide a black woman's soul? This is one of the hardest tasks for Catholics who have been harmed in the Church: discerning what in our own piety is gift and what is temptation. (When her "voices" spoke of God's mercy, Ursula says, "I greatly resisted that vision.")

There are aspects of her visions which implicitly overturn colonial Lima's racial and economic hierarchies. She contrasts God, Who welcomes everyone who comes to Him, with the viceroy who would laugh at her if she dared to approach. After Ursula sees the dead Isabel of Bourbon in need of her prayers, and asks, "What do I have to do with queens or kings?", the Lord says, "All come to my feet; to me, they are all the same." Instead of reading "the book of Saint Teresa," the Lord says "her book must be the feet of My Lord Jesus Christ," for all people, even the poorest, were "written in His wounds." Ursula's portrait, painted after her death, shows saints' writings in the background; yet there are hints in the diary that she never learned to read. Without any defensiveness, attending only to Jesus and not to herself, she insists that she never needed to.

But in other passages it's clear that Ursula imbibed the prejudices of her culture. In one vision, Mary appears as a blonde; I trust that by now Ursula and Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin have compared notes. When a young slave was mortally wounded by fireworks celebrating Corpus Christi, Ursula prayed for him to be returned to his owner. Her voices rebuked her for thinking of the owner's material rather than his spiritual inter-

ests; perhaps losing this possession would "open his eyes to the world." Only after the boy had died did the slave's own soul come to her mind, as she recalled his devotion to the Virgin, and prayed for him as her voices assured her that he had been taken from this life before succumbing to temptation.

Ursula's visions never condemn slavery. Unlike Saint Josephine Bakhita, who lived more than two centuries later, Ursula does not say she forgives those who enslaved her—because she can't yet name what they did as evil.

And yet her visions do not allow her to accept the racism and dehumanization which were the basis of her oppression. One of the first visions she describes showed her a black woman who had been enslaved in the convent, María Bran. Ursula sees her in purgatory, dressed in a priest's alb and crowned in flowers, "her face a resplendent black." The woman says that "she was very thankful to God, who with His divine providence had taken her from her land and brought her down such difficult and rugged roads in order to become a Christian and be saved." But the Christianity taught to slaves has left Ursula with an urgent, heartbreaking question: "I asked whether black women went to heaven[.]" María Bran says yes, God's mercy will save black women who give Him thanks. Later Ursula writes, "Although He raised us as different nations, the will of blacks and whites is the same. In memory, understanding, and will, they are all one. Had He not created them all in His image and likeness and redeemed them with His blood?"

Ursula's diary is a vivid record of a soul struggling for the honesty, the trust in God's love, which can make Christian humility liberating and not degrading. She views herself as inferior to everyone—and her visions insist that there's a sharp difference between "inferior to everyone" and "inferior to white people." Between "I am the lowest

of all” and “I am lower *than my oppressors*” (than my abuser, than my employer, than the rich or the privileged or the lucky) there is a gulf as wide as the gulf between heaven and hell.

Ursula’s visions encouraged her to act in lowly ways, to remember her sins, to take on additional suffering when she was already exhausted; to keep silence when she was insulted. But they never let her sign her name to those insults. They never let her call evil good, or slavery justified, or black women inferior. They did not let her insult her own soul.

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BAGATELLE

PIUS PAPA DECIMUS

BY JOEY BELLEZA

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
 Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we groaned through Terce,
 And unto us the priests all turned their backs,
 Till Papa Ultra Vires made things worse.
 Monks prayed asleep. Many had lost their shoes,
 Yet sang as one with eyes to psalters blind,
 Inspired as good New Covenantal Jews
 Upon whom God’s assistance hath inclined.

“New Books! Quick, boys!”—An ecstasy of fumbling,
 Breaking the brand-new bindings just in time;
 But someone was still rustling ’round and bumbling,
 For triple crowns hath purged the Writ Divine.
 Dim, through the abbey’s stained glass filtered light,
 As ’neath a deep blue sea, I saw him drowning;
 To halve the Sunday Psalms yields no delight—
 Our brother sat there, sulking, pouting, frowning.

If in some haunting dreams you too could pace
 Around the cloister with a psalter thin
 And see the calendar descend from grace
 And find where Hannibal fell into sin—
 If you could hear the experts resurrect
 Mark Tully’s tongue in Nineteen Forty-Eight
 While readying the Missal to be wrecked
 Beneath the Dewfall’s unrelenting weight—
 My friend, you ardently would fain discuss
 The tailor who unwove the Psalms away:
 The tyrant *Pius Papa Decimus*,
Servus servorum Dei.

Joey Belleza works in the Diocese of Oakland.

BUTTERED SLEEVES

NUNC DIMITTIS BY CARINO HODDER

Christian publishers, much like the manufacturers of washing powder, have a ready-made but perhaps easily forgotten focus group in communities of consecrated religious. In my Dominican convent, as in many convents around the world, the sisters observe the monastic tradition of reading at meals: each suppertime, one of us will read aloud from a book of spirituality or theology, a biography of a saint, a treatise on prayer or similar, while the rest of the community eats and listens in silence. This tradition serves to build up the sororal life of the religious house through shared intellectual and spiritual endeavour. It also creates very discerning book reviewers.

On entering the convent, the novice sister discovers that reading suppers are not simply a novel and edifying way to spend half an hour of a weekday evening. In fact, they are the training ground for the development of a nexus of obscure but nevertheless highly useful mental and spiritual disciplines. First, the novice develops the ability to assimilate large amounts of textual information while simultaneously peeling a satsuma, cutting up a sandwich, or wondering why the last sister who used the peanut butter did not simply throw out the practically empty jar, rather than assuming her fellow sisters would want to spend five minutes scraping the bottom with a knife.

Eventually she finds herself able to listen without accidentally buttering her sleeve, and a new skill is mastered: becoming attentive not only to the words of the spoken text, but to the emotional equilibrium of the community as the reading progresses. For a poor book, a challenging book, or an informative book is never more quickly

or more profoundly exposed than when it is being read out loud, and real-time literary criticism is broadcast from the face and body language of each sister. Brows furrowing deeper and deeper as a particularly tedious chapter stretches out before us, like an empty motorway in high summer; bitten-back smiles of appreciation at good, lively prose; the hush and almost sacred stillness that descends on the table as a saint approaches the hour of death. It's an excellent gauge of orthodoxy, too: hours of novitiate classes on philosophy and theology exercise far less hold over the novice's memory and imagination than the sight of her Mistress of Studies dropping her fork in alarm at a well-meaning but ham-fistedly modalist analogy of the Trinity.

Table reading is unparalleled as a means of getting to the heart of a book, for there is no better context in which to come to appreciate a work of prose than it in the company of people whom you love and trust, and whom you know could not control their facial expressions if they tried. Our local Benedictine nuns send us their quarterly newsletter in the mail, and we know that their book review section is solidly trustworthy, for they, too, will have gone through all the familiar stages of trying to stifle laughter for the sake of preserving silence and observing *that look* on Mother Abbess's face when constructing their literary opinions.

Table reading transforms the process of coming to know and love a book into a common project, one swept up into the grand common project of coming to know and to love all of God's good creation—and, pre-eminently, coming to know and love one another. After all, what better way is there

to learn, not only of the book in question, but about the sisters whom God has deigned to surround us with (or, in some cases, rub us up against)? Why spend hours questioning them about their likes and dislikes, their family background, their earliest memories, their relationship with their father, when one can simply look around the table at supper to see an apparently dour sister turned dewy-eyed by the *Dialogues* of Saint Catherine of Siena, or a fellow novice revealed, by her silently quaking shoulders during *The Everlasting Man*, to be one of those people who finds all Chesterton indiscriminately funny?

As with all the faculties of our human nature, given to us by our Creator and redeemed and re-made in His incarnate Son, the human love of words exists in a sanctifying *exitus reditus*: a divine gift which can, if we let it, lead us back to the heart of the giver. To read together as a community is to choose to cooperate ever more closely with the God Who gave us words, Who speaks to us in words, and Who ultimately came to dwell among us as the very Word made flesh. For the consecrated religious who observe this practice, the lessons of table reading can be among the most profound of our lives in the convent—and, indeed, of our whole lives as a member of the community of the baptized.

This, then, is my advice to Christian authors: find your nearest convent—ideally, the nearest Dominicans. We know a good book when we hear one, and our motto is “Veritas.”

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