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Learning from Victorian Virtues

Interview: Gertrude Himmelfarb

Professor Himmelfarb taught for twenty-three years at Brooklyn College and the Graduate School of City University of New York, where she was named Distinguished Professor of History in 1978. Professor Himmelfarb's research has focused on, among other topics, morality and its effects on economics. Her previous books include *Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics*, *On Liberty and Liberalism*, and *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians*. Now Professor Emeritus,

she spoke with us from her home in Washington, D.C.

R&L: Let's begin by discussing your latest book, *The Demoralization Of Society*. In it you state that Victorian society stigmatized the recipients of government assistance. Tell us about that.

Himmelfarb: Well, it stigmatized them in several ways: first, it stigmatized them rhetorically. The recipient of relief was called a pauper, not a poor man. The Victorians made a great attempt to keep the distinction between pauper and poor. The word poor was synonymous with the working classes or the "independent laborer"; "pauper" was a term of stigmatization.

Another way was through the principle of "less eligibility". This principle stipulated that the pauper should always be in a less eligible, that is to say a less desirable, condition than the independent laborer. The pauper would be less eligible in two respects. First, he would receive less from the parish than the laborer did in the way of wages. In addition, the able-bodied pauper, (this principle did not apply to the sick, elderly or children) would be assisted only in the workhouse. This was a form of psychological as well as economic stigmatization.

R&L: Was this type of stigmatization dehumanizing?

Himmelfarb: No. Its purpose was precisely the opposite — to make the poor better human beings by encouraging the able-bodied pauper to seek work and discouraging the laborer from lapsing into pauperism. The evil of excessive or "indiscriminate" relief, as the Victorians put it, was that it tended to pauperize, demoralize, and thus dehumanize the poor. Stigmatization is the other side of the coin of virtue. You can't have a set of virtues, a system of values, without having a corresponding system of stigmas. The interesting thing about the workhouse was that conditions there were not always worse than the conditions of the poorest independent laborer; some contemporaries claimed that in terms of food and living conditions, they were sometimes better. What the Victorians understood, however, was that the workhouse was socially and morally demeaning. This was its great deterrent.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE • Interview: Gertrude Himmelfarb © Article: "The Accumulation of Moral Capital" by Jennifer Roback Morse © Review Essay: "The Theme is Freedom" by Charles E. Rice © In the Liberal Tradition: C.S. Lewis © Book Review: Luis E. Lugo on Leroy Rouser's *Civil Religion and Political Theology* © Column: "Is Welfare Compassionate?" by Robert A. Sirico, C.S.P. © Plus Book News.

R&L: What about the image of the workhouse that we have from Dickens?

Himmelfarb: It must be said that workhouses were appalling by our standards. But they were not as bad as they were sometimes represented. There were serious debates among the Victorians as to just what were the conditions of the workhouses, the diets of the inmates, the living conditions, and so on. Dickens exaggerated the evils of the workhouse just as he exaggerated everything; this is part of his literary genius. And later commentators have exaggerated what Dickens had said. So, yes, workhouses were appalling by our standards, but less appalling when seen in the contemporary context.

Although the Poor Law reform of 1834 did stipulate that the able bodied should receive relief in the workhouse, in actuality that principle was violated more often than not, and many continued to receive “outdoor” relief. There were not enough workhouses to go around, they were expensive to build, and the parishes tended to be far more lenient about the application of the law than the reformers had intended.

R&L: Alexis de Tocqueville visited England during this period. What was his reaction to all of this?

Himmelfarb: Tocqueville visited England just before the reform of 1834 and recommended that relief — state provided relief — be abol-

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ished. He thought such relief was demeaning and demoralizing, a public manifestation of inferiority. Charity, on the other hand, being a private transaction, was more effective and morally satisfying, both for the recipient and the donor.

R&L: Does Victorian England have anything to tell us about illegitimacy, a social phenomenon so often associated with welfare?

Himmelfarb: Yes, a great deal. One of the extraordinary facts about Victorian England, which came as a revelation to me, was the low illegitimacy rate. Around 1845

the illegitimacy ratio was 7%; by the end of the century it had come down to less than 4%. In the poorest part of London, east London, it was 4% at its peak and 3% by the end of the century. Remember, this was a time of enormous political, economic and social turmoil: the industrial revolution, the cultural revolution, urbanism and so on. And yet it in spite of all these difficulties, illegitimacy was considerably reduced and the English emerged from this period in a state of re-moralization — in dramatic contrast to our present situation where illegitimacy rose from 5% in 1960 to nearly 30% today.

R&L: The Victorians, especially with their strong emphasis on morality, virtue, and the like, are often criticized for hypocrisy — their high rate of prostitution, for example. How do you interpret this?

Himmelfarb: First of all, many of the charges of hypocrisy are grossly exaggerated. The rate of prostitution, for example, was probably no higher in the early Victorian period than it had been before, and it was almost certainly lower later in the century. In any

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case, I believe firmly in the old adage, “hypocrisy is the homage that virtue pays to vice.” Violations of the moral code were regarded as such; they were cause for shame and guilt. The Victorians did not do what we do today — that is, “define deviancy down”— normalize immorality so that it no longer seems immoral. Immorality was seen as such, as immoral and wrong, and was condemned as such. Men might be weak — they might have recourse to prostitutes, for example— but the moral prin-

ciple remained the same. (And the same, incidentally, for men and women. Men violated the principle more often than women, but the principle applied to both. In this respect, there was no “double standard”.)

R&L: *Is this unique in contemporary society, this lowering of the moral standard to accommodate the lifestyle?*

Himmelfarb: I suppose there is the temptation to normalize the ab-

normal in all societies, isn't there? But it is particularly so in our society because we have a weak sense of what is regarded as moral and normal. We are wary of all value judgments. We tend to regard them as evidence of an intolerant, illiberal, and judgmental spirit. We are all too willing to abandon the very idea of a moral standard.

R&L: *Your point connects with the subtitle of your book, “From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values”; please ex-*

C. S. Lewis 1898-1963

“I am a democrat because I believe in the Fall of Man ... Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows.”

One of the greatest Christian thinkers of the twentieth century, C.S. Lewis was a respected scholar and teacher at Oxford University for 29 years and then a professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature at Cambridge University to the end of his career. An atheist throughout his early life, he adopted theism in 1929 and converted to Christianity in 1931. Although a talented debater and writer—Lewis wrote many fictional, didactic, and devotional works in addition to his sizable academic production—he is not known as a political commentator. He avoided partisan commitments; indeed, he turned down a title offered him by Winston Churchill, thinking his critics would use it to accuse him of being an anti-Leftist propagandist.

In spite of his indifference to politics as such, he did often give prescient analysis of a variety of political topics. One example is Lewis' sharp criticism of what he termed “the omniscient state,” that is, the modern welfare state that promises a universal curative for society's ills. He saw it as antithetical to human freedom and the institutions that preserve it, and instead favored a regime of limited government. He was suspicious of technological advancement, but only because he thought that technology in the hands of the omniscient state would result in widespread, all-pervasive tyranny. He noted that the lure of the welfare state is understandable in the face of seemingly limitless human suffering, yet he exhorted his readers to be wary of the purveyors of utopian dreams. He instead promoted the good actions of individual Christian citizens engaging the challenge of living in a fallen and dark world, stating that “the art of life consists in tackling each immediate evil as well as we can.” A



Sources: “Politics from the Shadowlands,” *Policy Review*, Spring 1994 by John G. West, Jr., *God in the Dock* by C.S. Lewis, edited by Walter Hooper (Eerdmans, 1970), and *The Abolition of Man* by C.S. Lewis (Macmillan, 1947).

plain for us the distinction between virtues and values.

Himmelfarb: The idea of virtue goes back to antiquity, and it varied in the course of time. The ancient virtues were not the Christian virtues, and they were certainly not the Victorian virtues. But what was common to all of these virtues, to the very idea of virtue, was a fixed moral standard — a standard by which all people at all times and under all circumstances would be judged. Today we have abandoned that idea of virtue and have adopted instead what we now call “values”. Value is a subjective, relativistic term; any individual, group, or society may choose to value whatever they like.

which in the past thirty years has risen ten-fold. The low crime rate was a reflection of the Victorian virtues — work, temperance, orderliness, and responsibility.

It was also a reflection of the degree to which this ethos had been internalized. We tend to think of stigma and sanctions as being externally imposed by society, by law and coercion. But in fact, what was most characteristic about Victorian England was the internalization of these sanctions. For the most part they were accepted by the individual willingly, even unconsciously; they were incorporated in his super-ego, as we would now say. This combination of external and inter-

pists, like Charles Booth, were not religious in any orthodox sense, but adhered to the Positivist’s “Religion of Humanity”. The Salvation Army was founded by a Methodist sect, but catered to those of all religions — or none. Each religion had its own children’s mission. Toynbee Hall, the first settlement house, was nondenominational, although it was established and run by Samuel Barnett, who was an Anglican minister. Whatever their denominational or nondenominational character, they were all imbued with a religious spirit. One of the important lessons we can learn from Victorian England is the cooperation of the various religions, and indeed, of religious and secular organizations, in philanthropy in general.

Their low crime rate was a reflection of the Victorian virtues — work, temperance, orderliness, respectability, and responsibility.

One cannot say of virtues what one can say of values, that anyone’s virtues are as good as anyone else’s, or that everyone has a right to his own virtues. This shift from virtues to values represents the true moral revolution of our time.

R&L: In your book you also mention the impact of Victorian social mores on the crime rate: the Victorians seemed to have had an exceptionally low rate of crime. Can you expound on this?

Himmelfarb: Like the low illegitimacy rate, the low crime rate is quite extraordinary. There was a drop in the crime rate of nearly fifty percent in the second half of the 19th century; again in dramatic contrast to the crime rate in our own times

nal sanctions made for a powerful ethos, an ethos supported by religion, law, and all the other institutions of society.

R&L: In Victorian society there were a multitude of private charities operative. To what extent were they religious in orientation, and what does this signify for us today?

Himmelfarb: This period saw an enormous expansion of private charities, especially in the 1880’s and 1890’s. Most of them, but not all, were religious based. Some were denominational, some ecumenical, still others testified to a generalized religious spirit. Charity itself was regarded as a religious virtue. Some philanthro-

R&L: What role did the Victorian Jew play in forming the culture?

Himmelfarb: There was a very large Jewish immigration from Russia and Poland to England in the late 1880’s, as there was to this country. Beatrice Webb, who was not then quite a socialist but had socialist inclinations, examined this Jewish community and wrote a perceptive and sympathetic account of it. She came to the conclusion that these very poor Jews epitomized the Victorian spirit. They worked hard, they saved, they were thrifty, law-abiding, family oriented, thought in terms of the future, and so on. And she saw these virtues as related to their religion. It was their this-worldly, moral religion that inspired them to “better themselves” and rise from the class of the poor. Of the totally impoverished Jews coming out of Russia, there were very few who went on public relief. Those

Jews who needed support for the first years until they got a job, were taken care of by the Jewish community rather than the state. Webb found all of this entirely admirable. It's curious to find a socialist praising a Jewish ethic which was also, as she recognized, a capitalist ethic.

R&L: *You are one of the pre-eminent Acton scholars in the world, some of your earliest work dealt with Acton's intellectual contribution to the ideas of liberty and religion. I know this is a difficult question, but what would Acton say about re-moralizing society? How would he approach this question?*

Himmelfarb: I think he would have been as distressed as many of us are today by the condition of our society. He was very religious and very liberal, and very much a moralist, and for all these reasons he would have been appalled by our present state of demoralization and acutely aware of the need for some kind of remoralization. Like all of us, he would have preferred that it come about not by the efforts of government, but by the cultivation of an ethos that would encourage both private and public virtues. Acton was not a libertarian; he was not opposed to social legislation in principle. He had too much respect for the complexities of history and society to be a strict libertarian. I think he would have agreed that there was a role for both the law and the state in the process of remoralization. But above all, he would have looked to religion as the inspiration for moral reformation.

R&L: *In a recent Wall Street Journal column you suggested that a faith revival such as the one experienced in 19th century England might be necessary in*

order for religion to have an impact on the morality of today. Do you see such a revival coming about?

Himmelfarb: There is no question but that religion played a crucial role in the Victorian moral reformation. That reformation goes back to the Wesleyan movement in the 18th century.

The movement had several distinctive features. First, it was from its beginning as much an ethic as a religion; the two were intimately connected, so that the ethic derived its strength from the religion. Second, the ethic was as much a social matter as an individual one; it emphasized the social virtues (charity, good works) as much as the individual ones (work, temperance). Third, it cut across class lines. After Wesley's death, at the end of the 18th century, the movement split, the Methodists becoming dissenters and the Evangelicals remaining in the Church of England. While the Methodists appealed largely to the working and lower middle classes, they shared the same ethic. There was thus created something much like a national moral consensus.

Whether we have the conditions for that sort of moral revival today I don't know. Certainly there are some heartening signs of it. The other day I picked up my paper in Washington and read of a rally of over 50,000 *Promise Keepers* — men who stood in a stadium for nearly 10 hours, praying and committing themselves to be dutiful husbands and faithful fathers (and paying \$50 for this privilege). And this is being reproduced all around the country. The other encouraging thing is the beginning of a convergence of religious conservatives and secular conservatives on this moral issue. I am re-

mindful again of Victorian England when the Evangelicals and the Utilitarians made common cause in social and moral reformation.

R&L: *Many have claimed that this kind of alliance threatens civil liberties and pluralism. Do you share such concerns?*

Himmelfarb: No, I don't. We are talking about an alliance on specific issues. This does not mean that these groups will constitute a separate party or that they will be allied on all sorts of other issues. But if there can be agreement and cooperation on questions, that will be a step forward. I don't see how this can be a civil liberties threat — except to those who regard all religions with suspicion.

R&L: *What has been the general reaction to the book?*

Himmelfarb: There has been, predictably, a double reaction. The book has been favorably received (more favorably than I had expected) by those who recognize the seriousness of today's moral crisis and who are prepared to learn from the experiences of the Victorians. At the same time it has been criticized by others who refuse to acknowledge that there is a problem and who are hostile to any idea of virtue, let alone the Victorian virtues. There are still many people who are in a state of denial — they think that illegitimacy is an acceptable "alternative life style" and that crime is a misperception created by faulty statistics. But I do believe that this point of view is becoming increasingly rare (expect, perhaps, in the academy), and I think that the sympathetic response to my book on the part of many liberals as well as conservatives is itself a sign of the times.

A

The Accumulation of Moral Capital

Jennifer Roback Morse

By now most readers of this journal are familiar with arguments that the charitable impulse is not well-served by institutions of the modern welfare state. Indeed, many are persuaded that the modern state feeds itself from the fount of charitable feelings that have been created by the Judeo-Christian tradition. The state, by exploiting this ethos, has created a situation in which people feel more like suckers than Samaritans. In this article, I will argue that the economic significance of the Western religious traditions extends far beyond the creation of an ethic of sharing or neighborly charity.

The first example is the economics of cooperation. The theoretical problem is, why should people cooperate for mutual benefit in a situation that presents possibilities of greater personal gain from ignoring other people. Game theorists from many disciplines have studied the problem of mutual cooperation in problems as trivial as whether to litter on the beach, and in problems as significant as whether to attempt to shoplift if you think you might get away with it. Theoretical economists have shown that a tit-for-tat strategy is stable. That is, I cooperate with you, if you cooperate with me. I follow the rules if you follow the rules. But tit-for-tat works only if someone gets the game started with a cooperative first move. Is there not, then, economic significance to an ethical system that insists on a generous first move, even to strangers?

The theorists have difficulty in answering this question, in part, because their theories do not tell them

to look at basic cultural and religious values at the foundation of people's behavior. One scholar, Don McCloskey put it rather colorfully: "Some [economists] go on trying to solve the Hobbes Problem, well into its fourth century of irresolution—namely: Can a mob of unsocialized brutes be proven on a blackboard to

The theoretical problem is, why should people cooperate for mutual benefit in a situation that presents possibilities of greater personal gain from ignoring other people.

create in the end a civil society? The problem lacks point if people are already French or American." Or, I would add, if they are already Christians or Jews.

Economists have also shown that it is almost impossible to construct a contract that completely covers every possible contingency. Thus, long term contracts almost always present opportunities for profitable renegeing. The theoretical economist has difficulty explaining why people do not renege more often than they do. We now even have experimental evidence that people behave opportunistically less than predicted, that they contribute to public goods more than predicted, and that they generally cooperate more than predicted. In other words, we know that an ethos of promise-keeping is a valuable piece of social capital, but

that the market does not fully reward promise-keeping. What then of the credibility of the early Christian Church?

People were asked whether they were Christians under the following cost-benefit calculus: If you say no, all you have to do is offer a sacrifice to the Roman Emperor. If you say yes, I am a Christian, then your body will be covered with pitch and set on fire. You may conclude that people who said yes to such a question could be counted on to mean what they said. The fact that this religious belief survived persecution of this magnitude over a period of three hundred years adds to its credibility.

And so, we are no longer surprised to learn that the medieval economy, a far-flung network of trading and entrepreneurship, was held together by oaths. People sealed their contracts by swearing oaths before God, and people took this seriously. We need not marvel at the lack of law produced by the state, and the richness of the merchant-law created by the merchants themselves, for their own use. Indeed, in the medieval world, we find layers and layers of cooperative ventures for business, charity and religion, and virtually none of it was provided by the state. The guilds, communes, confraternities, and sodalities were all created by the Christian ethos. In our time of idolatry of the state, it is difficult for us to really comprehend that there was once a real place and time in which the state played a peripheral role in people's lives. The institutions of government were not always solidified and monopolized.

Princes were absorbed in competing with one another for territorial claims. The ability of these distracted Princes to tax and regulate their subjects was minuscule by modern standards.

In spite of the political fragmentation, people could travel anywhere within half of the known world and still be within the same basic culture. Standards of behavior would be familiar, religious observances would be familiar, even the Latin language would get a traveler a very long way. This real place was known as Christendom.

It is interesting for us as free market economists to reflect upon what destroyed this world: the rise of the modern state. The competition between Church and state over the independence of the Church, and particularly for control of the clergy and Church lands, had gone on steadily since Pope Gregory VII in 1076.

Professor Harold Berman has argued that this tension between Church and state was one of the sources of Western liberty. By the end of the religious upheaval we now call the Reformation, the state had won that struggle decisively. For in every country, both Catholic and Protestant, the state controlled the Church lands, the monasteries, and the appointment of the clergy. With the strengthening of state power that these gains made possible, states could consolidate their territorial monopoly positions. Not only did they acquire monopolies over the use of force, as we so often point out, they attempted to acquire moral monopoly over allegiances, over values, and to make the state the ultimate arbiter and measure of the Good.

One of the benefits to be noted from this sorry affair is that the loss of papal states actually increased the true moral independence of the papacy, if not of the Church, more generally. The papal states had to be defended and this brought the papacy into the business of raising armies

and monies, all regarded as necessary for the independence of the Church, and the physical protection of the pope himself. Now, the pope occupies a postage stamp in the midst of the most turbulent republic in Western Europe. The person of the pope is protected by a handful of unarmed men in colorful costumes. The moral authority and independence of the papacy has never been stronger.

It is fair to say that idolatry of the

It is fair to say that idolatry of the State is a powerful force in modern times.

Many in our society assign to the State all the attributes of God: perfect goodness, perfect reason, perfect knowledge, and ultimately, omnipotence.

state is a powerful force in modern times. Many in our society assign to the state all the attributes of God: perfect goodness, perfect reason, perfect knowledge, and ultimately, omnipotence. The long term effect of this idolatry of the state has still not fully played itself out. I must say that I find this idolatry to be at the heart of the moral crisis of statism that so many of us deplore.

The person of religious sensibilities knows who the captain of the ship is; and he knows what he is expected to do, even though he may not always do it perfectly. The person whose soul is without a captain, is always subject to forcible boarding. This is a convenient arrangement for those who wish to have moral territorial monopoly, to complement their more physical monopolies. It may be for this reason that we observe a new solidarity among religious persons of all

persuasions. I have often noticed that observant Jews and practicing Christians have more in common with each other, than either has with the modern skeptic. Perhaps this is providential, for the segregation of the Jews was one of the black spots of the medieval world. Perhaps this new solidarity is a long overdue recognition that the worship of the One True God transcends every other difference. Perhaps we have been led to this recognition by the Original Invisible Hand, the one that led the Children of Israel out of captivity, and promised to be with us until the end of time.

Many formerly skeptical academics have begun to recognize the usefulness, if not the truthfulness, of many traditional religious values. Indeed, Don McCloskey ended his *American Scholar* article with a plea to intellectuals to stop scoffing at bourgeois Judeo-Christian virtues. I second his plea and add to it that we ought to stop scoffing at bourgeois religion as well. For the ordinary American continues to hold religious beliefs that inform his actions. These are the virtues that he brings with him, both to the market and to politics. The skeptical posture that most of modern academia assumes is not only out of tune with the reality of our society, but also undermines those who are trying their best, against all odds, to keep their promises, to behave decently, and to meet their familial obligations. We are all living on the moral capital accumulated through centuries of Judeo-Christian teaching and practice. **A**

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The Theme Is Freedom

A Review Essay by Charles E. Rice

M. Stanton Evans, former editor of *The Indianapolis News* and chairman of the *American Conservative Union*, is now director of the *National Journalism Center*, in Washington, D.C. His exposition here of the place of religion in American public life is a remarkable synthesis of history, sound philosophy and political judgment.

In the classic phrase of Fr. Francis Canavan, the great Fordham Jesuit, the present stage of Western culture can be described as “the fag end of the Enlightenment.” For three centuries, philosophers and politicians have tried to organize society as if God did not exist. They sought to govern man according to the Enlightenment premises of secularism, relativism and autonomous individualism. The result has been not an increase, but a contraction of freedom and an increasing subordination of the individual to the interests of the state which is liberated from any law higher than itself.

The author of this book takes issue with the basic notion of the liberal view of history which is “the supposed clash between religious precept and the practices of freedom.” In this liberal view “the idea that one can favor both religious belief and individual freedom [is] a hopeless contradiction.” On the contrary, Mr. Evans notes the “correlation of Christianity with the rise of freedom . . . Rather than finding political freedom rising in opposition to the religious values

of the West, we see exactly the reverse: ideas of personal liberty and free government emerging in Christian Europe; institutional development of such ideas in the Middle Ages; vigorous defense of

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M. Stanton Evans**

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these in England, on the basis of medieval doctrine; the translation of such ideas and institutions to America by a religious people, and the persistence of this connection in our life and thought long past the founding era. If religion is the enemy of freedom, how are these matters to be explained?” Interestingly, the author concludes that, “On net balance, it is fair to say, the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages was the institution in Western history that did the most to advance the cause of constitutional statecraft.”

Mr. Evans accurately notes that the assumptions of modern thought “converge into a central thesis: If belief in religious absolutes implies repression, it follows that denial of such absolutes will lead to freedom. A stance of moral relativism is accordingly viewed as the proper outlook for a free society.” However, “the repeated translation of relativ-

ist value theory to ideas of despotic statecraft, and the resemblance of all the totalitarian movements in this respect, are striking.” One reason why relativism is a foundation of totalitarianism is “the effect of relativist theory in *devaluing the individual*, in denying all grounds for considering the human person worthy of respect. This is the most terrible of the totalitarian doctrines, and it is grounded squarely on a denial of religious absolutes.” (Emphasis in original).

Mr. Evans’ analysis corresponds remarkably to the teachings of Pope John Paul II, especially in his 1993 encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*. The twentieth century has produced more proclamations of human rights than any century, and yet has also produced the greatest violations of those rights in history. John Paul explains why, in that the denial of objective truth by today’s jurisprudence reduces law to a function of raw, totalitarian power: “Totalitarianism arises out of a denial of truth in the objective sense. If there is no transcendent truth, in obedience to which man achieves his full identity, then there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people. Their self-interest as a class, group or nation would inevitably set them in opposition to one another. If one does not acknowledge transcendent truth, then the force of power takes over, and each person tends to make full use of the means at his disposal in order to impose his own

interests or his own opinion, with no regard for the rights of others. . . . [T]he root of modern totalitarianism is. . . the denial of the transcendent dignity of the human person who, as the visible image of the invisible God, is therefore by his very nature the subject of rights which no one may violate—no individual, group, class, nation or state.” (*Veritatis Splendor*, No. 99.)

As Mr. Evans correctly notes, “the transition from biblical to secularist belief is in fact a change from one religious system to the next.” “[P]agan cultures united religious and secular functions in the state, thereby precluding the idea of limits on its power, foreclosing the notion of any higher loyalty, denying refuge to the spirit.” The author describes the secular religions of the modern epoch as “actually a species of neopaganism.” Thus, the “worship of physical nature is glaringly evident in the chief political movement of the day—environmentalism.” In contrast, “[i]t was the religion and metaphysics of the Bible that overthrew the pagan state, then was subjected to a neopagan onslaught at the era of the Renaissance, redoubled by the French Enlightenment and its offspring. While the larger history is nowadays neglected, the religious-secular quarrels that we experience are in direct descent from this enduring conflict, dating from the remotest ages of society.”

The Supreme Court decisions under the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment purport to maintain governmental neutrality between theism and non-theism. The public school teacher, for example, can neither affirm nor deny the existence of God. But such suspension of judgment involves the implicit preference by the state of the agnostic creed of secular humanism. The supposed neutrality

of the state entails in fact an aggressive promotion of that secular creed especially in the area of morals. School children cannot be told that premarital sex is morally wrong. They cannot be allowed to

Recovery of our religious faith and its teachings should be our first and main concern. Without it, nothing much by way of practical improvement can be accomplished. With it, all the rest might readily be added

see the Ten Commandments on their classroom wall. But the secular religion requires that they be given condoms and instruction in how to use them. And they must be taught to be non-judgmental about the homosexual lifestyle and other manifestations of the new paganism. None of this is surprising. As G. K. Chesterton put it, “When you lose the supernatural, the natural passes into the unnatural all too quickly.”

Mr. Evans shows that constitutionalism arose, especially in the emerging United States from a spiritually grounded effort to impose and enforce limits on the power of the state. Moreover, the author makes the necessary and generally neglected connection between Christianity and economic freedom. The “biblical worldview” encouraged economic freedom because it imposed “effective boundaries on the power of the state. The result was, *eo ipso*, to give rise to market economics.”

Mainstream Republicans and Beltway conservatives, however, would confine today’s Republican

party strictly to an economic agenda. The “social issues” are divisive. However, if the Republicans follow the politics of inclusiveness on abortion and other moral issues, they will go the way of the Whigs who tried similarly to finesse the slavery issue. If an auto-destruction of the Republican Party makes way for a new party, that party will draw on the principles and conclusions ably advanced by Mr. Evans in this book. On the one hand, he says that, “anything which can decrease the power of the federal government should be encouraged.” But, more basically, he affirms that “we need, above all else, a reinfusion of religious precept in our national life and public custom.” “Recovery of our religious faith and its teachings should be our first and main concern. Without it, nothing much by way of practical improvement can be accomplished. With it, all the rest might readily be added.”

I have known the author of this book since before the Goldwater campaign. In numerous endeavors Stan Evans has demonstrated the steadiness of a vision well grounded in the realities of God and nature. He has inspired a generation of younger writers and his analyses stand up well under the test of time. This book, in my opinion, is his best work. He has gone to the foundation of the essentially religious war in which we are engaged. He is perceptive. He is erudite and most amazingly, he writes in readable English. If you have a relative or friend in the adult world, in college, or even in senior high school, give him or her this book. For that reader it will probably be a news flash — because it restates the truths we have forgotten to our detriment. **A**

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Economic Crime and the Necessity of Morality

Mark Elliot

At present an alarming crime wave is engulfing Russia and is threatening to spiral out of control. Professor Mikhail Gelvanovsky of Moscow's *Orthodox Charity Center of Social Protection* reflects a widespread fear when he points out, "In the past we had the Iron Curtain; now people need iron doors to protect themselves against the growing number of thieves." Three to five thousand gangs now control some 40,000 businesses. Post-Soviet organized crime is rapidly commandeering an entire nation's assets: factories, businesses, real estate, and exportable natural resources. Never before have criminal elements had such ready access to natural resources remotely approaching the wealth of a prostrate Russia. Investigative reporter Claire Sterling has noted, "There are fifty ways of saying 'to steal' in Russian, and the Russian Mafia uses them all." President Boris Yeltsin admits the problem is huge: "Organized crime has Russia by the throat, squeezing the life out of the fledgling private sector and holding the government itself hostage."

Prior to the fall of Communism many members of the Soviet intelligentsia came to regard the sickened

state of their own society as a product of lost faith and abandoned morals. In May 1986, writer Viktor Astafyev penned a corporate confession for a nation gone awry: "What happened to us? Who hurled us into the depths of misfortune, and why? Who extinguished the light of goodness in our soul? Who blew out the lamp of our conscience, toppled it into a dark, deep pit in which we are groping, trying to find the bottom?...[In the past] we lived with a light in our soul...so that we would not wander in the darkness,...scratch out each other's eyes, or break our neighbor's bones....They stole it from us and did not give anything in return, giving rise to unbelief, an all-encompassing unbelief....To whom should we pray? From whom should we ask for forgiveness?"

Viktor Astafyev is himself proof that honesty is not dead. It can be argued 1) that man, mired down as he is, has a moral sense; 2) that en-

Prior to the fall of Communism many members of the Soviet intelligentsia came to regard the sickened state of their society as a product of lost faith and abandoned morals.

couraging this moral understanding makes sense, even from a purely pragmatic point of view; and 3) that, accepting the above premises, there is hope for Russia.

Today, most anthropologists and philosophers deny the existence of moral absolutes, calling into question any rational basis for ethical judgments. According to philosopher Richard Rorty, "What counts as a decent human being is relative to historical circumstance, a matter of

transient consensus."

Challenging this academic consensus, political scientist James Q. Wilson argues for an innate, universal moral impulse. He maintains in *The Moral Sense*, no matter how frequently "selfish desires" may prevail over "moral capacities," "we are almost always able, in our calm and disinterested moments, to feel the tug of our better nature. In those moments we know the difference between being human and being inhuman." Alexander Solzhenitsyn made much the same point when he argued that the line between good and evil cannot be drawn through states, classes, or parties, "but right through every human heart."

A desperate Gorbachev told reporters in December 1989, the day before his historic meeting with Pope John Paul II, "We need spiritual values. The moral values which religion generated and embodied for centuries can help in the work of re-

newal in our country." Such utilitarian, crowd control arguments for faith and morality have emanated from pragmatic heads of state from time immemorial. Yet even if *politicos* employ religion and morality for their own self-serving ends, the predictable results of a better ordered and more humane society still accrue to the benefit of many.

But an enormous economic advantage follows as well. It is only logical, James Wilson explains, that

“Someone who can be counted on is likely to attract more opportunities for profitable transactions than is someone who, by his past waffling on commitments, seems a poor risk. Most economists understand the monetary value of investing in a good reputation.”

Even if we grant the existence of a moral sense and its necessity for an efficient and humane economy, of what value are such principles in a sea of Russian lawlessness and gangland greed? No one questions the enormity of the country’s present, crime-infested time of troubles. The debate, rather, centers on whether or not the situation is hopeless. The likelihood of Russia’s escape from the Mafia’s stranglehold and endemic bureaucratic corruption appears slim on paper. But there is, and there must be, hope, because humankind cannot live without it—whatever the empirical realities and prospects. To that end Russians need to 1) take heart in, and take further instruction from, the moral genius of their own rich literature, and 2) cherish and cultivate the scattered parcels of moral high ground that have survived both Marxist and Mafia depredations. Great works of Russian literature penned by Gogol, Dostoevsky, Leskov, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Pasternak, and Solzhenitsyn are replete with deep and profound moral reflection. Czech theologian Jacob Trojan’s entreaty for his countrymen applies equally for Russians: “we must pay careful attention to the sources for *our* moral and spiritual tradition.”

At an April, 1994 Wheaton College conference on economic crime in the former Soviet Union, two and a half days of bleak reporting prompted a question from the audience: “Could anything positive be said about Russia?” Berkeley’s Gregory Grossman and Duke’s Vladimir

Trembl both cited the family circle as a remaining harbor of civility and good intentions. One of the strengths of Hedrick Smith’s popular *entre* to the last years of Soviet life, *The Russians*, is his insightful treatment of the dichotomy between the exasperating, cold, officious public face, and the very loving, honorable, and winsome private self, proffered only to family and a few intimate friends. But bluntly put, what bearing does the survival of a modicum of private decency have to do with the prospects for a rational market economy in the former Soviet Union?

At the Wheaton conference Harvard economist Marshall Goldman referred to a minimalist solution—an option at least for Western businesses—that is, to get out, to go somewhere else where the graft and violence are less endemic. On the other hand, the maximalist option of succumbing to the Mafia and bureaucratic malfeasance is much in evidence, even if its repugnance is a given. Perhaps a middle ground somewhere between business flight and business surrender might be carved out, a middle ground that would take as a starting point Grossman’s, Trembl’s, and Smith’s family circle. The concept is not the diplomats’ “spheres of influence,” but rather, proposed “spheres of integrity.” In March 1994 ethically sensitive entrepreneurs from Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania met for a business ethics seminar near Bratislava to wrestle with their moral dilemma. They already had expanded their sphere of honest dealings beyond their family and half-dozen close friends to include a fairly substantial *coterie* of business associates. Their goal was to expand these modest spheres of ethical business relationships over years or even decades. It also was their means of coping with the agonizing predicament

of trying simultaneously to preserve a conscience and a profit.

When all is said and done, Russia’s institutions cannot be expected to be any more humane, equitable, and free of vice than are its citizens

Only time will tell if Russia can heal its wounds. Moscow reporter Alexander Kan figures his “only hope is remembering that Chicago of the 1920s didn’t last forever.” Father Alexander Borisov of Moscow’s Orthodox parish of Saints Cosmas and Damian prefers an older and more sacred analogy as he likens Russia’s present disorientation to that of the Jews in the Old Testament Exodus. Just as the Hebrew children, after their liberation from Egyptian bondage, sojourned forty years in the wilderness, likewise Russia may require forty years to produce a generation born free, which does not, like the ancient Hebrews, “look back with nostalgia to the security of slavery.” Lothar de Maiziere, East Germany’s first and last non-Communist prime minister, recently used the exact same analogy to explain “the psychological gap between Eastern and Western Germany” that could endure “until the last person born under Communism passes away.”

In the interim, what Russia needs, if it is ever to realize a just social order, is the rule of law and a civil society. To capitalize on the country’s human potential, citizens and foreign investors need to be able to count on a legal system that is predictable and impartial. For economic reform to succeed it has to have re

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Civil Religion and Political Theology

A Review Essay By Luis E. Lugo

Civil Religion And Political Theology, Edited by Leroy S. Rouser, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 1994 pp.228 Cloth \$29.95

What role should Christianity play in the life of the *polis*? This question has engaged Christian thinkers for two millennia and, judging from this volume, we are no closer to agreement now than we were at the time of the early Church fathers. The contributors to this recently reissued collection of essays, which is comprised of lectures delivered in the mid-1980s at *Boston University's Institute for Philosophy and Religion*, all wish to affirm the relevance of Christian faith to public life, but they differ markedly in how they understand this relationship. The editor casts the discussion in terms of two main approaches: civil religion and political theology. The most interesting contributions, however, are those that question the adequacy of these alternatives and point the reader in a different direction.

If, as it is said, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then Part III of this book should discourage anyone with the slightest inclina-

tion to sample any of the popular brands of political theologies. Grouped under the title, "The practice of Political Theology," the essays try to enlist our sympathies for a wide assortment of victims of imperialist, sexist, racist, and ecological oppression. The Christian Church — no less than Western societies — comes in for some rather harsh prophetic denunciations in this section, whose heroes invariably are dissenting elements within the tradition, including, for example, egalitarian schismatics who challenged the patriarchal order which the likes of Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine foisted on the Church in North Africa.

The one explicitly economic piece, while putting in some kind words for Michael Novak and making some interesting points along the way, is bereft of any rigorous economic analysis and settles instead for vague appeals for a Christian economy that is neither capitalist nor socialist, and for a global economy that is environmentally friendly. The only thing of which the author is empirically certain is that we are running out of resources and the biosphere cannot accept the increased punishment which Third World industrialization inflicts upon it.

Contributors to this concluding section would have benefited greatly from careful reflection on the essay by Jürgen Moltmann which appears in the first part of the volume. If Moltmann is sympathetic to the new political theology, he is also very aware of its limitations and dangers. He lived, after all, through the first wave of German political theology in which Christianity was coopted into the service of the Third Reich and became thoroughly politicized in the process. His is a cautionary tale of the dangers to Christian faith of political captivity by ideological programs. Perhaps that is why much more so than the others he is clear about his own identity as a Christian theologian. As he states at the outset: "The ecumenical solidarity of the Christian church is for me higher than national loyalty or cultural, class, or racial associations."

The historical pitfalls which have attended the mixing of religion and politics is one of the reasons why many have sought a language for the public square that transcends religious categories. In a fascinating essay, included in Part I, Yaron Ezrahi shows how Western liberal democracies originally had recourse to the language of rationality and science in order to moderate public discourse and encourage political compromise.

The problem, as he points out, is that this discourse rested on certain classical concepts of truth and reality which are fast giving way to a subjectivism that completely collapses the distinction between fact and opinion. The result is what he calls a "crisis in civil epistemology."

Regular readers of the *New York Times* and other prestige

press will no doubt share Ezrahi's skepticism concerning the claim that journalism, which some look to as the contemporary embodiment of the scientific realist ideal, is a worthy inheritor of the tradition. Faced with his rather pessimistic conclusions, one is left wondering whether Ezrahi has considered the relevance of the natural law tradition, including its Jewish variant, for the epistemological di-

His major contention is that the common religious base is no longer operative and that a new synthesis is necessary if we are to resist successfully the drift toward a thoroughgoing secularism in contemporary public life.

lemma of public discourse.

Does American civil religion perhaps provide a better way? Part II of the volume moves from general philosophical and theological themes to tackle this question head on. Robert Bellah helpfully revisits his now-famous treatment of the topic in the context of reviewing the work of other major writers, including Dewey, Lippmann, and Niebuhr. It is left to Rouner to defend the view that American civil religion is an essential common bond which evokes people's loyalty and provides them with a sense of being at home in a diverse, democratic society. As John Wilson's essay perceptively points out, however, this American civil religion far from being truly pluralistic was as a matter of fact nurtured by a Protestant consensus which served as a *de facto* common religion. His

major contention is that this common religious base is no longer operative and that a new synthesis is necessary if we are to resist successfully the drift toward a thoroughgoing secularism in contemporary public life.

All of which brings us to Richard Neuhaus's suggestion that we move beyond a discussion of civil religion and attempt to articulate a public philosophy that can serve as the basis for the American democratic experiment. Though careful to distinguish it from religion, civil or otherwise, Neuhaus clearly affirms the need for this public philosophy to be attuned to the religious character of the American people. Only thus, he argues, will we be able to avoid the twin dangers of religious warfare and, its opposite, the naked public square. He maintains that such a self-consciously modest public philosophy can succeed in retaining the moral sense of politics in the context of a religiously pluralistic culture. Neuhaus explicitly appeals in his essay to the tradition of natural law as providing precisely the kind of mediating language which Ezrahi finds so valuable. Though he fails to clarify precisely how our political institutions should attempt to accommodate this religious diversity in a just legal-constitutional framework, Neuhaus at least sets the stage by insisting that we stop speaking of "the people" or "the public" as though it were a singular, undifferentiated whole rather than the religiously and institutionally plural reality which it in fact is. A

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liable contracts, secure property rights, and a justice system capable of defending both. In turn, the indispensable foundation for a rule of law is a society with the moral scruples to appreciate it and abide by it. In addition, Russia needs the benefit of civil society with its thousands of private initiatives for human betterment replacing the ingrained tsarist and Communist assumption that the state will or should tend to everything of consequence.

When all is said and done, Russia's institutions cannot be expected to be any more humane, equitable, and free of vice than are its citizens. Human rights activist and Russian Orthodox priest, Father Georgi Edelstein, speaking at the Wheaton conference on economic crime, made that point clear.

In the wake of Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's failed *perestroika*, and in the face of rampant criminality, the only form of restructuring that is capable of sparing Russia additional incalculable grief ahead, he argued, is a *perestroika* of the human heart. May it be so. A

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Hidden Politics: Progressive Nonprofits Target the States

Thomas J. DiLorenzo
Capital Research Center, 1993.
78 pp. Paper: \$20.00

Readers of these pages will be well aware of the Acton Institute's involvement with the welfare reform debate, and that this debate is closely tied to the nature of private charity. In this book, Mr. DiLorenzo examines leftward-leaning non-profits and discovers that their strategy is based on obtaining money from private citizens through state power. He notes that, far from stimulating individual creativity and diversity in addressing social problems, it is essentially a recipe for social and economic statism. He concludes that this agenda poses a threat to the very notion of private charity, being yet another attempt to politicize charity, to abandon age-old notions of direct assistance to deserving men and women, and to instead adopt political advocacy.

Godly Materialism: Rethinking Money & Possessions

John Schneider
InterVarsity Press, 1994.
215 pp. Paper: \$16.95

This highly accessible book is the product of professor Schneider's long reflection on the nature of wealth and affluence, prompted by his students' guilt about their middle-class backgrounds. He argues simply, yet completely, that there is indeed scriptural, theological, and moral support for the responsible Christian possession of wealth. He ultimately concludes that America's economic and political institutions at root embrace an understanding of human liberty and happiness compatible with scripture by honoring, both materially and morally, the dignity of mankind.

The Parting of Friends: The Wilberforces and Henry Manning

David Newsome
William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.
486 pp. Cloth: \$29.99

The Oxford Movement has continued to fascinate Evangelicals and Catholics alike, but so many books have dealt with it that another would seem unnecessary. This work stands apart, however, due to Professor Newsome's access to the private papers and correspondence of the Manning and Wilberforce families. An account of four of this movement's leading personalities — Henry Manning and his three brothers-in-law, Samuel, Robert and Henry Wilberforce (sons of the leading social reformer William Wilberforce) - it traces the history of their relationship from early optimism to tragic dissolution due to personal and ecclesiastical differences. In addition to giving us a glimpse of the religious turmoil of the Victorian era, this book also presents interesting details about early Victorian domestic life. A well researched work of historical scholarship, this excellent book is also a fascinating study of four remarkable men.

One by One from the Inside Out

Glenn C. Loury
The Free Press, 1995
332 pp. Cloth: \$25.00

"We Americans remain a nation struggling to confront intractable problems of race" says Professor Loury, and is a fair summary of this excellent collection of his essays and reviews. Historically, there have been two approaches to this problem of race in America, aligned with two individuals: Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois. The former

promoted a policy of self-improvement, the latter a program of political agitation. Professor Loury notes that the primary approach in this past century has been that of Du Bois, but it may now be insufficient. He argues throughout this book that the enjoyment of rights is conditional on the performance of duty; the problems that blacks face today are therefore best countered through individual initiative. The primary condition with which blacks need to deal is the human condition. This is an insight that bears reflection given that deliberations on race will be in the public spotlight more than ever in these coming campaign months.

God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy

M. Douglas Meeks
Fortress Press, 1989
257 pp. Paper: \$14.00

Mr. Meeks has given us a dense application of the language of theology to the discipline of economics, a book by no means for the casual reader or the popular audience. Its main thesis is that in order to come to a more Christian view of political economy, we must regain, and to a certain extent reconceptualize, our idea of God along the lines of an economist. It is in the end highly critical of the classical liberal tradition and free market theory, and although these criticisms are on one level very common, they are argued systematically and comprehensively. As such this book is useful in understanding the full conversation about the interrelationship between economics and faith that we find ourselves in today. A

—Gregory Dunn

Is Welfare Compassionate?

Many of our current economic problems have their roots in the moral crisis of our day. In these times of moral turmoil many have mistakenly equivocated government sponsored welfare with the virtue of compassion. Compassion is an adjective frequently used to describe state supported social programs. The question needs to be raised: Is State welfare truly compassionate? Are we really serving the human needs of the people with state handouts?

The theory behind today's welfare state is that people need material provision. Without denying the fundamental importance of material provision, we cannot forget other aspects of human life.

In our minds we have reduced all giving to material giving. One result of this materialism is our belief that the more money we allocate for specific programs the more compassionate and person-centered we are as a nation. What we fail to see is that material provision apart from spiritual values is insufficient, empty and not truly compassionate.

For example, if faced with a single woman with children who is experiencing severe financial difficulty, is it right and truly person-centered for our collective response to be sending her to an impersonal government building, having her stand in line, fill-out forms in triplicate and then wait for the processing of a check? Does anyone in this process address the woman's fear? Has any one really reached out to her? Where is the broader concern for her family's *genuine welfare*? Giving her a check and sending her on her way is not a humane response. Compassion literally means to share in someone's passion, to stand with someone in their time of crisis. Are we really

standing with this woman who needs more than our dollars?

More often than not there is a deeper story to someone's economic difficulties. Economic poverty is often accompanied by other forms of deprivation. Is this woman experiencing economic hardship due to a recent divorce? Does she have an adequate education and/or job skills? Does she have anyone other than a civil service clerk behind a government counter to stand with her in her difficulty?

Large government agencies are neither necessary nor sufficient for the exercise of human compassion. Neither is it plausible to say that

Compassion literally means to share in someone's passion, to stand with them in their time of crisis.

the obligation to Christian charity is fulfilled by having the central government administer a welfare state costing \$350 billion per year. Real charity must reflect the di-

versity of the needy. Congressional committees and sprawling offices are not capable of adequately meeting the human needs of real people experiencing poverty.

True compassion requires the formation of private charities that can provide assistance to individuals right in their own communities. Smaller, less bureaucratic initiatives stand a better chance of personalizing the aid given. Such groups would not be limited to merely issuing checks but could tailor their efforts to individual cases. The American people's charitable impulses are a firmer foundation for compassion than the federal government's incompetence and expense.^A

Rev. Robert A. Sirico, C.S.P., is President of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty.

“Of all the dispositions and habits
which lead to a political prosperity,
religion and morality are
indispensible supports. In vain
would that man claim the tribute of
Patriotism, who should labour to
subvert these great pillars of human
happiness...”

—George Washington

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