An Austro-Libertarian View, Vol. III
An Austro-Libertarian View

ESSAYS BY DAVID GORDON

VOLUME III
CURRENT AFFAIRS • FOREIGN POLICY
AMERICAN HISTORY • EUROPEAN HISTORY

Mises Institute
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RALPH RAICO, the great European historian who passed away this year, once said: “Who needs the Library of Congress when you have David Gordon?”

As the founder of the Mises Institute, I’ve had the good fortune to meet quite a few extraordinary minds over the course of many years. Yet David Gordon is unique. In fact, I’d go so far as to say that one of the great pleasures of my life with the Institute these past 35 years has been the opportunity to give David a platform and an outlet for his considerable (and important) output.

It’s not simply that the depth and breadth of David’s knowledge are so astonishing, though indeed they are: David is profoundly learned in history, economics, philosophy, and related fields, and can effortlessly summarize the scholarly literature on even the most abstruse debates within obscure corners of numerous disciplines.

It’s also that his mind seems capable of feats that are denied to the rest of us. After speaking about Ludwig von Mises’s discussion of Rome in *Human Action* at our annual Mises University summer instructional event in July, David (who always lectures without notes) casually added, “If you have the scholar’s edition, it’s around page 762.”

That’s typical David.

You can imagine what his book reviews are like. His vast knowledge equips him to ferret out errors big and small. His agile mind detects weaknesses and fallacies that escape other reviewers. Even books David likes rarely escape without the exposure of a minor error or two. Of course, a good review from David is especially meaningful: if someone of David’s learning and intellect thinks you’ve made a valuable contribution, you surely have.
Who even knows how many book manuscripts David has received over the years, from authors hoping he might discover their errors before the book review stage? And David, as a kind and generous a scholar as anyone could ask for, has in so many cases gladly obliged.

So you can see why David’s book reviews are worth collecting, studying, and cherishing, and therefore why we chose to highlight them in this form.

In fact, all the way back in 1979, Murray N. Rothbard was already marveling at David’s extraordinary intellect, the likes of which he had never before encountered:

I have been in the scholarly world for a long time, and it is my considered opinion that you are a universal genius unequalled in my experience. . . . The only flaw in your makeup is that you don’t seem to have the slightest idea of what a genius you are. The fact that your talents have so far gone unrecognized and untapped is a horrible waste and injustice, and Ron Hamowy and I are embarking on a personal crusade to do something about it.

With that endorsement, you have a taste of the treat that awaits you in the pages that follow.

LLEWELLYN H. ROCKWELL, JR.
AUBURN, ALABAMA
JULY 2017
Shortly after Murray Rothbard’s lamented death in January, 1995, Lew Rockwell telephoned me. He asked me to write a book review journal for the Mises Institute, covering new books in philosophy, history, politics, and economics. Moreover, he wanted the first issue in one month. I managed to meet the deadline and continued to write the journal for a number of years. Articles from The Mises Review form the bulk of the material included in these volumes; but a few reviews from other sources are here as well.

My thinking tends to develop in reaction to what others have said; and this, I suppose, is why I have written so many reviews. If there is any original thought to be found in these books, it lies in the analysis of the arguments that various authors have put forward. To come up with a valid argument using sound premises is a difficult task, and I fear that many authors have underestimated its challenge.

For this reason, many of my reviews are critical, but I owe readers a word of explanation. As a humorous way to attract attention, I sometimes deliberately adopted a ferocious tone of voice. This has had its own “unintended consequences” and now there is no going back. To me, the greatest of all critical reviewers was the philosophical scholar A.E. Taylor, and it is his reviews, written in Mind and other journals, that I have adopted as models, though I am always conscious of how far I am below his standards.

Ever since I first read Man, Economy, and State in 1962, I have been a convinced Rothbardian, and it is from this standpoint that I have written my articles. The articles in these volumes appear as written, aside from minor corrections.

I am most grateful to Lew Rockwell, for support for my work extending over many years, and to my friends and colleagues at the Mises Institute,
including Pat Barnett, Jeff Deist, Peter Klein, Joe Salerno, Mark Thornton, Judy Thommesen, and Hunter Lewis. I am most of all grateful to my parents, to whom I owe so much.

David Gordon
Senior Fellow,
Ludwig von Mises Institute
Current Affairs
A Propensity to Self-Subversion*

ALBERT HIRSCHMAN

Tea for One

December 1, 1996, Mises Review

ALBERT HIRSCHMAN is hard to pin down. No sooner does he offer a theory than he thinks of a qualification to it. He has achieved great fame for his portrayal of “exit” and “voice” as competing forces; but in the present work he tells us they can act together. How does one review someone with a “propensity to self-subversion”?

Fortunately, a solid anchor awaits our grasp. Hirschman, though not a Marxist, has a deep aversion to free-market capitalism. From his teenage years, his intermittently charming memoirs reveal, he has been involved with socialist parties and causes.

But in his desire to criticize the free market, he faces a dilemma. He resolutely opposes large-scale theories and has a well-deserved reputation as an institutionalist. It would go thoroughly against the grain for him to address directly, say, the socialist calculation argument of Mises and Hayek: What then is he to do?

In fairness to our author, he does not at all accept that he is anti-theoretical. He states:

I bristle a bit when I am pigeonholed as “atheoretical” or “anti-theoretical” or even as “institutional” and cannot wholly agree when I am portrayed... as someone who is primarily interested

in noticing and underlining what more systematic minded (theoretical) economists or social scientists have overlooked. (p. 87, footnote number omitted)

But, whatever he thinks, he is anti-theoretical and our question demands an answer: how do you attack the free market if you avoid theory?

Hirschman gives his answer in “The Rhetoric of Reaction Two Years Later.” Instead of a response to free market arguments, he offered in his earlier book, and here reaffirms, an elaborate classification of types of argument advanced against “progressive” measures. Conservatives claim that leftist proposals will fail to achieve the ends their proponents intend: to the contrary, they will have perverse effects. Another response claims that the leftist measures are futile: e.g., schemes aimed at helping the poor in fact principally benefit the rich and middle classes. Again, conservatives contend that new reform measures expose past gains, e.g., in liberty, to danger (the “jeopardy thesis”).

It is not clear why Hirschman thinks that this classification somehow tells against the foes of “progress”; but I do not presume to plumb the depths of his capacious intellect. Suffice it to say that the main point of Hirschman’s polemic is that these arguments have been used again and again. If conservatives always trot them out, must we not suspect that the arguments are not altogether advanced in the cause of truth?

Even if Hirschman’s account of the “rhetoric of reaction” were entirely accurate, nothing would follow about the soundness of particular arguments advanced against the left. As he himself admits:

As critics of my book have not failed to remark, the mere finding that reform proposals have indeed been attacked with the help of one (or several) of my typical “rhetorical” arguments by no means constitutes in and of itself a refutation of what is being argued. (p. 50)

Is it not amazing that a scholar of Hirschman’s eminence needed to have critics point this out to him?

But what of the rhetorical analysis, taken on its own terms? Here our verdict must without question be negative. According to the perversity thesis, reformers mean well but their proposals have opposite effects to what they want. As a prime example, Hirschman in his earlier book cited Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790).
But he completely misinterpreted the book. Burke did not claim, as the perversity thesis would have it, that the French Revolution achieved the opposite of the good ideas its founders wanted. Quite the contrary, as a glance at the book’s publication date should have told Hirschman, Burke opposed the Revolution from the first. He did not condemn it for failure to achieve its initial goals: he thought those goals destructive and believed the Revolution had achieved them.

The error about Burke illustrates a more general failing of Hirschman’s treatment. He ignores another “rhetorical strategy” of free-market advocates and conservatives, the contention that leftist measures are immoral. To deal with this view, Hirschman would have to engage in argument instead of classification: and this is not his style.

The whole “rhetorical analysis” is peculiar in the extreme. His three theses, perversity, futility, and jeopardy, are all cases in which conservatives allege that measures they oppose will not achieve their ends. But, unless you argue that the aims of a proposal are flawed, that is virtually the only way you can oppose it. Almost any argument opposed to any proposal will take this form, so long as the aims of the proposal themselves are not subject to attack. Hirschman, against his initial plan, devoted the last chapter of *The Rhetoric of Reaction* to an analysis of certain leftist rhetoric, leaving some of his critics confounded. But they should not have been. Hirschman has merely come up with a scheme of classification that applies everywhere.

As one roams more widely in the book, the same pattern appears: Hirschman substitutes classification and historical description for analysis. A good example occurs in the book’s third part, “New Forays” (the book’s first part, which includes the Rhetoric of Reaction essay, discusses modifications Hirschman has made to various of his conjectures; the second part is autobiographical).

Several of the essays in “New Forays” address economic development, one of Hirschman’s main areas of concentration. He has in his long career vigorously supported state directed industrialization in various Latin American countries. How does he respond to the obvious objection that these measures interfere with the international division of labor?

In this way: “[T]he international neoclassical establishment castigated ‘inward-oriented’ industrial development for causing misallocation of resources, balance-of-payments problems, and ‘rent-seeking’” (p. 164). A good beginning: our author has stated tersely the standard criticisms.
Unless one is already familiar with Hirschman’s modus operandi, one might expect him next to reply to these criticisms.

Of course he does not do so: that would demand argument. Far better a conjecture: “No one [our author is too modest] asked whether the assorted problems of import-substituting industrialization were conceivably growing pains that might be overcome in due course by adroit, incremental policy-making” (p. 164). Instead of a theory, Hirschman gives us a metaphor supported by a tendentious narrative.

One must, however, give Hirschman credit. Like J. K. Galbraith, he has shown that an economist who spurns theory can do very well for himself. Hirschman has accumulated a remarkable number of honorary degrees and awards, a fact he is ever at pains to remind us. His book might better have been called A Propensity to Self-Celebration.
“Social Security and Its Discontents”*

JEFF MADRICK

The Ultimate Bailout

April 1, 1997, Mises Review

JEFF MADRICK, an economic journalist of statist bent, shows us the mind of a true leftist at work. He begins by pooh-poohing the alarmists who predict a crisis for Social Security. True enough, by the year 2020, the system will owe “$200 to $300 billion a year” in benefits more than it raises in taxes (p. 68). In part, the difficulty arises because the federal government has spent funds from the misnamed “trust fund.”

Why is this not a crisis? According to Madrick, a “modest increase” in Social Security taxes now could prevent the impending shortfall in funds. But, he admits, “Washington would likely squander” the increase in the trust fund that higher taxes would bring (p. 69). He suggests instead that the government invest part of the trust fund in common stocks instead of Treasury bonds. Madrick’s “logic” arouses interest: since the government has squandered the trust fund, we might as well give it a stranglehold on the stock market as well. One suspects that what Madrick calls “moderate plans” are modest proposals in the sense of Jonathan Swift.

Having shown to his own satisfaction that the “crisis” can be solved, Madrick himself admits that a further aspect of the problem stumps him. If the

deficit in Medicare is taken together with that of Social Security, things do not look bright.

Social Security and Medicare could absorb more than 12 percent of the nation's GDP in 2020 and more than 15 percent in 2040... taxes would have to rise to 25 percent to 30 percent of wages to fund both programs unless changes are made. (p. 69)

Here then is how to defuse a crisis. Propose a solution; when you admit that it faces a fatal difficulty, toss up another; continue the remedy as necessary. Our author unfortunately forgets that you must not end up with one more problem than solutions.

And why go through the trouble? Isn’t Social Security a poor “investment” for those not now of retirement age? Madrick admits that those “who retire today or in the future will receive an average return [on their contributions] of perhaps only a couple of percentage points. Higher-paid workers may well get back less than they contribute” (p. 70). Why raise taxes and turn the economy over to the government for such meager results?

But this misses the point, Madrick informs us. The Social Security program “was never originally designed to give workers the highest possible return on their invested payments” (p. 70). Quite the contrary, it aims at redistribution of income.

Why then include nearly everyone in the program? Need one ask? It is to gain political support for it. If the redistributive aims were openly avowed, the American people might be unwilling to tender the degree of support our Washington masters think required. “The unspoken appeal of privatization [of Social Security and Medicare] may well be that it allows the middle class to reduce its commitment to help those who are less fortunate” (p. 72).

Look at the “hardship” inflicted on hundreds of thousands of children, Madrick laments, by cuts in daycare programs. Who can doubt that the American public is too “callous” to be left to its own devices? “If day care or early educational programs were available to 90 percent of all American children... they would be far less likely to lose political support” (p. 72).

Plainly put, Madrick thinks that people are too stupid to notice that they are supporting more redistribution than they wish, if they are tossed a few crumbs. And why worry about cost? As Mr. Micawber said, “something will turn up.”
Richard Rorty is a distinguished analytic philosopher, but you would never know it from this vulgar screed. Our author makes clear the basic assumptions of “infantile leftism,” in Lenin’s phrase, in a way that hardly stops short of self-parody.

The foundation for a sound American politics, Rorty claims, is atheism. Even non-religious readers will gasp in astonishment at Rorty’s assertion: is not freedom of religion guaranteed by the First Amendment? How then can Rorty wish to rest American politics on a sectarian view of religion, one moreover abhorrent to the vast majority of Americans?

For Rorty, the answer to our queries lies in the thought of two of his heroes: Walt Whitman and John Dewey. These two febrile intellectuals realized that politics must rest on vision. Absent popular enthusiasm, we shall lack the will required to implement leftist reforms, in the face of reactionary opposition from the “haves.” And to attain the required dose of zeal, Americans must abandon belief in a “higher” realm beyond the political.

Whitman and Dewey were among the prophets of this [American] civic religion. They offered a new account of what America

was, in the hope of mobilizing Americans as political agents. The most striking feature of their redescription of our country is its thoroughgoing secularism. . . . Dewey and Whitman wanted Americans to continue to think of themselves as exceptional, but both wanted to drop any reference to divine favor or wrath. (p. 15)

Suppose that Rorty is right—and he may well be—that enthusiasm for his pet political crusades comports better with secularism than with religion. Does not Rorty face a formidable task? He must now show that secularism is correct. What new arguments will our latter-day Hume deploy against those who seek solace in the eternal?

But to await atheistical arguments from Rorty is completely to misunderstand his project. The request for arguments showing the falsity of religion rests on an assumption—there is truth to be had about religion, apart from what people believe.

But surely, you may think, this “assumption” is too banal to be worth stating. Is it not a matter of fact whether God exists, just as it is a matter of fact, not up to us, whether neutrinos or Julius Caesar exists? What could be more obvious?

If you think so, I fear that you are not an apt candidate for initiation into the mysteries of postmodernism. Rorty denies that there is a matter of fact about God, or, so far as I can tell, anything else. There is no sense in asking for “the way the world is” independent of human decisions.

Thus, he writes:

Antiauthoritarianism is the motive behind Dewey’s opposition to Platonic and theocentric metaphysics, and behind his more original and far more controversial opposition to the correspondence theory of truth: the idea that truth is a matter of accurate representation of an antecedently existing reality. For Dewey, the idea that there was a reality “out there” with an intrinsic nature to be respected and corresponded to . . . was a relic of Platonic other-worldliness. (p. 29)

Here precisely is where our author nears self-parody. Can he really expect us to take seriously the notion that we decide, rather than find out, e.g., whether the New Deal led to prosperity? If you are so benighted as to believe in God, why need this entail commitment to Platonism? By the way, how do Dewey
and Rorty know that Plato’s philosophy is false? They offer no arguments, but merely sneer at the aristocratic, “spectatorial” point of view which they allege Platonism embodies. Does Rorty regard his own account of truth as true, in some other sense than as a doctrine that appeals to him? You must not ask such things: to do so marks you as not an up-to-date pragmatist.

If ordinary, factual truth is out, you can imagine what happens to ethics. “The trouble with Europe, Whitman and Dewey thought, was that it tried too hard for knowledge: it tried to find an answer to the question of what human beings should be like” (p. 23). Again, ethical truth is a matter for decision, not apprehension. Oddly, he thinks that John Stuart Mill favored this view; in support, Rorty appeals to Mill’s stress on the need for diverse experiments in living. But Mill thought these desirable because they led to truth about what really does promote happiness. Rorty has forgotten, one hopes temporarily, that Mill professed utilitarianism of a firmly cognitivist sort.

Suppose we grant Rorty his freewheeling view: ethics depends entirely on human decisions. What happens when people disagree? Our author is quick to provide an answer:

Insofar as human beings do not share the same needs, they may disagree about what is objectively the case. But the resolution of such disagreement cannot be an appeal to the way reality, apart from any human need, really is. The resolution can only be political: one must use democratic institutions and procedures to conciliate these various needs, and thereby widen the range of consensus about how things are. (p. 35)

And what if you prefer not to widen the range of consensus, but rather to impose your will on those who do not share your insights? Is that not a decision also?

After clearing the decks of truth, in matters of fact and ethics, what is it that Rorty wishes to do? What are the wondrous political projects that followers of Whitman and Dewey must undertake? Our author has surprisingly little to offer in response. On one matter, however, he is clear: leftists must unite against horrid reactionaries. In an incredible passage, he tells us:

A hundred years from now, Howe and Galbraith, Harrington and Schlesinger, Wilson and Debs, Jane Addams and Angela Davis . . . will all be remembered for having advanced the cause
of social justice. They will all be seen as having been “on the Left.” The difference between these people and men like Calvin Coolidge, Irving Babbitt, T. S. Eliot, Robert Taft, and William Buckley will be far clearer than any of the quarrels which once divided them among themselves. Whatever mistakes they made, these people will deserve, as Coolidge and Buckley never will, the praise with which Jonathan Swift ended his own epitaph: “Imitate him if you can; he served human liberty.” (p. 45)

When I read these lines, I was tempted, in spite of Wittgenstein’s dictum, to examine another copy of Achieving Our Country to see whether Rorty really wrote this imbecilic passage. May I ask my readers to have another look at the quotation? What Rorty is saying is that Angela Davis—a longtime member of the Communist Party, USA, and once tried as an accessory to murder—is to be preferred as someone who served human liberty, to one of the greatest poets of our century. (In fairness to Miss Davis, I should add that she was acquitted, in an O. J. Simpson-style verdict, of smuggling guns to her boyfriend at Soday. Ah, these servants of liberty have a way about them!)

Given this display of Rorty’s large-minded humanism, it is perhaps fortunate that he does not favor us with a detailed account of his plans. But he does let us in on a few details. Surprisingly, the cultural left does not win Rorty’s complete approval.

True enough, he says, we owe the cultural left a great deal.

The tone in which educated men talk about women, and educated whites about blacks, is very different from what it was before the Sixties. Life for homosexual Americans, beleaguered and dangerous as it still is, [!], is better than it was before Stonewall. . . . This change is largely due to the hundreds of thousands of teachers who have done their best to make their students understand the humiliation which previous generations of Americans have inflicted on their fellow citizens . . . by assigning stories about the suicide of gay teenagers in freshman composition courses, these teachers have made it harder for their students to be sadistic than it was for those students’ parents. (p. 81)

By now, readers will be accustomed to Rorty’s technique. He offers no discussion of what policies toward minorities are ethically appropriate. The quest
for criteria of proper treatment is of course futile—what is important is what “we leftists” find pleasing. Hence the crucial importance for Rorty of language reform: if we redescribe something, we have by that very fact changed it. No underlying reality apart from linguistic practice will sully our fantasies.

Given this aestheticized approach to politics, it is ironic that, in a *volte-face*, Rorty indicts the cultural left for ignorance of the real world of politics and economics. In their stress on cultural studies, postmodern leftists ignore the importance of labor unions. Oh, for the glory days of the Wagner Act!

When the Taft-Hartley Labor Act was passed in 1947 I could not understand how my country could have forgotten what it owed the unions, how it could fail to see that the unions had prevented America from becoming the property of the rich and greedy. (p. 60)

One can only echo the medieval scholastics: *puerilia sunt haec.*
The Roots of Rothbard

December 1, 2000, Mises Review

This indispensable selection of articles that Murray Rothbard wrote for the Rothbard-Rockwell Report contains the most insightful comment on foreign policy I have ever read. In a few paragraphs, Rothbard destroys the prevailing doctrine of twentieth-century American foreign policy.

According to the Accepted Picture, totalitarian powers twice threatened America during the past sixty years. Germany, under the maniacal leadership of Hitler, aimed at world conquest. When the United States and her allies succeeded in halting the Nazis, a new menace demanded attention.

The Soviet Union, a militantly expansionist state, had to be contained during the protracted Cold War. At various times throughout the Cold War, and continuing after it to the present, hostile and aggressive dictators presented America with problems. Saddam Hussein ranks perhaps as the most notorious of these tyrants.

* Center for Libertarian Studies, 2000.
The Accepted Picture draws a lesson from all these events. An aggressive power, almost always led by a dictator, must be dealt with as one would handle a neighborhood bully. Only firm demands to the dictator can stave off war.

Since bullies generally are cowards, dictators will back down if directly challenged. The Munich Conference, September 29–30, 1938, perfectly illustrates how not to handle a dictator. Britain and France appeased Hitler; the result was war one year later. Had Britain and France acted when Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland in 1936, the Nazis could have been overthrown virtually without cost.

Rothbard at once locates the fallacy in this oft-repeated line of thought.

Answer me this, war hawks: when, in history when, did one State, faced with belligerent, ultra-tough ultimatums by another, when did that State ever give up and in effect surrender—before any war was fought? When? (p. 170)

Rothbard’s rhetorical question rests upon a simple point of psychology. The supposed “bully” cannot surrender to an ultimatum lest he be overthrown. “No head of State with any pride or self-respect, or who wishes to keep the respect of his citizens, will surrender to such an ultimatum” (p. 170).

The Gulf War perfectly illustrates Rothbard’s contention. Faced with an overwhelming show of force, Saddam Hussein did not back down. Rothbard’s apt generalization explains Saddam’s seemingly irrational response.

But have we not forgotten something? What about World War II? Does not the failure to confront Hitler over Czechoslovakia in 1938 prove conclusively the thesis of the anti-appeasers?

Our author’s response illustrates his ability to counter an opposing argument at its strongest point.

Neither was World War II in Europe a case where toughness worked. On the contrary, Hitler disregarded the English guarantee to Poland that brought England and France into the German-Polish war in September 1939. (p. 170)

A belligerent foreign policy, then, will most likely lead to the wars it professes to deter. But who urges us toward this course? Rothbard arraigns the social democrats and their successors, the neoconservatives. These he accuses of support for statism at home and war abroad.
Rothbard tersely sums up the credo of social democracy in this way:

on all crucial issues, social democrats stand against liberty and tradition, and in favor of statism and Big Government. They are more dangerous in the long run than the communists, not simply because they have endured, but also because their program and their rhetorical appeals are far more insidious, since they claim to combine socialism with the appealing virtues of “democracy” and freedom of inquiry. (p. 23)

For Rothbard, the State always ranks as the principal enemy. The battle against the “massive welfare-warfare State” to him was no mere clash of abstractions. Quite the contrary, he aimed at particular targets who embodied the statist doctrines he abhorred. Sidney Hook occupied a place near the summit of his intellectual foes. A precocious communist in the 1920s, Hook found the Soviet Union insufficiently revolutionary and soon beat the drums for militant anticommunism, though of a distinctly socialist cast. Throughout his long life, he called for war, first against Nazi Germany and then against Comrade Stalin. According to Rothbard, “one’s attitude toward Sidney Hook . . . provides a convenient litmus test on whether someone is a genuine conservative, a paleo, or some form of neo” (p. 25).

The struggle against the State needed to be waged on many fronts. Rothbard saw a disturbing trend among certain left-libertarians. Although libertarianism quintessentially opposes State power, some doctrinal deviants allowed the enemy to enter through the back door.

They did so by holding that public agencies must observe rules of nondiscriminatory treatment. These rules have nothing to do with the free market, but everything to do with the slogans of the contemporary Left. Rothbard expertly locates the central fallacy in the argument of the libertarian heretics. Since nearly everything nowadays partakes to a degree of the State, the new doctrine leads to total government control.

Rothbard states his point with characteristic panache:

But not only literal government operations are subject to this egalitarian doctrine. It also applies to any activities which are tarred with the public brush, with the use, for example, of government streets, or any acceptance of taxpayer funds . . . sometimes, libertarians fall back on the angry argument that,
nowadays, you can’t really distinguish between public and private anyway. (p. 103)

We have, then, an all-out statist attack on liberty. How has this assault managed to do so well? Rothbard’s answer exposes the philosophical roots of our problem. No longer does the academic elite believe in objective morality, grasped by right reason. Lacking a rational basis for moral values, our supposed intellectual leaders readily fall prey to statist fallacy.

The beginning stage of nihilism, Rothbard maintains, occurred in art.

First, the left-liberals preached *l’art pour l’art* in aesthetics, and, as a corollary in ethics, trumpeted the new view that there is no such thing as a revealed or objective ethics, that all ethics are “subjective,” that all of life’s choices are only personal, emotive “preferences.” (p. 296)

The denial of objective standards in the name of freedom led to death and destruction. Rothbard maintains that ethical nihilism results in the overthrow of the most basic human rights, including the right not to be murdered. He has not the slightest sympathy for the rampant pro-euthanasia movement.

No, the mask is off, and Doctor Assisted Death and Mr. Liberal Death with Dignity, and all the rest of the crew turn out to be Doctor or Mister Murder. Watch out Mr. And Ms. America: liberal humanists, lay and medical, are . . . out to kill you. (p. 303)

What can be done to combat statism and nihilism? Rothbard views populism with great sympathy. As so often in his work, he rethought and deepened his position. He determined that a common libertarian strategy, looking to the courts to enforce rights, was mistaken.

Even in cases in which courts enforce the “correct” position, the imperatives of local control and states’ rights should not be overturned. Thus, Rothbard favored a “pro-choice” position on abortion. But he was loath to have courts enforce abortion rights against recalcitrant states.

“No; libertarians should no longer be complacent about centralization and national jurisdiction—the equivalent,” he writes, “of foreign intervention or of reaching for global dictatorship. Kansans henceforth should take their chances in Kansas; Nevadans in Nevada, etc. And if women find that abortion clinics are not defended in Kansas, they can travel to New York or Nevada” (p. 306).
Although Rothbard found great merit in populism, he did not defend the movement uncritically. He saw danger in leftist populism: a true populist movement must not abandon the free market in favor of crackpot panaceas. In one of the last articles he wrote, he warned Pat Buchanan against this danger.

In this murky and volatile situation, the important thing for us paleopopulists is that we find a candidate as soon as possible who will lead and develop the cause and the movement of right-wing populism, to raise the standard of the Old, free, decentralized, and strictly limited Republic. (p. 141)
While America Sleeps: Self-Delusion, Military Weakness, and the Threat to Peace Today*

DONALD KAGAN & FREDERICK W. KAGAN

The Bomber Caucus

April 1, 2001, Mises Review

While America Sleeps might better have been called While the Kagans Sleep. The book is divided into two parts: one on British foreign policy in the 1920s and 1930s and another on American foreign policy in the 1990s. The initial part, marginally better than the dreary laundry lists of military procurement policy that clog its successor, aims to inculcate a lesson. Britain, after the First World War, stood in position to dominate the planet. Foolishly, she threw away her chance at world hegemony by rapid demobilization and disarmament.

Lacking the tools to police the world, disaster followed. Britain failed to crush Germany as a potential antagonist. Further, with craven weakness the British Foreign Office refused to support collective security through the League of Nations. How could the British have failed to see the imperative need to punish Italy for Mussolini’s occupation of Corfu in 1923? Without overwhelming military might, Britain felt herself constrained in her options.

The result, you will not be surprised to learn, was Hitler. The new German Führer posed a threat of unparalleled magnitude; but Neville Chamberlain

and Lord Halifax, at the helm of British foreign policy, persisted in appeasement. Only America’s intervention saved Britain from disaster, and she became a power of the second rank after the war ended. The Kagans’ sad tale, they make evident, has more than antiquarian interest.

The United States occupies a similar position to that of Britain in the 1920s. After the collapse of Soviet Russia, the United States stood poised for world mastery. But overly cautious defense budgets have blocked us from imposing our will on other nations. The Kagans find especially disturbing our failure to dispatch Saddam Hussein and to destroy the North Korean nuclear program. Has the lesson of Hitler been forgotten so quickly? Only a massive arms buildup can save us. Whether or not you speak softly, at least carry a big stick.

The Kagans leave no doubt as to the moral of their prolix story:

A situation very like ours faced another great democracy this century. Warnings that England was sleeping came too late to do any good. We hope that this one comes in time. America . . . must make the necessary commitments and be ready materially and morally to meet them. (p. 435)

This latest entry into Aesop’s fables proceeds in utter disregard of logic and morality. Our authors’ initial premise on the surface seems plausible. If a nation has sufficient arms to cope with any conceivable threat, and the will to use them, then is it not obviously the case that her power can be indefinitely maintained? No doubt; but this is merely the tautology that a nation that can meet any threat can, not surprisingly, meet any threat.

It does not at all follow that, in the concrete circumstances of the 1920s and 1930s, Britain could have achieved enough of an arms dominance to attain this ambitious goal. No doubt, Britain after the First World War was in a position to crush resistance to the Versailles treaty by Germany. No doubt, further, that Britain could defeat either the Turks or Iraqi insurgents should the occasion demand this. But how is it supposed to follow that Britain could maintain a force sufficient to meet all of these threats, along with many others? Lemuel Gulliver could easily turn aside any of the Lilliputians, but he could not prevail against a number of them acting in concert.

Nor is the problem simply that many threats might come at once. Suppose that Britain could easily meet the first of a series of threats. To do so would inevitably cost men and material, and the next threat might well prove more
difficult to handle. Again, the fallacy is manifest: a nation that can meet one threat need not be in a position to handle an entire series of them. The Kagans have too quickly jumped from a tautology—a nation strong enough always to maintain hegemony can always maintain hegemony—to the far less evident claim that a particular nation, Britain, was in the 1920s capable of making itself master of the world.

To this objection our authors will likely deploy two responses. First, I have wrongly supposed a static military machine. True enough, if the Royal Air Force terror bombed Arab tribesmen, as it in fact did, its resources would be depleted; but could these not be readily replenished? Then—happy thought—the RAF would have undiminished capacity to bomb some other alleged threat to smithereens.

Further, it will be said, my argument rests on another false assumption. Once a hegemonic power showed herself ready to confront the slightest resistance to her will with condign force, would not defiance lessen, if not disappear altogether? One threat would not, as I have imagined, be followed by another.

The first counter merely serves to expose an unsupported premise of the Kagans’ argument. What exactly would Britain have required in the 1920s to meet any new threat with undiminished force? The Kagans never tell us, but surely the cost would have been enormous. Even so notorious a war hawk as Winston Churchill favored cuts in military spending during the 1920s. Where was Britain to obtain the money required to meet the Kagans’ gargantuan requirements? If, by some miracle, the necessary funds could be secured, would not a large part of civilian spending and investment be crowded out?

You might think that Churchill’s espousal of cuts would induce our authors to reconsider; but this is to underestimate the Kagans. Although they praise Churchill for sparking resistance to the Turks in the Chanak crisis, they incrediblly view him as someone unduly averse to war. He foolishly preferred economy to more bullets. “Churchill’s cost limitation proposal . . . was not only unwise but impracticable” (p. 53). What do such pacifists as Churchill and the General Staff know about military preparation? The Kagans have spoken!

In like fashion, the second counter also rests on a false assumption. Nations do not always react to a dominant power by cringing away in fear. If Britain had attempted to pursue the path of dominance our authors urge, would this not have induced other nations to challenge her? Would France always
remain the compliant ally, as the book assumes without evidence? And what of the United States? Would we have consented forever to remain appendages of the British Empire? During the early 1920s, influential British experts feared impending conflict with America. Our authors dismiss these fears as nonsense, with no grounds but their complacent assumption of a permanent identity of interests between the two countries.

Even if the Kagans’ policy were feasible, it would fly in the face of morality. Why is Britain, or any other country, justified in suppressing any regime that dares flout its dictates? The authors denounce with great ferocity Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935; how could Britain idly stand by the blood of her neighbor? But if Italian aggression is wrong, what sanctifies British aggression? I suspect that the Kagans would dismiss my inquiry as misconceived.

What concerns them is not morality, but its appearance: in order to pursue world hegemony, a nation’s policies must be couched in the proper ideological terms. Wary readers will suspect that I have caricatured the authors’ views—as if I could do such a thing. But they set forward their standpoint in terms that leave no room for doubt:

It is, in fact, a requirement of true realism in the modern world to recognize the inescapable role of what has come to be called ideology but is not very different from what once was called honor. By 1935 the British public would not ignore the commitment to resist aggression, especially on the part of a dictator against a weak country. (p. 207)

Suppose one puts aside all the objections thus far raised against the Kagans’ argument. Even judged strictly on its own terms, their main thesis collapses. They contend that British failure to maintain armed superiority during the 1920s made Britain unable to meet the threat posed by Hitler in the 1930s. Yet they themselves acknowledge that Hitler could easily have been expelled from the Rhineland in 1936. Why, then, all the fuss and fury over the lack of a military force adequate for hegemony? Is the argument supposed to be that with sufficient arms, the British would have found appeasement less tempting? But why believe this? The Kagans’ argument rests on an unverifiable counterfactual: given larger armed forces, British generals would have supported a more aggressive policy.

I should myself prefer to press a different supposition: had Britain been less aggressive, war might have been avoided in 1939; but to pursue this would
veer too far from our authors’ argument. Rather, let us turn to the book’s lessons for America in the 1990s.

As earlier explained, the Kagans fear that the United States will succumb to the British disease. They show, at wearying length, that America cannot respond adequately to several large threats at once. Like Britain in the 1920s, American policy makers pay attention to the costs of military might. For such foolish economy, Les Aspin, secretary of defense under Clinton, bears much of the blame. But though his predecessor in office, Richard Cheney, earns from our authors higher marks, he too failed to grasp that a hegemonic nation must turn a blind eye to the budget.

Suppose that our authors, in spite of everything here brought against them, have correctly dissected British policy in the 1920s and 1930s. Britain ought to have striven for hegemony, just as they allege. It does not follow that the United States should do so in the 1990s. It is hardly entailed by their analysis that a Hitler always waits in the wings to pounce on a nation that neglects its arms budget. One historical instance hardly suffices to establish a law of action; and, absent that, the “lessons” derived from their case study must be set against the risks and costs of the bellicose policy they favor.

Their efforts to conjure Iraq and North Korea into major threats to the United States I shall leave to readers to evaluate; I found myself nodding off more than once. The first part of the book contains useful information, although the Kagans oddly think that Harold Nicolson was a Conservative member of Parliament (p. 212). Nicolson was a member of National Labour.
The War Over Iraq: Saddam’s Tyranny and America’s Mission*

LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN & WILLIAM KRISTOL

The Violent State

April 1, 2003, Mises Review

THIS BOOK FRIGHTENS ME. The authors do not confine themselves to a justification of the American invasion of Iraq, which began shortly after their book was published. They offer a plan by which this war is but the first of many that the United States is to undertake. For Messrs. Kaplan and Kristol, “perpetual war for perpetual peace” is not a mocking comment but rather a slogan to be embraced with fervor.

But why be frightened? If these authors have objectionable ideas, let us endeavor to respond: but why go beyond that? Unfortunately, what we have here is not simply the ravings of two armchair generals. The authors speak for an influential group within the government, and the war with Iraq has begun to put their sinister designs into practice.

The group in question assumed a dominant influence over American foreign policy during the current administration. Kaplan and Kristol view with disdain the foreign policies of the elder George Bush and Bill Clinton, for reasons that will soon become apparent. At first, the younger Bush seemed no more promising:

Indeed, for all his evocations of Reagan, it appeared that Bush’s approach would amount to nothing more than a variation of

old-world realpolitik. . . . Bush’s choice of senior foreign policy aides only bolstered that impression. (pp. 68–69)

Bush’s secretary of state, Colin Powell, particularly upsets our authors: for them, he is a veritable pacifist. He initially, horrible dictu, opposed the first Gulf War. Condoleezza Rice “espoused an unsentimental brand of realpolitik” (p. 69); she too does not fit in with the New Order.

Fortunately, “Bush. . . also appointed several American internationalists to prominent posts in his administration” (p. 69). The authors single out for praise Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz; I strongly suspect that they are personally close to Wolfowitz and faithfully reflect his views. I propose to examine these views, but in a different order from that adopted in the book. First, the general principles that the authors believe should govern American foreign policy will be presented, with appropriate expressions of horror. After this, I shall look at their views on Iraq. (Readers who cannot wait will get a good preview of what is in store if they read Washington’s Farewell Address, negating every prescription of policy it contains.)

Kaplan and Kristol’s views can best be considered by first having a look at the doctrine they are most anxious to reject. By the end of the Cold War, a realist theory of foreign affairs, whose principal theorist was Hans Morgenthau, had largely replaced the global crusading beloved of our authors. The realists favored working within the balance-of-power tradition of European diplomacy. “This in turn led to the realists’ key recommendation: A state must limit itself to the protection of its ‘vital interests,’ lest it disrupt the balance of power” (p. 46).

In my own view, and I hope that of my readers, Washington was right: we should avoid altogether meddling in power politics. But if one insists on an interventionist foreign policy, the realist position seems mandated by common sense. Should not any intervention be assessed with care, weighing costs against benefits? In particular, should not policymakers beware of ideologies that require remaking the world according to a Utopian plan? “Morgenthau condemned the effort to apply a nation’s principles abroad as itself evidence of ‘immorality,’ neatly exemplified ‘in the contemporary phenomenon of the moral crusade’” (p. 46).

This sentiment almost induces apoplexy in our authors. A foreign policy realist will not hesitate to ally, if need be, with an undemocratic state,
but this strikes at the heart of Kaplan and Kristol’s ideas. The key to their approach is that America should embark on a worldwide crusade for democracy. To do so, they claim, will result in a world at peace.

They contend that the “strategic value of democracy is reflected in a truth of international politics: Democracies rarely, if ever, wage war against one another” (p. 104). Given this premise, is not the conclusion obvious? We have only to establish democracy everywhere and the millennium is at hand.

But why accept the premise? Our authors appeal to Kant: “[When] the consent of citizens is required to decide whether or not war should be declared, it is very natural that they will have a great hesitation in embarking on so dangerous an enterprise” (p. 105, quoting Kant).

Kant’s point gives our authors no help. In modern “democracies,” the executive usually decides unilaterally on military action: I do not recall, e.g., that a declaration of war from Congress, much less a popular referendum, preceded our crusade against Hitler redivivus, Saddam Hussein. Further, Kant here says nothing about our author’s claim, viz., that democracies are unlikely to do battle with other democracies. He is making a general claim that democracies are less bellicose than other regimes: one has only to glance at a list of modern wars to see that the claim is false.

But perhaps our authors can do better than Kant. Is it not simply a well-confirmed fact that democracies do not fight one another but settle disputes peacefully? Our authors do not cite the Yale political scientist Bruce Russett, but he, among others, has published data that purport to establish this “fact” as ironclad.* (By “democracy” in the following I mean, roughly, “a representative government with some civil liberties.”)

I do not think it wise to use this alleged fact as a basis for policy. Until the twentieth century, very few democracies existed, and generalizations about their behavior seem unlikely to prove robust. If the few democracies that have so far existed have not gone to war with each other, why does it follow that a world transformed into democratic states would be likewise pacific? Would, e.g., the conflicts between Israel and the Arab states go away if all the regimes in question became democratic?

I have not chosen this example at random. Kaplan and Kristol find lacking all of the political systems of the Arab world, and they propose to replace them: “There is today not a single Arab state that qualifies as a democracy. . . . But promoting democracy in the Middle East is not a matter of national egoism. It has become a matter of national well-being, even survival” (p. 101).

In particular, the royalist government of Saudi Arabia must go. Why not replace it as American ally with a democratic Iraq? “Iraq’s experience of liberal democratic rule in turn could increase the pressure already being felt by Teheran’s mullahs. . . . Iraq could even replace Saudi Arabia as the key American ally and source of oil in the region” (p. 99). What a wonderful confirmation of the authors’ thesis we have had since their book was published! Even the most cynical isolationist can see with his own eyes how gladly the Iraqi people have welcomed the armies of democratic liberation.

Let us, though, grant our authors their thesis: a world of democracies would be a world at peace. Does it then follow that we ought to endeavor to topple authoritarian governments, in order to secure peace? What happens if the attempts to impose democracy fail? Kaplan and Kristol have the nerve to cite Woodrow Wilson on the need for a world of democratic states. Evidently they do not know, or choose to ignore, the fact that Wilson’s demand that the German monarchy be abolished as a condition for negotiating an armistice in November, 1918, led to political chaos. The result of Wilson’s meddling was not a stable democratic system, but rather, in a mere 15 years, the onset of the Nazi regime and its Führer.

The Kaplan-Kristol thesis is vulnerable at yet another point, and this a very obvious one. The world contains many nondemocratic governments, few of which are likely to depart the scene voluntarily. The proposal to fill the world with democratic states is a recipe for a long series of wars. Our authors are fully aware of this, and welcome the consequence; but I cannot think those who do not share their bloodthirsty proclivities will agree.

Pending the arrival of a democratic world, America faces immediate problems, and our authors have suggestions, of a quality similar to their long-term plans, to deal with them. Several nations somehow fail to see the United States as the source of enlightened guidance and cast hostile glances at us. What is worse, they possess nuclear weapons or other dangerous devices that could harm us. (Or at least, as with Iraq, they may, for all we know, have weapons fit only for our friends and us.)
What is to be done? To our authors, the answer is obvious: we should launch preemptive attacks on these countries. Do we not have a moral right to defend ourselves against those who menace us? Must we wait until they strike an initial, and possibly fatal, blow against us?

In international law, in international practice and in American history, there is ample precedent for the doctrine of preemption. . . . The origins of this concept date back to the father of international law, Hugo Grotius, who in the seventeenth century wrote, “It be lawful to kill him who is preparing to kill.” (p. 85)

Our authors here confuse two very different situations. To strike at someone who is about to strike you is one thing: to attack him on the ground that he has—or might have—weapons that in the future might be used against you is another matter altogether. Once more, our authors have advanced a policy that leads to perpetual war.

Further, suppose the United States did follow the doctrine of preemption. Would not a nuclear power on bad terms with the United States have strong reason to think the United States would attempt a preemptive strike against it? If so, would it not have good reason to strike at us first? Our authors must be rubbing their hands with delight at the incendiary potential of their policy.

Is there not a further danger in our authors’ plans? They would have us preemptively strike various powers, as we attempted to build a world of democracies under our hegemony. Would not other states, assuming they escaped our nuclear wrath, come to resent us? The plans of our authors seem likely to provoke a worldwide coalition against us.

Kaplan and Kristol dissent. Other nations, they think, will be quick to fall in line behind America’s leadership. They had better: otherwise, we will zap them.

To be sure, those regimes that find an American-led world order menacing to their existence will seek to cut away at American power. . . . None of this, however adds up to a convincing argument against American preeminence . . . it is doubtful that any effective grouping of nations is likely to emerge to challenge American power. Much of the current international attack against American “hegemonism” is posturing. (pp. 121–122)
But a doubt remains. Even if one is of the devil’s party and thinks their scheme for American empire desirable, would not these plans impose a crushing burden on us? How can we possibly afford to subdue country after country in war? Spoilsport that I am, I have conjured up an imaginary difficulty.

Still, the task of . . . creating a force that can shape the international environment today, tomorrow and twenty years from now is manageable. It would probably require spending about $100 billion per year above current defense budgets. This price tag may seem daunting, but in historical terms it represents only a modest commitment of America’s wealth. (p. 123)

If this requires a socialized and militarized economy, who cares? We will make the world safe for democracy, just as Woodrow Wilson did before us.

It only remains for us to see how the authors apply their ambitious plans to Iraq. By now, you will have no trouble guessing what they have in mind: we must blast Saddam Hussein and all his works to smithereens and then create an Iraqi democracy out of whatever fragments of the country remain.

In making their case for an invasion of Iraq, the authors ply us with atrocity stories, lest we think mistakenly that Saddam is Father Christmas. Did they ever pause to reflect that wars and blockades kill a great many people also? These facts, one gathers, must not enter into our deliberations. To think of them, or to ask how we know that a benevolent democracy would replace Saddam, is to engage in the supreme sin: realism. Away with questions! We shall bomb Iraq into liberal democracy, as true reason and humanity demand of us.
Why We Fight: Moral Clarity and the War on Terrorism*

William J. Bennett

Blood for Unity

July 1, 2003, Mises Review

William Bennett has updated the paperback edition of his book with two new chapters, one of which demands that Saddam Hussein and all his works be eradicated. But he has not availed himself of the chance to correct the misleading title of his book. The present title suggests that Mr. Bennett himself is among the fighters, but this is obviously not the case. A more accurate title is Why Others Should Fight to Fulfill My Vision of the World.

As Bennett sees matters, the United States must be able to recognize evil for what it is. Once we Americans see evil in the world we must act against it: only we have the power to do so. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan banned music; this was evil and justified us in overthrowing it. I do not exaggerate. Bennett states:

When Kabul was liberated in mid-November [2001], . . . everywhere, everywhere, there was singing and the sound of music. . . . The music was playing, and people were dreaming their dreams again. That is why we fight. (p. 177)

But does not the doctrine of just war limit us in our crusade against evil? Not at all, our author replies. Just war theory teaches us to fight in order to avert future evil. There is the little matter of the criterion of last resort, which requires us to seek a peaceful resolution of a dispute before using force, but this does not faze Bennett. He omits to mention it altogether.

Relativists and other anti-Americans attempt to subvert our judgments of good and evil, but fortunately Bennett, a trained philosopher, is here to help us make discriminating judgments. Here is an example. Saddam Hussein’s monstrous tyranny has been surpassed by only a few other dictators, all of them rightly reviled in the judgment of history. Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, invaded Kuwait, attempted to assassinate a former US president... murdered thousands of his own people, and refused to abide by international law. (p. 193)

A deplorable list of misdeeds, no doubt; but one would have thought that they do not suffice to make Saddam more than a despot of a quite ordinary sort.

But I must be careful. Critics of Bennett’s rather unsubtle judgments risk verbal assault themselves. He deems Stanley Fish a relativist. As such, he holds the same position as the murderer Charles Manson. Bennett quotes a remark by Manson and says: “Stanley Fish himself could hardly have put it better” (p. 69). All Fish said, in the passage that arouses Bennett’s ire, is that we cannot detach ourselves from our own judgments of good and evil. Fish maintained “that we should abandon any ‘hope of justifying our response to the attacks in universal terms that would be persuasive to everyone, including our enemies’” (p. 66, quoting Fish). I take this to be a rejection of relativism. Fish claims that we should adhere to the moral views we have, not, as a relativist would, that we should regard our own views as but one of many equally valid positions. Fish rejects neutrality, not truth. But, even if I am wrong, is it not strange to think that Fish’s view puts him on the same level doctrinally as a notorious killer?

We must, if Bennett is right, strike against evil when we find it. A problem arises, if we wish to follow his path. How are we to identify evil, if Bennett has not spoken to the situation we confront? And even if he has, how can we see for ourselves the basis of his judgments, without having to depend on his authority?

This font of kindness stands ready to help. We must not be guided by dispassionate reason: we must rather rely on our feelings of anger.
But why must we accept the premise that anger is itself a suspect quality and always in need of “management”? To the contrary, as the ancients recognized, anger is a necessary power of the soul, intimately connected with the passion for justice. (p. 41)

I do not doubt that there is a place for righteous anger; but I had not heard that it ought to control foreign policy. But I must not proceed further with this thought, lest I expose myself as a Mansonite.

Not content with what he has already done for us, Bennett helps us to identify the target of our future wrath. It is the Islamic group of nations, if they fail to clean up their act posthaste. Bennett has read Bernard Lewis, so he is in a position to tell us that the doctrines professed by Al-Qaeda are not a radical aberration from mainstream Islam.

This brings us back to the question of whether the brand of radical Islam represented by Osama bin Laden was indeed an artificial growth that “hijacked” the classical faith. What I have been trying to suggest is that the growth is not artificial, and that the classical faith is not without its deeply problematic aspects, particularly when it comes to relations with non-Muslims. (p. 95)

I do not presume to quarrel with someone as righteously angry as Bennett, particularly so when he has read Bernard Lewis; but I do not recall that any Muslim country has attacked the United States in recent centuries.

Why is Bennett so anxious to involve America in so extensive a struggle against evil? Any answer must be speculative, but I suspect that he seeks a sense of national unity based on hatred of an enemy. He speaks of the mood in America after September 11 as if it were a religious experience:

In the wake of September 11, the doubts and questions that had only recently plagued Americans about their nation seemed to fade into insignificance. Good was distinguished from evil, truth from falsehood. We were firm, dedicated, united. (p. 10)

In one place, to my surprise, Bennett praises the “open-ended search for the truth” of Peter Abelard (p. 178). Though he rightly ranks the dialectical method of the medieval scholastics as one of the glories of the West, he does not want critical thinking to extend to foreign policy. Here,
with D. H. Lawrence, we are to “think with the blood.” Those who question our feelings of national unity, founded on moral indignation, are themselves enemies to be vilified.

It would be easy to laugh at Bennett’s verbal extravagance, but his strident calls for war seem to have borne fruit. He said, several months before the American invasion, that a “decision not to act against Saddam Hussein would go down as one of the most dishonorable acts of appeasement and nonfeasance in history” (p. 196). He need not have worried.
A great many people have learned from Mises and Rothbard, but Lew Rockwell belongs to a much more select class: he has developed their thought in an original way. His essay, “The Economics of Discrimination,” included in the present collection of Rockwell’s speeches and articles, stands as an especially impressive contribution.

Through a well-known argument, Mises showed that interventions in the free market could quickly lead to full-scale socialism. Suppose, to take a familiar example, that the state institutes price controls on milk, in an effort to help the impoverished. The result will be a shortage, precisely the opposite of the program’s aim.

What then is to be done? The interventionists can come to their senses and abandon their misguided interference. If they do not, they must proceed to further interventions. To attempt to remedy the shortage, they may impose further controls. If the costs of production to milk retailers are lowered, will not the shortage disappear? Such efforts are of course futile, and planners must again confront the same choice as before: back to the free market or forward to more controls.

All readers of Mises will recognize the argument that I have just paraphrased from “Middle-of-the-Road Policy Leads to Socialism,” but Rockwell has found
an illuminating parallel to it. Mises’s contention, he shows, applies also to laws that forbid discrimination. The 1964 Civil Rights Act, its proponents claimed, did not tell employers whom they could hire. It merely forbade them from refusing to hire someone on grounds of race and a few other categories.

But so taken, the law would inevitably have failed to achieve its purpose. What employer in his right mind would tell an applicant, “I’m rejecting you because I don’t like people of your race”? The employer has only to invent a plausible excuse for rejecting those whom he dislikes, and he may discriminate as much as he wishes.

To block him, must not the state impose further restrictions? It will require employers to hire specific numbers of the groups it holds to be disadvantaged.

If an owner is forbidden to discriminate in hiring on grounds of sex or race, the government can only discover a violation of the law by looking at who is hired. This compels active discrimination against people on grounds of their sex and race. It is a zero sum game, where one person’s winnings come from another’s losses. (p. 100)

Rockwell’s development of Mises’s argument reflects his careful study of this great free-market economist. He often calls attention to details not usually stressed. Everyone knows that Mises showed that economic calculation under socialism is impossible; but how many are aware that Mises was also a pioneering critic of socialized medicine?

Mises called attention to a crucial feature of programs that separate the benefits of medical programs from their costs. Rockwell summarizes his key insight in this way:

Because there is no clear line between sickness and health, and where you stand on the continuum is bound up with individual choice, the more medical services are provided by the State as a part of welfare, the more the programs reinforce the conditions that bring about the need to make use of them . . . socialized medicine must fail for the same reason all socialism must fail: it offers no system for rationally utilizing resources, and instead promotes the overutilization of all resources, ending in bankruptcy. (p. 116)
Rockwell uses a detail in the work of Friedrich Hayek to make another point of vital importance in the struggle for the free market. Opponents of the free market sometimes disguise their plans. Claiming to be defenders of economic freedom, they promote schemes inimical to the free market. In Orwellian fashion, plans for control of trade by international bureaucracies come packaged as “free trade.” Rockwell notes that Hayek warned against this threat:

As F. A. Hayek warned in the neglected conclusion to his 1944 book, *The Road to Serfdom*: “If international economic relations, instead of being between individuals, become relations between whole nations organized as trading bodies, they will inevitably become the source of friction and envy.” (p. 144)

To use Hayek against NAFTA is indeed a stroke that would have occurred to few.

But we have not yet reached the central theme of Rockwell’s book. As our author sees matters, the principal threat to the market, and to freedom generally, is war. During a war, and in the period of preparation for it, the state seizes control of the economy, a state of affairs that at least in part continues even after the supposed emergency passes. (The classic account of this process is Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan.*) How can one rationally favor both the market and a bellicose foreign policy?

The framers intended to keep the US out of foreign wars. They understood that a government that goes abroad in search of monsters to destroy will end up destroying its own people. The foreign-policy apparatus of today inflicts a horrible cost on the world. But the greatest cost of all—or at least the one that should matter to us most—is the cost to the liberty that is our birthright. (p. 157)

But, one might object, cannot a peace-loving nation sometimes be forced to fight? After the attacks of September 11, for example, what choice did the Bush administration have but to strike back at those who attacked us?

Rockwell rises to the challenge: though the attacks on the World Trade Center were a grievous wrong, the American response made matters much worse. How did the overthrow of the backward Afghanistan regime, in no way a threat to the United States, advance our safety? The perpetrators of the September 11 attacks remain at large, and since the triumph over the Taliban, we have since proceeded to a much more costly and futile war.
The right response to September 11 would have been for government’s entire security apparatus to be dismantled, and to allow the airlines and other firms to provide their own security. But, of course, it had all the earmarks of a crisis, and history shows that crises are great opportunities for the State. (p. 138)

Rockwell’s emphasis on war and its dangers derives in large part from Murray Rothbard, whose thought, along with that of Mises, underlies the entire program of the Mises Institute. Rothbard constantly stressed the imperative necessity of a peaceful foreign policy. The contrasting view, long favored by William Buckley and his National Review colleagues, that claimed to marry free-market economics and the warfare state could not possibly succeed. Rothbard’s prescience won him few friends among conventional conservatives.

But what really did Murray in was not his conviction that the State was unnecessary, but his position on the Cold War. [Because of Rothbard’s noninterventionism] Libertarians were said to be tacit supporters of the Sovietization of the world. (p. 398)

Rothbard’s resolute views come as no surprise, but Rockwell once again presents readers with something unexpected. Mises also warned against the dangers of militarism. Rockwell cites a characteristically incisive passage from Mises:

Military Socialism is the Socialism of a state in which all institutions are designed for the prosecution of war…. Standing preparedness for war is impossible if aims other than war influence the lives of individuals…. The military state is a state of bandits. (p. 195)

Militarism, then, is Rockwell’s great enemy, and a free society his goal. But what, specifically, should defenders of a free economy support? Our author, following Mises and Rothbard, places great emphasis on the gold standard. Only a currency immune to government manipulation can save us from inflation, with all its attendant dangers. The needed separation of government and money can only be effected by resort to a commodity standard.

Why do the government and its partisans dislike the gold standard? It removes the discretionary power of the Fed by placing severe limits on the ability of the central bank to inflate the money supply. Without that discretionary power, the government has far fewer tools of central planning at its disposal. (p. 61)
A further advantage of sound money, Rockwell explains, is that the government cannot initiate business cycles through credit expansion.

Rockwell’s powerful defense of the key tenets of Mises and Rothbard presents us with a paradox. The American Right once strongly supported both a noninterventionist foreign policy and the gold standard. The arguments in favor of these measures, as Rockwell has abundantly shown, have great force. Why, then, were the supporters of traditional American foreign policy unable to mount an effective resistance to interventionist “conservatives” and their neoconservative successors? Why has the gold standard for many become a lost cause, abandoned for nostrums peddled from Chicago?

As Rockwell sees matters, the problems lie not in any deficiency in the arguments for correct policy. Quite the contrary, American conservatives placed little emphasis on argument. They often viewed logical thinking as doctrinaire; and, although Mises was widely admired, many on the right viewed him as extreme because of the radical conclusions to which his rigorous thinking led him. And to reiterate, Rothbard, who rejected government and the Cold War altogether, was dismissed completely.

The point, once more, is not that the conservatives deployed bad arguments against the supposed extremism of Mises and Rothbard. Rather, they downgraded the role of reason as such; and this rendered ineffective their resistance to the left. Rockwell cites in this connection the baleful influence of Russell Kirk.

In the middle fifties, as a consequence of Russell Kirk’s Conservative Mind, the word “conservative” came to describe anyone who was a nonsocialist skeptic of federal policy. . . . There was a fundamental difference between the Old and New Right of Kirk’s making. . . . In Kirk’s hands, conservatism became a posture, a demeanor, a mannerism. . . . And if there was a constant strain in Kirkian conservatism, it was opposition to ideology, a word that Kirk demonized. This allowed him to accuse Mises and Marx of the same supposed error. In fact, ideology means nothing more than systematic social thought. Without systematic thought, the intellectual shiftiness of statist impulse gets a free ride. (p. 395)

Speaking of Liberty is an excellent example of systematic thought in action, imbued with the value of freedom.
Reading Robert Higgs’s magnificent collection of essays leaves one puzzled. Higgs is the foremost American economic historian who writes from a free-market perspective. His analysis of government failure and malfeasance rests on a combination of theoretical acuity and mastery of empirical data unmatched since the passing of Murray Rothbard. Why, then, are there so few Higgsians? Why do so many intellectuals embrace the statist disasters that Higgs ruthlessly and mordantly demolishes?

Are the supporters of the state gripped by Hegel’s illusion that the State is the march of God on earth? Most are not that delusional: they recognize at least some of government’s crippling deficiencies. Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics who is sympathetically inclined toward socialism, remarked after his service with the Council of Economic Advisers:

I had expected lower standards of evidence than would be accepted in a professional article, but I had not expected that the evidence offered, would be, in so many instances irrelevant, and that so many vacuous sentences . . . would be uttered. (p. 50)
Stiglitz, like so many of his colleagues, has not given up on government. Why not? They think that however imperfect an instrument, government is needed; and exactly this Higgs denies.

Is not government necessary to remedy the inequalities that the free market allows? Higgs responds by asking, is equality always a good thing? He gives numerous examples when it clearly is not. If, e.g., rich older people began dying in great numbers, or people developed an aversion to education, equality would increase, yet everyone not a follower of Pol Pot would acknowledge these trends to be undesirable. Higgs contends that “economists and other intellectuals routinely compare the income or wealth distribution between times or places and judge the differences good or bad, depending on whether the measured degree of inequality is less or more, without giving any consideration to why the differences exist” (p. 7, emphasis in original).

But is not inequality sometimes bad? Higgs responds with a list of nineteen dire consequences of attempts to redistribute income. Such programs, e.g., make society more contentious: groups struggle with one another to get benefits, and taxpayers view as enemies those who receive the money that has been taken away from them. “Less and less does the society constitute a genuine community. Rather, it becomes balkanized into bellicose subgroups regarding one another as oppressor and oppressed” (p. 24).

Do we not need government for some purposes, though? Must not dangerous medicines be kept off the market by government regulation? Without the FDA, would not consumers be victimized by makers of patent medicines, preying on the desperate hopes of those who suffer from incurable illnesses? Higgs responds with the obvious point that the FDA has delayed, or kept off the market altogether, drugs that might have saved many lives.

Higgs’s careful research is evident in his response to the next stage of the argument. Suppose a proponent of regulation says, “True enough, the FDA has delayed some valuable drugs. But it has kept dangerous drugs from harming people. When you condemn the FDA, you show only that you and that agency weigh costs and benefits differently.”

Higgs questions the alleged benefits. According to one study, “fatal reactions to FDA-approved drugs amount to the fourth-leading cause of death in the United States, after heart disease, cancer, and stroke” (p. 65). And to those still reluctant to abandon the comforting myth that the FDA protects us from harm, Higgs has at the ready another surprising fact:
Once a drug has been approved, doctors are not restricted to using it solely for the FDA-approved indication; they may prescribe it for other uses as well. Such uses, known as “off-label,” account for some 40–50 percent of all prescriptions. (p. 67)

The costs of drug regulation are real, the benefits illusory.

Suppose that the defender of government retreats to his last battle station. Do we not need government at least to preserve law and order? Higgs asks in response an imaginative question. If we lived without government at all, could the situation conceivably be as bad as the present? Governments have killed millions: is it not the height of folly to entrust our safety to this institution? “Even though my own opinion of mankind is, I confess, substantially lower than the average opinion, I still have trouble imagining that, without government, people would have done even worse than they did with government” (p. 103, emphasis in original). As always, Higgs backs up what sounds like an extreme statement with a revealing fact: Somalia for most of the 1990s had no national government, yet “no one can dispute that Somalia compares favorably with many other African countries in which governments continue to exercise their power” (p. 374).

If Higgs’s view of government is right, a further question arises: why is government so bad? Our author’s answer is two-fold. First, those in government are too often evil power seekers, with no concern for the public welfare they hypocritically claim to advance. Higgs in his remarks shows himself an able disciple of one of his favorite writers, H. L. Mencken:

People do not expect to find chastity in a whorehouse. Why, then, do they expect to find honesty and humanity in government, a congeries of institutions whose modus operandi consists of lying, cheating, stealing, and if need be, murdering those who resist? (p. xvi)

Those trusting souls who would reject what Higgs says as cynical must confront his next point. Even with the best will in the world, government could not carry out the formidable tasks it undertakes. Government action rests on accurate statistical data; but such data are generally not available. As an example, alleged trade deficits often serve as an excuse for government meddling, though we are never told why such deficits should be called “unfavorable.” Yet figures on trade contain “a fudge factor called statistical
discrepancy . . . [in 1996 this discrepancy was] equivalent to 32 percent of that year’s deficit on current account” (p. 117, emphasis in original). For the whole problem of government statistics, Higgs calls attention to “one of the most important and neglected economics books of the past fifty years [i.e., in the period 1948–1998]” (p. 116), Oskar Morgenstern’s On the Accuracy of Economic Observations (Princeton University Press, 1963). Morgenstern, by the way, was a member of Mises’s famous private seminar in Vienna.

If government is as bad as Higgs portrays it, how did it secure the dominating position it now holds? Here Higgs invokes his most famous thesis, elaborated in his great work Crisis and Leviathan. The state grows during wartime and other “emergencies”; and when peace or normality returns, government does not shrink to its former size. Business groups that might have been expected to defend free enterprise in fact cooperate with the government in order to advance their own interests:

Within three decades, from the outbreak of World War I in Europe to the end of World War II, the American people endured three great national emergencies, during each of which the federal government imposed unprecedented taxation and economic controls on the population . . . . Rather than resisting the government’s impositions or working to overthrow them, they [business interests] looked for ways to adapt to them, positioning themselves so that the government policies would provide a tax advantage, channel a subsidy their way, or hobble their competitors. (p. 171)

But did not the framers of the Constitution endeavor to protect us from these malign developments? Though they of course could not predict the exact contours of the present American variety of “quasi-corporatism,” Madison and his colleagues feared a powerful central government and enacted safeguards designed to keep the government limited. What went wrong?

The problem, for Higgs, does not lie in the text of the Constitution. Rather, during periods of crisis, the Supreme Court all too often defers to the central government. Faced with an emergency, the Court refuses to impose legal barriers that an inflamed public is likely to condemn. Higgs places great emphasis on the Court’s upholding the Adamson Act in 1917, under which the Wilson administration imposed a labor settlement on interstate railroads. Nothing in the Constitution allowed Wilson to do this, but the Court found “a reservoir of reserved power on which it [the government] may legitimately
rely during emergencies. The outcome: railroad owners were deprived of a great deal of property, without compensation, for a use not public” (p. 202).

Even worse, the Court during World War I “readily affirmed the constitutionality of sending men against their will to fight and die in a remote power struggle” (p. 202). Once conscription was allowed, how could government be restrained at all? Elsewhere Higgs has noted that this was precisely the argument of Justice Holmes: If government may involuntarily compel people to put their life at risk, may it not restrict their liberties in any lesser way it chooses, should an emergency in its judgment demand this?

Higgs has no sympathy for those who look to democracy as a means to limit Leviathan. In a brilliant review, he annihilates the principal thesis of Bruce Ackerman’s influential We the People. Ackerman argues that popular mandates can amend the Constitution by means other than the formal process specified in the document. If the people support seeming violations of the Constitution by several times reelecting the revolutionaries, the deed is done. Thus, the Fourteenth Amendment was “ratified” at the point of a bayonet; but when the Radical Republican Congress was returned to power, its revolutionary measures were confirmed. Again, the multiple reelections of Franklin Roosevelt made his usurpations of power legitimate.

As befits a disciple of Mencken, Higgs will have none of this:

Perhaps the most important unacknowledged weakness of Ackerman’s argument is its failure to deal with a critically important reality: those in positions of power . . . possess major advantages over their opponents in elections, Supreme Court proceedings, and other political encounters. Frequently, the incumbents have gained their positions by misrepresenting themselves. When Abraham Lincoln campaigned in 1860, he did not promise to mount a military invasion of the slave states. (p. 359)

Higgs discusses in detail Roosevelt’s use of New Deal patronage to buy votes.

If Higgs is cynical about what Hans Hoppe has called “the god that failed,” democracy, no one can doubt his commitment to liberty. He rejects with contempt the arguments of the “cliometricians” that pre-Civil War slavery was efficient. He agrees with Jeffrey Hummel that “efficiency is a welfare concept that presupposes the existing property-rights regime. In this light, finding that slavery was efficient amounts to little more than finding it benefits thieves when legal conditions allow them to get away with it” (p. 303).
Higgs is baffled by the contention of the institutionalist economist Warren Samuels that “there is something like a constant level of coercive command and control in society” (p. 108, quoting Samuels). How, Higgs asks in astonishment, can Samuels deny that coercion decreased when slavery was abolished and increased when the draft was imposed? Such questions show that Higgs, unlike Samuels, has a firm grasp on the common sense meanings of freedom and coercion.

* One can make sense of Samuels’s contention by invoking an odd theory of freedom held by the American Legal Realist Robert Hale, but I think it best to pass this by.
No Victory, No Peace*

ANGELO M. CODEVILLA

Mass Execution as Public Policy

October 1, 2005, Mises Review

If there is such a thing as a good super hawk, Angelo Codevilla is it. He makes many neoconservatives look like pacifists; and he advocates a dangerous course of action, accompanied by quotations from Machiavelli, whom he takes to be an exemplar of political wisdom. As he proceeds to his misguided conclusion, though, he has much of value to teach us.

For one thing, Codevilla will have nothing to do with the neoconservative plans to extend the blessings of democracy to the Middle East. What evidence is there, he inquires, that American-style democracy can be exported to that region? Americans lack the ability to impose our political system on alien ground; why then should we try? Against Norman Podhoretz, a principal advocate of warmed over Wilsonianism, he trenchantly remarks: “Imperialism is a difficult, un-American art. Neither Podhoretz nor I know [sic] of any Americans fit or inclined to imperial service” (p. 86).

Applied to Iraq, the neoconservative nostrums have of course failed.

How, indeed, does one government transform the alien culture of a whole region on the other side of the globe? . . . Building viable new governments in foreign lands is extraordinarily difficult, and building wholly new regimes near impossible. Native regimes may change culture over generations, but the

* Rowman & Littlefield, 2005
notion that foreigners who cannot even speak the language can do it in a few years is a pipe dream. Is anything sillier than the notion that American secularists can convince Muslims about what true Islam commands? (p. viii)

To such skepticism, the neocons respond by adducing the success of the post-World War II reconstruction of Germany and Japan. Did not America transform dangerous totalitarian powers into peace-loving democracies? Codevilla dismisses with disdain this customary view. He notes

the massive damage to local cultures that the “best and the brightest” from our universities wrought when they sold the Germans and the Japanese secular socialism. The rebirth of Germany and Japan occurred because the remnants of Christian Democratic and Taisho democratic culture, respectively, were strong enough. Nevertheless, the Americans almost managed to make Adenauer and Yoshida into discredited puppets which is what the next generation of Americans succeed in doing to Thieu and Ky in Saigon. (p. 86)

Codevilla’s doubts about exporting democracy strike home with great force, but his insights here are not distinctive: few but ideologically driven partisans of the president continue to defend this misguided policy. Our author in another area is much more radical. He questions whether Osama bin Laden and his mysterious Al-Qaeda lie behind the attacks of 9/11. “Officially, the [US] government maintains that the mastermind of 9/11 was one Khalid Shaik Mohammed. . . . Indeed, the government believes officially that neither Mohammed nor any of his associates were ‘members’ of Al-Qaeda (whatever that might mean) before 1996” (p. 5). Yet Mohammed and his group “had the idea, the capacity, and the resources to attack the World Trade Center in 1993, and to use airliners as weapons in 1995. . . . Factor out bin Laden, and 9/11 still happens” (p. 5, emphasis in original).

US intelligence agencies blamed Al-Qaeda for the attacks, but Codevilla finds the bulk of “intelligence” against terrorism of scant value:

Roughly, US intelligence brings to bear against terrorism its network of communications intelligence (COMINT) and its network of human collectors. The value of COMINT with regard to terrorism has never been high and has been diminished by
the technical trends of recent decades. . . . The gullibility of US intelligence is not merely an intellectual fault. The CIA’s judgment is corrupted by its long-standing commitment to certain policies. (pp. 44, 46)

But did not Osama himself claim to be behind the attacks? Codevilla is not convinced. “No reliable source has seen him [Osama] since September 11. I [Codevilla] wrote that the quality and content of a video tape in which he arguably took credit for 9/11 suggested it was a fabrication” (p. 9). Codevilla wonders whether Osama is alive; perhaps his associates killed him, lest he fall into American hands.

Such matters are admittedly speculative; but Codevilla next proceeds to a truly radical point that requires no assessment of “inside” intelligence data. He throws into question the whole basis of the US war against Afghanistan. Whatever the faults of the Taliban regime, it posed no threat to the United States.

The Taliban are mostly irrelevant to America. Typically Afghan . . . the Taliban have little role in or concern with affairs beyond their land. They provide shelter to various Arabs who have brought them money and armed force against their internal rivals. But Afghans have not bloodied the world. (p. 48)

Codevilla finds domestic developments in the “war on terrorism” no more to his liking. Have not measures such as the Patriot Act and meddlesome airport security checks restricted our civil liberties, without enhancing our security?

Unable to stop terrorists, Homeland Security will spend its time cracking down on those who run afoul of its regulations. In Chicago’s O’Hare Airport, for example, a man was taken off an aircraft in handcuffs for having boarded before his row number had been called. . . . As Machiavelli points out in his Discourses, security measures that hurt, threaten, or humiliate citizens engender hatred on top of contempt. No civil libertarian, Machiavelli teaches that true security comes from armed citizens to whom the government is bound by mutual trust. (p. 41)

Far from aiding genuine security, these measures add to the danger they aim to combat.
Security measures actually magnify the effects of terrorism. The hijackings of September 11 have set in motion security measures that shut down airports on receipt of threats. . . . What’s more, any successful attack through, or around, the security systems . . . proves that the government cannot protect us. (p. 42)

No libertarian could better Codevilla on the Patriot Act:

The most awesome aspect of Homeland Security is the discretion, untrammeled by fact or reason, with which it wields its vast, permanent powers. President Bush’s statement underlines that the Patriot Act of 2001 penalizes giving aid and comfort to terrorist organizations, but it does not mention that the law also empowers the US government to designate any organization or association as “terrorist.” The law gives no guidelines, and the government does not have to justify its designation to anyone. (p. 131)

Codevilla claims that determined terrorists, willing to sacrifice their lives to their cause, have a very good chance of success. No internal measures of security can save us. What then are we to do?

Here our author’s answer may elicit surprise. As I have so far presented Codevilla, he might easily qualify as a leading contributor to LewRockwell.com. Why then did I call him a super hawk? Alas, in his positive recommendations he abandons the analytical skill he so abundantly displays in his criticism of current policy.

He has demanded evidence that Al-Qaeda lies behind the 9/11 attacks; but he embraces a theory of his own that rests on very little proof. He maintains, apparently because of claims that Iraqi intelligence agents met with the 9/11 plotters, that Iraq sponsored the attacks. In response, the US should destroy the regimes of Iraq, with Syria and the PLO thrown in for good measure.

Before we undertake a systematic policy of upheavals, should we not at least demand strong evidence that these regimes are guilty? Codevilla, as mentioned earlier, is elsewhere doubtful of the value of information gathered by “intelligence” agencies. Yet here he has abandoned his skepticism and stands ready to destroy governments he holds responsible for terrorism—once more, all on mere suspicion. He maintains, without convincing argument, that only a state has the resources to support a terrorist network.
Why cannot terrorists successfully act as an independent enterprise? Even if Codevilla’s view is right, though, this does not establish which states bear responsibility for terrorism.

Codevilla does have a response to an obvious objection to his bellicose schemes. Why do not his strictures against Bush’s program of “democratization” apply to his plans as well? After all, he too favors not only invading Iraq but also extending the assault more widely.

He responds that he has in mind no such ambitious goal as changing a country’s social system. All he proposes is to kill the elites that dominate each of the countries on his list. No more than a few thousand people need to be killed: doing this will suffice to end the regimes that threaten us.

Regimes are forms of government, systems of incentives and disincentives, of honors and taboos and habits. Each kind of regime gives prominence to some kinds of people and practices, while pushing others to the margin. . . . It follows that killing regimes means killing their members in ways that discredit the kinds of persons they were, the ways they lived, the things and ideas to which they gave prominence, the causes they espoused, and the results of their rule. . . . The list of people executed should follow the party-government’s organization chart as clearly as possible. (pp. 53, 55–56)

If it is objected that following this course will leave the affected areas unstable, our author answers, like the Sanhedrin to Judas, “What is that to us?” We have, he contends, no interest in promoting stability in these countries. Our goal should be confined to eliminating our enemies.

If one further objects that the new elites that will eventually emerge may be just as hostile as those we have just dispatched, I suppose Codevilla would reply that we ought to continue the process of killing until a regime arises that no longer sponsors hostile actions against us.

A less bloodthirsty course of conduct offers much better prospects for containing the terrorist threat. Are not the 9/11 attacks a response to America’s interventionist policies in the Middle East? The very invasion of Iraq that was supposed to contain terrorism seems rather to have exacerbated it. If the United States were to adopt a “hands-off” policy toward this troubled region, would we have much to fear from terrorist assaults? When those who claim to be spokesmen for terrorist groups complain about the presence
of infidel Americans on the sacred soil of Saudi Arabia, perhaps we ought to take them at their word and withdraw. In what way does the security of our country depend on an American presence there?

Codevilla might object that the Arab regimes would still sponsor terrorism against even a noninterventionist America. Even if he is right, which I very much doubt, is it not the path of prudence to try nonintervention first, before committing ourselves to a revolutionary program of such vast dimensions as Codevilla wants?

On one policy, though, noninterventionists can come to agreement with Codevilla. As he notes, Saudi Arabia is the principal financial supporter of Wahhabi Islam, and this sect arouses the masses of its followers against the United States.

The Saudi regime is the nursery of the Wahhabi heresy that for two centuries has vied for leadership of Islam. It is also the source of the billions of dollars by which, since the 1970s, the Wahhabis have spread their influence further than ever before. Anti-American terror would hardly be conceivable without widespread Wahhabi influence. (p. 139)

Why then should the United States extend financial and military support to the Saudis? Defenders of an “Old Right” foreign policy will join Codevilla in his wise suggestion. But why should abandoning aid to Saudi Arabia stand alone? Why not a complete course of nonintervention abroad?
Resurgence of the Warfare State: The Crisis Since 9/11*

Robert Higgs

A State of Ignorance

December 1, 2005, Mises Review

Robert Higgs has a well-deserved reputation as an eminent economic historian, but in this collection of essays and interviews, he shows himself an adept moral philosopher as well. He subjects the “humanitarian” case for the Iraq War, unfortunately professed by some self-styled libertarians, to withering scrutiny.

According to the argument Higgs rejects, the justification of the Iraq War does not rest on the supposed presence of WMD. Humanitarian considerations supported the overthrow of the tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein. True enough, the American invasion has killed innocent people.

But their deaths have been accidental, and these must be weighed against those who would have suffered and died had Saddam’s government continued in power.

Higgs rejects completely this sort of moral calculation.

In the present case, making such a judgment with anything approaching well-grounded assurance calls for powers that none of us possess.

How does anybody know, for example, what the future harms caused to innocent parties by Saddam or his henchmen would...
have been, or that those harms, somehow properly weighted and discounted, would be greater than the harms caused by the US armed forces in the invasion of Iraq? (p. 167)

If these calculations cannot be carried out, how can we determine the morally proper course of action? One thing we can know is that we ourselves should not directly kill or injure the innocent; but this is just what the US has done in Iraq.

Scattering cluster bomblets about areas inhabited by civilians . . . was inexcusable: doing so was in no sense necessary to oust Saddam’s government. Nor was the use of very high-explosive bombs (two thousand pounds and bigger) in densely populated urban areas a means one can defend morally. (p. 168)

How can defenders of the Iraq War maintain that these deaths were accidental?

When US forces employ aerial and artillery bombardment—with huge high-explosive bombs, large rockets and shells, including cluster munitions—as their principal technique of waging war, especially in densely inhabited areas, they know with absolute certainty that many innocent people will be killed. To proceed with such bombardment, therefore, is to choose to inflict these deaths. (p. 173)

Higgs’s point here is a valuable riposte to the effusive praise of so-called “smart” weapons by some apologists for the Iraq War. James Turner Johnson, who views Bush as a latter-day St. Augustine in his grasp of the just war tradition, remarks:

PGMs [precision guided missiles] give the American military (and at this point only the American military) the ability to fight in the way moralists have long been saying they should fight: in a way that avoids harm to noncombatants and minimizes overall destruction to the society. (James Turner Johnson, The War to Oust Saddam Hussein, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, pp. 20–21)

Johnson might with profit read Higgs on the bombing of Baghdad.
A last ditch supporter of the “humanitarian” argument might appeal to the doctrine of double effect. In crude terms, the American forces did not aim to kill innocents: they just happened to be unavoidably in the way of targets that were proper objects of attack. But Higgs has already given us the resources to answer this argument. According to the doctrine of double effect, the injury to the innocent must be proportionate: you cannot, e.g., blow up a crowded football stadium as a side effect of your justified response to someone in the stadium who is shooting at you.

We need not here consider the vexed question of how many innocent deaths qualify as a proportionate side effect. For this defense of killing even to be considered, it must first be shown that one’s original purpose is a just one. The US cannot plead in excuse, “We want to attack the Iraqi army, but this means that some civilians will suffer” unless the attack on the Iraqis was in the first place justifiable. And what Higgs has called to our attention is that there is no good “humanitarian” argument to justify the original assault: we cannot know the consequences of intervention.

If the humanitarian argument fails, the claim that Iraq threatened America fares even worse. Who can seriously believe that a nation long subjected to a devastating blockade and bombing posed a danger to America? In the months that preceded the invasion, much was made of Saddam’s supposed plans to obtain nuclear weapons. Of course we now know that the intelligence reports that alleged such plans were false. But even if they had been true, an Iraq with nuclear arms was a minor matter.

[N]otwithstanding the tens of thousands of Soviet nuclear warheads and their sophisticated delivery vehicles kept in constant readiness, the United States was not “blackmailed” by the USSR. Odd that the United States should quake at the prospect of a single Iraqi softball of fissionable material. (p. 138)

With the main arguments in favor of the war thus easily dispatched, Higgs asks a fundamental question: why should we believe that the Bush administration sincerely intended them? Not only the Iraq War but also the entire “war on terrorism” seems a made-up affair, designed to frighten the American public into support for a foreign policy of militant aggression.

Higgs deploys a simple and telling argument to show that the campaign against terror is bogus. If we really were in danger, is not the government doing far too little to protect us?
If semi-organized gangs of suicidal maniacs numbering in the thousands are out to kill us all, the government ought not to be fiddling with kindergarten subsidies and the preservation of the slightly spotted southeastern screech owl. It ought to get serious. (p. 70)

When writing about a book by Robert Higgs, a reviewer needs to resist the temptation to rely too much on quotations; his analysis is so convincing that one wants to reproduce as much of the book as possible. I shall once more follow Oscar Wilde’s advice and give in to temptation. In a single sentence, Higgs destroys the rationale of our military budget:

A smarter and more resolute government would not fritter away scores of billions of dollars annually on producing, deploying, and maintaining an array of weapons systems fit only for fighting a USSR that no longer exists. (p. 70)

If American foreign policy is so manifestly unreasonable, how can the elites who control the government fail to see that it is? Higgs finds part of the answer in a concept of C. Wright Mills’s. (Murray Rothbard, by the way, also thought highly of Mills’s work, especially his *The Sociological Imagination*.) Mills maintained that a self-styled elite thinks itself superior to the masses, in that it is not deceived by idealistic rhetoric but can cope with the hard realities of Machtpolitik. In fact, as Mills explained in *The Causes of World War III*, the elite is the prisoner of its own narrow assumptions. Mills called this inability to think beyond the ready resort to force “crackpot realism.”

They know of no solutions to the problems of the Far East and Africa except the landing of marines. Being baffled, and also being very tired of being baffled, they have come to believe that there is no way out—except war—which would remove all the bewildering paradoxes of their tedious and now misguided attempts to construct peace. (p. 109, quoting Mills)

Higgs finds parallels between the crackpot realism of the Bush administration and the foreign policy of Kennedy’s New Frontier. “The Kennedy people reeked of recklessness. . . . Above all, however, the mock-virile president resolved that he must demonstrate toughness” (p. 112). Accordingly Kennedy and his cohorts, who imagined themselves men of surpassing
intellect, “pushed the world to the brink of nuclear catastrophe in their management of the Cuban missile crisis” (p. 112).* Bush and his coterie likewise stress toughness and the use of military force to insure American dominance of the world.

No longer does the US government . . . find satisfaction merely in a Monroe Doctrine that proclaims its hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. No, our rulers have declared in sufficiently plain language, in their new “National Security Strategy of the United States,” that they intend to dominate the entire world. (p. 131)

Why have such inept and dangerous policies been adopted? A good part of the answer, Higgs argues, stems from the vast fortunes to be made in the defense industry. The Cold War, he trenchantly remarks, is “too good a deal to give up” (p. 49). No longer is America locked in conflict with its Cold War adversary; but US military spending during the six fiscal years from 1995 through 2000 was equal to what it had been during the baseline years . . . of the Cold War. Moreover, the Pentagon continued to spend its money for the same kinds of forces and weapons that had been developed for confrontation with the Red Army or a similar foe. (p. 49)

We do not need these weapons for defense, but a “politically entrenched defense industry makes sure that spending continues at a high level, and pork-dispensing congressmen grease the wheels, buying a few votes in the process” (p. 51).

The cost of such massive militarism to the American people is far more than financial. Higgs is most famous as a historian for his classic Crisis and Leviathan, in which he showed the baleful effects of wars in extending the scope and power of the state and restricting individual freedom.† Even when the military crisis subsides, the state does not shrink to its prewar level; by a “ratchet effect,” part of its wartime growth remains in place.

* I do not think that Dean Rusk was one of the “steel-trap” rational Cabinet officers of the Kennedy administration (p. 111). Did not the genuine New Frontiersmen view him as part of the State Department establishment, not one of their own?

† See also his Against Leviathan (Independent Institute, 2004) and my review found in Volume 3, “Current Events.”
Unfortunately, events since 9/11 have conformed to this pattern of offenses against freedom. Most notable in this connection is the notorious Patriot Act, and Higgs is appropriately severe:

Our rulers declare that by nothing more substantial than the emperor’s say-so, any person may be arrested and held incommunicado, without trial, and then punished, even put to death. Say good-bye to the writ of habeas corpus, the very bedrock of limited government. . . . Do I [Higgs] fear that the USA PATRIOT Act will be abused? No. I know that it has been already and will continue to be as its elastic language allows unscrupulous prosecutors to scratch a variety of itches unrelated to terrorism. (pp. 29–30)

Higgs writes with searing passion; readers will find his descriptions of the effects of US bombs on Iraqi children very hard to bear. He tells us that he has made no attempt here to suppress or conceal my own values. Indeed, perhaps my greatest grievance during the past four years [2001–2005] has been that the values that I hold dearest—justice, peace, humanity, honesty, and basic decency—have been savaged most fiercely. (p. xiv)

Higgs has made a major contribution to understanding and, one hopes, changing America’s warfare state.
In Our Hands: A Plan to Replace the Welfare State*

CHARLES MURRAY

A Man, A Plan, A Flop

April 1, 2006, Mises Review

CHARLES MURRAY, by his own account, should not have written In Our Hands. He identifies a genuine problem; but he himself shows that his plan to solve it is either useless or inferior to a better plan.

Government programs spend billions of dollars to help the poor, but poverty continues. Given the inordinate waste of bureaucratic programs, why not abolish them altogether? Would we not do better instead to give the money that the transfer programs cost directly to the poor?

America’s population is wealthier than any in history. Every year, the American government redistributes more than a trillion dollars of that wealth to provide for retirement, health care, and the alleviation of poverty. We still have millions of people without comfortable retirements, without adequate health care, and living in poverty. Only a government can spend so much money so ineffectually. The solution is to give the money to the people. (p. 1)

Does not a problem at once arise? In Murray’s proposal, the government uses taxes that would otherwise have gone to welfare programs to finance a

grant of $10,000 per year to every American citizen 21 or older. But if the government is as inefficient as Murray thinks, why take money in taxes at all? Should people not be free to spend or save their own money as they please?

An obvious objection threatens this suggestion, but Murray provides the resources to answer it. What about the poor? It is all very well to talk about people keeping their own money, but what about those unable in the free market to cope for themselves? Are they to be left to starve or to do without needed medical care that they cannot afford?

As Murray rightly notes, voluntary associations for welfare were widespread before compulsory New Deal programs crowded them out of existence.

At the time the New Deal began, mutual assistance for insurance did not consist of a few isolated workingmen’s groups. Philanthropy to the poor did not consist of a few Lady Bountifuls distributing food baskets. Broad networks, engaging people from the top to the bottom of society, spontaneously formed by ordinary citizens, provided sophisticated and effective social insurances and social services of every sort. (pp. 116–117)

If, Murray asks, so much was accomplished in the relatively poor conditions of the early twentieth century, how much more could be done “to deal with human needs at today’s level of national wealth?” (p. 116, emphasis removed).

Murray surprisingly agrees that a laissez-faire policy is better than his own plan.

The libertarian solution is to prevent the government from redistributing money in the first place. Imagine for a moment that the trillion-plus dollars that the United States government spends on transfer payments were left in the hands of the people who started with them. If I [Murray] could wave a magic wand, this would be my solution. (p. 4)

Murray rejects the libertarian approach because it is unacceptable to the American public. Are we then to regard his guaranteed income plan as a compromise with political reality? Unfortunately for this suggestion, Murray also thinks that his own plan exceeds the bounds of political possibility: “The ladder I am describing to you would work if it existed, but today’s American politicians will not build it. I must ask you to suspend belief and play along” (p. xv). He cannot then imagine himself a Milton Friedman and
say, e.g., “Ideally government should play no role in education. But the public will not accept this. Instead, educational vouchers are the closest to the free market that we can in practice attain.” Friedman thought that his proposals were realistic; and however much one may disagree with them—would not vouchers lead to more government control, rather than less?—one can grant that he had a case worth presenting. Not so Murray—what is the point of a detailed account of an inferior plan that cannot be realized?

Perhaps Murray has an answer. Toward the end of the book, he suggests that the plan may not be unrealistic in the future:

I began this thought experiment by asking you to ignore that the Plan was politically impossible today. I end proposing that something like the Plan is politically inevitable—not next year, but sometime. (p. 125)

How has the impossible turned into the inevitable? Our author points to the continual progress of American capitalism. Are we not getting richer and richer? “Real per capita GNP has grown with remarkable fidelity to an exponential growth equation for more than a century” (p. 125). Unless the government through even more incompetent policies than those it now pursues disables the economy, may we not expect this process to continue?* If it does, the continued existence of poverty will become intolerable. People will realize that government programs have not worked and will turn to something else. Hence the Plan will become a live option.

Murray has evidently forgotten his earlier discussion. If the government has failed to alleviate poverty, will not very wealthy people come to realize that a purely voluntary society will be worth trying? If they are sufficiently wealthy, charitable contributions will not burden them unduly. Why then will they turn to the Plan, which Murray acknowledges is less than ideal?

But let us disregard this objection. Suppose sometime in the future people do wish to adopt Murray’s plan. If so, they will need to compare the costs of the government programs, Social Security and Medicare chief among them, with the costs of the annual payments to the population that will then exist. What

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* Murray’s argument seems based on the questionable premise that a long established trend, other things being equal, may be expected to persist. In past work, Murray has relied on this dubious assumption. See his What It Means to Be a Libertarian: A Personal Interpretation (Broadway Books, 1997). In the present instance, though, his conjecture strikes me as reasonable.
is the point, then, of the elaborate estimates that occupy the bulk of this book? People in the future will not be concerned with calculations based on conditions that to them will be past. If Murray’s figures are right, he has shown that a politically impossible program could now be realized. So what?

If we seek an answer to Murray’s preoccupation with an inferior and politically impossible idea, the answer is not far to be found. It transpires that he is not really a libertarian at all:

People are unequal in the abilities that lead to economic success in life. To the extent that this inequality is grounded in the way people freely choose to lead their lives, I do not find it troubling. . . . Inequality of wealth grounded in unequal abilities is different. . . . When a society tries to redistribute the goods of life to compensate the most unlucky, its heart is in the right place, however badly the thing has worked out in practice. (pp. 4–5)

Murray characterizes his own project as an effort “to extend a hand across the political divide between libertarians and social democrats, offering a compromise that provided generous assistance for dealing with human needs without entailing the suffocating and soulless welfare state” (p. xii). But libertarianism rejects coercive redistribution and social democracy embraces it: how then is compromise possible?

What of Murray’s plan itself? It must confront a potentially fatal objection. If all adults receive a guaranteed income, regardless of whether they work, will this not induce many people to leave the work force? Does not the proposal substantially reduce the opportunity cost of leisure? Did not a similar problem render Milton Friedman’s negative income tax unworkable?

During the 1970s, the federal government sponsored test versions of the NIT [negative income tax] in selected sites in Iowa, New Jersey, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and, most ambitiously, in Denver and Seattle. The experimental NIT produced disappointing results. The work disincentives were substantial and ominously largest among the youngest recipients. (pp. 8–9)

Murray argues that his vastly more ambitious plan would largely escape the incentives problem. The sum and substance of his argument is that neither young people first entering the work force nor those earning substantial salaries will be likely to rely entirely on their $10,000 annual grants. Suppose
that he is right: he has still ignored the main problem that the incentives argument poses for his plan.

The difficulty is not that people will “drop out” entirely, living entirely on a hardly munificent sum. Rather, those who prefer a leisurely life may do quite well with little labor. Murray has himself noted the effect, though he fails to see its relevance to the incentives problem: “Surpassing the official poverty line under the Plan is easy for people in a wide range of living circumstances, even in a bad economy, and even at the rock-bottom wage” (p. 54). Murray uses this point to counter the objection that his plan will leave substantial numbers mired in poverty, but he fails to see that it allows more skilled workers to avoid full-time employment.* If sufficient numbers did so, the income base on which Murray rests his calculations would be upset. Much less revenue than he thinks might be available to pay the annual pensions.

Even on Murray’s optimistic figures, the scheme costs a great deal of money. “[I]n all, the expenditures on programs to be replaced amounted to $1.385 trillion in 2002, compared to the Plan’s residual funding requirement of $1.740 trillion. In other words, as of 2002, the Plan could have been implemented with a $355 billion shortfall” (pp. 17–18). What is a mere $355 billion among us libertarians? You will be comforted to know that by 2011, the Plan will cost no more than the current welfare state; and after that it will cost less—if Murray’s projections are accurate.

Given such huge costs, taxes of course must remain high: “There is no way to reconfigure the tax system so that middle-income and affluent citizens do not end up paying just about as much tax as they do now” (p. 158). Here for once Murray is entirely correct. The whole point of his plan is to maintain the transfer of income to the poor carried out by the current welfare state: his claim is that the plan will transfer income more efficiently. And to do so, high taxes are necessary.

If we must have redistribution, should we agree with Murray that the process ought to be carried out as efficiently as possible? In this case, we pay a very high price for efficiency. Murray argues that his system minimizes administrative costs because everyone is required to have a national

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*Murray’s proposal resembles the plan of the Belgian Marxist Philippe Van Parijs to guarantee everyone a minimum income without work. See his Real Freedom for All (Oxford University Press, 1995).
passport and a bank account to which the government can gain access. Does this not enable the government to save a great deal of money? No longer, e.g., would wasteful expenses be incurred in tracking down unmarried fathers who do not pay child support: “Police do not need to track him [the unmarried father] down or try to find him on a day when he has cash on hand. All they need is a court order to tap the bank account” (p. 63). Those who do not share Murray’s non-Euclidean brand of libertarianism will view such police state measures with suspicion. The internal passport was a defining feature of Soviet communism.*

Though the plan imposes high costs and threatens liberty, must not even opponents concede that it brings some genuine advantages? Does it not eliminate Medicare? Yes; but the plan hardly provides for a free market in medicine. Quite the contrary, everyone is required to use $3,000 of his annual grant for medical insurance.

Murray has anticipated an obvious objection to this. Three thousand dollars will purchase very different amounts of insurance, depending on one’s risk factors. Someone whose parents died in their forties may find that the money will not buy him much coverage.

Our author solves this problem with consummate ease. “Legally oblige medical insurers to treat the entire population, of all ages, as a single pool” (p. 44). Some exceptions might be allowed: perhaps obese hang-gliders might have to pay higher premiums than those who engage in less risky hobbies. But even this is doubtful: “It may well turn out that the cost to the rest of us of subsidizing the health risks of obese smokers who hang-glide is only a few dollars per year per person” (p. 44). If so, even these extreme cases should be included in the common risk pool.

What is the point of all of this? It is unfair, as Murray sees matters, that persons risky to insure should be penalized:

the requirement to treat the population as a single insurance pool . . . eliminates the cosmic unfairness through which some people have genes or accidents that produce debilitation, pain, and physical handicaps that the rest of us are spared, through no fault or merit of their own. (pp. 43–44)

Why Murray thinks that obese people who smoke and hang-glide are at risk through no fault of their own I shall not venture to say; but to end “cosmic unfairness,” Murray’s plan subjects medical insurance to government control. Once more, a commitment to equality trumps Murray’s “libertarianism.”

Also, what if, contrary to Murray’s assumptions, many people squander their annual grants? Would not taxpayers demand controls on spending? The bureaucratic programs that his plan aimed to eliminate would reenter the scene. And rightfully so: one should be free to spend one’s own money, not other people’s. Further, an increase in controls, as President Clinton realized, will tend to drive people off welfare. Murray’s plan, by offering “free money,” reverses the gains of Clinton’s reforms.* Murray defends his proposals with elaborate calculations, but he sometimes presents his results in a misleading way. He fails to note that influential people who derive all their income from the present system, such as Medicaid doctors and social workers, might also have to be bought off. He points out, quite correctly, that a 21-year-old earning over $50,000 who every year until retirement invests $2,000 from his grant will end up better than he would under Social Security. Hence some at any rate of the relatively well-off will find it in their interest to support the plan.

Murray here ignores the fact that the $2,000 extra that the well-off person has to invest is simply a remission of part of his taxes. Without the universal grant, taxes could be massively reduced, and many people would have much more to invest than the $2,000 Murray generously offers them. But we are not provided with figures on how much people would gain: these calculations, one suspects, would interfere with Murray’s need to propagandize against “cosmic unfairness.”

Murray ends his book with a surprise. As mentioned before, Murray acknowledges that to implement his plan would result in a massive “shortfall” of $355 billion. He obtains this figure by, on the one hand, multiplying the eligible population by $10,000 and, on the other, adding the costs of the government programs to be eliminated under the plan. (The first figure is reduced by the taxes that high-income earners must pay on their grants.) But our social democratic libertarian has kept something from us until “Appendix D.” Some well-off people benefit more from the present system than from the plan. They might have to be “bought off” to induce their acquiescence to the new system, and to do so entails heavy costs.

* I am grateful to Jeff Tucker for these points.
[A]ll but those on the verge of actually retiring could be bought off with a lump-sum payment that represents less than the present value of the government’s obligations to those couples under the current system. Nothing in this perspective denies that the transition costs would be large and problematic. (p. 173)

Murray suggests that these transition costs would not be “obviously unmanageable,” but he has not included them in his calculations. Had he done so, the financial irresponsibility of his plan would have been more glaring. Perhaps he feared that our shock at the figures would be too much for us to bear. But what we have is bad enough.
Norman Podhoretz, an eminent authority on the novels of Norman Mailer, has for decades postured as an expert in foreign policy as well. It is not too much then, one might have supposed, to expect him to possess an elementary knowledge of European history. Any such expectations are soon disappointed. We find in his latest effort this surprising remark:

Following from this [wish for stability through a balance of power] was a very old principle, going all the way back to the arrangements of the sixteenth century that grew out of the Treaty of Westphalia allowing for more or less peaceful coexistence among perennially warring Catholic and Protestant principalities. In its original form this principle was expressed in the Latin motto *cuius regio eius religio* (the religion of the ruler is the religion of the region). (p. 132)

Podhoretz has blundered badly. He confuses the arrangements made in the Peace of Augsburg (1555) with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which
confirmed the principle of *cuius regio* and extended it to Calvinism. But what is a mere century to our learned author?

But I am holding Podhoretz to an unfair standard. As he makes abundantly clear in this book, his field is not historical fact but rather fantasy and propaganda. We see this immediately in the title that he has chosen for his book. This presupposes two falsehoods: that we are engaged in a world war and that something called “Islamofascism” exists.

The United States invaded Iraq in March 2003 and has since remained there, but this hardly suffices for a global war. Nor do matters change if one adds to this the Bush Administration’s bumbling efforts to dispatch Osama bin Laden. How could even someone of Podhoretz’s ineptitude for historical reasoning fail to see that there is no World War IV? (World War III was the Cold War. Once again, Podhoretz errs; though there was a protracted conflict between the United States and Soviet Russia, there was no world war, James Burnham to the contrary notwithstanding.)

To understand our author’s reasoning, we must progress to the second falsehood, the existence of Islamofascism. Podhoretz conjures this threatening and monstrous entity into existence by combining a number of genuine phenomena. First, he recalls several terrorist incidents that go back to the 1970s:

> The record speaks dismally for itself. From 1970 to 1975, during the administrations of Nixon and Ford, several American diplomats were murdered in Sudan and Lebanon while others were kidnapped. The perpetrators were all agents of one or another faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). (p. 27)

These he groups together with terrorist incidents in the 1980s that involve Muammar Qaddafi in some cases and Hezbollah in others.* In the 1990s, Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda join the fray with embassy bombings and the attack on the *USS Cole*. The incidents of course culminate with the 9/11 attacks. These various incidents were of course deplorable, but without adducing any evidence, Podhoretz considers them all part of a decades-long concerted terrorist war against the United States.

Even if Podhoretz were right that the various terrorist assaults were linked, this would hardly constitute a world war. But our distinguished expert on

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* For a skeptical account of some of the charges against Libya, see John Quigley, *The Ruses for War* (Prometheus Books, 2007).
fiction has just begun to confabulate. Our enemy is not merely a few terrorist groups but a substantial part of Islam, a religion with over one billion adherents. Following Daniel Pipes, Podhoretz warns of

an ideology capable of appealing to Muslims of every size and shape . . . [with] a large number of committed cadres. If Islamists constitute 10 to 15 percent of the Muslim population worldwide, they number some 125 to 200 million persons . . . the objective of the Islamofascists is not merely to deploy these resources in order to murder as many of us as possible. Like the Nazis and the Communists before them, they are dedicated to the destruction of the freedoms we cherish and for which America stands. (p. 14)

Podhoretz confuses two very different things. Many Muslims quite aggressively proclaim their belief that their religion is destined to triumph and view the secular Western world with disdain. But how does Podhoretz get from this to a plot involving millions to destroy America?

He offers us no more than anecdotes. “Unlike in Europe, where the attack of 9/11 did elicit a passing moment of sympathy for the United States . . . in the realm of Islam the news of 9/11 brought dancing in the streets and screams of jubilation” (p. 99).

Which people, and how many were jubilant? Podhoretz does not tell us, nor does he refer, e.g., to the candlelight vigil for the victims of 9/11 in Iran. But suppose that Podhoretz is right. Would this show anything more than that some people are happy to view the misfortune of a hostile power? To jump from this to a worldwide conspiracy to destroy America is nothing short of reckless. I do not suggest that all talk of an Islamic threat is foolish. My problem concerns Podhoretz, not Islam: he totally fails to provide evidence for his principal claims.

A difficulty now threatens our author. As we have seen, he maintains that millions of Muslims profess a radical version of Islam that aims to bring America down. He advocates a war to combat this “armed doctrine,” and he enthusiastically supported the invasion of Iraq as part of the anti-terrorist crusade. But Saddam Hussein, though of course a Muslim, led a largely secular state. Further, he was not involved in the 9/11 attacks. Even if Podhoretz is right about the Islamic plot, why is the Iraq war part of the anti-Islamic struggle? Is it not rather a diversion from that struggle?
So minor a matter as logic does not detain our author. It is enough for him that Bush declared Iraq part of the “axis of evil.” No evidence that Saddam planned any assault against America is needed, nor does it matter that the invasion of Iraq led to “a furious outburst of anti-Americanism” in the Arab world (p. 100). The destruction of Saddam did not weaken the power of the radical Islam that Podhoretz fears, since Iraq was not governed by this ideology. Rather, the invasion further inflamed the hostility of the radical Islamists. Podhoretz, as just mentioned, notes this reaction but sees it only as an illustration of Arab evil rather than proof that the policy he favors is bankrupt.

I fear that we are not yet done with Podhoretz’s depiction of the foe we face. Even if everything Podhoretz has said about his antagonists is true, why does he call them fascists? He cites Bernard Lewis about the influence of the Nazis on the formation of the Baath Party in the 1940s. This party, though, was and remains a secular nationalist movement; what does it have to do with the Islamic thrust against the West that our author fears? His “argument” appears to be that Islamic religious radicals are fascist because some secular Arabs sixty years ago viewed the Nazis with sympathy.

Let us put all this aside, though, and suppose that millions of Muslims aim to destroy us. What is to be done? For Podhoretz, the answer is straightforward: we must install democracies throughout the Middle East.

Bush’s “new approach” aimed “(in my [Podhoretz’s] own preferred summation) to make the Middle East safe for America by making it safe for democracy” (p. 144).

This is no Utopian idea, since the states of that region had all been conjured into existence less than one hundred years ago out of the ruins of the defeated Ottoman empire in World War I. . . . This being the case, there was nothing “utopian” about the idea that such regimes—which had been planted with shallow roots by two Western powers [Britain and France] and whose legitimacy was constantly challenged by internal forces both religious and secular—could be uprooted with the help of a third Western power and that a better political system could be put in their place. (pp. 144–145)

Of course Podhoretz’s argument is wrong; it does not follow from the instability of a government that a successor regime can be easily established, but this is not the problem to which I now wish to call attention. If Podhoretz is to
be believed, millions of Muslims aim to destroy us. In a democracy, will these people not vote for governments that will endeavor to carry out their radical programs? Given their numbers (once more, if Podhoretz is right about them) they are often likely to have a decisive voice in elections. The effect of Podhoretz’s democratic remedy is likely to be an intensification of the problem it is supposed to cure. Does Podhoretz think that the radical Islamic views he fears flourish only in undemocratic regimes? If so, he once again offers nothing to support his position.

He does mention the problem in one place: “Yes, elections brought Hamas to power in the Palestinian Authority, gave the terrorists of Hezbollah a place in the Lebanese government, and awarded the terrorists of the Muslim Brotherhood seats in the Egyptian parliament” (p. 211). His response is to cite two Middle Eastern writers who praise elections as a sign that the ballot box has replaced tyranny. In other words, the answer to the problem that voters may establish hostile regimes is that Democracy is a Good Thing.

Once more, though, let us give the benefit of the doubt to our distinguished expert on the Middle East. Suppose that, before 2003, one was inclined to see merit in the notion of democracy as the cure for that region’s problems. Would not any rational observer have to conclude that, applied to Iraq, the policy has failed miserably?

Not at all, says Podhoretz: the war is going quite well. True, mistakes have been made, but what of it? These amount to “chump change when stacked up against the mistakes that were made in World War II—a war conducted by acknowledged giants like Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill” (p. 115). Podhoretz’s “reasoning” here, if I have understood it, is that if the mistakes of the Iraq war are less than those of another war he deems a success, then the Iraq war is not a failure. It is probably just as well that Podhoretz normally does not attempt to argue for his assertions.

Podhoretz makes a number of other remarkable claims. The prisoners at Guantánamo are not ill-treated. Quite the contrary, they receive advanced medical care and so healthful is their regimen that they have gained on average eighteen pounds during their imprisonment (p. 93). On reading this, I was tempted to apply for admission to the facility. Before sending off my enrollment form, though, caution intervened. Elsewhere Podhoretz tells us that “the key factor in fighting a terrorist insurgency” is the amount of intelligence that can be obtained, and that one method of securing this is through questioning prisoners. Podhoretz bemoans efforts to “define ‘torture’ down
to the point where it would become illegal to subject even a captured terrorist to generally accepted methods of interrogation” (p. 114). Podhoretz has a rather aberrant view of good treatment, and as a result I shall have to abandon my Guantánamo vacation plans.

America’s policy in Iraq, then, is a magnificent success. Accordingly, then, does not the author of that policy qualify for greatness? “I [Podhoretz] believe that on top of the ways in which he [Bush] already resembles Harry Truman will come the belated recognition of him as a great president” (p. 205).

Criticisms of Bush’s domestic policies leave intact his greatness: “who today either remembers or cares about Truman’s domestic policies?” (p. 205). Eric Voegelin, following the Austrian novelist Heimito von Doderer, spoke of a Second Reality inhabited by those who suffer from a disorder of the spirit. I cannot think of a more exact illustration of what he meant than Podhoretz’s *World War IV*. *

* Podhoretz writes in serviceable, though undistinguished, prose; but I do not think his teachers Lionel Trilling and F. R. Leavis would have approved of his constant use of “and/or”—a locution more suited to a business letter than an essay or book.
This is going to be an unfair review—I hope readers will not say to themselves, “as usual.” Brian Doherty has done a remarkable amount of research for his book, which endeavors to present a comprehensive history of American libertarianism. No one can read this book without learning a great deal. If you want to know about Leonard Read’s mystical experiences or how effectively Andrew Joseph Galambos taught, this is the book to read. Doherty, furthermore, has not confined the book to a recital of personalities and events. He has immersed himself in libertarian theory and manifests a gift for explaining complex issues in simple language. Readers new to the subject will get an excellent preliminary understanding of, e.g., Austrian economics, the Chicago School, and Ayn Rand’s egoistic ethics and its critics. I propose, though, to concentrate on a problem that mars the book.

* Public Affairs, 2007
In undertaking a survey of libertarianism, two divergent approaches suggest themselves. One can adopt a particular view of correct libertarian doctrine. A certain variety of libertarianism, e.g., Rothbardian anarchism, can be taken as “libertarianism rightly so called”: other varieties will be assessed by the extent of their deviations from the favored position.

One might, by contrast, confine oneself to a description of all the various sorts of views that claim to be libertarian. Here only points that all, or nearly all, self-professed libertarians accept will be deemed essential to the concept of libertarianism. If someone takes this approach, he may very well hold strong opinions of his own about correct doctrine; but these will play no role in how he structures his account. Opinions he believes vital may appear as optional, if some libertarians reject them.

An example from another field will clarify what I have in mind. Someone writing a study of comparative religion might well classify belief in God as optional rather than part of the definition of religion, owing to the fact that some types of Buddhism reject belief in God. A student of religion who proceeded along this path could with entire consistency be a firm believer in God.

Thus, one cannot much fault Doherty when he says:

These days, war revisionism is ignored by most mainstream libertarian institutions. Arguing against the Leviathan state seems far enough beyond the pale to trouble yourself further by linking with such lost causes as arguing that America should not have entered World War II or even the milder version, that Roosevelt’s means for getting us into it were underhanded, antidemocratic, and anti-republican in the real, not partisan, sense. Nowadays, only some writers associated with the Ludwig von Mises Institute and the libertarian-run website Antiwar.com are apt to link libertarianism and revisionism. (p. 63)

From my own Rothbardian perspective, opposition to war is central to libertarianism, not a sideshow; but, once more, if Doherty wishes to write a descriptive survey, he is free to do so. He is quite right that some who consider themselves libertarians reject revisionism. Even here, though, a shadow of doubt on Doherty’s method begins to form. What exactly counts as a “mainstream”

* Here I am paraphrasing Samuel Craig’s pamphlet on Calvinism, *Christianity Rightly So Called.*
libertarian organization? Doherty keeps his criteria of selection to himself nor does he tell us why the Mises Institute fails to meet them. We shall see the problem of the mainstream reemerge in another context. Why, further, is the issue of war revisionism a lost cause? Again, he does not tell us. He might, by the way, benefit from reading Josiah Royce on the value of belief in lost causes.

The essential problem with the way Doherty has organized his material does not lie in a quarrel over details. Rather, the difficulty is this. He does not always follow the descriptive methodology sketched above. Sometimes, his own ideas of the essence of libertarianism intrude on his presentation. But because he does not openly defend a point of view, readers will find it hard to challenge him. He oscillates between the two interpretative approaches I have mentioned, though the descriptive method occupies by far the larger place.*

An example or two will show what I have in mind. Doherty begins his book with a paean to the plans of the Cato Institute to “privatize” Social Security.

A group of intellectuals and activists had long seen the need for an escape route from the Social Security system and had offered a solution two decades before most American politicians or citizens realized that a crisis was coming. . . . One way to rescue America from the potential fiscal wreckage of Social Security, said the libertarians at Cato [Institute], was to give citizens personal control over their own savings and their own retirement. Let them keep at least a portion of their own money to invest however they thought best (in a nod toward political reality, the modern Cato plan would limit the choices of what private investments citizens could make with Social Security money) rather than force them into a complicated and doomed pyramid scheme. . . . (pp. 1–2)

Doherty treats the Cato plan as if it were completely noncontroversial among libertarians. Quite the contrary, some libertarians view with alarm schemes to “privatize” Social Security that require vast increases in government spending in the transition period to the new system. The work of John Attarian, Social Security: False Consciousness and Crisis (Transaction, 2002)

* In pursuing my claim that Doherty does not have a consistent framework of interpretation, I have greatly benefited from an online article by Joseph Salerno, “A Fairy Tale of the Austrian Movement.”
is especially noteworthy in this regard.* My point here is not to urge the superior merits of Attarian’s analysis over Cato’s, though I indeed think that Attarian is right. Rather, Doherty has without discussion insinuated his own view of the question as the libertarian position. Behind ostensible description lies concealed interpretation.

Again, in a manner that will delight Mrs. Virginia Postrel, Doherty remarks:

Advances in technology have made possible new wired worlds where governments might be unnecessary, new biological abilities have expanded our potential power over ourselves and our environments to almost godlike status. We may even be on the cusp of creating new societies off the surface of the planet itself. (p. 4)

Though he does later mention in passing Rothbard’s criticism of “space cadets,” he does not elaborate. The unwary reader would not guess that technological Titanism is not a universal feature of libertarianism. It is a particular point of view, again insinuated as part of a libertarian consensus when it is not.

The gravamen of my complaint against Doherty concerns his treatment of the space cadets’ antagonist, Murray Rothbard. Doherty considers Rothbard one of the five thinkers who “form the spine of the story this book tells, five people without whom there would have been no uniquely libertarian ideas or libertarian institutions of any popularity or impact in America in the second half of the twentieth century” (p. 8). (The other four are Mises, Hayek, Rand, and Friedman.) He is by no means hostile to Rothbard. Quite the contrary, he praises him for embodying “the purest form of the libertarian political philosophy” (p. 569).

But he leaves the impression that the “mainstream”—again, that blessed word!—of libertarianism has passed Rothbard by; and, as always, he does not tell us why the persons he cites form part of this mainstream. He says that Robert Poole “sums up the most charitable [sic] current assessment of Rothbard in most mainstream libertarian institutions outside the Mises Institute . . .” (p. 567). Poole’s assessment is that although Rothbard “was important, particularly in the 1970s” and one “had to respect his energy, his intellect, his skill with words, and some aspects of his vision,” nevertheless “I

* See my review found in Volume 2, “Political Theory.”
[Poole] thought then [in the 1970s] and thought more as time went on that he was a very divisive figure and a negative influence” (p. 567). So much for charity. I do not think it altogether a coincidence that the person Doherty here selects to represent mainstream opinion, Robert Poole, is the founder of the Reason Foundation, which publishes the journal for which Doherty works as an editor.

A number of the assessments of Rothbard that Doherty offers stress his influence but the dominant opinion conveyed is that he is a past figure who has put himself aside by his extremism and contentiousness. If Doherty confined himself to quoting people who held this view, one could not object: he would be properly engaging in his task as a historian of libertarianism. But, to reiterate, he insinuates a value perspective that he has not defended by argument. To say, e.g., “Poole thinks Rothbard a bad influence” is one thing; to say, “Poole, who represents the mainstream, thinks Rothbard a bad influence” quite another.

His account of Rothbard’s ideas is in general good, but at one key point, he seems to me mistaken. He stresses the influence of Ayn Rand’s ethics on Rothbard. In doing so, he misses a major difference between their views. Like Rand, Rothbard’s ethical theory is Aristotelian: the good is what enables man, as a species, to flourish. But Rand goes beyond this to adopt an egoistic standpoint: I ought to act according to what is good for me. To assume an Aristotelian standpoint that stresses the virtues does not commit one to egoism. Tara Smith, an Objectivist philosopher, in her excellent *Ayn Rand’s Normative Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), notes that moral philosophers such as Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse who argue “that goodness is a function of our [human] nature” nevertheless distance themselves from egoism. Foot “insists that the moral does not simply consist of doing what is good for oneself, though she concedes that a ‘reasonable modicum’ of self-interest is permissible” (Smith, pp. 2–3). Rothbard would have to be numbered with Foot, whom he cites in *Ethics of Liberty*. He favors a natural law ethics and does not follow Rand into egoism.

The single most unfortunate remark in the book, though, does not concern Rothbard. After discussing the 1987 presidential nominating convention of the Libertarian Party, in which Ron Paul defeated Russell Means, Doherty says: “Some old party hands such as [David] Bergland thought Ron Paul ended up a carpetbagger, moving in on the LP merely to expand the mailing list and donor base for his investment advice business” (p. 515).
Is this not a vicious smear against a man who has spent decades of his life defending libertarian principles? Doherty does not endorse the remark, but he says nothing at all against it. Does this not convey to the reader that he thinks there is at least something to the charge? If he thinks so, he owes us some argument; if he disagrees, he ought explicitly to dissociate himself from the accusation. Twenty pages later, he discusses Ron Paul’s current libertarian activities in Congress.

He holds his seat as an absolute maverick, refusing to vote for anything he doesn’t think is explicitly authorized by the Constitution, proposing libertarian bills that never make it out of committee, working in general obscurity with GOP colleagues who admire his principles yet refuse to learn any lessons from him. (pp. 534–535)

Hardly the behavior of an opportunist; yet Doherty does not think to connect this account with Bergland’s smear.

I noted a few mistakes on other matters. Doherty explains the rise of the concept of marginal utility in this way:

Before Menger, Jevons, and Walras, an object’s value was generally thought to arise from the labor that went into making it. Economists tended to consider the value of objects as a class, which led to the apparent diamond/water paradox. If water is indispensable for human life and diamonds are a frippery, how is it that diamonds cost more than water under most circumstances? The innovation of marginal utility cut to the solution. We don’t make valuation decisions regarding diamonds and water in general or in total, but on a specific given amount of either up for our immediate consideration. (p. 69)

This is misleading. The diamond/water paradox does not arise for the labor theory of value, because diamonds normally require more labor to produce than water does. The paradox is a problem for explaining economic value through utility, and it is marginal utility that answers this difficulty.

It is also misleading to say, “Keynes thought unemployment was caused, rather, by insufficient aggregate demand from consumers—that if people had enough money to buy all the goods produced, then people would always find work producing those goods” (p. 118). Keynes did indeed stress deficiencies
in aggregate demand, but it is insufficient investment, rather than underconsumption, that principally concerned him.

Even worse is the claim, “Logical positivists believe that all human knowledge has to be reduced to empirical sense impressions, rejecting theory entirely” (p. 83). The positivists decidedly do not reject scientific theory; much of their work attempted to analyze science.

To turn to an entirely different matter, Doherty notes that Isabel Paterson called the US Constitution “the greatest political document ever struck off at one time by the mind of men” (p. 118). He neglects to point out that she was paraphrasing W. E. Gladstone.

*Radicals for Capitalism* is well worth reading, but its interpretations should be taken with caution. To have a point of view is no failing; but one’s standpoint should be explicitly stated, not hidden away through indirection.
The Meaning of Sarkozy*

Alain Badiou

Continental Drift

December 1, 2008, Mises Review

This book provides evidence of the abysmal intellectual standards of much of contemporary Continental philosophy. Long-discredited dogmas of Marxism, accompanied by frequent references to Lenin and Mao as purveyors of wisdom, form the backbone of this deplorable book. Yet the author is no hack. He is one of the most famous current French philosophers, his Being and Event acclaimed by many as a masterpiece.

The book purports to analyze the recent victory of Nicolas Sarkozy in the election for president of France. As befits a distinguished philosopher, though, Badiou sets his account in a broad context: he offers us not only a portrait of a particular election but a view of world history. One premise controls that view: capitalism is evil.

Contemporary capitalism, as we all know, prides itself on its global nature. Globalization is the buzzword on all sides. . . . [But] why am I justified in saying that the unified world of human subjects does not exist? Because the world that is declared to exist and that supposedly has to be imposed on everyone, the world of globalization, is uniquely a world of objects and monetary signs, a world of the free circulation of products and financial flows. It is precisely the world seen by Marx a hundred

* Verso, 2008.
and fifty years ago: the world of the global market. All that exist in this world are things—objects for sale—and signs—the abstract instruments of sale and purchase, the various forms of money and credit. But it is not true that human subjects freely exist in this world. (pp. 53, 55)

Money transforms people into objects. How does it do so? It leads people to concentrate on such trivial matters as their personal welfare. The pursuit of self-interest constitutes the essence of corruption: true virtue must replace it.

In his radical critique of the democratic regime, Plato noted how, from the standpoint of such a regime, what politics has to regulate is the anarchy of material desires. And as a consequence of this, a democratic government is unsuited to the service of any idea at all… The French revolutionaries, who were republicans and not democrats, termed “corruption” the subjection of governmental power to business matters… “Corruption” in this sense is essentially expressed in Guizot’s famous slogan “Enrich yourselves!” (pp. 89–90)

People must spurn so crass a slogan and surrender themselves to the pursuit of virtue. Why? Because Plato, the French revolutionaries, and Marx, not to mention their true successor, Alain Badiou, have told us so. It becomes a matter of some importance, then, to see exactly what the true path of virtue dictates.

That not-altogether-happy task will soon detain us; but before it does so, we need to consider Badiou’s one argument against capitalism that merits consideration. He rightly points out that in today’s world, people cannot freely move wherever they please:

to start with, they [human subjects] totally lack the basic right to move around and settle where they wish. In their crushing majority, the women and men of the supposed “world,” the world of commodities and money, have no access at all to this world. They are rigorously locked out of it, where there are very few commodities for them and no money at all. (p. 55)

Badiou has made a strange complaint. If the market is evil, why is it bad that people lack access to it? If Badiou complains that state-imposed walls lock people in, why not simply call for their removal? But no one can doubt
that Badiou does not want greater access for all to the benefits of the market. Quite the contrary, he opposes the market for its emphasis on material welfare. Again, if Badiou complains that people lack access to commodities and money, why does he not extol the spread of capitalism, which provides precisely those things? As Mises again and again pointed out, capitalism is a system of mass production for the masses. But of course our great philosopher cannot be bothered to read Mises.

Badiou has enmeshed himself in contradictions. He obviously deplores poverty in the third world and in the immigrant communities of his own country. But how can people rise out of poverty unless their material welfare concerns them?

Perhaps, though, I have misunderstood Badiou’s argument. On this reading, he does not spurn material goods entirely. Rather, capitalism allows a privileged class to pursue unlimited wealth at the expense of exploiting others. Of course Marx long ago said exactly this; but why should we accept it? Badiou offers no argument that Marx’s account of capitalism is right. Instead, he just assumes it as given.

If capitalism is bad, what should replace it? Badiou has no doubt. We must adopt the “communist hypothesis”:

The communist hypothesis is that a different collective organization is practicable, one that will eliminate the inequality of wealth and even the division of labour; every individual will be a “multi-purpose worker,” and in particular people will circulate between manual and intellectual work, as well as between town and country. (p. 98)

How civilization at more than a primitive level could exist without the division of labor Badiou does not deign to tell us.* And when he says that his collective order is “practicable,” there is the little matter of Mises’s socialist-calculation argument, which to the contrary shows that a socialist regime is impossible. Again, Badiou has nothing to say.

One must, though, give Badiou credit—if he will pardon the monetary metaphor. He does advance one argument in favor of the communist hypothesis. He cites his great predecessor Jean-Paul Sartre:

* See on this Murray Rothbard, Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature, and Other Essays (Mises Institute, 2000).
Sartre said in an interview, which I paraphrase: if the communist hypothesis is not right, if it is not practicable, well, that means that humanity is not a thing in itself, not very different from ants or termites. What did he mean by that? If competition, the “free market,” the sum of little pleasures, and the walls that protect you from the desires of the weak, are the alpha and omega of all collective and private existence, then the human animal is not worth a cent. (p. 101)

There you have the essence of Badiou. He rejects ordinary human beings and their banausic interests and wishes to replace them with something better. What if people do not wish to be transformed? So what! This has never bothered the great revolutionaries:

We are in 1793, with the Revolution under desperate attack. Saint-Just asks, “What do they want who accept neither Terror nor Virtue?” (p. 89)

People, after all, have often supported bad things. Hence, as Marx long ago noted, we need a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat to destroy the old materialistic order. If you disagree, he can again appeal to Sartre, who “uttered the famous sentence that ‘every anti-Communist is a swine’” (p. 5). Throughout the book, he calls Sarkozy a rat. One can readily see the high argumentative standard of our eminent philosopher.

I am sure that Badiou would brush all this aside. For him, arguments do not count. Instead, the communist hypothesis must be embraced as a matter of faith. To do this expresses courage:

We have to accept heroically to dissolve the individual into a face-to-face with the point to be held on to. . . . The turn by which the individual de-individualizes is undoubtedly what Plato calls “conversion.” (p. 74)

Badiou in *Being and Event* and other works has dressed up what he preaches here with pretentious references to the Cantorian infinite, not to mention Paul Cohen on “forcing”; but his doctrine reduces to the *acte gratuit* of André Gide.

Even if Badiou disdains argument, must he not acknowledge the disasters of 20th-century communism? He does condemn Stalin, but Mao’s Cultural
Revolution still merits defense. Mao had the right idea, but he too narrowly limited his target:

it was necessary, whatever the cost, to steep the party in the mass movement in order to regenerate it, to de-bureaucratize it, and launch it on the transformation of the real world. The Cultural Revolution attempted this test, and rapidly became chaotic and violent, given that the definition of the enemy was uncertain, and that it was directed against the single pillar of society: the Communist Party itself. Mao is not blameless for this. . . . Eventually, for want of support for the most radical experiments in the decentralization of the state . . . the old order had to be re-established in the worst conditions. (p. 110)

If only Mao had been more radical!

Most of the book comments on politics, but Badiou of course is a man of culture. Here is a sample:

Music of the past should be judged by the standard of today’s creations, as nothing better displays the contemporary reactionary desire than to wax ecstatic, like the fans of “baroque,” over the works of a seventeenth-century prig rediscovered under a well-deserved coat of dust in the Montpellier library and interpreted with the aid of shrill “original instruments,” while the greatest masterpieces of the twentieth century are not played. (p. 46)

Faced with such refined sensibility, it would be churlish to complain that Badiou ascribes Pindar’s familiar “become what you are” to Nietzsche (p. 65).
The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free*

Christopher A. Preble

The Dangers of Militarism

December 1, 2009, Mises Review

America, it is frequently urged, cannot return to its traditional foreign policy of nonintervention. We live in a world that constantly exposes us to danger. Unless America acts as a world policeman, a conflagration far distant from us can soon spread and strike at our essential national interests. The lessons of 9/11 must not be forgotten. Fortunately, America is far and away the most powerful nation in the world. We can, if only we maintain a resolute will, act to promote world order: if we do not, no one else can act in our place.

This disastrous line of thought has embroiled us in futile wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; now neoconservatives urge us to take drastic action against Iran, lest that nation secure nuclear weapons. Once more, the contention supporting a strike at Iran is that the United States must act as a hegemonic power to maintain a stable world. Christopher Preble provides an outstanding critical analysis of this dangerous doctrine in what must count as one of

the best defenses of a restrained and rational foreign policy since Eric Nordlinger’s Isolationism Reconfigured.*

Even those inclined to give credence to the siren song of a Pax Americana must confront reality. Though America may be the world’s mightiest nation, it cannot achieve the grandiose goals of the interventionists. America is strong, but not strong enough.

But our military power has come up short in recent years. Although the US military scored decisive victories against those individuals in Afghanistan and Iraq who were foolish enough to stand and fight, it has proved incapable of enforcing a rule of law, or delivering security, in many parts of post-Taliban Afghanistan or post-Saddam Iraq. . . . We know that our men and women in uniform can accomplish remarkable things. But we have also begun to appreciate their limitations, the most important of which being that they cannot be everywhere at once. (pp. 37–38)

If the goal of universal peace under American domination is unrealizable, the attempt to achieve it has imposed heavy costs. Most obviously, the wars undertaken to secure this chimerical goal have caused death, destruction, and resentment against the United States by the people subjected to our assault. In Afghanistan, e.g., the use of air power to attack suspected insurgent strongholds has enraged Afghan leaders and the local population causing them to question our intentions. Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s “first demand” of Barack Obama was for the President-elect “to put an end to civilian casualties.” (pp. 147–148)

The financial burdens of hegemony are difficult to overestimate. America spends more on the military than all other industrialized nations combined. Defenders of our current policy counter by saying that our defense spending is no higher than many other countries as a percentage of GDP, and lower than some. Preble dismisses this as irrelevant:

There are a very few poor countries that spend a larger percentage of their meager GDP, but that translates to far less military capacity in

real terms... what a country spends as a share of its GDP doesn’t
tells us very much about how much it should spend. (p. 67)

Talk of percentages occludes the immense amount of money the hege-
monic policy demands. As an example, the Iraq War, according to an esti-
mate by Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, will cost

between $2.7 trillion in direct costs to the federal treasury, to
as much as $5 trillion in terms of the total impact of the war on
the US economy. . . . Although critics challenged aspects of the
Stiglitz/Bilmes research, two of their central arguments are be-
yond dispute—and they apply not merely to the Iraq War, but
to all wars. First, we spend more money on our military when it
is at war than when it is at peace. Second, having waged war, we
pay more over the lifetimes of those injured and disabled than
we would have paid if they had never fought. (p. 39)

Preble’s stress on this point continues the pioneering work of Earl Rav-
enal, a one-time Robert McNamara “whiz kid” who became a resolute foe of
interventionism. He too stressed the extraordinary financial costs of Ameri-
can military policy, in such works as Never Again.

Leftist critics of American policy often call up visions of the utopia that
would result were the government to spend its military budget on social
programs. Could we not, absent a crushing military budget, easily provide
decent healthcare and education for all, not to mention the drastic reduc-
tion of poverty, if not its total eradication? Preble trenchantly points out the
fallacy. The problem of the military budget does not lie in its crowding out
of other government programs. Rather, it prevents people from spending
their money as they wish, owing to the high taxes it requires:

Such arguments implicitly assume that money not being spent on
a war, or the military more generally, would be spent by the go-
vernment or on other government programs. That is shortsighted
and ultimately counterproductive... [Opportunity] costs apply
not just to what the government is spending and where the gov-
ernment might be spending elsewhere, but also [to] what aver-
age taxpayers are not able or willing to spend because they are on
the hook for paying for an enormous and seemingly permanent
military industry, and also for the occasional wars. (pp. 78–79)
The pursuit of hegemony has also adversely affected our system of government. Recent presidents have arrogated to themselves the right to commit America to war, in defiance of the Constitution.

The Founders of our great nation... worried that wars would give rise to an overgrown military establishment that would upset the delicate balance between the three branches of government, and between the government and the people. A government instituted to preserve liberties could swiftly come to subvert them. A gloomy Jefferson opined, “The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground.” (p. 80)

Defenders of current policy have a counterargument to all that has been said so far. They will reiterate the dangers that a disordered world presents to us. Even if we cannot completely attain a stable world order controlled by America, and even if the attempt to bring this about has heavy costs, we ought to try to come as close as we can to this goal. Otherwise, a conflagration anywhere on the globe can quickly escalate to an existential threat to us.

One of the best features of Preble’s book is the convincing response it offers to this objection. It is unquestionably true that disorder constantly threatens various areas of the world; but why must a single power act to restore order? If America does not act, will not those nations in the vicinity of a crisis have a strong incentive to cope with it?

In fact, there is little reason to believe the world will descend down this path [to chaos] if the United States hews to a restrained foreign policy focused on preserving its national security and advancing its vital interests. This is because there are other governments in other countries, pursuing similar policies aimed at preserving their security, and regional—much less global—chaos is hardly in their interests. On the contrary, the primary obligation of government is to defend the citizens from threats, both foreign and domestic. (p. 94)*

* Preble expertly disposes of the claim that international defense is a public good that will be under produced if the United States fails to provide it: nations, it is argued, will hope to benefit from efforts by others in their region to cope with threats rather than deal with these threats themselves. Preble counters that defense is not a pure public good. To the extent that it is a public good, though, smaller powers can free ride on American defense efforts.
Those anxious to insure that America remains embroiled in the Middle East warn against a particular example of disorder, i.e., the danger to our economy that would result from an interruption in the supply of oil. Must we not act to interdict any threat to this vital resource? Preble points out that this danger is grossly exaggerated:

As oil is the principal source of revenue for the Persian Gulf countries, an explicit attempt to withhold this source of wealth from world markets would certainly be more painful for the perpetrators of such a policy than for their intended victims. (p. 111)

Even those who reject American hegemony sometimes call for American action to meet “humanitarian catastrophes.” Are we to stand idly by when mass murder, e.g., in Rwanda and Darfur, is taking place? Preble has a two-fold response to this unfortunately influential doctrine of the “responsibility to protect.” First, military interventions often fail to achieve their ostensible humanitarian purpose and

[even] the best-intended military interventions, those specifically aimed at advancing the cause of peace and justice, can have horrific side-effects, [the] most important of these being the real possibility that innocent bystanders and those the operation seeks to protect may be inadvertently killed or injured. . . . Those killed leave behind a legacy of bitterness; parents, spouses, children, friends, few of whom may have actively supported the former regime, but all of whom may forget the noble intentions of the invading force and later direct their wrath at those responsible for their misfortune. (pp. 123–124)

The second strand of Preble’s case against humanitarian intervention appeals to the fundamental insight of his book: the limits of American power. To use the American military for humanitarian missions may strain our resources and interfere with the protection of the American people.

The Constitution clearly stipulates the object of the US government is to protect “We the People of the United States.” Our government is supposed to act in our common defense, not the defense of others. (p. 131)
Preble has constructed an overwhelming case against our current hegemonic policy. The most valuable insight of the book, though, emerges once one accepts this case. This vital insight answers the question, what must be done to achieve a noninterventionist foreign policy? Preble forcefully contends that we will never be able to limit American overreaching so long as the current imbalance in military power persists. Given America’s overwhelming military superiority to any opponent, the temptation to use that power is well-nigh irresistible. To cope with this problem, our military forces must be drastically reduced. Preble is no pacifist; but only by making the grasp at hegemony impossible, he argues, can we hope for a more limited and saner policy. As Preble aptly remarks, “Reducing our power and thereby constraining our ability to intervene militarily around the globe will limit our propensity to intervene” (p. 138).
The Financial Crisis and the Free Market Cure: Why Pure Capitalism Is the World Economy’s Only Hope*

JOHN A. ALLISON

You Call That Austrian?
November 7, 2012, Mises Daily

This book contains the oddest sentence I have ever read about the current financial crisis, or for that matter about any financial crisis. John Allison, President of the Cato Institute, writes,

I also thought of titling the book How the Critique of Pure Reason by Immanuel Kant (1783) Caused the Financial Crisis, but that was too obscure for most people, although it was more accurate, since Kant was the major philosophical opponent of reason who put an end to the Enlightenment century (1700s) that indelibly shaped the founding of the United States. (p. 255, n.3)

It is not enough that Kant lies at the origin of Nazism, as Leonard Peikoff so cogently demonstrated in Ominous Parallels. (It comes as no surprise that Allison admires this great contemporary thinker and scholar. “Leonard Peikoff’s book Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand enabled me to integrate

Rand’s philosophy and use it as a major competitive advantage for myself and for BB&T” [p. 277].) No, he also caused the recession of 2008! The way in which this machine gunner of the mind brought about the catastrophe is not altogether apparent. Perhaps, by weakening confidence in reason, Kant’s destructionism made people blind to the errors of the inflationist doctrines that led to financial ruin. But were not inflationist and mercantilist policies popular long before Kant?

We fortunately do not need to try to clarify this less-than-transparent causal chain. Allison does not develop his intriguing remark any further. To the contrary, his main line of approach seems much more promising. He is a student of Austrian economics and proposes to use insights from that theory to analyze what has gone wrong since 2008. He is not only an extremely successful banker but, he tells us, an intellectual as well.

I have tried to personally exhibit the attributes necessary for life-long learning. Every month, I read a difficult book (typically one that was not directly-business-related) and referred the best books to our senior leadership team. . . . I particularly studied Austrian economics. . . . A deep understanding of the Austrian economic school is a tremendous competitive advantage in making long-term economic decisions. (You should read Human Action by Ludwig von Mises, p. 238.)

One hesitates to challenge so learned a scholar—he reads a difficult book every month—but his knowledge of Austrian theory is not adequate to the task he has set himself. Although he mentions Mises and Hayek a few times, he never refers to anything they have to say on the business cycle. He says, e.g., “Ludwig von Mises proved the futility of central planning in his numerous books, including The Theory of Money and Credit (1913 [sic]), Socialism (1922), and Human Action (1940 [sic])” (p. 34). Very true, but in two of those books, Mises also discussed at some length the business cycle: why not address what he wrote?

Again, Allison says about Hayek,

The free-market economist and Nobel laureate Friedrich Hayek highlighted a concept he termed fatal conceit. This is the belief on the part of elitist intellectuals that they are smarter than the reality of markets. (p. 31)
If Allison were to look up the reason Hayek was awarded the Nobel Prize, he would find a reference to the “theory of money and economic fluctuations.” Would it not have been a good idea for him to consult Hayek’s relevant works on the subject? Of course Murray Rothbard is not mentioned at all: he is *persona non grata* at the Ayn Rand Institute.

Allison’s neglect of the essential sources of Austrian business-cycle theory leads him into error. He rightly notes that the Fed’s expansion of the money supply played the principal role in bringing on the financial crisis, but he misconceives the central issue. From him, the trouble lies mainly in the fact that the increased money supply fueled a bubble in the housing market. Instead of investing in capital goods, people foolishly sought to profit from speculative ventures in housing, a consumption good.

Allison does not mention that, according to Austrian theory, the expansion of bank credit temporarily upsets the balance between the gross market rate of interest and the “originary” rate, determined by people’s rate of time preference. (If I am not mistaken, time preference is never mentioned in the book.)* By upsetting this balance, the entire structure of production is distorted. Businesses use the expanded bank credit to invest in projects that cannot be sustained, given the existing stock of capital goods. In the book that Allison rightly recommends, Mises states,

> However conditions may be, it is certain that no manipulations of the banks can provide the economic system with capital goods. What is needed for a sound expansion of production is additional capital goods, not money or fiduciary media. The boom is built on the sands of banknotes and deposits. It must collapse. (*Human Action, Scholar’s Edition*, p. 559)

Perhaps, besides recommending the book to others, Allison ought to have studied it himself.

Though Allison does mention “misallocation of capital,” for him this intricate process has to a great extent been reduced to trouble in one sector, albeit an important one, of the economy—the housing market:

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* Interest is not, as Allison says, “the price of money” (p. 31). The price of money is what must be exchanged to get money, i.e., goods and services. Interest, as David Friedman notes, is the rent of money expressed in money.
The primary cause of the Great Recession was a massive malinvestment in residential real estate. We built too many houses, too large houses, and houses in the wrong places. . . . In other words, by investing too much in housing, we invested too little in manufacturing capacity, technology, education, agriculture, and other such areas. (pp. 9–10)

(Despite his talk of “malinvestment” here, it is clear that Allison considers buying a house spending on consumption.) It is entirely right that, in Austrian theory, the expansion of bank credit can cause a boom in consumption as well as production goods; and Mises was adamant that the Austrian view be characterized as a malinvestment, not an overinvestment, theory. It is going too far, though, to pass off an underinvestment view as Austrian.

Perhaps Allison would reply that he here is not endeavoring to expound Austrian theory: he instead disagrees with it. Would he not then owe us some account of what is wrong with Mises’s position? He passes it by altogether. Though I cannot prove it, I suspect he is unaware that his view of the cycle differs from that of Mises.

Allison shows insufficient knowledge of Austrian work on another issue. He accepts Milton Friedman’s claims that the Fed drastically contracted the supply of money after the onset of the Great Depression, in that way severely worsening conditions: “The evidence is clear that the early phase of the Great Depression was primarily a liquidity crisis, brought about by the Fed’s arbitrary reduction in the money supply” (p. 70). He does not mention Murray Rothbard’s criticism of this view; again, Rothbard must not be discussed or cited. If he disagrees with Rothbard, should he not have explained why? Again, I suspect that Allison is unaware of the controversy.

What has happened? Why has Allison written an ostensibly Austrian explanation of the financial crisis that displays so little acquaintance with Austrian theory? The answer may in part lie in a remark in the acknowledgments: “Richard Salsman assisted with a significant amount of research and provided most of the footnotes” (p. 278).

Ayn Rand asked, “Who is John Galt?” If, emulating her, we ask, “Who is Richard Salsman?”, the answer lies ready at hand. He is an Objectivist economist who, incredibly, takes Mises to be an enemy of the free market. In an essay that appeared in The Abolition of Antitrust, edited by Gary Hull, Salsman said that Mises
never refuted the myth that capitalists, in his own words, “are merely parasites who pocket the dividends.” For Mises, even entrepreneurs merely buy low and sell high as a passive service to consumers who, he claims, are the real drivers of the economy and profit. (*Abolition of Antitrust*, p. 45)

When Allison sticks to topics that fall within his experience as a banker, such as the effects of Freddie and Fannie on the home-mortgage-lending business and the problems of fair-value accounting, his comments are often insightful; he is after all a distinguished banker of great experience. When he strays into Austrian theory, though, he seems at a loss. If Allison relied on Salsman for his remarks on business-cycle theory, his errors would be understandable, given Salsman’s egregious mistakes and prejudices. I freely acknowledge that my suggestion is no more than speculation.

If Allison is not altogether satisfactory as an expositor of Austrian economics, is he at least fully committed to the free market? He is an Objectivist; and, whatever one’s opinion of Ayn Rand’s philosophy, must not any fair-minded person acknowledge that she and her followers stand among the foremost supporters of the free market?

Although, to his credit, Allison calls for a systematic move to “pure” capitalism, his move falls short of this laudable goal. Robert Wenzel, in an excellent notice of the book in his *Economic Policy Journal*, has already called attention to a number of Allison’s questionable recommendations, including his support for the flat tax and education vouchers and opposition to the homeowner’s deduction.

He says that

> some conservatives argue against the flat tax because they claim it would be easier to raise the tax in the future. This is ridiculous. A properly designed flat tax would be harder for Congress to increase because the increase would have a negative impact on all voters. (p. 197)

Allison seems to have forgotten that Congress has on many occasions passed bills that call for tax increases.

In addition to the items Wenzel has so ably catalogued, I should like to call attention to Allison’s support for government unemployment insurance. He thinks that the present program is excessive; but, he says,
There are many honest workers who would like a job, but who cannot obtain employment because of the minimum-wage laws. It is unjust to deny people work and, at the same time, not provide unemployment benefits. (p. 213)

The principle here appears to be that those disadvantaged by government intervention may claim a compensating intervention in their favor. Is this not a dangerous idea? Why not, in like fashion, a protective tariff for businesses that compete with foreign firms that receive subsidies from their governments? I leave it to readers to extend the list.

Like Wenzel, I find Allison’s views on foreign policy disturbing. He wants to cut the military budget and opposes the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; but opposition to these wars will enable us to confront the real threats, such as North Korea, Iran, and “Islamic terrorism.” Like his mentor Peikoff, Allison stands among those who would “busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels.”

Despite the book’s manifest mistakes about Austrian theory, it has attracted praise from economists, including Tyler Cowen, Peter Boettke, and Bruce Yandle. I take some comfort from the fact that none of these endorsements mentions the Austrian School.
Obamacare, Stimulus, and Other Disasters

August 12, 2013, Mises Daily

J ohn Lott is best known to the public for his outstanding analysis of gun control legislation, but his research as an economist extends far beyond that topic; and he here gives us a devastating account that covers the full range of the Obama Administration’s economic policy.

Readers stirred to anger by the simpleminded statism of Paul Krugman will be delighted by Lott’s demolition of several of his claims. To those who urge that high taxes on the wealthy discourage investment, to the disadvantage of us all, Krugman often recalls the palmary era of the 1950s. Did we not then see very high tax rates together with high rates of economic growth? “In the 1950s incomes in the top bracket faced a marginal tax rate of 91, that’s right, 91 percent, while taxes on corporate profits were twice as large, relative to national income, as in recent years” (p. 200, quoting Krugman).

Lott is a master of economics statistics, and he quickly exposes a fatal flaw in Krugman’s argument. Capital moves much more quickly nowadays than in the 1950s; and if tax rates abroad fall significantly below the American exactions, investors will readily shift their funds to the more favorable foreign conditions.

* Regnery, 2013.
But the world has changed substantially since the 1950s and even the 1960s. One major change has been increased international competition between countries over taxes. For investors . . . in international capital markets looking for the highest return, even a small difference in tax rates can determine where their money goes. (p. 201)

If Krugman views high taxes as good, he likes government spending even better. Will not the multiplier, he asks, readily restore to prosperity a depressed economy? Government spending stimulates the economy more than tax cuts to individuals do, Keynesians like Krugman allege, because people siphon off some of the money they gain from tax cuts into savings. The government can more efficiently spend us into prosperity.

Lott rejects this dubious doctrine, on grounds both theoretical and empirical.

Barring true, concrete destruction, resources in the economy do not just disappear. Savings is not a black hole but always corresponds to real resources, somewhere in the economy, in some form or other. . . . Keynesians conveniently forget that the resources used to finance the additional government spending have to come from somewhere, either through taxes or through borrowing. If through taxes, taxpayers have less to spend. If through borrowing, the government absorbs resources that could have been invested in private firms. (pp. 89–90)

Krugman would no doubt respond to Lott that the facts bear him out: austerity programs prolong economic ills and extensive government spending is needed to end a prolonged depression. Once more Lott is ready for his adversary.

My regressions find that increasing last year’s government expenditures (as a percentage of GDP) by 1 percent reduces per capita GDP by $184. Such an increase in spending reduces the figure for working-age population employed by about 0.5 percent. The bottom line should be clear. Governments were unable to spend their way out of their problems. . . . “Austerity” may be a dirty word to some politicians, but the countries that followed Keynesian policy have assumed a triad of woes: poor GDP growth, poor job growth, and massive debt. (p. 102)
Lott does not confine his attention to general guidelines for economic policy but discusses specific programs as well. Of these Obamacare is the most controversial, and Lott makes clear from his chapter’s title what he thinks of it: “The Looming Obamacare Disaster.”

Strong words, no doubt; but Lott makes good his claim. For one thing, the program cannot succeed without large increases in the number of people who purchase medical insurance: that is the point of the controversial “individual mandate.” But the mandate is highly unlikely to achieve what its proponents hope for it.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that in 2015, Obamacare will cause twenty million people to purchase insurance. That number is crucial to its cost estimate because fines and insurance premiums are supposed to cover the program’s costs. That number is also completely unrealistic. Higher insurance premiums will cause more people to drop their insurance. The ranks of the uninsured may actually increase. . . . For all but the highest earners, then, it will make sense to skip the insurance and pay the fine. Americans will be able to save thousands of dollars every year by waiting to buy insurance until they are seriously ill or pregnant. . . . And more and more will do so as the price of the ‘same’ insurance increases. (pp. 13–14)

Defenders of Obamacare maintain that regardless of the program’s drawbacks, drastic action was needed to cope with a crisis in America’s health care. Lott’s response will surprise many, but it is based on his customary careful survey of the data. The supposed “crisis” does not exist. “Polls show that about 90% of Americans are happy with their health care . . . even the vast majority of uninsured Americans are happy with their care” (p. 29).

One would expect a book by John Lott to say something informative about gun control, and our author does not disappoint us. It transpires that he met President Obama when both of them served on the law school faculty of the University of Chicago.

I first met him in 1996, shortly after my research on concealed handgun laws and crime had come to national attention. I introduced myself, and he responded, “Oh, you are the gun guy.” “Yes, I guess so,” I answered. “I don’t believe that people should
be able to own guns,” Obama replied. I then suggested that it might be fun to have lunch and talk about that sometime. He simply grimaced and turned away, ending the conversation. (pp. 126–127)

Readers of Lott’s carefully documented work will learn a great deal of vital information about the American economy, all of it unfortunately unknown to the president who turned away.
Fascism vs. Capitalism*

LLEWELLYN H. ROCKWELL, JR.

Fascism Is a Current Political and Economic System

December 9, 2013, Mises Daily

LEW ROCKWELL offers us in Fascism vs. Capitalism a provocative and insightful diagnosis of the political and economic ills of our time. The situation that we face, he says, is dire; but, fortunately, he does not leave us without remedy. To the contrary, the wisdom of Mises, Rothbard, and their colleagues in the Austrian School offers the means to rescue us, and the inspiring leadership of Ron Paul shows us the way to put their ideas into practice.

As the book’s title suggests, Rockwell finds “fascism” to be the key concept needed to analyze the modern American era. He is quick to deflect an objection:

“Fascism” has become a term of general derision and rebuke. It is tossed casually in the direction of anything a critic happens to dislike. . . . But fascism is a real concept, not a stick with which to beat opponents arbitrarily. The abuse of this important word undermines its true value as a term referring to a very real phenomenon, and one whose spirit lives on even now.

* Mises Institute, 2013.
What, then, is fascism? To Rockwell, it is an aggressive nationalism and imperialism, together with domination of the economy by the state.

The state, for the fascist, is the instrument by which the people’s common destiny is realized, and in which the potential for greatness is to be found. Individual rights, and the individual himself, are strictly subordinate to the state’s great and glorious goals for the nation. In foreign affairs, the fascist attitude is reflected in a belligerent chauvinism, a contempt for other peoples, and a society-wide reverence for soldiers and the martial virtues.

To what extent does this conception of things apply to contemporary America? Rockwell demonstrates in detail that it applies all-too-well. Following one of his great predecessors, the Old Right stalwart John T. Flynn, he distinguishes eight “marks of fascism,” and for each one he illustrates its contemporary relevance.* We have space to discuss only a few of these, but the reader is urged to read Rockwell’s complete discussion to grasp fully the strength of his analysis.

When the ordinary person thinks of fascism, he probably identifies it with the cult of the Leader, in the style of Hitler and Mussolini.

I [Rockwell] wouldn’t say that we truly have a dictatorship of one man in this country, but we do have a form of dictatorship of one sector of government over the entire country. The executive branch has spread so dramatically over the last century that it has become a joke to speak of checks and balances. What the kids learn in civics class has nothing to do with reality. . . . As for the leadership principle, there is no greater lie in American public life than the propaganda we hear every four years about how the new president/messiah is going to usher in the great dispensation of peace, equality, liberty, and global human happiness. The idea here is that the whole of society is really shaped and controlled by a single will—a point that requires a leap of faith so vast that you have to disregard everything you know about reality to believe it.

The increased power of the executive branch has been accompanied by a policy of militarism and war.

Ronald Reagan used to claim that his military buildup was essential to keeping the peace. The history of US foreign policy just since the 1980s has shown that this is wrong. We’ve had one war after another, wars waged by the United States against noncompliant countries, and the creation of even more client states and colonies.

US military strength has led not to peace but the opposite. It has caused most people in the world to regard the United States as a threat, and it has led to unconscionable wars on many countries. Wars of aggression were defined at Nuremberg as crimes against humanity.

At the heart of fascism lies state control of the economy. As Mises long ago pointed out, socialism can come about while the form of capitalism remains. In this type of socialism, the government dictates economic decisions and the ostensible business owners must obey its orders. It was precisely this pattern that Mises found in Nazism, and, unfortunately, it has become increasingly prevalent in America today.*

The reality of bureaucratic administration has been with us at least since the New Deal, which was modeled on the planning bureaucracy that lived in World War I. The planned economy—whether in Mussolini’s time or ours—requires bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is the heart, lungs, and veins of the planning state. And yet to regulate an economy as thoroughly as this one is today is to kill prosperity with a billion tiny cuts.

Those devoted to freedom will of course reject fascism, with its blind power worship and dangerous economics, but what if one finds the fascist vision appealing? Can it maintain itself in power for the indefinite future? Rockwell does not think so; we have entered the period of “late fascism,” and the appeal of the “cult of the colossal” has passed from the scene.

* Rockwell devotes an outstanding chapter to Guenter Reimann’s *The Vampire Economy*, which discusses in detail the takeover of the German economy by the Nazis.
The fascist style emphasized inspiration, magnificence, industrial progress, grandeur, all headed by a valiant leader making smart decisions about all things. This style of American rule lasted from the New Deal through the end of the Cold War. . . . Fascism, like socialism, cannot achieve its aims. So there is a way in which it makes sense to speak of a stage of history: We are in the stage of late fascism. The grandeur is gone, and all we are left with is a gun pointed at our heads. The system was created to be great, but it is reduced in our time to being crude. Valor is now violence. Majesty is now malice.

What, then, is the way forward? Rockwell looks to the great Austrians for an answer. By contrast with intellectuals who pander to the powerful, the Austrians must go against the grain. They must say the things that others do not want to hear. They must be willing to be unpopular, socially and politically. I’m thinking here of people like Benjamin Anderson, Garet Garrett, Henry Hazlitt, and, on the Continent, L. Albert Hahn, F. A. Hayek, and, above all, Ludwig von Mises. They gave up career and fame to stick with the truth and say what had to be said.

Rockwell finds particular inspiration in the work of Murray Rothbard.

We all do well to emulate this master when we go about our work. When Rothbard would take on a subject, his very first stop was not to sit in an easy chair and think off the top of his head; instead, he went to the literature and sought to master it. He read everything he could from all points of view. He sought to become as much an expert in the topic as the other experts in the field. . . . There is another respect in which we can all emulate Murray. He was fearless in speaking the truth. He never let fear of colleagues, fear of the profession, fear of editors or political cultures, stand in the way of his desire to say what was true. This is why he turned to the Austrian tradition even though most economists at the time considered it a dead paradigm. This is why he embraced liberty, and worked to shore up its theoretical and practice rationale at a time when the rest of the academic world was going the other way.
How are the ideas of Mises and Rothbard to be put into practice? How can we enlist a wide public in the cause of liberty? Rockwell points to the career of Ron Paul. He knew that the philosophy of liberty, when explained persuasively and with conviction, had a universal appeal. Every group he spoke to heard a slightly different presentation of that message, as Ron showed how their particular concerns were addressed most effectively by a policy of freedom.

Everyone interested in the future of liberty needs to read *Fascism vs. Capitalism*. 
Foreign Policy
Isolationism Reconfigured: American Foreign Policy For a New Century*

ERIC A. NORDLINGER

The Return of Anti-Imperialism

October 1, 1996, Mises Review

Ever since World War II, the traditional American foreign policy of nonintervention in foreign affairs has had a bad press. Isolationism, it is alleged, helped cause the Second World War, with all its appalling destruction and massacres. Fortunately, America learned her lesson during the war; and, when the battle with the Axis came to an end, we were prepared for a new struggle. Only the repudiation of isolationism enabled the United States to prosecute the Cold War to a successful conclusion.

Eric Nordlinger, a distinguished political scientist who unfortunately died shortly before Isolationism Reconfigured appeared, has braved the perils of nonconformity. He advocates what he terms a “national” strategy for the United States, which largely, though not entirely, corresponds with traditional isolationism. In making his case, he challenges his opponents on their supposedly strongest ground, the onset of World War II. Not content with this singular act of iconoclasm, he also questions the necessity of the Cold War.

The basic argument for Nordlinger’s brand of isolationism rests on a simple premise, combined with a fact of manifest importance. (Nordlinger, I regret to say, presents his simple case in a needlessly complicated and jargon-filled style; but this is by the way.)

Nordlinger’s starting point is that a national security strategy should be judged

by way of two encompassing questions. How do the alternative security strategies compare in protecting America’s security, its highest political, material, and survival values, from any and all external threats . . . how do they stack up in promoting America’s extra security values at home and abroad, material and ideal, political and economic? (p. 3)

What happens if the answers to these two queries conflict? Suppose, for example, that an isolationist strategy best protected America’s security, but some other scheme did better at promoting American extra security goals. One might think the answer obvious; since security is of the first importance, the strategy that most successfully promotes it ought to be adopted.

But are no tradeoffs to be allowed? Does any amount of the security goal outweigh any amount of the extra security goals? What if a strategy were slightly less good than another in protecting security, but much better at promoting nonsecurity goals? Must it without further thought be cast aside? Unfortunately, Nordlinger does not address issues of this sort. Fortunately, this omission does not hurt his case. He maintains that an isolationist strategy (at least taken with his modifications) best promotes both sets of values.

Another aspect of Nordlinger’s starting point requires attention. Although he phrases his questions in a general form, he addresses himself exclusively to the American case. He is not concerned to argue that for any nation, anywhere, an isolationist strategy is best. Rather, his contention is that isolation is the indicated course for the United States.

Though limited in this way, our author’s thesis is not the narrowest possible. Not only does he think that isolation is the best course for the United States now; he adheres to the traditional view that isolation served us well during the period 1789–1917. More controversially, he does not think that the abandonment of isolation by Woodrow Wilson, continued by US involvement in World War II and the Cold War, was a necessary, if distasteful, interruption
of our customary foreign policy. In the style of revisionists such as Charles A. Beard and Harry Elmer Barnes, he supports isolation during these events as well. And, nothing if not consistent, Nordlinger has no use for Operation Desert Storm against Saddam Hussein.

During most of the long historical period that Nordlinger covers, one fact has remained constant; and this is the linchpin of his case for American isolation. Because of our geographical position, natural resources, and military strength, the United States since the early 19th century has always been in a position to resist invasion without difficulty. To do so of course requires a strong defense capacity: Nordlinger does not argue his case on pacifist grounds. But, given military technology that equals or surpasses that of rivals, the advantage lies naturally with the defense.

“A national strategy does not entail any less of a commitment to research and development than strategic internationalism,” he writes. “Without it there is no knowing how science and technology can make for yet greater security, and it is the only way to guard against others forging beyond us in ways that would detract from our security” (p. 49).

One advantage of isolation should excite little controversy. It is much cheaper than a policy of “entangling alliances,” as Thomas Jefferson aptly termed interventionism. Like Earl Ravenal, one of the few “defense intellectuals” to support isolation, Nordlinger maintains that the drastic cuts in the defense budget under isolation would redound greatly to the advantage of our economy, through lowering the deficit and releasing funds for private spending and investment.

But this of course does not suffice to make the case for isolation, as opponents of the policy will be quick to point out. How does Nordlinger defend his principal thesis, viz., that isolation can better promote American security than interventionism? He does so, in large part, by an ingenious reversal of an influential argument for intervention of worldwide scope.

According to the view Nordlinger combats, a state’s security depends on its credibility. The world of nations is one of constant struggle for power; and to maintain its existence amidst this strife, a country must acquire a reputation for resolve. If it is known to fulfill scrupulously its commitments, other nations will be deterred from threat or invasion.

“The more frequently the United States undertakes and fulfills defensive obligations,” proponents of this view allege, “the greater its current credibility. Insofar as the fulfillment of defense commitments involves major
efforts and great sacrifices, the other side will be all the more convinced of our high resolve” (p. 116).

As Nordlinger notes, the distinguished economist Thomas Schelling has probably been the most influential supporter of this argument. He went so far as to claim “that most of the globe is central to our security for subjective, political reasons” (p. 117).

To enable a state to secure credibility, Schelling and other theorists have devised elaborate models detailing how states should threaten and respond to threats. Nordlinger confronts the models with an elementary fact. The intentions of others are very difficult to gauge. But the strategic minuets of move and countermove devised by defense specialists depend on accurate perceptions of intention: if what was intended as a gesture of conciliation is judged a threat, e.g., trouble obviously looms. Why then engage in such futile exercises?

One might in part reply to Nordlinger that not all strategic analysis does in fact depend on knowledge of intention. Some strategies dominate others; i.e., following them makes one better off regardless of what others do. But in the main our author is clearly right. To judge that because a nation has kept its commitments, it will be likely to do so in the future is precisely to assess intention.

If, though, we take Nordlinger’s advice and abstain from the strategic duels of Schelling and company, does not disaster threaten? If we do not make commitments, we shall not obtain credibility; and then other nations will not hesitate to threaten us. Here exactly lies the point at which Nordlinger executes his remarkable reversal of the credibility argument.

It is not, he says, by constant commitments that one best builds credibility. Quite the contrary, a nation that maintains a strong defense capability but refrains from foreign entanglements has made its intentions crystal clear. Since, almost by definition, a nation places extreme value on its territorial integrity, no problem exists of convincing others that it will fight if attacked. And there is no need to fight for others in order to enhance a credibility that was not first laid on the line.

An isolationist, then, is not a player who always concedes the point to an opponent, but rather someone who does not play the game of international power politics at all. In making this distinction, Nordlinger deftly avoids a common accusation against isolationists: they are, it is charged, appeasers who ignore the lessons of Munich.
Not at all. Isolation, to repeat, entails disengagement from world politics, not participation in them in a particular fashion.

It was Britain and France, not a disengaged America, that pressured Czechoslovakia to concede much of its territory to Hitler at Munich. Without being at all bellicose, isolationism does not involve significant concessions to opponents, with whom there are few interactions and few political-military treaties and agreements. (p. 5)

With this defense, though, our author appears to have walked directly into the line of fire. Surely World War II suffices by itself to cripple Nordlinger’s thesis. Had America not become involved in the war, would we not have faced an invincible foe, in control of all of Europe and poised to strike?

Nordlinger rises to the challenge. No matter how powerful a Nazi Germany triumphant in Europe, it is extremely doubtful that it would have been in a position to invade America. Members of the America First Committee, the leading organization that opposed the United States’ involvement in the war, “were duly impressed with what Germany could not do. Despite its control of most of Europe by 1940 it was still unable to breach the narrow English Channel to attack England” (p. 56).

And it is eminently doubtful that America’s entry into the war was needed to prevent German conquest of Europe. Relying on an argument by the Yale political scientist Bruce Russett, Nordlinger maintains that Hitler’s gamble to seize control of Europe had failed well before Pearl Harbor. The Luftwaffe could not defeat the British Royal Air Force; and “by late 1941 Germany’s early advantages [in the invasion of Russia] had lost their sway: outright Soviet superiority in troops, tanks, and planes became dominant” (p. 58).

Opponents of the America First Committee charged that its purpose was to further the cause of fascism; but, Nordlinger insists, this is a baseless canard. “The great majority of isolationists held no brief for Nazi Germany. . . . Senator Robert A. Taft detested every one of the German government’s actions after Hitler assumed power” (p. 188). Quite the contrary, the isolationist case rested on a careful analysis of America’s security needs. And, as Nordlinger abundantly shows, that case remains valid today. “America goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy.”
Defend America First: The Antiwar Editorials of the Saturday Evening Post, 1939–1942*

GARET GARRETT
Introduction by BRUCE RAMSEY

Against Preemptive Strike

October 1, 2003, Mises Review

During the 1920s and 30s, a majority of Americans came to believe that our involvement in World War I had been a horrendous mistake. The war was supposed to make the world safe for democracy, but instead fascism, communism, and aggressive nationalism were the order of the day in Europe. In an effort to forestall future involvements in European conflagrations, Congress enacted stringent neutrality legislation.

Toward the end of the 1930s, a crucial question confronted Americans. Did the growing power of the Nazi regime require Americans to alter their newfound commitment to neutrality? The question could not be avoided once Britain and France decided in 1939 to resist Hitler’s endeavors to revise the Versailles and Locarno treaties in Germany’s favor. War in Europe began on September 3, 1939, when Hitler refused British and French ultimatums that he end his invasion of Poland.

Garet Garrett, an outstanding critic of Roosevelt’s New Deal, brilliantly argued in favor of continued American neutrality. Garrett, during the decisive years 1940 and 1941, was the chief editorial writer for the Saturday Evening Post, then one of the most popular American magazines; and Bruce Ramsey has very usefully gathered together a selection of Garrett’s articles from this and a slightly earlier period.

One way to defend American neutrality was to argue that Hitler posed no danger to the United States. Garrett decisively rejected this line of thought. As he saw matters, the Nazi regime had built up a military machine of unparalleled power. This might very well pose severe problems for America. In an editorial of July 6, 1940, Garrett said:

A new and frightful power has appeared, an offensive power moved by an unappeasable earth hunger, conscious of no right but the right of might. It does not threaten this country with invasion: at least, not yet. It does threaten the Western Hemisphere by economic and political designs in the Latin American countries, and this is, for us, an ominous fact. But the larger aspect of what has happened is that the world is in a state of unbalance. (p. 51)

If this is Garrett’s view, does he not at once confront a difficulty? If Germany was moved by “unappeasable earth hunger,” should not the United States act to contain this malign power? If so, should not neutrality be abandoned? Whatever the failings of Britain and the nations allied with her, was it not in the interest of the United States to provide the anti-Hitler forces with all possible aid?

Garrett’s decisive move was to deny that an adequate response to Hitler required military aid to the Allies. Quite the contrary, America should make its borders impregnable to attack:

In the whole world . . . there is one people able to create a defensive power equal to the new power of frightful aggression that has destroyed the basis of international peace and civility. We are that people . . . we are the most nearly self-contained nation of modern times, an empire entire, possessing of our own in plenty practically every essential thing . . . . Our productive power is equal to that of all Europe, and may be increased, so far as we
know, without limit. . . . Finally, as we lie between two oceans, our geographical advantages in the military sense are such as to give us great natural odds against any aggressor. (pp. 58–59)

Defenders of American intervention in the war might answer Garrett in this way: “Maybe America can do as you say. But why should we retreat to a Fortress America? If, as you concede, Germany menaces us, why should we not aid those already struggling against the Third Reich and its Führer?”

Garrett fully anticipated this objection, and in his response he showed himself a better economist than his critics. If America sent arms to other countries, would this not weaken our own forces? Interventionists thought only of the benefits that aid would help secure, but they ignored the fact that stripping America of its arms weakened us, all the more so as America had not yet built up secure defenses. In sum, Garrett, unlike his critics, was fully alive to the concept of opportunity cost.

If it should turn out that to strip this country of armaments and send them to Europe at a moment when our existing power of defense was pitifully inadequate . . . had been a tragic blunder . . . then the leader who had done it might wish that his page in the book of fame might refuse to receive ink, for it would be written of him that in his passionate zeal to save civilization in Europe he had forgotten his own country. (p. 56)*

Garrett supplemented his argument with a further point. Did not interventionists realize that if they armed one side in a war, the enemy would deem this a hostile act? Roosevelt, beginning with his notorious Chicago Bridge speech of October 1937, had spoken of the need to “quarantine” aggressors. But how could this be done “short of war,” as the interventionists promised? Garrett accused his interventionist opponents of seeking a victory on the cheap over the Axis powers. Others would do the fighting, while America would secure without bloodshed the end of the German threat.

For Garrett, this course of action was foolhardy and cowardly as well. In June 1940 the Navy arranged for France to buy American bombers, a sale that Garrett claimed had put us into the war.

* The importance of this theme for noninterventionists has been stressed by Justus Doecke, Storm on the Horizon (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000). See my review found in Volume 3, “European History.”
Suppose we were at war and a government that had been neutral in form, but not in feeling, suddenly opened its arsenals to our enemy, exactly as we have opened ours to the Allies. Would we regard it as act of war? We would. (pp. 55–56)

Not only did Roosevelt’s unneutral conduct risk reprisal from Germany, but it also displayed a lack of moral fiber. If the Germans were really our enemies, we should take up the battle ourselves rather than rely on others to give their lives on our behalf.

Interventionists rarely sought directly to counter Garrett’s powerful dialectic, but a Roosevelt supporter rash enough to do so might have replied to him in this way: “Your case is too exclusively strategic. Even if you are right, what about the moral dimension of the war? Do we not have a duty to fight against evil, even if it has not yet reached America?”

Our imagined objector is quite wrong; Garrett did not ignore the moral dimension. For him, the preservation of America as an independent civilization was a categorical imperative. A worldwide crusade against evil could not succeed and put in peril our unique contribution to the world:

They are defeatists who develop the beautiful thought that if America will now put her strength forth in the world, instead of keeping it selfishly to herself, the principle of evil can be chained down. . . . Suppose we had reconquered Europe for democracy, and the principle of evil were chained down. What should we do about the peace? Leave it to Europe? We did that once [without success]. . . . Should we stay there to police it? Or should we come home and stand ready to go back to mind or mend it when something went wrong? (pp. 138–139)

It is apparent that Garrett had learned the lessons of Woodrow Wilson’s futile crusade.

The essentials of Garrett’s case remained constant from the onset of war in Europe until Pearl Harbor; but as Roosevelt proceeded relentlessly on the path to war, another issue emerged. Garrett and his fellow noninterventionists had ably stated their case, and their opponents were not slow to follow with their point of view. Who should now decide what course of action America should follow?
For Garrett the answer was obvious: the American people, through their representatives in Congress. Unfortunately, Franklin Roosevelt had entirely other ideas. He gradually maneuvered America into the war, all the while professing his peaceful intentions. Congress for him was but a minor obstacle, to be evaded or ignored if it refused to obey his bidding.

Roosevelt’s policy of executive dictatorship continued and extended his conduct into domestic affairs. Garrett, who had long been one of the president’s fiercest critics on this score, stressed a devastating admission by Roosevelt:

As he was receiving into his hand from an obedient Congress the new instrumentalities of power [in 1936], Mr. Roosevelt himself remarkably said: “In the hands of a people’s government this power is wholesome and proper;” in bad hands, he added, it “would provide shackles for the liberties of people.” (p. 101)

But could not the American people, if they wished to do so, repudiate Roosevelt and all his works? Had the Republicans in 1940 nominated for President a resolute noninterventionist, such as Senator Robert Taft, the choice of peace or war would have been up to the voters. But they did not do so, instead choosing under mysterious circumstances Wendell Willkie. He favored, like Roosevelt, a policy of unneutral aid to the allies; voters who saw through the “aid short of war” deception could do nothing.

Garrett puts the essence of the matter this way, in his inimitable style:

when you consider what must be involved in the decision [on whether America should defend Britain and her allies], who will have to fight and die for it, whose country it is, you might think that with all the facts submitted, it could be left to the people. Was it? Did they vote on it? (p. 123)

Incidentally, Garrett’s point undermines his surprising defense of conscription. Although Garrett fully grasped that conscription was a step toward totalitarianism, he thought it was needed to build up America’s defenses. Did not the extraordinary nature of the European situation require drastic action?

Perhaps it did; but why could not Americans of military age decide the matter for themselves by volunteering? Garrett relied on a peculiar argument of Woodrow Wilson’s that the volunteer system was “unscientific.” As near as I can make out, the contention is that a draft allows men to be deployed efficiently, as the central command wishes. With volunteers, the
armed forces must rely piecemeal on those who happen to appear at recruitment stations. But this argument ignores the fact that volunteers can register for future call up, in the same fashion as draftees.

In the context of his magnificent defense of liberty, Garrett’s lapse is a minor failing. Garrett noted that once Roosevelt won reelection, he could drop the mask. Although he had promised during the election to keep us out of “foreign wars,” Roosevelt three months later said that America would never accept a peace dictated by aggressors. Garrett commented:

“We” were the people, suddenly staring at the fact that we had assumed ultimate and unlimited liability—moral, physical, and financial—for the outcome of war on three continents, for the survival of the British Empire, and for the utter destruction of Hitler. (p. 161)

If the American people did not accept this broad and ambitious mandate, what did this matter? Roosevelt, like Woodrow Wilson before him, viewed himself as the indispensable man who would guide Americans as he saw fit.
President Bush’s invasion of Iraq made many observers gasp with amazement. What could have motivated such hasty and ill-advised action? Surely Iraq, a country of minor importance, posed no threat to the vital interests of the United States. It soon transpired that a deep design lay behind the thrust into alien territories. Neoconservatives such as William Kristol, who enthusiastically supported the invasion, wished to export Western-style democracy to the countries of the Middle East so benighted as to wish to govern themselves. And these writers were rumored to have the ear of key policymakers, most notably, Paul Wolfowitz, in the Bush administration. There was method in Bush’s madness.†

Some went on to discover a further dimension in the neoconservative scheme. Kristol and his fellow propagandists did not devise their plans for worldwide democracy out of nothing. They looked for political wisdom to the writings of Leo Strauss, a historian of political thought who taught for many years at the University of Chicago. Kristol, some alleged, was a Straussian; so was Wolfowitz.

† See my review found in Volume 3, “Current Events.”
Defenders of Strauss at once ran to their battle stations. Wolfowitz had only a passing acquaintance with Strauss; and, besides, Strauss never supported the universal imposition of democracy. Those in search of the intellectual antecedents of neoconservative foreign policy should look elsewhere.

The defenders have a point. Strauss devoted the bulk of his work to detailed textual studies of Plato, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Rousseau, among many others. He rarely intervened in contemporary political issues. In his youth, he strongly supported the Zionist movement; and his only appearance in National Review was a letter to the editor criticizing the magazine for its advocacy of an anti-Israel foreign policy. He also signed a letter supporting President Nixon in the Watergate affair. I can recall nothing else.

Further, it is quite possible to be a Straussian, in the sense that one thinks Strauss had important things to say about philosophy, and at the same time oppose an interventionist American foreign policy. Straussianism in the sense just distinguished seems compatible with disparate philosophical and religious doctrines. There are, for example, Roman Catholic Straussians, such as the late Father Ernest Fortin, Peter Augustine Lawler, and Robert Kraynak.

But the defenders of Strauss protest too much. Throughout his studies of the classics, he emphasized the role of a philosophical elite as advisors to those in power; and if we consult the works of those who declare themselves Straussians, we find precisely the same stress on leadership.* Carnes Lord, a distinguished translator of Aristotle who occupied high positions in the administrations of Ronald Reagan and the elder George Bush, is universally acknowledged as a leading Straussian. Even Myles Burnyeat, the leading critic of Strauss's views on Greek philosophy, has good things to say about Lord. His *Modern Prince* gives us an excellent picture of Straussian elite politics in action.

Lord wastes no time in letting us know where he stands. Machiavelli must be our guide. In particular, we must learn from him that the supreme form of

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* For a valuable discussion of Strauss, see the recently translated magnum opus of the Heideggerian philosopher Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies* (Indiana University Press, 2003). Schürmann asks: “And what is the crucial truth that Leo Strauss himself presents exclusively between the lines? This ‘truth’ is that the historic division between the classical and modern epochs, and thus that the ‘teleological vision’ of which the division marks a loss and a mourning, are but tools of political intervention to constitute the new aristocracy and to confer on it full powers” (*Broken Hegemonies*, p. 667).
political leadership consists of founding “new orders.” The founding prince molds his society according to his ideas:

Listen to Machiavelli: “It should be considered that nothing is more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than to put oneself at the head of introducing new orders. For the introducer has all those who benefit from the old order as enemies, and he has lukewarm defenders in all who might benefit from the new orders.” (p. 8, quoting Machiavelli)

The leader must innovate; but what sort of innovation earns Lord’s praise in the American context? It transpires that Lord’s Machiavellian new orders do not amount to very much: he has merely dressed up in fancy language Alexander Hamilton’s familiar program of a strong executive who follows a mercantilist economic policy.

Here Lord stands on familiar Straussian ground. Straussians revere the Federalist; and whenever you find someone yammering about the wisdom of “Publius,” it is a good bet that you have found one of Strauss’s acolytes.

Lord is a case in point. He tells us, “Hamilton’s case for a strong executive does not rest primarily on the argument from administrative competence. Rather, the key requirement in the design of the presidency, and indeed in the design of the nation as a whole, is what Publius calls ‘energy’” (p. 77).

Hamilton, or Publius, if you prefer the affectation, wishes to use presidential “energy” both in foreign affairs and domestically. For a reason that I hope will become obvious later, I shall save foreign affairs for last. Domestically, interference with the free market is on occasion required, a position with which his later-day admirer enthusiastically agrees. “While they were by no means enemies of free trade, Hamilton and [Friedrich] List argued on behalf of the importance of limited protectionist measures designed to support domestic industries at an early stage of their development” (p. 144).

Did it ever occur to Lord that economists have heard of the infant industries argument and have had something to say about it? (Mises offers a characteristically insightful discussion in Human Action. Mises sums up his discussion in this way: “The infant industries argument is no less spurious than all the other arguments advanced in favor of protection” [Human Action, Scholar’s Edition, p. 507].) What concerns me is not so much that Lord arrives at the wrong conclusion as that he fails even to grasp the relevance of economic analysis to the question he is addressing.
Instead, he serves up a few clichés about the importance of national defense.

Hamilton supported a diversified national economy with a strong manufacturing center that would provide at least a measure of self-sufficiency in military production. . . . “Rich country, strong army”—this maxim of the Meiji reformers is not as alien to our own traditions as it might sound. (p. 143)

Lord does not tell us why impoverishing American consumers by interfering with the international division of labor will promote national defense.

In domestic politics, then, a leader who follows Lord will subordinate economic well-being to “higher” politics. Given this requirement, it is not surprising that our author is on the whole an ardent partisan of Franklin Roosevelt. (Supreme honors do not go to Roosevelt, though. Lord thinks that Ronald Reagan surpassed him as an excellent leader.) As with tariffs, there is no pretense of economic argument. Instead, all we are told is that, given the dire circumstances of the Depression, Roosevelt had to act:

In 1932, almost everyone agreed that the nation faced a dire economic crisis, that strong measures were needed to deal with it, and that such measures had to involve a greater degree of government intervention in the economy than seen before in the United States. (p. 8)

So what? Are not Hamiltonians and New Dealers all-too-common phenomena? Why make such a big fuss about Lord and his Straussian views if these involve no more than normal economic illiteracy? What Lord adds is the ruthless pursuit of power that he apparently derives from his account of Machiavelli.

For our author, Roosevelt’s attempt in 1937 to pack the Supreme Court was not an assault on constitutional government. It was a justified attempt to repel a challenge to the Supreme Leader. If the constitution, as interpreted by the “nine old men,” blocks the way of the New Deal, must not something be done?

It is customary to decry FDR’s move against the Court as a prime example of the abuse of executive power by an American president. . . . Politically, though questions can be raised about the
way it was handled, it can certainly be defended as an extraordi-
nary act of statecraft in circumstances of national crisis. (p. 128)*

The Supreme Court is not the only possible danger to the leader’s program. What if the press criticizes the president? Might this not impede the leader’s program of needed action? Of course, there is the little matter of the First Amendment and its guarantee of free speech; but this is readily swept aside.

The model of “objective control” in civil-military relations may be said to have its counterpart in a bargain whereby government respects media autonomy and facilitates its coverage of national issues in return for the media observing certain fundamental norms of behavior and respecting certain government requirements. The fundamental norms are political and ideological neutrality[!] and a reasonable respect for the symbols and traditions of the nation. The government requirements are protection of sensitive information and the integrity of government operations. (pp. 188–189)

If the media do not agree to the bargain, the government will take them over. But am I not here treating Lord unfairly? Elsewhere in the book, he shows himself alert to the danger of executive abuse of power, and he sometimes speaks of the need to preserve the independence of the three branches of government. Perhaps he is not so extreme as I have pictured him. Only when a great leader like Lincoln or Roosevelt is faced with an emergency will Lord favor tossing the Constitution into the garbage pail.

I would like to be generous, but unfortunately Lord gives away the game. When he speaks of the executive’s having too much power, what concerns him is only a situation when the president is officially assigned too many tasks. In doing so, he weakens his real power; Lord thinks that French president François Mitterand was for this reason ineffectual.

But where what is in question is power to achieve great Machiavellian enterprises, matters are entirely different. If we have a genuine leader, limits and checks and balances are mere devices to deceive the masses:

Paradoxically, the presidency can be strong precisely because it is weak. Because of its formal subordination to the people and

* F. A. Hayek, surprisingly, also criticizes the Supreme Court for overturning too many New Deal measures (The Constitution of Liberty [University of Chicago, 1960], p. 190).
the legislative power, it is seen fundamentally as an instrument of others or as not fully responsible for its actions and therefore can disarm to a degree the resentments of those adversely affected by them. (p. 83)

A leader of true Machiavellian excellence must not openly assert his full power: he should operate behind the scenes to disarm opposition.

But are we not so far missing something important? Leo Strauss, whatever criticisms one may advance against him, was undoubtedly a philosopher. But in Lord’s Straussian politics, as I have so far presented it, there is nothing of philosophical interest. Is there anything to Lord’s position beyond blind power worship?

At one place, Lord endeavors to engage with the thought of a genuine philosopher, but the results are hardly compelling. The leader, Lord informs us, illustrates in his conduct Aristotle’s virtue of prudence.

The mode of knowledge that is at the core of statecraft in its traditional sense is political judgment, or to use another old fashioned term, prudence. . . . It implies that politicians, because of their greater experience of political matters, develop an intellectual ability that enables them to make sound political decisions. . . . The classic articulation of the notion of prudence appears in the thought of Aristotle. (p. 27)

Lord’s strategy here is to my mind deceptive. His view, as will become apparent in the discussion of foreign affairs below, is that leaders are free from the restraints of principle. They are superior beings whose judgments are not to be questioned by the inexperienced. He disguises this position as Aristotle’s view that one needs judgment to apply general principles to concrete situations. Aristotle’s prudence is not an amoral doctrine of reliance on the superior statesman, Lord to the contrary notwithstanding.*

When Lord discusses how the leader is to use force in foreign affairs, the restraints of justice never cross his mind. Instead, the leader, in correct Machiavellian fashion, must follow an energetic, impetuous course of conduct. He

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* Harry Jaffa uses the same false appeal to Aristotelian prudence to justify Lincoln’s lawless conduct. See my review of his A New Birth of Freedom found in Volume 3, “American History.”
must avoid a danger: he must not pay too much attention to advice from the military. Not, of course, because the generals are apt too readily to counsel military intervention; quite the contrary, they tend to be altogether too cautious.

I have promised to save the best for last; and, with Lord’s help, the promise is easily fulfilled. Many people, according to our cheerleader for “energy,” entertain an erroneous assumption. They have the strange idea that, faced with a crisis, one should endeavor to reduce tensions and settle the issues in dispute peacefully. What nonsense!

Particularly troublesome is the idea that visible preparations for war should be avoided in a crisis for fear such actions will lead to unwanted escalation. . . . There is a tendency today in some quarters to understand crisis management as a form of “conflict resolution” in which third parties set out to prevent or end violent conflict between other states. . . . Some conflicts are stubbornly resistant to mediation by outsiders, and there may well be cases . . . where military action is the only realistic option for advancing the prospects for a political settlement and eventual lasting peace. (p. 204)

We must not let the nasty mediators get in the way of Impetuous Leader, as he blasts and bombs to insure eventual peace. And it gets even better. A crisis atmosphere is in many cases desirable. Otherwise, the leader cannot get what he wants:

In a larger perspective, one should bear in mind that crises can have their positive side. They present opportunities not always available to policy makers to mobilize the country behind certain policies and to overcome bureaucratic obstacles to firm action. . . . [Crises] may also open avenues for skilled leaders to strengthen alliances, bolster the legitimacy of their regimes, and enhance their international prestige. (pp. 204–205)

Carnes Lord, whatever his virtues, has not given much help to those who endeavor to acquit Straussians of bellicose tendencies.
Much has been made in recent years of the so-called “war on drugs.” The pursuit of ecstatic sensations through chemical means, it is alleged, threatens the social order. Stern action by the state must suppress this danger. As Thomas Szasz and others have amply shown, this danger is vastly exaggerated. In two excellent books, Chris Hedges has called attention to a genuine deadly drug, one that the state creates rather than endeavors to suppress. His diagnosis of the danger is outstanding, but his account leaves a key issue unresolved.

Paradoxically, the horrors of war attract many people. The pursuit of extreme situations is for many a route to meaning in life. But Hedges, a distinguished war correspondent who has himself been gripped by this attraction, warns against it.

The enduring attraction of war is this: even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of much of our lives become apparent... war is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble. (*Meaning*, p. 3)

As our author sees matters, it is very difficult to lead a meaningful life by yourself. If, by contrast, you feel yourself tightly connected with others, the task becomes much easier. This is all the more so if your connection with others aims to achieve a goal that you and your comrades deem vitally important.

As Hedges makes clear, the struggle for meaning takes very different forms on the home front and in actual combat. On the home front, the “myth of war” prevails:

The cause, sanctified by the dead, cannot be questioned without dishonoring those who gave up their lives. We become enmeshed in the imposed language.... There is a constant act of remembering and honoring the fallen during war. These ceremonies sanctify the cause. As Americans we speak, following the September attacks, like the Islamic radicals we fight, primarily in clichés.... We accept terms imposed upon us by the state—for example the “war on terror”—and these terms set the narrow parameters by which we are able to think and discuss. (*Meaning*, pp. 145–146)

In wartime, people do not regard this narrowing of discourse as a problem to be overcome. Quite the contrary, they often suppress those who dare to dissent. During World War I, for example, the British public turned on the once-popular reformer E. D. Morel, famed for his exposure of atrocities in the Belgian Congo. Morel’s exposure of British propaganda and secret treaties drew this response:

His fight against the war saw mobs break up his meetings with stink bombs and his banners ripped down. He finally could not rent a hall.... He was flooded with hate mail. The government finally jailed him in 1917. (*Meaning*, p. 147)

Hedges aptly notes that in wartime figures such as Morel are the exception. The press does not have to be dragooned into following the government line.
Propaganda may rouse into frenzy the civilian population, but matters are very different in actual combat. The reality of fear and killing quickly ends the myths absorbed on the home front; but another form of meaning through collective endeavor now comes to the fore. The combatants feel bound to their fellow fighters: defense of their close comrades paradoxically heightens their sense of life as they are exposed to supreme danger.

The battlefield, with its ecstasy of destruction, its constant temptation of self-sacrifice, its evil bliss, is more about comradeship. The closeness of a unit, and even as a reporter one enters into that brotherhood once you have been together under fire, is possible only with the wolf of death banging at the door. The feeling is genuine, but without the threat of violence and death it cannot be sustained. (Meaning, pp. 115–116)

War may offer meaning through action in unity; but, one might wonder, can we not attain unity in some less destructive way? Hedges does not mention William James’s famous essay “The Moral Equivalent of War” (1906). James suggested that youth camps to carry on social work could provide the needed sense of purpose. Our author implicitly disagrees with James; and the quotation just given adumbrates the point at which Hedges would challenge him.

For Hedges, unified action is not enough. A life with meaning demands that our senses and emotions be roused from their humdrum sources of stimulation. War’s risk of sudden death, not to mention the gruesome sights and smells of the battlefield, accomplish this to a far greater extent than does chopping down trees as a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Hedges’s view parallels the theory of the early twentieth-century German sociologist Georg Simmel, who likewise found war a means to attain meaning through heightened experiences. Simmel, writing during World War I, interpreted war as a way to overcome the meaninglessness of everyday life. Instead of the “cyclical repetition of everyday life,” war offers “the deeply moving existential experience of an ecstatic feeling of security that liberates our personality from inhibitions and opens it up to social impulses once again.”

Unlike Simmel, though, Hedges writes not to praise war but to warn us of its dangers. He places principal emphasis on the most obvious of these ill effects: war leads to death and horrible injuries in large numbers. Hedges brings this home to us even more effectively in *What Every Person Should Know About War* than in the self-consciously literary *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*. The former work is ostensibly a guidebook, intended to provide the “plain facts” about war: “The book is a manual on war. There is no rhetoric. There are very few adjectives” (*What Every Person*, p. xiii).

A few examples of these plain facts must here suffice. In response to the question, “What are the best and worst places to get shot?” we learn:

> A clean line through your arm, hand, or foot is best, though it will be painful. . . . The pressure from a bullet that enters the brain will usually rupture the skull . . . a lung wound will make it very difficult to breathe. . . . The spleen, liver, and kidney may rupture on impact. (*What Every Person*, p. 41)

Even if a soldier in battle manages to escape being wounded, he will still face a difficult situation: “You will most likely be subject to loud noise and vibration as well as a lack of oxygen, choking fumes, chemicals, skin irritants, bright lights, and haze” (*What Every Person*, p. 81).

Hedges gives similar graphic descriptions of imprisonments, torture, and rape, among many other topics. To my mind, though, the most unnerving image occurred during the response to “What does it feel like to die?” “According to people who have been clinically dead and then resuscitated, you will feel your consciousness swiftly wind down. It will not flip from on to off, like a light, but rather will gradually disappear, like a match burning out” (*What Every Person*, p. 100).

Given the facts that Hedges has so assiduously amassed about combat, combined with his earlier description of the effects of war on truth and free inquiry, is not the conclusion obvious? The emotional ecstasies of war are bought at too high a price. Unfortunately, matters are not so simple.

Hedges has left himself open to a counterargument. An advocate of war might respond to him in this way:

> I readily grant that war has horrendous effects. But these effects are worth enduring, because war gives our life meaning in a way that nothing else can match. We can be pacifists and
shun war, if we wish; but then we will lose our chance to experience life at its fullest.

I do not think that Hedges has a satisfactory reply to this objection. To portray the bad effects of a practice does not suffice to determine how we should evaluate it. To do this requires philosophical principles to guide us. (The battle between Eros and Thanatos, one of Freud’s most implausible speculations that Hedges has unfortunately taken over, is not an example of what I mean by philosophical principles.) Absent guidance by the appropriate moral standards, someone can find the bad effects of war additional sources of fascination and seek war all the more. Hedges himself is aware of the point. He speaks of the “seductiveness of violence, the fascination with the grotesque. . . . Killing unleashes within us dark undercurrents that see us desecrate and whip ourselves into greater orgies of destruction” (Meaning, p. 100).

I cannot here hope to supply these principles, but to my mind an acceptable response requires us to reject a view that Hedges does not question. He accepts without argument that meaning in life depends on experiencing extreme sensations. Why believe this? Why not instead try to find meaning in the ordinary business of life?

Hedges tells us: “All great works of art find their full force in those moments when the conventions of the world are stripped away and confront our weakness, vulnerability, and mortality” (Meaning, p. 91). I think that our author has here eaten an unbalanced diet. The novels of Jane Austen, not to mention Dante’s Paradiso, hardly support Hedges’s thesis. He would have been helped in his reflections on meaning in life had he consulted Ronald Knox’s Enthusiasm (much esteemed, incidentally, by Murray Rothbard) and remembered Talleyrand’s counsel: “Pas trop de zèle.” [Avoid excess enthusiasm.]

But if Hedges has not solved the difficult philosophical problems connected with his topic, he has nevertheless written books of great value. Surely people with normal sensibilities, when faced with Hedges’s account of the realities of war, will react with aversion rather than fascination; and that is all to the good.
“Is There Still a Terrorist Threat? The Myth of the Omnipresent Enemy”

JOHN MUELLER

The Myth of the Omnipresent Enemy

July 1, 2006, Mises Review

JOHN MUELLER asks a question that, if answered reasonably, undermines the basis of current American foreign policy. We are constantly assured that we face a threat from terrorists. Noah Feldman claims that withdrawal from Iraq would result in a chaotic situation that would breed terrorists.† They cannot be deterred by conventional means; is not the principal task confronting American foreign policy, then, the destruction of terrorist groups before they inflict more attacks comparable to 9/11?

If the terrorists pose so substantial a threat, Mueller inquires, why have there been no terrorist attacks in America since the destruction of the World Trade Center? It is not difficult to prepare an attack: a few chemicals suffice. Further, American security forces cannot possibly watch every person in the United States. And yet there have been no attacks since 2001. Could it be that that terrorist threat has been much exaggerated?

* Foreign Affairs, September/October 2006.
If Al-Qaeda operatives are as determined and inventive as assumed, they should be here by now. If they are not yet here, they must not be trying very hard or must be far less dedicated, diabolical, and competent than the common image would suggest. (p. 3)

To this the response is obvious. Has not America substantially strengthened its security measures since the dire days of 2001? Perhaps only the vigilance of the FBI, CIA, NSA, and other guardians of freedom has saved us from destruction. Mueller finds this response unconvincing.

It would take only one or two guys with a gun or an explosive to terrorize vast numbers of people. . . . Accordingly, the government’s plans would have to be nearly perfect to thwart all such plans. Given the monumental imperfection of the government’s response to Hurricane Katrina, and the debacle of FBI and National Security Agency programs to upgrade their computers to better coordinate intelligence information, that explanation seems far-fetched. Moreover, Israel still experiences terrorism even with a far more extensive security apparatus. (p. 3)

Mueller prefers a different explanation. Perhaps there have been no terrorist attacks because there are no terrorist cells in the United States. Mueller here cites what Herbert Hoover would have called a “powerful statistic.” According to a secret FBI report in 2005, the Bureau “had been unable to identify a single true Al-Qaeda sleeper cell anywhere in the country” (p. 5).

But why are there no terrorists? Given the success of the 9/11 attack, why were there no further attacks? Why did not Al-Qaeda follow up its advantage? And what of the fear, endlessly exploited by the neoconservatives, that the “axis of evil” will deliver WMD to terrorist groups?

Mueller once more replies with a challenge to the conventional wisdom. The 9/11 attack did not strengthen Al-Qaeda—far from it. Even states not well disposed to America have no interest in supporting terrorist groups that can easily turn against them.

No matter how much they might disagree on other issues (most notably on the war in Iraq), there is compelling incentive for states—even ones such as Iran, Libya, Sudan, and Syria—to cooperate in cracking down on Al-Qaeda, because they know that
they could easily be among its victims . . . thousands of terro-
rists have been rounded, or rolled, up overseas with US aid and
encouragement. (p. 6)

Further, according to Fawaz Gerges, an authority on Islamicist move-
ments, even among Islamic groups that favor *jihad*, Al-Qaeda is regarded as
“irresponsible, reckless adventurers who endanger the whole movement. In
this view 9/11 was a sign of Al-Qaeda’s desperation, isolation, fragmentation,
and decline, not of its strength” (pp. 7–8).

Political science is not praxeology, and Mueller’s analysis is admittedly
speculative. But if he is right, it would not be the first time that an alleged
threat has been used by the American government to curtail civil liberties.
Mueller does not suggest that terrorism should be totally ignored. But he
concludes by pointing out

that the lifetime chance of an American being killed by inter-
national terrorism is about one in 80,000—about the same
chance of being killed by a comet or a meteor . . . The massive
and expensive homeland security apparatus erected since 9/11
may be persecuting some, spying on many, inconveniencing
most, and taxing all to defend the United States against an en-
emy that scarcely exists. (p. 8)
The key to George Weigel’s thought lies in his earlier massive volume *Tranquillitas Ordinis* (Oxford University Press, 1987). St. Augustine beautifully defined peace as the tranquility of order. Weigel twists Augustine’s dictum for his own bellicose purposes. In standard just war theory, the conditions a legitimate war are required to meet are so demanding that, as the eminent theologian Charles Cardinal Journet contended,

After reading this specification [by St. Thomas Aquinas of the criteria] for a just war we might well ask how many wars have been wholly just. Probably they could be counted on the fingers of one hand. (Journet, *The Church of the Word Incarnate*, Volume 1, Sheed and Ward, 1955, pp. 306–307)

Weigel endeavors to escape from these limits. Anything less than a stable, ordered world does not meet Augustine’s definition of peace. But should not our goal be to promote this sort of peace, rather than be satisfied with peace as the mere absence of war? If so, we may aim actively to secure an ordered world. Needless to say, Augustine did not take his remark to have

these implications. Quite the contrary, he helped initiate the tradition of strict limits on war to which Cardinal Journet refers. *Faith, Reason, and the War Against Jihadism* may be regarded as an application of Weigel’s “tranqillitas ordinis fallacy” to current American foreign policy.*

The book consists of three parts: the initial part concentrates on Islamic theology and the other two on foreign policy issues. I propose to concentrate on the latter two parts, since theology far exceeds my competence. The sum and substance of the first part is that the notion of three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, should be rejected. Islam diverges sharply from the other two faiths. The issue, further, cannot be confined to mere theological argument. Many Muslims wish to wage holy war against the West in order to bring about the triumph of their faith. In doing so, some countenance tactics of terror, as we learned to our horror on 9/11. Some Muslims seem amenable to compromise, but the danger from Islam must not be underestimated; and tough tactics are the order of the day. An “Open Letter to Pope Benedict XVI” signed by thirty-eight Islamic leaders is encouraging.

Yet it is not without interest that this statement—which despite its shortcomings was still the most forthcoming from senior Muslim leaders in living memory—followed a robust critique [by the Pope] of the theological roots of jihadism, not the exchange of banalities and pleasantries that too often characterizes interreligious dialogue. Surely there are lessons here for the future. (p. 61)

I do not wish to argue for a different view of Islam from that which Weigel adopts: his foreign policy conclusions do not follow even if one sees Islam as he does. But his efforts to drive a wedge between Islam and the other two “Abrahamic” religions are sometimes forced. He rightly notes that Muslims believe that their faith has superseded Judaism and Christianity.

In a Christian understanding of salvation history, Abraham is not only the great ancestor; he also points to the fulfillment of God’s saving purposes, which will emerge from Abraham’s stock, the people of Israel—a fulfillment Christians believe

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* I hasten to add that I do not object to the Augustinian definition of peace, but rather to Weigel’s misapplication of it to evade the just war standards.
God accomplished in Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Abraham and Son of David . . . Despite the supersessionist claims that some Christians have made throughout history vis-à-vis Judaism, no orthodox Christian holds that God’s self-revelation in Christ negates God’s self-revelation in the history of the People of Israel. Islam, by contrast, takes a radically supersessionist view of both Judaism and Christianity, claiming that the final revelation to Muhammad trumps, by way of supersession, any revelatory value (so to speak) that might be found in the Hebrew Bible or the Christian New Testament. (pp. 20–21)

Weigel races past the common, but not universal, Christian view that Israel has ceased to be God’s chosen people. He does not mention at all that neither Christians nor Jews regard Muhammad as a prophet. By contrast, Muslims believe that both Abraham and Jesus were prophets. Weigel glides over this by mentioning only the correct claim that Muslims do not accept the texts of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament; as he himself later points out (p. 166, note 6), they think that these texts have been corrupted. For that matter, Jews do not grant any religious authority to the New Testament. In what way has Weigel shown that Judaism and Christianity are closer to each other than either to Islam?

Again, Weigel says:

Islam’s radical stress on the unicity (oneness) of God, which Islam sharply distinguishes from the Christian Trinitarian concept of God, may also help explain the differing success each religion has had in creating societies characterized by a healthy, vibrant pluralism. (p. 169, note 21)

Weigel omits to mention that Judaism also insists on God’s absolute unity. Indeed, Maimonides largely for that reason thought Islam closer to the truth than Christianity.

Weigel contrasts Christians, who believe that Holy Scripture can be interpreted, with Muslims:

The Qur’an . . . is understood by Muslims to be dictated, word for word and syllable for syllable, so that there is no question of “exegesis,” as Christians and Jews would use the term; nor is there any possibility of a postscriptural development of doctrine. The
priority in Islam is on jurisprudence, the debate of experts in Islamic law on the applicability of texts to circumstances…. (p. 16)

But infalliblist views of the Bible are not absent from the history of Christianity; and Weigel omits to note that the priority of jurisprudence is a feature of Judaism as well. He also does not mention, lest this disturb his emphasis on Islamic rigidity, that Islam has competing schools of jurisprudence.

Enough of theology. Given his bleak account of Islam, what does Weigel propose to do about the contemporary Islamic world? His main proposal is to demand “regime change” in Iran. Its president is a jihadist fanatic of the worst sort, who ardently seeks nuclear weapons so that he can immolate Israel and, in doing so, hasten the end of the world. He must be stopped before it is too late.

It’s worth pausing briefly to consider the case of [Iranian] President Ahmadinejad, who embodies a distinctively Shiite form of jihadism…Shiite jihadists, like Ahmadinejad, have a somewhat different strategic goal [from Sunni jihadists]: to hasten the return of a messianic figure, the Twelfth Imam…he and those of his cast of mind believe themselves obligated to do whatever they can to hasten the arrival of the messianic age—including incinerating Israel, even if that results in the destruction (or, as they would say, “martyrdom”) of their own country. (pp. 98–99)

Faced with such a dire prospect, should not even committed supporters of a noninterventionist foreign policy rethink our position? Before doing so, though, some questions arise. First, what is the evidence that Ahmadinejad does aim at the nuclear destruction of Israel and, with it, of his own country? Weigel cites in support only an article by the Israeli historian Benny Morris, “This Holocaust Will Be Different,” Jerusalem Post, January 18, 2007 (pp. 182–183, note 5). This article, however, merely conjures up an apocalyptic picture and offers no evidence that Ahmadinejad has such plans.*

Weigel, though, does have one further “argument.” As is customary in such matters, he evokes the memory of Hitler:

Those who opted for appeasement and deterrence in the mid-1930s could not say that Adolf Hitler hadn’t warned them: statesmen

* The article is available online, and readers may judge for themselves.
could find, buried in the turgid prose of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler’s entire program . . . In 1933, it was a serious mistake to dismiss *Mein Kampf* as the ravings of a lunatic. It would be a grave mistake today to think that the mullahs of Iran are simply raving. . . . (pp. 97–98)

Would it not make more sense to endeavor to determine the exact goals of Iran’s current policy rather than rely on an analogy from European events of seventy years ago? If one does so, several facts that Weigel does not discuss spring to mind. For one thing, Ahmadinejad does not hold supreme power in Iran; and, in any case, his often-bizarre rhetoric is difficult to interpret. Further, as Glenn Greenwald has pointed out, Iran was a few years ago well-disposed to the United States. Iran was glad that the United States had overthrown the Taliban and Saddam Hussein and seemed prepared to negotiate; but America spurned the opportunity.* Further, current American intelligence estimates do not support Weigel’s charge that Iran aims to build nuclear weapons.

Perhaps, though, Weigel has a rejoinder. Even if there is only a chance that Ahmadinejad intends to bring about the end of the world, should we not act to interdict him? Even a small chance of a great evil demands action. This rejoinder fails: to reason in this way ignores the costs and risks of the policy that Weigel proposes.

What exactly is this policy? He appears to think that Iran can be prevented from developing nuclear weapons without a direct strike. But we must not enter into negotiations with the Iranian government. Oh, no, that would never do: that would be to accord “legitimacy” to the regime. Instead, we must endeavor to isolate the Iranian government and try to secure “regime change.” If this does not suffice, military action may be necessary; does not that eminent literary critic Norman Podhoretz, add the weight of his authority in foreign affairs for this option? “In any event,” Weigel assures us, “it will be a coalition of the willing, not the United Nations, that will affect [sic] the needed changes in Iran—one way or another” (p. 184, note 9).

What would happen if we take Weigel’s advice? Would this not inflame Iranian jihadists to violent action against us? It never seems to occur to Weigel that the jihadists are influenced by American policy. No doubt they seek the universal triumph of their religion; but, as Michael Scheuer in his *Imperial

Hubris, and Robert Pape, in Dying to Win, have pointed out, Islamic terrorists react to concrete grievances, most notably American involvement in the Middle East. Both of these authors have devoted years of study to the problem; Weigel prefers to rely on an expert on the novels of Norman Mailer.

Weigel fails to see the point that Scheuer and Pape make because he is in the grip of theological determinism. He rightly says that how “men and women think about God—or don’t think about God—has a great deal to do with how they envision the just society, and how they determine the appropriate means by which to build that society” (p. 13). It does not follow from this undoubted fact, though, that religious belief, to the exclusion of all else, directly causes political action. Surely jihadist views do not develop in a political vacuum.

Weigel is himself constrained to admit that in Iraq, American intervention has increased terrorism. “American analysts and US policy makers miscalculated the degree to which post-Saddam Iraq would quickly become a battlefield in the wider war against jihadism” (p. 82). Do we not have here a perfect illustration of how American intervention causes the problem its advocates profess to cure? Naturally, Weigel does not see matters this way. For him, the increase in terrorism shows only that the American invasion should have been planned better. Of course, we cannot leave Iraq now, he says: terrorists would regard American withdrawal as a great victory and would intensify their actions against us. One wonders how he knows this. Weigel professes belief in a “tranquillitas ordinis,” but what he in fact favors is religious war. He would do better to adhere to the just war tradition he has endeavored to replace.
American Empire: A Debate*

Christopher Layne & Bradley A. Thayer

Shall It Be War Again?

July 1, 2012, Mises Review

Christopher Layne and Bradley Thayer both specialize in international-relations theory, in particular what they term “grand strategy,” but they hold very different views on what foreign policy the United States ought to pursue. “Distilled to its essence, grand strategy is about determining the state’s vital interests—that is, those that are important enough for which to fight—and its role in the world” (p. x).

Despite their differences, they are friends, and American Empire is a debate between them. Each author begins with a long chapter presenting his conception of grand strategy: these chapters were written independently. After this, each responds to the other in a shorter chapter. Layne has much the better of the argument, though he has not fully broken from one of the dubious claims of what is misleadingly called “realist” theory.

Both authors agree on a fundamental fact. America is at the present time an empire, despite the facts that our leaders disclaim imperial ambitions.

Is America an empire? Yes, it is. An empire is a state that surpasses all others in capabilities and sense of mission . . . an empire has worldwide interests . . . empires always have a mission they seek to accomplish—this is usually creating, and then maintaining, a world order. (p. 3)

True, our political leaders refuse to use the word “empire,” but this is understandable:

They choose not to use it because it does not help to achieve the grand strategic goals of the United States. . . . For an American president or senior official to state that America is an empire would only help to organize resistance to it. (p. 4)

A better objection to thinking that America is an empire is that we do not have very many colonies, in the style of the empires of old. This however is a matter of form rather than substance.

A great power also can establish an informal empire by using its military and economic muscle—and its culture and ideology . . . to install and maintain compliant, friendly regimes in foreign territories. By ruling indirectly through local elites, an imperial power can forego the burdens of direct colonial rule. (p. 59, emphasis in original)

Thayer defends the current order, in which America seeks to dominate the world, but it is not altogether clear why he does so. He devotes the bulk of his essay to a description and celebration of American power, arguing that we can, if so minded, continue for a long time to impose our will on the rest of the world.

The United States has the ability to dominate the world because it has prodigious military capability, economic might, and soft power. [“Soft power,” roughly, is cultural and ideological influence.] . . . Will it be able to do so in the future? The answer is yes, for the foreseeable future—the next thirty to forty years. (p. 12)

No doubt America also has the power to blow up the world, but it hardly follows that we should do so: “can” does not imply “ought.” If, as Thayer thinks, we need to undertake the very costly task of imposing order on the rest of the world, must there not be some nation, or group of nations, that would otherwise pose a grave danger to our safety? If no such danger impends, why should we undertake the Herculean task of dictating and enforcing the terms of international order?
Thayer fails utterly to show that the United States stands in peril from any other country. To the contrary, he shows that each of the two most likely challengers to American hegemony—China and the European Union—faces significant obstacles to an attempt to become the world's dominant power.

Although its continued economic growth is impressive, China faces major problems that will hinder its ability to replace the United States as the world's hegemon . . . unlike China, the EU [European Union] does not pose a danger to the American Empire for two major reasons—political and economic. (pp. 32, 34)

Thayer argues to this effect in order to show that the United States can maintain world dominance, but he does not see that he has at the same time undermined the case for doing this. Unless we face some powerful global antagonist, what is the point of the enterprise Thayer recommends?

Thayer might reply to our objection in this way. We face no imminent danger from others only if we maintain our hegemonic position. Should we abandon this, other nations, China in particular, might supplant us and hence threaten our security.

This response exposes the most basic objection to the line of thought that Thayer pursues. He takes for granted that a world power, at least one with a different political system from our own, poses a threat to us. Why need this be so? To take his example of China, in what way would even a vastly expanded and more powerful China pose an existential threat to the United States? What political ambition does China have in the Western hemisphere, let alone in America itself? The only territorial conflict Thayer adduces between America and China involves Taiwan, surely not an integral area for American security. Of course, a power that vies for hegemonic primacy is a threat to America, if one assumes that America needs to be the world's dominant power. But why assume this? Thayer's defense of American hegemony begs the question by building hegemony into the requirements for American security.

In fairness to Thayer, he does succeed in mentioning a genuine threat to America. He is right that Islamic terrorist groups pose a genuine danger, but it surely does not require world hegemony to contain attacks from them. Further, as Layne aptly points out, these attacks are responses to American policy in the Middle East, itself a product of the hegemonic grand strategy. Were America to pursue a modest strategy confined to defense of our own territory, it is highly doubtful that these groups would view us as a target.
The United States may be greatly reviled in some quarters of the Islamic world, but were the United States not so intimately involved in the affairs of the Middle East, it’s hardly likely that the detestation would have manifested itself as violently as it did on 9/11. (p. 70)

The assumption that American security requires world hegemony is indeed a puzzling one, and it is Layne who clarifies what lies behind it. As mentioned earlier, both authors are realists, who stress the primacy of power in international relations. Layne notes that one type of realist theory underlies Thayer’s approach. “Offensive realism holds that the best strategy for a great power is to gain primacy because, if it can do so, it will not face any serious challenges to its security” (p. 62).

As the old adage has it, the best defense is a good offense, and some proponents of this school of thought willingly embrace drastic prescriptions for policy. The mere prospect that China might rise in power to challenge American primacy is for these offensive realists sufficient grounds for launching a preventive war against that country.

Advocates of containment hope that… this strategy will halt China’s rise and preserve America’s primacy. However, as one leading proponent of containment argues, if these steps fail to stop China’s great power emergence, “the United States should consider harsher measures.” That is, before its current military advantage over China is narrowed, the United States should launch a preventive war to forestall China’s emergence as a peer competitor. (p. 73)

Layne does not mention in the text the author of this harrowing idea, but his reference discloses that it is the book’s coauthor, Bradley Thayer (p. 99, note 74).

Layne’s response to offensive realism is within its own terms a good one. He points out that the pursuit of world hegemony will arouse the resentment of other nations, encouraging them to unite against the dominant power.

Up to a point . . . it is a good thing for a state to be powerful. But when a state becomes too powerful, it frightens others; in self-defense, they seek to offset and contain those great powers that aspire to primacy. (p. 63)
So far as the danger to us posed by rising powers like China is concerned, why not rely on regional coalitions of nations to “balance against” the new threat? This is the essence of the “offshore balancing” strategy that Layne favors. It is, he holds, much less costly and dangerous than offensive realism.

The key component of a new geopolitical approach by the United States would be the adoption of an offshore balancing strategy. . . . The other major powers in Asia—Japan, Russia, India—have a much more immediate interest in stopping a rising China in their midst than does the United States, and it is money in the bank that they will step up to the plate and balance against a powerful, expansionist state in their own neighborhood. (p. 76)

Though Layne makes some excellent points, he fails fully to break with the “realist” axiom that the mere existence of a powerful state poses a danger to us. Thus, he calls for the government to regulate trade with China in order to hamper its technological progress:

American trade with China should be driven by strategic, not market, considerations. . . . Individual American corporations may have an interest in penetrating the Chinese market, but there is no national interest, for example, in permitting US firms to facilitate China’s development of an advanced aerospace industry. (p. 74)

Unless a nation directly threatens us, why should we endeavor to impede its activities?

Despite taking for granted this dubious realist dogma, Layne’s essays are insightful. He notes that, in justification of American hegemony, offensive realism is often combined with another wrongheaded view, democratic peace theory. This holds that democracies do not fight other democracies. Hence, it is highly desirable for world peace to establish democratic regimes where these do not presently exist. Concerning this position, Layne remarks,

The democratic peace theory is probably the most overhyped and undersupported “theory” ever to be concocted by American academics. In fact, it is not a theory at all. Rather it is a theology that suits the conceits of Wilsonian true believers—especially the neoconservatives who have been advocating American Empire since the early 1990s. (p. 94)
Though offshore balancing is a vast improvement over American empire, it is not the best available grand strategy. The prize goes rather to isolationism: its proponents “argue that the United States should withdraw from involvement in international politics” (p. 3).

Long ago, John Quincy Adams expressed the point in more eloquent fashion: “America goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy.”
American History
Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950–1985*

Patrick Allitt

Up From Buckleyism
April 1, 1995, Mises Review

Patrick Allitt’s excellent book may be approached at two levels. On the one hand, Allitt has produced an old-fashioned narrative history, and his book is none the worse for that. He offers a detailed account of most of the leading American Catholic conservatives of the past forty years, and his extensive research has uncovered much valuable material about them. One the other hand, he has a thesis to advance.

I propose to concentrate on the former of these levels, “where the bodies are buried,” if you will. I do so not because his central argument is false or uninteresting—quite the contrary. Allitt’s thesis is that during the 1950s American Catholic conservatives generally held a cohesive position, based on natural law. In politics, Catholic rightists favored a strongly anti-Communist foreign policy and defended capitalism, although not in the pure form professed by libertarians. This group succeeded during the 1950s and early 1960s in securing for themselves a distinct place in American politics.

But then disaster struck. The Second Vatican Council, with its attendant upheavals, fragmented American Catholicism. Accordingly, in the 1960s and

1970s the united front among Catholic conservatives broke apart. Allitt’s contention strikes me as well argued and important, but at one point he seems to me mistaken. He criticizes natural law ethics on the ground that “natural law principles can in fact be made to yield multiple solutions to each problem, depending on which of the many available principles is granted salience for the particular issue under scrutiny” (p. 8). But all this says is that there are competing arguments. This is a situation true in innumerable areas, historical interpretation not least among them. Allitt probably would not wish to argue that because others differ with his views of Catholic intellectuals, all he says is thrown into doubt. Likewise various natural law “solutions” do not invalidate natural law. Allitt might reply that not only do interpretations of natural law differ; there is no means of rationally deciding among them. But to show that requires much more argument than Allitt attempts.

But Allitt’s brief surrender to relativism is at worst a minor blemish that does not much affect his discussion, which offers illuminating accounts of central figures. No doubt the most famous Catholic conservative during Allitt’s period was William F. Buckley, Jr.; but after reading Allitt, one can only marvel at how little of substance underlay his reputation. The two main planks of Buckley’s political outlook, anti-Communism and pro-capitalism, were well in place on the Catholic right long before Buckley arrived on the scene. Allitt places particular emphasis on the historian Ross J. S. Hoffman and the political scientist Francis Graham Wilson, both converts to Catholicism, who in the 1940s and 1950s articulated the vision that Buckley later propagandized “Ross Hoffman had by 1950 expressed many of the convictions that were to guide the Catholic new conservatives in the coming decades” (p. 57). Hoffman and Wilson maintained that behind Communism lay a spirit of revolutionary utopianism, sharply at variance with the Christian doctrine of original sin. Politics guided by prudence, in the spirit of Edmund Burke, was the order of the day, and an economy based on private property an indispensable adjunct in the struggle. (I think, however, that Allitt overstates Wilson’s commitment to capitalism in The Case for Conservatism [pp 58–59].)

If Buckley contributed nothing of intellectual substance to Catholic conservatism, he effectively popularized its principal tenets. In his defense of the Right, Buckley sometimes adopted positions with which he would today hardly be associated. He published several article in National Review that defended segregation, and in 1959, “Buckley himself opined that the
disfranchisement of blacks in the South could be justified on grounds of their lack of education and civilization” (p. 114).

Allitt’s discussion of Buckley helps clear up a mystery. In Buckley’s venomous obituary notice of Murray Rothbard, many readers will have found puzzling Buckley’s stress on Khrushchev’s visit to the United States in 1959. Why did Buckley dredge up this minor event of thirty-five years ago? As Allitt makes clear, the struggle against Khrushchev’s visit had the status of a crusade for Buckley and his National Review associates: to them Western Civilization was at stake (pp. 67–70). That Buckley became at the time overwrought is perhaps understandable; what is harder to fathom is that this “venture in triviality” remains for him a major incident in his life so many years later. Allitt also points out that Buckley’s opposition to Rothbard was of longstanding: Buckley never supported laissez-faire capitalism in Rothbard’s resolute fashion.

Allitt devotes much of his book to writers who, if less well known than Buckley, have much more intrinsic significance. Among these is Buckley’s brother-in-law, L. Brent Bozell. Bozell felt himself to be in Buckley’s shadow during his years as a National Review editor (p. 142), but he was in fact the more substantial figure. His The Warren Revolution holds up after nearly thirty years as a major, though neglected, contribution to constitutional scholarship. Here Allitt goes astray, for one of the few times in the book. He presents Bozell’s book as if it were simply a protest against the usurpations of the Warren Court. Quite the contrary, much of the book is a full scale historical investigation of judicial review, with radically revisionist findings. (Unfortunately, he published only one volume of what was intended as a longer study.) Allitt gives a valuable account of Bozell’s founding of Triumph, his split with Buckley and his journal’s collapse.

Allitt has astutely seen that Frederick Wilhelmsen, Bozell’s collaborator at Triumph, had “a brilliantly acute intellect and [an] internally consistent vision” (p. 145). Wilhelmsen, like Bozell, reflected the breakup in the solid front of 1950s Catholicism. Unlike Buckley, who moved ever closer to the American Establishment, Wilhelmsen doubted the ultimate stability of the secular American state. Instead, he looked to Spain, becoming a supporter of the Carlists, a dissident monarchist group. Allitt rightly emphasizes the importance for Wilhelmsen of his work in philosophy; but when he says that Wilhelmsen denied “the legitimacy of the idea of objective knowledge” (p. 147), he conveys a misleading impression. Wilhelmsen did indeed deny
that we can have knowledge without personal involvement; and Allitt, taken strictly, says no more than this. But I fear that his wording may convey to the unwary reader the suggestion that Wilhelmsen doubted that human beings can obtain knowledge of the world as it really is. This is the very reverse of the truth: Wilhelmsen ardently defended realism and wrote a laudatory preface to the English translation of Wilson’s classic attack on idealist epistemology.

Allitt’s sure touch for those outside the mainstream emerges clearly in his chapter on those two remarkable Hungarians, John Lukacs and Thomas Molnar. Molnar especially seems to me a writer of great intellectual power. He found most American intellectuals far inferior to their European counterparts. But the latter also were not all they should be; and in The Decline of the Intellectual (1961), he traced the decadence of the Western mind to the overthrow of the scholastic synthesis by the nominalists. As Allitt points out, Richard Weaver took the same line (in Ideas Have Consequences, 1945 [p. 226, n. 84]). Molnar rejected received political wisdom in similarly radical fashion; he admired European counter-revolutionaries such as Franco and Salazar and spurned the American political system. Allitt might have pointed out, however, that The Decline of the Intellectual includes a highly critical chapter on reactionary intellectuals. Allitt I suspect finds the historian John Lukacs more congenial; he presents a brilliant description of Lukacs’s historical writing (pp. 211 ff.).

Although neither Garry Wills nor Michael Novak compare in intellectual power with Wilhelmsen, Lukacs, and Molnar, the former duo have received much more public attention; and in a very useful chapter, Allitt compares and contrasts them. Most commentators on Wills see him as breaking sharply with his one-time conservatism. The former critic of Martin Luther King became the defender not only of King but of the Berrigan brothers as well. But Allitt, with the insight of a good intellectual historian, sees continuity between early and late Wills. In all phases of his intellectual career, Wills has opposed individualism. In Nixon Agonistes, for example, “Wills’s main target was the idea of ‘markets,’ central to liberalism since the days of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham” (p. 267). Wills instead advocated a “convenient state” whose governing virtue was not justice but prudence. I think that Allitt, clearly an admirer of Wills, overrates the plausibility of his position. Does Wills’s convenient state really comport well with the “prophetic figures,” such as King and Arthur Waskow, whom he admires (p. 281)? And Allitt’s praise for the “vast analytical range and power” of
Inventing America seems hard to maintain in the face of Ronald Hamowy’s devastating assessment in the William and Mary Quarterly.

Although Michael Novak has also made a big splash, he comes off in Allitt’s portrayal as very much inferior to Wills. After abandoning his study for the priesthood, he enrolled in the Harvard Philosophy Department. Unfortunately, he twice failed his PhD general exams, a fact that did not prevent his securing prestigious teaching positions at Stanford and elsewhere (p. 255). Novak’s prolific output, in both theology and politics, was often marred by wildly overstated and implausible claims. In his early theological works, “he criticized traditional Catholic exclusivist claims with the abrupt assertion that in the ‘secular city’ of the 1960s the differences between the believer and the unbeliever, let alone Protestant and Catholic, were negligible” (p. 256). In his 1978 Guns of Lattimer, Novak argued that a “sacrament of blood” had been necessary to produce reconciliation between immigrant Pennsylvania coal miners and their WASP neighbors. Novak now champions “democratic capitalism,” a peculiar amalgam that he has endeavored unsuccessfully to explain in numerous books. Though Allitt never criticizes Novak directly, he brings out the slapdash quality of Novak’s thought to devastating effect. I do think, though, that he should have given Novak credit for an interesting early piece on substance in Aristotle.

I wish that Allitt had said more about Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, Willmoore Kendall and Joe Sobran; but on the whole he has written a comprehensive, balanced, and satisfying book.
Original Intentions: On the Making and Ratification of the United States Constitution *

M. E. Bradford

America’s Many Propositions

July 1, 1995, Mises Review

By profession M. E. Bradford was a literary scholar, and Original Intentions, issued shortly after his untimely death, manifests his sure touch for the nuances of words. We can already see Mel Bradford in action by the second word of his title—not “intention” but “intentions.”

By using the plural, Bradford called attention to a fundamental fact about the US Constitution. Diverse persons and groups, both in the Constitutional Convention and the state ratification conventions, had various purposes in mind in their advocacy of the new charter of government. One cannot then assume that the views of any particular Framer have been enacted into law.

Bradford applies this precept to no less than James Madison, the “protagonist” of the convention (p. 1). Madison arrived at the Convention a strong centralizer; and his Virginia Plan, introduced through his follower Edmund Randolph, would have allowed the larger states to dominate a powerful national legislature. Although, through shrewd maneuvers and the favor of George Washington, Madison succeeded in having his plan placed on the convention’s

* University of Georgia Press, 1993.
agenda, he soon discovered that he could not force his designs upon delegates for the most part much less centralist than he was.

Madison at first failed to grasp the extent of resistance to his centralizing designs, and the convention neared collapse.

That he [Madison] was listening to other music instead of the baleful iteration of these predictions of adjournment sine die can be demonstrated by his functional indifference to the structure of the Great Convention itself. For he failed to treat it as an assembly representing the people of the states. (p. 9)

Only when Madison came to recognize that most delegates did not want the basic framework of their way of life to be tampered with could the convention proceed.

I have dealt in some detail with Bradford’s initial essay as it illustrates the basic features of his historical method. Like the great historian of Rome Sir Ronald Syme, he relied heavily on collective biography. With immense labor, he investigated the lives of as many as possible of the convention’s delegates. His Constitution, unlike that, say, of Harry Jaffa, was informed not only by the views of James Madison, but by those of Roger Sherman, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and William Samuel Johnson as well.

Bradford possessed a keen logical mind, and his method avoids a fallacy into which lesser writers often fall. One frequently sees arguments of this form: (1) someone (e.g., Jefferson, Madison) was the principal author of a document (e.g., the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution); (2) the person in question held views of a particular character; (3) therefore, these views can be used to specify the fundamental intent of the document.

After Bradford’s work, the fallacy in this line of thought should be apparent. If a document has more than one author, or is adopted by a group, only views shared by the group can be imputed to the document. And, as Bradford went on to argue, matters are yet more complicated.

Even if one knew the views of all delegates to the Constitutional Convention, the work of interpretation has just begun. Though the Convention proposed the Constitution, it did not institute the new regime. That task belonged to the state conventions that ratified the Constitution, and thus the intentions of the delegates to those conventions must be taken as authoritative. To construct a detailed picture of all the state conventions is a Herculean task, but it was not beyond Bradford’s powers. In chapters on the ratifying conventions of
Massachusetts, South Carolina, and North Carolina, he presents the results of his painstaking investigations.

Like King Lear, Bradford could say, “I will teach you differences.” He stresses always the influence of the local, and the effects of seemingly minor events. Had the state conventions been held in a different order, he speculates, the Constitution might well have failed of adoption.

Some generalizations can, however, be ventured.

That the powers of the new government are few and explicit is in the ratifying conventions the central theme of the Federalist defense of the United States Constitution and a primary explanation of why the sequence of ratification went as it did. (p. 41)

The dominant desire of the Framers and ratifiers of the Constitution was to maintain the settled ways of the past rather than impose some new philosophical scheme. Not for Bradford is the Straussian view that the Framers were enlightenment philosophers who wished to establish a new order based on rationalist principles. Quite the contrary, Bradford finds the British Constitution of 1688 their principal model.

For early English constitutional history is a universe of discourse, a structure of values inherent in the language of its expression that is the opposite of metaphysical speech concerning abstract moral principles and ideal regimes. (p. 33)

Elsewhere, Bradford applies his biographical method to other historical issues. In “Religion and the Framers” he argues that the current Supreme Court’s understanding of the establishment clause of the First Amendment ignores the intent of the Congress that proposed it. Once again, he works by careful building up of biographical detail and attention to the particularities of debate. In “Changed Only a Little” he deploys his method to challenge the view that the Reconstruction Amendments fundamentally altered the Constitution.

Though Bradford opposed fitting history to a Procrustean bed of philosophy, he was himself a philosophical intelligence of considerable stature; and his protests against improper philosophizing have themselves a deeper end in view. Bradford feared the imposition of what, following Michael Oakeshott, he terms a teleocratic political order. This sort of regime subordinates politics to some overarching goal—such as, to take an example
not at random, equality. The governing powers need observe no limits in pursuit of their end; and the result, inevitably, is despotism. Instead, Bradford directed the full force of his scholarship and personality toward the promotion of a nomocratic order—a system that operates by fixed rules of procedure, never to be set aside.

M. E. Bradford was a scholar of immense gifts, devoted to the cause of liberty. Though he was denied in life the full recognition that he deserved, he could apply to himself the words of Browning’s Paracelsus: “But after, they will know me.”
Forgotten Lessons: Selected Essays of John T. Flynn*

Edited by GREGORY PAVLIK

Warfare vs. American Liberty

December 1, 1995, Mises Review

John T. Flynn is best known today as a once-liberal columnist for the New Republic who became a bitter enemy of Franklin Roosevelt and a stalwart of the Old Right. The present collection of brilliant essays, ably edited and introduced by Gregory Pavlik of the Foundation for Economic Education, makes clear that Flynn has been much underrated, even by most of his supporters. He was a comparative historian of major importance, who trenchantly analyzed the economic factors behind militarism.

As Flynn saw matters, governments often face a problem owing to the vagaries of the business cycle. Confronted with the mass unemployment and poverty brought about by economic depression, what is to be done? Unless the condition of those accommodated can be bettered, popular discontent threatens to overwhelm the ruling authorities; and few rulers wish to cede power.

The solution that has again and again come to the minds of the rulers is to increase spending. Then, it is hoped, business may revive and all will be well. But the solution leads to new problems, more severe than the difficulties that

provoked the initial bout of spending. If government spending is the order of the day, what new projects are to become the beneficiaries of the Treasury’s largesse? Justifications for increased spending need constantly to be located. Meanwhile, the burden of new spending and borrowing threatens once more to topple the economy, and with it the government.

Once more the question arises: what is to be done? Flynn contended that the siren song of militarism usually proves irresistible. An arms buildup offers a never-failing outlet for government spending; and the draft of men into the armed services presents a cure for unemployment as well.

Here precisely lies Flynn’s greatest contribution to comparative history. He pioneered in the study of domestic pressures that lead to war. Particularly in the brilliant Militarism: The New Slavery for America, he casts illuminating light on the history of Europe and America in the period from 1870 to 1939.

But Flynn did not do his work in a detached spirit, sine ira et studio. Rather, he strongly rejected the militaristic “solution” to economic depression and wrote to warn his countrymen of the disasters that lay ahead should this policy be adopted. In an essay, “Can Hitler Beat American Business?,” first published in 1940, he warned: “Economic dislocation, control and more control, national debt, and militarism these three great facts have now invaded our life” (p. 106).

The strength of Flynn’s theory emerges more clearly when its details are examined. Flynn places supreme stress on fractional reserve banking as a cause of instability. He writes, in “The New Deal: An Old Racket,” first published in 1955:

A business man wants to borrow $10,000. The bank takes his note. But it does not give him $10,000. It gives him a deposit. It writes in his deposit book a statement that he has $10,000 deposited in the bank. By this simple process, the deposits of the bank are increased by $10,000 though no additional money has actually been deposited. (p. 57; emphasis omitted)

Unlike Murray Rothbard, Flynn did not totally condemn this process. He found “nothing wrong or fraudulent about this” (p. 57). But he was alive to the grave dangers inherent in money thus created; here lay a most potent source of instability. Although he did not work out in detail the causes of the business cycle, Flynn obviously operated in the same neighborhood as the Austrian theory of Mises and Hayek, which places prime responsibility for the cycle on the overexpansion of bank credit.
Flynn’s keen insight is evident at another point in his theory, already briefly mentioned: the mechanism by which the search of the government for projects on which to spend money leads to militarism.

We have created a huge national debt to relieve poverty and idleness and produce recovery. With the money we have built schools, hospitals, playgrounds, roads, parkways. But now it is no longer possible to support such expenditures. Powerful resistance has developed. . . . But the spending must go on or the present government will face a collapse. And hence this one great imperious call to national defense is invoked. (p. 105)

Thus Flynn strikes at a key weakness in Keynesian economic policy. Government spending, in Keynes’s theory, ostensibly may be on anything. But when the realities of politics are taken into account, the options available prove quite limited. Keynesian policies are apt to lead not to harmless (if useless) public works boondoggles but instead to war and destruction.

At one point Flynn perhaps lays himself open to criticism. When he says that the government must continue to spend in order to avert collapse, is Flynn himself endorsing the Keynesian point that spending is necessary to end a depression? I do not think he need be taken in this way. Perhaps what he wishes to claim is that a government that refused to spend but instead allowed the market to operate unhindered would itself face collapse, owing to political exigencies. But Flynn, neither here nor to my knowledge elsewhere, states in a precise way his view of how the market economy in depression operates; and I am here uncertain of his meaning.

But this is at worst a minor blemish. Flynn is at his superb best in his comparative analysis of the military policies of Germany and Italy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He argues that in Germany, Bismarck inaugurated government planning of the economy in order to steal the Socialists’ thunder.

The great German Chancellor decided, after some experimenting, that he could give the German people all that the socialists promised without setting up socialism a tragic blunder which politicians in America who have not read history seem not to have comprehended to this day. (p. 117)
Conscription into the armed forces formed a vital part of this quasi-socialist program. It provided employment for large numbers of young men, as well as offering a huge outlet for government spending. Militarism, in brief, met perfectly domestic imperatives. And, as the burden of debt mounted, the pressure for war increased concomitantly: “War, the supreme project of obfuscated politicians trapped in impossible promises, in overpowering taxes and crushing debt” (p. 121).

In stressing the domestic imperatives in German policy that led to war in 1914, Flynn anticipated the influential work of Fritz Fischer and his school in Germany. And Flynn developed his account with much more balance than Fischer, who tends to see the European conflict of 1914 as exclusively the result of German aggression.

To Flynn, the pressures of war caused by expansion of debt were a European-wide phenomenon. (Flynn, incidentally, was a considerable authority on German history. One thinks in this connection of his outstanding comparison in *The Road Ahead* of the British and German systems of government in 1914 by no means to the advantage of the former. But this is another story.)

Flynn’s eloquent arguments against the entry of the United States into the Second World War were rudely interrupted by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The course of the war confirmed Flynn in the essential correctness of his analysis; and at war’s end he renewed the struggle.

His target now was the Cold War. Though a fervent anti-communist, he warned against a military buildup supposedly designed to contain Stalin and his successors. To impose military socialism at home would not help to defeat communism; rather, it would increase militarism, which “was and remains a racket the oldest in history” (p. 132), to unprecedented levels.

Simple common sense, one would suppose; but Flynn’s classic defense of Old Right thinking was not to the liking of the warmongering editor of the newly founded *National Review*. When Flynn submitted an article to *National Review* that warned against militarism and war, the editor returned it to Flynn. Pavlik quotes in his insightful introduction to this volume from the editor’s letter: “This piece just isn’t what I had in mind” (p. 4). The editor preferred the interests of the military state to the welfare of the American people. And in the forty years that have passed since that letter, William F. Buckley, Jr., has changed not at all.

The volume contains, besides the essays on militarism, an important early piece, “Whose Child is the NRA?” In this 1934 article, Flynn exposed the
business interests who favored subjecting the economy to the straitjacket controls of the New Deal’s National Recovery Administration. The later studies of Murray Rothbard fully confirm Flynn’s findings. And “What is Senator McCarthy Really Trying to Do?” offers a provocative defense of a figure for whom the right has displayed at best a tepid enthusiasm. *Forgotten Lessons*, if it receives the attention it deserves, will revive interest in a major social thinker.
DEFENDERS OF THE FREE MARKET are often stigmatized as uncritical apologists for big business. Nothing could be further from the truth, as readers of this book will at once discover. Written by one of the two greatest twentieth century champions of free-market capitalism, Murray Rothbard, it is nevertheless a searing indictment of the influence of investment bankers on twentieth-century American foreign policy.

But “nevertheless” is the wrong word. Rothbard’s criticism of certain big business interests directly follows from his free-market position. Like Franz Oppenheimer and Albert Jay Nock, Rothbard distinguished two means by which people can attain their ends. One of these, voluntary exchange, constitutes the basis of the free society to which he devoted his life. The other, the “political means” is inimical to freedom. For Rothbard, in an even more unqualified way than for St. Augustine, the state is “a great robbery.” Its guiding principle is coercion, and its revenues are plunder extracted from producers.

Business interests who ally with the state, then, find no favor with our author. He maintains that investment bankers are especially liable to form alliances of this sort; hence their activities must be viewed with the greatest suspicion.

Investment bankers do much of their business underwriting government bonds, in the United States and abroad. Therefore, they have a vested interest in promoting deficits and in forcing taxpayers to redeem government debt. Both sets of bankers [i.e., commercial and investment], then, tend to be tied in with government policy, and try to influence and control government action in domestic and foreign affairs. (p. 1)

For Rothbard this view was no mere abstract speculation; it was the linchpin of much of his historical research. And his adoption of this theory makes his history all the more fascinating to read. Economic history too often is disguised sociology: forces such as Business, Labor, and Government confront one another in an “unearthly ballet of bloodless categories.”

There is none of this in Rothbard. For him history is a matter of who did what to whom. As Justin Raimondo points out in the book’s insightful “Afterword,” Rothbard’s search for the individual actor is a direct consequence of methodological individualism, a key tenet of the Austrian school.

In the present book, Rothbard applies his historical method with illuminating results. Though relatively short, it is, as my great teacher Walter Starksie used to say, “packed with matter”; and I have space here to indicate only a few of the many episodes Rothbard explores.

Near the start of the work, Rothbard advances a striking thesis:

The great turning point of American foreign policy came in the early 1890s, during the second Cleveland Administration. It was then that the US turned sharply and permanently from a foreign policy of peace and non-intervention to an aggressive program of economic and political expansion abroad. (p. 4)

The turn came at the behest of the House of Morgan, which in Rothbard’s view exerted a controlling influence on American foreign policy until the onset of the New Deal.

Under the new activist policy, the United States vigorously sought to wrest control of the Latin American market from Great Britain. In spite of the later close partnership between the Morgan interests and Britain, the United States was very far indeed from alliance with Britain during most of the 1890s.
Rothbard seems to me entirely on the mark here; few historians have grasped this simple but essential truth. In further support of Rothbard’s analysis, Britain strongly backed Spain during the Spanish-American War of 1898.

But a British-American partnership was not long in coming, and Rothbard finds in the close ties between the House of Morgan and British financial interests an underlying cause of American entry into World War I. Because of Morgan investments in Allied war bonds and in the export of war munitions, “J. P. Morgan and his associates did everything they possibly could to push the supposedly neutral United States into the war on the side of England and France” (p. 16).

Rothbard is by no means finished with the House of Morgan. During the 1920s, Morgan interests controlled the Federal Reserve System. Here the key figure was Benjamin Strong, “who singlehandedly dominated Fed policy from its inception until his death in 1928” (p. 23). Strong “spent virtually his entire business and personal life in the circle of top associates of J. P. Morgan” (p. 23); and as Governor of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, then the most powerful position in the Federal Reserve system, he was ever alert to the interests of his Morgan allies.

I fear that I have so far given a misleading impression of the book. It is much more than a study of the Morgans. Indeed, in the 1930s the Morgans ceased to occupy the top position in the financial elite and were replaced by the Rockefellers. But, so filled with detail is the book that a review can really do no more than single out a few topics for mention.

The reader has much more in store for him. Rothbard again and again turns up a new angle on some person or event. Theodore Roosevelt, Walter Lippmann, John F. Kennedy, Henry Kissinger—all of these, and many others, come under Rothbard’s scrutiny, as he illustrates his thesis about the influence of investment bankers. The book defies summary: twentieth-century American diplomatic history will never be the same.
The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson and The French Revolution 1785–1800*

CONOR O’BRIEN

The Jefferson Revisionism Hoax

April 1, 1997, Mises Review

CONOR CRUISE O’BRIEN lets the mask drop on p. 274 of his deplorable new book. Praising another writer on Jefferson, O’Brien remarks:

What is most impressive in Miller’s book to my mind is his intuitive capacity to penetrate through Jefferson’s verbiage into Jefferson’s mind. This is the kind of capacity that tends to be held in low esteem by academic historians and indeed there are obvious reasons for a degree of skepticism concerning such a capacity. (p. 274)

Our author here perfectly epitomizes his own method. In this long tirade against Thomas Jefferson, O’Brien follows a simple course. He first dredges up a passage from Jefferson that he believes suitable for his intuitive powers. Disregarding what the text says, he enters Jefferson’s mind. Not content with enjoying his mystic powers, O’Brien feels impelled to communicate his findings to those less psychically gifted than he.

To what end? Jefferson must be expelled from the pantheon of the American civil religion. O’Brien’s indictment is twofold: Jefferson defended uncritically the French Revolution, down to its bloodiest atrocities; and he held racist views about blacks. The multicultural society of today cannot tolerate so brazen a miscreant. Away with him!

Before we consider O’Brien’s case in detail, a preliminary question confronts us. Why must we have a civil religion at all? As O’Brien rightly notes, the phrase “civil religion” stems from Rousseau. In his opinion, Christianity had wrongly diverted men from politics to pursuit of salvation in another world. Additionally, conflicting sects threaten the state with disorder. To avert this danger, and to restore the civic virtue of old Rome, citizens must profess common articles of belief that promote the good of the state.

This bizarre view is utterly alien to the American political tradition, whatever Robert Bellah and similar worthies may assure us. The First Amendment forbids a national establishment of religion; surely this applies to Rousseau’s witch’s brew as well as to the more conventional faiths.

For O’Brien this seeming commonplace is false. He assumes without argument that we have, and must have, a civil religion. In a way that our author neglects to specify, we need this for a cohesive society. “Among the sacred beliefs, a cult of liberty has been important from very early on…. In the American civil religion, liberty, nationalism, and faith are fused” (p. 301). Oddly, O’Brien at one point condemns Jefferson for allegedly adopting the slogan “forced to be free” from Rousseau; but it is O’Brien himself who has been intoxicated by Rousseau’s fantasies. So far as civil religion is concerned, a profession of atheism is in order.

If we reject civil religion, the question of Jefferson’s place in that concoction loses its importance. Nevertheless, O’Brien’s book merits attention, since his bill of indictment can easily be translated into secular terms. Jefferson is a much admired figure: does he deserve to be?

The chief exhibit in O’Brien’s case that Jefferson fanatically supported French Revolutionary atrocities is a letter written by Jefferson to William Short, the American Chargé d’Affaires at Paris. The missive in question is the famous “Adam and Eve” letter of January 3, 1793. In it, Jefferson rejects Short’s criticism of the French revolutionaries for their numerous executions:

In the struggle which was necessary, many guilty persons fell without the forms of trial, and with them some innocent. These
I deplore as much as anybody, and shall deplore some of them to the day of my death.

But the

liberty of the whole earth was depending on the issue of the contest, and was ever such a prize won with so little innocent blood? My own affections have been deeply wounded by some of the martyrs to this cause, but rather than it should have failed, I would have seen half of the earth desolated. Were there but an Adam and and Eve left in every country, and left free, it would be better than it now is. (p. 145, quoting Jefferson)

If Jefferson’s letter is taken literally, O’Brien would have a point. Is it not the very midsummer of madness to endorse the revolution at the cost of depopulating the world? But Jefferson often wrote in purple prose, and surely he cannot be taken literally. The letter was written well before the Reign of Terror, usually dated from the onset of the second Committee of Public Safety in July, 1793; and it displays considerable unease over the executions that had then already taken place. O’Brien himself admits that Jefferson condemned “the atrocities of Robespierre” in a later letter (p. 310).


According to O’Brien, Jefferson’s phrase “the very doctrine that had been my polar star” is “illuminating.” “It is clear,” writes O’Brien, “that Jefferson regarded as meritorious the fixity of his doctrinal attitude to the French Revolution, irrespective of what might be happening in and around France and as a metaphorical instrument for conferring grandeur on an idée fixe, there is nothing to beat the polar star” (p. 144).

It is not Jefferson, but O’Brien, who is here dominated by an idée fixe. As the context of the notes makes unmistakable, the “polar star” is the view that France is an effective American ally: the phrase has nothing to do with revolutionary doctrine.

Jefferson writes that Washington “went into the circumstances of dissatisfaction between Spain, Gr. Brit. and us, and observed that there was no
nation on whom we could rely at all times but France.” Jefferson is “much pleased with the tone of these observations. It was the very doctrine which had been my polar star” (p. 144, quoting Jefferson).

Remember, it is Washington to whom Jefferson ascribes these remarks. O’Brien’s interpretation of “polar star” nonsensically requires that Washington be a fanatical partisan of French revolutionary ideology.

This, I regret to say, is not the only instance of O’Brien’s ineptitude. Let us return to the Adam-and-Eve letter. Please note carefully what O’Brien places in brackets in this citation from the letter: “The Jacobins saw this, and expunging that officer [in English, executing the King] was of absolute necessity” (p. 145).

I fear that our author has neglected to note the date, January 3, 1793, of Jefferson’s letter. The King was not executed until January 21. And in any case news in those days did not travel fast. Had O’Brien read the letter with focused attention, he would have seen that the sentence he wrongly construes refers to abolition of the monarchy, not the King’s execution. “The Jacobins . . . tried the experiment of retaining their hereditary Executive. The experiment failed completely,” then follows the sentence quoted earlier (p. 145).

When our author is in hot pursuit of his quarry, the conventions of scholarly discourse depart. He states:

Jefferson is a prophet, but not in the predictive sense of that term. He is a prophet in the spiritual sense, a being whose imagination is ablaze with a vision. Specifically, he is the author of the American Holy Book, the Declaration of Independence. He sees his own life as dedicated to what the Declaration calls “the holy cause of freedom.” (p. 66)

An eloquent passage, if a bit perfervid in rhetoric; but this “quotation” from the Declaration does not appear there, but comes from a speech 14 years later. This will not do.

Let us return once more to Adam and Eve. O’Brien’s attempt to shore up his interpretation of the letter by the “polar star” conversation fails utterly, as we have seen. But how does he deal with counterevidence? Why, by his intuitive power to enter Jefferson’s mind, of course.

Did Jefferson condemn the “atrocities of Robespierre?” Yes, writes O’Brien, but what Jefferson meant was that the revolutionaries emancipated the slaves. “The emancipating Act of February 1794 was probably not the least of the
atrocities of Robespierre’ in the eyes of Virginia slave owners, including Thomas Jefferson” (p. 312). There is no need for textual evidence, when that great mentalist the Amazing Conor is at work.

O’Brien’s argument now takes a surprising turn. He has so far condemned Jefferson as an ideologue, a precursor of totalitarian terror, for his favorable remarks about the French Revolution. But Jefferson did at some point in 1794–1795 abate in his enthusiasm for the revolution, as our author readily acknowledges. Should he now receive credit for acquiring, however belatedly, a little of the wisdom of O’Brien’s hero, Edmund Burke?

Not at all. For O’Brien, Jefferson cannot win. As I have suggested already, our author thinks that for Jefferson, the preservation of slavery outweighed zeal for revolution. Jefferson was, first and foremost, a Virginia planter.

He continued to speak of Virginia as “my country” even when he was representing the United States abroad. Nor was this an isolated trick of speech. The United States was not an object that engaged his emotions; Virginia was. (p. 304)

If Jefferson admires the French Revolution, O’Brien condemns him as ideologue; if he prefers the values of his local culture to the revolutionary ones, O’Brien denounces him as a hidebound provincial. O’Brien fails to see that to reject ideology characteristically leads to the embrace of tradition. Does O’Brien have some third alternative in mind? He neglects to tell us what it is.

No doubt O’Brien would respond in this way. Even if most opposition to the French Revolution came from traditionalists, not all traditions are good. In particular, Jefferson’s Virginia was a slaveholding society, and Jefferson entertained a low view of blacks. In his Notes on the State of Virginia, he questioned the intellectual capacity of blacks; and he did not think that free blacks could live side-by-side with whites.

But to condemn Jefferson for these views is anachronistic. His opinions of blacks did not differ from those of Hume and Kant. Should these philosophers join the author of the Declaration of Independence in O’Brien’s Book of Heroes With Feet of Clay? In September 1858, a well-known American politician declared: “There is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living on terms of social and political equality.” The author of these sentiments was Abraham Lincoln. Does he too have to go?
To list O’Brien’s misunderstandings in extensive detail threatens tedium. I shall thus conclude with only two more howlers. He cites this passage from Jefferson: “I do not indeed wish to see any nation have a form of government forced upon them; but if it is to be done, I should rejoice at its being a free one” (p. 12). About this, O’Brien observes: “The basic concept here is taken from *Du contrat social* and is the most audacious of Rousseau’s paradoxes: the notion that people may be ‘forced to be free’” (p. 12).

What Jefferson says has nothing to do with Rousseau. According to Rousseau, those not in accord with the general will are forced to be free by acting as it dictates, since by definition the general will realizes freedom. What has this murky metaphysics to do with Jefferson’s commonsense point that a free government is better than an unfree one? Jefferson does not say that free governments should be forced on unwilling people; has O’Brien read the first sentence of the passage he cites?

Even worse is O’Brien’s explanation of Jefferson’s failure to meet his young daughter, Polly, in London in 1787. Jefferson, then the American Minister in France, sent someone else to bring her to Paris. Our author comes up with a characteristically fatuous explanation for Jefferson’s behavior.

Polly was accompanied by a teenage slave girl who was a half-sister of Jefferson’s wife. Had Jefferson gone to London, he would have had to meet John Adams, the American Minister, and his wife Abigail. “New Englanders were aware in general that such relations between families of masters and slaves [as that between Jefferson’s father-in-law and the slave girl] were not uncommon in the South.” But Abigail Adams “detested such arrangements.” So it is understandable that Jefferson “did not want to meet Abigail in the presence of his daughter, and of the young slave who was Polly’s aunt” (p. 24).

Once again the mind of our mystic is at work. His account of Jefferson’s thought is pure conjecture, and he presents not the slightest evidence in its support. How, by the way, was Abigail Adams supposed to know the slave girl’s ancestry?

I once asked my great teacher, Walter Starkie, what he thought of O’Brien. He replied: “I found him a rather self-opinionated young man when he was a pupil of mine.” After a long career, O’Brien has wound up a self-opinionated old man. Such is progress.
Great Britain learned an important lesson from World War I. American entry into that war in 1917 proved decisive. The American Expeditionary Force helped bring the long military stalemate on the Western Front to an end; and even before America’s declaration of war, Britain and her allies would have been in a hopeless position without American loans and sales of arms.

American entry into the war did not come about by accident. Quite the contrary, an extraordinary propaganda campaign by the British moved America from “neutral in thought, word, and deed” to armed intervention. The increasingly tense European diplomatic situation in 1938, culminating in the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, and the British and French declarations of war on Germany on September 3, led the British government to attempt to repeat its World War I strategy.

America had to be brought into the new war, and propaganda was a vital weapon in this task. This British propaganda campaign is described in careful detail by Nicholas John Cull; his book, based on extensive archival research and personal interviews, is a major contribution.

The British faced a formidable obstacle in their attempt to draw the United States into the war. During the 1920s, most Americans came to believe that United States entry into the First World War had been a disaster. The historical revisionists, such as Sidney Fay and Harry Elmer Barnes, challenged the official accounts of the war by “court historians.” Of particular relevance here, detailed studies exposed the British propaganda efforts. Cull emphasizes Walter Millis’s 1935 study *Road to War* in this connection. Millis’s “findings sparked a surge of Anglophobia and paranoia” (p. 9).

This time, the opponents of war were prepared for the British campaign, making their task all the more difficult. Isolationists, including Senators Nye and Borah and the great aviator Charles Lindbergh, did not hesitate to warn of British wiles.

Here, Cull might have made more use of an important book published in 1937. Cull does mention the work in question.

The American isolationists pressed their attack by once again raising the hue and cry against British propaganda. Senators William E. Borah and Gerald P. Nye seized on a British study titled *Propaganda in the Next War*, by British public relations expert Sidney Rogerson, as evidence of “a basic plan to involve us in the next war.” (p. 29)

Unfortunately, though, Cull does not discuss the book’s contents. It suggested that America might be drawn into a future European war by the “back door” of a conflict in the Far East. Surely this was a detail worth mentioning, at least as important as Lord Halifax’s distaste for hotdogs (p. 134).

Before 1940, British propaganda was according to our author not very effective: the British Library of Information in New York, whose activities Cull covers thoroughly, spent much time in futile conflicts of jurisdiction with other agencies. Cull attaches much of the blame for this state of affairs on the government of Neville Chamberlain, of whom he is decidedly no admirer. He holds the conventional view of Chamberlain as an appeaser of Hitler, reluctantly dragged into war. As such, he and his officials were half-hearted in their propaganda efforts.
Cull, it seems to me, radically underestimates the aggressiveness of the Chamberlain government. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, was in particular no milquetoast trembling before the Fuhrer. From October, 1938, he dominated foreign policy decisions and he actively pursued a militant anti-German policy.

Though Cull has no use for Chamberlain, he does celebrate one hero who served this regime: the British Ambassador to Washington, Lord Lothian. He finds that Lothian was an excellent propagandist, especially skilled at cultivating important American politicians. “Lord Lothian was a master of the American scene. Always accessible and disarmingly frank, he charmed the press corps” (p. 57). Of especial importance as a source on Lothian’s activities is the contemporary newsletter of the American isolationist Porter Sargent, later published as the book Getting US Into War. Cull cites this but ought to have made more use of it.

After the German invasion of Norway in May 1940, Chamberlain’s government collapsed; and Winston Churchill was appointed Prime Minister. For Cull, this is of decisive significance for British propaganda.

Churchill’s accession to power proved to be a watershed event in Anglo-American relations. His coalition Cabinet brought several key figures of the prewar Anglo-American bloc back into power. . . . Given Churchill’s own commitment to the “English-speaking peoples,” the reshuffle sounded a death knell for the reticence that had marked Chamberlain’s dealings with the United States. (p. 68)

Cull covers extensively the principal British officials engaged in war propaganda in the United States; and the reader will make the acquaintance of such figures as Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, an independently wealthy scholar attached to the British Library of Information.

But propaganda was by no means confined to official spokesmen. The British government carefully cultivated such journalists as Edward R. Murrow, whose broadcasts during the Blitz became legendary.

Meanwhile, at the Ministry of Economic Warfare, the press officer David Bowes-Lyon charmed the Americans, which was no easy task considering that he had to explain such matters as the blockade. His popularity owed something to his family
connections. King George’s wife, Queen Elizabeth, was his sister; and favored correspondents were invited to take tea with her at Buckingham Palace. (p. 87)

Cultivation of the journalistic elite of course did not preclude direct appeal to the American masses, and here Hollywood played a decisive role. “In the late autumn of 1940, the Films Division [of the Ministry of Information] dispatched the distinguished British film executive A. W. Jarratt to develop the necessary links with the studios” (p. 87). At a dinner with the leading Hollywood producers, Jarratt received pledges of support. The author offers a characteristically detailed account of their efforts to fulfill these pledges.

Cull’s book poses a formidable challenge to reviewers. It is a detailed narrative rather than an analytical study, and only a few of the many incidents it discusses can be mentioned here. One incident, though, cannot be omitted, as it brings together several key themes of the book.

On October 27, 1941, during his Navy Day speech, [President Franklin] Roosevelt made an astonishing claim: “I have in my possession a secret map, made in Germany by Hitler’s government, by planners of the new world order. It is a map of South America and part of Central America, as Hitler proposes to organize it.” (p. 170)

In fact, the map was a crude forgery; and although Cull does not establish its origins with certainty, William Stephenson, notorious for his “dirty tricks” as the head of British Security Coordination in New York, bears primary responsibility for its dissemination. “Whatever the exact origin of the map, the most striking feature of the episode was the complicity of the President of the United States in perpetrating the fraud” (p. 172).

American popular sentiment in 1940 strongly opposed entry into the European War; and Roosevelt’s pledge, “Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars, except in case of attack” helped him win an unprecedented third term. But the combination of the British propaganda machine with an American President set on undermining neutrality proved too difficult for the isolationists to overcome.

Cull’s study, though written from what D. C. Watt has called a “triumphalist” perspective on British propaganda, provides a great deal of information
to those who seek to avoid future foreign entanglements. *Selling War* gives ample, if unintended support for the judgment of the great diplomatic historian Charles Callan Tansill: “The main objective of American foreign policy since 1900 has been the preservation of the British Empire” (*Back Door to War* [Chicago University Press, 1952], p. 3).
Fabrication

April 1, 2000, Mises Review

G ARRY WILLS is a man with a mission. He wishes to expose for the falsehood that it is a myth that has bedeviled American history. Teachers of heresy such as Thomas Jefferson and John C. Calhoun have maintained that government, especially the US federal government, is at best a necessary evil. Strict limits to its power must be imposed: otherwise, it will soon impose tyranny.

But Mr. Wills knows better. The anti-government fanatics have supported their false doctrine with legends about the meaning and purpose of the Constitution. Once he clears these away, Wills thinks, people will be ready to accept the truth: energetic government is a good, essential to a well-ordered society.

Before beginning a gentle critique of Mr. Wills’s thesis, let me make an admission. He might complain that his views are unlikely to be fairly considered by a follower of Murray Rothbard who writes in a publication named for Ludwig von Mises. Is having me review this book analogous to a critical essay by Stalin on The Gulag Archipelago? Perhaps; but Mr. Wills has certainly made my job easy by the extraordinarily poor quality of his arguments.

The main reason to view the state with suspicion is a simple one. Albert J. Nock, one of the figures Wills discusses, developed the point in an especially

effective form. The “political means,” as Nock called it, rests on coercion. It is parasitic on voluntary production and exchange: on its own it makes nothing. If a state is necessary at all (a necessity that Nock and his followers denied) surely it must be kept within rigid bounds.

What, one wonders, can our defender of government say in reply? Has Mr. Wills found some flaw in the argument which has eluded less discerning analysts? Our author disappoints: he does not mention Nock’s central argument at all. Instead, he provides an irrelevant discussion of Nock’s opinions of the Jews. Even on this peripheral subject, he fails to cite Nock’s most important essay, which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1941). See also the debate with John Chamberlain in subsequent issues.

The principal argument against government does not merit mention: but what is to be said in the institution’s defense? Mr. Wills’s main effort is puerile. He points out, correctly enough, that people cannot function alone. Man is a social animal, who must live cooperatively in order to survive and prosper. To good effect, our author quotes Plato about the imperative need for the division of labor.

But what has all this to do with the state? The entire point of Nock’s central argument is that the state impedes social cooperation. The very points about society which Wills makes constitute, to the anti-statist, strong evidence for his position.

Wills knows this objection full well. “What has been described so far is just the exchange of goods. Why does that involve a government, the state” (p. 303)? Wills responds that exchanges are contracts: hence a state is needed as a means of enforcement.

Did I miss something? There appears to be a gap between the premise—exchanges are contracts—and the conclusion—the state is necessary. Where is the intervening matter? All that Mr. Wills says is this:

> But without the state the free market could not exist… A businessman cheated by another businessman cannot form a private police force, to haul the accused into a court which consists of the aggrieved person judging his own case, and then to compel submission to the verdict. A third party must do that, in whom a sanctioning power has been recognized… The state, far from being an enemy of the market system, is both the market’s product and its perpetuator. (p. 303)
Even by my tolerant standards, Mr. Wills has gone too far. How can he not be aware that individualist anarchists have proposed that the function of adjudication and enforcement he rightly thinks essential can be handled by private protection agencies? Mr. Wills can, if so inclined, dismiss these suggestions as inadequate: he is hardly within his rights ignoring them altogether.

And what is one to make of the last sentence in the passage just cited? If the state is the market’s product, then how did the market manage to bring it into being? How can the private market create anything more than a private enforcement agency? Further, suppose that Wills’s non-argument is right: we do need a state. Why would anything more than a minimal state that enforces contracts be required? Almost everyone on Wills’s list of horrid anti-statists, from Jefferson on down, would have had no trouble endorsing such a night-watchman state. Our author has not noted that he has inadvertently deserted to the enemy.

If Mr. Wills as a political philosopher is a total disaster, he is little better as a historian. Like Abraham Lincoln, he rejects the view that the states created the national government. Quite the contrary, the states were subordinate to the Continental Congress from the inception of the 1776 Revolution: “The colonies did not act, so far as independence was concerned, singly but in concert. The entity that was declared independent was the united body of states. . . . Lincoln was right, after all” (p. 60).

How odd that Mr. Wills has enlisted in the camp of the Great Railsplitter. Not long ago, Harry Jaffa, that keeper of the Eternal Lincoln Flame, denounced Wills as a follower of Calhoun. One awaits with interest Jaffa’s reaction to his new disciple.

To return to Mr. Wills’s argument, he himself recognizes a problem. What about the Articles of Confederation? “The mere fact that they [the states] took separate votes to enter the Confederation shows that they were not already in it. The full thirteen states did not ratify till 1781. . . . Those outside the Confederation certainly look like separate entities” (p. 61).

Unfortunately, our author does not find his own objection convincing. He fancies himself a textual critic of skill, able to extract the finest nuance of meaning from a historical document. He will tell us the meaning of the Articles.

I cannot say that he acquits himself in this endeavor with entire success. He claims that under the Articles, a state “must stay in the union unless all twelve other states gave them permission to change the Union or dissolve it” (pp. 62–63). Mr. Wills’s sentence does not parse, but never mind: his meaning is
sufficiently clear. His assertion that unanimous consent was required for a state to leave the union grievously misreads Article 13. It is a change in the Articles that requires unanimous consent, not a change of membership in the Union. The Articles do describe the Union as “perpetual,” but Wills fails to note that this word can mean “without a fixed term” as well as “forever.” Unless he can show that the second meaning was intended, he can get no anti-secessionist mileage out of the word.

Wills does no better when he gets to the Constitution. He places great emphasis on James Madison’s nationalistic aims at the Philadelphia Convention and during the First Congress. As he rightly notes, Madison wanted to give the federal government the power to veto laws passed by the state legislatures.

But why does this matter? Madison’s proposal of course failed of passage; and the more general aims of Madison at this period form no part of the Constitution as ratified. What counts when interpreting the Constitution, as the late M. E. Bradford never tired of insisting, is the intentions of the members of the state ratifying conventions.

Wills thus falls into fundamental error when he says:

the [anti-government] distortion began very early, when the arguments of Antifederalists against the Constitution were said, only a decade or so after that document’s ratification, to be embodied in the Constitution. (pp. 16–17)

To secure passage of the Constitution, its advocates often had to offer concessions to Antifederalists at the ratifying conventions. Contrary to Wills, then, it is to a large extent justifiable to read the Constitution through Antifederalist lenses.

Our author makes many surprising assertions in A Necessary Evil. Justice Story’s claim that the Second Amendment was intended to help resistance to usurpation of power by the government is brushed aside with “Story is hardly infallible” (p. 215), though Wills is elsewhere glad to mention him when he took a nationalist position (p. 60). Dietrich Bonhoeffer thought that Hitler should be killed, but he did not consider doing the job himself (p. 21). Witches in New England were hanged, not burned (p. 43). I shall not go on: to catalogue Wills’s errors is decidedly not a necessary evil.
When in the Course of Human Events: Arguing the Case for Southern Secession*

CHARLES ADAMS

Adams’s Stunning Achievement

October 1, 2000, Mises Review

CHARLES ADAMS manifests in this excellent book a rare talent—he asks intelligent historical questions. Many today portray the Civil War as a struggle to end slavery. Given the manifest injustice of Negro slavery, was not Lincoln justified in opposing Southern secession by all-out war? Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in a once-famous essay, went so far as to compare Lincoln’s crusade with the struggle against the Axis Powers in World War II.

Our author poses a simple question. How can one maintain this interpretation in the face of some obvious facts? First, if the Southern states seceded in order to preserve their “peculiar institution,” did they not follow a self-evidently foolish course? Mr. Adams points out that secession, even if peacefully accepted by the North, made slavery more precarious:

Under the protection of the Constitution and the Supreme Court, the entire nation was one gigantic prison from which the fugitive slave could not escape, which explains why the

The so-called underground railroad ended up in Canada. . . . To protect their slave property, staying in the Union was the wiser course to take. (p. 75)

But, it may be countered; did not Southerners fear that Lincoln intended, if he could, to end slavery? No doubt the South mistrusted Lincoln, but given Southern power in Congress, the president could do little. Further, “Lincoln said in his inaugural address that he would enforce the fugitive slave laws, hardly the philosophy of an abolitionist” (p. 75).

Mr. Adams also rejects a more sophisticated version of the “rebellion to defend slavery” approach. Even if Lincoln intended no immediate strike at slavery, the South faced danger. If slavery were excluded from the territories, as the Republicans wished, eventually enough free states might have been admitted into the Union to abolish slavery outright.

Our author finds this argument no more convincing than the “immediate danger” view. Few of the territories offered fertile ground for slavery; and in any event, the Dred Scott decision was still the law of the land. Chief Justice Taney’s decision denied Congress the power to prevent slave owners from taking their slaves into free territory. How then could the Republicans exclude slavery from the territories, even if they wished to do so? Mr. Adams tersely remarks: “Even the territorial issue was a nonissue” (p. 4).

Here I am not altogether sure that Mr. Adams is right. Could not a defender of the sophisticated slavery view say that Mr. Adams’s contention that little room existed in the territories for slavery supports his case? If the new territories entered the Union as free states, did this not pose a danger? And, as J. G. Hamilton argued some seventy years ago in the American Historical Review, did not this prospect in fact disturb many in the South?

Our author has a strong response to this objection. Any prospect of a new majority of free states swamping the South was very far in the future. How could so speculative a threat suffice to explain the drastic step of secession? Mr. Adams’s argument becomes even stronger when one examines his alternative analysis of the reasons for secession.

It comes as no surprise that the author of Those Dirty Rotten Taxes finds the key to the mystery in financial affairs. The Southern states favored a regime of free trade: this would enable them to benefit to the greatest extent possible from their cotton exports. By contrast, many in the North favored high tariffs to help local industries.
Because of high tariffs, the South was burdened to benefit the North, a situation hardly likely to promote amicable relations. And, by contrast with slavery, here was an issue on which Lincoln would not compromise. Mr. Adams shows, by a careful analysis of Lincoln’s First Inaugural, that behind the conciliatory rhetoric lay a design of adamantine strength.

Lincoln was determined, come what may, to collect tariffs from the ports of the seceding states.

Lincoln’s inaugural address on 4 March 1861, certainly set the stage for war, and most of the South saw it that way. It sounded conciliatory . . . [but] he would, however, use federal power to hold federal property (the forts) and “to collect the duties and impost; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion.” Southerners immediately saw the meaning behind Lincoln’s words. (p. 22, emphasis added)

In support of his thesis, Mr. Adams makes effective use of numerous contemporary newspapers, both Northern and Southern. He also draws from the important 1941 study of Philip Foner, *The New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict*. Of this book, which he terms “remarkable,” Mr. Adams writes:

If money makes the world go around (private sector) and is the heart of war and the blood of governments (public sector), then the Foner book explains more about the Civil War than any other study. (p. 242)

The arguments in favor of the “tariff war” thesis were well-known to contemporaries, both in America and abroad. The British press was not deceived by Lincolnian rhetoric, and Mr. Adams reprints a number of British cartoons that amply showed “the follies and falsehoods of the war” (p. 97).

But the very obviousness of Mr. Adams’s interpretation raises a problem. If the true causes of the war were that apparent to contemporaries, how did the competing “war for slavery” thesis ever secure a following? Mr. Adams traces the popularity of this mistaken hypothesis to a vigorous but sophisticated article by John Stuart Mill.

Mill met head-on the main argument against the slavery thesis, precisely the point our author emphasizes so forcefully. How can the desire to preserve slavery have led to secession, if slavery was not at risk in 1861? Mill
answered with a fanciful conspiracy. “He thought he saw that the Southerners wanted to turn the whole world, especially the continents of North and South America and the Caribbean, into one vast ‘slavocracy’” (p. 92).

Mr. Adams, as usual displaying his ability to confront a theory with an embarrassing fact, notes that the Confederate constitution expressly prohibited the slave trade. Mill’s thesis, he contends, is “utter nonsense” (p. 94). Our author prefers the analysis of Charles Dickens, who maintained that “the quarrel between North and South is, as it stands, solely a fiscal quarrel” (p. 95).

But even if the war did not begin over slavery, did it not quickly become a battle for liberty? Once more, Mr. Adams stands ready to puncture illusion with inconvenient fact. Lincoln, far from being a paladin of freedom, arrogated to himself dictatorial powers and suppressed those who dared to dissent.

Lincoln on his own authority suspended the writ of *habeas corpus*; at his direction, civilians suspected of *lèse-majesté* were arrested by the military. When Chief Justice Taney held in *Ex parte Merryman* that Lincoln had acted unconstitutionally in suspending the writ, Lincoln responded as Nero or Caligula might have done. Not only did he ignore Taney’s ruling, he determined to have the Chief Justice himself arrested and imprisoned. (Fortunately, the arrest order was never served.)

Our author’s forthright condemnation of Lincoln in this matter may be usefully contrasted with the comments of Allen Guelzo in his recent exercise in hagiography, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Eerdmans, 1999). Professor Guelzo finds Taney’s resolute defense of liberty “ridiculous”; it expressed “tedious Jacksonian constitutionalism” (Guelzo, pp. 281, 283). (Fittingly, Mr. Guelzo’s tome is dedicated to Jack Kemp.)

Can we not, though, credit Lincoln for at least one highly beneficial outcome? As a result of the war, slavery came to an end. Even if Lincoln would have maintained the *status quo* to keep the Union together, does he not deserve credit for his later role as the Great Emancipator?

As always, Mr. Adams has at hand an observation of devastating effect. Much Northern opposition to slavery stemmed from what he terms “Negrophobia.” Lincoln, like most people from his region, did not like slavery and did not like blacks. “Like Jefferson, Lincoln did not believe in racial mixing, not in the ability of the races to live with one another in harmony. The solution? Expulsion” (p. 132).
I have had to leave out much of interest in Mr. Adams’s outstanding work, e.g., his account of Fort Sumter and his discussion of Reconstruction. Suffice it to say that Mr. Adams touches nothing that he does not illuminate.
The Swiss scholar Eduard Fueter once observed that every historian must decide whether he wishes to write from the perspective of his own time, or from the perspective of those whom he is studying. Few historical issues show the salience of Fueter’s dictum as well as the interpretation of Abraham Lincoln’s politics. Precisely illustrating the fallacy that Fueter had in mind, many have viewed Lincoln from the standpoint of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and ’60s.

To this way of thinking, Lincoln fought for the universal human rights proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence. He regarded the Union as the “last, best hope on earth” for a government “dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Accordingly, he did his utmost to preserve the Union and to end what he regarded as the greatest imperfection of that Union: Negro slavery.

This view of Lincoln by no means is restricted to mythologists in the style of Carl Sandburg. Quite the contrary, scholars such as Harry Jaffa, the leading promoter of Lincoln-as-philosophical-statesman, accept this view in its entirety. Lerone Bennett does not mention Jaffa in his outstanding new

book, but the entire volume massively refutes his position. As Bennett abundantly shows, Lincoln cared little for blacks and wished them to leave the United States.

This surprising contention must face an obvious objection. Did not Lincoln repeatedly declare that the Declaration, and particularly the document’s equality clause, was his most basic political principle? Bennett astutely turns the flank of the objection by partially conceding its truth. Lincoln did indeed believe that “all men are created equal.” But historians have misunderstood what Lincoln meant.

Bennett derisively cites several historians who have made Lincoln “the patron saint of the Declaration of Independence. J. G. Randall said ‘the Declaration of Independence was his platform, his confession of faith.’ Roy P. Basler [the editor of Lincoln’s Collected Works] said ‘democracy was to Lincoln a religion’” (p. 311). Bennett comments: “If so, it was a Jim Crow religion with a separate-but-unequal Holy Writ” (p. 311-312).

How can Bennett say this? If he admits that the equality clause of the Declaration was central to Lincoln, has he not given away his case? The Declaration says that “all men are created equal,” and no one, not even Chief Justice Taney, doubted that blacks were human beings.

Bennett shows himself fully equal to the challenge of this objection. He places great stress on Lincoln’s distinction between “natural” and “political” rights. No doubt blacks, like all other human beings, possess natural rights; but rights of citizenship are an entirely different matter. Further—and this is crucial to Bennett’s analysis—all essential political rights are prerogatives of citizenship. Natural rights, apart from citizenship, count for next to nothing in Lincoln’s conception.

As our author notes, Lincoln expressed himself with complete clarity on the point. He cites the following, which he terms “so shocking that the best thing for us to do is to get out of the way and let Lincoln speak.” Lincoln stated:

Negroes have natural rights, however, as other men have, although they cannot enjoy them here . . . no sane man will attempt to deny that the African upon his own soil has all the natural rights that instrument vouchsafes to all mankind. (p. 315)

For Lincoln, then, the question of blacks’ rights in the United States could not be answered by looking at the Declaration in isolation. To do so would be to seek guidance from bare abstractions: Bennett terms these “Declaration
A.” Only by interpreting the Declaration within the concrete historical circumstances of America’s founding (“Declaration B”), can one grasp a proper policy towards blacks.

If one interprets the Declaration in this historically sensitive way, Lincoln argued, blacks have little or no place in the American polity. During his debates with Stephen A. Douglas in 1858, Lincoln left little room for doubt about this, and Bennett cites statements that, if made today, might earn Lincoln an indictment for incitement to hate crimes. In the debate at Charleston, Illinois, Lincoln stated:

Judge Douglas has said to you that he has not been able to get from me an answer to the question whether I am in favor of Negro citizenship. . . . I tell him very frankly that I am not in favor of Negro citizenship. (p. 305)

Lincoln, then, did not wish political rights to be extended to blacks. But why not? Here is where Lincoln might encounter legal troubles today. He thought that America was a white man’s country. Whites had founded the nation (exercising their natural rights under the Declaration) and had extended the rights of citizenship to other free, white people, not to blacks.

Again, during the Douglas debates, Lincoln famously remarked:

There is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race. (p. 208)

Defenders of the standard view are likely to answer Bennett in this way. “No doubt,” they will say, “Lincoln made racist comments from time to time, largely for reasons of political opportunism. He showed his true devotion to the Declaration, though, by his unrelenting opposition to slavery. ‘A house divided against itself cannot stand.’ During the Civil War, his Emancipation Proclamation freed many slaves and led the way to the Thirteenth Amendment. Even if he could not always transcend his background as a poor white from a border state, Lincoln richly deserves to be called the Great Emancipator.”
Lincoln, as the imagined objection correctly states, opposed slavery. But, exactly in line with the distinction between natural rights and citizenship as Bennett construes it, he did not oppose slavery in the states where it existed. To do so would be to interfere with settled custom. “We must not disturb slavery in the states where it exists, because the constitution, and the peace of the country, both forbid us” (p. 249). Lincoln’s opposition to slavery had an entirely different focus.

What he consistently attacked was extending slavery to the territories. Extension of slavery might lead to the overthrow of the Declaration, which would threaten the rights of white people. Lincoln denounced the few, but an increasing number of men, who, for the sake of perpetuating slavery, are beginning to assail and to ridicule the white-man’s charter of freedom—the declaration that “all men are created free and equal.” (p. 222)

To press the objection to Bennett further, though, did not Lincoln strike a blow for freedom with the Emancipation Proclamation? Once more, Bennett insists on the need to take into account the historical context when interpreting Lincoln’s words and actions.

If one does so, one thing is clear. Lincoln, ever the follower of Henry Clay, wished at all costs to preserve the Union. Freeing blacks was simply a tool to be used in the fight against secession. Lincoln, in response to a letter from Horace Greeley urging that he enforce the Confiscation Act in order to free slaves, made clear his priorities.

My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it. (p. 480, emphasis in original)

Is not our author here open to counterattack? Even if Lincoln viewed emancipation as a mere means in the struggle for the Union, he did, after all, free the slaves. Does this not count for something?

Bennett anticipates the objection and has a ready answer. The Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves only in areas in which the Union army had no control. True enough, as the army advanced, slaves came under Union jurisdiction; but Lincoln often held back generals from freeing slaves and supported those who did not. He seemed quite ready to abandon his own very
limited emancipation plans at the slightest sign of a Southern government, however anti-black, that wished to rejoin the Union.

Bennett hammers home the theme that Lincoln’s real hope for blacks was their colonization outside the United States.

Even as Lincoln basked in the glow of the Emancipation . . . some 450 African-Americans, . . . were being deported, with their consent, we are told, and at Lincoln’s direction to establish the first Lincoln colony. (p. 553)

Contrary to Lincoln’s many apologists, he did not abandon colonization in the last years of the Civil War. Quite the contrary, the scheme formed an essential part of his plan for a centralized state based on white ethnic identity.

Bennett mounts a formidable case, and is on only a few points open to challenge. He claims that had Lincoln adopted the policies of the most radical Republicans, he could have ended the war much sooner. But he fails to offer evidence for this contention, and one suspects his view merely expresses his own approval of Thaddeus Stevens and his ilk. Bennett makes very heavy weather of Lincoln’s love of jokes about blacks. Is this really evidence of racism? Further, in his extravagant praise of Frantz Fanon, he ignores Fanon’s calls for murder of Europeans. But in his central contentions about Lincoln, Bennett has proved his case to the hilt.
The Indefensible Abe

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Professor Jaffa has set himself a difficult task. He presents Abraham Lincoln as a champion of freedom for all. Not for Honest Abe the virulent racist sentiments of his contemporaries about blacks. Quite the contrary, his lodestar was the clause of the Declaration of Independence that tells us “all men are created equal.” Far from being a mere man of his time, Lincoln ranks with Socrates as a political philosopher.

Our author must here confront a small problem. Did not Lincoln make a number of statements that suggest his commitment to equality for blacks was far from complete? Jaffa acknowledges that “in the debates with [Stephen A.] Douglas, Lincoln reiterates that he is not, and never has been, in favor of bringing about a perfect social and political equality between blacks and whites” (p. xii).

In order that we may fully appreciate Jaffa’s ingenious resolution of his difficulty, it will be helpful to have some of Lincoln’s remarks in more complete form:

There is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race. (See on this whole question Lerone Bennett’s very useful Forced Into Glory. The passage from Lincoln is quoted there on p. 208.)

How can someone who says this be regarded as a believer in equality between blacks and whites? Our author at once dissolves the difficulty: Although Lincoln says that he is not, and never has been, in favor of equality, “[h]e never says that he will not be” (p. xii). No doubt, then, the quotation just offered would leave Mr. Jaffa untroubled. Lincoln says that the physical difference will “forever” forbid social and political equality between blacks and whites. But he does not say that it will forever be true that these physical differences will forever have this effect. Hence he believes in equality. What could be simpler?

Has not Mr. Jaffa given us a marvelous hermeneutic tool? Let us see how well we can apply what our author has taught us. He tells us: “Lincoln is perhaps the greatest of all exemplars of Socratic statesmanship” (p. 368). Is not the meaning of this statement obvious? Jaffa does not say that he will in future believe that Lincoln manifested Socratic excellence. Of course, then, Jaffa is really telling us that Lincoln opposes whatever Socrates defended. And far from enlisting Lincoln in the egalitarian army, is not Jaffa really telling us that Lincoln is a racist of Hitlerian scale? Note carefully that Jaffa does not say that he will in future believe that Lincoln supported equality.

But have I not resorted too readily to mockery? It is easy to parody Mr. Jaffa’s reluctance to admit flaws in his Prince Charming, but surely his book raises an issue that classical liberals must confront. Have we supported the wrong side in the Civil War? From Lord Acton to Murray Rothbard, the leading classical liberals have embraced the cause of the Confederacy. Lincoln, in their view, was a faithful votary of Leviathan. By a bloody crusade that cost vast numbers of lives, he crushed those who dared resist centralizing power. In so doing, he ended the Old Republic, in which states’ rights drastically curtailed the scope of the national government.

Jaffa raises against this view an objection that compels attention. The libertarian outlook rests squarely on a fundamental Lockean insight: Each
person is the rightful owner of his own body. As such, slavery is of course ruled out. Was it Lincoln or his Southern opponents who accepted the key libertarian axiom?

Surely, our author claims, the honors go to Lincoln. He rejected slavery as illegitimate, precisely because it contravened the inalienable right to liberty possessed by blacks as well as whites. The leading lights of the Confederacy, to the contrary, denied the universal scope of self-ownership. In the famous “Cornerstone” speech, to which Jaffa attaches enormous importance, Alexander Stephens claimed that the Confederacy had overthrown the equality clause of the Declaration of Independence. The newly inaugurated Confederate vice president stated that “our government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its . . . cornerstone rests upon the great truth that the negro [sic] is not equal to the white man” (p. 222, quoting Stephens).

I am here trying, with characteristic fairness, to present Jaffa’s argument as strongly as I can. But enough is enough. I cannot forbear from one illustration of our author’s peculiar way with ideas. Speaking of Stephens’s belief that science demonstrated blacks to be inferior, Jaffa writes:

One can only surmise that Darwin’s *Origin of Species* published in 1859, may have been on his mind. Yet there is nothing in that work bearing directly on the question of Negro equality. (p. 224)

Mr. Jaffa rather understates the case. Darwin’s book is not about human evolution at all. But even if one takes what he says at face value, Jaffa’s insouciance is nothing short of breathtaking. What he in essence says is: “Here is my surmise; the evidence contradicts it.” But this is by the way.

If Lincoln championed self-ownership against slavery, should not classical liberals defend rather than revile him? Further, Jaffa claims, the Union established by the US Constitution did not allow secession. The rebel states refused to accept the legitimate results of a democratic election. In their rejection of majority rule, they again defied the Lockean principles that Lincoln did his best to uphold.

Such, in essence, is Jaffa’s case. It seems to me to fail at every point. For one thing, Lincoln’s commitment to self-ownership amounts to less than one might at first sight imagine. By no means did Lincoln think that blacks were unconditionally entitled to freedom. Quite the contrary, he repeatedly pledged after his election as president that he would do nothing to interfere with slavery in the states where it existed. In his First Inaugural, e.g., he said:
I do but quote from one of those [earlier] speeches when I declare that “I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe that I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.” (p. 261)

Lincoln did strongly oppose extension of slavery to the territories, but he sharply distanced himself from the abolitionists.

Why, then, does Jaffa make such a fuss over Lincoln’s alleged commitment to self-ownership in the style of John Locke? Why is Lincoln to be preferred to his Southern opponents? So long as the Union remained intact, Lincoln avowed himself willing to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. What sort of Lockeanism is this?

Here we reach the heart of things. Jaffa’s version of self-ownership is hardly recognizable to libertarians. As he sees matters, a group of self-owners form a society by unanimous agreement. They accept majority rule as a principle of decision; since this acceptance rests on everyone’s agreement, it is consistent with individual autonomy. If you refuse to obey a properly constituted majority, you may be compelled to do so. How can you rationally object? You are merely being forced to carry out your promise to abide by majority rule.

But what if you say that you no longer wish to belong to the society whose majority has decided against you? Do you not have a basic right to depart? Not necessarily, our author tells us. If you deny that someone else owns himself, you forfeit all your own rights.

Applied to the situation in 1861, the departing Southerners stood guilty of supreme sin. Because they, or at least those among them whom Jaffa elects to quote, viewed slavery as a positive good, they forfeited their rights. Lincoln then acted with full propriety in his endeavor to thwart their efforts to depart from the Union. Unlike the revolutionaries of 1776, the Confederates could make no valid appeal to the right of self-government. This right does not exist for those who deny to anyone the right to liberty.

To grasp Jaffa’s point fully, one must avoid a misstep. The fault of the South was not that slavery existed within its borders. On this ground, one might deny rights to several of the Northern states as well. Indeed, would not Lincoln himself be suspect, since in his First Inaugural he promised to respect slavery where it existed? Rather, the fatal step was that some Southerners no longer regarded slavery as a necessary evil. Had they said that slavery was a
temporary expedient; had they professed themselves in fear of the violence that blacks too hastily freed might inflict upon them; or had they tied gradual and compensated emancipation to expulsion of the blacks from the United States, all would have been well.

Is this not totally bizarre? Simply because one avows the wrong verbal formula, one’s rights are erased. You may hold slaves with Jaffa’s and Lincoln’s best wishes, so long as you do not declare your practice a good thing.

What manner of self-ownership rights do we have here? How can it be that a Lockean in good standing need not be committed to the immediate abolition of slavery? We here reach the core of Jaffa’s view of morality. The notion that a moral principle commits you to an absolute course of action is “Kantian” and as such beyond the pale. Instead, all is subordinate to prudence. Applied to the concrete historical situation in 1861, Lincoln, as the all-wise statesman, was free to act as he thought prudent. Since he mouthed with endless repetition the proper litany, he fulfilled all that morality required.

Do you suspect me of exaggeration? Let us see our author in action without interference from me. Against Chief Justice Taney, who argued that if the equality clause of the Declaration of Independence was intended to apply with full legal force to blacks, the signers would have acted at once to end slavery, Jaffa waxes indignant:

Taney’s pseudo-Kantian attempt to infer the “true” meaning of the Declaration from the failure of the Founders to abolish slavery would have been merely ludicrous. . . . The Declaration itself endorses the dictates of prudence, thereby endorsing a prudential morality that is the very antithesis of Kant’s categorical imperative. (p. 297)

Once more, then, Jaffa’s position is as clear as it is repellent. Moral principle commits you to nothing in particular; all stands under that infinitely elastic catchword “prudence.” But one piece in the puzzle is missing. If Jaffa empties morality of its practical force, why does he regard the continued reiteration of Lockean liberties as so important? Why, in particular, is it so vital a matter that certain Southerners chose the wrong verbal formula to defend their policies toward blacks?

Our problem may be resolved by a glance at Lincoln’s First Inaugural. He tells us: “the central idea of secession, is the essence of anarchy” (p. 279). For him, the idea of secession refutes itself; do the Southerners not realize
that eventually, dissidents will seek to leave the Confederacy, with the end result a group of small territories? Do the dissatisfied states not see that their course of action strikes at the existence of a strong and powerful nation?

Here we see what really troubled Lincoln. Like his Prussian contemporary Otto von Bismarck, he sought a powerful, centralizing state. The Constitution stood in his way, since under a widely held view, the states had the right to depart from a compact they had joined as sovereign entities. Hence Lincoln’s moralizing rhetoric, enthusiastically seconded by Jaffa. It committed him to nothing as regards the slaves, but it provided a screen behind which his transparently flimsy efforts to deny the right of secession could proceed.

Jaffa goes on at enormous length to support Lincoln’s absurd claim that the Union preceded the states. Yet at times he drops his guard, and he is constrained to admit that the states, at the time they ratified the Constitution were sovereign. Thus, he contends that the central authority under the Articles of Confederation did not rank as a genuine government. “Under the Articles of Confederation, the Congress possessed no powers of its own by which to execute its laws” (p. 376).

But, one might counter, was not the very point of the Constitution to change this situation? No doubt; but the issue at hand lies elsewhere. At the time the states contemplated ratification of the Constitution, they resumed their complete powers of sovereignty. Since the Articles of Confederation were no longer in force, literally nothing stood between a state and full authority. Of course, it is open to Jaffa to contend that once a state ratified the Constitution, it abandoned its sovereignty. But Lincoln’s tendentious account of the origin of the states cannot be used in favor of his anti-secessionist line. Precisely to distract attention from the weakness of the legal case against secession, and to hide the real motive of power that underlies Lincoln’s policy, Jaffa constructs his spurious moral argument.

In view of the fact that Lincoln’s morality, as expounded by Jaffa, does nothing to limit power, Jaffa’s tasteless remarks about the late M. E. Bradford are astonishing. He compares Bradford, an outstanding Southern man of letters, to Hitler.

Bradford and Hitler agree with the Lincoln of the House Divided speech, that America, on the eve of the Civil War, stood at a divide between “a great new social order based on slavery and inequality” [a remark allegedly made by Hitler] and one based on
the principles of the Declaration. They only disagree with Lincoln as to which choice ought to have been made. (p. 503, n. 10)

Because Bradford dared question egalitarian dogma, Jaffa accuses him of support for a social order based on slavery. (In this context, it is but a minor issue, though worth noting, that the veracity of the volume by Hermann Rauschning on which our author relies for his quotation from Hitler is much in doubt. Of the controversy surrounding Rauschning he seems blissfully unaware.) Of course Bradford did not view the Confederacy as an incipient Third Reich. It is not Bradford but his critic who subordinates morality to power.

Even his harshest critic must grant Mr. Jaffa that he has carefully studied Lincoln’s words, which to him constitute a veritable Holy Writ. When he strays outside St. Abraham’s purview, though, he sometimes slips. He informs us that Shakespeare’s King John is set in the thirteenth century—the age “of papal supremacy within the Holy Roman Empire, of which Great Britain was a part” (pp. 14–15). Perhaps Mr. Jaffa would be good enough to give us the dates in which Britain was part of the Empire. Also in error is Jaffa’s claim that Henry VIII wanted the pope to grant him a divorce from Catherine of Aragon (p. 19). Henry sought an annulment. The Holy Alliance did not defeat Napoleon; it was not formed until after Napoleon’s final ouster (p. 84).
Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus

Rick Perlstein

Barry’s War

October 1, 2001, Mises Review

Barry Goldwater’s campaign for the presidency in 1964 decisively influenced American conservatism. At last, a candidate who dared to challenge the prevailing liberal consensus! Mr. Perlstein brings to life those decisive days. (I was a high-school student at the time and can testify to how well our author evokes the atmosphere.)

Goldwater’s remarkable act of defiance had for him an unhappy outcome: Lyndon Johnson, a quintessential practitioner of New Deal politics, trounced him in the November 1964 election. Why did Goldwater fail? Was his cause one with at most a minority appeal to the American public? Our author, though decidedly not a Goldwater partisan, thinks otherwise. Ronald Reagan, an ardent supporter of Goldwater during the campaign, won the presidency on a platform that resembled Goldwater’s; and the Arizona senator’s sharp assault on the welfare state, once dismissed as extremist, is today a commonplace.

What, then, happened? In part, an inept campaign led to electoral rout, but the major cause lay elsewhere. The Johnson forces skillfully used shock

over the Kennedy assassination to fuel a mendacious assault on the supposed right-wing atmosphere of hate that, it was alleged, bore responsibility for President Kennedy’s death. Goldwater fell right into the trap set by his leftist foes. Though his domestic policies stood squarely within the American tradition, he accepted the appellation “extremist” that his enemies sought to pin on him.

And in one essential area, the leftist charge was right. Goldwater enthusiastically championed the Cold War, and many who might otherwise have been well disposed to him found frightening his apparent haste to bring nuclear weapons into play. Ironically, in foreign policy, Goldwater stood squarely within the liberal consensus, which was itself extreme. Mr. Perlstein shows that his “extremist” nuclear rhetoric merely echoed earlier remarks by Kennedy, Rockefeller, and other stalwarts of the Cold War consensus. Had Goldwater returned to the noninterventionist foreign policy of the Old Right, he could have turned the campaign of fear against his accusers.

Goldwater could have avoided difficulties had he followed the policy of Clarence Manion, a longtime conservative activist who organized the first drive to draft Goldwater as the Republican presidential nominee. Among his many endeavors on Goldwater’s behalf, Manion commissioned Brent Bozell to write *Conscience of a Conservative*, the widely circulated manifesto of the conservative movement that appeared under Goldwater’s name.

Manion, for many years dean of the Notre Dame Law School, firmly supported the foreign policy of Washington’s Farewell Address. As a young man, he opposed America’s entry into World War I, and “[w]hen Roosevelt began making noises for military mobilization in 1940, Manion once again joined the anti-interventionist cause, taking a leadership position in the left-right coalition America First” (p. 7). Manion’s close political associate, who aided him in his efforts to draft Goldwater, was none other than General Robert Wood, a founder of America First.

Traditional American foreign policy diametrically opposed what our author terms “consensus, managerial, or pragmatic liberalism: the belief that any problem, once identified, could be settled through disinterested application of managerial expertise” (p. 56). Readers of Murray Rothbard will have little difficulty in seeing consensus liberalism as a continuation of the ideology of the Progressive movement. Nelson Rockefeller, aided by his employee Henry Kissinger, ranked among the foremost consensus liberals of the 1950s.
As regards foreign policy, a managerial liberal would reason in this way: Soviet Russia and its allies threaten the United States. Faced with this danger, we cannot stand idly by. A massive military buildup, stressing nuclear weapons, must be used to support worldwide intervention against the Communist bloc. But anticommunism is not enough. Foreign aid programs must be instituted to cope with poverty, the underlying cause of sympathy for communism.

Noninterventionists saw matters in an entirely different light. They did not ignore the evils of communism, but they refused to accept that the proper way to combat it was to establish a militarized centralized state that imitated Soviet Russia. Quite the contrary, the natural forces of the market would eventually bring about the collapse of communism. Probably the most important “positive” foreign policy step the United States could take would be to refrain from foreign aid to prop up the tottering economies of the Warsaw Pact countries. Exactly as with domestic matters, laissez-faire was the order of the day.

Goldwater to a large extent rejected traditional American foreign policy. (An early indication of this, which our author has surprisingly missed, is that he supported Eisenhower rather than the noninterventionist Robert Taft at the 1952 Republican Convention.) Not all of the foreign policy in *Conscience* was bad. Goldwater opposed most foreign aid and viewed the United Nations with suspicion. He questioned the “balance of terror” doctrine common at the time, according to which peace depended on the United States and Soviet Russia each being able to scare the other with the prospect of nuclear holocaust. In this happy state of affairs, it was alleged, each would deter the other from ever using the dread weapons.

Goldwater was right to challenge the regnant orthodoxy on these matters. Surely peace depends on the concrete interests at issue among competing nations, rather than on an automatic mechanism whose supporters, *ad absurdum*, viewed it as desirable that the Soviet Union possess a large nuclear arsenal. (Oskar Morgenstern, among many others, advocated precisely this.)

Unfortunately, Goldwater did not move from his defiance of standard nuclear doctrine to a call for a return to traditional diplomacy. Instead, he spoke constantly about the need for a “war of attrition” and denounced “surrender.” His frequent reminders of the need to risk death in all-out war were hardly the customary rhetoric of the American right, at least in its pre-William Buckley days. Even Herbert Hoover found it “hard to disagree” with the feeling that Goldwater might get us into war (p. 348). Such inflammatory language, as we shall see, played into the hands of his leftist
adversaries, although as Perlstein makes evident, Goldwater did little more here than echo mainstream cold warriors.

On domestic matters, Goldwater went far to justify the confidence that Manion and other rightists reposed in him. His attacks on waste in the welfare state and on labor union violence struck home; these proved very effective issues for him during the campaign. Mr. Perlstein dissents: he appears to question the existence of welfare fraud (p. 132), and he fervently admires Walter Reuther. Concerning the notorious Kohler strike in Wisconsin, our author refers to “violence piling up on both sides” (p. 36). I venture to suggest that had Perlstein paid greater attention to one of his sources, Sylvester Petro’s The Kohler Strike, he would have realized the serious threat that labor union thugs posed to the free market (p. 526).

Goldwater’s stand on an even more controversial issue boded well for his election prospects. He deplored discrimination against blacks; but, in contrast with the civil rights movement of the 1960s, he refused to accept confrontation and violence as a means to ameliorate racial relations. The nonviolence of Martin Luther King et hoc genus omne was of course a fraud: It aimed to provoke others to violence in the hope that this would advance the civil rights agenda. As incendiarism and looting mounted during the “long, hot summers” of the early ’60s, Goldwater’s principled stance won him wide support.

The traditional American order, ably championed by the Old Right, favored peace and laissez-faire on both the domestic and foreign fronts. In view of the widespread fears of nuclear war abroad and racial violence at home then prevalent among the American public, would not an Old Right program that aimed to defuse tensions on both fronts have had great appeal? Unfortunately, Goldwater adopted only the domestic part of this program. His foreign policy proposals fomented unease, a fact his adversaries hastened to exploit.

Indeed, foreign affairs were Goldwater’s undoing during his race for the presidency. Although he virtually had to be dragged into the presidential campaign by Manion and F. Clifton White, he had, by 1963, outdistanced Nelson Rockefeller as frontrunner for the next year’s nomination. But Kennedy’s assassination on November 22nd at once changed the situation. The left, without a pause for breath, pounced. Without the slightest evidence, they indicted the right for a “climate of hate” that they claimed caused Kennedy’s murder. “A word was repeated again and again, on the streets, before the television cameras, in the newspapers: hate. . . . Extremism had killed Kennedy” (p. 249). Chief Justice Warren,
no doubt resentful of the right-wing call for his impeachment, joined in the hue and cry against “fanaticism.”

Largely owing to the anti-hate campaign, Goldwater lost his position as frontrunner; Perlstein ably chronicles the rise and fall of the many aspirants to the top position. These included the ubiquitous Nelson Rockefeller; Henry Cabot Lodge; and the moderates’ last hope, Governor William Scranton of Pennsylvania. With the help of careful planning by Clifton White, whom our author portrays as a master of convention politics, Goldwater rebounded, regained his leading position, and won the nomination.

Now the crucial question arose: Would the candidate succeed in overcoming the attempt by the partisans of Lyndon Johnson to depict him as a hater and as an extremist hell-bent on nuclear holocaust? Goldwater did not help matters when, in his speech accepting the party’s nomination, he reminded his audience, “extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice . . . and moderation in the pursuit of justice no virtue” (p. 391).

The line stemmed from Harry Jaffa, a frequent target in these pages; but for once, Jaffa had a point. As a good Aristotelian scholar, he knew well that in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, justice, unlike other virtues, is not a mean between two extremes. Surely, however, the convention was not a fit place to apprise people of this nuance, and Jaffa played into the hands of the scaremongers. Incidentally, in view of the invective Jaffa frequently launches these days against Chief Justice Rehnquist, it is fascinating to learn that the two collaborated on Goldwater’s speeches (pp. 424, 461).

Perlstein emphasizes the many tactical errors of those in control of the campaign. Once the nomination had been secured, Goldwater turned from White to the “Arizona Mafia” headed by Denison Kitchel to run the campaign. Our author clearly regrets the shift, as well as the delegation of intellectual leadership to a team headed by William Baroody. But not even the most skilled political operatives could have repelled the leftist assault. Goldwater was his own worst enemy: his bellicose foreign policy might as well have been written to order by his opposition.

Mr. Perlstein has given us a work remarkable for the scope of its coverage and the depth of its research. I noted a few mistakes: The *Fact* magazine story that smeared Goldwater did not appear in the “first and only issue” (p. 438); Lyndon Johnson was not the first Southerner since Zachary Taylor to become president (p. 252); Arthur Krock appears as “Arthur Crock” (p. 222); and the thesis of Revilo Oliver’s “Marxmanship in Dallas” is misstated (p. 290).
Does Liberalism Lead to Absolutism?
October 1, 2001, Mises Review

A supporter of the absolute state might defend his cause with many slogans, but freedom of religious opinion, one would think, could hardly find a place among them. Professor Conyers disagrees: he maintains that in the history of modern Europe, toleration has had a distinctly illiberal outcome.

I was at first skeptical of our author’s arresting contention, but another book has given me pause. Walter Berns’s Making Patriots† perfectly illustrates Conyers’s point. Berns defends religious freedom, but believers had better grasp their servile place within society. Woe to the believer whose conscience tells him a law duly enacted by the state is unjust! He must, Berns holds, put away his private misgivings and obey the state’s dictates. By confining religion purely to the private sphere, Berns renders nugatory its impact on the social order.

If Conyers is right, Berns is no accident. The substance of our author’s argument is this: Kings who, starting in the sixteenth century, wished to centralize

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†  See my review found in Volume 3, “European History.”
power faced formidable obstacles. In the Middle Ages, they found themselves everywhere hemmed in by competing centers of power and local customs.

The habitual contours of society—one might say its natural arrangement within the ebb and flow of informal authority—is a function of the family, the village, the locale, the trade association, and of religion. These sometimes smaller and always subtler arrangements of customary authority were always potentially in competition with the comprehensive political arrangements of the modern state. They were seen as natural obstacles in the project of erecting large-scale central administration, remote from local arrangements. (pp. 50–51)

In particular, aspiring absolutists had to do something about religion. The Roman Catholic Church, a formidable international power, blocked the way of any king who claimed total authority. And the Reformation churches, though often instruments of national consolidation, by no means always aided the growth of central authority. All the major Christian churches taught that a body of divine or natural law limited the government's power.

Given this structure of society, the course of action for a potential absolutist was apparent: He must endeavor to reduce the power of all institutions that limit his power, the church foremost among them. If individuals had to confront the ruler without the benefit of intermediate institutions, they would find resistance to his will a difficult if not impossible task.

But this bold agenda could not be achieved directly. People often adhered to their faiths with tenacious loyalty, and any attempt to abolish the church would necessarily prove futile. More plausibly, the king might attempt to construct a national church to serve as his pliant tool. But this scheme faced some formidable difficulties of its own. How was the king to deal with those who dissented from the official church? To allow them to practice their faith unhindered might lead to a “state within the state.” Religious dissenters, like the Huguenots in France, exercised political authority in certain areas in virtual independence of royal authority. And if the king tried to compel dissenters to join his church, outright religious war threatened.

The absolutist king then faced a task almost impossible to fulfill. To hold unlimited power, he must control the church; but it appeared that he could not achieve this goal without bringing about consequences that from his point of view were undesirable. Our author suggests that a different tactic
proved useful. If religion could be reduced entirely to private belief, would not the absolute monarch gain everything he wanted? Since each person was free to believe as he wished, dissenters need no longer fear persecution. But because the state divorced religion from public affairs, the absolutist king could proceed without hindrance from the church.

Professor Conyers’s thesis suffers from a glaring weakness that I fear is fatal. He has identified with perfect accuracy a real issue: Institutions that shield individuals from powerful centralized states have lost much of their authority. No longer can the church bring a ruler to his knees in repentance. But it does not follow from these undoubted facts that theorists of religious toleration aimed to bring about an absolute state and an impotent church. Conyers fails to show that the major writers he discusses favored toleration for these purposes. (Hobbes favored absolutism but not toleration.)

Conyers’s treatment of the greatest of the theorists of tolerance, John Locke, provides an excellent test case for his thesis. If he wants to claim that Locke’s policy of religious tolerance promoted absolutism, he confronts a formidable obstacle: Locke defended individual rights and a strictly limited state. How, then, can one possibly argue that Locke’s defense of toleration aimed to promote state power?

Our author fully grasps the difficulty, and one tactic, if successful, would resolve it. In the 1660s, Locke wrote favorably of absolutism; perhaps his early work provides the key to the real meaning of his later and more famous books. In the Two Tracts on Government (1660–1662),

it becomes clear that Locke was an “authoritarian” rather than a “liberal” in his view of public order. These early tracts were written to uphold the authority of the “supreme magistrate” over matters of religion. . . . Toleration is hardly in view in this writing, and when he raises the issue in 1667, in An Essay on Toleration, he clearly takes a position that is at variance with his famous “Letter Concerning Toleration,” two decades later. (p. 125)

In the earlier essay, he rejects liberty of conscience.

Leo Strauss and his many followers argue that Locke never really abandoned his early absolutism; he only disguised it. Conyers cites in this connection Robert Kraynak, a follower of Strauss: “Kraynak finds it remarkable that they [non-Straussian scholars] do not consider the possibility that there is a deeper, underlying principle to which Locke is perfectly
loyal: “They have not considered the possibility that absolutism is the original form of liberalism” (pp. 125–126).

One may readily grant Kraynak’s premise that his contention should be examined; but having done so, why should we accept it? Why is it naïve to think that Locke, having discovered good arguments for individual rights, abandoned his youthful and derivative Hobbesian proclivities? Strauans themselves favor rule by a philosophical elite, hidden beneath the form of liberalism. To them, classical liberalism is obvious nonsense, if taken at face value. No significant thinker can, then, genuinely hold this view; and this is why they dismiss as naïve the standard interpretation of Locke. If Locke in his later writings meant what he appears to be saying, Conyers cannot use him to show that liberal toleration aimed to promote absolutism.

Conyers’s next step appears obvious; he must show that the Straussian reading fits the texts better than the “face-value” position. Oddly, he does not do so. Instead, he lists four possible interpretations of Locke, including the two just mentioned (pp. 135–136), and two that stress Locke’s complexity and confusion. He offers no grounds for choosing between the conflicting views. Does he not realize that his failure undermines his argument? To claim, absent any evidence, that Locke’s liberal works have a hidden authoritarian agenda helps Conyers’s thesis not a whit.

But our author goes on to deploy a somewhat better argument. Locke, he contends, suffered from a “bipolar disorder.”

In Locke’s Second Treatise of Civil Government . . . he writes consistently as if the relationship between the individual and the commonwealth were the only relationships that mattered so far as political theory and policy are concerned. He takes note of smaller associations, but only as they figure into the evolution of the grand arrangement between the individual and the state. (p. 139)

He contrasts Locke unfavorably with Althusius, who was fully alive to the importance of families and associations.

But from the fact that Locke did not say as much about intermediate groups as Conyers would like, how does it follow that he wished to eviscerate them? Locke constructed his political theory around individuals and their rights, true enough; but this is perfectly consistent with thinking associations between the state and individuals supremely important.
Locke wrote a good deal about education, a fact that should suggest he did not neglect the family.

At this point I can imagine Professor Conyers complaining, “You have misunderstood me completely! I do not contend that Locke consciously aimed to promote absolutism. My thesis is rather that his bipolar political philosophy led to an increase in state power. Haven’t you heard of unintended consequences?” (I do not, in fact, think he would say this, since I think he inclines to the conscious-aim view; but as always, I try to make the best case I can for my authors.)

This reply falls before the counterargument already considered. Conyers can show to his entire satisfaction that Locke viewed churches, from the standpoint of his political theory, as contracts between individuals. It does not follow that the effects of this theory reduced their importance. Conyers, following Tocqueville, de Jouvenel, and Nisbet, rightly stresses the value of associations; but he does nothing to show that Locke, whether by intent or otherwise, had anything to do with their decline.

Conyers’s book deals with other thinkers than Locke; but whether Pierre Bayle and John Stuart Mill lend better support to his argument I shall leave to readers to decide for themselves. I do not think that they do, but I have thought it more useful to consider one writer at length than a number in less detail. Conyers has hold of an important truth. There is, just as he says, a quasi-Hobbesian position that promotes religious tolerance in order to aggrandize the state. Of that Walter Berns is proof. But he does not show that any of the major theorists he discusses adopts this view. His book, though, does contain much that is excellent, such as the discussion of Mill and Calvinism (p. 161). One can even forgive him for thinking Richelieu a minister of Louis XIV (p. 58).
The New Dealers’ War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the War within World War II*

THOMAS FLEMING

The Truth About the “Good War”

October 1, 2001, Mises Review

THOMAS FLEMING has done a great deal to strengthen a standard revisionist contention about America’s entry into World War II. Historians opposed to Roosevelt’s interventionist diplomacy, such as Harry Elmer Barnes and Charles Callan Tansill, have suggested the following argument: Roosevelt, gripped by strong hostility toward Germany, wished ardently to enter the war on the side of the British. But Hitler had no desire to accommodate the American president, and he instructed his navy to avoid hostile incidents with American ships. There would be no repetition of the Lusitania disaster, if he could avoid it.

What was Roosevelt to do? He knew that he could never ram through Congress a declaration of war against Germany, in the absence of German moves against the United States. Most Americans, however hostile to the Third Reich, opposed entry into the European War. According to the revisionists, this situation did not prove too much for the ingenuity of the wily Roosevelt.

Japan and Germany were allies; and if Roosevelt could provoke Japan into attacking the United States, was not Germany bound to enter as well?

Thwarted by isolationist sentiment for a direct blow against Germany, the president could enter the war through the Japanese “back door.” Fleming notes that, after Pearl Harbor, this famous phrase was not long in coming to characterize Roosevelt’s strategy. General Robert Wood, a founder of the America First Committee, told Charles Lindbergh immediately after learning of the Japanese attack, “he [Roosevelt] got us in through the back door” (p. 40).

In the revisionist view, Roosevelt implemented his plan by provoking Japanese hostility, most notably through an oil embargo that placed Japan in an untenable economic situation. After Roosevelt rejected all Japanese peace feelers, Japan made ready to attack. Of this, Roosevelt was well aware, since the United States was able to decode Japanese military and diplomatic messages. Although information in the days before Pearl Harbor indicated an imminent Japanese assault, Roosevelt refused to warn the Army and Navy commanders at the base. He wanted an attack; otherwise, his back-door ruse would fail.

To this daring argument, opponents of revisionism have posed two strong objections: First, was Roosevelt a Japanese agent? If not, surely he would not have placed the United States in a potentially losing situation. But did not the back-door strategy threaten exactly that outcome? A refusal to warn the naval commander of an impending Japanese attack risked major damage to the US Pacific Fleet. Second, suppose Roosevelt’s alleged plan “worked,” in the sense that the Japanese attacked without inflicting unacceptably severe damage. Why would this get America into war with Germany? What if Germany refused Roosevelt’s bait and did not declare war? Then Roosevelt would be no nearer to his goal of American entry into the European War, and he would face a full-scale war with a powerful foe.

Mr. Fleming offers persuasive responses to these objections.

If an attack on Pearl Harbor was a surprise only in the tactical sense, what lay behind FDR’s decision to base the fleet there? . . .

A good part of the answer lies in the race-based contempt for the Japanese that too many Americans shared with their British allies. The Anglo-Saxons were convinced that the Japanese could neither shoot, sail, or fly with the skill of Westerners. . . . This arrogant mindset explains why Roosevelt expected to “get hit but not hurt” wherever the Japanese attacked—including Pearl Harbor. (pp. 44–45)
If our author has turned aside the first objection, his case survives only to confront a more formidable obstacle. Once more, what if Germany did not respond with a declaration of war? Here, Mr. Fleming responds with his boldest stroke. On December 4, 1941, the Chicago Tribune, under the byline of Chesly Manly, published the Rainbow Five War Plan, a detailed agenda for an American invasion of Europe, in cooperation with the British. Most historians have seen publication of this plan as a grievous blow to the president. Did not the exposé show Roosevelt’s constant claims that he sought no war in Europe to be blatant lies?

Accordingly, most writers have wondered what dissident isolationist privy to administration plans leaked the documents. Suspicion has sometimes centered on the plan’s author, Major (later General) Albert Wedemeyer, a firm supporter of America First, but he satisfied investigators that he was not involved. Mr. Fleming, amazingly, suggests that Roosevelt himself orchestrated the leak.

By doing so, he ensured the success of his scheme. The publication of the plan convinced Hitler that war with the United States was inevitable; and in his speech to the Reichstag declaring war, he emphasized the Tribune story.

His final decision, Hitler said, had been forced on him by American newspapers, which a week before had revealed “a plan prepared by President Roosevelt . . . according to which his intention was to attack Germany in 1943 with all the resources of the United States. Thus our patience has come to the breaking point.” (p. 35)

Publication of the plan served Roosevelt’s interests, but it does not at once follow from this that he bore responsibility for the leak. Our author’s case, however, is not yet complete. He notes that, although some evidence suggested that General Henry Arnold leaked the plan, the assistant director of the FBI, Louis Nichols, stated, “When we got to Arnold, we quit” (p. 28). Fleming takes this as an indication that the real source outranked the general; is not the president the most likely candidate? Further, General Wedemeyer, in his later years, inclined to hold Roosevelt responsible.

Our author’s case, though based on a convergence of several lines of evidence, seems to me no more than an intriguing possibility. But he is entirely correct to cast aside the antirevisionist argument suggested earlier. True enough, Germany might not have declared war. But what had Roosevelt to lose? Given the Axis Pact, he might have been able to force an American
declaration of war through Congress. And even if he could not, how would the chances of entering the European war be weakened by a fight with Japan?

I have spent a great deal of time on the leak of the Rainbow plan, since Fleming’s explanation of it is the most original element of his book. But the volume contains much else. For one thing, it includes a devastating criticism of Roosevelt’s unconditional surrender policy. Roosevelt’s demand, announced at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, played into the hands of German propaganda.

Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s propaganda chief, was in a state of euphoria. He called Roosevelt’s announcement “world-historical tomfoolery of the first order.” To one of his colleagues, he admitted: “I should never have been able to think up so rousing a slogan. If our Western enemies tell us, we won’t deal with you, our only aim is to destroy you . . . how can any German, whether he likes it or not, do anything but fight on with all his strength?” (p. 176)

Critics might claim that our author’s argument overrates the capacity of the German resistance to Hitler, but I think he stands on firm ground. However small the chances of an overthrow of Hitler, what had Roosevelt to gain by unconditional surrender? Had there been no opposition at all to Hitler within Germany, the policy still would have been a mistake, for the reason stated by Goebbels.

Further, if the Germans did surrender, they could anticipate an American policy more befitting Genghis Khan than the civilized leader of a modern state, a fact of which Goebbels was not slow to make use. Roosevelt inclined toward the plan of his Treasury secretary, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., for dealing with postwar Germany.

The Morgenthau Plan aimed to strip Germany of her industrial capacity, with dire consequences for the German people.

It proposed . . . destroying all the industry in the Ruhr and Saar basins and turning Central Europe and the German people into agriculturalists. At one point Communist agent [Harry Dexter] White . . . feared they were going to extremes. He warned Morgenthau that the idea was politically risky; it would reduce perhaps 20 million people to starvation. “I don’t care what happens to the population,” Morgenthau said. (pp. 428–429)
Fortunately, the accession of Harry Truman to the presidency brought about the plan’s demise. I have had to leave much in this rich book unmentioned—for example, Fleming’s depiction of the conflicts between extreme New Dealers such as Henry Wallace and their opponents. But I have endeavored to sketch the main lines of our author’s indictment of Roosevelt. He schemed to get the United States into a war that most people did not want. Once in it, he pursued a course designed to ensure an unnecessarily long and bloody conflict; and his postwar plans for the defeated enemy threatened widespread catastrophe. Hardly a record worthy of praise, memorials in Washington to the contrary notwithstanding.
Inadvertent Ammunition

December 1, 2001, Mises Review

Professor Fletcher’s book brings to mind a remark by Yvor Winters, in a review of C. S. Lewis’s English Literature in the Sixteenth Century. Winters praised Lewis for his grasp of the facts, but he said that he disliked whatever writers Lewis liked, and vice versa. Fletcher agrees with M. E. Bradford and other defenders of tradition that Lincoln destroyed the Old Republic, but he is happy about it. Those of us who side with Bradford will find in this very useful volume a familiar picture, but reflected in a distorting mirror.

As Fletcher sees matters, the American Founding Fathers had the wrong idea. Foolishly, the authors of the Constitution thought that the people had the right to choose their government, as if a nation were a club that one may join or leave at will. Even worse, they thought that the states retained sovereign powers. Did they not see that the states needed to be submerged into a new organic union?

Whatever can have been the matter with dolts like these? They believed that the government needed to be strictly limited. What nonsense! We need

a strong centralized authority—of course to protest the weak. Fortunately, we were blessed in 1861 with a heroic Leader, Abraham Lincoln, who realized the folly of the old ways. He saw that America had to be remodeled along the lines of the progressive European nations.

Our Leader faced a problem. The Southern states had the gall to believe that America remained bound by the antiquated Constitution; and, exercising their rights under a plausible interpretation of it, they seceded from the union in fear of what the Leader had in store. So great a Leader surely could not accept dissolution of the organic nation. The South would have to be dealt with.

But did not the Constitution bar the Leader’s path? Even if antiquated, was it not still legally binding? Yes, in a way; but our Leader rightly did not pay much attention to this scrap of paper. Why should he accept the commands of men long dead? He had work to do!

Manifesting his supreme wisdom, our Leader used to his own ends the Southern threat to the organic union. Though our country was “conceived in liberty,” a sin stained us. Slavery had always threatened to undercut the nobility of the organic nation; but now a remedy was at hand. Through a war to compel the recalcitrant states to obey the commands of the Leader, we could purge ourselves from sin.

To end slavery peacefully would not have been enough. To cease from sin does not suffice for atonement and redemption. The redemptive suffering that war offered had to be borne, if our nation was to emerge to “a new birth of freedom.” Our Leader was equal to the task, and his speeches show that he fully grasped his divine mission.

After the Leader’s death, the Reconstruction Amendments promised to carry on his plans for a centralized government that would protect the weak. But a reactionary Supreme Court rudely interrupted these plans, by giving the amendments a narrow construal. The Court, incredibly, thought the old Constitution still binding and spurned the New Order. But all was not lost. The Reconstruction Amendments remained in the nation’s conscience. Legal emasculation proved powerless ultimately to destroy the “secret constitution.” It emerged from eclipse in the twentieth century, and many of the Leader’s dreams for us have been fulfilled.

Readers may long since have concluded that I am attempting to parody Professor Fletcher’s précis of the New Wisdom, but of course I am incapable of such irreverence. What I have hitherto presented is exactly what our author claims. His distaste for the Constitution emerges early in the book:
The preamble to the 1787 national charter begins with the words “We the People.” The people come together, at least as imagined by their self-appointed representatives in Philadelphia, to form “a more perfect Union.” The emphasis is on voluntary association. We the people choose our form of government. . . . Choice marks the people. History breeds the nation. . . . The 1787 Constitution stands, therefore, for the choice of the people. The Civil War Constitution builds on a recognition of organic nationhood as the legacy of the American experience. (pp. 2–3; the context makes clear that Fletcher intends to contrast the 1787 document unfavorably with its alleged successor)

Has not Fletcher here erected an unreal antithesis? No doubt he is correct that people in a nation feel bound to one another by close ties. But why does this imply anything about the form of government that a nation should establish? Why, specifically, do the close, “organic” bonds that unite a people require them to have a strongly centralized government, rather than a loose association of states? The ties that so much concern our author no doubt help to explain why the states wished to form a union, but they do not determine the nature of that union.

Fletcher might admit all this. His contention, he could reply, is not that close ties make a centralized state inevitable; it is rather that an organic state is desirable. In particular, only a powerful central authority can protect the weak by its service to the supreme political value, equality.

But what about liberty, you will no doubt object? Why think that the organic state will act to protect the weak, Fletcher’s professed goal? Our author dismisses fears about liberty with a wave of the hand. “True” freedom is not freedom from government. “The postbellum constitution emphasized not freedom from government but equality under law. The state would have to do more than just leave us alone. It would have to ensure the equal protection of the laws for all” (p. 3). Rights against the central government permit the strong to oppress the weak.

Fletcher’s comment does not respond at all to the objection. Even if he is right (which I do not for a moment believe) that only Leviathan can secure equal protection under law, he does not show that it will act to do so. His paragon Lincoln, after all, managed to bring about a war that resulted in
more than a few deaths: was this equal protection under law? His incredible answer to this query has already been suggested, but we will shortly confront it more directly.

Before we do so, let us give Professor Fletcher a chance to present his case in its best light. He thinks equality more essential than liberty: what then is his argument for equality? With commendable honesty, Fletcher admits that most defenses of equality do not succeed:

Modern philosophical approaches toward equality all suffer from the same flaw. They are strongly committed, vaguely, to some position on the spectrum [of equality] but they offer no reason why they are so intensely committed to this value . . . equality is one of those values that has become so deeply held that it is neither questioned nor justified. (pp. 95–96)

Professor Fletcher, it transpires, believes that he has something better to offer. Equality rests on religious foundations: “the central idea that generates the concept of universal humanity or universal brotherhood is that we are made in the image of God” (p. 103). Exactly how the Biblical doctrine translates into political imperatives our author does not vouchsafe to tell us. I confess that I do not think very helpful Fletcher’s suggestion, “[t]he basic ideas of Genesis receive their best secular rendition in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who takes the idea of creation in the image of God and bequeaths to us the idea of universal humanity” (p. 104).

Fletcher, it is evident, confuses the statement of a view in magniloquent language with its philosophical defense. When he tells us, “Each generation must struggle to assay how far they are willing to go in the name of egalitarian justice” (p. 104), it becomes clear that he has nothing useful to provide to support or delimit his proposed substitute for liberty.

No doubt it is just as well that our author does not develop at greater length his views on the religious basis of equality. What he says about religion and politics in another context is positively frightening. The killing and bloodshed of the Civil War, in his view, were necessary redemptive sacrifices the people of the United States paid for the sin of slavery.

The spilling of blood in a great battle is understood instinctively as the suffering that must precede redemption. . . . But blood alone does not save a nation from its sins. The argument here
is that indulgence in evil—slavery, mass killing, persecution—
must first issue in the suffering of the people. (p. 19)

Here we see the author’s answer to the query posed earlier. As long as the
organic state endeavors to secure equality, sacrifices of liberty do not weigh
in the balance. Indeed, we must seek them out as means of redemption.

The important point is that the rule of law—not charity, not
prayer, not animal sacrifice—should provide the means of sec-

ular redemption. . . . The law redeems not the individual but
the community or the nation as a whole. (p. 19)

A skeptic might remark that under Lincoln and his Reconstruction suc-
cessors, there was much pseudo-religious rhetoric, even more suffering and
death, but very little redemption.

I shall forego the pleasure of comment on Professor Fletcher’s Epic of Equal-
ity—his account of the onset, eclipse, and ultimate triumph of the Reconstruc-
tion Amendments. Rather, I shall confine myself to a brief account of this dis-
tinguished legal scholar’s ideas on constitutional interpretation.

Readers will not be surprised to learn that Fletcher thinks original intent
of little importance. He rightly notes that it is often difficult to establish a
clear original meaning when a number of people have drafted a document.
I never cease to be amazed that legal scholars . . . continue to be confused
about the relevance of the framers’ original intent” (pp. 30, 32).

One might think this view understandable, given Fletcher’s less than com-
plete enthusiasm for the Constitution. But he extends his view to the beloved
Secret Constitution as well. Did the authors of the Fourteenth Amendment
intend to establish integrated schools? A “vast literature has grown up around
the question . . . but the dispute seems to be entirely irrelevant” (p. 31). The
Supreme Court quite properly used the Fourteenth Amendment in Brown
v. Board of Education to end segregation, since the views of the amendment’s
authors do not matter. Doubts about whether the amendment was legally rati-
ﬁed should also be put aside. Who cares?
The Illusion of Victory: America in World War I*

THOMAS FLEMING

Presidential Hubris and War

October 1, 2003, Mises Review

THOMAS FLEMING’s outstanding book poses a fundamental problem. Fleming shows that Woodrow Wilson led America into an unnecessary war. Wilson had not the remotest idea of what he wished to accomplish by involvement in World War I, but his ill-considered policies added massive American casualties to the horrendous totals racked up by the European powers. As if this were not enough, Wilson proved totally incompetent at the Paris Peace Conference.

Of Wilson’s manifest incompetence, there can be no doubt: Fleming has documented to the hilt a picture of the American president that makes the reader gasp in astonishment. But, if Fleming is right, a question at once arises: How could such a bizarre character as Wilson have managed to assume control of American foreign policy? In ability, Wilson ranked no more than what his great rival Theodore Roosevelt called him: “a Byzantine logothete [i.e., accountant or tax official].” How then did Wilson rise to supreme power and maintain a tenacious hold on it?

The answer lies largely in Wilson’s skill as an orator. At crucial times, he was able to convince people that he was an idealist who wished to reform sordid politics through moral principles. When examined, his words proved

to be frothy and meaningless verbiage; but he again and again succeeded in fooling large numbers of people.

Fleming analyzes in considerable detail Wilson’s most famous oration: his speech to Congress on April 2, 1917, calling for a declaration of war against Germany. As Wilson presented matters, the need for war admitted of no doubt. Germany’s practice of unrestricted submarine warfare violated America’s rights as a neutral power. Despite repeated protests, Germany refused to stop a policy that had killed many Americans.

But in taking up the German challenge, Wilson averred, the United States did not seek any sordid ends. Wilson did not aim at territorial conquest, nor was his quarrel with the German people. He wished rather to defeat autocratic power and promote democracy and self-determination.

I have deliberately presented the substance of Wilson’s remarks in nondescript language. Now, let us hear how Wilson himself put the matter:

> It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to hang in the balance. But the right is more precious than peace, and we will fight for the things we have always carried in our hearts—for democracy... for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world at last free... America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other. (p. 20)

Wilson’s rhetoric today sounds a little stilted and old-fashioned, but it accomplished its goal: a wildly cheering Congress granted in a few days Wilson’s wish for a declaration of war. In doing so, they made a disastrous mistake, as Senator Robert LaFollette pointed out in his brilliant but futile challenge to Wilson’s flights of fancy.

Britain, from the onset of war in 1914, had imposed a tight blockade on Germany; by preventing food from being imported into the country, the British brought starvation and malnutrition to large masses of the German people. As Senator LaFollette pointed out, a food blockade violated international law and struck at America’s rights as a neutral power. Even the British sometimes recognized the essential issue:
LaFollette cited an admission by Lord Salisbury, one of England’s most prominent statesmen, that food for the civilian population was never contraband—a principle that the English were callously ignoring in their blockade of Germany. (p. 35)

German submarine warfare was a desperate response to the British blockade—a blockade so effective that it threatened to force the Germans out of the war. But Wilson declined except in perfunctory terms to challenge the British. In complete contrast, he held Germany to the strictest accountability.

But perhaps Wilson’s distinctly unneutral “neutrality” was justifiable. Was not Germany bent on world domination? If so, was not a victory of Britain and her allies in America’s interest? Fleming sees little reason to view the European war as more than a struggle among competing powers. Contrary to Wilson and his Svengali-like adviser, Edward Mandell House, the war was not a struggle by the “democratic” countries, led by the British Empire, to stave off autocratic Germany’s bid for world control.

In this connection, Fleming effectively demolishes the myth, propagated by American Ambassador to Turkey Henry Morgenthau, Sr., that Kaiser Wilhelm II chaired a council in July 1914 that determined on war. “Historians examining the evidence in the next decade concluded that Morgenthau was lying” (p. 374).*

Latter-day defenders of Wilson will no doubt respond, “Even if revisionist historians have shown that Germany did not deliberately embark on war, the conduct of the war showed that Germany menaced world civilization. What about the Belgian atrocities?”

Fleming maintains that the British began a worldwide propaganda campaign designed to show the Germans to be inhuman monsters. Lord Bryce, a historian and political scientist of great distinction, issued a report that contained riveting claims of gruesome atrocities, but these could not be documented.

The Germans were unprepared for the British propaganda onslaught of 1914. As a newcomer to international power politics—Germany was barely 40 years old in 1914—the country

* Fleming should ideally have included some discussion of the treatment of the war council by Luigi Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914 (Oxford University Press, 1952). Sidney Fay was the main historian critical of Morgenthau’s account.
had paid little attention to this time-honored British custom of slandering their enemies. (p. 59)

Our author is by no means an uncritical apologist for the German Kaiser and his military machine. Germany pursued a harsh policy of reprisals against Belgian and French civilian resisters; but the lurid accounts of rapes and baby-killings put forward by the British had no foundation. Nothing in Germany’s conduct matched the British hunger blockade—or, for that matter, Belgian treatment of their Congolese subjects—in horrendousness.*

Wilson, then, carried away by his own rhetorical effusions, succeeded in involving the United States in war. To what end? As his Republican critics such as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge noted, Wilson had done next to nothing to prepare a military force capable of intervention in Europe. Fleming goes so far as to claim that Wilson believed the war could be won without the dispatch of an American expeditionary army to Europe. Here I think our author’s intriguing speculation needs more evidence; but of the fact of American unpreparedness, there can be no question.

The American forces, when they finally arrived in Europe, had to “learn by doing,” and the untrained Americans sustained massive casualties as soon as they engaged in battle. Although the American commander, John J. Pershing, preserved for the most part the Americans’ status as an independent military force, he fell in entirely with the fighting methods of the European armies. These involved frontal assaults on heavily fortified positions; efforts, usually unsuccessful, to gain a few hundred feet of ground cost thousands and thousands of lives.

True enough, the Americans and their European allies finally achieved “victory,” but at what cost?

The Americans had been in combat two hundred days. . . . In that time, 50,300 doughboys were killed. Another 198,059 Americans were wounded in action. Another 62,668 died of disease. . . . In 1930, the Veterans Bureau estimated that war-related diseases, wounds and other kinds of trauma inflicted on the Western Front had raised the total cost to 460,000 deaths. (p. 307)

Americans who remained at home also suffered from the war, especially if they had the effrontery to criticize Wilson’s policies. Wilson in his April 1917 speech declared that “the world must be made safe for democracy,” but evidently America was to be withdrawn from the sphere of freedom for the duration of the war. Protesters often faced long prison terms and were in some cases lynched. Discontent with the war among American blacks led to race riots. “Throughout the uproar [in East St. Louis] Woodrow Wilson said nothing. When prominent African Americans journeyed to Washington to complain in person, he refused to see them” (p. 110).

Once more our question recurs: to what end did all these Americans sacrifice their lives, health, and liberty? According to Wilson, a treaty of peace would establish a new world order. Self-determination and democracy would prevail, and the League of Nations would put an end to war. Was not this beautiful ideal worth hundreds of thousands of deaths and a few lynchings?

Once again, Wilson followed his characteristic pattern of announcing goals in flowery language that bore no relation to reality. The peace treaty imposed harsh terms on Germany, despite the fact that Germany agreed to an armistice on the basis of Wilson’s Fourteen Points.*

Along with the confession of guilt for the war were reparations that would be decided later—which meant Germany’s economy would be at the mercy of the victors for as long as they pleased. Added to this were the loss of crucial coalfields to the Poles and French; the separation of the Rhineland, the Saar, and Upper Silesia from the Reich; the loss of the port city of Danzig. (p. 378)

So much for self-determination. The peace settlement actually represented a massive victory for empire building. In a discussion between British and Italian diplomats about League of Nations mandates, “one of them read aloud the lines that an ‘A’ mandate required ‘the consent and wishes of the people concerned.’ Nicholson [sic] was struck by how heartily everyone laughed. [Italian] Premier Orlando’s eyes were filled ‘with tears of mirth’” (p. 364).

As readers will by now expect, Wilson responded to the collapse of what he had promised with rhetorical moonshine. In response to protesting remarks

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* The extent to which exceptions to the Fourteen Points were contemplated in the armistice is much disputed, but it is unquestionable that Germany did not surrender unconditionally.
by Frank Walsh, a onetime supporter, Wilson explained the betrayal of self-determination in this way: “You have touched on the great metaphysical tragedy of today” (p. 371). What pretentious nonsense!

Wilson insisted that the peace treaty incorporate his pet project, the League of Nations. All else might be given up, if he was granted his League; and he was willing to see the entire Treaty of Versailles scuttled by the Senate rather than allow any “reservations” to modify his pet project. But exactly how the League was supposed to guarantee peace he never bothered to explain.

In essence, Wilson’s solution to all problems was simple—the world must always have Woodrow Wilson to lead it. Thus, although felled by a crippling stroke that for a considerable time left him unable to function, he wanted the Democrats to renominate him for president in 1920. Colonel House in his novel Philip Dru: Administrator, portrayed a “military and political genius” who led a nation “into an era of almost superhuman contentment by persuading the people to make him their supreme autocrat” (p. 9). Wilson no doubt thought of himself in such vainglorious terms, but he was no more than a glib purveyor of words without substance. As Fleming ably shows, he brought disaster to his country and the world.

Fleming demonstrates an impressive command of the vast literature on World War I. I noted a few mistakes. The Chief Justice in 1917 was Edward Douglass White, not Andrew White (p. 18). William Gladstone’s middle name was “Ewart,” not “Evarts” (p. 21). The author wrongly promotes Hugo Munsterberg to the nobility (p. 62). The IWW was the “Industrial Workers of the World,” not “International Workers” (Fleming gets this right on p. 344, but not elsewhere). Kaiser Wilhelm II was Wilhelm I’s grandson, not his son. Harold Nicolson’s last name is misspelled (p. 364).

* By the way, “the red-bearded Paul Mantoux” (p. 333), who translated into English Raymond Poincaré’s speech at the opening of the Paris Peace Conference, later offered Ludwig von Mises a chair at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva.
Recovering the Past: 
A Historian’s Memoir

FORREST MCDONALD

The New History: A Cover For War

December 1, 2004, Mises Review

Forrest McDonald takes no prisoners. He has been one of the leading American historians since the publication of We The People in 1958; and much of the present book is an engaging account of his life as a historian. He often passes acerbic judgments on other historians; he knows where the bodies are buried and is willing to disclose at least some of what he knows.

I propose to pass by most of the personal details. McDonald has also given us most valuable remarks on the nature of historical writing and on specific issues in American history, and it is on these that I will concentrate.

First, though, a small sample of what we will be missing. Carl Bridenbaugh, a leading authority on the American colonial period, was “a sorry excuse for a human being” (p. 111). He tried to destroy the careers of students of McDonald and another historian who had opposed him in a faculty dispute. Merle Curti, a leading American intellectual historian, had “apparently been a communist” in the 1930s, until the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact (p. 65). Samuel Eliot Morison, a famed Harvard scholar, “gutted the materials [a graduate student entrusted to him] and published an article based on them” (p. 65). Perhaps the latter revelation should not be accepted at face value; the student in question, Fulmer Mood, who became McDonald’s dissertation adviser, was later diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic.

Enough of this: I am no gossip. One issue that McDonald raises of far more than personal importance concerns the nature of historical writing. From the 1930s until McDonald became a historian in the 1950s, by far the most influential approach to the philosophy of history by American historians was the New History of Carl Becker, Charles Beard, and James Harvey Robinson.

According to the New History, historical objectivity was impossible: the historian was inevitably guided by his value judgments. McDonald terms this view the “subjectivist-relativist-presentist position” (p. 22). Also, the New Historians “spurned the traditional emphasis on war and politics and stressed economic and social forces as the ‘real’ driving forces in history” (p. 22).

McDonald asks a pertinent question: why did the New History become so popular among the historical profession? The movement stemmed from an influential essay by Frederick Jackson Turner, written in 1891, which stressed the importance of present conditions on the historian’s point of view. But the movement did not really “take off” until after World War I. McDonald thinks that this was no accident.

Woodrow Wilson, who took America into the war, “was a man with a rigidly uncompromising psyche, and he could imagine no war but an all-out war” (p. 23). In order to avoid divisions in public opinion, Wilson was determined to act. “Prosecuting it [the war] successfully, he believed, would hinge upon the creation of a ‘proper war spirit,’ by which he meant dedication bordering on the hysterical” (p. 23).

To promote this spirit, Wilson established a propaganda bureau, the notorious Committee on Public Information, headed by George Creel.

But for President Wilson that was not enough: as a historian, he regarded it as essential to control what historians thought about the past. Accordingly, a Division of Civic and Educational Cooperation, better known as the history subcommittee, was established. The list of historians who wrote propagandistic history for the division reads like a scholars’ all-star team. (p. 25)

Among these scholars were Beard and Becker, two of the leading proponents of the New History. McDonald suggests that these historians favored value relativism in order to justify *ex post facto* their propagandistic endeavors.

What the profession had done clearly called for justification. This Lost Generation of historians needed an authoritative
voice or voices to say to them, “There, there. It’s nobody’s fault. You’re human, and therefore you can’t help yourselves.” (p. 26)

We can imagine Becker and Beard replying to McDonald in this way:

Even if you are right that our defense of the New History stemmed from a guilty conscience, this does not invalidate our arguments. Are not the historian’s activities necessarily affected by the questions he asks? And are not these questions in large part determined by the subjective values of the historian?

To this, McDonald responds in a philosophically interesting way. Why assume, he asks, that a historian’s research must always be an effort to answer a question that has been set in advance? Can he not investigate the documents of a particular period without a theoretical apparatus set in advance that determines the answers to his questions?

McDonald’s bold move restores old-fashioned inductivism: followers of Karl Popper will no doubt rise in wrath, telling us that there is no direct knowledge of the world without concepts. We cannot even recognize simple objects without possessing concepts of color and shape. Is not the inductivism that McDonald has sought to restore naïve?

The imagined objection to my mind fails. No doubt concepts are required to experience the world. But it hardly follows that controversial theories must be assumed in advance before a scholar can engage in research. If a historian must know what “property” means before he can study the economic interests of the drafters of the Constitution, he need not commit himself before his studies to a position on the economic interpretation of history or the merits of socialism.

McDonald’s ideas on this matter derive in part from an outstanding thinker, James Malin, to whom our author pays generous tribute.

In 1946 the brilliant if eccentric historian James C. Malin . . . attacked the notion that one begins with a theory or hypothesis, which underlay the thinking of Becker and Beard. Malin’s teacher F. W. Hodder . . . taught that “history should be studied as it is lived, as a whole.” [i.e., without a preconceived hypothesis] (p. 31)

Incidentally, Murray Rothbard admired Malin’s work.*

* A book of Malin’s has one of my favorite titles: Confounded Rot About Napoleon.
In two respects, though, McDonald’s arguments can be challenged. If McDonald is right that a historian need not begin with a hypothesis, it does not follow that to do so is to surrender all hope of objective history. Why should the fact that one is trying to test a theory, as McDonald indeed tells us he has sometimes done, mean that the results of that test are infected with the historian’s subjective assessments? Further, McDonald has in one respect misstated Beard’s view. He did not deny that the historian should try to tell the truth fully and fairly: he did not say, “because everyone is governed by his value judgments, you might as well distort what you discover without compunction.” Rather, he thought that the historian should try to state the truth but would not fully succeed in doing so.

For our prolific author, meditations on historiography are but a sideline. He first achieved fame as a critic of Charles Beard’s interpretation of the Constitution. Beard, an early-twentieth-century Progressive, advanced a thesis that proved useful to those who wished to counter judicial efforts to block as unconstitutional interference with freedom of contract. To the Progressives, insistence on the rule of law was blind “Constitution worship.” Beard supported them by arguing that the authors of the Constitution were not impartial statesmen seeking to apply the wisdom of the ages to the task of governing a newly independent country. Quite the contrary, they were motivated by economic self-interest. If so, why need deference be paid to their views? If people wish to overturn economic arrangements, they should not let the paper barriers of the Constitution stop them.

McDonald undertook a careful investigation of Beard’s claims. In particular, Beard argued that a division between real and “personalty” property interests was of crucial importance for the drafting and ratification of the Constitution. By “personalty,” Beard meant in essence money: “capital as opposed to land” (p. 34). Those in this group feared that state legislatures, under debtor influence, would pass laws interfering with their property rights. To prevent this, they established a new form of government. In it, states are expressly forbidden from “impairing the obligation of contract.”

Beard’s iconoclastic An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution created a sensation on its appearance in 1913 and was immediately denounced by conservatives. William Howard Taft “reputedly . . . privately remarked, ‘Of course it’s true, but the damned fool shouldn’t have been allowed to publish it’” (p. 35).* Although Beard’s book was first greeted with horrified

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* Elsewhere, McDonald says that Taft “had the personality of a dead halibut” (p. 44).
gasp, its interpretation became dominant in the next half century. McDonald ascribes this dominance in part to a false picture of American history: Progressives saw the American past as a struggle over democracy between the poor and those who sought to dominate them. This view reflected a Marxist disdain for capitalism. The Progressive historians looked on businessmen as exploiters; they failed to grasp that the free market promotes gains for all participants in it.

As Beard admitted, many of the documents needed to verify his claims were not available at the time he wrote. McDonald, who is capable of Herculean labors in research, used many more records than Beard did. He found no support for Beard’s main contention: neither in the Constitutional convention nor in the ratification conventions did personalty interests favor the Constitution more than landed ones. McDonald’s work has led to the overthrow of Beard’s account among mainstream historians. Unfortunately, though, McDonald does not discuss the important book by Robert A. McGuire, To Form a More Perfect Union (Oxford University Press, 2003). McGuire claims to show, by the use of sophisticated statistical techniques, that Beard was right after all: personalty interests did indeed support the Constitution to a greater extent than did owners of land.*

Regardless of how the battle over Beard ultimately turns out, McDonald deserves great credit for his efforts to combat the Progressive bias against capitalism. In one respect, though, his own picture of the free market neglects a vital point. He fails to distinguish the free market from state-guided capitalism. Thus, his hero is Alexander Hamilton. As McDonald sees matters, Hamilton wished to promote individual enterprise, liberating the static agricultural society that Jefferson and his followers supported: Hamilton saw that his adopted country was made weak and despicable by its citizens’ narrowness of vision and lack of drive. These shortcomings were reinforced by a social order in which status was derived not from the marketplace, where deeds and goods and virtues could be impartially valued, but from birthright. . . . Hamilton saw that by infusing money into a static agrarian order, it would become the leaven . . . that would stimulate growth, change, prosperity, and national strength. . . . Thus he

* McGuire’s book might have appeared too late for McDonald to address; but it was based on influential articles that had appeared years before.
was the champion of liberty, of freedom under law, as opposed to those—the Jeffersonians—who defended privilege and authoritarianism. (pp. 146–147)

Is this not a confusion of two very different things? In what way are protective tariffs and expansive government financed through taxation ways of promoting liberty? McDonald’s defense of liberty is a welcome change from the banalities of the left, but he fails to see that promoting individual enterprise does not require state action. Rather, if the state gets out of the way and leaves individuals free to act, free enterprise will take care of the rest.

Unfortunately, there is another place in which McDonald fails adequately to distinguish loyalty to the American tradition of liberty from support for American statism. He attacks William Appleman Williams and other critics of the Cold War. “Williams,” he complains, “did not entirely subscribe to Charles A. Beard’s theory that Roosevelt conspired to get the United States into the war [i.e., World War II]—nor, for that matter, to Harry Elmer Barnes’s and Charles Tansill’s conspiracy theories of American entry into World War I—but his interpretation differed in detail, not in general substance” (p. 122).

Why is opposition to war taken to be a sign of anti-American bias? Has not involvement in war been the foremost instrument for the destruction of the liberty that McDonald supports? Has he so soon forgotten what he has told us about the effects of Wilson’s drive for war on the historical profession? What, by the way, is wrong with Tansill’s account of American entry into World War I? Tansill, a legendary figure on the American Right, can certainly not be dismissed as an anti-American leftist.

Despite these difficulties, even his severest critics must recognize that McDonald is an insightful historian, never afraid to challenge conventional opinion. Two examples of his swimming against the current must here suffice. He tells us that advocates of the doctrine of states’ rights

were justified by the history of the Founding and that the position was held not only by John C. Calhoun and various southern spokesmen but also, and as frequently, by northerners when they were displeased by the activities of the federal government. (p. 156)

If states’ rights is not in fashion, the glories of Reconstruction are most definitely a key element in the regnant orthodoxy. McDonald will have none of it:
Of the white historians of American blacks, some turned out works that were as inane as the fantasies conjured by the black-is-beautiful school. Kenneth Stampp . . . rewrote the history of Reconstruction with a radical twist. His account of the course of events was the same in almost every detail as the older versions, but he turned the interpretation upside down. Earlier versions depicted reconstruction as a tragedy because Radical Republicans had tried to go too far, too fast, and had left the white South devastated as a result. Now radicals were attacked because they did not go far enough. (pp. 117–118)

Against the new interpretation, McDonald invokes the weighty authority of C. Vann Woodward. He “belittled the speculations of armchair revolutionaries . . . he pointed out that everything desired for the freedmen had been put in place in regard to the western Indians, yet they fared worse than the blacks” (p. 118). Readers of Recovering the Past will gain a clear sense of the personality of a historian never lacking in enterprise and courage.
Marc Trachtenberg’s guidebook is intended as a “how-to” book for students of diplomatic history and political science. But much of it is of great value to anyone interested in a revisionist brand of history. Trachtenberg, an authority on twentieth-century American diplomacy, teaches by example. He shows students how to analyze historical arguments by considering a number of case studies. Although Trachtenberg seldom cites standard revisionist historians—Charles Tansill and Charles Beard are not mentioned at all—his illuminating discussions lend strong support for their work.

The German historian Fritz Fischer created a sensation with a book published in 1961, translated into English under the title Germany’s Aims in the First World War. Fischer overthrew the dominant historical interpretation of the origins of war in 1914, which argued that responsibility for the onset of war was shared by both the Entente and Central Powers. According to the leading American proponent of this view, Sidney Bradshaw Fay, none of the major European powers wanted a world war in 1914: the war resulted through mistakes and misunderstandings on both sides.

Not so, said Fischer. Germany, pursuing a policy of European dominance, deliberately instigated war in July 1914: the war was, as the German title of Fischer’s book puts it, “Germany’s grasp for world power.” Fischer’s interpretation now dominates the field. If Fischer is right, does this not lend support to the supporters of American intervention into the war, as against their isolationist opponents? If Germany wanted to impose its will on the world, was it not wise for the United States to confront it? Supporters of the traditional American policy of nonintervention could of course retreat to a second line of defense. They could plausibly argue that America had no need to fight Germany unless directly threatened. But the isolationist case would be strengthened if Fischer’s thesis were false.

Fischer did not carry the entire historical profession with him; Murray Rothbard, e.g., never accepted it. Trachtenberg shows that the skeptics were right. He tests Fischer’s claims against the documents he cites in its support, and the results are devastating. Trachtenberg shows again and again that Fischer distorts the documents. Fischer argues that

the German government had actually decided in early July—that is, very soon after the archduke’s [Franz Ferdinand’s] assassination—to start a continental war. . . . You thus turn to the section called “The Occasion is Propitious—The First Week in July.” The seven-page section can be examined quite closely. As you read it, you want to approach it with a particular question in mind: does Fischer really show that the Germans had decided at that point to start a war? (p. 68)

Fischer begins the section by citing a

conversation between a high Austrian Foreign Ministry official and the well-connected German publicist Viktor Naumann. . . . Naumann happened to be in Vienna when the archduke was assassinated on June 28, and he met with the Austrian official a couple of days later. Fischer has Naumann picturing the German government as ready, even eager, for war. (pp. 68–69)

Fischer’s paraphrase of the conversation does not correspond to the document he cites. Fischer alleges that according to Naumann, the German government believed that public opinion would force it into war with Russia. In
fact, all “Naumann had said was that public opinion would force the Foreign Ministry to support Austria in a showdown with Serbia” (p. 69).

Again and again, Fischer misreads German support in July 1914 for decisive Austrian action against Serbia as support for general European war. He acknowledges that according to one report, Kaiser Wilhelm favored preserving the peace, but he claims that this was not a correct account of the emperor’s position. Did not the Kaiser add a handwritten note on a report from the German ambassador to Vienna that “now or never . . . we must make a clean sweep of the Serbs and soon”? Trachtenberg points out that the emperor’s comment, however, scarcely proves (as Fischer had implied both here and his use of the phrase in the subtitle of the chapter) that the emperor wanted a European war. The “now or never” referred simply to a showdown between Austria and Serbia, which was not the same thing at all. (p. 70)

Trachtenberg shows his skill as an analyst by not stopping here. Fischer has mistaken German intransigence against Serbia for support for a European war. What assumption would explain this mistake? Fischer might assume that the Germans believed that if Austria cracked down on Serbia, Russia would inevitably come to the aid of her Slavic ally.

So you ask yourself whether Fischer ever explicitly makes this assumption . . . and sure enough, you find Fischer saying at one point that “as innumerable documents show, Germany knew that Russia would never allow Austria-Hungary to act in the Balkans unopposed.” (p. 71)

Trachtenberg argues that Germany “knew” no such thing. Germany, according to documents that Fischer himself quotes, hoped to localize the conflict.

Our author presses further. Even if the Germans hoped to localize the conflict, perhaps this was a completely unrealistic assessment.

The Germans might have pretended, even among themselves, to believe that localization was possible while at the same time realizing that it was not . . . It therefore makes sense to consider whether it was a simple political reality that Russia was bound to intervene. If that was the case . . . one might
reasonably conclude that a bellicose policy vis-à-vis Serbia could therefore be taken as proof of Germany’s desire to provoke a general war. (p. 72)

Trachtenberg’s account has all the excitement of a good detective story. He continually poses questions that, once answered, generate new questions. But the question just posed is his last. He concludes that the German assessment of Russia’s aims was not completely unrealistic. There was still a bit of softness in the Russian position even late in the crisis, and . . . it might consequently have made sense for the Germans to think that a localized war was not out of the question. Evidence that the Germans were pressing for a war in the Balkans thus cannot be taken as evidence that the Germans were really trying to engineer a European war. (p. 72)

Trachtenberg has struck the Fischer thesis a fatal blow.

Trachtenberg’s support for revisionism goes further. The thesis most identified with American revisionism concerns the entry of the United States into World War II. Far from being the victim of unprovoked Japanese aggression at Pearl Harbor, the United States pursued a deliberate policy of provocation, designed to maneuver Japan into war. President Roosevelt wanted to enter the war in Europe, but he realized that isolationist sentiment among the public made impossible a direct effort to do so. If, however, Japan could be induced to attack, Roosevelt’s problem would be solved: America could enter the war through the “back door.”

This interpretation has hitherto not won much of a hearing among mainstream historians; despite the eminence of Beard and Tansill, the consensus view rejects it as extremist. As I have already mentioned, Trachtenberg does not find these revisionist historians worthy of citation. (He does, though, discuss the mildly revisionist work of Paul W. Schroeder, The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations, 1941.) Nevertheless, he develops a strong argument of his own for the revisionist thesis.*

* Trachtenberg is not at all sympathetic to the revisionist claim that Roosevelt knowingly allowed the Japanese to attack the fleet at Pearl Harbor, a view he dismisses as “an absurd and baseless charge” (p. 123). Unfortunately, he offers no discussion of Beard, Tansill, Morgenstern, Sanborn, Kubek, and Barnes, among other writers who have made careful arguments for the “absurd and baseless charge.”
He proceeds in his customary dialectical manner by a continual process of raising new questions. First, the revisionist thesis assumes that Roosevelt wished to enter the war in Europe. Is this in fact correct? No one doubts that he wished the Allies to win. But Gerhard Weinberg, perhaps the foremost opponent of the revisionists, maintains that Roosevelt endeavored to avoid American entry into the war. Weinberg notes that

from April 1941 the Americans were able to read intercepted German naval messages. The knowledge that the US government acquired in this way, he [Weinberg] writes, “was regularly and carefully used to avoid incidents, when it could very easily have been used to provoke them.” … This is a point, he believes, that nearly everyone has overlooked, in spite of the fact that the “relevant records have been available for decades” and had been analyzed in an account by the German scholar Jürgen Rohwer published “many years ago.” (p. 85)

Readers should by now be able to surmise the next step in Trachtenberg’s argument. He considers the article by Rohwer that Weinberg cites and asks: does Weinberg accurately report its findings? Weinberg, he contends, has misread his source: “What emerges [from Rohwer’s article] is a picture of a very active American policy in late 1941… The Americans, however, had clearly not adopted a policy of avoiding confrontations with German warships” (p. 86). America, far from avoiding conflict, carefully followed the British lead in deciding “how the convoys would be routed… So the evidence in the Rohwer article does not prove that Roosevelt was trying to keep America out of the war. If anything, it suggests exactly the opposite” (p. 87).

Trachtenberg’s revisionist thesis has thus successfully met its first challenge: contrary to Weinberg, Roosevelt wanted to enter the war in Europe. But how was he to do so? Hitler, knowing that the American president viewed him as an enemy, carefully avoided incidents with American ships.

For this reason, Trachtenberg thinks, Roosevelt looked to Japan. He imposed an embargo on oil exports that posed a mortal threat to the Japanese economy. Was this not a provocative move designed to induce the desperate Japanese to attack the United States? Almost all mainstream historians reject this revisionist claim, and Trachtenberg offers a step-by-step account of various objections that have been raised to it.
The first of these objections is obvious. The American embargo was not the Machiavellian stratagem that revisionists have made of it. It had a perfectly straightforward explanation: America wanted to contain Japan’s policy of imperial expansion in China and Southeast Asia. “America’s policy toward Japan is thus interpreted essentially as one of containment. The goal, it is alleged, was to deter Japan from making further advances, both toward the south and toward Russia” (p. 91).

Trachtenberg rejects this interpretation. If the embargo had been designed to deter Japan, would not the Japanese have been warned that further expansion on their part would lead to sanctions? Further, would not the Japanese have been informed that if they refrained from further expansion, the sanctions would be lifted?

The deterrent threat, after all, could carry weight only if the Japanese understood that they could avoid war if they bowed to the threat. If war would result even if they agreed to forgo further advances, what incentive would they have to pursue a moderate policy? (p. 91)

In fact, the Japanese received no such warnings or promises of remission. The Americans decided explicitly not to warn the Japanese that sanctions would be imposed if they moved into southern Indochina . . . the sanctions were not lifted when the Japanese government made it clear that it was willing to halt its advance . . . rather than face war with the United States. (pp. 91–92)

The aim of the sanctions, then, cannot plausibly be taken as deterrence.

I shall not rehearse in detail the various steps of Trachtenberg’s argument. He considers and responds to a large number of objections. Is not American policy explainable as a response to an unwavering Japanese policy of aggression? No, Japanese leaders such as Prince Konoye sought to meet with Roosevelt and would likely have accepted America’s terms. So, at any rate, the American Ambassador to Tokyo, Joseph Grew, believed. But did it matter what Konoye and other civilians wanted? Was not Japan in the iron grip of the military, who willingly preferred war to withdrawal from China and Asia? No, says our author: the military leaders, well aware that a war with America would probably be disastrous for them, were quite willing to compromise. Besides,
they knew that the Emperor favored peace, and obeying the Emperor was to them a high imperative. Did Roosevelt know that the oil embargo was likely to result in war? Yes, he did.

If Trachtenberg has successfully met all these challenges to his thesis, he must confront one final objection, a point that most historians regard as decisive against the “back door to war” thesis. Roosevelt, it is alleged, wanted war with Japan in order to enter the war in Europe. But why should he have thought that war in Asia would lead to war with Germany? Suppose that Hitler had not declared war on the United States. Then Roosevelt would have not have secured the alleged goal of his provocative policy toward Japan. America would have had a war on its hands with Japan and been no closer than before to entry into the European war. If one counters that Roosevelt had reason to think that Hitler would, in the event of an American war with Japan, come to the aid of his Axis partner, was this not still an enormous gamble? Only a fool would have tried to enter the European war through this madcap plan.

Trachtenberg has a brilliant response to this powerful objection. It rests, he holds, on a false assumption. Once America and Japan were at war, why would the decision for war with Germany rest only with Hitler? Would not Roosevelt have then been able to overcome isolationist resistance and secure from Congress a declaration of war against Germany?

The Axis alliance . . . came to be seen as much tighter than it actually was. And it was in large part for that reason that Pearl Harbor was widely blamed on the Axis as a whole. Indeed, many people throughout the country . . . were convinced at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack that the Japanese were “Hitler’s puppets.” And Roosevelt, of course, would not have been unaware of something this basic. . . . He might well have reached the conclusion that Germany would not be able to stay out of a US-Japanese war, no matter what decision Hitler made. And what this means is that a back-door strategy, if that is what it was, might well have been workable in that political context. (pp. 127–128)

I should like to supplement Trachtenberg’s argument with an additional point. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, not even the America First Committee thought that there was a realistic chance of separating war with Japan and war with Germany. It mounted no campaign to confine the war to
Asia, and the Committee disbanded on December 11, the day that Germany declared war on the United States.

Trachtenberg is not a conventional revisionist. He suggests that Roosevelt’s policy may have been a reasonable way of coping with a possible future threat from Germany*; and he is elsewhere in the book quite critical of A. J. P. Taylor’s *The Origins of the Second World War* (1961), a pioneering revisionist work. Nevertheless, he offers penetrating arguments for several key contentions of revisionist history. Murray Rothbard would have been delighted.

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* For an excellent anticipatory response to this argument, see Garet Garett, *Defend America First: The Antiwar Editorials of the Saturday Evening Post, 1939–1942* (Caxton Press, 2003) and my review found in Volume 3, “Foreign Policy.”
Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning*

Jonah Goldberg

History in Wonderland
April 1, 2008, Mises Review

Jonah Goldberg has ruined what could have been a valuable book. Goldberg has in the past treated libertarians with disdain, but here he offers an analysis of fascism that libertarians will find familiar. Goldberg has been influenced by John T. Flynn’s comparison of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal with Italian fascism; and he cites Friedrich Hayek with respect. He has learned from Murray Rothbard on the progressives as well. (He at one point remarks, “if libertarianism could account for children and foreign policy, it would be the ideal political philosophy” [p. 344].)

Fascism is usually counted a movement of the Right; but, as Goldberg notes, many leftists viewed Mussolini with sympathy. (Here Goldberg follows the important work of John Patrick Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America.) H. G. Wells in a speech at Oxford in 1932 called for a “Liberal Fascism”; and Rexford Tugwell, a leading member of Roosevelt’s Brain Trust, said in 1934, “I find Italy doing many of the things which seem to me necessary. . . . Mussolini certainly has the same people opposed to him

as FDR has. But he has the press controlled so that they cannot scream lies at him daily” (p. 156).

How is this possible? Leftists wish to reconstruct society along socialistic lines; fascists glorify the nation and militarism. How can leftists favor fascism? Goldberg readily resolves the difficulty. Precisely by importing the war spirit into domestic affairs, leftists hope to reconstruct society. In war, people unite to achieve victory; in doing so, they sacrifice their personal ends to achieve the common goal. The fascists took exactly the same view, and many leftists accordingly recognized the affinity.

The progressives were well aware that war would enable them to advance their ambitious social plans, and they advocated American entry into the First World War for this reason. Herbert Croly, author of the vastly influential The Promise of American Life, “looked forward to many more wars because war was the midwife of progress . . . Croly’s New Republic was relentless in its push for war” (pp. 99, 107).*

The wartime regime of Woodrow Wilson fulfilled the hopes of the progressives.

War socialism under Wilson was an entirely progressive project, and long after the war it remained the liberal ideal . . . If we are to believe that “classic” fascism is first and foremost the elevation of martial values and the militarization of government and society under the banner of nationalism, it is very difficult to understand why the Progressive Era was not also the Fascist Era. (p. 119)

Goldberg appropriately calls attention to “the brilliant, bizarre, disfigured genius Randolph Bourne [who] seemed to understand precisely what was going on” (p. 108).

Given the Wilsonian precedent, the affinity of the New Deal with fascism is hardly surprising. Just as the progressives had done under Wilson, the New Dealers demanded collective action by the government to cope with the economic emergency. Indeed, many of the measures they supported reintroduced programs of Wilson’s wartime government. In his discussion of the New Deal, Goldberg draws attention especially to the close parallel between the National

* Goldberg does not mention that Irving Kristol, the godfather of neoconservatism and high in the counsels of National Review, ardently admires Croly.
Recovery Administration and Mussolini’s corporatism, a fact that was not lost on either the fascists or the New Dealers.*

If Goldberg has elaborated and extended the standard libertarian view of fascism, does he not deserve praise? Why then do I claim that he has ruined his book? The fault, as I see it, lies not in various less defensible contentions about fascism that he advances. He seems to me too ready to call any resort to “identity politics” fascist; and while he criticizes the “compassionate conservatism” of George Bush, he turns a blind eye to the effects of Bush’s bellicose foreign policy on the domestic scene. Goldberg himself supports the Iraq war; when one is faced with a “good” war, apparently, the link between war and fascism no longer need be of concern.

However dubious Goldberg’s views on these issues, they are at least matters of opinion. By contrast, he makes a large number of outright errors on historical matters.

He traces fascism to the philosophy of Rousseau, “who properly deserves to be called the father of modern fascism” (p. 38). To see Rousseau as a precursor of totalitarianism is certainly a defensible position; Jacob Talmon classically argued for this view in *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. But in his account of Rousseau, Goldberg makes an astonishing claim: “It followed, moreover, that if the people were the new God, there was no room for God Himself. . . . Loyalty to the state and loyalty to the divine must be seen as the same thing” (p. 39).

Has Goldberg ever examined the “civil religion” of Rousseau, which he claims is enforced “by the all-powerful God-state” (p. 40)? Rousseau gives the dogmas of the civil religion in Book IV of *The Social Contract*. The first of these is the “existence of a mighty, intelligent, and beneficent Divinity, possessed of foresight and providence.” Goldberg might also consult with profit the *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar* in the fourth book of *Emile*. This defends the view that God can be known from the natural order; it does not identify God and the state.

Goldberg does no better when he turns to the great classical liberal Lord Acton. He tells us,

Lord Acton’s famous observation that “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” has long been

* See on this the important book of Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals* (Metropolitan Books, 2006) and my review found in Volume 3, “European History.” Goldberg cites this work.
misunderstood. Acton was not arguing that power causes powerful leaders to become corrupt (though he probably believed that, too). Rather, he was noting that historians tend to forgive the powerful for transgressions they would never condone by the weak. (p. 84)

Acton’s comments come in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton in April 1887:

I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men, with a favorable presumption that they did no wrong. If there is any presumption it is the other way against holders of power, increasing as the power increases. . . . Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Acton, it is apparent, is saying what Goldberg says that he isn’t: he is contending that the possession of power tends to cause leaders to be corrupt. In a column on National Review Online for October 23, 2002, “Might vs. Right,” Goldberg himself quotes this passage and defends his odd interpretation of it.* Goldberg cannot understand a few simple sentences. Are we to take Acton as saying that the spectacle of absolute power absolutely corrupts the historian who writes about it?

Goldberg has not yet touched bottom. The book includes a section, “The Nazi Cult of the Organic” that discusses such matters as vegetarianism, public health, and animal rights. In it, this passage appears:

German historicism had pioneered the organic conception of society and state tied together. The state, wrote Johann Droysen, is “the sum, the united organism, of all the moral partnerships, their common home and harbor, and so far their end.” Nor were these ideas uniquely German. Droysen was Herbert Baxter Adams’s mentor, and Adams was Woodrow Wilson’s. Droysen’s work is cited throughout Wilson’s writings. The law that established our national park system was dubbed the “Organic Act” of 1916. (p. 385)

* Goldberg’s remarks in the column do not adequately distinguish between what Acton meant and whether what he said is true. Goldberg points out that some powerful rulers have not been corrupt; he fails to see that this observation does not refute the claim that power tends to corrupt.
Does Goldberg seriously think that the organic concept of the state, i.e., the view that the state, like an organism, must be explained by how its parts function together for a common end, has anything to do with a “back to nature” movement? It is hardly surprising, by the way, that Wilson often cites Droysen. He was one of the most famous German historians of the nineteenth century.

Our author does not neglect American philosophers. He gives us a crude caricature of William James on the “will to believe”:

[James] pioneered the notion that all one needs is the “will to believe.” It was James’s benign hope to make room for religion in a burgeoning age of science, by arguing that any religion that worked for the believer was not merely valid but “true.” (p. 37)

Goldberg has either never read James’s essay, “The Will to Believe,” or read it with the same interpretive skills he displayed in his remarks about Acton. James argued that in a restricted number of cases, one has the right to believe something that goes beyond the evidence. The evidence for the view one favors must be no worse than for views that contradict it; and one must be in a situation where a choice cannot be avoided. The options that one faces must be living, momentous, and forced. Though James noted certain cases where believing something can result in its becoming true, e.g., a patient whose belief that he will recover has beneficial effects that help to cure him, he did not advocate the strange position Goldberg here attributes to him. (I do not think it worthwhile to inquire what Goldberg has in mind by the distinction between “valid” and “true.”)

We now come to my favorite passage:

In his infamous rectorial address, [Martin] Heidegger looked forward to the time—hastened by Hitler’s efforts—“when the spiritual strength of the West fails and its joints crack, when the moribund semblance of culture caves in and drags all forces into confusion and lets them suffocate in madness.” (pp. 174–175)

How can I possibly accuse Goldberg of distortion? Has he done anything more than quote a passage from the rectorial address? Well, let’s have a look. In “The Self-Assertion of the German University,” the address in question, Heidegger calls for teachers and students to will the essence of the German university: this essence is “the will to science as will to the historical spiritual
mission of the German people as a people that knows itself in its state.” (I cite from the same translation that Goldberg uses, which appears in Günther Neske and Emil Kettering, eds., *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers* [New York: Paragon House, 1990], p. 6.)

This will to science is to be achieved in large part by rethinking the beginnings of Greek philosophy. It is up to us: “Do we, or do we not, will the essence of the German university?” (Neske, p. 13). Heidegger then says, “But no one will even ask us whether we do or do not will, when . . .” following which is the passage that Goldberg quotes (Neske, p. 13). Goldberg has completely reversed what Heidegger is saying. Heidegger does not look forward to the spiritual collapse of the West. Rather, he warns that we may delay too long in our mission to will the essence of the university. If our culture “caves in,” what we will is irrelevant. Further, although Heidegger criticized the philosophical notion of “values,” he did not contend that “good and evil were childish notions” (p. 174).

Goldberg does not confine his howlers to intellectual history. He refers in one place to “communist Jacobinism (or Jacobin communism, if you prefer), which expropriated property and uprooted institutions in order to remake society from the ground up” (p. 297). The Jacobins were not communists. Although they abandoned the original laissez-faire tenets of the Jacobin Club for interventionism, they remained strong defenders of private property.

It goes on. It is not true that in the notorious Tuskegee syphilis experiment, “poor black men were allegedly infected with syphilis without their knowledge” (p. 261). Rather, men who already had syphilis were deceived into thinking that they were being treated for their illness. Unity Mitford did not “have to leave the country, incensed that Britain would fight such a progressive leader as Hitler” (p. 460 n. 15). At the time war was declared, she was in Germany. She was so despondent that she shot herself in the head, but her suicide attempt failed. She was then sent back to England, where she lived out the war as an invalid. As all-too-often, Goldberg has things backwards.

I have saved the best for last. He says that Napoleon’s “victories against the Austro-Hungarian Empire prompted the captive nations of the Hapsburgs to greet him as ‘the great liberator.’ He beat back the authority of the Catholic Church, crowning himself Holy Roman Emperor . . .” (p. 41). No, no, Mr. Goldberg. Emperor Francis II, who had meanwhile become Emperor Francis I of Austria, dissolved the Holy Roman Empire in 1806. The Austro-Hungarian Empire did not come into existence until 1867, although of course the
Habsburgs ruled over both Austria and Hungary throughout the nineteenth century. Goldberg does somewhat better in the index. There is a listing for “Napoleon I, Emperor of France” (p. 479); but this too is wrong. Napoleon was Emperor of the French: the title is important because Napoleon claimed his power emanated from the French people. He was not the successor to the French territorial kings, as the title Emperor of France would have suggested.

Although Liberal Fascism contains much important information, its many mistakes require that it be used with extreme caution. Jonah Goldberg should acquire a more accurate knowledge of history before he presumes to instruct others.
The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History*

GORDON S. WOOD

Philosophy and History

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GORDON WOOD is one of America’s most distinguished historians. He is best known for his Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787 (University of North Carolina Press, 1969) a study that controversially claimed to find a communal, “republican” system of ideas, not classical liberalism, at the heart of the American Revolution. In The Purpose of the Past, he has collected a number of his longer reviews, in pursuit of a larger purpose than that of giving these articles a more lasting setting. He finds disturbing recent trends in historiography that throw into question the historian’s ability accurately to reconstruct the past. As if postmodernism were not enough, other types of thought also threaten the historian’s effort to study the past for its own sake. Political theorists and ideologists of various stripes seek to subordinate history as it actually happened to their own ends.

Wood’s defense of objective history is salutary, and besides this, as one would expect from a historian of his eminence, he makes many illuminating remarks about concrete issues in American history. In addition, he is in one respect an ideal reviewer. However critical he may be of a particular book, he always presents a full and accurate summary of its contents.

Despite its considerable merits, though, his book suffers from a fundamental flaw. He protests against ideologists who impose their own concerns on the past; but Wood himself has definite views about the nature of the past that are as much theoretical impositions as those of the writers he challenges. In a number of cases, he ascribes particular opinions of his own to “the historian,” wrongly seeing them as inherent in the study of the past for its own sake.

If Wood defends objective history, he does so in part as a repentant sinner. In one essay, written in 1982, a review of Robert Middlekauff’s *The Glorious Cause*, he was prepared to throw into question the ability of narrative history effectively to recapture the past as it actually happened. He argued that the narrative historian necessarily imports a plot to history that was not present in the original:

> The plots, the coherence, and the significance of narratives are always retrospective. This recognition lies behind the contempt French social historians have for the unique, unconnected events of traditional narrative history. For a historian to emphasize one of these unique events and not another, writes François Furet, he has to assume some connecting plot in the events, that they are going somewhere; he has given them an “an ideological meaning.” (p. 53)

Based on “epistemological problems” like this, Wood concluded, “the narrative form, particularly as Middlekauff has used it, may not bear much looking into” (p. 55).

Wood tells us that he “came to regret” this last sentence, and in any case, his skepticism in that article did not extend to structural, “social science” history. Wood’s underlying views come out best in a passage in that same article.

> “The historian’s vocation,” writes [Oscar] Handlin, “depends on this minimal article of faith: truth is absolute; it is as absolute as the world is real.” This faith may be philosophically naïve, may even be philosophically absurd in this skeptical and relativist-minded age; nevertheless, it is what makes history writing possible. Historians who cut loose from this faith do so as the peril of their discipline. (p. 60)

Hardly a convincing argument.
However philosophically weak Wood's defense of these “articles of faith” may be, in his own historical writing he firmly adheres to this creed; and he assails ideologists who do not. In doing so, he seems to me to stand on solid ground. To make a case against the ideologists, he does not have to show that the historian can in fact attain objectivity, or even closely approach it. It suffices if we have good reason to think that attempts to yoke the past to present concerns are likely to impede efforts to portray the past as it actually happened. Even if we can’t come close, we may know that certain paths will keep us away and avoid them.

In a review of Richard K. Matthews’s *If Men Were Angels: James Madison and the Heartless Empire of Reason*, Wood shows that Matthews’s anti-capitalist bias distorts his understanding of Madison. Matthews argues that Madison intended to promote a political system in which capitalist owners would dominate the rest of society. Though he admires the brilliance with which Madison constructed his political vision, Matthews finds it alien and inhuman. Wood points out that Matthews reads a modern-day understanding of capitalism into Madison’s thought. Madison was in fact concerned with property owned by landowners, not with entrepreneurs as we know them today.

Madison’s conception of property was not quite the kind of modern bourgeois property that Matthews has in mind. Madison was still thinking of property in premodern, almost classical terms: rentier property, proprietary property, property as a source of authority and independence, not as the source of productivity and capitalistic investment. (p. 153)

In similar fashion, he faults the popular historian Barbara Tuchman for anachronism.

She can never quite accept the fact that the papacy was a secular power in fifteenth-century Italy. The popes’ eagerness to extend their political strength, and their obsession with “conspicuous and useless expenditure . . . for the sake of effect” are to Tuchman sheer madness. She has little appreciation of the papacy’s political role and its fear of dependency in a world of aggressive emerging nation-states. (p. 67)

This is well said; but in the same essay, it is apparent that Wood is quite willing to impose his own views on history, exactly the fault he finds in Tuchman and others. He remarks that
history is a conservative discipline—conservative, of course, not in any contemporary political sense but in the larger sense of inculcating skepticism about people’s ability to manipulate and control purposefully their own destinies. . . . Historical knowledge . . . gives people a perspective on what is possible, and, more often, what is not possible. (pp. 71–72)

How does Wood know this? He might, by examining particular episodes of history, show the limited possibilities that confronted certain persons in the past. But this does not suffice to establish a general law that historical possibilities are always limited. Perhaps the investigation of some new episode will show that in it, the main actors faced a wide range of choices and were able in large part to fulfill their goals as planned. Wood says nothing to rule this out: instead, he presents his own philosophical opinion as if it were a fact derived from the study of history. I venture to suggest that attention to Mises’s discussion of historical laws in Theory and History would have saved him from this error. (Incidentally, Wood refers to Santayana’s famous saying that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it as “fatuous” [p. 71].)

Again, he effectively challenges James MacGregor Burns for assuming that a sufficiently great leader would have been able to solve the sectional and other problems of nineteenth-century America without a civil war:

Over and over Burns reveals his heroic conception of the historical process. . . . After all, says Burns, “a supreme test of leadership” is the leaders’ ability to deal with “the ‘impersonal’ forces streaming around them.” Americans in the antebellum period simply did not produce that kind of leadership. Even Lincoln was “a perplexed and flawed” leader . . . . This is romantic American optimism carried to extremes. Somehow from somewhere some great hero, some Lochinvar, might have ridden in and rescued Americans from their predicament. (p. 38)

Wood rightly argues that Burns cannot without argument simply assume that leadership of this kind was a historical possibility. Once more, though, he goes too far in ruling out from the start a leader capable of averting conflict. Wood says, “Thus for Burns the coming of the Civil War cannot be a true tragedy, the kind of tragedy that sees the inescapable boundaries within which people have to act” (p. 38). Wood has again imported a particular
philosophical vision into history, wrongly presenting it as a given with which “the historian” works.

A similar problem arises in Wood’s discussions of intellectual history. In a review of Garry Wills, *Explaining America: The Federalist*, Wood criticizes Wills’s attempt to show that Francis Hutcheson, not John Locke, lay at the root of Jefferson’s thought. He does so not by arguing that Locke was the stronger influence, in my opinion the correct course. Rather, he contends that the entire controversy rests on a false assumption:

> The kinds of distinctions that Wills and his critics have drawn between Locke’s or Hutcheson’s respective contributions to Anglo-American thought are too precious, too refined, too academic for the dynamic culture of the eighteenth century. Jefferson was scarcely capable of drawing such fine distinctions or of perceiving any antagonism between what Locke and Hutcheson had written. . . . There is no possibility of proving the influence of Locke or Hutcheson on the thought of such a person as Jefferson, even if we find Jefferson quoting one or the other. For the ideas of both Locke and Hutcheson had become so mixed up in the discourse of eighteenth-century culture that by 1776 they could never be separated out and their “influence” measured. (pp. 20–21)

As readers will have anticipated, I think that Wood has once again imposed on history a philosophical view—in this instance, a theory of how intellectual influence works. He might respond that he has not done so: he has rather presented what his own study of Jefferson has revealed about his manner of thought. This cannot be ruled out, though it is curious that Wood ascribes to Jefferson an ability to follow a connected argument inferior to his own.

The issue here is clarified in another essay, a review of Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*. He says, with obvious approval, that Maier “doesn’t bother with hermeneutics or attempt to refute Carl Becker, Morton White, and Garry Wills, the principal scholars who have written about the Declaration in this [i.e., twentieth] century” (p. 162). To do so is unnecessary: these writers were misguided enough to try to trace ideas. Maier knows better. She is “a historian through and through” (p. 162) and knows that the Declaration was a response to local context. Wood, as I expected, does have a view of intellectual history to which he requires the past to conform.
Despite this problem, Wood is a historian of great gifts and readers will gain much from his analysis of particular issues. I shall close with two examples that readers of the Mises Review will appreciate. He notes the radically nationalist aims of Madison at the Constitutional Convention:

Crucial to Madison’s plan was a veto power given to the Congress over all state laws and the proportional representation for each state of its people or its financial contributions or some combination in both houses of Congress. . . . Since states represented as states was what was wrong with the Articles of Confederation, Madison was convinced that retaining any semblance of state sovereignty in the new national government would vitiate it and ultimately destroy it. (p. 298)

Madison in the 1790s reverted to a Jeffersonian position and strongly supported state sovereignty. In warning of a Federalist plot to establish monarchy, Wood tells us in a review of Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, The Age of Federalism, Madison and Jefferson were by no means deluded:

Yet there was truth in the Republican invective, for Hamilton and other Federalist leaders . . . wanted to turn the United States into a fiscal-military power that would rival the great European states and achieve the honor and glory that all such great states aspired to . . . although the Federalists technically did not want to set a king upon an American throne, they were indeed seeking to infuse enough monarchical elements into American life to lend weight to the Republican fears of Federalist monarchism. (pp. 116–117)
Readers of the Mises Review will not be surprised to learn that Folsom considers the New Deal a failure. Nevertheless, even those already familiar with such books as John T. Flynn’s The Roosevelt Myth will find Folsom’s book valuable. Folsom advances new and important arguments.

His anti-New Deal verdict is hard to dispute: levels of unemployment at the end of the 1930s remained at depression levels. In May 1939, Treasury Secretary Henry J. Morgenthau, Jr., one of Franklin Roosevelt’s best friends, testified before the House Ways and Means Committee: “I say after eight years of this Administration we have just as much unemployment as when we started. . . . And an enormous debt to boot” (p. 2). When he spoke, unemployment exceeded 20 percent. Further, and here Folsom has absorbed the pioneering research of Robert Higgs, not even the onset of World War II ended the Depression. True enough, unemployment ended; but this was only because of the draft. Absent this military slavery, there is every reason to think that Roosevelt would have continued to struggle with unemployment.

A diehard defender of Roosevelt might essay two replies to this indictment. He might argue that Roosevelt was insufficiently far-reaching; despite his radical reputation, Roosevelt only reluctantly embraced the Keynesian prescription of increased public spending. Roosevelt did indeed spend a great deal on government programs; but this must be balanced against his tax increases. When the two are taken together, the stimulus that New Deal outlays provided the economy was less than needed to restore prosperity. William Leuchtenburg, one of the most influential historians of the New Deal, favors this approach.

“The havoc that had been done before Roosevelt took office,” Leuchtenburg argues, “was so great that even the unprecedented measures of the New Deal did not suffice to repair the damage.” . . . Some historians say that FDR should have done more deficit spending during the recession of 1937. (p. 12)

Folsom wisely rejects this argument. It rests on a familiar fallacy, classically exposed by Frédéric Bastiat in the 19th century and Henry Hazlitt in the 20th. Spending by the government does not add to employment, since taxes displace private spending and investing. Folsom aptly quotes Hazlitt in this connection:

“Every dollar of government spending must be raised through a dollar of taxation,” Hazlitt emphasized. If the WPA builds a $10 million dollar bridge, for example, “the bridge has to be paid out of taxes. . . . Therefore,” Hazlitt observed, “for every public job created by the bridge project a private job has been destroyed somewhere else. . . . All that has happened, at best, is that there has been a diversion of jobs because of the project.” (p. 84)

Keynesians of course have a response ready. They will say that investors, owing to pessimism about the future, would not have spent on their own the money the government takes in taxes. Instead, they would have hoarded it; had the money remained in private hands, the increase in employment would have been less than what occurred under the beneficent auspices of Washington.

Folsom ably dispatches this Keynesian canard. If businessmen were reluctant to invest, precisely the antibusiness attitude of the Roosevelt administration was in large part responsible. Roosevelt supported confiscatory rates of taxation; small wonder, then, that investors were reluctant to embark on
new projects. They had good reason to think that if they were to be successful, Roosevelt would grab their profits for his own dubious schemes. Polls of businessmen taken in 1939 make evident this reluctance.

In March 1939, for example, AIPO (American Institute of Public Opinion) asked a national sample, “Do you think the attitude of the Roosevelt administration toward business is delaying business recovery?” More than twice as many respondents said “yes” as said “no.” (p. 248)

Unfortunately, there is a gap in Folsom’s case. His argument, as so far presented, is sound; but what if the government simply increases the money supply? In that case, defenders of interventionism will claim, the new jobs created by the government generate a net increase in employment.

To refute this, one needs the Austrian theory of the business cycle. Government spending, if it takes place through the expansion of bank credit, will, if “successful,” result in another artificially created boom. The recovery thus generated will result in the long run in even worse economic distress, once that new boom in turn collapses. Nor can a policy of further monetary expansion indefinitely postpone disaster. Eventually people’s confidence in the monetary system will crumble, and a hyperinflation will result.

Folsom, though not blind to the danger of inflation, ignores Austrian theory. In his own account of the continued severity of the depression that began in 1929, he rightly stresses the malign effects of the Smoot-Hawley tariff. Its extraordinarily high rates greatly restricted trade, not only through restricting imports but also because of retaliatory tariffs imposed by other nations. But he says nothing at all about the Austrian view, i.e., that the expansion of bank credit during the 1920s was the principal cause of the 1929 crash.

Quite the contrary, he follows Milton Friedman and the Chicago School in bemoaning the Federal Reserve’s contraction of the money supply.* He appears not to be aware of the Austrian view. He does not cite Hayek or Mises on the cycle, and he ignores Lionel Robbins’s outstanding The Great Depression. (The fact that Robbins wrongly repudiated his own book should

* It is possible to support the Austrian view of the Depression’s cause while still rejecting the Fed’s monetary policy once the Depression started as overly deflationist, but it is most unlikely that Folsom adopts this approach. For a criticism of Chicago orthodoxy, see Murray Rothbard, America’s Great Depression, and Melchior Palyi, The Twilight of Gold.
not make one reluctant to benefit from its analysis.) He includes only one reference to Rothbard’s *America’s Great Depression*, and this is in connection with Herbert Hoover and the RFC (p. 276, note 18).

But I come not to bury Folsom, but, mostly, to praise him. One of his best insights is that the New Deal programs were financed in large part by the poor. At Roosevelt’s behest, excise taxes were imposed on many popular items of consumption; and these weighed especially heavily on the impoverished. “In the first four years of Roosevelt’s presidency, revenue from excise taxes exceeded that of income and corporate taxes combined” (p. 126). (I do not think it right, though, to call excise taxes “regressive,” as Folsom does. Everyone paid the same rate; the poor were not charged more.)

This was far from the only way in which New Deal programs hurt the poor. Blacks fared very badly under Roosevelt, the supposed great exemplar of enlightened modern liberalism. Minimum-wage laws proved a stumbling block to efforts by blacks to secure jobs. These laws prevented employers from undercutting unions by offering lower wages to nonunion members. Since blacks faced exclusion from many of the powerful unions, they were in effect frozen out. Roosevelt, by the way, allowed unions freely to violate private-property rights: sit-down strikes, i.e., the forcible seizure and occupation of an employer’s property, were for him quite in order. In the famous sit-down strike by Walter Reuther’s United Auto Workers against General Motors, neither “Governor Frank Murphy of Michigan nor President Roosevelt was willing to support evicting the strikers from GM property” (p. 120).

Roosevelt was not much concerned with the effects of his programs on blacks. Indeed, he did little to support civil rights: he would not, e.g., support anti-lynching legislation. To do so might antagonize important Southern congressmen. Despite his seeming indifference to blacks, Roosevelt gained support among many members of the black community, in part owing to carefully calibrated publicity gestures by members of his administration. Nevertheless, several prominent blacks saw through him. Roosevelt snubbed Jesse Owens after the latter’s triumph at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games; and thereafter Owens campaigned against him. Joe Louis sent a telegram of support to Wendell Willkie in the 1940 election: “‘Win by a knockout,’ Louis telegraphed” (p. 210).

Folsom ably addresses an objection to his anti-Roosevelt thesis. If Roosevelt’s policies were such a miserable failure, why was he reelected? In 1936, he won by a landslide over the Republican candidate, Governor Alf Landon
of Kansas. Moreover, not even the most bitter anti-Roosevelt partisan can deny the president’s popularity.

In part, Folsom claims, the answer lies in Roosevelt’s great personal charm. Even opponents, such as the eminent journalist Arthur Krock, found themselves under its sway. Krock once explained to Roosevelt why he no longer attended presidential press conferences. “You charm me so much that when I go back to write a comment on the proceedings, I can’t keep it in balance” (p. 223).

But Folsom has a deeper explanation. Roosevelt manipulated welfare programs, especially jobs under the WPA, to gain votes. WPA officials were quite willing, if need be, to twist arms in order to gain votes for the president and his congressional supporters. More generally, under the expert advice of Emil Hurja, the principal assistant to Postmaster General James Farley, polls were undertaken to indicate where patronage and pork could be used to best advantage.

Folsom here uses to good advantage a long-forgotten book, *Who Were the Eleven Million?* by David Lawrence, the founder and editor of *US News & World Report*. Through a county-by-county analysis of the 1936 election, Lawrence showed that voting for Roosevelt varied directly with the patronage and jobs extended. Sometimes one can trace in detail the way particular acts of political beneficence shifted voters to the Democratic camp. The Republicans were caught in a bind. As the party out of power, they could not match Roosevelt as a dispenser of favors. They could to an extent try the path of virtue, denouncing Roosevelt’s tactics for what they were; but this tactic could not be pushed too far. To do so risked alienating voters who benefited from the government’s largesse. Thus, Landon promised to maintain payments to farmers under the AAA, fatally compromising his denunciation of Roosevelt for political manipulation of welfare.

Folsom places great emphasis on Roosevelt’s character, and the president comes off very poorly indeed. Politicians are hardly noted for honesty, but even judged by the low standards of the breed, Roosevelt was mendacious. In a speech in the 1920 election, when he ran for vice president on the Democratic ticket, Roosevelt falsely claimed to have drafted the constitution of Haiti. When challenged, he denied ever making the statement, though numerous witnesses attested that he had done so. Folsom might also have mentioned the charges of dubious dealings leveled against Roosevelt’s Warm Springs Foundation for polio victims. (Folsom does mention this project but says little about it.)
The president did not grow more honest with age. Though he had promised to stay neutral in the fight between Alben Barkley and Pat Harrison for Senate majority leader, he came down decisively for Barkley, who won the vote, 38-37. As a result, he converted the popular Harrison from a strong New Dealer to an opponent.

Roosevelt also had an unslakeable thirst for power. Though the 1936 elections gave the Democrats overwhelming control of Congress, this was not enough for Roosevelt. He sought to purge those who were not fully behind his program. In particular, he could not forgive those who dared to oppose his unsuccessful proposal to pack the Supreme Court. He opposed long-serving and influential Democratic congressmen, favoring instead more pliant newcomers. (One favorite was Lyndon Johnson, whose later efforts to bring the New Deal to South Vietnam were not altogether a success.) In most cases, Roosevelt’s efforts proved unavailing. The once-dominant Roosevelt, despite his undoubted political gifts, found himself in a much weaker political position at the end of the 1930s than he had been in 1936. Roosevelt had overreached.

Roosevelt’s quest for power and disdain for criticism had a sinister side. He used government agencies, especially the FBI and IRS, to harass his political opponents. Thus, at the president’s instigation, a case of tax evasion against former Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon was pursued, though known to be without basis by Elmer Irey, the head of the special intelligence unit of the IRS. Robert Jackson, who ordered the prosecution of Mellon, was later elevated to the Supreme Court. Mellon was eventually vindicated. As soon as Jesse Owens and Joe Louis criticized Roosevelt, IRS investigations of them commenced. Readers of this well-documented book will view Roosevelt with distaste.

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* I cannot resist the story of Barkley’s death. In a speech in 1956, he said, “I would rather be a servant in the House of the Lord than to sit in the seats of the mighty” and moments later dropped dead from a heart attack.

† There appears to be a mishap in the text at p. 306, note 38. Folsom refers to a letter from Arthur Sears Henning to Herbert Hoover, apparently on the court-packing plan, and thanks Gary Dean Best for calling this letter to his attention; but the letter is not mentioned in the accompanying text.
Andrew Bacevich has written a powerful but flawed criticism of American foreign policy. Both an academic historian and a professional soldier, he is exceptionally qualified to undertake such a critique.

He begins his indictment from an indisputable fact. America has commitments all over the world, but we proved unable to defend ourselves against the assault of 9/11. By allowing empire to trump defense, what Bacevich calls the “national security state” failed miserably.

A political elite preoccupied with the governance of empire paid little attention to protecting the United States itself. In practical terms, prior to 9/11 the mission of homeland defense was unassigned. The institution nominally referred to as the Department of Defense didn’t actually do defense; it specialized in power projection. (p. 5)

Bacevich contends that this failing reflects not merely the defects of the Bush administration, though he addresses these in detail, but the whole course of long-established American foreign policy.

Four core conditions inform this ideology of national security... [1] history has an identifiable and indisputable purpose... [2] the United States has always embodied, and continues to embody, freedom... [3] Providence summons America to ensure freedom’s ultimate triumph... [4] for the American way of life to endure, freedom must prevail everywhere. (pp. 74–75)

The key idea, the core of the core, is in my view collective security, i.e., the contention that any threat around the world to “freedom” threatens America’s security. Traditional American foreign policy, exemplified in Washington’s Farewell Address, rejected this position. America, favored by its geographical position, could avoid involvement in European power politics.* In the twentieth century, Charles Beard ably challenged the basis of the collective-security doctrine in American Foreign Policy in the Making, 1932–1940 and other books. (Bacevich does not discuss Beard in the present book, but he has written about him sympathetically in his American Empire.)

Bacevich unfortunately disagrees: he thinks that America has always aimed at empire. The Farewell Address merely reflected America’s temporarily weak position: “George Washington had dreamed of the day when the United States might acquire the strength sufficient ‘to give it, humanly speaking, the command of its own fortunes’” (p. 28). No doubt Washington did hope for enhanced American power, but it hardly follows from this that insulation from European struggles was intended as a temporary expedient. In suggesting otherwise, Bacevich unwisely follows the interpretation of the warhawk Robert Kagan.† (Bacevich never refers to Kagan’s book, and he elsewhere sharply criticizes his views on Iraq; but his unusual interpretation of the Farewell Address is identical with Kagan’s.) Like Kagan, he confuses continental expansion with empire and great power politics. In what way does the former imply the key doctrine of collective security?

What is wrong with the foreign policy of the national security state? Bacevich argues that, far from promoting America’s safety, the policy embroils us in

* For an excellent defense of the continued relevance of the traditional policy of nonintervention, see Eric Nordlinger, Isolationism Reconfigured and my review found in Volume 3, “Foreign Policy.”

dangerous disputes that weaken us. America’s military presence in the Persian Gulf is a prime example:

Far more than any of his predecessors, Reagan led the United States down the road to Persian Gulf perdition. History will hold George W. Bush primarily responsible for the disastrous Iraq War of 2003. But if that war had a godfather, it was Ronald Reagan . . . [whose] real achievement in the Persian Gulf was to make a down payment on an enterprise destined to consume tens of thousands of lives, many American, many others not, along with hundreds of billions of dollars—to date, at least, the ultimate expression of American profligacy. (pp. 49, 52)

Though Bacevich is a political conservative, it is apparent that he holds Reagan, usually viewed as a paragon of the Right, in contempt. He denies that Reagan was a genuine conservative. He promised to curtail government but instead expanded it:

during the Carter years, the federal deficit had averaged $54.5 billion annually. During the Reagan era, deficits skyrocketed, averaging $210.6 billion over the course of Reagan’s two terms in office. Overall federal spending nearly doubled, from $590.9 billion in 1980 to $1.14 trillion in 1989. The federal government did not shrink. It grew, the bureaucracy swelling by nearly 5 percent while Reagan occupied the White House. (p. 39)

Carter, though normally considered far to the left of Reagan, was substantially less a spendthrift.

Bacevich’s revisionism on Reagan is useful, but behind it lies a dubious thesis on which the author insists. Given the bad consequences of unlimited intervention and empire, why have American policymakers adopted this policy? Americans, it seems, demand more and more material goods. These goods cannot be secured without access to energy, in particular to oil. America’s aggressive policy in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere is ultimately motivated by our refusal to restrict consumption:

The first protracted economic downturn since World War II [in the 1970s] confronted Americans with a fundamental choice. They could curb their appetites and learn to live within their
means or deploy dwindling reserves of US power in hopes of obliging others to accommodate their penchant for conspicuous consumption. (p. 30)

Bacevich may deplore “conspicuous consumption,” but his Veblenesque theory does not account for our bellicose foreign policy. If the American economy requires oil, there is no need to use military measures to secure it. Countries with oil have every incentive to trade with us. Hostile countries are no exception. Ivan Eland has pointed out that even if Saddam Hussein had taken over the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia,

his control over a greater market share of world-wide oil production and reserves would have allowed him to drive oil prices higher by cutting production somewhat. Yet, according to [economist David] Henderson, those price increases would have amounted to less than one-half of 1 percent of US Gross National Product (Ivan Eland, *The Emperor Has No Clothes* [Independent Institute 2004, p. 249])

The American foreign-policy elite has indeed sought control of foreign resources, but this reflects its own quest for power and profit rather than an attempt to fulfill the demands of the rapacious consumer. As Bacevich himself emphasizes, the controllers of foreign policy disdain public opinion:

From time to time, however, the mask slips and it becomes apparent that those on the inside don’t care a fig for what members of the great unwashed might think. “If you truly had a democracy and did what the people wanted,” Secretary of State Dean Acheson once remarked in passing, “you’d go wrong every time.” In addition to expressing his own personal view, Acheson’s statement neatly summarized one of the fundamental assumptions on which the national security elite bases its claim of authority: Public opinion is suspect; when it comes to national security, the public’s anointed role is to defer. (p. 103)

Bacevich displays appropriate severity toward the pretensions of the security elite; but at times, he is regrettably ambivalent. He looks with nostalgia on the “cadre of distinguished citizens rotated to Washington (more often than not from Wall Street) to occupy senior positions in the Roosevelt administration” (p. 104).
Most notable among these was Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson.

Adherents of the Stimson tradition saw themselves as servants of the state. . . . Their aim was to preserve the United States rather than to tamper with the social or economic arrangements defining the American way of life. In the circumstances that existed in the 1940s, preserving the nation meant strengthening it—establishing beyond question America’s place in the front rank of great powers. To a remarkable extent, Stimson and others like him succeeded in achieving their goal. (p. 104)

This praise for Stimson goes altogether too far. During his tenure as secretary of state in the Hoover administration, Stimson pursued a hostile policy toward Japan that helped drive that country into the arms of the Axis. His policy contrasted sharply with that of peace-loving President Hoover. Further, Stimson supported dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, albeit with some misgivings.

Bacevich contrasts Stimson and his cohorts with a more fanatical group that supplanted them. Among the latter were James Forrestal and Paul Nitze. Forrestal in particular arouses our author to fury, and about him he writes the following, which I commend to all lovers of invective:

Forrestal’s personal life was a shambles: His wife was a floozy and a drunk; he was himself a hard drinker, an inattentive father, and a compulsive womanizer. He was ambitious, erratic, insecure, combative, and resentful. (p. 105)*

I fear that I must take issue with Bacevich on one more point. Throughout the book, he continually appeals to the wisdom and far-sighted realism of Reinhold Niebuhr.

As pastor, teacher, activist, theologian, and prolific author, Niebuhr was a towering presence in American intellectual life from the 1930s throughout the 1960s. Even today, he deserves recognition as the most clear-eyed of American prophets. (p. 6)

* For a more sympathetic look at Forrestal, see Cornell Simpson [Medford Evans], The Death of James Forrestal (Western Islands, 1966).
Niebuhr was a leading theologian; his magnum opus, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, merits careful study. But he was a committed opponent of 1930s noninterventionism and a firm supporter of the Cold War as well. In ethics, he disdained absolute prohibitions. The prudent statesman must take account of the “impossible possibilities” of the Gospels but could be guided neither by them nor by natural law precepts. Accordingly, Niebuhr refused to condemn saturation bombing of civilians during World War II. Readers may find it useful to compare Bacevich’s enthusiasm for Niebuhr with the remarks on him in Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom*.

But I shall not end on a negative note. Bacevich concludes with several suggestions for changes in American foreign policy, and among these is one that is especially excellent:

For the United States, abolishing nuclear weapons ought to be an urgent national security priority. . . . Nuclear weapons are unusable. . . . Furthermore, the day is approaching when the United States will be able to deter other nuclear-armed states, like Russia and China, without relying on nuclear weapons. Modern conventional weapons possess the potential to provide a more effective foundation for deterrence. (pp. 178–179)
The Atomic Presidency

December 1, 2009, Mises Review

I did not anticipate writing a favorable review of a book by Garry Wills. He veered fairly early in his career from a quirky form of conservatism to a run-of-the-mill leftism. In his *A Necessary Evil*, he assailed the view that government is inherently bad: society, he hastened to assure us, could not function without the State. Only fanatics would fail to realize that the capitalist market depends for its existence on this vital institution. And the American State must not be hobbled by antiquated notions of federalism. After all, he averred, the federal government created the states, not the other way round.†

Wills’s previous espousal of topsy-turvy history did not inspire confidence in his new venture; but he has in this instance written an excellent book.

In a few details, Wills still manifests his anti-market prejudices. Thus he writes,

The [Second World War] revealed what might be called “the dirty little secret” of American capitalism. The myth of capitalism is

† See my review found in Volume 3, “American History.”
that the free market is the most efficient economic system. But it is not. Governmentally sponsored and regulated production is far more efficient. It was the war, not the New Deal, that finally reversed the Great Depression. (p. 9)

Wills badly needs a remedial course in the work of Robert Higgs, beginning with *Depression, War, and Cold War*.

But in *Bomb Power*, Wills comes not to celebrate the American State, but to challenge it, at least in one crucial respect. He contends that the president has usurped power properly belonging to Congress, in large part because of the executive’s sole discretion over the use of atomic weapons. How can one speak of Congress as having war-making authority, if the president controls the nuclear “football”?

The power of nuclear control does not stand by itself. Rather, it forms the core of a secret “national-security state” largely immune from congressional control. Despite the clear words of the Constitution, the CIA and other parts of the national-security state keep their activities secret from Congress. More generally, presidents use executive orders to enact legislation; and, since Ronald Reagan, matters have gotten worse. The presidents claim by “signing statements” to set aside legislation they do not like.

Wills calls attention to a striking fact that illustrates how far we have strayed from the traditional understanding of the Constitution. It is quite common nowadays to call the president our commander-in-chief, but, contrary to the claims of Dick Cheney and other partisans of executive dictatorship, this title gives him no power over civilians. Rather, it gives the president control over the military, though it confers no military rank on him.

The President has no power, as Commander-in-Chief, over any civilian. Yet so common is the assumption that he does that when I [Wills] wrote an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* saying that the President is not my Commander-in-Chief, I received abusive mail saying I was clearly not a citizen of the United States and I should leave the country. Loyalty to the Commander-in-Chief is now equated with loyalty to the country, though it is clearly a form of disloyalty to the Constitution. (pp. 47–48)

Why do people think of the president as everyone’s commander-in-chief? Wills traces the misapprehension to the development of the atomic bomb
during World War II. The extreme secrecy of the project led to what was in effect an independent government, immune from the oversight of Congress. The director of the project, General Leslie Groves, who formed an unexpected partnership with the left-wing physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, played a crucial role in this process:

One man had to be given extraordinary powers, outside the normal systems, to bring off the creation and delivery of the bombs. . . . Groves had a free hand in the actual creation and practical delivery of them . . . he was so much outside the rules that the official army report on the air war cannot trace a clear line of responsibility for the nuclear bombing of the Japanese cities. Groves, the key figure, was outside the military chain of command. (p. 45)

The end of the war of course did not terminate this secret system. Quite the contrary, the onset of the Cold War intensified the creation of agencies independent of Congress and public scrutiny.

The National Security State was formed in and by the Cold War. It was modeled on entities from World War II. . . . It was continued and intensified during the war on terror, with even greater secrecy, executive unaccountability, and projects like torture and extraordinary rendition. The whole structure is outside the Constitution. (p. 98)

As a result of the president’s control of nuclear weapons and the secret agencies established in the era of the bomb, Congress has lost its constitutional authority to declare war. In one of the best passages in the book, Wills demolishes John Yoo’s efforts to obfuscate the plain meaning of the Constitution.

John Yoo, the lawyer Cheney was relying on to uphold his constitutional oddities, had to deal with Congress’s constitutional rights to declare war. . . . He did this with a flimsy philosophical fantasy. He said that in the eighteenth century, “declare” did not mean “initiate” or “authorize” . . . [according to Yoo] all that Congress can do with regard to war [is to] publish the fact that it is occurring, once the President has initiated
It takes a fierce determination to ignore the obvious source and sense of the phrase “declare war” to play these word games with it. (pp. 194–195)

In his defense of Congress’s constitutional prerogative, Wills makes a most valuable point. The War Powers Resolution of 1973, which requires the president to submit his military initiatives to congressional approval, should not be deemed a check to presidential usurpation. Far from it: the resolution in fact cedes to the president powers the Constitution does not authorize him to have.

The WPR institutionalized a joint authority that is denied in the Constitution. . . . “War power” is not a term that occurs in the Constitution, much less “war powers,” as something to be divided between the President and Congress. (p. 195)

But this is not the worst of it. Since the time of Ronald Reagan, the president has claimed the right to set aside duly enacted laws by “signing statements.” The Constitution gives the president the power to veto laws; but he is not granted the power to sign a law, accompanied by a statement of his intention to act as he pleases. “Looked at from any angle, the signing statements clearly go against the Constitution’s structure, in which the legislature makes law and the President executes it” (p. 221).

Wills has built a formidable case that recent presidents have arrogated to themselves vast powers not contemplated by the Constitution. He is less successful in showing that this aggrandizement has come about principally because of nuclear weapons and their attendant secrecy. No doubt the bomb has enhanced the power of the president; but Will’s inordinate stress on this factor leads him to underestimate the continuity between presidents who held office before the atomic era and those after it.

Thus, he downplays Lincoln’s manifestly illegal conduct during the Civil War. True enough, Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus when the Constitution gave him no power to do so; but he acted, Wills tells us, with great circumspection:

Recent Presidents have defended their own runaway practice of issuing executive orders by using Lincoln as a precedent. His situation was unique—our only great national insurrection—and he was careful in limiting his actions to partial martial law. (p. 132)
Again, Wills mentions that Franklin Roosevelt interned Japanese American citizens by executive order; but this too he brushes off as minor by comparison with what has happened since 1945. But the post-nuclear-era presidents declare, exactly as Lincoln and Roosevelt did, that in a time of emergency they must act to save the nation.

Further, although Roosevelt, in contrast to his successor Truman, did seek a declaration of war from Congress, he acted in the period preceding Pearl Harbor in a way designed to provoke a Japanese attack.* Given the president’s provocative diplomacy, the declaration of war was a mere formality. And such conduct did not begin with Roosevelt; James Polk showed long before him that a president determined on war is not without resources to secure his goal. Once more, the onset of the atomic bomb marked no sharp break in the history of presidential aggrandizement of power.

One might raise another objection to Wills; but here I think that he has the resources to overcome it. Suppose that the president were restored to his proper constitutional role and that his usurpations of power came to an end. Congress would have the exclusive power to declare war and its laws would not be set aside by signing statements. We would then be in the hands of Congress; but would we be better off? Can there not be congressional dictatorship as well as the presidential kind?

The constitutional arrangement is far from perfect. But, at least if its provisions are obeyed, there is a barrier imposed on arbitrary and secret rule by one person. And dictatorship by a congressional bloc, one may hope, is hard to establish. To expect more than this from a governmental charter of power would be foolish.

The contributors to Donald Livingston’s valuable collection of essays defend two main contentions. Each of these contentions may be held independently of the other, but the first one provides a reason to welcome the truth of the second.

Livingston, with characteristic care, states the first of these contentions in this way:

As Aristotle taught, everything in nature has a proper size, beyond or below which it becomes dysfunctional. . . . The same holds for the functioning of other social entities [than a jury] such as committees, lawmaking assemblies, and bureaucracies and the ratio of population to representative (e.g., one representative for every million persons is not representation at all). None of these can function well if they are too large or out of scale (pp. 16–17).

Livingston concludes that a republic must be of limited size. His argument, if I have grasped it, is this: A republic must have a representative legislative
assembly. In order to count properly as representative, the number of persons that each member of the assembly represents must not be too large. But it is also the case that the number of people in the assembly itself cannot be overly large, for the reason stated in the preceding paragraph. In a large republic, these requirements cannot at the same time be met. Thus, the proper size of a republic is necessarily limited.

Livingston adds to this argument an appeal to tradition:

Any thinking about the proper size and scale of republican order must take its bearings from the republican tradition that stretches back to the ancient Greeks. When we do so, we must be astonished to find that for over two thousand years, republics seldom went beyond a population of 200,000 people, and most were considerably smaller. (p. 126)

What is more, “the republican tradition also taught that the government of a large territory would necessarily end in a centralized monarchy” (p. 25).

Kirkpatrick Sale likewise appeals to Aristotle, who “thought mostly in terms of cities, not knowing nations, but even if we may extend these units with the experience of 2,000 more years to larger units such as nations, they have to be limited: limited by human nature and human experience” (p. 168).

Current experience confirms that Aristotle was right.

We have abundant evidence that a state as large as 305 million people is ungovernable. Did not Katrina and the BP oil disaster prove that, or runaway health care costs and broken borders, or the failure of education . . . ? (p. 168)

Before we ask whether the argument about the size of a republic is right, another issue requires attention. Even if the argument of Livingston and Sale is correct on its own terms, have they wrongly presupposed a premise that should be challenged, if not rejected altogether? They ask, what are the conditions under which a republic can flourish; but what if one denies the need for a state at all, even though it be a properly functioning republic?

Though the case against the state seems to me entirely persuasive, anarchists should not dismiss the question of size that Livingston and his colleagues raise. If ideally we ought to do away with the state altogether, nevertheless we need also to ask, given the existing world of nation states, how
may the power of the state to do damage be limited to the greatest extent that is in practice possible?

Further, anarchists need to consider an analogous issue to the one raised in this book. What is the proper size of an anarchist protection agency? Do too many clients for a single agency pose problems similar to the ones created by too many constituents for a member of a legislature?

Granted that the question of the proper size of a republic is legitimate, even for anarchists, do the authors of this book respond to it correctly? Their case for small size strikes me as largely persuasive: tyrannical power has indeed often been conjoined with great size. But not always: Cambodia comes to mind as the most striking exception—a very small state whose Communist rulers were guilty of monstrous evil.

Further, an objector might say, perhaps the authors have focused on the wrong issue. Is not the scope of the government more important than its size? Would not a government strictly limited in scope that controlled a large territory be better than an intrusive and meddling state of small size? But the authors might with justice reply that limiting the size of a nation is often an indispensable means to ensuring that the scope of its government is small.

Before turning from this topic, I should like to raise one more point. Suppose the authors are correct: the proper size of a republic is small, and too large a state requires the abandonment of republican government and risks the onset of tyranny. Does it follow from these facts that for any state larger than the proper size, a reduction in size that falls short of the ideal always constitutes an improvement? I cannot see that it does, although it may well in practice be true that such reductions are almost always desirable.

If the authors’ case has merit, does not a practical difficulty render what they have defended with such care inoperable in our own world? In a world of colossal states, how can a small republic hope to survive? Livingston ably faces the problem, noting in the first place that small states do not always lose conflicts with larger ones, and in any case pointing to federation as one possible solution. Here he appeals to David Hume, who “agrees with the republican tradition that ‘a small commonwealth is the happiest government in the world within itself’ but ‘it may be subdued by great force from without’” (p. 143).*

* Livingston is a distinguished authority on Hume.
Hume proposed a large republic composed of 100 small republics. Laws passed by the national senate required ratification by a majority of the constituent republics. In essence, Hume thought, the advantages of small size could in this way be joined to the greater fighting power of a large state.

Hume’s ideas, along with similar views by other writers, influenced the founders of the American republic; and here we arrive at the second of the two major contentions of this book. It is that America was founded not as a centralized Leviathan but as a federation of republics, each of which retains intact its sovereign power, except on matters delegated to the national government. Each state, on this view, retains the right to leave the federation, should it deem that the national government (or the other states) has sufficiently violated its rights. The 11 Southern states that seceded in 1861 thus acted legally, whether or not they were wise to do so.

Kent Masterton Brown, in his long and learned contribution to the book, very forcefully defends this position. As he points out,

The Constitution is an agreement “between the States so ratifying the same” [quoting the Constitution]. It has parties—the States. Each of the parties agreed to surrender some powers in exchange for receiving a “common defense” and some regulation of commerce between the States when it was necessary. . . . Each party retains the right to rescind its ratification of the Constitution if there is a material breach by other States or by the federal government created by the Constitution. . . . The framers and ratifiers of the Constitution unquestionably understood it to be a “compact.” Not only did the document, in form, contain all the elements of a contract, but the prevailing political thought of revolutionary America underscored the fact that written constitutions were “compacts.” (pp. 42–43)

Though Brown’s argument is strong, I should like to have seen a response to an objection. If states could withdraw at will from the union, why did the anti-Federalists so much stress in the ratification debates the dangers of centralization? If a ready remedy existed for federal usurpation of power, why was such usurpation so perilous a prospect? Perhaps, though, they did not doubt the legal possibility of secession but rather feared that in practice it would prove difficult to carry out with success—as indeed proved to be the case in 1861.
If the Constitution established the United States as a decentralized federation, unfortunately federal aggrandizement of power in the long run prevailed. In an incisive essay, Thomas DiLorenzo explores the steps by which the old order was upset. As he makes clear, from the beginning of our national history, Alexander Hamilton, whom Cecelia Kenyon aptly termed the “Rousseau of the Right” (p. 72), and his followers, dissatisfied with the decentralized government of the Constitution, endeavored to substitute for it a regime of centralized power. In this endeavor, Hamilton had the very considerable help of Chief Justice John Marshall, whose nationalist opinions often echoed Hamilton’s words.

Marshall also repeated Hamilton’s bogus theory of the American founding, claiming that the “nation” somehow created the states. He amazingly argued that the federal government was somehow created by “the whole people.” . . . In the name of “the people,” Marshall said, the federal government claimed the right to “legitimately control all individuals or governments within the American territory.” (p. 70)

Readers of DiLorenzo’s outstanding books on Lincoln will not be surprised to learn that he assigns Lincoln a large measure of responsibility in the drive toward national consolidation.* Marshall DeRosa is entirely in accord:

Lincoln rhetorically explained [at Gettysburg] that he launched the US into a war of aggression against the CSA in order to refound America without the Southern defilement; this is what he meant by a “new birth of freedom.” The physical evidence lay all around him in Gettysburg that Southerners were not to have a government of, by, and for the Southern people but a coercive government based in Washington, DC. (p. 94)

For the contributors to this book, secession is not an issue confined to the past. They regard it as an essential remedy for the ills of today’s overly large America. In this connection it is interesting to note that secession had the backing of the renowned American diplomat and historian George Kennan, who, in a manner that would have delighted Thomas Jefferson, called for America to be broken up into a number of regional commonwealths.

* See, for example, his The Real Lincoln (2002) and Lincoln Unmasked (2006).
“To begin the debate, and without being dogmatic, Kennan suggests that the Union could be divided into ‘a dozen constituent republics’” (pp. 21–22).

Rethinking the American Union for the Twenty-First Century repays careful study by anyone interested in political philosophy or in American history. In their bold defiance of contemporary orthodoxy, the contributors deserve great praise.
“Is Secession a Right?”

DAVID GORDON

December 5, 2012, Mises Daily

GRANT DEFEATED LEE, the Confederacy crumbled, and the idea of secession disappeared forever, or at least that’s what the conventional wisdom says. Secession is no historical irrelevance. Quite the contrary, the topic is integral to classical liberalism. Indeed, the right of secession follows at once from the basic rights defended by classical liberalism. As even Macaulay’s schoolboy knows, classical liberalism begins with the principle of self-ownership: each person is the rightful owner of his or her own body. Together with this right, according to classical liberals from Locke to Rothbard, goes the right to appropriate unowned property.

In this view, government occupies a strictly ancillary role. It exists to protect the rights that individuals possess independently—it is not the source of these rights. As the Declaration of Independence puts it, “to secure these rights [life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness], governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from consent of the governed.”

But what has all this to do with secession? The connection, I suggest, is obvious: if government does not protect the rights of individuals, then individuals may end their allegiance to it. And one form this renunciation may take is secession—a group may renounce its allegiance to its government and form a new government. (It is not, of course, the only form. A group can overthrow its government altogether, rather than merely abjure its authority over them.)

The Declaration of Independence adopts just this position: whenever a government “becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it.” But the American colonists did not attempt to abolish
the British government; rather, they “altered” it by withdrawal of the colonies from its authority. In brief, they seceded from Britain. As such, the right of secession lies at the heart of our country’s legitimacy. Deny it, and you must reject the American founding.

One might here interpose an objection. Regardless of one’s opinion of Jefferson and the Continental Congress, is it not consistent to accept natural rights, as conceived of by classical liberals, but refuse to recognize a right of secession? On this position, individuals have natural rights, but once they choose a government they are stuck with it. In response to this objection, we must distinguish two cases.

First, the position might hold that even if the government violates the rights it was established to secure, its subjects may not depart from it. But this is a strange contention: government exists for certain purposes, but it may continue unabated even if it acts against these very aims.

To this, it might be replied that to protect individual rights, resort may be had to means other than secession. One must concede to this view that alternatives to secession do indeed diminish the force of the imperative in its favor. After all, if a state may interpose its authority to block an enactment of the federal government within its borders, why must it also be accorded the right to leave altogether?

This view, I think, is logically consistent, but it has little to recommend it. Why should people give up this very potent means of keeping their government in check? To do so leaves their natural rights, if recognized in theory, nugatory in practice. At the very least we may say this: those who deny the right of secession have the burden of advancing a rationale for their view. Why should supporters of natural rights reject the right of secession?

Opponents of secession may, however, take a less extreme position. They may concede that secession is to be allowed should the government violate individual rights, but not otherwise. A group may not renounce duly-constituted authority just because it would rather be governed by others. Does not the Declaration itself say that governments should not be changed for “Light and transient causes”?

This position no doubt is stronger than the utter repudiation of secession, but we must once more inquire: What is its justification? Prima facie, it appears that to hold that a group may remove itself from a government’s authority whenever it pleases is more in line with classical liberalism’s purely functional view of government. To deny this insinuates that the state is
something other than a tool to secure rights. Just as an individual need not retain the services of a business, but may change to another, why may not a group switch protective agencies?

Further, the Declaration of Independence need not be read to endorse only a limited right of secession. The passage that refers to light and transient causes forms part of a discussion of when change of government is prudent, but the issue that concerns us here is not prudence, but rights. Many exercises of one’s rights are imprudent—I may have the “right” to walk into oncoming traffic, if the signal is in my favor—but I have these rights regardless. Thus, a group may secede imprudently, but act within its rights. Once more: If not, why not?

The argument may proceed one more step. Suppose a group wishing to secede is guilty of violating individual rights. Does it still have the right to secede? I do not see why not. Of course, it should not violate individual rights, but why should the fact that the group does so compel it to submit to a government it no longer wishes to obey?

Allen Buchanan, whose *Secession* is the most influential discussion of our topic in contemporary American philosophy, rejects the legitimacy of Southern secession in 1861 on the grounds just suggested.* Since slavery violated rights, no slaveholding state had the right to leave the Union. But why does this follow? (Incidentally, Buchanan holds that Southern secession, absent slavery, *would* have been justifiable.) Clearly, Buchanan’s discussion of the Southern case would have gained from close attention to the contemporary arguments of the Southern secessionists.

We may distinguish an even more difficult case. Suppose that a group which violates individual rights secedes. May the government formerly in authority interfere only to the extent necessary to secure the rights of those put at risk by the secession?

Even here, we need to sound a note of caution. The attempt to resist secession may itself lead to rights violations, and the benefits of intervention need to be weighed carefully against its costs. Even if one agrees with Locke that there is a general right to enforce the law of nature, this generates no duty to do so.

Robert Barro, a distinguished economist associated with the “rational expectations” movement, has addressed this issue with insight. Of course,

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during the Civil War, Lincoln’s government did not act only to secure the rights of the enslaved. But suppose that it had. Would it have been justified in using force to resist secession?

Not, Barro suggests, given the cost of doing so:

The US Civil War, by far the most costly conflict ever for the United States . . . caused over 600,000 military fatalities and an unknown number of civilian deaths, and it severely damaged the southern economy. Per capita income went from about 80 percent of the northern level before the war . . . to about 40 percent after the war . . . . It took more than a century after the war’s end in 1865 for southern per capita income to re-attain 80 percent of the northern level.*

But, it may be replied, this quotation from Barro does not address the point at issue. No one denies the costs of the Civil War, but our question concerns justification: Does one have the right to interfere with a secessionist group that violates rights?

Yet surely the point raised by Barro is relevant. The costs of an action cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to morality. This is all the more true if one takes account of another issue that Barro raises. The claim, once more, is that the Civil War illustrates (or rather, would illustrate, had it been conducted differently) the thesis that secession may be blocked to protect individual rights.

Barro here makes a typical economist’s point. The goal of defending individual rights could likely have been secured through less costly means.

Everyone would have been better off if the elimination of slavery had been accomplished by buying off the slave owners—as the British did with the West Indian slaves during the 1830s—instead of fighting the war.†

And what if this proposal is dismissed as unrealistic? What would have happened to slavery had the Southern states been allowed peacefully to secede? Barro suggests that slavery would soon have come to an end anyway.

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† Ibid., p. 28.
Here a more detailed discussion by historian Jeffrey Hummel lends support to Barro's view:

No abolition was completely peaceful, but the United States and Haiti are just two among twenty-odd slave societies where violence predominated. The fact that emancipation overwhelmed such entrenched plantation economies as Cuba and Brazil suggests that slavery was politically moribund anyway. . . . Historical speculations about an independent Confederacy halting or reversing this overwhelming momentum are hard to credit.*

But have we not addressed our question on too narrow a front? However ill-advised Northern policy was during the Civil War, this does not suffice to show that any resistance to secession that aims to defend individual rights is without justification. Here, for once, I grant the objection, but those who wish to restrict secession in cases of this kind need to show how their preferred interventions may avoid the costs that our example illustrates.

At one point, I fear, this analysis of secession lies open to misunderstanding. Secession arises from individual rights: I have not attempted to defend it as a group right unreducible to individual rights. Thus, it by no means follows that the majority of those living in a territory can compel these residents to secede who do not wish to do so. The question is not one of majorities or minorities but of individuals. As such, the argument offered here in no way depends on “democratic” assumptions.

The issue has been addressed with unsurpassed clarity by one of the foremost of all classical liberals, Ludwig von Mises.

The right of self-determination . . . thus means: whenever the inhabitants of a particular territory, whether it be a single village, a whole district, or a series of adjacent districts, make it known, by a freely conducted plebiscite, they no longer wish to remain united to the state to which they belong at the time . . . their wishes are to be respected and complied with.†


Mises emphasizes that this right

extends to the inhabitants of every territory large enough to form an independent administrative unit. If it were in any way possible to grant this right of self-determination to every individual person, it would have to be done.*

Once one has grasped Mises’s point, the fallacy in an often-heard argument is apparent. Some have held that the Southern states acted “undemocratically” in refusing to accept the results of the election of 1860. Lincoln, after all, received a plurality of the country’s popular vote.

To a Misesian, the answer is obvious: so what? A majority (much less a plurality) has no right to coerce dissenters. Further, the argument fails on its own terms. It was not undemocratic to secede. The Southern states did not deny that Lincoln was in fact the rightfully elected president. Rather, they wanted out just because he was. Democracy would oblige them only to acknowledge Lincoln’s authority had they chosen to remain in the Union.

But a problem now arises. I have endeavored to defend secession from an individual-rights standpoint. Notoriously, Mises did not acknowledge natural rights. I fear that, like Jeremy Bentham, he regarded declarations of rights as “nonsense on stilts.” Why, then, did Mises accept self-determination?

Mises’s reasoning is characteristically incisive. If people are compelled to remain under a government they do not choose, then strife is the likely outcome. Recognition of the right to secede “is the only feasible and effective way of preventing revolutions and civil and international wars.”† Mises’s argument does not rest on natural rights, but it is of course consistent with the approach I have sketched out. Regardless of one’s moral theory, it is surely a strong point in favor of a view that it has beneficial consequences.

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† Ibid., p. 109.
European History
LIKE MARTHA NUSSBAUM, *Cultivating Humanity* (Harvard University Press, 1997), John M. Ellis is concerned with multiculturalism. His excellent book, taken together with her less than excellent one, enables readers to gain a firm grasp on the new style of education.

A common argument for multiculturalism proceeds in this way. The humanities have been for too long cramped by a narrow canon of acceptable works. Multiculturalism does not debase education; it expands the humanities by exposing students to new perspectives.

Ellis, a distinguished scholar of German literature and the author of the best analysis of deconstruction, quickly locates the flaw in this argument. (His earlier volume is called *Against Deconstruction*—see whether you can guess his view of that movement.) Race-gender-class scholars do indeed consider works not previously studied in humanities departments. But they do not analyze these works in order to extend their knowledge. Quite the contrary, they impose on all works a distinctive set of political concerns. All literary works wind up conveying the same banal message, and students’ literary sensibilities become coarsened.

The context of race-gender-class critics

is merely a different context, wider, to be sure, in the sense that it encompasses more phenomena than literature, but also narrower,
in that it addresses nothing but a single strand that runs intermittently through that widened body of phenomena. In the relevant sense, then, this context is narrower, not wider. (p. 43)

And not only is the context narrower, literary works that fall within its purview are analyzed according to a bizarre system that our author amusingly terms PC logic. This sophistical system has two main components. Following Michael Foucault, PC theorists hold that “covert relations of power are the driving force in human situations” (p. 161). Nothing else matters. Against this, Ellis makes a commonsense point that unfortunately seems far beyond our “advanced thinkers”; power is of value not for itself, but for what its wielders accomplish with it. “Power is a means, not an end, and it should have no independent context as an idea” (p. 163).

How can the race-gender-class brigade avoid recognition of so obvious a truth? They do so, Ellis maintains, by a peculiar mode of “reasoning.” This breaks down distinctions by denying that pure categories exist. No one, let us suppose, is completely unbiased. Then, everyone is biased, and partisan posturing is held to be just as good as, if not better than, allegedly disinterested study.

Ellis locates an especially bizarre example of this “logic.”

The arguments of Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin begin by focusing on the apparent difference between consensual sexual activity and rape. . . . Is there any sexual activity that is absolutely and completely free of the slightest hint of coercion or persuasion? Possibly not. . . . Then the distinction between rape and consensual activity breaks down; hence all sexual activity is coerced and as such there is no difference between rape and any other sexual activity. (p. 170)

And MacKinnon is taken to be a serious thinker by many of the high and mighty of academia.

Ideas, if they can be called that, of this caliber of course cannot withstand critical examination. What then are multiculturalists to do? The answer may readily be guessed; critical analysis of PC ideas is forbidden. Ellis reports an instance in which a women’s studies professor required students in her class to sign a set of “Ground Rules” that mandated acceptance of her views without question (p. 149).
So far my remarks have been entirely favorable to Ellis’s book, but of course in the *Mises Review* this cannot be allowed to continue unchecked. I shall therefore venture one mild criticism. Ellis suggests here, and much more fully in *Against Deconstruction*, that our categories never fully grasp reality. They impose distinctions, not perfectly true of the “booming, buzzing confusion” of the world. Precisely the failing of deconstructivists, Ellis thinks, is to take this fact too far: they wrongly think it denies us knowledge of the world altogether. In my view, Ellis has too quickly dismissed a more robustly realistic position.

That said, I can return to praising the book. *Literature Lost* is an indispensable guide to current literary studies; if its message is heeded, it has the potential to achieve great good.
Ralph Raico points out in his incisive introduction to this fiftieth anniversary edition of *The Roosevelt Myth* that many take sharp criticism of FDR to constitute sacrilege against the civic religion of the United States. “Republican no less than democratic leaders revere and invoke the memory of Franklin Roosevelt” (p. vii).

No reader of *The Roosevelt Myth*, unless totally blinded by preconception, can continue to bow down in this temple of Rimmon. Quite the contrary, Roosevelt can be viewed only as a near total disaster. The “Roosevelt-haters” of the 1930s and 1940s, not least among them Flynn himself, have been vindicated by the account so vividly presented here.

Yet in one respect, our assessment seems paradoxical. Roosevelt, as he emerges from this book was a vain, intellectually shallow person whose principal interest was to retain at all costs his personal power. Can so petty a figure have been that dangerous?

Consider, for example, the amusing account Flynn provides of Roosevelt’s decision to run for a third term. In conversation with the Eternal Glad-hander, Postmaster-General Jim Farley, who himself sought the presidency, Roosevelt alternately said that he would not run and plotted his campaign strategy. One half of his brain seemed unaware of the activities of the other lobe.
On July 1, 1940, two weeks before the [Democratic Party] convention was to meet, Roosevelt asked Farley to visit him at Hyde Park . . . the conversation proceeded in the most singular manner with literally three persons present: Farley for one, Roosevelt the man who was not going to run as the second, and Roosevelt the man who had decided to run as the third. In one breath he began to discuss vice-presidential candidates . . . he then began to outline the letter he would write to the convention telling them he didn’t want to run and at what point he should send the letter. Then having gone into details about how he would eliminate himself he said, “Undoubtedly I will accept the nomination by radio and will arrange to talk to the delegates before they leave the convention hall.” (pp. 192–193)

Can such an absurd person really have been so dangerous? As Flynn shows with crystal clarity, the answer unfortunately is yes. Owing to the combined circumstances of economic depression and a menacing diplomatic situation in Europe and Asia, Roosevelt’s “gifts” were an ideal recipe for disaster.

Roosevelt’s total subordination of his country’s welfare to his personal ambition began before he took office in March, 1933. The outgoing president, Herbert Hoover, confronted a dilemma. Faced with numerous bank failures throughout the country, Hoover wished to announce a plan to help promote bank solvency. He knew, however, that a statement from him would be worse than useless. He had utterly lost the confidence of Congress and the people.

He accordingly proposed to Roosevelt that he announce a plan to save the banks. Roosevelt refused to do so, since continued bank failures until he took office were to his political advantage. It would hardly do, would it, to have the banks recover under Hoover? Perish the thought! “On February 28 [1933], Hoover received a message that [Roosevelt adviser] Rexford Tugwell had said that the banks would collapse in a couple of days and that is what they wanted” (p. 22, emphasis in original). I leave aside here the issue of whether governmental action to end the bank panic was appropriate. Roosevelt himself favored such action: the point was not to allow Hoover credit for it.

Not an auspicious beginning, and matters soon got worse. Roosevelt had denounced Hoover as a spendthrift, and his platform promised strict economy in government. But a government that spent little would give Roosevelt scant opportunity to exercise the patronage he craved. Accordingly,
Roosevelt sent his now famous message to Congress deploiring the disastrous extravagance of the Hoover administration…. As one reads that message now it is difficult to believe that it could ever have been uttered by a man who before ending his regime would spend not merely more money than President Hoover, but more than all the other 31 presidents put together three times more, in fact, than all the presidents from George Washington to Herbert Hoover. (p. 28, emphasis in original)

Here then, to reiterate, was the situation. Roosevelt confronted a major depression. The solution, so far as the government was concerned, lay within his grasp. He had only to follow his campaign pledge of economy. As good Austrians, we know, Paul Krugman to the contrary notwithstanding, that if the government steps out of the way and allows malinvestments to be liquidated, all is likely soon to be well. But just that solution went against the Rooseveltian categorical imperative: spend money to gain power.

Very well, then; out with economy: the government must spend. But spend on what? Roosevelt had little idea, and his vaunted Brain Trust gave him scant help. Flynn heaps scorn upon the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, one of FDR’s more bizarre schemes:

Curiously enough, while [Secretary of Agriculture Henry] Wallace was paying out hundreds of millions to kill millions of hogs, burn oats, plow under cotton, the Department of Agriculture issued a bulletin telling the nation the great problem of our time was our failure to produce enough food to provide the people with a mere subsistence diet. . . . It was a crime against our civilization to pay farmers in two years $700,000,000 to destroy crops and limit production. (pp. 44–45, emphasis omitted)

I must not give readers the wrong idea. Roosevelt’s efforts to extricate the United States from the depression were not totally aimless. The New Dealers found the blandishments of fascism much to their liking, and Mussolini’s corporative state was the model for Roosevelt’s National Recovery Administration. “As I [Flynn] write, of course, Mussolini is an evil memory. But in 1933 he was a towering figure who was supposed to have discovered something worth study and imitation by all world artificers anywhere.” What they liked particularly was his corporative system. . . . “The NRA provided
that in America each industry should be organized into a federally supervised trade association. It was called a Code Authority. But it was essentially the same thing” (p. 39).

To Flynn’s thesis of the New Deal as a combination of nonsense and fascism, there arises an obvious objection. Did not the Supreme Court declare both the AAA and the NRA unconstitutional? Flynn of course knew this, and wrote about these decisions, and Roosevelt’s “court-packing” response, at length. Incidentally, the subject betrays Flynn into one of his few mistakes. He states: “On May 27, 1935, the Supreme Court, to everybody’s relief, declared the NRA unconstitutional. . . . And the decision was unanimous, Brandeis, Cardozo, and Holmes joining in it” (p. 43). Justice Holmes retired from the court in 1932. (It’s just this sort of point that makes reading the Mises Review worthwhile, isn’t it?)

Flynn rightly saw that even without these two programs, his thesis was intact. The movement of the New Deal toward a planned economic system reflected the influence of a wide variety of self-styled Great Minds. Derailing a few programs could not halt their forward march.

Our author ascribes special importance to the influence of Thorstein Veblen, whose obscure writing style occasioned one of H. L. Mencken’s best articles. “Perhaps the great pioneer of planning in this country was Thorstein Veblen and it was from him that Tugwell and the others drew their inspiration. Veblen, like so many of his kind, was an unpleasant fellow” (p. 142).

In the plans of Tugwell, Leon Henderson, and their fellow technocrats, Flynn saw grave danger to liberty. Anticipating the thesis of F. A. Hayek in The Road to Serfdom (1944), he maintained that a planned economy led inevitably to a totalitarian state.

Mussolini and Hitler . . . realized that a system like this, which undertakes to impose a vast complex of decrees upon a people while subjecting them to confiscatory taxes to support the immense activities of the State cannot be operated save by an absolute government that has the power to enforce compliance. (p. 140)

As if this group of planners were not bad enough, Flynn found another set of Bright Men even more ominous. This group, whom our author terms “the spenders,” believed that extensive government outlays were necessary to ensure continued prosperity.
“Well,” you may say, “so what? The dispute between Keynesian spenders and sound economists is long-standing. Why does Flynn emphasize it so much?”

Flynn’s point was not primarily that the spenders practiced unsound economics: indeed, he unfortunately accepted the view that the economy requires a high level of spending to maintain prosperity. (Flynn, in contrast to the planners, thought that extensive government programs were not needed to achieve this.)

The danger that Flynn saw in the big spenders was not economic, but political. The spenders wished to stimulate the economy: but what projects stood available? Civilian spending had completely failed to achieve the goal of full employment. In point of fact, unemployment in 1938 was 11 million.

What could Roosevelt do? Only military spending remained available.

Here he was with a depression on his hands [with] the pressing necessity, as he put it himself, of spending two or three billion a year of deficit money and most serious of all, as he told Jim Farley no way to spend it. Here now was a gift from the gods. . . . Here now was something the federal government could really spend money on military and naval preparations. (p. 157)

As Flynn saw matters, extensive government spending on the military, given the tense diplomatic situation during the period 1938–1941, led almost inevitably to war. Roosevelt, with his customary lack of thought, abandoned the Neutrality Act of 1936, legislation he himself had enthusiastically backed. American participation in war, Roosevelt thought, meant a chance to end economic depression and secure renewed electoral triumph. Never mind whether entry into the war served US interests: a higher need, the fame and political fortune of Franklin Roosevelt, was at stake.

Given Roosevelt’s utter lack of strategic sense, it should come as no surprise that the chief result of the war was an enormous expansion of Stalinist power in Europe and Asia. But for that sorry tale, which Flynn recounts with great skill, readers must consult the book.

Rather than describe every major topic in Flynn’s book, I have thought it more important to stress his chief contribution: his brilliantly sustained argument that an irresponsible and ambitious president unleashed the baleful forces of state planning and militarism in order to keep alive his power. The book ends on a melancholy note: the dying Roosevelt, unable to think clearly, nevertheless clung to power. He proved no match for Stalin in the conferences at Teheran and Yalta.
A Manifesto Without Evidence

December 1, 1999, Mises Review

THIS IS NOT A BAD BOOK, but almost every major thesis in it is wrong or unproved. According to our author, human society depends to a large extent on “social capital.” This he defines as “a set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permits cooperation among them. If members of the group come to expect that others will behave reliably and honestly, they will come to trust one another” (p. 16).

Danger lies at hand. Since the 1960s, social capital in the United States and Europe has become depleted, as rising crime rates and increased family disruption demonstrate. This is the great disruption referred to in the book’s title.

Fortunately, we need not despair. Strong biological tendencies urge human beings toward cooperation, limiting the extent to which social capital can dissipate. Further, people are capable of cooperative behavior spontaneously, as game theory illustrates. But biology and spontaneous cooperative behavior do not suffice: for a well-functioning and just society, hierarchical elements

must be present. A complex mixture, no doubt. But we can take solace in the upward trend of history toward universal acceptance of liberal capitalism.

In one sense, Mr. Fukuyama’s thesis that civilization rests on social capital cannot be challenged. He sometimes uses social capital and trust as synonyms for cooperative behavior. Of course, in this sense he is right: as Mises never tired of insisting, only social cooperation through the division of labor enables human beings to survive above the level of animals.

From the undoubted fact that social capital in this sense is essential to civilization, it does not follow that people, in order to prosper, must trust each other in a way that goes beyond rational self-interest. Mr. Fukuyama argues, on grounds of evolutionary biology, that human beings have natural instincts to cooperate and trust one another. He does not contend that evolution developed these instincts apart from individuals’ self-interest, but the self-interest involved here is not present-day conscious self-interest. Rather, it is self-interest in the sense of genetic fitness of our supposed evolutionary ancestors that is here involved.

In brief, Mr. Fukuyama thinks we have social instincts. These need not lead us to do what is in our rational self-interest, as dictated by the conscious disposition of means to best achieve what we want. But these instincts became embedded in us because evolution favored those who had them.

After this longwinded account of what Mr. Fukuyama is saying, we can return to the question of whether he is right. I cannot see that he has shown that social trust, in the sense of instincts for social behavior, is needed to establish a complex society. Why is it not enough if people recognize, entirely consciously, that social cooperation is to the advantage of each of them?

I do not say that this is all that is involved in civilized societies; but rather that our author has failed to show that social trust in his stronger sense is necessary. Cannot mistrustful individuals engage in mutually beneficial trade?

If there is anything to this line of thought, Mr. Fukuyama’s notion of a Great Disruption contains a crucial gap. Suppose he is right that social trust, in the sense of actions based on inherited social instincts, has gone down. It may still be the case that social cooperation does not atrophy, since people may recognize it is in their self-interest to cooperate. If so, the Disruption may not amount to so much as our author thinks. Once more, I do not assert that the hypothesis just canvassed is true: but Mr. Fukuyama has not shown it false, and he needs to do so if his thesis is to stand.
Another difficulty in the idea of a Great Disruption our author recognizes:

It should be noted at the outset that there is one very serious problem with using social dysfunction data as a negative measure of social capital: it ignores distribution. Just as conventional capital is unevenly distributed within a society... so social capital is also likely to be unevenly distributed: strata of highly socialized, self-organizing people may coexist with pockets of extreme atomization and social pathology. (p. 23)

Thus, increases in crime, drug use, family breakups, etc., may not show a general downturn in trust. But though our author recognizes the problem, he nevertheless goes ahead exactly as if it did not exist.

And there is a further problem our author does not recognize. Some of the measures of social dysfunction he adopts seem entirely compatible with high levels of social trust, even among the dysfunctional people themselves. Why cannot people from broken homes trust one another in their business and social affairs? Need drug users be socially mistrustful?

Again, suppose that Mr. Fukuyama is entirely right: social pathology does measure social trust, and there has been a sharp increase in social pathology since the 1960s. Is the thesis of a Great Disruption proved?

I do not think so. It does not follow that whenever social capital goes down, that this has untoward consequences for society. For all he has shown to the contrary, the optimal rate of social trust has come closer to achievement, because of the increase in antisocial behavior. Maybe the rate of trust was too high before: who says there cannot be an oversupply of social capital?

In any case, Mr. Fukuyama has argued that there has been a Great Disruption. He spends the remainder of the book trying to show that grounds for hope exist. Humpty-Dumpty has had a great fall, and now Mr. Fukuyama proposes to put him together again.

He does so principally by appeal to evolutionary biology. As suggested earlier, he thinks that evolution has implanted social instincts in us. These have evolved, not through group selection, but according to what promoted the inclusive fitness of our ancestors. (Readers unfamiliar with this term should read our author's brief reprise of Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene*, pp. 168–169.)

Evolutionary explanations of behavior are all the rage nowadays, but they seem highly speculative in the bad sense. As Mr. Fukuyama recognizes,
It is, of course, both easy and dangerous to draw facile compar-
isons between animal and human behavior. Human beings are
different from chimpanzees precisely because they do have cul-
ture and reason, and can modify their genetically controlled be-
behavior in any number of complex ways. (p. 165)

Nevertheless, he assures us that findings from primatology do give us
insight into politics. Once again, our author states a problem and then passes
by untroubled.

Again, though, suppose I am mistaken: it has happened. Evolutionary
biology, we shall suppose, succeeds entirely in explaining human behavior
and it does show that human beings have social instincts. (I confess, though,
that I very much doubt that the alleged facts that preferences stem from the
limbic system and rational thought from the neocortex will ever be shown
to have any relevance for social thought [p. 182]).

The imagined success of evolutionary explanations of social instincts
gives us little grounds for thinking that the Great Disruption is limited in
its scope. If Mr. Fukuyama is correct that there has been a Great Disrup-
tion, then whatever the constraints of evolution, they by hypothesis did
not prevent some degree of disruption in social capital. If this degree, why
not more? Why not enough disruption to create total social chaos? We are
left in the dark.

Mr. Fukuyama, I fear, has a penchant for assertion without evidence. He
informs us that “[h]ierarchy is necessary to correct the defects and limita-
tions of spontaneous order” (p. 234); but the defects in question appear to
be that, without the hierarchical “charismatic” leadership, societies will not
be governed by the universal values he thinks appropriate. Without legisla-
tion in the 1960s, e.g., “popular norms on race” might not have changed (p.
234). In order to come to a reasoned judgment on our author’s case for hier-
archy, one would need to know in some detail the nature of the universal
values only hierarchy can secure.

One would also have to have an argument that these values ought to be
supported rather than resisted. These our author does not provide. He gives
us instead a brief sketch of his version of historical progress (pp. 280–281).

The Great Disruption contains an abundance of material on various areas
of social science, and is for this reason worth reading. Mr. Fukuyama con-
fuses behaviorism, a school of psychology, with behavioralism, a movement
in political science; in any case, William James was not, as our author thinks, a behaviorist (p. 73). The remark “social capital is not a public good but a private good pervaded by externalities” (p. 251) suggests that Mr. Fukuyama’s grasp of the nature of a public good is not altogether solid.
Mr. Pipes has written a very good book, but he has made life difficult for me as a reviewer. He defends the importance of property rights throughout the book, but he does not argue systematically, in the style of his Harvard colleagues John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Rather, he presents a host of observations about property, putting to excellent use his wide erudition. How these observations fit together to make a coherent case is a question he leaves to the reader.

I propose to do so as well and will here confine myself to calling attention to a few of the book’s insights. Mr. Pipes maintains, first, that the instinct to acquire property is natural to human beings. Societies that attempt radically to restrict the acquisition of property, or to do away with individual property altogether, are liable to destroy freedom. A regime that defies human nature is on the road to tyranny.

But why believe that property is natural to humans? Mr. Pipes adduces convincing evidence from child psychology.

Studies of child development have made it possible to chart the evolution of acquisitive impulses. Two psychologists have
observed something parents are well aware of; namely that infants of eighteen months have difficulty falling asleep without a special toy, blanket, or other familiar object, and are clearly aware what belongs to whom. . . . As they grow older, children learn to share, but the spirit of ownership remains strong, as does the desire to accumulate. (p. 73)

“If socialism goes against human nature, we will change human nature!” So an old Marxist slogan boasts. Perhaps the desire of children for property can be overcome with the proper socialist upbringing. The results of such experiments hardly encourage imitation:

Bruno Bettelheim learned to his surprise that while it was possible, over time, to inculcate in kibbutz children indifference to private belongings, this exacted a heavy price. Israelis brought up in such a Spartan environment . . . experienced great difficulty forming an emotional commitment to any one individual, whether by forming a friendship or falling in love. (p. 75)

The wish to hold property, then, our author has persuasively shown intrinsic to our nature: interfere with it at your peril. (Pipes endeavors to support his conclusion further by appeal to studies of territoriality among animals. These I confess to finding less persuasive: except on controversial and speculative assumptions, they are not relevant to humans.) And the importance of property for the human personality is not, for Pipes, a mere matter of empirical psychology. Philosophers have argued to the same conclusion.

Pipes enlists in his support the surprising figure of Hegel, hardly a devout libertarian:

Hegel already stressed the positive psychological effects of ownership . . . “It is only through owning and controlling property that he [man] can embody his will in external objects and begin to transcend the subjectivity of his own immediate existence.” (p. 72, quoting Hegel)

Less opaquely, William James maintained that we consider what we own to be part of ourselves; “We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves” (p. 72).
James here lends support to a Lockean-style argument for the right to own property. If I own myself, and external objects that I acquire in the “right” way become part of myself, do I not own them as well?

Surprisingly, our author declines to follow this path. He distrusts metaphysical arguments. After a brief summary of Locke’s theory, he remarks:

Attractive and self-evident as it may appear, the labor theory of property is a two-edged sword, for it can also be used to assail property. How is one to justify inherited wealth which requires no personal effort, or the fact that farm laborers and factory workers do not own what they produce? (p. 36)

Pipes’s objections to the Lockean account strike me as weak. Inherited wealth stems from the right of bequest, and workers do not own what they produce because they have contracted to use property belonging to others in return for wages. What could be simpler? Nor is Proudhon’s point against property, which our author mentions with sympathy, of any greater weight. Proudhon asked, what are latecomers to do, if all landed property has been appropriated? Why is it unfair if they must for a time labor for others, until they can afford to buy property from its current possessors?

But I must not be unjust to Mr. Pipes. His specialty is history, not political philosophy; and his historical observations often display penetrating intelligence. He stresses, e.g., an idea crucial to the recognition of individual property rights in Europe: Even under absolute monarchy, the ruler was expected to support himself from his own domain.

Our author finds this idea clearly expressed by Jean Bodin, often considered a leading proponent of unlimited rule. True enough, Bodin extolled in extravagant terms the prerogatives of sovereignty; but these did not include the power to impose new taxes. Natural law forbade this.

Pipes’s summary of Bodin’s views is excellent:

The foundation of the state is the property-owning household. The authority of the sovereign stops at the boundary of the household: imperium or potestas is never to be confused with dominium or proprietas. Bodin cites Seneca to the effect that “to Kings appertains the power over all, but property belongs to individuals.” (p. 28)
I fear that I have so far given a misleading impression of *Property and Freedom*. It does not consist entirely of disjointed observations about property. Two of the chapters, taken together approach a central thesis.

Mr. Pipes contrasts the systems of property rights in Britain and Russia; each had very different consequences for liberty. Pipes’s chapter on Russia grows out of his long and distinguished career as a specialist in the modern history of that country.

As he sees matters, Russia was a patrimonial state in which all property was owned by the Tsar. His subjects, accordingly, lived by his sufferance. Even the highest nobles were in effect the slaves of their sovereign, utterly dependent on his will. Our author paints in bold strokes, and some may consider his account one-dimensional. Indeed, in other works, Mr. Pipes has stressed the continuity between patrimonial Tsarist Russia and Communist Russia, a thesis that aroused the ire of the famed mathematician Igor Shafarevich. But Pipes makes a strong case that the lack of personal and professional freedom throughout Russian history has stemmed from the absence of strong individual property rights.

Why did the patrimonial system develop? Mr. Pipes ascribes part of the responsibility to the “surfeit of land in Russia prior to the nineteenth century” (p. 161). Because land was available in abundance, people felt little need to work out fixed rules for delimiting separate spheres of influence over land. Incidentally, Professor John Nye takes Pipes to task for not citing the work of Ester Broserup in this connection (*Reason*, March 2000, p. 69). But this criticism is incorrect: Pipes does cite Broserup (p. 42).

In contrast to Russia, Britain is Pipes’s success story, and he carefully traces the resistance to royal attempts to impose new taxes. The attempts by Charles I to tax at will led to resistance, culminating in civil war and the king’s execution in 1649. His successors had to recognize that taxes could be imposed only with parliamentary consent.

I cannot see why Pipes so insistently praises the importance of this development. No doubt he is right that if a king loses the power to tax as he pleases, this is all to the good. But what is so wonderful about taxes imposed by a parliament?

Mr. Pipes writes not simply as a chronicler of the past, but also as a concerned citizen. He neatly identifies the fallacy in “social rights”:

The so-called “social rights” of today are not “rights” and certainly not “entitlements,” since no one is entitled to anything at
someone else’s expense. They are rather claims on society which it may or may not grant. (p. 289)

It is not every day that a Harvard professor advances such an opinion; moreover, he cites Ayn Rand in support of it.
Justus Doenecke’s careful study of the opponents of American entry into World War II makes evident that the noninterventionists had a clearer grasp of essential truths about American foreign policy than their eager-for-war opponents. As our author shows, positions within the group varied widely; but on certain key points, a consensus emerged. Most basically, they maintained that the dominant aim of American foreign policy should be the protection of the United States. Only in case of a direct military threat is war justified; otherwise, a belligerent policy should be avoided.

Because of the vicious nature of the Nazi regime, almost all Americans viewed German military success in the early stages of the war with misgiving. The noninterventionists fully shared this aversion to the Third Reich and its Führer. Oswald Garrison Villard, an opponent of intervention long associated with The Nation, bitterly protested Nazi persecution of the Jews. He stated: “The Jews are treated literally as no German would be allowed under the law to treat a dumb animal” (p. 13).
Nor was Villard alone among noninterventionists with these sentiments. “Not since Genghis Khan and Attila, suspected Hugh Johnson in January, 1940, had there been such barbarism. Herbert Hoover . . . called for the creation of a new refugee state in Central Africa” (pp. 13–14).

But it does not follow from the undoubted evil of the German regime that it posed a military threat to the United States. Unless it did, the opponents of war maintained, war should be avoided. To this contention, supporters of intervention replied in two ways. First, they challenged the premise of the argument. Even if the Nazis posed no direct and immediate threat to the United States, were there not grounds to work actively for the elimination of their regime? Second, conceding their opponents’ premise that only danger to the United States justifies a policy of belligerence, some interventionists claimed that Germany did indeed directly threaten our country.

To the first contention, the noninterventionists had a ready if controversial response. The premise “the existence of a sufficiently horrendous regime is by itself grounds for intervention” proves too much. The Nazi regime was not the only morally awful government in the world. What about Soviet Russia?

The Chicago Tribune found him [Stalin] possessing an “unparalleled record of brutality and treachery”; he was “the man responsible for more human misery than any since the Mongolian invasions.” . . . By 1941, [Senator Hiram Johnson] was saying of the Russian dictator, “The greatest blood-letting that ever was committed on this earth occurred through him.” (p. 214)

But what about the victims of Nazi persecution? Here the defenders of peace had a point of the utmost relevance. How would an intensification of the war in any way help the victims? Would not the best way to abate persecution be to help negotiate a speedy end to the war? One of the most militant noninterventionists, Lawrence Dennis, maintained that “[w]ere America truly humanitarian . . . it would persuade the Allies to ‘stop the war’” (p. 56).

Those anxious for war pressed another argument. The power of the Nazis posed a direct threat to the United States. To counter them involved, not soppy humanitarianism, but hardheaded realism. Should we wait until Germany fully dominated Europe before acting against her? Why allow one’s enemy to build itself into a power of invincible might?
The anti-interventionists answered here with a point of great depth. The fears of German invincibility stemmed from her success in the first two years of the war. After the German invasion of Russia, June 22, 1941, most military experts predicted swift Soviet collapse. Would not a victorious Reich then dominate Europe?

Here the noninterventionists’ distaste for war led them to challenge an assumption of the argument just presented. Is it the case that the possession of large territories gained through conquest strengthens a nation? This is by no means certain.

To some Roosevelt foes, massive German conquests of the Soviet heartland really aided the United States and Britain, not threatened them. Late in June [1941], [Robert A.] Taft found the invasion postponing for many months any attack Hitler could possibly make on the US . . . Even a victorious Hitler, such anti-interventionists kept saying, would not have it easy. Representative [Robert] Chiperfield stressed that the German leader needed to rest his troops, replace lost planes, and police a vast area before turning his attention again to England and Western Europe. (pp. 221–222)

Besides, why assume that Hitler had hostile intentions toward the United States? No doubt he wished Germany to be the dominant power in Europe, but what followed from this as regards America? Interventionists such as Walter Lippmann conjured up a Nazi threat to invade the United States through Latin America, but they failed to back their expressions of panic with evidence.

But suppose the interventionists were correct; what if Hitler had designs on the United States? Would the proper course of action then be to send as much aid as possible to Britain and Russia, as groups such as the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies urged? Once more the opponents of war located a dubious premise. If the United States was at risk, would it not make more sense to build up our defenses rather than ship arms and supplies to other nations?

Here the noninterventionists echoed a theme prominent in the military during the initial months of 1940.

Chief of Staff George C. Marshall in particular objected to expending American matériel in what appeared a hopeless cause.
He vetoed the sale of any fighter plane requested by Churchill, disapproved of any ship transfer, and agreed only to send rifles, machine guns, and field pieces left over from World War I. (p. 105)

Professor Doenecke has written a very self-effacing book. He confines himself to a detailed narrative of the arguments advanced by the major noninterventionists, with little in the way of comment of his own. He clearly brings out their powerful case; unfortunately they did not prevail against Roosevelt’s machinations. Doenecke has devoted a lifetime of scholarly study to his topic, and all future work on the noninterventionists must take account of this book. I noted a few mistakes: The Soviet Union invaded eastern Poland on September 17, 1939, not September 27 (p. 13). Doenecke has the wrong Sir Arthur Salter; the man he refers to was an economist and official of the League of Nations, not the British jurist of the same name (p. 31). Sir Nevile Henderson’s first name is misspelled (p. 199), as is Gandhi’s satyagraha campaign (p. 206). It was not Marx who called anti-Semitism “the socialism of fools” (p. 56).
Making Patriots*

WALTER BERNS

A God Before Thee

October 1, 2001, Mises Review

PROFESSOR BERNS has written a book capable of great harm. Not content with the world’s major faiths, he proposes to establish a “civil religion” in the guise of patriotism. Those inclined to continue the old ways, he hastens to assure us, need not fear persecution. They must, of course, stay out of the path of the state, guided exclusively by the New Revelation; if they do not, they will be swept away.

What glorious promise can justify so drastic a policy? If faith must bow before the new power, must not Berns bedeck his new state in shining raiment? Otherwise, why would those already committed to a faith of their own be so much as tempted by what Berns has to offer? Here our author manifests genuine originality.

The main benefit that accrues to citizens of his state is that the civil religion gives them a cause to which they can sacrifice their lives. Lacking the new truth, people might—what a thought! —pursue their own interests. Though commerce has its place in the Bernsonian state, it must be firmly subordinated to sacrifice. Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.

I have so far omitted the most surprising part of Berns’s construction: As he sees it, he has not devised a dystopia out of an overactive imagination; rather, he has accurately described the United States as her Founding Fathers

intended her to be. Abraham Lincoln, the great poet of our national glory, brought to perfection the vision that has captured Berns. Since that time, Americans have lapsed; we stand in danger of neglect of our duty to sacrifice for the state.

And the entire world beckons us Bernsians.

Ours is not a parochial patriotism; precisely because it comprises an attachment to principles that are universal, we cannot be indifferent to the welfare of others. To be indifferent, especially to the rights of others, would be un-American. (p. 8)

The prospect of many future patriotic deaths will inspire us as nothing else can.

You will, I fear, suspect me of caricature. Surely, Professor Berns, a distinguished constitutional scholar, cannot be quite the worshipper of Moloch that I have made him out to be. But, as always, I state the simple truth. Our author locates a problem with overemphasis on Lockean rights to life, liberty, and property. No doubt, these have their proper place, and it is not a small one. But

patriotism means love of country and implies a readiness to sacrifice for it, to fight for it, perhaps even to give one’s life for it. But, aside from the legendary Spartans, why should anyone be willing to do this? . . . why should self-interested men believe it in their interest to give their lives for the idea or promise of their country? (pp. 131–132)

The question that interests me differs from the one Professor Berns has just posed. I wish to ask, how can an apparently intelligent and learned man be induced to worship war and death? The first step on Berns’s *via dolorosa* is his yearning for classical Athens, where no conflicting loyalties stood between the citizen and his city: “Athenians were enjoined to be lovers of Athens because they were Athens—in a way, by loving their city, they loved themselves—and because, by gaining an empire, Athens provided them with the means by which they gained fame and glory” (p. 16).

By no means does Berns seek to restore the ancient city. Quite the contrary, he recognizes that the “institutions of both Athens and Sparta were ordered with a view to war, and, precisely for this reason, neither Athens nor
Sparta could, or can, provide a model for America” (p. 17). Since the rise of Christianity, allegiance no longer can be undivided. The soul of the religious believer does not belong exclusively to the political community, and the great mistake of the French Revolution was its futile attempt to uproot the church and restore the ancient ways. The founders of the American Republic avoided this trap. So far, so good.

But Berns now proceeds to precisely the wrong question. Given that Christianity cannot be eliminated, how can as much as possible of the unity of the ancient city be restored? His answer—and it is not a bad one, given his premise—is that religion must be rigidly confined to the private sphere. In that way, the state may proceed toward its great tasks, unhindered by the scruples of believers. Though believers may practice their faith unmolested, they must realize that private conscience must always bow before the law.

Our author makes entirely clear that, on this matter, he is thoroughgoing Hobbesian:

> with the free exercise of one’s religion comes the requirement to obey the law regardless of one’s religious beliefs…. Whether a law is just or unjust is a judgment that belongs to no “private man,” however pious or learned, or, as we say today, sincere he may be. This means that we are first of all citizens, and only secondarily Christians, Jews, Muslims, or any other religious persuasion. (p. 31)

Thus, if your religion forbids you to fight, Berns would grant you no right to avoid military service. It may be a prudent policy for the government to make room for conscientious objectors, so long as they number but few. But their status is a privilege, and Berns does not hide his dismay with the Supreme Court for making “the exception the rule for anyone willing to invoke it” (p. 38).

So much for religion—or, rather, so much for religion that extends beyond devotion to the state. What is to replace it, as an object of popular devotion? We cannot, of course, rely on so egotistic a notion as natural rights; instead, we need a national poet around whose work the emotions of the people can concentrate.

Fortunately, one is at hand: Abraham Lincoln. “As . . . Shakespeare was, or is, to the English (and Robert Burns to the Scots, Gabriele D’Annunzio to the Italians, and Homer to the Greeks) so Lincoln is to us; he is our spokesman, our poet” (pp. 99–100). I am not sure why Berns includes D’Annunzio;
though he was a fervent nationalist, his poetry and novels deal principally with love and nature, not political themes.

Lincoln gives Berns exactly what he wants. His winged words, especially the Gettysburg Address and the second inaugural address, remind all Americans “that freedom is more than being left alone, that there is a price to be paid for it” (p. 98). The great bloodletting that took place during Lincoln’s Crusade was an essential means to bond all Americans together in love.

Our author makes parody impossible. He solemnly informs us that Lincoln bore no hatred or even anger for the people of the South. Though Lincoln was determined to fight the war to the end, “he never looked upon the Confederates as enemies” (p. 96). In support of his surprising claim, Berns seems, incredibly, to contend that Lincoln intended in the Gettysburg Address— “the most beautiful speech in the English language” (p. 94)—to include Confederates among the patriots to whom the cemetery was dedicated. I say “seems,” because our author merely asks, rhetorically, whether Southerners were included; he does not say positively that it was “Lincoln’s larger purpose to include Confederate soldiers” (p. 94). But this is clearly what he intends.

To give Professor Berns credit, he does come to his senses at one point. He remarks:

Now, obviously, when he [Lincoln] referred to those who had given their lives at Gettysburg “that that nation might live,” he could not have meant to include the Confederates who had given their lives that that nation might die. (p. 118)

Exactly so. But does this outbreak of sanity lead Berns to revise his claim that Lincoln was suffused with love for the South? Of course not; though the words quoted are not addressed to Southerners, they are the audience of the rest of the speech. Their “freely given consent” (p. 118, emphasis in original) was needed to continue cementing the Union together.

One cannot help but ask: If Lincoln loved his Southern countrymen so much, why did he follow a policy that killed so many of them? The hundreds of thousands of dead and maimed casualties of Lincoln’s War are hardly, to the untutored eye, much evidence of love. As Berns makes clear, though, when we deal with Lincoln, we enter the realm of faith in which we can only see through a glass darkly. No ordinary mortal, Lincoln was, “as one historian of the presidency has said, (not irreverently[!]), ‘the martyred Christ of democracy’s passion play’” (p. 100). The pseudo-religious cult of the dead that Berns
invokes throughout this misbegotten book is not genuine American patriotism; rather, it recalls the cult of the dead characteristic of European fascism.

Berns’s book is no laughing matter, but at one point one cannot suppress a smile. Our author is greatly exercised by a line on the Marine Corps Memorial in Washington. A list of the wars that have involved the Marine Corps includes “The War Between the States.” An “unreconstructed southerner,” Berns tells us, must be responsible (p. 95).
Disarmed and Wholly Dependent

October 1, 2002, *Mises Review*

Professor Joyce Lee Malcolm’s erudite study has changed my view of gun control. Before reading her book, I was inclined to see control in this way: Leaving aside questions about individual rights, there is an obvious argument that supports allowing people to own firearms. If criminals know that their victims may be armed, they are less likely to attack: guns deter violent crime. The modern state refuses to acknowledge this elementary truth. If people have guns, this allows them to resist the state, and under no circumstances can this be permitted. The need to secure the state outweighs the desire to halt crime.

Malcolm’s book has shown me that I radically underestimated the danger of gun control. Her detailed study of British legislation on the topic shows the real aim of the disarmers. They wish to abolish the right to armed self-defense entirely. The point is not only to block armed resistance to the state, as I had previously thought; in addition, everyone is to be made totally dependent on the state for protection.

Some of Malcolm’s examples are shocking. In England

[m]erely threatening to defend oneself can also prove illegal, as an elderly lady discovered. She succeeded in frightening off a gang of

thugs by firing a blank from a toy gun, only to be arrested for the
crime of putting someone in fear with an imitation firearm. (p. 184)

Not even if one’s life is in danger can one legally use a weapon. In another
case, two men assaulted Eric Butler in a subway, smashing his head and choking him.

In desperation he unsheathed a sword blade in his walking stick
and slashed at one of them. . . . The assailants were charged with
unlawful wounding but Butler was also tried, and convicted of
carrying an offensive weapon. (p. 185)

You can imagine the legal position if someone goes so far as to use a real
gun to defend himself. As British law now stands, you cannot even use a gun
in your own home to defend yourself against burglars. In a 1999 incident,
Tony Martin surprised a professional burglar and his accomplice while they
robbed his home. He fired, killing one of them.

Did the government commend Martin for his bravery in confronting the
burglars? Quite the contrary, they tried and convicted him for murder. “Thus
an English farmer, living alone, has been sentenced to life in prison for killing
one professional burglar and ten years for wounding another when the two
broke into his home at night” (p. 216). Fortunately, our story has a “happy”
ending: the court of appeals reduced his sentence to five years, on grounds of
“diminished capacity.”

Supporters of gun control, I suspect, will not be moved by these cases.
“However unfair it seems to punish someone for defending himself,” they will
claim, “we have no choice. We must reduce violence in society. The state can-
not protect everyone, and curtailment of the right to self-defense will cause
innocent people to suffer.” But so what? Does not a slogan from a once promi-
inent regime tell us that the common good goes before individual good? If we
insist on the outdated ideas of personal rights and responsibilities, we will end
up as a Wild West society like the United States, where guns are plentiful and
violent crime flourishes. The “horror stories” just recounted took place in Eng-
land, where as everyone knows, the curbs on private ownership of weapons
have caused violent crime to occur far less often than in America. Down with
the right to self-defense!

Malcolm’s outstanding book thoroughly demolishes the case for gun con-
trol just sketched. She proceeds by a learned study of violent crime in England,
from the Middle Ages to the present. In her survey, a constant theme emerges. As guns became more prevalent, violent crime decreased. This trend culminated in the nineteenth century, when death by murder was rare but guns were widespread. The seizure of guns during the twentieth century has been accompanied by a marked increase in violent crime. At present some types of violent crime are more common in England than in America. As usual, the statists have their facts exactly backward.

Often people think of English medieval life as relatively calm and peaceful, but in Malcolm’s view this is a myth. “Medieval England was boisterous and violent, more so than court records reveal. . . . This high rate of homicide and violent crime existed when few firearms were in circulation” (p. 33).

Malcolm’s interest in the Middle Ages is not confined to her primary theme of the relation between guns and violence. She introduces another theme that will concern her throughout the book: the status of the right to self-defense. During this period, custom and law established the right of individuals to resist violence directed against them. In some instances, a person who killed his assailant stood immune from criminal penalty. Our author here as always argues convincingly, but I am surprised that she does not cite St. Thomas Aquinas on killing in self-defense and its limits. Suffice it to say that his discussion does not altogether support her account of the medieval situation.

I have space only for a few highlights from Malcolm’s detailed narrative. The Tudor and Stuart periods, “this era in which firearms first came into common use in everyday life as well as for the citizen militia . . . in which the Englishman’s right to have ‘arms for his defence’ was proclaimed, also witnessed a sharp decline in violent homicide” (pp. 62–63).

Developments in the eighteenth century should by now come as no surprise. “[A]t the very time that the individual right to be armed was becoming well established and guns were replacing earlier weapons, the homicide rate continued its precipitous decline” (pp. 88–89).

Readers will not earn a reward for correctly guessing Malcolm’s conclusions about the nineteenth century. Once again, the number of guns increased while violent crime declined. “The nineteenth century ended with firearms plentifully available while rates of armed crime had been declining and were to reach a record low” (p. 130).

So far, we have a vast example of an inductive argument. Increases in the prevalence of guns have always accompanied decreases in violent crime. Does
this not strongly suggest that guns in private hands deter crime? The twentieth century, especially its latter half, gives us a chance to test our induction, since ownership of guns during that period came under strict control. If it turns out that violent crime increased, then as Hume once remarked, “I need not complete the syllogism; you can draw the conclusion yourself.”

And of course violent crime did increase.

Scholars of criminology have traced a long decline in interpersonal violence since the late Middle Ages until an abrupt and puzzling reversal occurred in the middle of the twentieth century . . . a statistical comparison of crime in England and Wales with crime in America, based on 1995 figures, discovered that for three categories of violent crimes—assaults, burglary, and robbery—the English are now at far greater risk than Americans. (pp. 164–165)

Gun control advocates, faced with these facts, will at once begin to yammer uncontrollably, “a correlation is not a cause.” Indeed it is not; but in this instance, a strong correlation holds in two ways: when guns increase in number, violent crimes decrease, and when guns decrease, violent crimes increase. Further, a plausible causal story explains the correlation: the prospect of armed resistance deters criminals. This is about as good as an inductive argument gets. But I do not anticipate that those who wish to take away the right to self-defense will alter their position. They aim to make everyone totally dependent on the all-powerful state.
Bruce Caldwell has adopted a sensible strategy to cope with the formidable task he has set himself. Friedrich von Hayek was not only one of the most eminent economists of the twentieth century, whose contributions ranged from capital and business-cycle theory to the socialist calculation debate.

His work in economics also led him to make major contributions to political philosophy, the theory of knowledge, psychology, and history. How can an intellectual biographer of Hayek cope with this vast range of work? Must his breadth of knowledge rival Hayek’s own, if he aims adequately to assess his subject’s contributions?

Caldwell solves this problem through selection. Rather than attempt to follow Hayek on all his peregrinations, he chooses a few issues for analysis. The reader in search of an account of Hayek’s capital theory, e.g., must

go elsewhere; but the benefits in careful attention to detail that Caldwell’s method allows outweigh its losses.*

Caldwell begins with an account of Carl Menger’s battle with the German Historical School. As he rightly discerns, a grasp of this controversy is essential to understanding Hayek’s work. But one of his remarks surprises me. He states: “Given later developments, it is interesting that both Carl Menger and Ludwig von Mises criticized the historical approach for its inability to produce predictions” (pp. 96–97). Would it not be more accurate to say that Mises believed that the Historical School wrongly sought to substitute historical research for economic theory? Austrians contend that history, taken by itself, cannot generate theory: an Austrian would hardly then criticize the Historical School for failure to achieve an impossible goal.

Our author rightly devotes attention to Max Weber, whose views on methodology were of crucial importance for Mises and his successors, Hayek foremost among them; but I think his presentation of Weber at one point misses the mark. He notes that Weber maintains that the choice of facts a social scientist elects to study depends on the values he brings to the investigation. As Weber puts the matter,

> Only a small portion of existing concrete reality is colored by our value-conditioned interest and it alone is important to us. . . . We cannot, however, discover what is meaningful to us by means of a “presuppositionless” investigation of empirical data. Rather perception of its meaningfulness to us is the presupposition of its becoming an object of investigation. (p. 82, quoting Weber)

From this passage Caldwell draws a radical conclusion:

> Even “pure observation” is always observation from a point of view; there is no such thing as “facts in themselves.” In modern terminology, what we take to be the facts are themselves “theory laden” in that they reflect our own prior interests. (p. 82)

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* Caldwell’s decision to ignore Hayek’s work on capital theory leads him to miss at least one instance of material relevant to the topics he covers. In *The Pure Theory of Capital*, Hayek has a most valuable discussion of how misleading terms can impede economic analysis.
This goes altogether too far. Weber says that we select facts that interest us to study. But it does not follow from this that, once one has selected some object of study, the properties of the facts disclosed to us exist only because of the theory that we hold. If someone investigates the claim “all ravens are black,” he presumably does so because of his interest in this hypothesis. Nevertheless, the data on black ravens seem entirely neutral: a raven is either black or it isn’t, regardless of what theory an investigator may hold. The claim that facts are “theory laden,” much promoted by Thomas Kuhn, Norwood Russell Hanson, et hoc genus omne, dissolves scientific investigation into a mere subjective clash of perspectives.* The point is so important that it bears repetition. If you select the facts you study according to your interests, it does not follow that your interests construct the facts, to any degree whatever.

When Caldwell turns to the work of Hayek himself, he continues the pattern so far suggested: he selects an important topic, has much of value to say about it, but fails to get matters quite right.

In earlier studies, Caldwell has been much preoccupied with the a priori­ism of Mises; so it comes as no surprise, then, that he devotes attention to Hayek’s famous article of 1937, “Economics and Knowledge.” Hayek later identified a covert theme in this article, his break with Mises over the a priori. Caldwell, a strong opponent of Mises’s method, argues that Hayek had even before his article distanced himself from Mises.†

Hayek in his article restricted the sphere of a priori knowledge to the actions of single individuals. Interpersonal actions cannot be studied without resort to the empirical, because a person cannot know a priori the choices of others. But where did Mises ever say that one can? Mises’s praxeology is confined entirely to the form of human action and what follows from this: it never attempts to deduce the particular choices of individuals. Mises, I suggest, was entirely on target in thinking that Hayek had not broken with him. Hayek’s belief to the contrary rested on misunderstanding.

* A supporter of the theory-ladenness of facts can escape subjectivism if he confines theory to the a priori. Mises took this way out in economics.

† Caldwell states, “I do not now and never have in the past accepted Ludwig von Mises’s a priorism. Indeed, I spent a considerable amount of time during my post-doc year studying Austrian economics at NYU trying to convince a number of Austrians to abandon their commitment to a priorism” (pp. 419–420). He does say, though, that if a priorism were compatible with fallibilism, this would remove one of his main objections.
Hayek noted with surprise that Mises “took my critique silently and even approved the article as if he had not been aware that it was a criticism of his own views. I cannot explain this” (p. 221, quoting Hayek). Why did Hayek think that Mises denied that “the empirical element enters in people learning about what the other people do” (p. 221, quoting Hayek)?

The issue I have raised is of much more than biographical interest, since the nature of a priori reasoning is crucial to economics. To my amazement, Caldwell in one passage suggests that Hayek identifies a priori reasoning with introspection, when Hayek of course stands innocent of this gross fallacy. Hayek states: “We can derive from the knowledge of our own mind in an ‘a priori’ or ‘deductive’ or ‘analytic’ fashion an (at least in principle) exhaustive classification of all the possible forms of intelligible reasoning.” Concerning this, Caldwell says that when Hayek “refers to knowledge that is derived ‘a priori,’” he seems to mean by the phrase something like “knowledge that is gained by introspection” (both quotations from p. 222).

Not at all! A priori reasoning concerns the logical relations among concepts. By thinking about the concept of choice, e.g., one sees that an actor will always choose his highest valued alternative. By contrast, introspection merely reports a particular person’s thought. Relying on introspection, I report that I prefer vanilla ice cream to pistachio, but there is nothing a priori, deductive, or analytic about my assertion. Hayek surely did not mean anything like this. No wonder Caldwell views the a priori with misgiving: How can you gain knowledge about the world if you confine yourself to your private thoughts? Caldwell’s view, I hope to have shown, is a confusion.*

If Hayek was an epistemologist, a historian, and a political philosopher, he nevertheless always remained an economist; and Caldwell rightly calls attention to one of Hayek’s final contributions to economic thought. In his 1981 talk, “The Flow of Goods and Services,” Hayek renounced the notion of equilibrium. Equilibrium, Hayek maintained, was not a useful way to understand the market process; instead, Hayek suggested the metaphor, not altogether clear, of a stream. Caldwell sees the crucial point:

he rejected here even his own definition of equilibrium . . . as useful for understanding how the price system continually

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* I suggest that Quine’s influence on Hayek’s view of the a priori, a topic Caldwell does not explore, warrants attention. Hayek told me that he regarded Quine as “one of our most stimulating epistemologists.”
guides the formation of the capital stock. At a minimum, the paper suggests that, by the end of his life, Hayek’s commitment to equilibrium theory as a metaphor for capturing the essence of the market process had reached its lowest point. (p. 227)

How is one to explain so fundamental a change? Equilibrium had long been at the center of Hayek’s thought, a fact that Joseph Salerno has taught us better than anyone else. Now, suddenly, it is abandoned. Caldwell is puzzled. (Incidentally, I cannot think that Caldwell has adequately confronted Salerno’s fundamental work on Hayek and equilibrium. See his brief and inadequate remarks at p. 143, n. 14.)

I venture to suggest that had Caldwell devoted more attention to Mises, he might have found the answer to his puzzle. For Mises, equilibrium, in his terms the evenly rotating economy, is a purely heuristic concept that can never be realized in practice. By no means is the market to be judged by how closely it matches this artificial construct. Is it too speculative to think that Hayek continued throughout his life to study the writings of someone who had influenced him so much in his youth? If so, perhaps Mises’s doubts about equilibrium at some point hit home with Hayek. Certainly, Mises kept up with Hayek’s work; and in *Human Action*, Mises comments at several places on Hayek’s views on economic theory. (See, e.g., Mises’s rejection of the Ricardo effect, famously championed by Hayek, *Human Action, Scholar’s Edition*, Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1998, pp. 767 ff.) Of course, this does not prove that Hayek read Mises; and my remarks are no more than conjecture.*

On one point, I think, we can go further. Caldwell claims that Hayek’s theory of the business cycle is “a paradigmatic example of equilibrium theory” (p. 228). If Hayek abandoned equilibrium, how could he continue to maintain, as he did so late as 1978, that the Austrian account of the cycle was in essence valid? Here Mises resolves the supposed difficulty. As he makes clear in *Human Action*, the Austrian account does not at all depend on the initial assumption of equilibrium, i.e., full employment of all factors of production. (See the section “The Role Played by Unemployed Factors of Production in the First Stages of a Boom,” pp. 576–578.)

I have so far been rather critical of Caldwell; but he deserves full credit for his ability to explain clearly difficult concepts. To me, the high point of

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* Hayek told me in 1969 that he regarded Mises’s *Theory and History* as worth careful study.
the book is Caldwell’s expert journey through the labyrinthine complexities of the *Sensory Order*. He succinctly explains, e.g., the key assumptions that underlie one of Hayek’s major arguments in that work:

> One of the most important philosophical consequences of Hayek’s psychological studies is the claim that it is impossible for the mind to explain itself. Hayek’s argument hinged on the twin ideas that explanation is itself a sort of classification and that the explanation of a given classification system requires a classification system of greater complexity than the one being explained. (p. 344)

Caldwell also deserves praise for realizing that Hayek’s views deserve further development: Hayek is no mere past figure whose insights have been absorbed into a supposed neoclassical consensus. But here our praise must decidedly be mixed. Caldwell gives a radically incomplete and distorted account of those who are attempting to continue the Austrian economics that Hayek championed throughout his life.

Although he mentions “signs of considerable vigor” in Austrian macroeconomics, citing in this connection the work of Steve Horwitz, Roger Garrison, Larry White, and George Selgin (pp. 326–327), there is a rather noticeable omission in what he has to say. The name of Murray Rothbard nowhere appears. Even if one does not share my own view that Rothbard is the most important successor of Mises and Hayek, is it not strange that Caldwell devotes not a single word to this eminent Austrian? Hayek did not share Caldwell’s evident opinion that Rothbard’s work is insignificant. I well remember, in response to my query, his praise for Rothbard’s *America’s Great Depression*.

It is of course too much to expect Caldwell to acknowledge the contributions of Rothbard’s successors, such as Hans-Hermann Hoppe and Joseph Salerno. (The latter is mentioned only in a critical footnote.) Instead, our author lavishes attention on such exotica as the artificial society model Sugarscape, devised by Joshua Epstein and Richard Axtell. In this model, agents who follow simple rules generate various structures. Caldwell finds in this model analogies to Hayek’s spontaneous orders and cultural evolution.

But our author ignores a crucial point. The patterns produced in this model are computer simulations. They are not deduced praxeologically from facts about individuals’ actions. This model counts as an Austrian approach only
in a most etiolated sense. (Incidentally, Robert Nozick was in his last years much interested in the Sugarscape model.) If Caldwell must go in for this sort of thing, he might also have mentioned the computational economy devised by Eric Baum and Igor Durdanovic, called The Hayek Machine. (For a discussion, see Eric Baum, *What Is Thought?*, MIT Press, 2004, pp. 250–266.)

Caldwell’s book is based on wide reading, but I did note a few errors. Bismarck was not “Prussian chancellor” (p. 57). Frederic Benham’s joke about “given data” is I think misunderstood. The point is not that the economists who used the expression did not specify to whom the data are given, but rather that, since “data” means “things given,” the expression “given data” is redundant (p. 212). Hayek’s claim that the ultimate state of science is a self-contained, tautological system is not inconsistent with “evolutionary themes” (p. 275), since temporal predicates can be incorporated into such a system. (Caldwell does not pursue the obvious parallel with Leibniz.) It is unlikely that the remarks on evolutionary adaptation in the *Sensory Order* come from Ludwig von Bertalanffy. He was a strong critic of Darwinism, and I remember Hayek’s dismissal in conversation of his anti-evolutionary views (p. 278). Why is Felix Ehrenhaft’s amusing complaint about Hayek’s incomprehensibility cited to support the view that social scientists found Hayek hard to understand (p. 261)? Ehrenhaft was an experimental physicist.
Hope and Memory: Lessons from the Twentieth Century*

TZVETAN TODOROV

The Essence of Political Evil

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TZVETAN TODOROV’s career as a writer has taken a surprising course. A Bulgarian long resident in France, he acquired an international reputation as a structuralist literary critic. He has recently risked his reputation with a dangerous course of action. In several recent works, of which Hope and Memory is a distinguished example, he has revealed himself as a critic of the regnant leftist orthodoxy that dominates contemporary academic discourse. It is as if Harold Bloom had suddenly been transformed into Paul Gottfried.

In the present work, Todorov offers a brilliant analysis of what he regards as the dominant political development of the twentieth century—the totalitarianism of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. The characteristics of these evil regimes are not altogether a thing of the past: a key feature of totalitarianism exerts a malign influence on the foreign and domestic policies of the major contemporary democracies.

Todorov begins his account of totalitarianism by contrasting it with the features of a free society. A liberal society, as Todorov sees matters, stresses both individual autonomy and the democratic right of the collective body

of society to set policy as it sees fit. (Todorov, it is apparent, is by no means fully a classical liberal.)

These two principles, Todorov recognizes, are not in entire accord. If the social collective is not bound by any restrictions, how can individuals be free to lead their lives as they wish? If persons are autonomous, what room is left for any collective action that fails to command universal consent?

Todorov fails to resolve adequately the problem he has so sharply posed. Instead, he favors a compromise view. We need a democracy that respects individual rights:

“Liberal democracy” as applied to modern democratic states is thus constituted by the conjunction of two separate principles . . . . Each has existed in the absence of the other. There was popular sovereignty without any protection for the freedom of the individual in ancient Greece; there have been monarchies ruling by divine right over societies where individual liberties were protected. (p. 9)

Libertarians would say that Todorov’s efforts to secure a compromise between these two incompatibles are doomed to failure. Democracy should be dropped: Todorov needs a stiff dose of Hans Hoppe. But our differences from Todorov here do not much affect the rest of his argument.

Todorov’s main point is his contrast between liberal society, whether democratic or not, and a society that requires everyone to conform to a single truth. Our author adduces in this connection a famous debate between Montesquieu and Condorcet (Todorov is an authority on the French Enlightenment). Montesquieu praised pluralism: no universal principles hold good, come what may, for all societies. Condorcet dissented: is not truth the same everywhere and always?

Pluralism is a good in itself, in Montesquieu’s view . . . . Thirty years later Condorcet wrote a critique of The Spirit of the Laws and protested against Montesquieu’s insistence on plurality. If the best solution, or the best law, or the best government has been discovered, why should we not get rid of inferior ones? (p. 285)

Todorov comes down entirely on the side of Montesquieu. It is precisely the attempt to force everyone to accept a single doctrine that constitutes for our author the essence of political evil. Todorov is right to condemn the
imposition of political orthodoxy; but from this insight, as it seems to me, he has drawn an invalid inference. From the fact that one should not force people to accept the truth, as one conceives it, it does not follow that there is no universally valid truth. (It is not clear that Montesquieu commits the fallacy of thinking that it does follow; but I think that Todorov himself is guilty.) Leaving people to their own devices does not require that we accept their opinions as even partially true. Why cannot one consistently hold that people should be free to persist in error? Indeed, does not Todorov himself regard respecting freedom as universally good? A consistent pluralist would have to reject the view of freedom that Todorov espouses.

Todorov is no doubt right to reject compulsory adherence to political orthodoxy, but has he not cast his net too widely? How can he hope to characterize totalitarianism in this way, when many non-totalitarian societies impose orthodoxy? Those living in medieval or early modern Europe, e.g., were hardly in most cases free to choose their religion.

Our author is fully aware of this point; he holds that modern totalitarianism stems from a particular kind of political orthodoxy. In the nineteenth century, thinkers such as Ernest Renan contended that the growth of science would replace the welter of conflicting opinions with a single truth, universally accepted by those competent to judge. What is the point of professing a meaningless freedom to reject the law of gravity?

In like fashion, science would establish a single correct account of how society should be organized. In the attempt to impose by force such a doctrine, Todorov sees the sum and substance of the totalitarian impulse. Here he cites a prophetic story by Renan, written in 1871. This predicted a society in which dissenters would be kept in line by the threat of being sent to a death camp. People would be deterred “not with a chimerical hell of unproved reality, but with a real hell.” Setting up a death camp that would send shivers into every spine and instill unconditional obedience in all would be justified by the fact that it would serve the good of the species” (p. 29, quoting Renan).*

Todorov’s interpretation brings to mind Hayek’s similar views in The Counter-Revolution of Science. But Todorov does not pick up on Hayek’s point that

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* The notion that science would lead to universal agreement plays some role in the thought of John Stuart Mill, a fact that has been much stressed by Maurice Cowling and Joseph Hamburger.
efforts to plan the economy were at the heart of the totalitarian impulse. As Hayek pointed out in *The Road to Serfdom*, an economic plan must be guided by a single set of values. Dissenters from these values threaten the integrity of the plan; hence the temptation to suppress them, lest the plan be abandoned.

Todorov’s application of his view to Nazism and Communism is straightforward. The Nazis, following their racial science, ruthlessly suppressed whatever interfered with their plans. In like fashion, scientific socialism led to the death of millions in Soviet Russia. I shall leave to readers of the book Todorov’s detailed remarks about these regimes, as well as his moving chapters, interspersed throughout the book, about persons who have resisted totalitarianism. (The discussion of Margarete Buber-Neumann, a prisoner in both Soviet and Nazi concentration camps, is of particular interest.)

Rather, let us turn to Todorov’s view of contemporary trends. He finds the quasi-totalitarian appeal of the single imposed truth prominent in both Western Europe and America. In domestic policy, this appeal has a paradoxical aspect. In the guise of opposition to fascism and totalitarianism, views that in any way challenge leftist pieties are condemned. It is the self-proclaimed anti-fascists, Todorov claims, who now endeavor to coerce everyone to accept a rigid orthodoxy.

The commonest and so to speak the foundational rhetorical device of moralizing discourse is the excluded middle: whoever is not antifascist as we are may be suspected of indulgence toward Fascism. The consequence of this ploy is a systematic anathematization of the enemy. . . . The only proper attitude toward an enemy of that sort, moralizing critics assert, is (civil) war; any attempt to introduce nuances into the argument is seen as treason. (p. 192)

I assure readers that Todorov, not Paul Gottfried, said this.*

This dismaying trend has spread much farther in Europe than in the United States; but Todorov does not let us escape unscathed. Our main failings, he holds, lie in foreign policy. In a “Preface to the English Edition,” he bravely challenges our “war against terrorism.” America has fallen prey to the Manichean temptation to view itself as good and its opponents as absolutely evil.

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* See the discussion in Gottfried’s important book, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt* (University of Missouri Press, 2002).
In the name of opposing terrorism, the Bush administration has already overthrown the governments of two countries. The fight for freedom, as the president and his neoconservative gray eminences see it, threatens perpetual war:

Why is the plan to impose good so dangerous? Assuming that we knew what good was, in order to achieve it we should need to declare war on all who disagreed. Countless victims would strew the path to our radiant future. (p. xix)
Gertrude Himmelfarb is an intellectual historian of great distinction. She has specialized in British nineteenth-century history; and her book on Lord Acton, her study of nineteenth-century thought on poverty, and her collection *Victorian Minds* have had a deserved influence. Perhaps her most influential essay analyzed, to devastating effect, Jeremy Bentham’s *Panopticon*; her most neglected work is her outstanding *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution*.

At times in her work, though, a weakness is apparent. Though she writes about ideas, she often does not enter closely into the philosophical arguments that bear on her subjects. Thus, in her *On Liberty and Liberalism: The Case of John Stuart Mill* (Knopf, 1974), she contrasts what she deems the overly simple doctrine of *On Liberty* with several of Mill’s essays that she deems more nuanced. Her hasty dismissal of Mill’s alleged extremism in *On Liberty* almost completely ignores the philosophical literature on Mill’s ethics.

*The New History and the Old* manifests this weakness, along with her very considerable strengths. The book is a revised and expanded edition.

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of a collection of essays that first appeared in 1987. Himmelfarb writes as a defender of the old history, which stresses politics as the core of the discipline. To her the actions of great men, and the ideas of the great thinkers who influenced them, lie at the center of historical study.

By contrast, the new history, her principal target in the book, shifts attention elsewhere. Social structures and class assume prime importance. To the great French historian Fernand Braudel, “the ‘inanimate’ forces of geography, demography, and economy were the ‘deeper realities’ of history, compared with which the passions of Philip II and the idea of the Renaissance were ‘cockleshells’ tossed on the waters of history” (p. 12). Other exponents of the new history did not go so far. Marxists often write about the events of politics, but economic forces determine what is “really” at stake in these events.

To combat these two varieties of new history is a formidable undertaking; but since the original appearance of Himmelfarb’s book, a new enemy has come to prominence. What our author terms the “new new history” denies that history is an objective discipline. Such modish figures as Hayden White do not propose to subordinate politics to class; rather, they break down the distinction between history and fiction. Leopold von Ranke claimed to describe the past “as it actually happened;” but the new view seeks relief from the “fetish of facts” (p. 23).*

In her campaign against these views, Himmelfarb shows herself a brilliant tactician, but she cannot carry through the battle to final victory. She can make her opponents look silly, but she fails to demonstrate that their theories are false.

The most striking example of what I have in mind occurs in “The Historian as Marxist: The ‘Group.’” Himmelfarb shows that the British Communist Party developed an influential interpretation of English history. Such eminent figures as Maurice Dobb, Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, and E. P. Thompson were not only Marxists but also strictly observant party members. According to Hobsbawm, “Our work as historians was therefore embedded in our work as Marxists, which we believed to imply membership in the Communist Party. . . . We were as loyal, active and committed a group of Communists as any” (p. 91, quoting Hobsbawm).

* Himmelfarb mentions, but has little to say about, the early twentieth-century variety of new history developed by James Harvey Robinson. On this, see D. L. Hoggan, The Myth of the New History (Craig Press, 1965).
For once, a Communist told the truth. The Historians Group developed interpretations of English history in strict accord with Marxist dogma. Feudalism, according to the main English Marxist theoretician Maurice Dobb, principally concerned relations between lord and peasant, not lord and vassal. In good Marxist fashion, Dobb argued that “the dissolution of feudalism resulted from the internal contradictions of the social relations of production” (p. 93). The Group was anxious to combat another analysis of the feudal crisis, advanced by Paul Sweezy, a Marxist but not a member of the Party. The correct line must at all costs be preserved.

The English Civil War attracted even more devoted attention from the Historians Group. Here Christopher Hill led the way; a pamphlet that portrayed the war as a bourgeois revolution laid down the correct line.

Hill’s studies in the Soviet Union had focused on Soviet interpretations of the English Civil War, and his first important essay, “The English Revolution,” was written under the influence of the Russian historian E. A. Kosminsky. . . . For Hill the Civil War was a “class war” between a despotic king representing the “reactionary forces” of landlords and the Church, and Parliament representing the commercial and industrial classes in the towns, the yeomanry and “progressive gentry” in the countryside, and the enlightened elements among the masses. (p. 96)

Of course no good Marxist could let the Industrial Revolution pass by unremarked. According to E. P. Thompson, the author of The Making of the English Working Class, “still the most influential book produced by any member of the Group” (p. 102), resistance to capitalism produced a revolutionary working class.

[I]t maintains that by 1832 . . . England had witnessed the emergence of a single “working class” . . . a class that was fully developed, fully conscious of its class identity and class interests, consciously committed to the class struggle, politically organized to carry out that struggle, and ideologically receptive to an alternative economic and social system. (p. 102)

Himmelfarb has given us a painstaking account of an important episode in English historiography, and those of us not attracted to the science of Marxism-
Leninism must view the interpretations of the Group with caution. But has she shown to be false any of the Marxist interpretations she has discussed?

She thinks that she has fatally wounded the views of the Group, but I venture to suggest that she has not done so. She rightly notes that the Marxists came to the historical facts with their theory readymade: what they discovered was forced to fit preconceived categories.

The Marxist . . . is so assured of the truth of his thesis—it's political as well as historical truth—that the temptation, as Hobsbawm says, is to invoke arguments “designed a posteriori to confirm what we already knew to be necessarily ‘correct.’” (p. 107)

But suppose that Marxism is true: would anything be strange in expecting that the historical record would confirm it? To counter the Group, Himmelfarb needs to show that Marxism is false, not just that the members of the Group dogmatically embraced it. To do so, she would need to address on their own terms the central contentions of the Marxist account, a task she never attempts. (The best analysis of the Marxist theory of history, to my mind, is found in Mises’s *Theory and History*.)

A like problem arises in her account of another influential theory of history. Like Himmelfarb, devotees of psychohistory accent the role of the individual. But they fall short, our author contends, because they reduce conscious action to unconscious motives.

Himmelfarb displays remarkable skill as a close reader, and she readily shows some psychohistorians guilty of strained reasoning. She tells us that Isaac Kramnick contends that Edmund Burke hungered after his father’s love and affection: as proof, he tells us that Burke “named his first son (and the only one to survive) with his father’s name, Richard” (p. 117, quoting Kramnick). On this Himmelfarb comments with appropriate severity:

The familiar psychoanalytic fallacy—attributing great psychological significance to a commonplace convention (the naming of one’s son after one’s father)—is compounded by the parenthetical phrase that seems to reinforce that psychological significance, as if Burke foresaw that this would be the only son to survive. (p. 117)

Himmelfarb’s discussion of this point could hardly be bettered, but once more she has not pursued matters to the foundation. To refute psychohistory,
it is necessary to show that Freudian psychoanalysis is a mistaken theory. Himmelfarb may demolish a few lines of Kramnick; she may mock Rudolph Binion’s claim that Hitler’s anti-Semitism stems from a botched cancer operation on his mother by a Jewish doctor; and she may protest Erik Erikson’s bizarre choice of sources and “methodological audacity” (p. 56); but until she confronts psychoanalysis directly, she has left her opponent in the ring.*

Even when Himmelfarb faces an easier target, her discussion falls short for a now familiar reason. She reacts with appropriate outrage to the excesses of postmodernism.

For the postmodernist, there is no truth to be derived from the past because the past is only a “social construct” devised by the historian. The events of the past are “texts,” much as poems are, and the historian has the same authority over the past as the literary critic has over the poem. (p. 21)

Nor is postmodernism merely idle speculation, ignored when historians cease to play philosopher and write history. Such distinguished historians as Simon Schama and Natalie Zemon Davis introduce fiction into their works—“not historical fiction à la Walter Scott, but fictionalized history, which is quite another thing” (p. 23). Himmelfarb contrasts with this her own rigorous training in historical method: have not these new historians betrayed their calling?

Our author neglects to mention that both Schama and Davis have produced works of outstanding scholarship; but on her main point she is clearly right. It is indeed nonsensical to think that the historical past is not discovered by the historian, but constructed by him. But Himmelfarb fails to confront the arguments of her adversaries. She mentions in passing Derrida and Rorty, dismissing them as absurd; but she declines to pursue the philosophical issues that they have raised. I do not object to ridicule—I would be out of business without it—but more is needed.

Himmelfarb’s defense of her own conception of history is no more successful in taking matters to the foundations. Against a social historian who appealed to Aristotle, “translated as he understood it: ‘Man is by nature a social animal,’” Himmelfarb is adamant:

* For an excellent criticism of psychoanalysis, see Frank Cioffi, Freud and the Question of Pseudoscience (Open Court, 1998).
What Aristotle said, of course, is “Man is by nature a political animal.” . . . What [non-human animals] do not have is a polity, a government of laws and institutions by means of which, Aristotle believed—man consciously, rationally tries to establish a just regime and pursue the good life. The social historian, rejecting any such “elitist” idea as the good life . . . denies that man is the distinctive, indeed unique animal Aristotle thought him to be—a rational animal, which is to say, a political animal. (pp. 43–44)

Why does Himmelfarb assume that man’s distinctively rational activity takes place principally in politics? What happened to religion, philosophy, the arts, and literature? Would not her criterion eliminate her own historical work as distinctively rational? (She would probably respond that the rationality of her historical work derives from the rationality of the politics she discusses.) Such objections are obvious, but Himmelfarb never thinks to address them. Instead, she fobs us off with a quotation from Aristotle.

But have we not been too harsh on Himmelfarb? She wishes historians to concentrate on the actions of individuals, instead of vague social trends. Is she not here in perfect accord with Misesian teaching? Methodological individualism is after all a key tenet of Human Action. Should we not praise Himmelfarb for her insight?

The objection is in part well taken, but Himmelfarb’s individualism differs greatly from the sort that Mises and Rothbard favor. The difference lies not only in her unexamined premise that politics is the supreme occasion for rational action. Historical understanding, as Mises teaches, endeavors to reconstruct the thinking behind individual actions. By no means, though, does Mises contend that individuals are the best interpreters of their actions’ significance or the historical movements in which their actions take place. The explanation that a historian, informed by praxeology, will offer for the decline of Rome will hardly be identical with the views on politics of the Romans themselves.

Himmelfarb at least sometimes accepts the fallacious position just adumbrated. Thus, she contrasts the spurious precision of a model of class in early nineteenth-century England presented by R. S. Neale, a social historian, with the superior wisdom of Thomas Carlyle. He was an influential contemporary observer of the growth of capitalism: does this not suffice to rank his insights above those of a mere social historian? She finds great merit in Carlyle’s attack
on capitalism in his discussion of the “condition-of-England” question. Apparently, Carlyle’s insight was to see that the struggle between rich and poor should not be seen as a purely economic question. We must not surrender to the “cash nexus.” The true division lies not between those with a great deal of money and those with less, but rather between “‘toiling classes’ and the ‘untoiling.’ It was here that the two classes, so far from being simple descriptive terms, became morally charged” (p. 77).

Himmelfarb may like Carlyle’s rhetorical flights of fancy and idiosyncratic appeals to morality; but these are no substitute for sound economic analysis. Had Himmelfarb paid the slightest attention to economic theory, she would have surely mentioned that Carlyle’s account of the working classes grossly distorted the facts.*

Himmelfarb’s disdain for theory makes her the prisoner of an unexamined apriorism of her own devising. This emerges most clearly in her discussion of A. J. P. Taylor’s The Origins of the Second World War. In this highly controversial book, Taylor argued that Hitler did not by deliberate intention bring about world war in September 1939. Quite the contrary, Taylor claimed that the Polish crisis eventuated in war owing to diplomatic miscalculation. For Taylor, Hitler was a traditional German statesman: though “in wicked acts he outdid them all,” Hitler’s diplomatic aims were the same as those of his predecessors. Hitler operated by taking advantage of the immediate situation, not by following a plan for world conquest laid down long in advance.

To say that this account is controversial is a mild understatement, and Himmelfarb joins with many others in rejecting it. I do not propose to examine here the merits of Taylor’s thesis; what concerns me instead is another issue. Himmelfarb does not herself consider the diplomatic history of the late 1930s, showing in what ways Taylor has misread the documents. Rather, she deduces a priori that Hitler caused the war.

Since he was a bad man, he must have done so:

Diplomacy-as-usual works only with statesmen as usual, not with “world-historical individuals” like Napoleon and Hitler, who do not abide by the rules of the game—who change not

* For a valuable account of Carlyle, showing that his social thought rested on the acceptance of slavery, see David M. Levy, How the Dismal Science Got Its Name (University of Michigan Press, 2001). The chapter on Carlyle in Ernst Cassirer, The Myth of the State (Yale University Press, [1946] 1961) should also be consulted.
only the rules but the game itself... the precise timetable for war [was] not known in advance; Hitler himself did not know [it]. But that there would be a war if he were opposed abroad... was hardly in doubt. (p. 193)

An important thesis, if true; but Himmelfarb gives us no reason to accept it. To prove it, she would need to refer to the actual events of 1939, or at least refer us to an account more adequate than Taylor’s. That Himmelfarb fails to see the need to do so reflects her sometimes inadequate grasp of historical argument.
Remembered Past: John Lukacs on History, Historians, and Historical Knowledge: A Reader*

Edited by
Mark G. Malavasi & Jeffrey O. Nelson

Blunders, Lies, and Other Historian Habits

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**John Lukacs**, in his own estimation, is much more than an ordinary historian. In what he considers his most important book, *Historical Consciousness*, he elaborates

not a philosophy of history but its opposite: a multifaceted statement and exposition of a historical philosophy . . . it wishes to demonstrate the profound, yet considerably unsystematic, historicity of our knowledge. (p. 662)

When we learn from Conor Cruise O’Brien that Lukacs possesses “one of the most powerful, as well as one of the most learned minds of our time,” we eagerly await an account of Lukacs’s philosophical discoveries. Fortunately, this vast anthology does not disappoint us. It includes, among much else, an

* ISI Books, 2005.*
extensive selection from *Historical Consciousness*; indeed, *Remembered Past* tells us more about Lukacs than we need to know.

Much of the new historical philosophy consists of elementary blunders that, one might have hoped, his uninformed pupils at a Catholic girls’ college, about whom he patronizingly but engagingly writes, would have been able to avoid. He claims, e.g., that the “absoluteness of mathematical ‘truth’ was disproved by Gödel’s famous theorem in 1931” (p. 63).

Not at all! The two theorems in Gödel’s great paper do not show that mathematical truth is relative. They deal with consistency within a formal system adequate for arithmetic and with statements that can be neither proved nor disproved within such a system. Lukacs makes matters even worse when he refers to “Gödel’s revolutionary theorem about the inevitability of human preconceptions in mathematics” (p. 75). In point of fact, Gödel was a Platonist about mathematical truth, though this view neither entails nor is entailed by his incompleteness theorems. He thought that mathematicians directly perceive mathematical objects and condemned the exact view that our author attributes to him. (He saw Wittgenstein as a chief sinner in this regard.)

Lukacs does not much improve when he leaves the philosophy of mathematics. After a long quotation from Werner Heisenberg that discusses proposals to abandon the Law of Excluded Middle in quantum mechanics, our author has this to say:

Knowledge means not certainty . . . everyday language cannot be eliminated from any meaningful human statement of truth, including propositions dealing with matter; after all is said, logic is human logic, our own creation. (p. 67)

Our author suffers from an intellectual obsession: he must at all costs claim that logic and truth are human inventions. Unfortunately for him, the use of logical systems without the Law of Excluded Middle has nothing at all to do with how closely statements approach certainty, the use of ordinary language in scientific statements, or whether logic is “our own creation”; the quotation from Heisenberg does not support any of Lukacs’s odd inferences from it.

Lukacs displays a remarkable ability to draw philosophical “conclusions” that do not follow from the premises alleged to justify them. He states, e.g., “First: there is no scientific certitude” (p. 62, emphasis removed). He appeals in support to unpredictability at the level of subatomic particles. How does this in any way show that all scientific statements are uncertain? Even more
egregiously, Lukacs claims that quantum physics shows “the illusory nature of ‘factual’ truth” (p. 64, emphasis removed). How is this sweeping claim supposed to follow from the fact (I presume non-illusory) that a physicist cannot “exactly determine both the position and speed of the atomic particle” (p. 64)? Amazingly, he tells us elsewhere that Heisenberg “wholly agreed with what I had written in my ‘History and Physics’ chapter, which was all that I wanted to know” (p. 664). If Heisenberg really endorsed such nonsense, I would be astonished; but for a reason that will emerge later, I am not inclined to trust our author’s attributions of beliefs to others.

Perhaps I am unfair to Lukacs. Even if he is not the philosopher he imagines himself to be, can he not still be an excellent historian? Sadly, his scatterbrained theories infect his historical work, sometimes with fatal results. Lukacs, as we have seen, rejects objective truth in science: knowledge is “personal” and “participant.” He applies this view, with risible results, to economics. He tells us that

the idea of Economic Laws as if they were something like the Laws of Nature is even more dead [than the idea of free trade].
The notion of economics as a mental construction, indeed, as a fictio in every sense of the word, may be hard for many people to accept, but accept it they must if they want to think sensibly about the functioning of economic factors. (p. 25)

Mises long ago noted that the denial of economic law was a principal tactic of the German Historical School to avoid confronting the refutations by classical-liberal economists of their plans for state control of the economy.

Suitably instructed, the historian can now understand economic history:

The principal factor in the development of such a prima facie “economic” event as the American depression beginning in 1929 was a loss of confidence, that is a change in mentality, just as the American recovery beginning in 1933 was the result of the national recovery of confidence. (p. 26)

It is good to know that we need no longer rack our brains trying to grasp the fine points of Austrian business-cycle theory. Economic theory is as illusory as physics: “there’s nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” No doubt Robert Higgs and other economic historians will be interested to learn of the “American recovery beginning in 1933.”
Our author has more to teach us. Deficits do not matter: the national debt is “abstract”; a mere matter of bookkeeping. Accounting after a while, becomes a closed system of its own, and consequently less and less meaningful, historically speaking. An example of this is a figure such as the “national debt,” which in the twentieth century has become not much more than an abstract term within intra-national accounting. (p. 27)

Lukacs, whatever his faults, has read widely; but if he has the slightest acquaintance with economic theory, he has managed to keep it well concealed.

Lukacs is by no means wholly bad. The anthology includes excellent essays on Burckhardt and Tocqueville; and, it is good to see that he esteems highly the work of Christopher Dawson, whom he rightly calls a great historian. His essay on the diplomatic historian Paul Schroeder is well worth studying. Schroeder, who by the way is among the best critics of the Iraq War, is an outstanding authority on the period after the Congress of Vienna, “when the undisputed practice of balance-of-power was superseded, for the first time, by a tacit agreement for the upholding, or at least for some preservation, of an international order in Europe” (p. 256).

He has a good eye for less well-known but significant authors. He has learned much from Owen Barfield, and emulated his method of tracing the history of consciousness through changes in the meanings of words. I think he ought to have mentioned, though, that Barfield was an ardent disciple of the controversial occultist Rudolf Steiner, whose views lie not very far beneath the surface of his works. Lukacs also calls our attention to the profound essay of Romano Guardini, The End of the Modern World.

When Lukacs can manage to stay away from philosophy, he sometimes makes valuable points. He is at his best with the political history that some consider old-fashioned. “One hundred years ago,” he tells us, “it was largely taken for granted what the English historian J. R. Seeley, the Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, wrote: ‘history is past politics and politics present history’” (p. 92). Actually, it was Edward Augustus Freeman who wrote this; but with Lukacs one cannot be too exacting. (He makes the same misattribution on p. 36 as well.)

A point he makes about the Cold War is especially valuable. He strongly criticizes American foreign policy in the 1950s for an overly ideological
approach to Soviet Russia. Like Winston Churchill, one of his heroes, he views Russian national interest as the key to Soviet foreign policy under Stalin. Churchill, despite his “Iron Curtain” speech in 1946 inaugurating the Cold War, had by 1950 seen the potential for a peaceful resolution of the division of Europe. His suggestions had no impact on American foreign policy, dominated by a rigid ideological posture. “Eisenhower and Dulles rejected Churchill with contumely” (p. 300).

Lukacs’s skepticism about the Cold War is welcome, but by no means is he a supporter of the traditional American policy of nonintervention in European power politics. Quite the contrary, he smears the American opponents of entry into World War II as German sympathizers. They absurdly underrated the appeal of fascism. “When in 1941 Senator [Robert] Taft said that the danger to America was not Hitlerism but communism—‘for fascism appeals to a few, and communism to the many’—his diagnosis was entirely wrong” (p. 578).

Why were Taft and his fellow noninterventionists mistaken? They did not realize how close Hitler came to winning the war. Would not a Nazi-controlled Europe have placed America in mortal danger? “Hitler’s victory would have meant, at the very least, his domination of all of Europe, with incalculable consequences for the United States” (p. 195).

The fallacy in Lukacs’s argument can be seen in what he himself tells us:

> After December 1941 Hitler could no longer win his war because the British and the Russians had held out against him until finally the Americans joined them in full force. But before Pearl Harbor he could have won it. (p. 667)

But if Hitler was unable to overcome British and Russian resistance before December 1941, why was American entry into the war essential? For his argument to have merit, Lukacs would have to show that the British and Russians would have been unable to resist further after December 1941, absent American intervention. To conjure up visions of Hitler’s success before this, as Lukacs does, is not to the point.

Lukacs cannot defeat his opponents’ arguments; instead, as suggested earlier, he impugns their motives. Although, with becoming generosity, he acknowledges, “There is something to be said for the arguments of isolationists before World War II,” the smear follows immediately:
except that consistent isolationists were few and far between. The “isolationism” of most of the “conservatives” was deeply compromised because of their selective indignation. Most of those who had been critical of the American intervention on the side of Britain (and of Russia) against Germany very soon became the most vocal advocates of . . . intervention against Russia. (p. 535, emphasis in original)

Lukacs here ignores, whether willfully or not I shall not venture to say, that many of the prewar “isolationists” opposed the Cold War as well. National Review refused to publish an article by John T. Flynn critical of the Cold War. Herbert Hoover can hardly be described as a Cold Warrior, and Robert Taft opposed military aid to NATO. Harry Elmer Barnes, to whom Lukacs devotes considerable attention, was an ardent Cold War revisionist.

Lukacs makes some odd remarks about the post-World War I American revisionist historians. He condemns Charles Tansill’s America Goes to War as a “radical and Germanophile” book and seems shocked that it won the praise of Henry Steele Commager and Allan Nevins (p. 149). Tansill, whom he terms “the prototype of a zealous crusader,” was one of the foremost diplomatic historians of the twentieth century, and his book remains to this day the best and most thorough study of its subject. Lukacs disagrees: he thinks the “most serious” revisionist book on American entry into World War I was Walter Millis’s The Road to War. Millis’s study lacks the firm documentary basis of Tansill’s, but Lukacs esteems him because he shifted to an interventionist position before World War II. This our author considers proof that “he was an honest man” (p. 196).

But I have saved the worst for last. He dons the brass knuckles for an attack on Harry Elmer Barnes, who, by the way, was not a “sociologist turned historian” (p. 145). Barnes taught history from the outset of his career and considered himself primarily a historian. (So at any rate he told me in 1964.) Lukacs says that Barnes after the war “became an admirer of Hitler.” He adduces as evidence a shocking quotation. Barnes described Hitler as “a man whose only fault was that he was too soft, generous, and honourable” (pp. 147–148). He cites no source for this, but the remark comes from a privately printed pamphlet by Barnes, Blasting the Historical Blackout, which appeared in 1963. There is a slight difficulty for Lukacs. His version of the quotation does not exactly correspond to what Barnes says, and I do not mean only that Barnes used the American rather than British spelling of “honorable.” On page 17 of
Barnes’s pamphlet, the following appears: “Defenders of Hitler, of whom I am not one, contend that he lost the War and his life by being too decent and honorable.” Now we see what Lukacs has in mind by “the illusory nature of factual truth.” What does he think justifies his unconscionable practice of distortion? Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle?*

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* Lukacs recycles the old legend that Marx considered dedicating *Das Kapital* to Darwin (p. 73). He did not; he did send Darwin a copy of the book, which Darwin never opened.
Ronald Hamowy combines extraordinary critical powers with painstaking historical research. His skills are much in evidence in this collection of his essays, but I have an additional reason to call this book to my readers’ attention. On a few occasions, people have complained that my reviews are too negative.

Now, I can answer, “If you think I’m bad, look at Hamowy!” Here he is on a book by Christina Petsoulas:

Nor does Petsoulas grasp the nature of ordered arrangements in the context of market forces . . . she is oblivious to the origin of these “price signals” to which individuals react . . . It is difficult to know what to make of Petsoulas’s book. It was written as a dissertation at Nuffield College, Oxford, and has appeared under the imprimatur of a reputable academic press, yet it falls so far short of what would ordinarily be expected of a serious exploration of the topic that the reader is at a loss to know why it ever saw print. (pp. xvii–xviii)

* Edward Elgar, 2005.
What has aroused Hamowy’s ire are the hapless author’s mistakes about spontaneous order, and the exploration of this theory is the principal theme of this book. He carefully delimits what he means:

It is important to underscore that this theory of spontaneous order… does not simply contend that certain purposive social actions have unintended consequences… The theory of spontaneous order, on the other hand, refers only to those acts the unanticipated results of which issue in complex social patterns. (pp. 39–40)

I should like to suggest one modification of Hamowy’s definition. Suppose that people in a market economy anticipate, based on past experience, that their buying and selling will result in a coordinated economy. Is this not still an example of spontaneous order? It would be better to speak of acts that result in complex social patterns, where intending to produce those patterns plays no causal role in their genesis.

Hamowy maintains that spontaneous order is “perhaps the single most significant sociological contribution made by that group of writers whom we today regard as constituting the Scottish Enlightenment” (p. 39). He discusses the theory of spontaneous order in Mandeville, Hume, Smith, and Ferguson, among others. Hume, e.g., argued that “the rules that give shape to property, right, and obligation” arose spontaneously. People in the “circumstances of justice” must deal with scarcity: goods are not superabundant. Each person naturally wants as much as possible for himself; but this desire, Hume holds, leads to the rules of justice:

Tis self-love which is their [the rules of justice’s] real origin; and as the self-love of one person is naturally contrary to that of another, these various several interested passions are oblig’d to adjust themselves after such a manner as to concur in some system of conduct and behaviour. This system, therefore, comprehending the interest of each individual, is of course advantageous to the public; tho’ it be not intended for that purpose by the inventors. (p. 47, quoting Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*)

Hamowy finds Hume’s account plausible; but one adopts it. I think that its merits need to be weighed against the view that we directly grasp what is right. Richard Price, whose views on the American Revolution are the topic of another essay, held exactly this view. Price thought that “our intellectual
perceptions of right and wrong, our notions of moral rightness, follow immediately from our understanding and, once having been intuited, are appealable to nothing more fundamental” (p. 165).

The most famous example of the theory of spontaneous order is of course Adam Smith’s “invisible hand.” Hamowy notes that Smith’s use of the concept did not imply that he fully accepted laissez-faire. Although the “overall thrust” of Smith’s argument favored laissez-faire,

Smith supported a number of specific governmental intrusions into the market, among them the regulation of paper money banking, the compulsory regulation of mortgages, government participation in education, control of the coinage, taxes on the sale of liquor, the granting of temporary monopolies to merchants engaged in enterprises of great risk aimed at establishing new branches of trade, patents, copyrights, government stamps of quality on plate and on linen and woolen cloth, and the establishment of a maximum rate of interest. (p. 57)

I hope that Hamowy’s careful scholarship on this issue does not result in an accusation of dishonesty from any overwrought Smith partisans.

In his discussion of spontaneous order, Hamowy continues and extends the work of his teacher, F. A. Hayek. In another area, though, he and Hayek differ strongly. Hayek contrasted centrally directed societies, in which the state directly tells particular people what to do, with societies governed by the rule of law. In the latter, the laws are general and abstract: they make no reference to particular people. Because of these features of the law, people can plan their future actions to avoid legal trouble. Hayek saw in the rule of law the key to a free society.

Hamowy rejects Hayek’s thesis. He denies that the rule of law by itself offers significantly more scope to freedom than the discretionary law that Hayek opposes. He does not argue that discretion by government tribunals helps to secure freedom: that would be an implausible and unlibertarian view. Rather, he denies that the general and abstract rules that Hayek favors suffice to restrict the government’s discretionary power.

In making this argument, Hamowy ingeniously turns to his own purposes the contentions of a school of legal thought characterized by political opinions sharply at variance with his own. The American legal realists, such as Karl Llewellyn and Jerome Frank, wanted to use law as a tool to achieve
the social purposes they favored. Most of them sympathized with the New Deal and opposed as outmoded “formalism” efforts by the Supreme Court to derail the reform measures they supported.

Though Hamowy differs from the realists politically, he agrees with them that laws are indeterminate. Karl Llewellyn, e.g., noted that in almost any contested lawsuit, the law is to some extent in doubt.

Much litigation arises through genuine dispute over whether a particular law is, in fact, applicable to a given situation. . . . If decisions of law could be predicted with a good measure of certainty, there would be little disagreement among trained lawyers over such questions. The very existence of appeals courts belies this. Professor Llewellyn remarks . . . that “the rules of law, do not, because they cannot, decide any appealed case which has been worth an appeal and a response. . . .” (p. 227, emphasis removed)

Hamowy does not go so far as Jerome Frank, who once said that the decision in a contested case is determined by what the judge had for breakfast that morning.

Hayek’s use of the rule of law goes further. He thinks that one can define freedom as a condition in which the legislature is bound by general and abstract rules:

Freedom, for him [Hayek] is a logical consequence of a certain set of formal restrictions on legislative activity. . . . The implication is, of course, that these abstract rules, when applied impartially, without regard to person, are non-coercive, despite any substantive qualification. (pp. 211–212)

Hamowy makes short work of this view. On it, all sorts of measures, such as taxation, commonly held coercive count as non-coercive so long as they are specified in advance through general laws. But of course it does not follow that if you know the tax table before you decide on employment, taxes leave your freedom unimpaired.

For Hayek, the themes we have so far considered, spontaneous order and the rule of law, are closely linked. The rule of law in Britain, its foremost home, arose through an unplanned process. General rules emerged from the body of decisions built up over time by the common law courts.
Hamowy utterly rejects Hayek’s account. The common law courts were bound by “antiquated and sluggish processes”; they could not handle many types of commercial disputes. The royal courts, under the control of the king, were much more popular. He gives a hilarious example of these antiquated procedures:

The common law courts were further burdened by the fact that pleadings and judgments were made in Norman French, which persisted until the 16th century. Even as late as 1631, the records of Salisbury assizes noted that the Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas condemned a prisoner, who “ject un Brickbat a le dit Justice que narrowly mist,” for which “son dexter manue amputee,” and the man himself “immediatem hange in presence de Court.” (p. 254, emphasis removed)

Hamowy concludes: “The early common law cannot be said to be either the product of evolution, any more than any other medieval English institution, nor a workable system of justice” (p. 259).

Why is Hamowy so eager to criticize Hayek on legal issues? For him, there is a fundamental issue at stake. Freedom demands that the state’s power should be restricted as much as possible. “For at least two hundred years, social philosophers have known that association does not need government, that, indeed, government is destructive of association” (p. 236). A libertarian theory must specify the substantive rights that people have, e.g., self-ownership and Lockean property rights. It cannot confine itself to formal requirements on laws.

In a brilliant passage, Hamowy goes further. Is not the whole notion of limited government a dubious one? The highest power in a government arrangement cannot be bound by any other body.

Hayek’s whole model of government . . . is conceived in the mistaken notion that the political mechanism in society can itself be made subject to its own orders. However, the fact is that one cannot bind a legislature by a higher legislature and thus compel the lower house to obey rules applicable to everyone else. Legislatures, to the extent they legislate, are not like private citizens, since their instruments of compliance are not suasion and exchange but main force. (p. 236)
Schemes of constitutional government rely on the futile notion of the supreme power’s imposing limits on itself. Defenders of limited government are likely to reply with appeals to judicial review and “checks and balances,” but these devices do not solve Hamowy’s problem.

I have concentrated on the book’s principal topics, spontaneous order and the rule of law; but it contains insights on many other subjects as well. One of these concerns a key concept of Marxism. As everyone knows, Marxists talk constantly about alienation. Workers under capitalism, they claim, do not view their labor as a creative human activity. The division of labor means that workers are confined to performing the same boring operation over and over.

Hamowy contends that Marx took over this view from Adam Ferguson: In his *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Ferguson contended that

> the result of ever-greater specialization in the economy will lead . . . to a system of social stratification and subordination in which thinking itself will, in time, become the particular province of one class of people only. . . . Much of Ferguson’s analysis formed the basis of Marx’s later discussion of the division of labour and, indeed, Marx explicitly recognized Ferguson as one of the sources of his view. (pp. 36–37)

Hamowy’s book is a contribution of the first rank to the history of ideas.
Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt’s America, Mussolini’s Italy, and Hitler’s Germany, 1933–1939*  

**Wolfgang Schivelbusch**

They Loved Each Other’s Politics

October 1, 2006, *Mises Review*

Critics of Roosevelt’s New Deal often liken it to fascism. Roosevelt’s numerous defenders dismiss this charge as reactionary propaganda; but as Wolfgang Schivelbusch makes clear, it is perfectly true. Moreover, it was recognized to be true during the 1930s, by the New Deal’s supporters as well as its opponents.

When Roosevelt took office in March 1933, he received from Congress an extraordinary delegation of powers to cope with the Depression.

The broad-ranging powers granted to Roosevelt by Congress, before that body went into recess, were unprecedented in times of peace. Through this “delegation of powers,” Congress had, in effect, temporarily done away with itself as the legislative branch of government. The only remaining check on the executive was

the Supreme Court. In Germany, a similar process allowed Hitler to assume legislative power after the Reichstag burned down in a suspected case of arson on February 28, 1933. (p. 18)

The Nazi press enthusiastically hailed the early New Deal measures: America, like the Reich, had decisively broken with the “uninhibited frenzy of market speculation.” The Nazi Party newspaper, the Völkischer Beobachter, “stressed ‘Roosevelt’s adoption of National Socialist strains of thought in his economic and social policies,’ praising the president’s style of leadership as being compatible Hitler’s own dictatorial Führerprinzip” (p. 19).

Nor was Hitler himself lacking in praise for his American counterpart. He told American ambassador William Dodd that he was “in accord with the President in the view that the virtue of duty, readiness for sacrifice, and discipline should dominate the entire people. These moral demands which the President places before every individual citizen of the United States are also the quintessence of the German state philosophy, which finds its expression in the slogan ‘The Public Weal Transcends the Interest of the Individual.’” (pp. 19–20)

A New Order in both countries had replaced an antiquated emphasis on rights.

Mussolini, who did not allow his work as dictator to interrupt his prolific journalism, wrote a glowing review of Roosevelt’s Looking Forward. He found “reminiscent of fascism . . . the principle that the state no longer leaves the economy to its own devices”; and, in another review, this time of Henry Wallace’s New Frontiers, Il Duce found the Secretary of Agriculture’s program similar to his own corporativism (pp. 23–24).

Roosevelt never had much use for Hitler, but Mussolini was another matter. “‘I don’t mind telling you in confidence,’ FDR remarked to a White House correspondent, ‘that I am keeping in fairly close touch with that admirable Italian gentleman’” (p. 31). Rexford Tugwell, a leading adviser to the president, had difficulty containing his enthusiasm for Mussolini’s program to modernize Italy: “It’s the cleanest . . . most efficiently operating piece of social machinery I’ve ever seen. It makes me envious” (p. 32, quoting Tugwell).

Why did these contemporaries see an affinity between Roosevelt and the two leading European dictators, while most people today view them as polar
opposites? People read history backwards: they project the fierce antagonisms of World War II, when America battled the Axis, to an earlier period. At the time, what impressed many observers, including as we have seen the principal actors themselves, was a new style of leadership common to America, Germany, and Italy.

Once more we must avoid a common misconception. Because of the ruthless crimes of Hitler and his Italian ally, it is mistakenly assumed that the dictators were for the most part hated and feared by the people they ruled. Quite the contrary, they were in those pre-war years the objects of considerable adulation. A Leader who embodied the spirit of the people had superseded the old bureaucratic apparatus of government.

While Hitler’s and Roosevelt’s nearly simultaneous ascension to power highlighted fundamental differences . . . contemporary observers noted that they shared an extraordinary ability to touch the soul of the people. Their speeches were personal, almost intimate. Both in their own way gave their audiences the impression that they were addressing not the crowd, but each listener as an individual. (p. 54)

But does not Schivelbusch’s thesis fall before an obvious objection? No doubt Roosevelt, Hitler, and Mussolini were charismatic leaders; and all of them rejected laissez-faire in favor of the new gospel of a state-managed economy. But Roosevelt preserved civil liberties, while the dictators did not.

Schivelbusch does not deny the manifest differences between Roosevelt and the other Leaders; but even if the New Deal was a “soft fascism,” the elements of compulsion were not lacking. The “Blue Eagle” campaign of the National Recovery Administration serves as his principal example. Businessmen who complied with the standards of the NRA received a poster that they could display prominently in their businesses. Though compliance was supposed to be voluntary, the head of the program, General Hugh Johnson, did not shrink from appealing to illegal mass boycotts to ensure the desired results.

“The public,” he [Johnson] added, “simply cannot tolerate non-compliance with their plan.” In a fine example of doublespeak, the argument maintained that cooperation with the president was completely voluntary but that exceptions would not be tolerated because the will of the people was behind FDR. As one
historian [Andrew Wolvin] put it, the Blue Eagle campaign was “based on voluntary cooperation, but those who did not comply were to be forced into participation.” (p. 92)

Schivelbusch compares this use of mass psychology to the heavy psychological pressure used in Germany to force contributions to the Winter Relief Fund.

Both the New Deal and European fascism were marked by what Wilhelm Röpke aptly termed the “cult of the colossal.” The Tennessee Valley Authority was far more than a measure to bring electrical power to rural areas. It symbolized the power of government planning and the war on private business:

The TVA was the concrete-and-steel realization of the regulatory authority at the heart of the New Deal. In this sense, the massive dams in the Tennessee Valley were monuments to the New Deal, just as the New Cities in the Pontine Marshes were monuments to Fascism. . . . But beyond that, TVA propaganda was also directed against an internal enemy: the capitalist excesses that had led to the Depression. . . . (pp. 160, 162)

This outstanding study is all the more remarkable in that Schivelbusch displays little acquaintance with economics. Mises and Hayek are absent from his pages, and he grasps the significance of architecture much more than the errors of Keynes. Nevertheless, he has an instinct for the essential. He concludes the book by recalling John T. Flynn’s great pamphlet of 1944, As We Go Marching.

Flynn, comparing the New Deal with fascism, foresaw a problem that still faces us today.

But willingly or unwillingly, Flynn argued, the New Deal had put itself into the position of needing a state of permanent crisis or, indeed, permanent war to justify its social interventions. “It is born in crisis, lives on crises, and cannot survive the era of crisis. . . . Hitler’s story is the same.” . . . Flynn’s prognosis for the regime of his enemy Roosevelt sounds more apt today than when he made it in 1944. . . . “We must have enemies,” he wrote in As We Go Marching, “They will become an economic necessity for us.” (pp. 186, 191)
Eric Voegelin and the Problem of Christian Political Order*

JEFFREY C. HERNDON

Eric Voegelin: A Philosopher of Crisis

February 8, 2008, First Principles (ISI Web Journal)

MANY PEOPLE, I suspect, find themselves in this position. They have heard that Eric Voegelin is a great philosopher of history, much esteemed by such eminent conservatives as Willmoore Kendall, Russell Kirk, and Mel Bradford, and that he and Leo Strauss rank as the most influential political theorists of the contemporary American Right.† They eagerly obtain a copy of Voegelin’s most comprehensive work, Order and History. They are intrigued by the book’s opening: “The order of history emerges from the history of order”; but after reading a few pages, they turn away in bafflement. Though he can on occasion write with great beauty, Voegelin’s style is often dense and his train of thought difficult to

† Voegelin and Strauss corresponded intermittently over many years, and their letters have been published: Faith and Political Philosophy (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004). On one occasion, Strauss asked Voegelin what he thought of Karl Popper. Voegelin responded that Popper had deliberately twisted the meaning of Bergson’s phrase “open society” in his The Open Society and Its Enemies. Bergson meant societies open to the transcendent, as Popper decidedly did not. Strauss wrote back that Voegelin’s letter had been very useful to him in his efforts to block Popper from teaching at the University of Chicago. Voegelin once told me that he thought a major weakness of Strauss’s thought was that he never attempted an interpretation of Christianity.
follow. Even the great economist Murray Rothbard once told me that he found Voegelin’s “leap in being” unfathomable.

Reading Voegelin is well worth the effort his demanding books require, and Jeffrey C. Herndon’s insightful new book *Eric Voegelin and the Problem of Christian Order* offers a useful guide to an important part of Voegelin’s work.* Before turning to it, however, it will be helpful to look at the historical situation that formed Voegelin’s thought. Mark Lilla here grasps the essential point. In an excellent survey article on Voegelin, Lilla remarks:

> In the twentieth century, European history writing became a kind of *Trümmerliteratur*, a look back at the civilization that collapsed in 1933 . . . or 1917, or 1789, or further back still . . . Edmund Husserl spoke for many German thinkers when he declared, in a famous lecture just before the Second World War, that “the ‘crisis of European existence’ . . . becomes understandable and transparent against the background of the *teleology of European history* that can be discovered philosophically.”

How did the Nazis, a gang of brutal thugs, succeed in gaining power in Germany? Once Hitler attained power, why did the Western powers fail to stop him before his bid for European mastery? To Voegelin, as the quotation from Lilla suggests, these questions were of prime importance. Only a spiritual collapse could explain the failure to resist such an obvious menace.

But we must here avoid a misleading impression. Voegelin was by no means a head-in-the clouds philosopher who was never willing to descend from the empyrean to analyze mundane events. Quite the contrary; he often had penetrating and unusual insights on political affairs. He once told me he thought that Britain, blinded by ideology, had wrongly insisted on sanctions against Italy after its invasion of Ethiopia, thus driving Mussolini into alliance with Hitler. He also contended that Christian Science had exercised a deleterious pacifist influence on such British appeasers as Lord Lothian and

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* The book is based on the author’s doctoral dissertation at LSU. It is on the whole well written, though I regret to report that the author is guilty more than once of the solecism “mitigate against.”

† Mark Lilla, “Mr. Casaubon in America,” *New York Review of Books*, June 28, 2007, 29. Voegelin esteemed Husserl highly, and he wrote illuminatingly about him in his correspondence with Alfred Schutz. He thought, though, that Husserl at times succumbed to a positivist view of history.
recommended that I read Christopher Sykes’s biography Nancy: Lady Astor for background on the issue. (Although I’m fairly familiar with the literature on World War II origins, I’ve never seen anyone else make this point.)

His insights were by no means confined to the 1930s. He sharply rejected the influential book by Fritz Fischer, Griff nach der Weltmacht (1961), which placed near-exclusive blame on Germany for the First World War. (He thought that the only decent German prose in the book was in some of the letters of Kaiser Wilhelm that it included.) He said that the diplomatic crisis after the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia should have been settled though a conference of the Great Powers. The smaller nations such as Serbia should have been told, “taisez-vous!”

To cope with political upheaval, Voegelin believed that severe measures were required. He points out in The New Science of Politics, his most popular book, and elsewhere that if one adds the votes for the Nazis and the Communists in the last years of the Weimar Republic, one obtains a large majority of the population in favor of revolutionary overthrow of the existing order. In this circumstance, the ruling authorities would have been justified in suspending ordinary democratic rule. Voegelin supported for this reason the clerical regime of Engelbert Dollfuss, which was willing to act forcibly to counter revolutionary violence; and in his The Authoritarian State, buttressed with learned citations from Ernest Renan and the French jurist Maurice Hauriou, he offers a detailed defense of emergency authoritarian rule.*

This might stave off immediate disaster, but as I suggested earlier, a deeper problem—spiritual crisis—finally had to be confronted. Voegelin believed that order in society is much more than a political problem in the conventional sense. Besides the everyday world, there is a transcendent realm: human beings exist in tension between it and the world we grasp through the senses. Voegelin calls this tension the In-Between or, using a term of Plato’s, the Metaxy. The transcendent cannot be described in language that is literally true: myth and symbol are our only recourse. As he puts the point in his philosophically deepest book, The Ecumenic Age, Plato

is aware of the limits set to the philosopher’s exploration of reality by the divine mystery. . . . Since the philosopher cannot transcend these limits but has to move in the In-Between, the

* This book led to the unfair claim by Aurel Kolnai, in The War Against the West (1958), that Voegelin sympathized with fascism.
Metaxy, . . . the meaning of his work depends on an ambiance of insight concerning the divine presence and operation in the cosmos that only the myth can provide.*

But what has all this to do with politics? Voegelin thought that the rulers of a society must mirror their society’s conception of cosmic order in the way they organize the government. In doing so, it is vital that the governing authorities preserve the tension between the human and divine realms.

If this requirement is flouted, disaster threatens. If, e.g., a society thinks that God’s kingdom on earth can be established, its futile attempt to overcome the tension in which human beings exist will result in tyranny or chaos. Voegelin thought that this “derailment of being” paralleled the ideas of the Gnostics, a movement that flourished in the first few centuries of the Christian era. As the name suggests, the Gnostics believed in salvation through the possession of esoteric knowledge. In like fashion, Voegelin argues, Comte’s positivism, Marxism, and Nazism contend that human nature can be completely remade under the guidance of a revolutionary elite. In seeking to bring an end to the tension between human beings and the divine, these movements “immanentize the eschaton,” as Voegelin famously put it in The New Science of Politics† That is to say, these movements treat the symbol of the end of history as if it were a project that can be achieved in ordinary time.

Voegelin’s analysis of totalitarianism differs on a crucial point from the view of Hannah Arendt in her famous The Origins of Totalitarianism. Voegelin and Arendt knew each other, and he clarified the difference between them in a notable review of her book, to which she responded. He thought that she correctly saw that totalitarian movements aimed to change human

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* The Irish philosopher William Desmond also uses the concept of the Metaxy. See, e.g., his Being and the Between (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995).
† Arthur Versluis in The New Inquisitions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) assails Voegelin for his view of the Gnostics. He contends that totalitarian movements endeavor to impose a fixed system of beliefs. The Gnostics, by contrast, were a spiritual movement without rigid dogmas. Versluis’s critique fails to confront what for Voegelin is the key point, the direct possession of saving knowledge by an elite. In his later works, though, Voegelin thought that he had overemphasized the role of the Gnostics. Other movements were involved in the derailment of being as well. Cyril O’Regan, Gnostic Return in Modernity (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001) is an outstanding analysis of Gnosticism, with some attention to Voegelin.
nature. “This is, indeed, the essence of totalitarianism as an immanentist creed movement.” But “I [Voegelin] could hardly believe my eyes” that Arendt did not rule out such a change as impossible. For Voegelin, the structure of being is unchangeable: precisely because of this, attempts to alter it lead to disaster.*

Voegelin’s view that society represents cosmic order may strike those new to it as hard to grasp. Here Herndon’s book offers considerable help. Before Voegelin wrote Order and History he planned a massive History of Political Ideas. This he abandoned as unsatisfactory, but Herndon thinks that, to a large extent, it reflects Voegelin’s mature views. The History has the advantage of presenting certain aspects of Voegelin’s thought in more detail than is available elsewhere. Herndon gives us a detailed account of one part of this massive treatise; he covers the period from the rise of Christianity to the Reformation. † Someone new to Voegelin who reads Herndon’s book will get a good grasp of the basics of Voegelin’s thought.

Herndon brings out that for Voegelin, Saint Paul devised a series of “compromises” that enabled the Christian community to survive and grow in the world. These compromises preserved the necessary tension between the divine and human: in doing so they enabled the members of the community to achieve concord (homonoia). Herndon remarks, “Christian homonoia as understood by Saint Paul was no mean achievement in history.”‡ Herndon ably expounds the extensions and alterations of the Pauline compromises in the Middle Ages, culminating in the thought of Thomas Aquinas.§ (Herndon might have mentioned the great influence on Voegelin’s account of the Holy Roman Empire of Alois Dempf’s Sacrum Imperium.) The Reformation overthrew the delicate balance between the divine and the human described at its best in Aquinas’s thought, though never fully achieved in practice; and

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* Voegelin analyzed Nazism as a deformation of being in his early The Political Religions and in his lectures Hitler and the Germans. In the former work, he notes the importance of the symbol of light in Nazi propaganda: images and descriptions of “shining” abound.
† Voegelin never published the History, but it is now available in his Collected Works in eight volumes.
‡ On his visit to the United States in the 1920s, Voegelin attended the lectures of the sociologist Franklin Giddings at Columbia University. Giddings’s “consciousness of kind” influenced Voegelin’s later discussions of homonoia.
§ Herndon does not mention that after his treatment of Aquinas in the History, Voegelin sometimes suggested that Aquinas held overly rigid notions of being and natural law. He in part anticipated the controversial work of Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being.
Voegelin is scathing in his account of Luther and Calvin as political thinkers. Luther divorced the political world from the sacred; worse yet, Calvin attempted to construct an immanent universal Christianity. Herndon comments, “If Voegelin’s treatment of Luther was harsh, his examination of Calvin borders on the scandalous.”

What are we to make of all this? I find Voegelin’s thought impressive and his erudition staggering; but it seems to me that he fails to address a fundamental issue. Why should we accept what he says about the nature of being? Voegelin often does not give arguments for his views; indeed, in these matters, he distrusts the use of propositions altogether. For him, the mystical insights of certain great thinkers, Plato foremost among them, are primary, and Voegelin devotes most of his philosophical attention to an exposition of the myths and symbols of these thinkers. He was certainly capable of argument: to see this one has only to examine in The Authoritarian State the nimble dialectics he uses to analyze the new constitution proposed for the Dollfuss regime. But he thought that its place in philosophy was distinctly minor. I well remember one conversation in which he several times corrected me for referring to a philosopher’s “position,” a word he deemed unacceptably ideological.*

Voegelin also is open to challenge about the way he thinks society represents the cosmic order. Why must it be the ruling authorities who establish the order of society? In the classical liberal view, such matters belong entirely to civil society. Why should the police and defense departments decide how human society represents God? To ask this question is not at all to challenge Voegelin’s assumption that society mirrors cosmic order.†

Although Voegelin had been a member of the private seminar of the great Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises and had a good understanding of free-market economics, he dismissed what he considered extreme or dogmatic classical liberalism. He treated John Locke with scorn, hardly viewing him as a major thinker at all. The great classical liberal Charles

* Frederick Wilhelmsen, among others, has criticized Voegelin for his departures from Christian orthodoxy. Whether Voegelin was a Christian obviously depends on how one characterizes Christianity. Herndon gives a good account of the controversy. Incidentally, when he was Archbishop of Munich, Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) sent Voegelin a letter in 1981 saying that his thinking had “fascinated and enriched” him.

† I owe this insight to my late friend Robert Nozick, who immediately raised the problem after he asked me to give him a brief account of Voegelin’s thought.
Comte was for him someone who wished to overthrow the order of being. For Voegelin a strong state is essential.

I disagree with Voegelin here, for reasons set out elsewhere. But accept or reject the fundamental tenets of Voegelin’s thought, no one who studies him can fail to benefit from his insights and synoptic vision.
LIKE HIS GODFATHER—the legendary provost of Trinity College, John Pentland Mahaffy—Walter Starkie (1894–1976) was one of the great Irish conversationalists. When I met him in 1969, he bowled me over. I was then a senior at UCLA, writing a paper on British foreign policy in the Spanish Civil War. I interviewed Starkie, then in his early seventies and teaching in six different departments. He had been head of the British Council in Spain during World War II and was intimately familiar with all the major Spanish and British political figures of the 1930s and ’40s.

Indeed, he seemed to know everybody. I asked him whether he knew President Kennedy. He answered, “Nehru told me in 1961 that Kennedy was the hope of the world, but personally, I can’t stand Irish gangs. I can’t stand Neapolitan gangs either—I used to live with the Mafia in Sicily.” “But did you know Kennedy?” I persisted. “Oh, yes,” he answered, “I remember him in London when he was a little boy. I knew his father, too [United States Ambassador to London Joseph Kennedy].”

Starkie offered a perspective on the 1930s that has much to teach us today. To some extent, his view of that decade resembled Eric Voegelin’s, though the two were not acquainted. Popular accounts of the Spanish Civil War often portray it as a struggle between democracy and fascism, but for Starkie this ideological view radically distorted the facts. The Nationalist leaders, he maintained, were not pawns of Hitler and Mussolini but defenders of Spanish Spain who wished to avert a Communist takeover of their country. The Communist
leader Dolores Ibárruri said in response to a fiery talk in the Spanish Parliament by the conservative Calvo Sotelo, “You have given your last speech.” A group of Republican Assault Guards assassinated Sotelo a few days later, and Starkie believed that had the conservatives not risen against the weak Republican regime, they would have been destroyed in a Communist revolution.

For intellectuals who supported the Republic, Starkie had no mercy. He had harsh words for Jacques Maritain, the great Catholic philosopher and onetime ally of the rightist Action Française, who, perhaps under the influence of his wife, opposed the Nationalist rising. Even Georges Bernanos did not escape censure, for what Starkie thought his biased account of Nationalist atrocities in Mallorca. “A nasty bit of stuff,” Starkie remarked.

Like Voegelin, Starkie thought that ideological distortions impeded an effective British foreign policy in the 1930s. Leftist opposition to Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia drove Mussolini into the arms of Hitler, gravely weakening Britain’s position when war broke out in 1939. Mussolini had initially found Hitler an unpleasant person. When they met in Venice in 1934, he turned to Achille Starace, the secretary of the Fascist Party, and said, “Starace, no me piace [I don’t like him].”

But like today’s neoconservatives, leftist British opinion subjected foreign policy to an ideological litmus test. For the neocons, Saddam Hussein was a tyrant who had to be forcibly deposed: never mind whether doing so was in America’s interest. In like fashion, supporters of the League of Nations insisted that Mussolini be punished with sanctions for his invasion of Abyssinia. Naturally, Mussolini then turned against Britain. The leftist campaign against the Italian dictator helped create the Axis Pact and did the Ethiopians no good. Starkie pointed out that after World War II, the Ethiopians had to bring back the Italian administrators, as they were the only ones who could run the country.

Starkie realized that a European war was in the offing when he ran into Dr. Goebbels in March 1939 on the isle of Rhodes. Goebbels told him that there would be war because “you have too much and we do not have enough.” Goebbels also mentioned that he saw himself as an artist, manipulating the crowds at Nazi party rallies through the use of lights. Starkie reported this conversation to the British Foreign Office and also wrote a letter about it to the London Tablet.

For Starkie, the clear-sighted pursuit of foreign policy goals should never be occluded by ideology. Instead of bemoaning that General Franco was
a fascist, Starkie worked during World War II to elicit sympathy for Britain through the exhibitions and lectures he arranged as head of the British Council in Spain. His work played an important role in maintaining Spanish neutrality, though he unfortunately aroused the enmity of the British Ambassador Sir Samuel Hoare. (Starkie enjoyed telling the story of how the Lord Mayor of Birmingham once presented Hoare and his wife: “Sir Samuel and Lady W.”) When Starkie complained to Lord Lloyd, who had chosen him for the council, about Hoare’s treatment of him, Lloyd became so angry that he tore his telephone from the wall and threw it across the office.

One of his many stories about that period stands out in my mind. He said that Ortega y Gasset was surprised that Britain did not abandon the war after the German invasion of Russia in June 1941. When a UCLA graduate student who was writing a dissertation on Ortega told Starkie that he had never encountered such a view in Ortega’s works, he replied, “But he told me that himself, when I visited him in Portugal.”

Starkie had a remarkable eye for the telling detail. When I once asked him about Leo Strauss, his response was, “Oh, yes, I met him once. He was a friend of Tawney’s.” The close connection between Strauss and the British socialist historian R. H. Tawney is a key to Strauss’s thought and has only fairly recently attracted scholarly notice.* Strauss accepted Tawney’s view that the rise of capitalism led to a decline in political philosophy that replaced the pursuit of virtue with the mastery of the world.

Starkie had little use for the icons of the Left. When Bertrand Russell died, he said to me, “Father D’Arcy [Martin Cyril D’Arcy, S. J., Master of Campion Hall, Oxford] told me that Russell didn’t do any good work after 1914. I’d write a letter to him, but it would burn up in transit.” Asked about Conor Cruise O’Brien, he said, “I found him a rather self-opinionated young man when he was a student of mine.” Even Martin Luther King did not escape his scorn. “Perhaps he wasn’t as bad as some of the others, but he was still pretty bad.”

Politics, though, was for Starkie but a sideline; he was principally a literary scholar and musician. At Trinity College, Dublin, he taught Spanish and Italian literature. Samuel Beckett was a student in his class on Dante. (By the way, he did not agree with the fashionable view that Beckett was one of the greatest twentieth-century writers; he rated his friend George Bernard Shaw

In his teaching, he drew on his remarkable abilities as a linguist. He knew at least ten languages and was a foreign member of the Royal Spanish Academy, the governing body of the language. "Sanskrit is not so bad," he once assured me; "Hungarian is much more difficult." I was happy to take his word for it. When I told him that I had to take language exams in French and Latin, he said that I might as well learn all the Romance languages.

In his course on Dante, he once read some passages from a book by his friend Father Miguel Asín Palacios, the foremost authority on Dante’s Arabic sources. He seemed to be reading slightly more slowly than usual. After class, he said to me, "I couldn’t find the English translation, so I had to do a sight translation from the Spanish." He sometimes found it hard to remember that his students were not up to his level of knowledge. Once, he asked the class to name the rivers of Hades in Greek mythology. When no one answered, he said in a surprised tone of voice, "There’s a well-known hexameter in Horace that gives them!" In his own oral exams at Trinity College in 1917, someone asked him, "What is the last word in Horace’s *Ars Poetica*?" Starkie answered the question correctly; when I asked him how he had known it, he answered, "It’s a word of foreign derivation."

His most popular course at UCLA, though, was "Cervantes in Translation." I fear the reason for the course’s popularity do not reflect altogether favorably on the students; Starkie was reputed the easiest teacher in the school. When I took the course, the enrolment was 941, and two extra rooms with televisions were needed as well as the main lecture hall. But those who thought Starkie an easy "A" got their well-deserved comeuppance, in Booth Tarkington’s phrase. A janitor stole a copy of the final exam and sold copies to a number of students. Starkie discovered the plot and changed the exam. When the final was distributed to the class, several students, including a very famous basketball player, walked out: they hadn’t gotten what they purchased.

Starkie was certainly well qualified to teach the course. He translated the complete *Don Quixote*: after he had issued an abridged translation, his friend Luis Astrana Marín, one of the foremost Spanish authorities on Cervantes, insisted that he do the whole thing. (He also translated a volume of Cervantes’ short stories.) When he read from the novel, he would often look up at the class,

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* In his enjoyable *Of Farming and Classics: A Memoir* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), David Grene gives another example of the sort of questions the classics dons at Trinity liked to pose. In a scholarship exam, Professor George Mooney asked him, “What word does Homer use for ‘worm’ in the Odyssey?”
sometimes going on for pages. I asked him about this, and he said, “When you have been reading a book for sixty years, you get to know it fairly well.”

As one would expect, he was not very impressed with postmodernist literary critical discussions of the novel or with postmodernism in general. On one occasion, I showed him a copy of Jacques Derrida’s *De la grammatologie*. He read a page, dozed off, woke up and read another page, and fell asleep again. He handed the book back to me, saying, “not very interesting.”

For him, *Don Quixote* was the greatest of all novels, and he stressed its influence on later writers. Laurence Sterne is an obvious case in point, and writers as different as Dickens and Dostoyevsky drew heavily from Cervantes. In part 2 of the novel, Cervantes has Don Quixote comment on false continuations of part 1; the device in which a novel refers to itself is a key theme in subsequent literature.

Fundamentally, Starkie maintained, Cervantes was a comic novelist. He was not an enemy of chivalry and the Middle Ages: rather, he poked gentle fun at them. Neither was it correct, as Américo Castro claimed, to view Cervantes as an apostle of the Enlightenment and an enemy of the Church. Castro appealed in support of his view to the famous episode in which Cervantes satirizes book burning; but Starkie noted that the Arabs also engaged in this practice, and the satire might be with equal justice directed against them.

More generally, Starkie preferred to Castro as a historian the more conservative Ramón Menendéz Pidal. He and Menendéz Pidal were friends, and Starkie prepared an English translation of his book debunking Bishop Las Casas. In this book, Menendéz argued that Las Casas’s claims of vast Indian massacres by the Spaniards were the product of mental pathology. Such a politically incorrect view could not be published in English, and Starkie blamed in particular the influential historian Lewis Hanke for blocking the book’s publication. Menendéz Pidal, who had written the book in his nineties, was quite upset by this.

The dominant theme of *Don Quixote*, in Starkie’s opinion, is that the initially idealistic Quixote becomes more realistic as the novel unfolds, while the realistic Sancho Panza moves in the direction of idealism. Eventually, the two figures converge and indeed can be considered as aspects of a single character. In this interpretation, he was influenced by his friend Miguel de Unamuno, whose book on the novel appeared in English translation as *Our Lord Don Quixote*. Starkie wrote an introduction to this edition. He also
recommended to us the work of Joaquín Casalduero on symbolism in Cervantes, though this, he said, was suitable only for danced work. It is available only in Spanish.

Whether Starkie was right that *Don Quixote* was the greatest of all novels is a question that each reader must determine for himself. There is no better way for English speakers to do so than to read Starkie’s excellent translation.
Paul Rahe’s outstanding book can be considered an extended commentary on a famous passage in Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*:

Over these [citizens] is elevated an immense, tutelary power, which takes sole charge of assuring their enjoyment and of watching over their fate. It is absolute, attentive to detail, regular, provident, and gentle. . . . It works willingly for their happiness, but it wishes to be the only agent and the sole arbiter of that happiness. It provides for their security, foresees and supplies their needs, guides them in their principal affairs, directs their testaments, divides their inheritances. . . . In this fashion, every day, it renders the employment of free will less useful and more rare; it confines the action of the will within a smaller space and bit by bit it steals from each citizen the use of that which is his own. Equality has prepared men for all of these things: it
has disposed them to put up with them and often even to regard them as a benefit. (pp. 187–188, quoting Tocqueville)

As Rahe abundantly demonstrates, this passage has great relevance to recent American history. Tocqueville’s comment, he shows, represents the culmination of a line of thought that began with Montesquieu. Although Montesquieu in the eighteenth century was regarded as a great thinker, he does not figure much today in discussions of political theory. Most people view him as a figure merely of historical interest. Rahe shows that the modern view is seriously mistaken: Montesquieu offered a penetrating discussion of the problems of modern political regimes.*

Montesquieu in *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline* rejected both the desirability and possibility of a modern return to the virtue characteristic of classical antiquity, with its preeminent stress on military valor.

The point that Montesquieu intended to make is clear enough. We should not want to imitate the Romans. . . . And even if for some perverse reason we wanted to imitate the Romans, he then demonstrates in his *Universal Monarchy*, we could not succeed. (p. 7)

Instead, a commercial society, of which England was the foremost example, offered the best prospects for a flourishing social order under modern conditions. England, though ostensibly ruled by a king, was in fact a “republic concealed under the form of a monarchy” (p. 37). Unlike a genuine monarchy, it aimed at liberty and economic prosperity and demanded no particular virtue from the people.

It by no means followed from the success of English society, though, that the people in it lived in contentment. Quite the contrary, they found themselves in an anxious state, which Montesquieu termed “inquiétude.” With characteristic erudition, Rahe traces this notion to the Jansenist Blaise Pascal and his disciple Pierre Nicole. They held that after the Fall, human beings were in the grip of concupiscence. Though a malign emotion, it could simulate the effects of the virtues and produce, in unintended fashion, a workable society.

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* In taking Montesquieu seriously as a political theorist, Rahe follows Leo Strauss.
Nicole devoted a seminal essay suggesting that Christian charity is politically and socially superfluous—that, in its absence, thanks to the particular providence of God, *l’amour propre* is perfectly capable of providing a foundation for the proper ordering of civil society, of the political order, and of human life in this world more generally. (p. 43)

Montesquieu, following Montaigne, secularized this notion; here we have a principal source of Bernard Mandeville’s view that private vices were public benefits and more generally, of the Scottish Enlightenment concept of the unintended consequences of human action.

In the modern world, then, we can obtain a tolerable, though not ideal, order by following the English model. But a danger threatens this happy outcome: in certain circumstances, the executive might seize control of the reins of power and transform society into a despotic system.

In Montesquieu’s judgment, the legislature within a modern republic would be in serious danger of succumbing fully to executive influence only in the unlikely event that the management of commerce and industry within that republic were somehow, to a very considerable extent, entrusted to the executive. In such a polity should the populace in general and the middle class in particular ever be beholden to government for their economic well-being, the situation of the citizens would indeed be grim. (p. 58)

To prevent this transition to despotism, it is essential to preserve the intermediate powers, such as the nobility and clergy, who can interpose their authority between the central government and the people. Without these powers, the executive may take control, in the manner just described. The course of French history prior to 1789 illustrates an analogous transition, though in a monarchy rather than a republic. Under Louis XIV and his successors, the power of the nobility to resist royal authority had been suppressed; the ensuing growth of an all-powerful central state helped bring about the revolution, as a reaction against the state’s excesses. Malesherbes, a highly placed liberal aristocrat and close reader of Montesquieu, warned Louis XVI of the dangers of undue centralization, to no avail. In the *Grandes Remonstrances of 1775*, Malesherbes and his colleagues on the *Cour des aides*
charged “that the system of administration put in place by Louis XIV and further developed under Louis XV had made of the French monarchy an ‘Oriental despotism.’” Malesherbes, who was executed under the Revolution for his defense of Louis XVI, was Tocqueville’s great-grandfather, and like his ancestor, Tocqueville continued the line of analysis begun by Montesquieu.*

Before turning to Tocqueville, Rahe discusses another figure much influenced by Montesquieu. Jean-Jacques Rousseau took much of his criticism of bourgeois society from Montesquieu, but his remedy differed entirely from that of his great predecessor. Rousseau embraced the classical ideal that Montesquieu rejected:

Montesquieu’s description of the ancient republics and his analysis of their character Rousseau thought entirely just, but he did not share the misgivings that had caused the French philosopher to devote so much effort to assessing the virtues and prospects of monarchy and the peculiar form of government found in England. In fact, the very features of classical republicanism that had occasioned such misgivings on Montesquieu’s part were the features that Rousseau found most attractive. (p. 120)

Despite his praise for the ancient city, though, Rousseau as well as Montesquieu doubted whether it would be possible to recreate such a regime in the modern world. The conditions for doing so were so demanding as to render the task in effect impossible.

As we have already seen, Rahe wishes sharply to contrast the political theory of the modern age with classical republicanism. He can carry out this endeavor by treating Rousseau as an exception; but, as one might anticipate, he views with disfavor attempts by J. G. A. Pocock and others in the Cambridge School to find a classical republican tradition at the heart of early modern political theory. He devotes a mordant note to the view he opposes:

Today, to a remarkable degree, these arguments [of Rousseau] infect contemporary scholarship on republican thought before

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* After considering Malesherbes, Rahe devotes several pages to Turgot. Readers of this journal will find the following note of interest: “For an astute appreciation of Turgot’s qualities as an economist and an attempt to situate him vis-à-vis his immediate predecessors and successors, see Murray N. Rothbard, An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought I,” p. 290, note 23.
Rousseau, much of which consists in an ill-conceived attempt to read Rousseau’s distinctive vision back into Machiavelli, the republican thought of the English interregnum, and English Whiggery more generally; for one such attempt, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*. . . and for another, consider the various works by Quentin Skinner. (p. 310, note 56)*

Though a close reader of Rousseau, Tocqueville did not share his quixotic admiration for the classical republic. To the contrary, Tocqueville is for Rahe, “Montesquieu’s heir.” Like Montesquieu, he deplored the growth of administrative centralism in France. America, by contrast, was marked by strong emphasis on local institutions and was thus better able than France to reconcile the revolutionary impulse toward equality with liberty. (Tocqueville was not entirely optimistic about America either.) Rahe maintains that, despite its ostensible subject, *Democracy in America* really was intended as an intervention in French politics:

*Democracy in America* constitutes a muted polemic—designed first and foremost for consideration by his contemporaries. The warnings that he issued with regard to the propensities inherent in the democratic social condition were directed to them; and when he singled out various aspects of American life as portents of doom or as harbingers of hope, he nearly always did so with an eye to the presence of the former and the absence of the latter in his native France. (p. 222)

Unfortunately, a concerted political movement that began in the nineteenth century and continued in the twentieth has undermined the guards against despotism in America that Tocqueville analyzed. The progressives demanded efficiency in government and spurned traditional American practices as obstacles on the path to needed reforms.

The foundations for the administrative state were laid . . . in and after the 1870s and 1880s, in the thinking of a group of exceptional individuals, for the most part university professors, who regarded the separation of powers, the system of

* For further discussion of Rahe’s view of the republican tradition, see his monumental *Republics Ancient and Modern.*
checks and balances, the federalist system, and the primacy of local government—the very features in American institutions that had most powerfully elicited Tocqueville’s admiration—as hopelessly archaic. (p. 244)

Rahe stresses the role of Woodrow Wilson in the progressives’ takeover of the American system. Wilson, an ardent admirer of the Prussian administrative state, had no use for Montesquieu. The notion of checks and balances, he held, reflected an outdated mechanical philosophy. Biology, not physics, must be our guide; and an “organic” view of the state must replace limited government. Rahe also notes that Wilson “gave white supremacy a tremendous boost” (p. 250) by his patronage of D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of A Nation*.

Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal continued the progressive trend, and Rahe makes an especially valuable point in response to Roosevelt’s proclamation of a second, economic, Bill of Rights in 1944.

Every item . . . that Roosevelt denominated a right is, of course, something intrinsically desirable and good; every item is arguably an element within the “happiness” that the Founding Fathers expected most Americans to pursue. But in their day, and in Tocqueville’s as well, it was taken for granted that no one had a “right” to such goods . . . . Moreover, at the time of the founding, Americans believed—and no one more fervently than Thomas Jefferson—that the expansion in centralized administration necessary to guarantee “equality in the pursuit of happiness” and requisite for the provision of such goods was incompatible with the political rights that Roosevelt would later list in his message to Congress. Tocqueville was of the same opinion. (p. 261)

Hayek of course argued to the same effect in *The Road to Serfdom*, and Rahe’s great achievement is to show that this type of criticism has its origins in Montesquieu and Tocqueville.* He has, moreover, accomplished his task with extraordinary erudition. This is a major work of scholarship that everyone should read.

I have noted a few minor points: When he speaks of Louis XIV’s aspirations for “universal monarchy in Europe” in the War of Spanish Succession (p. 3), he

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* Rahe refers to Mises and Hayek on p. 265; see also the accompanying note 68.
should, I think, take account of the revisionist scholarship of Mark Thompson on the war. It is not altogether correct to refer to “the Estates-General in its traditional form as three separate assemblies” (p. 146); the three estates had in the past sometimes, but not always, deliberated separately. Roosevelt was Wilson’s assistant secretary of the navy, not secretary (p. 252).
Literature and the Economics of Liberty: Spontaneous Order in Culture*

Edited by
Paul A. Cantor & Stephen Cox

Culture and the Market
October 1, 2009, Mises Review

The contributors to this outstanding collection of essays propose a revolution in literary criticism—a revolution, moreover, that has as its heart the application of Austrian economics. At first sight, the project appears paradoxical: what has Austrian economics to do with literature?

Paul Cantor clears up the mystery in his introductory chapter. The dominant approach to literary criticism for much of the twentieth century was the New Criticism; Cleanth Brooks and W. K. Wimsatt, two of its leading exponents, were revered names in American English departments. This approach isolated literary texts: a text was a “verbal icon,” in Wimsatt’s phrase, to be studied apart from surmises about the psychological state of the author. To think otherwise was to fall victim to the dreaded “intentional fallacy.” The text was viewed as an ordered harmony, and the critic’s job was to tease out every nuance of meaning that it contained. The method was ideally suited to the lyric poem, in which every word served a perfectly designed purpose; but it faced difficulties when applied to longer works:

Precisely because the New Critics believed that every detail in a work of literature has to have a function, whenever some detail

* Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2009.
seemed extraneous or purposeless, they searched and searched until they found a reason for it. (p. 25)

Beginning in the 1960s, a reaction against the New Criticism set in. Many writers in “cultural studies,” as well as New Historicists such as Stephen Greenblatt, sought to study writers in their historical and economic background. The new emphasis was all to the good, but unfortunately, the economic assumptions of virtually all of those interested in the topic were Marxist.

[O]ne might ask a simple question: how many literary critics are sympathetic to socialism and critical of capitalism, and how many are sympathetic to capitalism and critical of socialism? . . . Economic discussions of literature are almost all anti-capitalist in spirit, and are often avowedly pro-socialist. (pp. 2–3)

Cantor and the other writers who have contributed to the present collection ask a penetrating question: if one proposes to use social background to illumine literary works, why not use correct economic theory in doing so? And correct economics, in the view of Cantor and his collaborators, is primarily Austrian economics.

Here is where the Austrian School can come to the aid of critics who are interested in the relation of literature and economics but are troubled by the reductionist implications of Marxism for the study of artistic creativity. . . . The relation between literature and economics looks very different when one works from a form of economics, like the Austrian School, that celebrates freedom and the individual, rather than determinism and the collective. (p. 18)

An excellent example of the benefits of such an economically informed approach is Cantor’s essay on Shelley’s economic views. Cantor argues that Shelley, far from being a radical socialist and opponent of capitalism, was in fact a firm defender of economic freedom. Shelley’s critical remarks were aimed at inflation and bank-manipulated credit, which he viewed along the lines of Austrian business-cycle theory.*

Shelley understood the great magic trick the British government had managed to pull off in the course of the eighteenth century. It used the Bank of England and the money market institutions that grew up along with it to finance its increasing debts, and then monetized the debt, thereby performing the seeming miracle of turning debt into wealth. . . . Shelley finally begins to talk about the horrors of working conditions in early nineteenth-century England, but contrary to conventional opinion about the economic attitudes of the Romantics, he attributes the problems not to the Industrial Revolution but to the financial policies of the British government and specifically to its suspension of gold and silver convertibility. (pp. 232–233, 238)

Shelley supported freedom of trade and opposed high taxes, in a way that contemporary libertarians would find entirely congenial.

Characteristically, he distinguishes between property acquired as a result of participation in the free market and property acquired only as a result of government intervention in the market. Shelley had no objection to property acquired by honest effort, whether it is the result of working class labor or middle-class entrepreneurship. (p. 251)*

Although monetary issues figure elsewhere in the book, e.g., in Cantor’s essay on Thomas Mann’s short story “Disorder and Early Sorrow” and in Dário Fernández-Morera’s “Cervantes and Economic Theory,” the dominant theme of the book lies elsewhere, in the notion of spontaneous order.†

As Hayek often insisted,

the great contribution of economics to thought in general has been a way of conceiving order that need not be imposed above on phenomena but can grow up out of them, an order generated by the phenomena themselves. (p. 22)

* Cantor points out that Shelley endorsed the labor theory of value but argues cogently that this is not grounds for viewing him as a socialist. (p. 255, note 67)

† I am glad to see that Fernández-Morera uses Walter Starkie’s translation of Don Quixote.
Here I should like to note an ambiguity in the concept of spontaneous order. On the one hand, as in the quotation just given, it may designate the way in which an order has arisen: no one mind has planned it, but it results from particular actions that have other immediate aims. On the other hand, spontaneous order may be used to refer to the likely results of an undesigned process. Although these results will of course be ordered, they will often display a different sort of arrangement from a designed order. In particular, it will have some “loose ends” and not display the tight unity of a perfectly planned creation. Often, but not always, it is not contradictory to suppose an unplanned process that culminates, e.g., in just the sort of detailed unity that the New Critics prized.

In Thomas Peyser’s excellent “Capitalist Vistas: Walt Whitman and Spontaneous Order,” both of the two meanings of spontaneous order just distinguished play a role. He writes,

To understand [Whitman’s] Song of Myself (or any other text) as an attempt to translate, as it were the form of a spontaneous order into the language of a literary work, one need not therefore demand that it display spontaneity of every kind at every moment. What is required is that the poem be seen as a compilation of discrete textual units that, while displaying ample signs of organization within themselves, are juxtaposed in a way that defies the strictures of rhetorical cohesion. (p. 287)

I should be inclined to say that this is a sufficient, but not necessary condition, for a literary work to mirror a spontaneous order. Another way would be to allow spontaneous elements into the process of composition, rather than its product.

Chandran Kukathas makes use of a similar view of spontaneous order to Peyser’s in his essay on the Nigerian writer Ben Okri, who has, he tells us, a “startlingly Austrian” vision of the world.

The world is the product not of justice or of beneficent design, but of human limitations. Out of ignorance, and in the chaos of conflict, the world is built and rebuilt. (p. 494)

The book contains an abundance of insightful discussions: Stephen Cox has essays on Willa Cather and Joseph Conrad; Paul Cantor ranges widely over Mrs. Gaskell, Ben Jonson, and H. G. Wells; and Dário Fernández-Morera
shows that Cervantes anticipated key elements of Austrian economics. The book is a major contribution to literary studies. Although all the contributors deserve praise, Paul Cantor merits special recognition. His essays fill about half the volume; and they display the remarkable scope and erudition of this outstanding scholar.
Ralph Raico in this brilliant book calls to our attention the dictum of Augustin Thierry: “The great precept that must be given to historians is to distinguish instead of confounding” (p. 136). Thierry, as Raico shows, did not always follow his own advice; but the remark perfectly describes the historical writing of Raico himself. He is master of the fine discriminations that F. R. Leavis thought essential to the task of the critic. His profound scholarship and keen intelligence make him a great historian. Indeed, he is our foremost historian of classical liberalism.

Raico begins his work of conceptual clarification by asking, what is classical liberalism; or, better, what is liberalism, since only the classical variety qualifies as liberalism properly so called. “[T]here was no ‘classical’ liberalism, only a single liberalism, based on private property and the free market, that developed organically, from first to last” (p. 1).

Raico answers his definitional question in the book’s initial chapter, “Classical Liberalism and the Austrian School.” Liberals believe that the main institutions of society can function in entire independence of the state:

Liberalism . . . is based on the conception of civil society as by and large self-regulating when its members are free to act.
within the very wide bounds of their individual rights. Among these, the right to private property, including freedom of contract and exchange and the free disposition of one’s own labor, is given a high priority. Historically, liberalism has manifested a hostility to state action, which, it insists, should be reduced to a minimum. (p. 2)

Liberalism, so defined, seems to have an obvious affinity with Austrian economics. But here a problem arises: is not Austrian economics a value-free science? Adherence to liberalism, obviously, entails value judgments. The relation between them, then, cannot be that the economic theory logically implies the political doctrine. Indeed, enemies of classical liberalism have at times embraced tenets of the Austrians. The Fabian Socialist George Bernard Shaw, influenced by Philip Wicksteed, accepted the subjective theory of value; and, Raico notes, the analytical Marxist Jon Elster finds Marxism compatible with methodological individualism. Nevertheless, Raico claims: “On the level of policy, Austrianism’s individualist and subjectivist methodology tends, indirectly at least, to sway decisions in a liberal direction” (p. 8).

Here Raico confronts a challenge. Austrian economics, as developed by its greatest twentieth century exponent, Ludwig von Mises, relies on a priori reasoning. Does not this style of thinking lead to dogmatism and intolerance, inimical to the spirit of classical liberalism? Milton Friedman, himself a noted classical liberal, has pressed exactly this accusation. Raico easily disposes of it:

How such an argument could emanate from such a distinguished source is simply baffling. Among other problems with it: Friedman’s theory would predict the occurrence of incessant bloody brawling among mathematicians and logicians, the non-occurrence which falsifies that theory in Friedman’s own positivist terms. (p. 11)

Those who condemn a priori reasoning often champion instead the fallibilism of Karl Popper. Whether they are right to do is eminently questionable, and Popper’s many advocates err grievously when they enroll him in the liberal tradition. As Raico points out,

Most damaging to any claim that Popper represents authentic liberalism is the fact that he accepted the traditional mythology of industrial capitalism as a system of oppression of the working class, only gradually made tolerable by social reforms effected
in part through socialist agitation. In *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper wrote that Marx’s protests against capitalist oppression “will secure him forever a place among the liberators of mankind.” (p. 12)

Judged by Raico’s criterion of liberalism, even his mentor Friedrich Hayek falls short. Though an undoubted classical liberal, unlike his friend Popper, he conceded too much to the welfare state.

The state, Hayek insisted, is not solely “a coercive apparatus,” but also “a service agency,” and as such “it may assist without harm in the achievement of desirable aims which perhaps could not be achieved otherwise.” . . . Predictably, Hayek’s endorsement of state activism in the “social” sphere has provided knowledgeable opponents of the laissez-faire position with a rhetorical argument of the form, “even F. A Hayek conceded. . . .” (p. 29)

In “Liberalism: True and False,” Raico advances further in his quest for conceptual clarity about liberalism. Nowadays, supporters of the welfare state usually call themselves liberals, but Raico maintains they are not entitled to the name. To accede to their takeover of the term from its nineteenth-century usage promotes confusion.

Instead, we should, learning from Max Weber, construct an ideal type for liberalism. If we do so, we will discover that “modern” liberals differ too far from the standard to be included.

The ideal type of liberalism should express a coherent concept, based on what is most characteristic and distinctive in the liberal doctrine—what Weber refers to as the “essential tendencies.” . . . Historically, where monarchical absolutism had insisted that the state was the engine of society and the necessary overseer of the religious, cultural, and, not least, economic life of its subjects, liberalism posited a starkly contrasting view: that the most desirable regime was one in which *civil society—that is, the whole of the social order based on private property and voluntary exchange—by and large runs itself.* (p. 65, emphasis in original)

How did the current confusion over liberalism develop? Raico ascribes a good deal of the blame to the “saint of rationalism,” John Stuart Mill, of
whom he is decidedly no admirer. Following the Mill revisionists Maurice Cowling, Joseph Hamburger, and Linda Raeder, Raico contends that Mill was very far from being a friend of liberty. Despite his frequent paeans to individual autonomy, he had an ultimately conformist ideology. He aimed to demolish religious faith, especially Christianity, and received mores, on the way to erecting a social order based on “the religion of humanity” (p. 53).

Mill’s disdain for tradition, expressed especially in On Liberty [which Raico calls “presumptuously titled” (p. 166)] led naturally to the new liberalism, with its reliance on the state and displacement of property rights from their formerly central position.

It [Mill’s view of tradition] also forges an offensive alliance between liberalism and the state, even if perhaps contrary to Mill’s intentions, since it is difficult to imagine the uprooting of traditional norms except through the massive use of political power. (p. 53)

Raico has constructed an ideal type of liberalism, but of course the historical phenomenon that this ideal type encapsulates did not arise fully grown but developed through a long process. And this process occurred in a particular place, namely Western Europe, though the principles of liberalism claim universal validity. Why did liberalism first arise there?

Raico’s response emphasizes the Christian roots of liberalism. John Neville Figgis famously claimed that “Political liberty is the residuary legatee of ecclesiastical animosities”; but, unlike Figgis, Raico does not look to the Reformation and its quarrels for the source of freedom. Rather, he focuses on the universal Church as an alternative source of loyalty to the state in medieval Europe.

That culture was the West—the Europe that arose in communion with the Bishop of Rome. . . . The essence of the European experience is that a civilization developed that felt itself to be a unity and yet was politically decentralized. The continent devolved into a mosaic of separate and competing jurisdictions and polities whose internal divisions themselves resisted central control. (p. 59)

Classical liberalism, one suspects most readers of this book will agree, is a very appealing system. Unfortunately, most intellectuals dissent: they spurn capitalism and its brand of freedom. More than a few intellectuals lacked the
sense to resist the blandishments of Stalin and Mao. In the third chapter, “Intellectuals and the Marketplace,” Raico carefully surveys the main contending theories that endeavor to account for the intellectuals’ opposition to the free market. Naturally enough, he devotes careful attention to the views of Mises (to whom the book is dedicated). In *The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality*, Mises stressed the resentment and envy felt by failed intellectuals. Raico does not dismiss this, but he prefers an analysis that Mises advanced in an earlier article.

Citing Cicero’s *De officiis* as an exemplary text, he [Mises] identifies the contempt for moneymaking deeply ingrained in western culture as the source of the hostility towards capitalists, trade, and speculation “which today dominates our whole public life, politics, and the written word.” (p. 85)

If Raico is attracted to Mises’s earlier account, Hayek fares less well at his hands. In *The Counter-Revolution of Science*, Hayek described an engineering frame of mind that to a large extent, in his opinion, attracted intellectuals to socialism. Scientific experiments and engineering projects require conscious planning: why not extend such planning to society as a whole? With characteristic acuity, Raico raises a strong objection:

from the fact that many particular engineering projects have succeeded it does not follow that a single vast engineering project, one subsuming all particular projects, is likely to succeed; nor does it seem likely that most people will find such a claim plausible. (p. 79)

As we have already seen, Raico places great emphasis on the distinction between true liberalism and its modern counterfeits. It should not then be difficult to surmise his answer to the question posed in his next chapter, “Was Keynes a Liberal?” According to Robert Skidelsky, among many others, Keynes fully adhered to liberal values. True enough, he rejected laissez-faire; but his interventionist measures aimed to cure a defect of capitalism, not to replace that system with socialism or some other revolutionary alternative.

It at once follows from Raico’s characterization of liberalism that Skidelsky *et hoc genus omne* are radically mistaken. Regardless of his supposed love of the English liberal tradition, someone who relied on the state to the extent that Keynes did could hardly have believed that civil society has no great need for the state. But Raico does not leave it at that. Keynes, far from being
a wholehearted lover of freedom, viewed with some sympathy the fascist and Communist “experiments” of the 1930s. In a notorious article, “National Self-Sufficiency,” which appeared in *The Yale Review* for 1933, Keynes wrote:

> But I bring my criticisms to bear, as one whose heart is friendly and sympathetic to the desperate experiments of the contemporary world, who wishes them well and would like them to succeed, who has his own experiments in view, and who in the last resort prefers anything on earth to what the financial reports are wont to call “the best opinion in Wall Street.” (p. 109)

This passage, Raico notes, has been omitted from the version of the article in *The Collected Writings*.

Nor was this the only occasion on which Keynes had good things to say about totalitarians. In a broadcast for the BBC in June 1936, he praised highly the notorious *apologia* for Soviet tyranny written by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization*?

What lay at the basis of Keynes’ hostility to capitalism? As he did in the previous chapter, Raico finds the answer in disdain for money. Keynes went so far as to appeal to Freudian psychology to account for the supposed “irrational” desire for money. Raico amusingly comments,

> This psychoanalytical “finding”—by the man Vladimir Nabokov correctly identified as the Viennese Fraud—permitted Keynes to assert that love of money was condemned not only by religion but by “science” as well. (p. 113)

Marxists would respond to the analysis Raico has so far pursued with an objection. Raico has spoken of ideas as if they possessed an independent existence; but in fact, are not ideas really reflections of class interest? Does not classical liberalism embody the interests of the bourgeoisie of a certain period, rather than enshrine some universal truth? In “The Conflict of Classes: Liberal vs. Marxist Theories,” Raico directly confronts this challenge. Ideas do not, as Marxists imagine, reflect the interests of conflicting economic classes. The free market rests, not on irreparable class conflict, but on a fundamental harmony of interests of people who benefit from social cooperation.

It remains true, nevertheless, that class conflict is a fundamental motor of history. Marx and Engels were not altogether wrong when in the *Manifesto* they said, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class
struggles.” But the conflict lies not among conflicting groups in the free market but rather between producers and those who seize their wealth, principally through statist predation.

We owe the correct account of class struggle to a group of early nineteenth-century French liberals.

Liberal class conflict theory emerged in a polished form in France, in the period of the Bourbon Restoration, following the defeat and final exile of Napoleon. From 1817 to 1819, two young liberals, Charles Comte and Charles Dunoyer, edited the journal *Le Censeur Européen*; beginning with the second volume (issue), another young liberal, Augustin Thierry, collaborated closely with them. (p. 124)

As the members of this group saw matters,

In any given society, a sharp distinction can be drawn between those who live by plunder and those who live by production. The first are characterized in various ways by Comte and Dunoyer, including “the idle,” “the devouring,” and “the hornets”; the second, are termed, among other things, “the industrious” and “the bees.” (p. 127)

This view of class conflict led Dunoyer and his associates and followers, who were called the Industrialists, to a new theory of the French Revolution. The revolutionaries aimed to secure government positions for themselves:

With the emphasis on state functionaries, a new and surprising interpretation of the Great Revolution is presented by the Industrialist writers. The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1791* proclaimed admission to government jobs as a natural and civil right. (p. 130)

Raico is naturally dismayed that well-known scholars have lavished attention on the inferior Marxist theory of classes, while ignoring the contribution of the classical liberals. Here he excoriates a famous authority for this scholarly lapse:

Needless to say, Professor [Albert O.] Hirschman is equally blithely ignorant that the use of the concept of “spoliation” was as common among the Italian as among the French laissez-faire liberals. (p. 124)
Raico greatly admires Hayek, especially as an economist; but he differs greatly from Hayek in his understanding of the history of liberalism. In “The Centrality of French Liberalism,” he challenges Hayek’s attempt to distinguish two traditions of individualism (or liberalism). The first, basically a British and empirical line of thought, represents genuine liberalism; the second, French (and Continental), is a no true liberal tradition, but rather a rationalistic deviation that leads “inevitably” to collectivism. (p. 143)

Already in his dissertation, written under Hayek’s direction, Raico had pointed to problems with Hayek’s dichotomy. Thus, he noted that Lord Acton, one of Hayek’s chief exemplars of tradition and common sense, evolved to a more rationalistic position:

By the time he delivered his two lectures on the history of freedom, Acton had revised his view of the supreme role of reason in this area: the achievement of religious freedom in England is ascribed not to fidelity to received ways, but to a deliberate rejection of them. (The Place of Religion in the Liberal Philosophy of Constant, Tocqueville, and Acton, Mises Institute, 2010, p. 111)

Hayek was no doubt aware that two of the most eminent French liberals, Constant and Tocqueville, were the opposite of constructivist rationalists, in his pejorative sense; and, in fact, Hayek greatly admired Tocqueville. But these two great figures, Raico makes clear, were far from alone in their respect for tradition. The Comte de Montalembert was a firmly committed Roman Catholic; by no means did he think that all religions of equal validity.

It is highly significant that Montalembert, as he categorically states, refuses to defend religious liberty on the basis of “the ridiculous and culpable doctrines that all religions are equally true and good in themselves, or that the spiritual authority does not obligate conscience.” (p. 152)

Given this view of religion, why was Montalembert a liberal? Given the unchangeable pluralism of contemporary society, it would be a hopeless project for Catholics to endeavor to establish Catholicism through the use of
force directed against non-believers. Moreover, any attempt to do so would be dangerous. Once the principle of state intervention is admitted, would not anti-Catholics, should they gain power, try to suppress the Church? Far better, then, to adopt a principled position of non-intervention; in that way, freedom for all could be assured. Montalembert did not confine his liberalism to the advocacy of religious freedom. He strongly opposed socialism and was a prescient critic of the danger to freedom posed by a state educational monopoly. In the face of Raico’s analysis, it would hardly do for Hayek to defend his dichotomy by pointing out that Montalembert was born in London.

Another influential figure who wreaks havoc with Hayek’s schema is Gustave de Molinari. At first, one might surmise that Molinari’s radical denial of the need for government would lead him to dismiss tradition as well. This was decidedly not the case.

This most “extreme” of French or even of all European liberals (Auberon Herbert in Britain would be a close rival) displayed a warm sympathy for tradition and “organic” culture, going so far as to criticize the Napoleonic Code for consolidating the “reforms” of the Revolution by replacing the variegated customs of the provinces with a uniform legislation. (p. 157)

Mises stood foremost among twentieth-century advocates of classical liberalism, and Marxists have been unable adequately to respond to his challenges to their creed. Instead, they have all too often resorted to smears. In “Ludwig von Mises’s Liberalism on Fascism, Democracy, and Imperialism,” Raico answers one such attack on Mises, advanced by the British Marxist historian Perry Anderson.

Anderson noted that in Liberalism, published in Germany in 1927, Mises said this about Italian fascism:

It cannot be denied that [Italian] Fascism and similar movements aiming at the establishment of dictatorships are full of the best intentions and that their intervention has for the moment, saved European civilization. (p. 166)

Was Mises, the supposed champion of freedom, really a fascist?

Raico’s comment on this issue is simple and straightforward. Mises was of course not a fascist: his criticisms of that system were many, far reaching,
and various. But Italy in the years after World War I really was threatened by socialist revolution, or at least many competent observers at the time believed; and Mussolini and his cohorts ended that danger. Anderson, by the way, is in the habit of smearing scholars he deems not far enough to the left. He called Karl Wittfogel’s great *Oriental Despotism* “a vulgar charivari” (Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, Verso, 1974, p. 487).

In “Eugen Richter and the End of German Liberalism,” Raico describes the heroic struggle of the leader of the German liberals against Bismarck’s welfare state. (He has written at length on German classical liberalism in his superb *Die Partei der Freiheit*.) Advocates of the welfare state often portray it as an effort to shield workers and the poor from the ravages of untrammeled capitalism. To the contrary, state-enforced welfare measures interfered with private welfare programs and threatened to initiate an unsustainable orgy of spending.

As Richter pointed out,

> By hindering or restricting the development of independent funds, one pressed along the road of state-help and here awoke growing claims on the State that, in the long run, no political system can satisfy. (p. 202, emphasis in original)

Raico entirely concurs:

> One might also reflect on a circumstance that today appears entirely possible: that, after so many fatal “contradictions” of capitalism have failed to materialize, in the end a genuine contradiction has emerged, one that may well destroy the system, namely the incompatibility of capitalism and the limitless state welfare yielded by the functioning of a democratic order. (p. 202)

The book concluding chapter, “Arthur Ekirch on American Militarism,” is a tribute to an outstanding historian who has traced the rise of militarism over the course of American history. Ekirch, like Raico, had a strong moral commitment to freedom; and he analyzed the rise of militarism, not as a dispassionate observer, but as a confirmed opponent.

In the course of his tribute to Ekirch, Raico accomplishes a remarkable feat. He offers a brilliant summary of the entire course of America’s foreign policy, culminating in America’s present position of world dominance. A few samples of his comments must here suffice. Of the great advocate of a strong navy, Alfred Thayer Mahan, he says,
Mahan was not much of a naval commander (his ships tended to collide), but he was a superb propagandist for navalism. His work on *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783*, was seized upon by navalists in Germany, Japan, France, and elsewhere. It fueled the arms race that led to the First World War, and was no great blessing to mankind. (p. 214)

On Theodore Roosevelt, he is no less unflattering:

Heaven only knows what Theodore Roosevelt is doing on that endlessly reproduced iconic monument on Mount Rushmore, right alongside Jefferson. He despised Jefferson as a weakling, and Jefferson would have despised him as a warmonger. (p. 214)

For much more detail on this and cognate subjects, readers should consult Raico’s outstanding *Great Wars and Great Leaders: A Libertarian Rebuttal*.

Ralph Raico is an extraordinary thinker and scholar. I first met him in 1979 and was at once impressed by his intelligence, his scholarship, and, not least, his humor. Thirty-two years later, these qualities remain impressive. I have learned a great deal from Ralph and am honored to have him as a friend.
Herbert Butterfield: History, Providence, and Skeptical Politics*

KENNETH B. MCINTYRE

A Great Historian

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Kenneth McIntyre has given us a deeply thoughtful and erudite account of one of the greatest 20th-century historians, Herbert Butterfield. I should like to concentrate on an aspect of Butterfield’s thought likely to be of considerable interest to libertarians, especially libertarians who follow Murray Rothbard. Butterfield, though not himself a libertarian, viewed with alarm the power of the state. He would have agreed with Burckhardt that “power is evil.” Power, he thought, often disguises itself in self-righteousness: a powerful state will endeavor to portray itself as the champion of the good, locked in battle with the forces of evil.

Such ideological distortions were especially characteristic of the 20th century, and Butterfield developed in response a resolutely revisionist account of World War I, World War II, and the Cold War. To understand this account, we need to sketch the background of the pre-20th-century European state system.

This system developed in reaction to the immensely destructive Wars of Religion. Following the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the European states deliberately endeavored to limit war and to avoid ideological conflicts. The arrangements they arrived at were far from ideal; but in this vale of tears, utopian schemes that seek to impose perpetual peace, blind to the reality of original sin, invite disaster. (Butterfield, it is essential to realize, writes as an

* Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2011.
Augustinian Christian for whom original sin is of prime significance.)

As Butterfield noted,

in the background of eighteenth-century thought there was the repeated remembrance of a past, still fairly recent, but darker than anything else—the cruel Wars of Religion . . . against the notion of a uniform Empire with a uniform culture, they [the creators and defenders of the Westphalian system] promoted the idea of a civilization fundamentally one but broken into panes of many-colored glass—achieving greater richness through the variety of its local manifestations. (p. 148, quoting Butterfield)

The Westphalian system was sharply interrupted but not permanently frustrated by the wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. The Congress of Vienna reverted to the older tradition; and whatever the defects of the monarchical European states in the 19th century, global war was avoided for a century.

World War I replaced this nonideological system with a different view, and Butterfield did not see this as a change for the better.

Butterfield points to World War I as the greatest tragedy of the 20th century because it shattered the old order, replacing it with a series of wishful but vacuous platitudes and creating the conditions in which the rise of totalitarian ideologies became possible. He writes that “in 1919 men had no feeling that an international order had been destroyed through a war that had broken all rules for the maintenance of such a system. They felt on the contrary that, in a ‘war for righteousness,’ the last seat of evil had been eliminated and now, for the first time in history, an international order had been installed.” (pp. 150–151, quoting Butterfield)

It is evident that Butterfield was no Wilsonian.*

One objection to Butterfield’s account is the claim that Germany sought in 1914 to overturn the European state system through a ruthless grasp for world power. Owing to German aggression, a limited response in the old style was no longer possible. McIntyre unfortunately does not discuss this point, but it is clear that Butterfield firmly rejected the thesis of Fritz Fischer and his acolytes of sole German culpability for the outbreak of war. Rather he was inclined to stress that Germany in the years before 1914 had a justified fear of the growth of Russian power. Butterfield brooded on the dangers of a generation so obsessed by the Hitler years that they forgot the [revisionist] scholarship of the 1920s . . . and saw nothing but poison in the German past. Inevitably these feelings brought from him a fierce response to Fritz Fischer’s Griff nach der Weltmacht (1961) and the later complementary volume by Immanuel Geiss.*

Butterfield’s praise for limited diplomacy must confront another challenge. Even if the harsh settlement of Versailles led to the rise of Hitler, is it not true that once that monstrously evil figure had come to power, a war of annihilation against his regime was necessary? Butterfield is well aware of the evils of Nazism, but he doubts the Manichean terms in which World War II is often framed:

The great failure in both world wars, according to Butterfield, was the Western allies’ decision to ignore the realities of the balance of power and, instead, to insist that they were fighting wars of righteousness. Butterfield writes that “we may wonder sometimes whether Russia was so much more virtuous than Germany as to make it worth the lives of tens of millions of people in two wars to ensure that she . . . should gain such an unchallenged and exclusive hold over that line of Central European States as Germany never held in all her history.” The problem in Central and Eastern Europe was the balance of power between Russia and Germany, and the destruction of either state was foolhardy precisely because it inevitably created

the conditions in which one power could dominate the whole region. (pp. 152–153, quoting Butterfield)

Butterfield’s less-than-enthusiastic attitude toward the wars against Germany earned for him the disdain of the neoconservative historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, and McIntyre has an appropriately severe comment:

In what is easily the worst essay ever written on Butterfield, Gertrude Himmelfarb attacks Butterfield for not displaying sufficient hatred of the Germans during the first half of the twentieth century and for repeating this wickedness by insufficiently hating the Russians in the second half of the same century. For Himmelfarb, Butterfield’s primary problem is that he is not self-righteous enough. (p. 223, note 126)

It should come as no surprise that Butterfield viewed American conduct of the Cold War with grave misgiving, and the American “victory” in that conflict would not have pleased him either. (Butterfield died in 1979, long before the collapse of the Soviet Union.)

A multipolar world is inherently valuable because it allows states a great deal more flexibility and it preserves their independence. The bipolar Cold War and the unipolar American hegemony which followed have rendered states much more susceptible to manipulation by the primary powers or power. (p. 145)

Like Murray Rothbard, he did not take the revolutionary rhetoric of world communism as an insurmountable bar to peaceful accommodation:

Butterfield always believed that, given enough time, revolutionary and ideological states could eventually become partners in defending an international order in order to defend their own continued existence and because the exigencies of the international predicament would encourage such normalization of relations . . . the experience of Western liberal democracies with the People’s Republic of China has supported Butterfield’s general notions. (p. 140)

If Professor McIntyre were to read this review, he could with entire justice complain that I have given a misleading account of his book. Butterfield’s views on foreign policy are only one of the topics he covers. It is in regard
to one of these other topics that I should like to raise an objection to Butterfield’s views. McIntyre devotes great attention to Butterfield’s depiction of the “historical revolution.” This refers to the development of history as a technical discipline, culminating in the work of Leopold von Ranke in the 19th century. Here the aim is to discover what actually happened in the past.

In contrast, the “practical conception of the past” understands history in relation to the religious beliefs or political aims of a particular community. Butterfield does not reject the practical conception, so long as it is not confused with technical history. His most famous work, *The Whig Conception of History*, criticized the anachronistic reading of the English past in terms of a story of the progress of Protestantism, parliamentary power, and liberty, and . . . a general tendency or attitude toward the past which conceives of the past primarily or solely in terms of its contribution to a current state of affairs. (p. 8)

But this criticism did not prevent Butterfield in *The Englishman and His History* (1944) from himself undertaking a Whig interpretation of English history. In the latter book, his purpose was not to write technical history; rather, Butterfield “always thought” of the book “as his contribution to the British war effort” (p. 63). E. H. Carr was then wrong to tax Butterfield with contradiction for writing the sort of Whig history he had earlier condemned: technical and practical or prophetic histories have different purposes.

The problem I have in mind concerns the assertions made in practical history. Ordinarily, when we assert something, we are asserting it to be true. Does the practical historian intend us to take the statements he makes about the past as true? If he does not, what does he take himself to be doing when he makes such statements? If he does claim to be asserting true claims about the past, what are his grounds for doing so, given that he by hypothesis has not followed the canons of technical history but has rather viewed the past from the standpoint of present concerns? Of what use, e.g., are Butterfield’s searching accounts of the Westphalian system and its overthrow in the 20th century unless what he says about these matters is true?

Butterfield appears to have enmeshed himself in an epistemological tangle. The confusion becomes even worse when one recalls that Butterfield, apparently influenced by his friend Michael Oakeshott’s *Experience and Its Modes*, held that not even technical history offers fully true statements.
Instead, technical history considers the world from a particular perspective: “For Butterfield, science, like history, is best understood as a conditional way of conceiving the world which is satisfactory in a provisional way but ultimately inadequate in explaining the meaning of human existence” (p. 87). I cannot argue the point here, but I venture to suggest that this position cannot stand. If you assert something, you assert it to be true, and you cannot at the same time say that it is “ultimately” untrue.

McIntyre displays great learning, but I note a few points of disagreement. It is surprising that in his references on the 18th-century Göttingen historians (p. 194, note 47), he does not cite the standard work of Peter Hanns Reill, The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism (University of California Press, 1975). When Imre Lakatos said that “the history of science should be written as it should have taken place” (p. 196, note 63), this did not commit him to a Whig conception of the history of science. I doubt that Oakeshott’s target in his criticism of sociological explanations of human action was Peter Winch’s Wittgenstinian The Idea of a Social Science (pp. 204–205, note 116). Winch was himself a strong critic of Durkheim and conventional sociology. Winch’s book, by the way, criticizes Oakeshott’s account of morality. The French historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s name is misspelled “Le Roy Ledurie” (p. 38, also p. 184, note 96).

But these are mere cavils, and I highly recommend McIntyre’s masterful study. It is well known that McIntyre is no admirer of Leo Strauss and his school, and his mordant remarks on the eminent Straussian Harvey Mansfield’s articles on Sir Lewis Namier should not be missed (p. 205, note 120).
The subject “Judaism and Capitalism” needs to be addressed in two related but separate parts. In one of these, the question up for discussion is, what is the relation between Judaism, taken as a body of religious doctrine, and capitalism? In the other, the issue that confronts us is, what is the relation between Jews, taken as a particular ethnic group, and capitalism? Obviously, the two questions are related. One way of identifying at least some Jews is as those who practice the Jewish religion. Certainly, many of those ethnically Jewish are estranged from their ancestral faith; nevertheless, that there exists a connection between the two parts of our topic is clear. I propose to consider both of these parts in the remarks that follow.

I shall take the “capitalism” in our title as not requiring an extended venture in definition or analysis. By it I intend nothing controversial. I mean the economic system in place over much of the world since the Industrial Revolution, characterized for the most part by private ownership of the means of production.*

* Contemporary “left libertarians” often use “capitalism” to designate a partnership between government and big business. They contrast this system with a genuinely free market. This is not my usage here.
Theories that endeavor to connect Judaism and capitalism often, though not invariably, spring from distaste for one or both of the paired terms. This was notoriously the case in Karl Marx’s famous essay _On the Jewish Question_, written in 1844. In this early work, Marx said that capitalism was Jewish, in that both were egoistic. In his important book, _Capitalism and the Jews_, Jerry Muller says:

Were Jews egoistic, as [Bruno] Bauer had charged? Certainly, Marx answered. But in bourgeois society, _everyone_ was egoistic. . . . Marx embraces all of the traditional negative characterizations of the Jew repeated by Bauer, and for good measure adds a few of his own. But he does so in order to stigmatize market activity as such. For Marx’s strategy is to endorse every negative characterization of market activity that Christians associated with Jews, but to insist that those qualities have now come to characterize society as a whole, very much including Christians.*

Marx’s argument is a simple one. Capitalism is based on the pursuit of profit. Each person is supposed to act to secure his self-interest. This makes universal the trader-ethics characteristic since the Middle Ages of Jewish peddlers and moneylenders. Marx of course did not advance this view as a purely theoretical account. He deplored this sort of society; in it, human beings lived alienated both from one another and their own essence.

Marx expresses his argument in unmistakable terms. Criticizing the right of private property in the French Constitution of 1793, he says:

> The right of man to private property is, therefore, the right to enjoy one’s property and to dispose of it at one’s discretion . . . without regard to other men, independently of society, the right of self-interest. This individual liberty and its application form the basis of civil society. It makes everyone see in other men not the realization of his own freedom, but the _barrier_ to it.

It is precisely the attitude toward others described here that, according to Marx, constitutes the essence of Judaism. *What is the secular basis

of Judaism? Practical need, self-interest. What is the worldly religion of the Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly God? Money.” (Emphasis in original)*

How are we to evaluate Marx’s argument? It suffers from two main problems. First, Marx fails to establish a connection between selfish, egoistic behavior and the Jewish religion. Why is egoistic behavior distinctively Jewish? It is no doubt true that Judaism looks favorably on a person’s pursuit of his own interests. In the famous saying of Rabbi Hillel in the first chapter of the Ethics of Our Fathers, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?”

But an approval of self-interest by no means signifies a selfish disregard for the well-being of others. One need only recall the continuation of Hillel’s saying, “If I am only for myself, what am I?”

One could easily amass other citations on the role of regard for others and charity in Judaism, but one more must here suffice. Jewish sources often view the principal sin of Sodom, the city that God destroyed by fire and brimstone, as lack of charity. As Rabbi Meir Tamari notes in his authoritative exposition of Jewish law regarding economics,

The Mishnah [first part of the Talmud] defined one who said . . . “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is mine” as an evil man. He who says, “What’s yours is yours and what’s mine is yours” is a righteous person. But “What’s yours is yours and what’s mine” is mine—some say that is the mark of Sodom.†

A defender of Marx might reply by recalling a distinction made earlier. At the outset, I distinguished the claim that Judaism as a body of doctrine is related to capitalism from the claim that Jews as a group are so related. Has the objection just raised to Marx’s account ignored this distinction? Perhaps Marx is not best taken as making a point about Jewish religious doctrine. Rather, is he not claiming that the behavior found in the economic activities

* All quotations from Marx are from Karl Marx, On the Jewish Question, consulted here: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question. One of these quotations is also given by Muller, p. 38, in his own translation.

of certain Jews, namely the traders and moneylenders, best expresses the essence of capitalism?*

If this is what Marx had in mind, it is no more satisfactory than the earlier version of his claim. What is supposed to be specifically Jewish about either selling or lending money? Marx nowhere informs us.

A more deep-seated failing besets Marx’s account of Judaism and capitalism. Marx characterizes both capitalism and Judaism as based on self-interest, practical need, selling, and money. Surely it would be difficult to find throughout recorded history many large-scale and complex societies in which these features did not play a prominent role. Contrary to Marx, neither self-interest nor the pursuit of money is distinctively either capitalist or Jewish.

In seeking to exorcise self-interest as a feature of the human condition Marx is beguiled by a fantasy in which human beings abandon all antagonisms. Murray Rothbard has aptly noted the influence of this fantasy:

To Marx, any differences between men, and, therefore, any specialization in the division of labor, is a “contradiction,” and the communist goal is to replace that contradiction with harmony among all. This means that to the Marxist any individual differences, any diversity among men, are contradictions to be stamped out and replaced by the uniformity of the anthill.†

Jerry Muller has insightfully drawn attention to the importance of Marx’s essay; but in one respect he goes too far. Muller says,

For “On the Question of the Jews” contains, in embryo, most of the subsequent themes of Marx’s critique of capitalism…. If Marx had one big idea, it was that capitalism was the rule of money—itself the expression of greed. The rule of capital was fundamentally immoral because it deprived the vast majority in a capitalist society of their humanity, requiring labor that enriched a few capitalists while impoverishing the workers physically and spiritually.‡

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* I confine to a note a difficulty with both readings of Marx. If Judaism is capitalism, how can it be at the same time true that Judaism gave rise to capitalism? Obviously, Marx does not use “is” here to denote strict identity.

† Murray Rothbard, Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature and Other Essays (Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2000), p. 256.

‡ Muller, pp. 41–42.
Muller here fundamentally misconceives Marxism. Marx in *Das Kapital* had principally in mind a scientific critique of capitalism, based primarily on the labor theory of value. The book contains fierce moral invective directed against capitalism, some of which make references to Jewish themes; this is rhetoric rather than the core of the book. (One such reference to a Jewish theme, incidentally, occurs in the famous passage of Chapter 24 of *Das Kapital*, “Accumulate, accumulate, that is Moses and the prophets.” The Jewish reference here is not only the obvious one, i.e., the mention of Moses. The entire expression “Moses and the prophets” refers to two of the three divisions in the Jewish arrangement of the books of the Bible: Marx is saying that for the capitalists, accumulation is the Bible.) The crucial point that Marx intended his project as science rather than ethics was made long ago by Werner Sombart, whom we shall be discussing later.*

Before turning from Marx on capitalism and the Jews, I allow myself one conjecture. Marx said that the essence of capitalism was egoism. Could awareness of this claim have influenced the young Ayn Rand, who after all grew up in Soviet Russia, where the writings of Marx were abundantly available in Russian translation? I ask because she of course also thought that capitalism was in essence egoism, though she embraced exactly what repelled Marx and ignored his identification of Judaism with capitalism.

What lesson should we draw from the failure of Marx’s attempt to link Judaism with capitalism? Should we abandon altogether all inquiries along the same lines as fundamentally misguided? Such a course was urged by Ludwig von Mises. He remarks in *Socialism*,

> Today the Islamic and Jewish religions are dead. They offer their adherents nothing more than a ritual. They know how to prescribe prayers and fasts, certain foods, circumcision and the rest; but that is all. They offer nothing to the mind. Completely de-spiritualized, all they teach and preach are legal forms and external rule. They lock their follower into a cage of traditional usages, in which he is often hardly able to breathe; but for his inner soul they have no message. They suppress the soul, instead of elevating it and saving it. For many centuries in Islam,

for nearly two thousand years in Jewry, there have been no new religious movements. Today the religion of the Jews is just as it was when the Talmud was drawn up.

I do not think that Mises’s remarks by themselves settle the questions at issue, even if one accepts Mises’s highly dubious characterization of Judaism as pure ritual, devoid of appeal to the mind. Mises’s comments do not exclude the possibility that legal regulations of the kind Mises describes in such unflattering terms influenced the development of capitalism, either by their content or by the qualities of mind and character that people who adhered to the rituals tended to develop. But these are no more than possibilities: whether these regulations in fact had such effects is another question. . . .
“Judaism and Capitalism: Friends or Enemies?”—Part 2

The Lou Church Memorial Lecture in Religion and Economics,
presented at the 2012 Austrian Scholars Conference

DAVID GORDON

Judaism, Capitalism, and Communism

February 13, 2013, Mises Daily

Let us turn then to another attempt to connect Judaism and capitalism, and this one the most significant of all, Werner Sombart’s *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*, which appeared in 1911. Sombart conforms to the pattern mentioned earlier that those who ascribe to the Jews primary responsibility to capitalism tend to be hostile to both Judaism and capitalism.

In Sombart’s case this is hardly surprising. Sombart began his academic career as a convinced Marxist. Though he veered to the right, he remained a socialist to the end, albeit of a peculiar kind. Like Marx, he stressed Jewish involvement in trade as the essence of capitalism: The Jews with their trader-ethic had succeeded in transforming the more static values of the Middle Ages. The broad outlines of this theory will already be familiar from our discussion of Marx’s essay; but Sombart developed the position with enormously greater learning in the Jewish sources and in Jewish history. Sombart himself says that Marx, in his essay, “looked deep into the Jewish soul.” After mentioning two other writers, he says, “What has been said about the Jewish spirit since these men (all Jews!) wrote is either a repetition of what they said or a distortion of the truth.”*

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His favorable reference to Marx’s essay should be sufficient to suggest that Sombart was an unfriendly critic of Judaism, but Milton Friedman dissents. He writes,

Sombart’s book . . . has had in general a highly unfavorable reception . . . and, indeed, something of an aura of anti-Semitism has come to be attributed to it . . . There is nothing in the book itself to justify any charge of anti-Semitism though there certainly is in Sombart’s writing and behavior several decades later, indeed, if anything I interpret the book as philo-Semitic.*

Friedman has I suggest been deceived by his own strong approval for the behavior and attitudes that Sombart depicts. Sombart was not praising the Jews, e.g., when he ascribed to them the trader’s mentality.

The great strength of his book is that he goes beyond the generalities to be found in Marx’s essay and offers specific evidence from Jewish religious sources and history. He points out, e.g., that though a Jew is forbidden to lend money at interest to another Jew, he is permitted, and according to some opinions required, to do so to non-Jews. Jewish law sees nothing intrinsically wrong with lending at interest: the ban on taking interest from fellow Jews stems from the bonds that ought to link fellow believers. The prohibition on taking interest from a fellow Jew is more than a negative requirement. It is a positive duty to lend money without interest to Jews in need, and free loan societies have long been part of the Jewish community.

Sombart expresses the point about taking interest from non-Jews in typically colorful language:

Now think of the position in which the pious Jew and the pious Christian respectively found themselves in the period in which money-lending first became a need in Europe, and which eventually gave birth to capitalism. The good Christian who had been addicted to usury was filled with remorse as he lay a-dying, ready at the eleventh-hour to cast from him the ill-gotten gains which scorched his soul. And the good Jew? In the evening of his days, he gazed upon his well-filled caskets and

coffers, overflowing with sequins of which he had relieved the miserable Christians or Mohammedans. It was a sight which warmed his heart, for every penny was like a sacrifice which he had brought to his Heavenly Father.*

Sombart does not see the law regarding interest as standing alone. To the contrary, he maintains that Judaism is a religion of calculative rationality, peculiarly suited to success under capitalism:

The kinship between Judaism and capitalism is further illustrated by the legally regulated relationship—I had almost said the business-like connection, except that the term has a disagreeable connotation—between God and Israel. . . . The contract usually sets forth that man is rewarded for duties performed and punished for duties neglected. . . . Two consequences must of necessity follow: first, a constant weighing up of the loss and gain which any action needs must bring, and secondly, a complicated scheme of bookkeeping, as it were, for each individual person.†

Sombart makes clear his evaluation of Judaism and capitalism, in a passage that evidently escaped Milton Friedman’s attention:

In all its reasoning it [the Jewish religion] appeals to us as a creation of the intellect, a thing of thought and purpose projected into the world of organisms . . . destined to destroy and to conquer Nature’s realm and to reign itself in her stead. Just so does capitalism appear on the scene; like the Jewish religion, an alien element in the midst of the natural, created world; like it, too, something schemed and planned in the midst of teeming life.‡

What is one to make of all this? The main problem with Sombart’s thesis is obvious. Though he is right that calculative rationality is integral to capitalism, this disposition is by no means peculiar to Jews. If so, capitalism cannot be considered Jewish in essence, though Sombart may well be right that certain traits of mind equipped Jews to prosper under capitalism. Sombart

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* Sombart, pp. 170–171.
† Sombart, p. 146.
‡ Sombart, p. 144.
could hardly ignore this point; only a few years before his own book, Max Weber had issued his famous *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In that book, Weber ascribed some of the same traits that Sombart thought especially Jewish to the Puritans.

It cannot be said that Sombart’s way of coping with this objection is entirely satisfactory. He writes, “I [Sombart] have already mentioned that Max Weber’s study of the importance of Protestantism for the capitalistic system was the impetus that sent me to consider the importance of the Jew. . . . Puritanism is Judaism.”* 

Sombart rightly stressed the importance for capitalism of lending money at interest, but allowing this practice is hardly peculiar to Judaism. In his great *An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought*, Rothbard remarks: “Calvin’s main contribution to the usury question was in having the courage to dump the prohibition altogether. . . . To Calvin, then, usury is perfectly licit, provided it is not charged in loans to the poor, who would be hurt by such payment.” Rothbard continues about a later Calvinist, “The honor of putting the final boot to the usury prohibition belongs to . . . Claudius Salmasius, . . . who finished off this embarrassing remnant of the mountainous errors of the past. In short, Salmasius pointed out that money-lending was a business like any other, and like other businesses was entitled to charge a market price. . . . Salmasius also had the courage to point out that there were no valid arguments against usury, either by divine or natural law.”† No doubt Sombart would respond by declaring Calvin and Salmasius to be Jews.

We have so far considered, and found largely wanting, attempts to connect Judaism with capitalism. But we have also to examine the views of those who find a Jewish impetus behind opposition to capitalism. Especially at the beginning of the twentieth century, a common view held that the Bolshevik Revolution was largely a Jewish enterprise.

Winston Churchill wrote in 1920,

> There is no need to exaggerate the part played in the creation of Bolshevism and the actual bringing about of the Russian Revolution by these international and for the most part atheistical

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* Sombart, p. 174.
Jews. It is certainly a great one; it probably outweighs all others. With the notable exception of Lenin, the majority of the leading figures are Jews. Moreover, the principal inspiration and driving power comes from the Jewish leaders.

Churchill by no means thought that all Jews were Bolsheviks. To the contrary, he contrasted the internationalist Jews behind world revolution with nationalist Jews, e.g., Zionists. “The struggle which is now beginning between the Zionist and the Bolshevik Jews is little less than a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people.”

Churchill was but one of many writers of his time with similar views. As he notes in his article, he had read Nesta Webster, a once famous popular historian who studied conspiracy theories of revolution in, among other books, *The French Revolution: A Study in Democracy; World Revolution; and Secret Societies and Subversive Movements*. (Contrary to general belief, incidentally, she did not endorse the authenticity of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*.) She was probably the foremost source for the view that communism was Jewish.

Backers of the theory, like Churchill, appealed to the fact that Jews occupied a high number of positions in the Bolshevik government. The Irish priest Father Denis Fahey published a pamphlet, *The Rulers of Russia*, containing long lists of Bolsheviks with Jewish-sounding names. In Germany, the Nazi writer Alfred Rosenberg sometimes read out such lists over the radio, leading to the joke that he thought that everybody named “Rosenberg” was Jewish except him. In recent years, the German writer Johannes Rogalla von Bieberstein has devoted a long book to the topic, *Jewish Bolshevism: Myth and Reality* [*Der juedische Bolshevismus: Mythos und Realität*].

Before we turn to evaluate this theory, it should be noted that it is possible, however unlikely it may seem, for someone to hold this view together with the position we have earlier examined. That is, it is possible to hold Jews responsible both for capitalism and communism, its foremost antagonist. This is more than a bare possibility: Hitler, for one, believed precisely this.

The main failing of the view that connects Judaism and communism is a simple one. It confuses two questions: why, looking at the historical


circumstances that led to the Russian Revolution, were many Jews attracted to revolution; and, is there anything intrinsic to Judaism that leads to support of communism?

The first question is readily answered when one recalls the long history of anti-Jewish measures taken by the Tsarist Russian government in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A similar appeal to particular circumstances would I think explain such other instances of Jewish support for socialist revolutionary groups as the historical record discloses. Absent the existence of special circumstances, there is no marked Jewish support for the overthrow of capitalism. Jerry Muller is right when he says:

Milton Friedman’s contention that Jews vilified capitalism while profiting from it is highly distorted. To the extent that Jews identified themselves with socialism, it was largely a phenomenon of eastern European Jews and their immediate descendants in the years from the late nineteenth century through the 1930s.*

And even if one is inclined to think the association between Jews and communism greater than Muller allows, it is clear that any such affinity has its limits. Even during the period when Jewish radicalism was at its height, most Jews were not communists, and most communists were not Jews. It would be difficult to consider the Chinese communist movement an instance of Jewish Bolshevism.

To show a close intellectual connection between Judaism and communism would require some derivation of communist ideas from Jewish religious doctrines, and that is not in the offing. True enough, radicals have appealed to Jewish texts to support their views. Michael Walzer has traced the role of the Exodus narrative on revolutionary thought:

I [Walzer] have found the Exodus almost everywhere, often in unexpected places. It is central to the communist theology or antitheology of Ernst Bloch. . . . It is the subject of a book, called Moses in Red, by Lincoln Steffens, published in 1926; a detailed account of Israel’s political struggles in the wilderness and a defense of Leninist politics.†

* Muller, p. 124.
Others have found in the Jewish prophets an inspiration for socialist schemes for reform of the world. A once famous book of the 1920s, *A Religion of Truth, Justice, and Peace*, by Isidor Singer, the editor of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, argued that “the world leadership of the social justice movement [is] offered to the Jew.”* Singer based his argument on an appeal to the words of Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and other prophets.†

Walzer and Singer to the contrary notwithstanding, the claim that Judaism teaches socialism or communism as a general political program cannot succeed. The basic reason such an attempt must fail is the same one that dooms the theories that link Judaism and capitalism. The religious precepts of Judaism are meant to apply only to Jews: they do not constitute an ethical system that prescribes a best social order for all of humanity.

As Meir Tamari says,

> For centuries, Jews enjoyed autonomy in many countries and maintained rabbinic codes of law which regulated and governed their economic activity, thereby preserving its specifically Jewish characteristics. The Bible and the homiletical literature established an ethical and moral framework within which Jewish communities operated.

I conclude, then, that although Mises radically underrated the intellectual merits of the Jewish sources, he was not far from the truth in thinking that are no direct connections to be drawn between Judaism and capitalism.‡

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† For a critical discussion of political appeals to the Jewish prophets, see Lewis Feuer, *Ideology and the Ideologists* (Transaction, 2010).

‡ Tamari, p. 3. To anticipate an objection, the Jewish sources do not prescribe a socialist order for the Jewish community either.
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