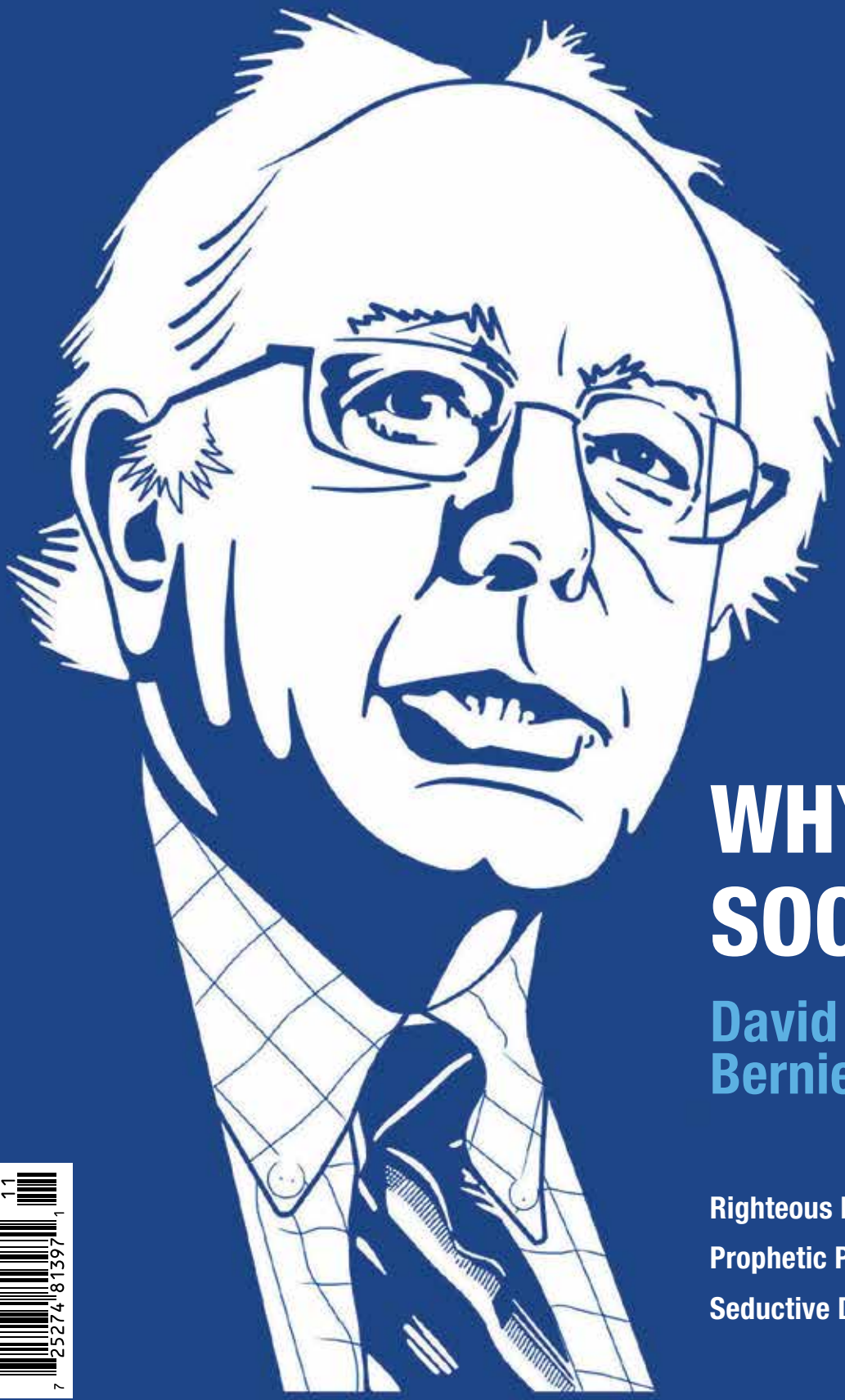
A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

JUNE 12, 2015



WHY NOT A SOCIALIST?

David O'Brien on Bernie Sanders

Righteous Heathens

Prophetic Profs

Seductive Droids

$3.95 US/$4.50 CAN

www.commonwealmagazine.org

Founded in 1924
Commonweal

Editor
Paul Baumann

Associate Editors
Grant Gallicho, Matthew Boudway

Production
Tiina Aleman

Digital Editor
Dominic Preziosi

Editor at Large
Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

Copy Editor
Susanne Washburn

Editorial Assistant
Maria Bowler

Marketing Coordinator
Kaitlin Campbell

Business Manager
James Hannan

Development
Christa A. Kerber

Poetry
Rosemary Deen

Film
Richard Alleva, Rand Richards Cooper

Stage & Television
Celia Wren

Columnists
E. J. Dionne Jr., Anthony Domestico, Rita Ferrone, Cathleen Kaveny, Jo McGowan, Charles R. Morris, Mollie Wilson O'Reilly, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Subscription Information
855-713-1792
subscriptions@commonwealmagazine.org

Advertising Manager
Regan Pickett
commonwealads@gmail.com
540-349-5736

Publisher
Thomas Baker

Commonweal [ISSN 0010-3330], a review of public affairs, religion, literature, and the arts, is published biweekly, except in April, July, August, and November, when it is published monthly, by Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. E-mail: editors@commonwealmagazine.org. Fax: (212) 662-4183. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Commonweal*, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-9982.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. *Commonweal* articles are available at many libraries and research facilities via ProQuest and OpinionArchives. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional offices. Single Copy, $3.95. Yearly print subscriptions, U.S., $65; Canada, $70; other parts of the world, $75. Special two-year rate: U.S. $108; Canada, $118; other parts of the world, $128. Add $45 for airmail. For digital and online subscription options visit www.commonwealmagazine.org/digital.

Cover design: Cecilia Guerrero Rezes
Cover image by DonkeyHotey

LETTERS

Francis & sexual abuse; sober history; knowing Jesus

JUSTICE DELAYED

I was not only disappointed in the editorial "Held to Account" (May 15)—about the resignation of Bishop Robert Finn—I was also angered at the tortured logic of the editors. How is it possible that they could argue that "the pope's favored methods of listening and deliberation… are themselves instruments of justice"? Have they never heard that "justice delayed is justice denied"? The charges against Finn have been public knowledge for nearly five years. His conviction, albeit a misdemeanor, came over two years ago. While I am all in favor of "listening and deliberation" as pastoral strategies, common sense dictates that once the guilty verdict is reached consequences must follow immediately—particularly when it involves a bishop and his failure to report child pornography in the possession of one of his priests. If the bishop had been a teacher at the parish school or a catechist in a religious-education program, he would have been removed immediately. The delayed removal of Finn cannot be favorably interpreted as the result of "listening and deliberation."

Is the pope listening and deliberating about newly installed Bishop Juan de la Cruz Barros Madrid of Osorno, Chile, who is tied to one of that country's most notorious abusers? Is the pope listening and deliberating about Cardinal Bernard Law remaining a cardinal? And on and on.

The editors conclude that the pope "has given Catholics something that has been in short supply throughout this terrible crisis: hope." If that opinion is true, then I can only despair.

DAVID P. DOWDLE
Western Springs, Ill.

FRANCIS'S FAILURES

One hates to contradict the response of someone as holy as Pope Francis, but the May 15 editorial raises a question for me. Regarding the sexual-abuse scandal, the pope has defended "the church as the only institution to address such crimes 'with transparency and responsibility.'" Claiming that no one else has done more, his statement is akin to that of a petulant child defending his position, when he says that "the [Catholic] church is the only one to be attacked." What's more, the editors make a case for how busy Francis is, citing the five thousand bishops around the globe as a possible excuse for his apparent slowness in removing one bishop from a small diocese in the United States three years after the offending priest was laicized and sent to prison. Similarly, it is strange indeed, that a leader as astute as Francis, soon after he was elected pope, would canonize John Paul II—a pope who had failed "time and again, to take decisive action in response to clear evidence of a criminal underground in the priesthood, a subculture that sexually traumatized tens of thousands of youngsters" (the *Nation*, May 16, 2011). Granted, the dual canonization of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II was underway before Francis became pope. But, as President Harry Truman used to say, "the buck stops here." Francis could have declined sainthood for a pope who turned a blind eye to child victims and their parents. In the end, even with so humble and understanding a prelate, does it come down to politics as usual? One wonders.

KATHLEEN BEAL
Bethesda, Md.

continued on page 4

Commonweal

JUNE 12, 2015 • VOLUME 142 • NUMBER 11

THE LONG VIEW

Too bad that Agnes Howard and Thomas Albert Howard take so parochial and defensive a view of David Christian's lectures, titled "Big History" ("A Theory of Everything," May 1). They are concerned that Christian's attempt "to cover a vast stretch of space and time obscures understanding of contingent human actions," and that his course "minimizes the significance of human experience." I suppose it does, but I listened to the two dozen lectures and found that they evoked a religious response in me. As Christian takes you through the slow, logical unfolding of the universe, it is hard not to imagine a creator of infinite intelligence launching this exquisite sequence developing over 14 billion years, with nothing added and yet moving inexorably from the initial Big Bang to the highly complex result we call man. Studying man, the highest organism in history, is, as the Howards suggest, a critical endeavor. But to limit one's study to the period when man finally arrives on the scene is to miss the opportunity to reflect on God's handiwork in launching the universe.

Sometime after I heard the lectures, I came across Leonardo Boff's *Christianity in a Nutshell*. I was delighted to see that Boff begins his account of Christianity with the Big Bang and takes his readers through the same "history" that David Christian does. Then I came across Ilia Delio's *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being*, which traces the thinking of Teilhard de Chardin and the centrality of evolution in the life of the universe as it moves to ever greater complexity and consciousness and expresses the overflowing love of the Creator.

Let's hope the Howards' article does not discourage people from listening to "Big History." I think it does what education is meant to do—expand one's mind.

JOHN W. WEISER
Kentfield, Calif.

DIRECT ADDRESS

Thanks to Jerry Ryan for his reflections on the challenge of "Knowing Jesus" (May 15). He's quite right to suggest that any relationship with Jesus is initiated by Jesus himself ("I believe that Jesus has a relationship to me—but is this reciprocal?"). And I can identify with his concluding thought that this relationship is a mysterious journey, made up of many smaller steps. That said, I wonder if Ryan isn't letting "thinking about" Jesus keep him from the more personal knowledge of the Lord that he apparently desires. All the attention here goes to what others have said about Jesus, but in my experience, the surest way to know Christ better is to address him directly in prayer.

TIMOTHY P. SCHILLING
Utrecht, Netherlands

WHO'S ASKING?

After reading the article by Jerry Ryan and also reading Elizabeth Johnson's book *Consider Jesus*, the words in Peter's confession (Matt. 16:13-20) have taken on another level of meaning. In previous years when I heard or read these words, I understood them as Jesus testing the disciples' understanding of who he was. Now I think they reflect Jesus' struggle to understand himself. When Jesus asks "But who do you say I am?" he asks the question not as a test but as one hoping to receive insight. When Peter answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus gets the insight he was looking for. The truth of Peter's confession that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God must have struck a chord in the depths of Jesus' heart and mind so that he joyfully says to Peter, "Blessed are you… flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

I am grateful to Jerry Ryan and Sr. Johnson for helping me see this level of meaning. I'll never again hear or read that part of Scripture without this better understanding of what it means.

MICHAEL PETRELLI
Haddon Township, N.J.

Signal Failure

In May, one day after the train derailment in Philadelphia that killed eight people and injured more than two hundred, the House Appropriations Committee voted to cut $251 million from next year's Amtrak budget. The following day a reporter made the mistake of asking House Speaker John Boehner whether insufficient funding for Amtrak might be partly to blame for the accident. "Are you really going to ask such a stupid question?" Boehner replied. "Obviously, it's not about funding. The train was going twice the speed limit."

Boehner was only half right. Investigators did determine that the train, en route from Washington, D.C., to New York, was traveling at 106 miles per hour as it neared a curve where the speed limit is only fifty. This was likely the result of human error. But "positive train control"—an automatic breaking system that could have slowed the speeding train—was not yet operational on the section of track where the crash took place. With proper funding, it might have been. The Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 requires all railroads to install this technology before the end of this year, but, largely because of inadequate funding, most are likely to miss this deadline. The National Transportation Safety Board recently concluded that, in the past decade alone, twenty-five fatal rail accidents could have been avoided if positive train control had been in place.

The United States lags far behind the rest of the developed world—and much of the developing world—in the quantity, quality, and safety of its passenger trains. Our only high-speed train, the Acela Express, travels between Washington and Boston at an average speed of about sixty-eight miles per hour. Some high-speed trains in Europe, Japan, and China average just under two hundred mph. And yet, despite the fact that our trains are slower and our rail network far less extensive, our rail fatality rates are twice as high as Europe's.

The reason is obvious: Other countries are willing to invest in rail infrastructure—and especially in new technologies that improve safety. In 2011, the United States spent about $35 per person on our rail system, while Japan and Europe spent about $100 per person. China, which has built ten thousand miles of high-speed track since 2008 and plans to build ten thousand more by 2020, will spend $128 billion on its rail system this year. If the House Republicans have their way, the U.S. government will spend just $1.1 billion on Amtrak in 2016. Some in Congress would like to stop funding Amtrak altogether. They say it should be able to make a profit or at least break even. But no modern transportation system pays for itself. As Andy Kunz, president of the U.S. High Speed Rail Association, told the *National Journal*, "Our highways don't make a profit. Our airports don't make a profit. It's all paid for by the government."

Not that our highways and airports are in much better shape than our railroads. The nation's entire infrastructure is suffering from neglect. The American Society of Civil Engineers gave it a grade of D+ back in 2013 and estimated that the country needed $3.6 trillion of public investment by 2020. The ASCE noted that the average age of the country's 84,000 dams is fifty-two, and that one in nine of its bridges is considered structurally deficient. Every few years one of these bridges collapses, occasioning a brief outburst of bipartisan concern on Capitol Hill. Then nothing changes. Federal spending on infrastructure rose a bit when President Barack Obama's stimulus package took effect, before dropping again to historic lows. The United States now spends less than 2 percent of its GDP on infrastructure, less than half of what Europe spends—and less than half of what *we* were spending in the 1960s.

There has never been a better time for us to repair and rebuild, and not only because the need is so great. Big infrastructure projects would create good jobs and thereby boost an economy whose annual growth rate recently fell below 1 percent. And with interest rates so low, it has rarely been easier for the government to finance these projects. The longer Washington waits to make the nation's infrastructure safe, reliable, and efficient, the more expensive it will be. The sooner it does so, the sooner our whole economy will benefit from the upgrade.

So what's keeping us? The government's failure to invest in infrastructure demonstrates not only a lack of leadership on the part of the Republican House and Senate majorities, but also a lack of basic political competence. Our elected representatives are responsible for maintaining the public services that we all rely on, directly or indirectly. If their ideological hostility to public spending has blinded them to this duty, they may be in the wrong line of work. ■

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Too Much Sunshine?

THE CASE FOR MACHINE POLITICS

In March, when Sen. Tom Cotton (R.-AK) rounded up forty-seven senators to sign a letter warning Iranian leaders against agreeing to a nuclear-arms treaty with the Obama administration, the body politic gasped. Cotton was challenging a presidential prerogative. Just two months later, Cotton called for a vote on a poison-pill amendment to a bipartisan bill giving the Senate a role in examining any agreement with Iran. In order for the bill to pass, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had to shut down the amending process. Another gasp: Cotton had disrupted the Senate's regular order.

We may attribute increasing dysfunction in Congress to the Republicans' disdain for President Barack Obama and their long-running effort to underfund and shrink government. But Cotton, Ted Cruz (R.-TX), and the Tea Party Caucus in the House of Representatives do what they do because they can. And they can because a cadre of lobbies and campaign donors support their antics undermining elected officials and legislative discipline.

Once it was the work of political parties to keep that from happening, to "recruit candidates, mobilize voters, and assemble power within the formal government," as social scientist James Q. Wilson put it in 1962. In order to do their work, parties depended on the "clout" we associate with "machine politics" (think Tammany Hall or the Cook County Democratic Committee).

In reducing that clout, we have undermined the ability of political parties to organize effective governance, argues Jonathan Rauch in "Political Realism," a recent Brookings Institution paper. "Loyalty is tenuous, interest is capricious, and ideology is divisive…they are no substitute for systematic inducements like money, power, prestige, protection, and the other stocks-in-trade of machine politics." In sum, political leaders like Mitch McConnell and House Speaker John Boehner don't have enough loyal followers—senators and representatives who depend on their party to get elected and who will generally vote with their party in order to produce legislation.

Rauch blames this state of affairs on reformers who have brought open primaries, sunshine laws, campaign-finance regulations, and the end of earmarks. These reforms may have reduced double-dealing and corruption, but carry "perverse consequences." Primaries have not brought out voters. "Instead of opening decision-making…primaries have skewed decision-making toward the notably narrow, ideologically extreme, and decidedly non-representative sliver of voters who turn out in primary elections," Rauch writes. An even more miniscule sliver of special interests and rich donors choose the candidates who run in primaries. Transparency has not achieved openness but rather paralysis: the ability of regulatory and legislative bodies to do their job requires not sunshine but a closed door behind which compromise can be reached. The end of earmarks has taken bargaining chips away from congressional leaders.

Sen. Tom Cotton

GAGE SKIDMORE

The reward systems of political machines and parties have been replaced by lobbying groups and rich donors. Sheldon Adelson, who kept Newt Gingrich in the 2012 campaign long after his sell-by date, is now among Sen. Cotton's donors. Shadow operations, such as the Koch-funded Americans for Progress, bankroll get-out-the-vote efforts that were once managed by political machines and parties. AFP has some six hundred paid staff members in thirty-five states working to get out the vote for Koch-favored candidates, while campaign-finance rules require state parties to use volunteers.

Rauch's appreciation for the old party machines is reflected in his paper's subtitle: "How Hacks, Machines, Big Money, and Back Room Deals Can Strengthen American Democracy." While he has diagnosed serious, perhaps fatal, problems with our current political arrangements, he seems to forget the complex ethnic framework that produced and maintained urban political machines. He acknowledges, then neglects the role media plays in elections. His solution: more money for party machines to compete with shadow machines and for individual candidates to compete against rich donors. But is *more* money really what the system needs?

Still, consider the alternative. What if the Senate had a hundred Tom Cottons each with his own agenda, his own advisors, his own donors, and his own rules? What if the House had 435 Cottons? Unthinkable? Not if Cotton's stunts catch on. Not if we allow people like the Koch brothers to select our political representatives and tell them how to vote. Rauch is on to the problem, if not quite the solution. ■

The Gospel of John

Professor of New Testament Studies Rev. Donald Senior, C.P., S.T.D.
Catholic Theological Union

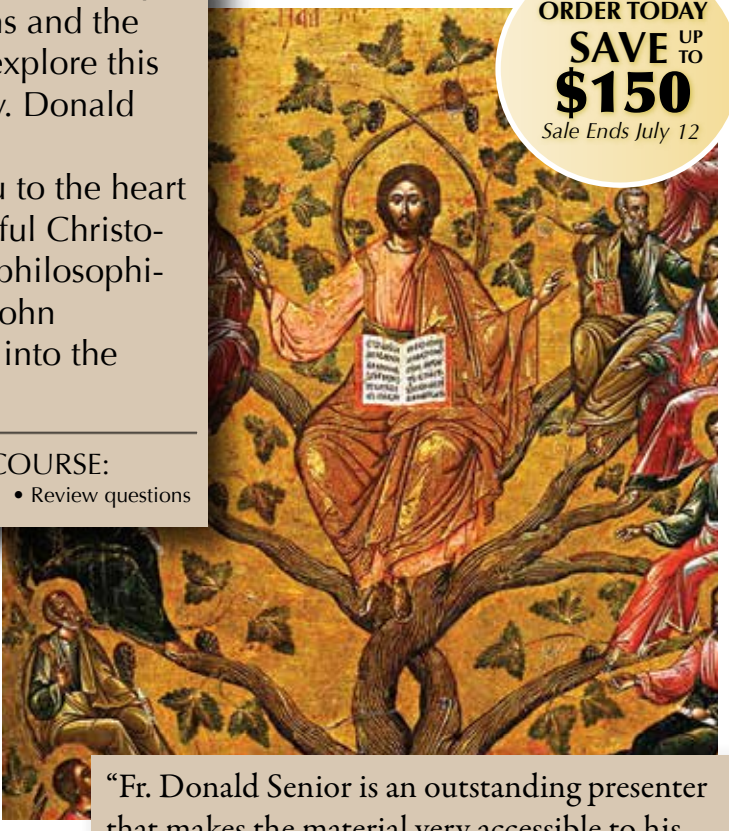
Explore the Fourth Gospel anew with one of Catholicism's **leading biblical scholars** in this outstanding course on DVD or CD.

From the time of its first appearance, the Gospel of John has gripped the imaginations and the hearts of Christians. Now you can explore this powerful portrayal of Jesus with Rev. Donald Senior as your personal teacher.

The Gospel of John will bring you to the heart of the New Testament's most powerful Christological themes. As you explore the philosophical and theological understanding John inspired, you will find new insights into the Fourth Gospel's timeless messages.

FREE STUDY GUIDE INCLUDED WITH COURSE:
- Course outlines
- Illustrations
- Timelines
- Review questions

ORDER TODAY
SAVE UP TO $150
Sale Ends July 12



"Fr. Donald Senior is an outstanding presenter that makes the material very accessible to his audience."
—BARBARA SMITH, SCARBOROUGH, MAINE USA

12 Lectures

1. Introducing the Gospel of John
2. The Prologue of John's Gospel as Its "Center"
3. The Prologue and the Christology of John
4. The Meaning of Discipleship in John's Gospel
5. The Johannine Discourses
6. The "Signs" of John's Gospel
7. The Bread of Life Discourse
8. Opposition to Jesus
9. The Raising of Lazarus as the Summation of Jesus' Mission
10. The Farewell Discourse of Jesus
11. The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John
12. The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
12 CONFERENCES (25 MINUTES/CONFERENCE)
+ electronic study guide

Video DVD ~~$209.95~~ **NOW $59.95**
Audio CD ~~$119.95~~ **NOW $35.95**

+ $8.95 Shipping & Handling
100% Satisfaction Guarantee
Coupon Code: A1863

SALE ENDS 7/12/2015

1-800-955-3904

www.NowYouKnowMedia.com/John

Now You Know Media, Inc.
12115 Parklawn Dr., Unit B • Rockville, MD 20852

Now You KNOW MEDIA

E. J. Dionne Jr.

No Room for Reformicons

GOP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO PARTY ORTHODOXY

Scott Walker insists that when he changes his positions, he is not engaged in "flips." "A flip would be someone who voted on something and did something different," the Wisconsin governor recently explained on Fox News. His altered views on immigration don't count because he is not a legislator. "These are not votes," he pointed out.

Sheer brilliance! Other than former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, Walker's major rivals at the moment are *Senator* Marco Rubio, *Senator* Ted Cruz, and *Senator* Rand Paul. They have all cast lots of votes. So Walker can accuse them of flip-flopping while claiming blanket immunity for himself. Unfortunately for the Republican Party and the country, Walker's careful parsing of shape-shifting counts as one of the cerebral high points of the debate among the party's 2016 presidential candidates.

The shortage of philosophical adventure and the eagerness of GOP hopefuls to alter their positions to make them more conservative have the same cause: a Republican primary electorate that has moved so far right that it brooks no deviation. What makes it even harder for the candidates to break new ground is that the imperatives of party orthodoxy are constraining even the thinkers who are trying to create a new "reform conservatism." The fall-in-line-or-fall-in-the-polls rule means that Walker has gone from supporting to opposing a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants, as has New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie. Rubio got much praise for his work in negotiating a bipartisan bill that would have allowed the undocumented to become citizens—and then, faced with hostility from Tea Partyers, he turned against it.

Paul, the most daring of the lot because of his libertarian convictions, deserves kudos for being true to his small-state ideology by standing up—literally, for nearly eleven hours on the Senate floor—against the Patriot Act. But even Paul has recast his foreign-policy positions to make them sound more hawkish and therefore more in keeping with prevailing Republican views.

Accommodating right-wing primary voters poses real risks to the party in next year's elections. Its candidates' messages on immigration and gay marriage could hurt the GOP with Latinos and the young, respectively. But the greater loss is that none of the leading Republicans is willing to offer a more fundamental challenge to the party's rightward lurch over the past decade. L. Brent Bozell III, a prominent conservative activist, could thus legitimately claim to the *Washington Post*: "The conservative agenda is what is winning the field." Where is the candidate willing to acknowledge that, like it or not, there's no way anywhere close to all Americans will be able to get health insurance unless government plays a very large role? Where is the Republican who will admit that if the party had its way on further tax cuts, many programs Americans like would fall by the wayside?

The reform conservatives were supposed to remedy this shortcoming, and they have issued some detailed proposals. But their efforts remain largely reactive. Last week, Yuval Levin, the intellectual leader of the movement, joined a symposium in *Reason*, the sprightly libertarian magazine, to reassure others on the right that reform conservatives are—honest and true!—no less committed than they are to "limited government," to rolling back "the liberal welfare state," and to reducing government's "size and scope." It's not surprising that Levin's fervently anti-statist *Reason* interlocutors were not fully persuaded. What's disappointing to those outside conservatism's ranks is that the Reformicons are so often defensive.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker

MICHAEL VADON

With occasional exceptions, they have been far more interested in proving their faithfulness to today's hard-line right than in declaring, as conservatives in so many other democracies have been willing to do, that sprawling market economies need a rather large dose of government. Conservatives, Levin says, are "eager to build on the long-standing institutions of our society to improve things." Good idea. But somehow, the successes of decades-old *governmental* institutions in areas such as retirement security, health-care provision, and environmental protection are rarely acknowledged.

Many Republicans, especially reform conservatives, know that most Americans who criticize government in the abstract still welcome many of its activities. Yet stating this obvious fact is now politically incorrect on the right. Conservatives who condemn political correctness in others need to start calling it out on their own side. Otherwise, Scott Walker's artful redefinition of flip-flopping could become the 2016 Republican debate's most creative intellectual contribution. ■

David O'Brien

A Socialist for President?

WHAT BERNIE SANDERS COULD BRING TO THE CAMPAIGN

Bernie Sanders is running for president. The longtime senator from Vermont, a political independent and self-declared socialist, will challenge Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nomination. Sanders is an experienced politician, articulate and strategically smart enough to get a lot of free media attention. Clinton fans should not be alarmed. Followers of Sanders's career and visitors to his website know that he is less interested in criticizing his Democratic rival than in raising basic issues of economic injustice, inequalities of power, and the need for democratic policies but even more for democratic practices—on the part of everyone.

Sanders has always been a democratic socialist, convinced that democracy—rule of and by and for the people—must be economic and social as well as political. Democracy requires what scholar Harry Boyte calls "public work": engaged citizens taking their full share of responsibility for the common good. When they do so, socialists are convinced, they will find that socialism is the best way to organize the political economy even if, as Oscar Wilde once said, it will require a lot of meetings.

Pundits and late-night comedians will have great fun with a socialist in the race; the mock horror of amused guests will be played against the possibly genuine horror of America's new plutocrats. But instead of simply laughing off Sanders and his socialism, consider this short primer.

Socialism has three meanings. One is public ownership, known to us via the post office, city buses and subways, municipal utilities, state and national parks, a few government-owned businesses, like Amtrak, and at least one state-owned bank. The idea here is that there are some resources so important that they should not be subject to competition and market manipulation. Instead, they should be controlled by the public through the instruments of democratic government. As in the private sector, bureaucracy and bad management, most notably at the level of boards of directors, sometimes lead to inefficiency and corruption. The solution on both fronts is engaged, committed, and creative citizens, including government-employed professionals, dedicated to the common good.

The second and perhaps best-known form of socialism is public provision of services to meet basic human needs. Thus the label "socialized medicine" for the health-care systems of Canada, the United Kingdom, and other countries. We have such a system for the elderly (Medicare) and for military veterans, but we have shied away from a sensible "single payer" system. In many other countries there is enough sense of shared responsibility for a valued common life to allow

Sen. Bernie Sanders

for effective public provision of education, health care, pensions, basic research, and other services considered essential to human dignity and a rich life.

We Americans are not immune to civic responsibility—we sacrifice for national security and generously support private charities. But Americans have been slow to accept wider social responsibilities when it comes to the environment, wages, and healthy food. In addition, many Americans are discouraged about public education, public safety, and, perhaps most of all, public finance. Democratic socialists share these anxieties but insist that good government, not even more limited government, is the solution. And good government means self-government: making public services better requires the commitment of everyone to the common good and to the renewal of democratic practices, in workplaces and local communities as well as in government.

The third form of democratic socialism is worker ownership, the idea that employees, dependent on wages and salaries, should have some degree of control over and responsibility for their firm, industry, or profession. We are familiar with this form of socialism in cooperatives, employee stock-ownership plans (ESOPs), and, rarely here but common in Europe, employee participation on corporate boards of directors. The strongest supporters of trade unionism always felt that collective bargaining, which pitted the self-interest

of workers against their employers, should eventually be supplemented by new forms of cooperation so that all sectors could work together for the benefit of the firm, industry, or profession. Unfortunately, our acceptance, even celebration, of corporate self-interest spilled over into our uniquely American forms of trade unions, which, like their corporate sparring partners, too often put self-interest above shared interests and the public interest. Unlike the labor movement in other countries, unions here did not organize their own political party but preferred to function as an interest group contending for public support. The United States had its share of class struggles, which, in the absence of a strong socialist movement, the bosses almost always won.

Some tried to offer a different democratic path. In 1901, the American Socialist Party formed, under the leadership of the charismatic Eugene Victor Debs. He won about a million votes for president in 1912 and again in 1920, when he was in federal prison for opposing the First World War. The party splintered after the war, some abandoning democracy for communist alternatives to democratic socialism. Debs's successor, Norman Thomas, a Christian minister and pacifist, was a widely admired Socialist candidate for president up to the 1950s. In the 1960s, Michael Harrington, best known as the author of *The Other America*, which helped inspire the war on poverty, persuaded the party to stop running its own candidates and work within the Democratic Party. That strategy depended heavily on the big industrial unions and, with their decline, democratic socialism in the United States faded to the margins. Fading with it was democracy, dangling as a slogan without content as the United States and its politics shifted further to the right until, God save us, friends of Wall Street like Charles Schumer and the Clintons could seriously be considered "the left."

But perhaps Sen. Sanders will spark a revival of interest in democratic socialism. If he does, it will not be the work of him alone. A century ago, Debs told an adoring audience that he would not lead them into the promised land because, if he did, someone else could lead them out. They would have to get there, and stay there, through their own efforts. For Debs, socialism was a movement more than a party, depending for its influence on broad networks of people dedicated to the practice of democracy—at home, in the workplace and neighborhood, and in politics. In the end, economic and social democracy, and the common good, depend on the people. If Bernie Sanders can do what Barack Obama failed to do, inspire a renewal of that kind of realistic participatory democracy, local communities and the entire country will be in his debt. ■

David O'Brien *is professor emeritus of history and Catholic studies at the College of the Holy Cross and a longtime contributor to* Commonweal.

Shared Commitments

Not All Secularists are Antireligious

Robert Gascoigne

This past October, Edward Gough Whitlam, former prime minister of Australia and leader of the Australian Labor Party, died at the age of ninety-eight. Though Whitlam's government was marked by intense controversy during its three-year term (1972–1975), a significant consensus holds that "Gough," as he was universally known, was a remarkable Australian, one who made a distinguished contribution to our national life. His memorial service in Sydney Town Hall was marked by a number of fine eulogies, including a heartfelt speech by the actor Cate Blanchett, who attributed some of her key career opportunities to the benefits of Whitlam's initiatives.

Perhaps the most powerful address was given by the Australian indigenous leader Noel Pearson, who has strong links to the heirs of Whitlam's political opponents. Pearson spoke as someone raised "next to the wood heap of the nation's democracy," in an indigenous community still confined within the petty bureaucracy of racially discriminatory laws later abolished by the Whitlam government's Racial Discrimination Act. He noted that Whitlam, who came from an upper-middle-class background, "harbored not a bone of racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice in his body," and was passionately dedicated to extending equality of opportunity in Australia. In a telling and amusing rhetorical ploy, Pearson spoke of Whitlam—both tall in stature and supremely confident in bearing—as "Roman," and asked, "What did this Roman ever do for us?" He answered his own question with a long list of the achievements of Whitlam's government that have helped shape Australian society since the 1970s.

Though Gough Whitlam had a Christian family background, from early on he was not a believer. He was first in class in divinity at his Anglican grammar school, yet the prize went to another pupil, Francis James (later a distinguished journalist); as Whitlam recalled decades later, the headmaster called both boys in and announced he was giving the prize to James "because Francis believed it." Rather like Winston Churchill, who compared himself to a "flying buttress" of the church, supporting it "from the outside," Whitlam—wittily adapting a Cold War phrase—termed himself a "fellow traveler" of Christianity. More than a traveler, he was a contributor; tributes by Catholic leaders emphasized the crucial contribution he made to Catholic education in Australia by opening the way for large-scale federal-government funding of Catholic schools. He was later to be an honored guest at the inauguration of my own institution, the Australian Catholic University, in Sydney Town Hall in 1991.

Painting of Edward Gough Whitlam by Clifton Pugh

The example of Gough Whitlam can assist us in reflecting on the relationship between secular humanism and Christian humanism in our culture. In this context, we can usefully distinguish between "secular" and "secularist." By the former I refer to a set of ethical and political values that is agnostic about religious claims and embraces a certain separation of church and state; by the latter I refer to a set of ideologies that advocates

Robert Gascoigne, *professor of theology at the Australian Catholic University, is the author of* The Church and Secularity: Two Stories of Liberal Society *(Georgetown).*

THE INSTANTS

After last night's rain, the world begun again—
you know what I mean, you have been here often—
I go to the window. For a moment the world
is my only backyard, such gold as I have seen
enclosing saints' heads in medieval paintings,
illumination surrounding every flower.

This summer I woke to as a child
after my long fall into sleep, black rain
which never ceased until my eyes could open
first light an expectation without words.

You remember this. You knew the same morning.
I'm four years old for both of us right now.
The window runs with gold. There was a time
when morning was enough for everything.

—Peter Cooley

Peter Cooley is Senior Mellon Professor of the Humanities, professor of English, and director of creative writing at Tulane University in New Orleans. Carnegie Mellon University Press just released his ninth book, Night Bus to the Afterlife. *Cooley is the poetry editor of* Christianity and Literature.

the marginalization or privatization of religion on the basis of atheistic convictions. There are many contexts in which we can speak of secularist humanism, whether it be the anticlericalism of French republican politicians during the Third Republic, the refusal by some European politicians to countenance any mention of Europe's Christian heritage in the European Union's representative documents, or the different variants of Marxism-Leninism.

The secular humanism that Gough Whitlam exemplified shares many ethical goals with Christian believers, but not their faith in an almighty and loving God. Whitlam was an outstanding example of those countless members of Western societies who do not share Christian faith, yet who *do* share with Christians many of the key ethical values that can motivate and energize democratic political life. Whitlam articulated some of these values in a speech during the election campaign of 1972. "Our program," he announced,

> has three great aims. They are: to promote equality; to involve the people of Australia in the decision-making processes of our land; and to liberate the talents and uplift the horizons of the Australian people. We want to give a new life and a new meaning in this new nation to the touchstone of modern democracy—to liberty, equality, fraternity.

Whitlam's political goals expressed a commitment to human dignity, manifested in the pursuit of justice and motivated by a love of neighbor—a love of neighbor expressed, for example, in his passionate dedication to eliminating discrimination. These values have substantial overlap with those of Christian humanism. For Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, love transcends justice while not undermining it. This dynamic is understood through the concept of gift, which the encyclical links both to the concept of fraternity and to solidarity—a term originally derived from the labor movement rather than the French revolution, and used to powerful effect by John Paul II, notably in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (*On Social Concerns*). By using these two terms, *Caritas in veritate* links its own argument with the best expressions of secular political movements that have been fundamental to the search for freedom and justice in the modern world.

This significant commonality of ethical and political ideals between secular humanism and the contemporary Catholic Church has a complex and turbulent historical background. The litany of suffering of members of the church at the hands of revolutionary political movements is a long and terrible one. Yet the relationship between the Catholic Church and movements for democratic change and social justice has happily, and surprisingly to many, developed into a shared commitment to defending human rights. In his recent work, *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights* (Georgetown University Press) the social theorist Hans Joas proposes that

we understand the belief in human rights and universal human dignity as the result of a specific process of sacralization—a process in which every single human being has increasingly, and with ever-increasing motivational and sensitizing effects, been viewed as sacred, and this understanding has been institutionalized in law.

For Joas, two key events in this process of sacralization were the campaign for the abolition of slavery and the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, after the catastrophic desecration of human dignity in World War II. As Jacques Maritain remarked at the time, different members of the drafting committee shared a commitment to human rights even though they did not share religious or metaphysical convictions. In a similar vein, John XXIII's *Pacem in terris*, promulgated in 1963, affirmed the church's willingness to express its evangelical commitment to the human person in the language of human rights, offering the church's support for the search for "peace on earth" through a reverence for the sacredness of the person that it shared not merely with Christians, but with "all people of good will." This affirmation would be echoed subsequently by Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*, by Paul VI's *Populorum progressio*, and in the many statements and symbolic actions of John Paul II.

Caritas in veritate, of course, emphasizes that love must be linked to truth: "Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and Resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity." It is here most of all that we must reflect on the tensions between Christian and secular humanism. Both—at their best—are passionately dedicated to a vision of justice motivated by love, by care and concern for one's fellow human beings, and by commitment to an equality of opportunity that removes all barriers to human flourishing.

So in what sense is there a difference between the Christian's vision of justice and that of their "fellow travelers"? I believe it would be arrogant and unwarranted for Christians to claim that faith gives their love a higher quality than that manifested by their secular fellow citizens. In fact, there exists an authentically biblical quality in a love that is, in a sense, agnostic about its own motivations and ultimate significance. Matthew's gospel affirms that those who assisted the poor and wretched did not know that it was the anonymous Christ who was embodied in them: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?" (Mt 25:37). Those who acted with charity are welcomed into the Kingdom even though they did not know to whom they ministered. The quality of love as a gift to those in need is motivated, as the gospel affirms, by the need of the human beings we encounter, and expressed in the quality of our care rather than in its ultimate meaning, ground, or reward.

Yet a Christian knows that there are times to bear explicit witness, affirming the bond between faith, hope, and love that is at the heart of Christian faith. For Christians, human love—however real, ardent, and unselfish—is vulnerable and unsupported without the hope that is grounded in faith. As Pope Benedict wrote in *Spe salvi:*

When someone has the experience of a great love in his life, this is a moment of "redemption" which gives a new meaning to his life. But soon he will also realize that the love bestowed upon him cannot by itself resolve the question of his life. It is a love that remains fragile. It can be destroyed by death.... In this sense it is true that anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life (cf. Eph 2:12).

One of the greatest modern expressions of this vulnerability is Albert Camus's novel *The Plague*. Its hero is Dr. Rieux, a doctor selflessly dedicated to caring for his fellow human beings amid a plague that has broken out in the Algerian city of Oran. When Tarrou, a character who assists Dr. Rieux, asks him, "Why are you yourself so dedicated when you don't believe in God?," Rieux answers that while he doesn't know "what awaits me or what will come after all this," in the meantime "there are patients who have to be cured...[and] I am defending them as best I can, that's all." When Tarrou presses further, Rieux ventures a challenging idea—that "since the order of the world is governed by death, perhaps it is better for God that we should not believe in Him and struggle with all our strength against death, without raising our eyes to heaven and to His silence." The observation sparks the following stirring colloquy:

"Yes," Tarrou agreed, "I can understand. But your victories will always be temporary, that's all."

A cloud seemed to pass over Rieux's face.

"Always, I know that. But that is not a reason to give up the struggle."

"No, it's not a reason. But in that case I can imagine what this plague must mean to you."

"Yes," said Rieux. "An endless defeat."

Camus's character powerfully expresses the most significant attributes of an agnostic or atheistic humanism: the refusal to accept that this world, in which so many children die painful deaths, could have been created by a God of love; the dedication to relieve human suffering through effort and solidarity; the acceptance that there is no ultimate meaning to human existence; and the recognition that all human striving fails in the face of death. In his now seminal work *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor notes that Dr. Rieux is a key example in contemporary literature of someone who has "the greatest degree of philanthropic action with the minimum hope in mankind." In a certain sense, such a stance—whether in literature or in life—might actually seem more heroic than Christian commitment, since it views acts of love for others as gratuitous, lacking a basis in any transcendent meaning to human existence. Yet, as Taylor asks,

[I]s this the ultimate measure of excellence? If we think of ethical virtue as the realization of lone individuals, this may seem to be the

case. But suppose the highest good consists in communion, mutual giving and receiving, as in the paradigm of the eschatological banquet. The heroism of gratuitous giving has no place for reciprocity. If you return anything to me, then my gift was not totally gratuitous; and besides, in the extreme case, I disappear with my gift and no communion between us is possible. This unilateral heroism is self-enclosed. It touches the outermost limit of what we can attain to when moved by a sense of our own dignity. But is that what life is about? Christian faith proposes a quite different view.

How can Christians support their "fellow travelers" by offering a communion of love sustained by faith in God and the hope to share in Christ's Resurrection? In suffering, in defeat and disappointment, Christians do in fact experience the kind of existential absurdity Camus wrote about—the absence of meaning—as part of the human condition they share with their secular fellow humans. Their proclamation of hope in the Resurrection, that focuses on Christ as the suffering servant and on the paradox of the crucified Son of God, affirms their solidarity with human pain and their faith in a divine power that will ultimately vindicate our attempts to effect justice in this world. The church's proclamation of the Resurrection must demonstrate its awareness that in this life we never leave Good Friday behind us, since we share our brokenness with all our fellow human beings. If Christians can profess their hope in this way, allowing the light of the Resurrection to illuminate their lives, they will give a uniquely valuable service to all who strive to enact a justice motivated by love. In their attempt to live by love of neighbor, Christians know that they are profoundly at one with all others who make love the true meaning of their lives, since love itself is implicitly fused with faith. And this unity, as Pope Francis noted in *Lumen fidei*, includes non-believers:

To the extent that they are sincerely open to love and set out with whatever light they can find, they are already, even without knowing it, on the path leading to faith.... Anyone who sets off on the path of doing good to others is already drawing near to God, is already sustained by his help, for it is characteristic of the divine light to brighten our eyes whenever we walk towards the fullness of love.

In the great domain of human rights, a Dr. Rieux and a believing Christian can usually be found in solidarity with one another. Yet there exists a notoriously important field of tension between them—namely, in the questions surrounding sexual ethics and dilemmas about the beginning and end of life. It is important to note that secular humanists are by no means necessarily at odds with Christians on these matters. Secular humanists can of course be committed to fidelity in marriage—Gough Whitlam and his wife Margaret were only a few weeks short of their seventieth wedding anniversary when she died. They can deplore whatever degrades and commodifies the sexual dignity of the human person; they can recognize that the human fetus is a unique individual that deserves protection as much as those already born; and they can agree that euthanasia threatens the moral community binding us all in the trust that we will not kill one another. A lack of religious faith does not preclude someone's being open to the ethical force of this or that particular Christian stance.

At the same time it is also clear that Christian and secular humanists experience their strongest and most intractable disagreements in these ethical fields. While some secular humanists maintain what could be broadly described as a traditional Christian ethic on these matters, others are much more influenced by a combination of Kant's ideal of autonomy (albeit divorced from the context that Kant himself held it in) and utilitarianism's emphasis on the minimization of suffering. However incompatible these two positions may be in strictly philosophical terms—since for a utilitarian, eliminating the suffering of many may override individual autonomy—in popular ethical culture they tend to be joined together as partners against perceived religious or metaphysical impositions on ethical experience.

In response to these points of tension in the fields of sexual ethics and bioethics, Christians should acknowledge that they experience disagreements of their own about some of these questions. And in attempting to build public consensus, they should persevere in presenting key Christian stances on these questions as ethical reflections on the human good, rather than as doctrinal positions mandated by religious authority. While their faith certainly gives a profound and specific context to marital and sexual fidelity and the cherishing of human life from conception to death, the ethical power in these stances can be shared with secular fellow citizens. The former premier of New South Wales, and later foreign minister of Australia, Bob Carr, a secular humanist, asserted in a debate on euthanasia in 1996 that "the bottom line that we must face as legislators" is "whether it is possible to legislate euthanasia with the safeguards necessary to assure the sick, vulnerable, indigenous, and invalid"—and affirmed his own view that he did *not* believe it possible.

There is little use in denying that the task of ethical communication has been complicated by revelations of sexual abuse in the church, and by the scandalous ways in which it was sometimes dealt with (or not dealt with). Nor, on the other side, can one exonerate those secularists whose gratuitous mockery of Christian faith and the church's social role damages civil discourse. (A particularly egregious example was the attempt by Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens to have Pope Benedict arrested for "crimes against humanity" on his arrival in the UK in 2010.) But the important point is that anyone committed to promoting sexual ethics and bioethics should avoid making these areas the hallmark of Christian ethical identity. Rather our first focus should be found in loving reverence for human dignity in the context of creation, and in resistance to any and all forms of commodification and degradation of the human person. In this reverence and resistance, Christians will find many "fellow travelers" among secular humanists, and may also find opportunities to share with them their hope in the God who is the source and end of all love. ■

Incarnation U.

The Future of Catholic Higher Education

George Dennis O'Brien

Jackson Lears's lament about the sorry state of liberal education in American universities ("A Place & Time Apart," May 1) was all too sadly familiar. Much of the essay is a favorable review of William Deresiewicz's *Excellent Sheep*, a pungent critique of the Ivy League's neglect of humanistic education in favor of "marketable skills." There is much truth in Lears's review and in Deresiewicz's book, but I think they would both have benefited from a broader historical perspective. History is particularly important for Catholic colleges and universities—mentioned by Deresiewicz but not Lears—because of a spiritual continuity that stretches back to the origins of the university in the Catholic cultures of the twelfth century. Because of their history and the range of their present sponsorship, Catholic universities can hardly avoid "the marriage of self and soul" that Lears claims has been lost in higher education over all. How well Catholic colleges understand and deal with the challenges of modern higher education is another matter.

In *Four Cultures of the West,* John O'Malley, SJ, presents a compelling analysis of four ancient cultures that have defined the purpose of higher education in different ways. He labels them the prophetic, the academic, the humanistic, and the artistic. Historically, prophetic culture stems from the Bible, the other three from classical Greece. Academic culture originated with philosophers (preeminently, Aristotle); humanistic culture, from ancient schools of oratory; and artistic culture from, of course, artists. Prophecy, philosophy, and oratory are all cultures of words, while the arts are often wordless.

The clash of university cultures today is mostly a clash of the three cultures of words. Each of these has a distinct style. Prophetic culture expresses itself in personal proclamations and cries from the heart: "I say unto you...!" O'Malley characterizes academic culture as "logical, rigorous, argumentative." It assumes neutrality before the truth. No personal or political considerations impinge on its proper task. For these reasons, it is the home of modern academic freedom. Humanistic culture, by contrast, is deeply concerned with social and political speech. While not exactly ignoring truth with a capital "T," it seeks the language of persuasion. The great humanist Petrarch puts the contrast well: "Aristotle teaches what virtue is, I do not deny that; but his lessons lack words that sting and set afire and urge toward love of virtue." Academic culture tends to withdraw from the public square. Humanistic culture teaches rhetoric, which is meant to be used in the marketplace and the polis.

Obviously there are tensions among these three cultures. As O'Malley puts it:

> Fanaticism is never far from [prophetic] culture.... [Academic] culture must fight the tendency to feed upon itself and to slide into sterile intellectualism, carping and corrosive in its analysis of everything that crosses its path.... [Humanistic] culture, meanwhile, harbors a weakness for platitudes and a tendency to mistake them for solutions.

To academics and humanists, prophets are fanatics; to prophets, academics are pedants and humanists are wishy-washy; to humanists, academics and prophets are both wildly impractical.

Universities emerged in the Middle Ages at a moment when these three cultures were colliding. Access to the bulk of Aristotle's philosophy had made possible an academic style that clashed sharply with the culture of the existing monastic schools, which were devoted to the prophetic word of the Bible. That culture was centered on the practice of *lectio divina*. But the Aristotelian academic style also had to contend with a humanistic culture that derived from the highly rhetorical style of St. Augustine, who spent much of his life teaching rhetoric. In his *Confessions* he employs every technique of oratory as he makes his case to an audience of one, God.

The cultural conflict evident when the first universities began remains to this day, especially at Catholic institutions where the Bible, humanistic speech, and academic proof exist side by side, each accommodating the others as best it can. The culture that dominates contemporary universities, including Catholic universities, is O'Malley's academic style. But this has been true for only about a hundred years. The

George Dennis O'Brien *is a frequent contributor to* Commonweal *and the author of several books, including* Finding the Voice of the Church *(Notre Dame, 2007).*

dominant style of higher education in the ancient world was not academic but humanistic, directed at educating future political leaders who needed to learn the art of persuasion. Humanistic higher education in one form or another was championed from the Sophists to Cicero, and on to the humanists of the Renaissance. Closer to our own time and place, the humanistic "classical curriculum" dominated American colleges from colonial times until the end of the nineteenth century.

American humanistic education was "classical" in two senses. First, the curriculum was dominated by classical texts—Latin and Greek authors along with the Bible. These texts offered more than a linguistic training in ancient tongues; they also presented tales of virtue to be emulated and extolled. The college curriculum was designed to hand on a long-established tradition of wisdom. Emerson's famous 1837 Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard reflected this humanistic conception of higher education; the proper aim of college education, he said, was "character." Cardinal John Henry Newman's idea of a university also fit this humanistic model. The purpose of a university, Newman argued, was to produce "gentlemen," a gentleman being someone "who causes no pain." How was the Bible treated in humanistic education? Since the aim was "character," the Bible came to be regarded mainly as a set of ethical instructions; Jesus was less the Savior than a moral exemplar.

Classical studies were designed to produce students with the characteristics of classical architecture: rational order, balance, harmony. The rationality of the humanistic tradition is not, as O'Malley observes, the probing rationality of the philosopher, but that of the statesman who seeks harmony in society. The authors of *The Federalist Papers*—James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay—had all been educated in the classics. Acknowledging their debt to classical wisdom, they attributed *The Federalist Papers* to an author named "Publius"—a reference to Publius Valerius Publicola, a Roman consul involved in the overthrow of the ancient monarchy.

Twentieth-century universities have replaced the humanistic style with the academic style of close argument and verifiable truths. Modern research universities do not seek to recover old truths, but to *discover* new ones. The aim of education is not character, but knowledge; their model is not the statesman but rather the "scientist." Yes, the typical university president's commencement address still insists that college education improves character—I have given that speech many times over—but I suspect that such speeches draw on moral capital left over from our humanistic past. College presidents love to quote Newman's *The Idea of a University*, but Newman's university was thoroughly "humanistic." It bears little resemblance to the modern research university, which derives from a German model of higher learning.

It should be no surprise that the dominant scientific ethos in contemporary higher education has precipitated a "crisis of the humanities" on campus. One example: literary critic Harold Bloom has been so distressed by the abandonment of the classics—like Shakespeare, whom he regards as "the inventor of the human"—that he has bequeathed his extensive library to St. Michael's College in Colchester, Vermont, because he believes Catholic institutions are the last refuge of the classics and humanistic higher education. But in truth, most contemporary Catholic universities are also deeply committed to academic culture. Beyond the presidential rhetoric, do Catholic institutions actually convey an education in humanistic culture—or in prophetic culture, for that matter? Do they do this in the *classroom*? Or do they leave these things to the campus chaplain and various extracurricular activities?

Do Catholic institutions actually convey an education in humanistic culture—or in prophetic culture, for that matter? Do they do this in the *classroom*? Or do they leave these things to the campus chaplain and various extracurricular activities?

Some would urge contemporary Catholic universities to take their cues from the first universities in the Middle Ages. That would be difficult. Medieval universities were really very different from our present-day institutions. To begin with, there were no *Catholic* universities in the twelfth century because no one thought there could be anything else. Just as important, medieval universities were much more like our contemporary professional schools; their precursors and models were schools of law (Bologna) and medicine (Montpelier). Modern American universities with large undergraduate colleges come complete with everything from football to teenage angst. Not the professional-school scene!

Nevertheless, it might be worth knowing whether one of O'Malley's three cultures of the word predominated at those first universities? Take Aquinas as an exemplar of medieval university culture. His allegiance to Aristotle could easily place him in the academic style. Alisdair MacIntyre has suggested, however, that Thomas should not be seen as a "philosopher" in the characteristic mode of Spinoza or Kant. The *Summa* can well be regarded as of a piece with humanistic culture; Thomas is seeking to strike a balance between competing views derived from the Bible, the Fathers, theologians, and philosophers: he was, on this view, more

a philosophic statesman engaged in reconciliation than a system builder. How about prophetic culture, then? Etienne Gilson—who also insisted that Thomas was not mainly a philosopher, but a Christian theologian first and foremost—pointed out that Thomas was well aware of "biblicist" criticism of his work and took pains to give primacy to revelation. So what is Thomas? Aristotelian academic, Augustinian humanist, prophetic biblicist? One could make a case the he was one, two, or all three of these things, though the prophetic Augustinian monk Martin Luther suspected he was only the first: "I have the strongest doubts as to whether Thomas Aquinas is among the damned or the blessed.... [He] is responsible for the reign of Aristotle, the destroyer of godly doctrine."

Aquinas may offer an elegantly complex balance of the three cultures, but there are ways to greatly simplify the relation of the clashing styles by putting one in charge of the others. Nineteenth-century American colleges reduced the Bible to a kind of wisdom literature, valuable mainly for its moral lessons. (These colleges didn't worry much about scientific culture. Science was left to freelance researchers and organizations like the Royal Society.) Today, academic culture tends to subsume sacred Scripture and the humanistic classics under a "scientific model." The Bible and Shakespeare are studied at arm's length: students are encouraged to learn *about* them, but not *from* them.

A meeting of doctors at the University of Paris. From the "Chants royaux" manuscript, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

The culture most resistant to such assimilation is the prophetic. Biblical revelation has been a challenge to the Greek academic and humanistic styles at least since Tertullian, who asked, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Despite his own thorough training in Greek culture, Tertullian answered "Nothing!" Salvation requires something more radical than either moral virtue or academic philosophy. As St. Paul proclaimed, "My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but a demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2: 4–5).

What makes prophecy so resistant to assimilation by the other cultures? Prophecy expresses itself in shouts, proclamations, and cries of the heart; it is intensely personal. *I* am the one whose heart is wounded! *I* say unto you. What authority can such personal utterances have in academic culture? Natural science, which enjoys pride of place in the modern university, excludes personal factors in its search for

a universal truth. Archimedes's exultant "Eureka!" added nothing to his scientific discovery. For its part, humanistic morality is skeptical of moral claims based on any kind of special revelation or personal authority. Insofar as religious witness is prophetic, therefore, it can fail both the academic and the humanistic standards.

Strangely enough, prophetic culture of a sort is clearly present at the contemporary university. Consider newly minted disciplines like black studies, gay studies, and women's studies. There is a supposition that the best, if not the only, teachers in these disciplines are those who *live the life*. A gay-studies program staffed entirely by straights would be at best paradoxical. I call these programs "witness studies." The gay faculty member does not just talk about the gay experience, he is a primary witness to that experience. Witness studies depend on the notion that *incarnation* is essential to understanding. If the model of most academic culture is intellect speaking to intellect, in witness studies incarnate minds speak to incarnate minds. Here the scientific model of dispassionate objectivity is replaced by a model of personal engagement. The voice that counts is the voice of someone who knows what it means to live as female, gay, or black in this time and place. Such disciplines can best be described as a gathering of witnesses.

Strangely enough, prophetic culture of a sort is clearly present at the contemporary university. Consider newly minted disciplines like black studies, gay studies, and women's studies. There is a supposition that the best, if not the only, teachers in these disciplines are those who *live the life*.

Biblical religion is also a gathering of witness. One hears the cry of the heart in psalms of complaint, grief, and thanksgiving, in prophetic denunciation and proclamation. Biblical witness is incarnate, revelatory only when heart speaks to heart. And this is why teaching Biblical "truth" in institutions defined by an academic or humanistic culture may seem impossible. In the academic style, truth is abstracted from personality. In the humanistic style, the truths of moral wisdom are universal and universally available; they don't depend on any particular revelations to a particular group of people, nor are they subject to group identity.

What might Rome say about the distinction I am trying to make? At Vatican II the early drafts of *Dei verbum* ("On Divine Revelation") discussed the truth of revelation as statements of doctrine. That approach was rejected by the Council, which preferred to focus on the revelation of God himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), and *Dei verbum*'s prologue quotes from 1 John: "We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you." Revelation exists in the incarnate person for those who witness—"we have seen and heard and *we* proclaim to *you*."

Constructing a pedagogy of Biblical witness is well beyond the limits of this essay and probably beyond my ability as well, but I will offer two suggestions. First, it is necessary to open up meaningful discourse beyond the *academic* style currently dominant in the university. There are many modern "philosophical" critiques of academic detachment, ranging from Wittgenstein's commitment to "ordinary language" to Emmanuel Levinas's Talmudic reflections. Wittgenstein and Levinas are "anti-philosophers" insofar as they do not write in what O'Malley describes as the academic style of abstract proof. The anti-philosopher insists with Levinas that *what* is said cannot be separated from who is saying it. Similarly, Stanley Cavell asks what is the proper pitch of philosophy, its tone of voice. Does the academic-philosophical style have a tone of voice? If the academic style is tone-deaf in its search for truth, it will never touch the heart. I once heard an actor talk about his experience playing Bill Sikes opposite a child actor playing Oliver in the musical by that name. He said it was difficult. The child knew his lines and never missed a cue. However, the actor noted, when you deliver a line to another experienced actor, you expect a return of energy that enriches your performance. With the child, you get the lines without the energy. In Christian instruction, just knowing one's dogmatic lines does not convey living faith. A pedagogy in the prophetic style would have to respond to deep needs and cares that we experience as incarnate beings: as teens and adults, men and women, and, well, as faculty and students.

If incarnation—that is, one's individual existence at a particular time and place—has standing somewhere in the classroom of a Catholic college, it is also a fundamental issue for all colleges and universities. The university is an existential reality, situated in a specific time, place, and social context. Reflecting on the incarnational condition of higher learning might lead to a "theology of the university" that answers the question: What is the ultimate purpose of the university in the lives of those who study and teach there? ■

‘One Moment of Reality’

The Last Days of Katherine Mansfield

Pierce Butler

Katherine Mansfield—writer of short stories, friend and literary compatriot of Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence—had a gift for arousing strong opinions. The reckless abandon with which Mansfield threw herself into sexual relationships with both men and women, and the acerbity of her tongue and pen, could provoke critics, family, and friends, not to mention her enemies. Critical estimates of Mansfield’s work—fewer than one hundred stories, an oeuvre curtailed by her premature death from tuberculosis at the age of thirty-four—have risen and fallen over the decades. Her stories fall into two categories: those set in the New Zealand of her childhood that contrast a corrupt adult world with the purity of the child’s experience; and those set elsewhere, frequently peopled by lonely and fearful young women whose attempts to confront their demons seem doomed to failure. Taken as a whole, the stories present a restless sensibility longing for the idyll of childhood and vainly seeking solace and security in adult love relationships.

Mansfield was a brilliant conversationalist who delighted in malicious wit, a writer with an exquisite sense of form who sometimes sacrificed honesty for aesthetic effect, and a freethinking woman whose bold exploration of her sexuality resulted in a number of liaisons that even her bohemian circle regarded as indiscreet. She found herself caught between the provincial Victorian values of her upbringing and a metropolitan world of literary self-expression in which art pointed the way to a thrilling new life. She struggled to resolve this conflict, and her work expressed—intemperately at times, and not always coherently—the many emotions it aroused. From this perspective, Mansfield’s life and work are of a piece, reflecting a passionate attempt to depict her inner journey: a going-forth from a place of innocence and certainty, a solitary passage through an inhospitable landscape, and—as the cloud of her illness increasingly darkened the horizon—a destination that seemed to offer little comfort. And yet her life ended in an episode that, like the finely crafted end of a meandering story, gave form and meaning to what had gone before.

Mansfield entered the Gurdjieff Institute in mid-October, 1922. On the verge of literary celebrity, she was deeply unhappy in her marriage to the critic and editor John Middleton Murry—and she was dying of tuberculosis. Occupying the Prieuré de Basses Loges, a magnificent chateau in the woods of Fontainebleau that had once been the residence of Mme. de Maintenon, the institute was directed by the enigmatic G. I. Gurdjieff, a mystic of Greek and Armenian parentage whose eclectic teaching combined Christian spirituality with Sufi practice. Putting herself under the direction of Gurdjieff (to whose methods she had been introduced by Alfred Orage, editor of *The New Age* and one of the foremost literary critics of his time), Mansfield put aside the reservations of husband and friends and unexpectedly found a home at the institute—and a chance to attain the inner peace and freedom that had eluded her throughout her life.

During the last months of her life—she died at the institute on January 9, 1923—Mansfield underwent what might be termed an examination, or perhaps an *experience,* of conscience that led her to an unflinching acknowledgment of her own shortcomings and an attempt to mend relations with family and friends. She also conceived of a different kind of writing—“stories that I would not be ashamed to show to God”—that she hoped would be an expression of a new spiritual health. Those stories would never be written. But this final episode in her life casts her and her work in a new and more sympathetic light. A series of remarkable

Pierce Butler *is writer in residence at Bentley University.*

stories from Mansfield's last productive years—and her celebrated *Journal* and letters—reveal a sensitive young woman striving to heal herself of a spiritual malady while adumbrating the final passage of her life's journey with all the literary skill and intuition at her disposal.

In her best work, Mansfield pursued an essentially religious ideal predicated upon the innocence and purity of the child. This ideal is explored in "The Doll's House," one of a series of stories set in New Zealand about a middle-class family engaged in passing on their social and cultural values to their children. The precocious middle child, Kezia, instinctively rejects this inheritance, and in her rebellion creates an alternative reality that opposes the bourgeois worldliness of her family.

The doll's house itself, a gift from a family friend, smells so strongly of paint that it cannot be brought indoors. With her superior discernment Kezia quickly perceives its most special element: "an exquisite little amber lamp with a white globe...[and] something inside that looked like oil...that moved when you shook it." The three children set about inviting school friends to see the doll's house, but are forbidden to invite the Kelvey sisters, who are their social inferiors ("the daughters of a washerwoman and a jailbird"). When Kezia sees the Kelveys passing on the road, however, she ushers them into the courtyard to view the doll's house. As the Kelveys peer inside, Kezia's Aunt Beryl appears, rebukes Kezia, and rudely expels the Kelveys. The narrative follows the Kelvey sisters to a resting place by the side of the road, where the younger sister, who rarely speaks, shyly informs the elder: "I seen the little lamp."

This conclusion creates a connection between Kezia and the Kelvey girl that affirms their capacity to "see the light" and sets at naught the social prejudices separating them. There is also a subtle criticism of a family life constrained by such prejudices in the description of the inhabitants of the doll's house, "the father and mother dolls, who sprawled very stiff as though they had fainted in the drawing room." Only the lamp is "perfect" and "real," in the enlightened perception of Kezia; it serves as symbol of a life informed by awareness and a sensitivity to the feelings of others.

Kezia's inner journey continues in two lengthy stories of family life, "Prelude" and "At the Bay," which contain some of Mansfield's best writing. Kezia is again a central, precocious figure, but the narrative also explores the inner lives of other family members, including her mother Linda and Aunt Beryl, to whom she looks for love and guidance. "Prelude" opens with the family in the midst of moving to the country. Kezia wanders about the empty house they are leaving, and feels, in the gathering darkness of evening, an unsettling sense of being watched by something "just behind her, waiting at the door, at the head of the stairs, at the bottom of the stairs." This moment of heightened perception establishes a connection between Kezia and her mother, who seeks refuge from the demands of motherhood in a subjective world where "things had a habit of coming alive":

> Not only large substantial things like furniture but curtains and the patterns of stuffs and fringes of quilts and cushions.... But the strangest part of this coming alive of things was what they did. They listened, they seemed to swell out with some mysterious important content, and when they were full she felt that they smiled.... Sometimes when she had fallen asleep in the daytime, she woke and could not lift a finger, could not turn her eyes to left or right because THEY were there.

This shared sensitivity, however, does not lead to sympathy between mother and daughter. When the kindly grandmother who lives with them suggests that Linda should keep an eye on the children, Linda's response is dismissive, and when Kezia asks her mother in a symbolic encounter if the aloe in the garden ("a fat swelling plant with...cruel leaves and fleshy stem") ever has any flowers, Linda seems to take a perverse pleasure in responding: "Once every hundred years."

The child's search for love and security is thwarted by her mother's self-involvement, and one wonders what this family life is a prelude to. Is there an adult character who can serve as a model? Or is Kezia doomed to adopt the solipsistic defenses of her mother—or the prejudices and the masks of her aunt Beryl, who bemoans her lot as a single woman attached to the family in a remote place where no eligible men will visit? Beryl pours out her troubles in a letter to her friend Nan. But it is not her "real self" who writes the "flippant and silly" letter.

> If she had been happy and leading her own life, her false self would cease to be. She saw the real Beryl—a shadow...Faint and insubstantial she shone. What was there of her except the radiance? And for what tiny moments she was really she.... Shall I ever be that Beryl for ever? Shall I? How can I?

At this moment in her reflections Beryl is interrupted by Kezia, and the implication is that Kezia is the inheritor of her dilemma. Will Kezia maintain the child's spontaneity of action and unmediated perception of the world? Or will she find herself conducting an increasingly frustrating search for an authentic self and for validation in the love of others.

PHOTO BY LADY OTTOLINE MORRELL

In "The Garden Party" the Kezia figure appears in the character of a teenager, Laura Sheridan, who faces a choice between her own moral intuitions and the dictates of a similarly privileged family. Helping prepare for a family party, Laura is interrupted by the news that a man from a nearby street of working-class homes has been killed in an accident. Her reaction is immediate—"we can't possibly just have a garden-party with a man dead outside the front gate"—but her sister Jose callously dismisses the idea: "If you're going to stop a band playing every time someone has an accident, you'll lead a very strenuous life." Laura's mother, to her amazement, sides with Jose. As Laura continues to insist on the heartlessness of holding the party, Mrs. Sheridan places her new hat on her daughter's head. "It's made for you," she exclaims. "I have never seen you look such a picture. Look at yourself!" Distracted, Laura wanders off, deciding she has been "extravagant" and will put off thinking about the accident until the party is over. The hat becomes the symbol of her dilemma: everyone admires it, and Laura accepts the admiration, at the cost of setting aside her feelings about the accident.

Once the guests have left, Mrs. Sheridan impulsively decides upon a propitiatory gesture: Laura is to be sent to the widow's house with a basket of leftovers. Still wearing the hat, Laura enters the lane of cottages, feeling acutely nervous and out of place. To her consternation, at the dead man's home she is conducted to the room where the corpse is laid out, "a young man, fast asleep—sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again." Fascinated, she wonders:

> What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane.... All is well, said that sleeping face.

Stunned by the glimpse of a reality beyond garden parties and big hats, Laura stumbles out of the room, sobbing, "Forgive my hat." To her brother Laurie who has been sent to meet her, Laura's experience is incomprehensible. How should all be well in the face of a tragic accident? But Laura's superior moral judgment has been rewarded by an almost mystical insight into the meaning of death.

Years later, incurable illness brought Mansfield to confront these issues again—and to complete in her own life the journey of Kezia and Laura. By the fall of 1922 she "already seemed to me to be halfway to death," noted P. D. Ouspensky, whose writings introduced Gurdjieff to the West and who facilitated Mansfield's admission to the Institute. "But...one was struck by the striving in her to make the best use even of these last days, to find the truth whose presence she clearly felt." In her final journal entries, written in the days before her departure for the Prieuré, Mansfield assesses her spiritual malady and describes her hope of surmounting it. "Let me take the case of K.M.," she writes:

> She has led, ever since she can remember, a very typically false life. Yet, through it all, there have been moments, instants, gleams, when she has felt the possibility of something quite other.... Now, Katherine, what do you mean by health? And what do you want it for? Answer: By health I mean the power to live a full, adult, living, breathing life in close contact with what I love—the earth and the wonders thereof—the sea—the sun.... I want to enter into it, to be part of it, to live in it...to learn from it, to become a conscious direct human being. I want, by understanding myself, to understand others. I want to be all that I am capable of becoming so that I may be...*a child of the sun.*

By now, as a letter to her friend Dorothy Brett reveals, Mansfield had given up all hope of a cure for her disease; her concern was with attaining the spiritual health outlined in Gurdjieff's teaching. In Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*, a 1949 exposition of this teaching, Gurdjieff describes conscience as a state of awakening in which one's inner contradictions are seen and acknowledged. "Even a momentary awakening of conscience," Gurdjieff taught, "is bound to involve suffering. And if these moments of conscience become longer and if a man does not fear them but on the contrary cooperates with them and tries to keep and prolong them, an element of very subtle joy...will gradually enter."

At the Prieuré, Mansfield pursued this process of awakening to conscience. On October 18, 1922, a few days after her arrival at the Prieuré, she wrote to her husband, John Middleton Murry:

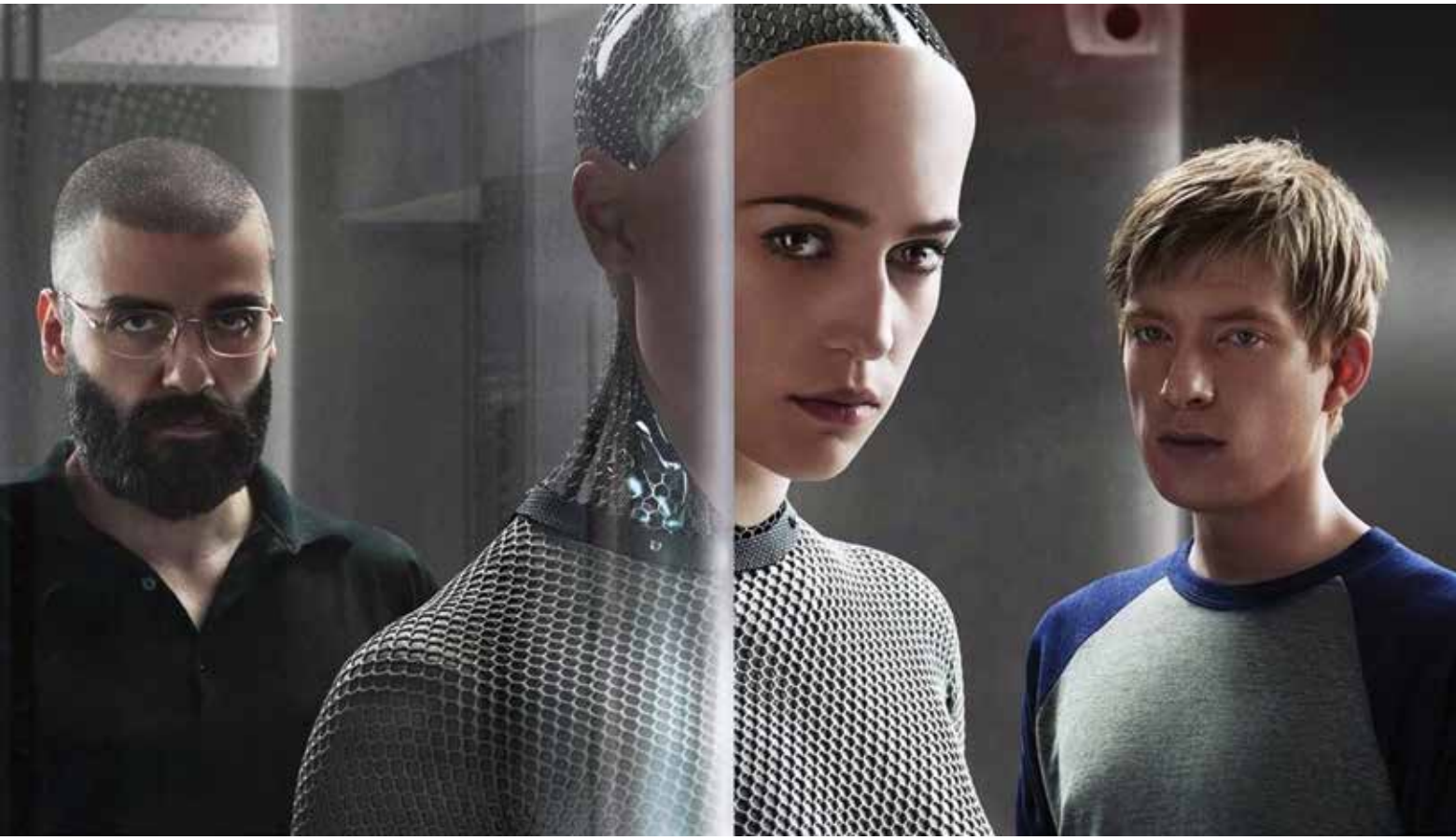
> I have been through a little revolution since my last letter. I suddenly made up my mind...to try and learn to live by what I believe in, no less, and not as in all my life up till now to live one way and think another.... In the deepest sense I've always been disunited. And this, which has been my "secret sorrow" for years, has become everything to me just now. I really can't go on pretending to be one person and being another any more.... It is a living death.

For perhaps the first time she was participating fully in a communal life, and she delighted in the company of people who shared her sincere wish to change. To the translator S. S. Koteliansky she wrote, on October 19, that she intended "to change my whole way of life entirely," and vowed not to write any stories "until I am a less terribly poor human being." To her lifelong friend and companion Ida Moore, frequently the object of her anger and criticism, she apologized "for the way I have treated you, for past sins of impatience, intolerance, and worse." In a farewell letter to her father—once the representative of all that was vulgar and provincial—she wrote to celebrate the new year, and closed with a poignant valediction: "God bless you...darling Father. May we meet again."

Feeling that her relationship with Murry was being transformed by the changes that she perceived within herself, Mansfield wrote him affectionately: "Oh my dearest Bogey, just wait and see how you and I will live one day—so happily, so splendidly." But it was not to be. On December 31, perhaps realizing that her time was short, she invited Murry to visit. He arrived on the afternoon of January 9. "Katherine was very pale, but radiant," he would write later; "she seemed a being transfigured by love, absolutely secure in love." She introduced him to her friends at the institute, and that night they watched a performance of sacred dances together. But when she went to climb the stairs to her room, she suffered a fatal hemorrhage and, despite the attentions of two doctors, died within the hour.

At the core of Gurdjieff's teaching was a process of self-observation designed to expose all pretense and deceit. "One must inwardly stop and observe, observe without taking sides, impartially," Gurdjieff instructed. "And if you observe in this manner, paying from yourself, without self-pity, by giving up all your imaginary riches for one moment of reality, then you may suddenly see what you have never seen before." Mansfield had seen two natures in herself (which she styled Katherine True and Katherine False), and she was drawn to the idea of a purifying self-knowledge that would allow a free and compassionate self to come forth. She was a difficult person to know and love, and even her closest relationships were marked by mistrust and evasion. But she perceived that her imminent death presented her with an opportunity to change, to be guided by something higher in herself.

Perhaps it is not too much to suggest that she was reaching for an infallible moral awareness—the synderesis of St. Jerome, a spark of original conscience that disposes all human creatures to good. Mansfield wished to cut through the pretenses and prejudices of her "false self," but unlike Aunt Beryl in her story "Prelude," she understood that such an effort entailed suffering, and she was willing to pay the price, separating herself from husband and friends and confronting her fear of the unknown. In the last months of her life, like her child alter-ego Kezia, Mansfield committed herself to the light, reimagining herself as a "child of the sun." Who is to say that she did not achieve her wish? ■



Richard Alleva

Robomance

'EX MACHINA'

Ex Machina is a deceptive movie about deceptions: the deception of attractive surfaces, the deception at the heart of a scientific experiment, the deception employed by an immured android that yearns to roam. Most of all, Alex Garland's film is about the very human tendency to deceive oneself in order to feel needed. And to realize this last theme Garland pulls a fast one on his audience.

At first the plot seems straightforward enough. Caleb, a young computer programmer for a fabulously successful search-engine company called Bluebook is chosen, supposedly by lottery, to spend a week with the company's founder and CEO at his house in the country. Depending on your point of view, this domicile is a technological marvel or sheer horror: the décor is a totalitarian version of Swedish Modern; rooms become prison cells at the press of a button; the lighting is oppressively womblike; there are no books in sight but there are bottles of expensive liquor everywhere. Everything is under surveillance, and it's hardly surprising that, though there are TVs in all the bedrooms, there are no programs to watch, only views of monitored rooms.

The lord of this sterile manor—an egomaniacal, bodybuilding control freak named Nathan—soon reveals that Caleb is to take part in an experiment that takes the Turing Test one step further. Alan Turing proposed that if, after a certain period of interaction, a person cannot tell that he is communicating

with a machine rather than a human being, then the machine can be said to think. But Caleb, played by Domhnall Gleeson, will know from the start that he's conversing with a robot because, despite Ava's pleasingly humanoid face, "her" wires and tubes are always visible. If, by the end of the week, her responses still impress him as human-like, then she passes the test, proving that an android can behave as a human.

Ava passes the test all too well. Caleb becomes infatuated with her and joins her plot to free herself from Nathan's control. It turns out that this very rebellion was anticipated by Nathan and is part of his secret plan. But Caleb anticipates Nathan's anticipation. In *Ex Machina* one deception always operates within the framework of a larger deception. The final, all-encompassing trick is played on the audience's sympathies by writer-director Alex Garland. Right up to the conclusion, the fetching Ava seems to perform the role of maiden-in-distress, and Caleb, weedy nerd though he is, seems to be the knight who will rescue her from Nathan. But there's a catch. While Nathan may be an insensitive manipulator, he never lets go of one vital fact: Ava is a machine. By contrast, Caleb's gallantry blinds the audience to his monumental folly: he's become dazzled by sheer surface. So we are pulled up short in the final scenes by the recognition that we've been rooting for a self-deceiving fool.

Garland's screenplay works so well overall that the viewer is tempted to overlook a few plot snags, yet these do tend to undercut the consistency of the characterizations. We are told that Caleb is quite bright and scientifically informed, if not the mastermind that Nathan is. Yet the experiment first outlined by Nathan seems so dumb that we wonder why Caleb doesn't realize right away that it's a ploy. And by the time we're told what Nathan's ultimate objective is, we can also see, retrospectively, that he actually attained his goal early in the experiment, about two-thirds of the way through the movie. So why didn't he just end the experiment then and declare victory?

Yet the movie does finally succeed in getting us to question our tendency to impute benevolence and even personality to our mechanical devices. Ava's flirtatiousness and neediness offer Caleb a relationship that he apparently can't find with a real woman, though the script might have been stronger if it had told us more about his previous relationships (if he had any). But perhaps Gleeson's childlike face fills that information gap. One of the movie's neatest ironies is that the macho Nathan seems as womanless as Caleb. The inventor's self-inflicted isolation is underscored by a closetful of female android dummies. Are these past experiments, or ex-girlfriends? Or both?

Which brings us to Ava, the dummy that refuses to be hung up in that closet, wanting to be a *who* rather than a *that*. She's the Frankenstein monster of this movie, but she's so much more dangerous than Mary Shelley's creation because so much more inviting. And while Fankenstein's monster is unambiguously human in his loneliness and fury, it's difficult to know how to take Ava. Nathan says that her brain has been loaded with all the audiovisual experience he's garnered from a multitude of iPhones and iPods, but what is her digital brain doing with all this information? We see her get acquainted with Caleb, little by little, but this social behavior is all calculated to get him on her side. The one presumably sincere thing she says to him is that she wants to be on a traffic island in the midst of crowds in a big city. But to what end? Is she like Poe's "Man of the Crowd," who simply can't stand solitude? When Ava achieves her objective, we hear uplifting inspirational music on the soundtrack, the kind usually meant to make audiences feel a warm glow. But why should we feel such a glow at the sight of robot liberation? What's being liberated besides circuits and plastic? Or is Alex Garland toying with us, trying to leave us as smitten with Ava as Caleb is? *Ex Machina* is one of the most interesting movies around, but you may feel a little queasy by the time the credits roll. ■

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

Separated at Birth

Our Kids
The American Dream in Crisis
Robert D. Putnam
Simon & Schuster, $28, 386 pp.

A number of books and articles in recent years have focused on the problem of income inequality. But surprisingly few have looked at how this pattern is affecting the lives of American children.

This book admirably fills that gap. Putnam argues that sharp disparities in income, education, and family structure have converged to create a class divide that separates many of today's kids into two starkly divergent groups. In one group, children are growing up with two college-educated parents, both potentially high earners, in spacious houses located in safe neighborhoods. Their parents shower them with lavish opportunities to develop their talents, gain important work and life skills, and prepare them for future college and career success. These kids attend highly ranked high schools, with AP classes and a hundred or more clubs. They have the option of choosing from a rich menu of extracurricular activities—drama, art, music, sports, debate, sailing, horseback riding, and water polo—provided by their parents, schools, and communities. They go on to top-ranked colleges.

In the other group, children are growing up with one or more high-school educated parents who work in low-wage jobs. The household composition may change. Sometimes the household is headed by a single parent; sometimes by a parent and partner; sometimes by a parent and step-parent. These adults struggle to provide the basics for their kids. The families move a lot. The kids land in neighborhoods described as war zones, attend failing high schools or do a stint in Job Corps, and have not much else to do in their economically decimated communities except hang out.

The class divide is deep. It slices through nearly every domain of children's lives: their families, neighborhoods, schooling, and community life, reproducing advantage for the already advantaged and disadvantage for the already disadvantaged.

It is also wide. "Chasm" might be a better word. Upper-tier families are residentially segregated from lower-tier families. Each tier lives isolated from the other. Parents on one side know almost nothing about parents on the other side. They share few common child-rearing experiences. Worse, there are no institutional bridges to span the divide and to bring lower-tier kids into the schools, parks, and playgrounds of the upper tier.

In Putnam's telling, this separate and unequal pattern is more than a social problem. It is a social tragedy. It means that kids' opportunities and future life chances are increasingly dependent on the families they are born into, rather than the society they belong to.

Our Kids presents stories of white, black, and Hispanic parents and their young-adult children living on either side the divide. These stories, based on interviews conducted in diverse communities, are intended to be illustrative rather than representative, Putnam says. Nonetheless, they reveal in unsparing detail how vastly separate and unequal the lives of American children have become. Indeed, it is hard to convey how extreme the divide is without summarizing one of the stories in the book. Meet Chelsea and David, white kids in Port Clinton, Ohio, a small town on the shores of Lake Erie, where Putnam himself grew up in the middle of the last century. Chelsea has grown up with her married parents and brother in a large house overlooking a lake. Her father is a corporate manager. Her mother has a graduate degree and now works part-time, though she chose to stay at home to devote attention to her children when they were young. Both Chelsea's parents were intensely involved in their children's upbringing, pushing the kids to achieve and intervening when they needed an advocate at school or a helper to hot-glue prom decorations in the middle of the night. Her parents culti-

CNS PHOTO / TYLER ORSBURN

Robert Putnam with President Obama at the Catholic-Evangelical Leadership Summit on Overcoming Poverty

vated the "soft" social skills as well. The family ate dinner together every night, in order, her mother says, to teach the kids "how to discourse with other people." Her mother organized fun too. She threw themed birthday parties for Chelsea every year—Barbie Princess when she turned six, Academy Awards (with limo pickup for guests) when she turned eleven. When Chelsea was a teen, her parents built a 1950s-style diner in their basement to provide a safe place for their daughter and friends to hang out. Chelsea and her brother always knew they would go to college, and both did. Now aiming for law school, Chelsea says her parents and other adults helped push her in the right direction. She is content with "what I am doing in life."

Then there is David. At eighteen, David is carrying big responsibilities. He is the single father of a young daughter and the watchful older brother of nine half-siblings who have no consistent parent or adult caregiver. His early life was full of turbulence and loss. His mother left him when he was little. Although she lives somewhere in Port Clinton, he doesn't know where. His father, who had custody, was in and out of prison. David lived with his paternal grandmother and, for a time, with his father's girlfriend, who was "crazy" and on drugs. His schooling was equally chaotic. He attended seven elementary schools, got into fights, and was sent to "behavior school." Eventually he transferred to a high school and graduated, "mostly because he got school credit for working at Big Bopper's Diner." His girlfriend, the mother of his daughter, left him to live with a boyfriend who, like her, is a drug addict. In a Facebook posting in 2014, he wrote: "I'll always end up on the losing end.... I'll never get ahead. "

There are several contrasts that can be drawn here, of course, but one strikes me with particular force: it is the profound difference in the emotional lives of these two young people, as well as others profiled in the book. Kids like Chelsea are secure, supported by the important adults in their lives, and confident about their future prospects. Kids like David are insecure, confused, and despairing. They believe that no one cares or helps or even notices them. They see the world as "unpredictable, intractable, malign."

A large literature tells us that the emotional lives of kids, rich or poor, are highly dependent on the strength and quality of their early attachments. Secure bonds provide all kinds of emotional and cognitive advantages that persist into adulthood. Insecure bonds, on the other hand, leave kids unmoored, untrusting, and unready for the challenges of adult life.

These crucial early attachments are formed and nurtured in families, and ideally by two parents who are committed to each other and to their children's healthy development. But more and more kids like David are growing up without strong attachments, and often without any consistent care at all. Their family lives are marked by multiple losses. Fathers die, disappear, or end up in prison. Mothers take off as well, carried away by new boyfriends and by the powerful tug of drug addiction. (The trend of wayward mothers is about the worst social indicator anyone can imagine.) A stream of other adults—step-parents, grandparents, step-grandparents, parents' partners, and strangers who crash on the couch—flow through kids' households. As if that weren't enough, the kids also have to deal with a "confusing web" of step-siblings, half-siblings, and children brought into the household by parents' partners.

Most troubling, the attachment deficit begins in the cradle. The absence of affectionate and reliable nurturing is hard to remediate or reverse later on. More to the point, today's emotionally impoverished kids are becoming parents themselves, often too soon, and without the models or capacity to nurture their own kids. This extends the deficit into the next generation and generations beyond, contributing to an all-but-inevitable hardening of the class divide.

If there is one disappointment in this illuminating book, it comes with the "what is to be done" chapter at the end. Putnam offers a list of suggestions for improving opportunities for the kids whose bleak and troubled lives he so powerfully describes. In the main, his proposals fall into two categories: more money for poor parents and more educational opportunities for poor kids. The benefits of these policies are likely to make marginal, but nonetheless worthwhile, improvements in the earning capacity of both parents and children. At the same time, however, it is not clear how they will help bring parents and children back together or how they will end what Putnam calls the "dreadful chaos" in the lives of our kids. ■

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead *is the author of* The Divorce Culture: Rethinking Our Commitment to Marriage and the Family *(Knopf), and director of Civil Society Studies at the Institute for American Values.*

Anthony Domestico

Mansplaining

The Age of the Crisis of Man

Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973

Mark Greif

Princeton University Press, $29.95, 448 pp.

In Ben Lerner's 2011 novel *Leaving the Atocha Statio*n, Adam Gordon—a John Ashbery–loving, Jacques Derrida–spouting young poet—asks himself a rhetorical question: "Who wasn't squatting in one of the handful of prefabricated subject positions proffered by capital or whatever you wanted to call it, lying every time she said 'I'?"

The assumptions underlying this question are the assumptions underlying much twentieth-century critical theory: the idea that the self is determined by forces beyond it; that taste and consciousness aren't expressions of our deepest being but the traces of history and ideology written on us; that terms like "the self" and "our deepest being" and even "the human" are false abstractions that need to be exposed rather than explored. These ideas, which we might describe loosely as antihumanist, claim that the story told by post-Enlightenment philosophy and art—the story of individuals choosing and loving and suffering and growing—is false. The "I," such thinkers argue, is a lie.

In *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973*, Mark Greif examines how we got to this moment of antihumanism. More specifically, he argues that we can only understand how we got to antihumanism by looking back to a very particular moment in American cultural and intellectual history. During a period of roughly forty years, Greif argues, American thinkers feared that man's irreducible nature, the identity that remained constant despite apparent differences, faced a serious threat: "human nature," it seemed, "was being changed, either in its permanent essence or in its lineaments for the eyes of other men." This anxiety could be seen in the many book titles, almost too many to count, that invoked a crisis of man and his meaning: Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1943); Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964); Joshua Heschel's *Who Is Man?* (1965). Greif lists several more.

Drawing of Saul Bellow by Zoran Tucić

Why was this question of what Greif calls "fundamental anthropology"—what is man?—asked with such desperation and regularity at this specific moment? To answer this, Greif argues, we must look to the "many streams of thought and writing that shape a public philosophy." Greif, a founding editor of *n+1*, has written on politics, philosophy, and literature before, and his intellectual versatility shows in this book. He shifts around constantly, moving back and forth between works of art and works of philosophy, reading theology (Niebuhr and Jacques Maritain), literary criticism (Lionel Trilling and Malcolm Cowley), anthropology (Franz Boas and Claude Lévi Strauss), and fiction (Ralph Ellison and Saul Bellow). Throughout, he shows how the period's thinkers circled around a series of common questions: What is man? Where has he gone wrong? And what can be done to save him?

W. H. Auden ended a 1930 poem with the assertion that things were about "to disintegrate on an instant in the explosion of mania / Or lapse for ever into a classic fatigue." Explosion or fatigue, upheaval or enervation: these seemed the only options in the 1930s. Global capitalism was spreading, along with the shocks and crashes that it is heir to. So also was totalitarianism, which sought to control not just human populations but human souls: as Hannah Arendt put it, it desired not "the revolutionizing transmutation of society, but the transformation of human nature itself." Finally, dramatic advances in technology made it seem that humanity would either become more machine-like or destroy itself by its own hand.

On many fronts, the humanist, universalist idea of man appeared under threat, and so philosophers, in book after book, began discussing what exactly it was that needed protecting. Did mankind's essence lie in his sinful "inclination to transmute his partial and finite self into the infinite good," as Niebuhr claimed? Or did it reside in our access to a storehouse of timeless ideas and concepts, as the popular defenders of the Great Books program argued at the time?

Whatever the particular way of framing the question, all of these crisis-of-man books assumed that there *was* an abstract human nature and that it was

of urgent importance that this nature be preserved. Greif calls this crisis-of-man talk a "maieutic discourse." By this he means a discourse that doesn't offer a singular answer to the question, "What is man?" Rather, it hopes that the very act of *posing* the question will bring into existence the thing that is being questioned—namely, man's essence. By asking what man's nature is, the existence of man's nature is established. (Greif borrows "maieutics" from Plato's *Theaetetus*, where Socrates defines "his dialectical method of questioning as *techne maieutike*, 'the art of midwifery.'" In other words, a style of questioning that helps bring forth new knowledge from another, just as the midwife helps bring forth new life from another.)

If crisis-of-man discourse arose first in philosophical circles, it quickly spread outward, making itself felt in many of the period's strongest works of fiction. The third and, to my mind, most original section of Greif's book shows how Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, Flannery O'Connor, and Thomas Pynchon all used the crucible of fiction to test the possibility of a universal essence of man. As Greif writes,

> To discover this abstract man, [these writers] had to know first whether the identity as Jew or black or, indeed, any subset of men, any category by which men would be recognized, was a hindrance or an aid to reaching the purely human state. If there was a human being as such, what did it have to do with always being marked as something besides the generic 'person,' being named, being already, as it were, outlined by the ways others will recognize you?

What happens to abstract man, in other words, when it runs into the shoals of particularity—of race, ethnicity, history, class, and gender?

In a complex and thrilling interpretation of *Invisible Man*, Greif traces the subterranean influences on Ellison—Communism and Transcendentalism, Joyce and Hegel—and moves toward the novel's brief moment of illumination for the unnamed narrator: "The crowd sweated and throbbed, and though it was silent, there were many things directed toward me through its eyes.... And as I took one last look I saw not a crowd but the set faces of individual men and women." From crowds to individuals, from Man to men and women: Greif reads *Invisible Man* as a defense of "nominalism"—and thus as a critique of the whole crisis-of-man enterprise. He argues that Ellison's novel shows that "categories and abstractions have no real existence. One tries to apply universal names to people and clasps the air. Only individuals exist—and the categories that would cover more than one of them are illusory." Likewise, Greif sees Bellow's *Dangling Man* as showing the impossibility of eternal dangling—that is, the impossibility of remaining forever free from the ties of ethnicity or family.

Readers of this magazine will be interested to know that, while Greif's analysis of Flannery O'Connor can be sharp (for O'Connor, "liberalism forgets all mysteries in a great deceptive mush"), it isn't as well integrated into the overarching argument as the sections on Bellow, Ellison, and Pynchon.

So, what happens when abstract man encounters the shoals of particularity? It sinks, according to Greif, taking faith in universal essences with it. The book's final section, entitled "Transmutation," charts the slow death and long afterlife of the American discourse of man. As Ellison proved, race was the fly in the ointment of crisis-of-man rhetoric, and this fact only received further confirmation in the civil-rights era. Malcolm X argued that appeals to universal brotherhood were often a screen for white privilege: as Greif puts it, "there was no background colorless universal, only different colors." Second-wave feminism likewise showed all that had been elided in the talk of universal man—namely, half the human population.

This is one of the moments where Greif is marching through thorny historical ground. After all, the civil rights and feminist movements were so successful not despite but *because of* their commitment to concepts of the human: Martin Luther King Jr. imagined a future in which blacks and whites joined each other at the shared "table of brotherhood," while the principal argument of feminism, both first- and second-wave, is that women are human beings, with all the rights that come with such a designation. Greif admits this, seeing King and others as making the pragmatic decision to use a flawed rhetorical tool for good purposes. But it's hard to see how any argument for rights could succeed *without* this tool, and this fact might suggest that the tool is less flawed than Greif thinks.

Still, Greif is correct to argue that the 1960s saw many thinkers back away from all essentialist discourse. He shows how "the recognition of a tyrannizing uniformity and concealment of difference in the rhetoric of man" created a philosophical and cultural vacuum into which antihumanism flowed. Where crisis-of-man thinkers had emphasized man's universal nature, antihumanists like Michel Foucault argued that such nature was really just contingency dressed up as essence. Where traditional humanists defended universalism, Lévi Strauss and others celebrated particularism. Where theologians spoke of man's irreducible metaphysical grounding, Derrida sought to destroy metaphysics. The age of the crisis of man, in short, prepared the way for the age of the critique of man.

Greif sees the passing away of abstract man as a positive development. His careful attention to the flaws at the core of this universalizing project prove to him the flaws at the core of *all* universalizing projects: "Anytime your inquiries lead you to say, 'At this moment we must ask and decide *who we fundamentally are*...' just stop. You have begun asking the wrong analytic questions for your moment." For "your moment" only, or from now on? Greif does not quite say, but his book strongly suggests that we've outgrown the old humanistic anxiety about universals—and good riddance.

Speaking not as a philosopher but as a literary critic, I see a problem here. As the best poets acknowledge, the

world is built out of the particular: see, for example, Hopkins's vision of the concrete, individuated "rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim." But just because the world is built out of particulars doesn't mean that there aren't also universals. Again, think of Hopkins: the particularity of a thing, its *haecceitas*, does not preclude the universal but is the way to the universal. As Hopkins writes,

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

"Each mortal thing"—that is, each particular creature—reveals both its singular self and what *kind* of thing it is by its characteristic activity. And kinds—kingfishers, dragonflies—are universals. So the particular and the universal are not necessarily at odds, and can relate to each other in more than one way. To insist on particularity, to dwell on difference, is not necessarily to deny the universal.

Whether or not you agree with Greif's anti-essentialist critique of "the human"—and, as a humanities professor, I don't fully—his book makes for exhilarating reading. *The Age of the Crisis of Man* shows that what we think of human nature—and whether we think there is such a thing—has profound consequences for every part of our culture, determining what kind of questions we ask and what kind of projects we undertake. Greif has written a work of real intellectual and moral force. ■

Anthony Domestico *is an assistant professor of literature at Purchase College, SUNY, and a frequent contributor to* Commonweal, *where he writes a regular literary column, "Bookmarks."*

Edward T. Wheeler

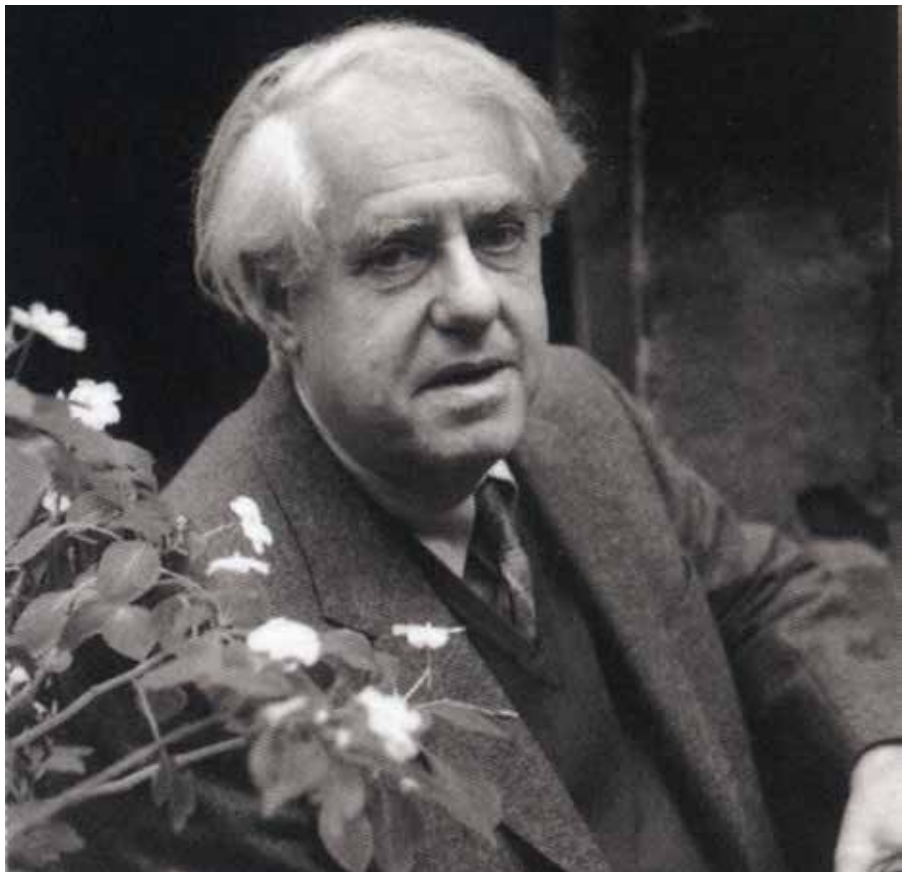
Make It New

Why the Romantics Matter

Peter Gay
Yale University Press, $24, 176 pp.

Peter Gay's list of published works covers pages. A professor of history at Yale, he was a scholar of the Enlightenment, a historian of "The Bourgeois Experience" of the nineteenth century, and an expert on Freud—yet, as he put it in the introduction to his final book (he died in May), he had never before written directly on romanticism. This short work, part of a Yale series titled "Why X Matters," offers Gay's mature thoughts on a notoriously challenging topic.

To those of us who identify romanticism with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley, this book is all the more interesting for taking us into unusual terrain, with examples drawn mainly from German and French literature, music, and art. Where historical scope is concerned, Gay suggests that Romantics matter because they are still very much with us, though their presence is largely unrecognized by today's artists. As a social historian he sets out to trace the pattern of acceptance of avant-garde art that led "radicals to become rentiers," and the social factors that turned "Middlemen into Pedagogues," as one chapter title has it. He is at pains to indicate the adversarial stance of so much that was perceived as "modern" and to show how, in response, museum curators and gallery owners educated consumers of art to appreciate works that might be said to attack their social attitudes.



Peter Gay

JANET MALCOLM / YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

This is a slender volume, but its aims are large. "No attempt has ever been made to map all the manifestation of modernity as part of a single historical epoch," Gay writes; "this book is an essay in generalization, without slighting, let alone ignoring, the individuality of each domain." The broad statements ventured in these pages expand Romanticism to include more than two hundred years—from the late eighteenth century to the present—while differentiating the "domains" of literature, art, and music. All this in 133 pages.

Gay's chapter titles outline the argument: "Re-enchantment of Nature," "Romantic Psychology," the "Middlemen as Pedagogues," "Art for Artists' Sake," and "The Beethoven Decades." We move from the familiar notion of the Romantic rebellion against Enlightenment rationality, to the focus on artistic self-expression and the artist's unique consciousness in music, paint, or words, and finally to the social mediation of the works produced. How did what was always new and challenging become assimilated by the very strata of society that it intended to subvert? Beethoven appears as the towering Romantic genius, the apotheosis of artistic dedication and achievement, a man "fully aware that his world of music, specifically his compositions, went far beyond his age"; a man, in Gay's estimation, who knew "he was writing for all ages."

The first section of *Why the Romantics Matter*, which looks carefully at Novalis and Schlegel, refreshes the old truisms about romantic rebellion. Gay possesses the depth of reading to choose apt examples and arresting quotations—quoting Novalis, to take one example, complaining about how the Enlightenment "disfigured the infinite creative music of the universe into the monotonous clatter of a gigantic mill." In considering the revolt of young artists against their conventional forebears, Gay explores the relevance of Freud and the Oedipus complex, but cautions against too simplistic an application of Freud's insight. Throughout the book Gay warns that any reductionist argument, or too strenuous an emphasis on one analytical strain, will inevitably distort the manifold representations of romanticism. Such caution arises from the wisdom of age and broad scholarship, and signals a judiciousness that keeps the author from ever allowing his own thesis to distort the evidence.

Though Gay never explicitly argues for expanding the term Romantics to Moderns, he comes close when he remarks that "all Moderns had in common...the conviction that the untried is markedly superior to the familiar, the rare to the ordinary, the experimental to the routine." Make it new; challenge convention in art and society; fall back on one's own consciousness; prefer the interior vision to the objective reality of the external world. These characteristics are present throughout the two-hundred-year period, forming "a single aesthetic mindset," Gay writes, "a recognizable style—the modern style—which is a climate of thought and opinion."

The book's final section, though titled "Epilogue," offers more than concluding remarks, forming in fact a reflection on the Romantics as a whole. Here Gay's wide reading and knowledge of European culture allow him to look at nonrepresentational art from the perspective of Kandinsky and Malevich, and at the self-portraiture of Cézanne and Max Beckman, drawing from their published commentaries the consistent themes that he has been tracing through the earlier chapters. The last chapter mirrors the way this book proceeds overall, not so much by digression as by apposition, summoning a plethora of examples that allows a reader time to linger over its thesis. When I reached the end of *Why the Romantics Matter*, I really did not have a sense that it was finished. Rather I felt that, had he wished, Gay could have continued, addressing other representative authors, canvases, or musical works. But a book has to end somewhere, as does a life.■

Edward T. Wheeler *is former dean of the faculty at the Williams School in New London, Connecticut.*

Flick, Flick

Rand Richards Cooper

A recent article in the *Washington Post* profiled a photographer with the pleasingly gangsterish name of Babycakes Romero, who photographed couples and friends in public places immersed in their separate handheld devices—together, but alone. Romero's project, "The Death of Conversation," was cued by his frustration at how "smartphones are becoming a barrier to communication in person." He describes feeling dissed when someone he's talking with checks a smartphone—"it is a form of rejection," he comments. Our digital devices, he says, "basically allow people to withdraw rather than engage."

You go, Babycakes! I feel that way constantly. It's strange. I consider myself a middle-of-the-road guy in most ways, but when it comes to cellphones I'm the proverbial voice shouting in the wilderness. Now, I'm no techno-Luddite by any reasonable definition. I gladly use On Demand; at my desk I download songs and go online to pursue some useful bit of knowledge or play a game of chess. I'm connected, in other words. Yet the universal desire to be connected *everywhere and all the time* leaves me baffled.

My main gripe, like Romero's, is that smartphones damage conversation. Vacationing with friends on Cape Cod a couple of summers ago I was the only phone-free person, and felt awkwardly out of sync. Picture four Red Sox fans sitting in a living room watching baseball, and three of them busy with their handhelds—checking in with work, texting, chasing down Red Sox trivia.

They weren't quite entirely *there*.

But that's America these days: people everywhere with their heads bent, fingertips flicking at their screens. Couples in restaurants, silently flicking. A schoolbus full of teenagers, heads bent as if in prayer. Flick, flick, flick, it never ends. At a political forum I saw our mayor here in Hartford, Connecticut, Pedro Segarra, sitting in the audience, and noticed how frequently he consulted the iPhone in his lap. I get that: you're mayor of an American city; someone always wants a piece of you, and you have to give it up. But who, other than a politician, would want that kind of life?

Most people, apparently. We now are all mayors, ruling over our virtual municipalities—compulsively checking in, checking back, giving up pieces of ourselves. We worry something might be happening without us. But what, and where?

Meanwhile, our here is disappearing. And not just our conversations. The other day I was driving across town on an errand. As I drove I found myself musing over a parenting book I've been reading. Nothing earth-shattering was going on, just one of those little daily interludes where you perform an unconscious activity—in this case, driving—while working out some thoughts in your mind. I stopped at a light, and when it went green the car in front of me failed to move...and I recognized, with annoyance, just how often these days you have to give that little "Stop Texting and Drive" beep to jostle a driver from his smartphone.

A bit later I passed a guy walking his dog. This was a blustery November day, dramatic sky, swirling colorful leaves—the perfect day for walking your dog and taking in nature's theatrics while letting your thoughts roam. But what was this particular dog-walker doing? The same thing every dog-walker does now. Flick, flick.

These idle moments when we used to be alone with our thoughts—they're being decimated. A casual but crucial meditative dimension in our lives is disappearing; soon there will be almost no lull, just a ceaseless stream of input. Occupied nonstop with taking things in, we'll have no time or place to mull things over. Eventually we'll lose the ability.

KAT NORTHERN LIGHTS MAN

Technology is a majestic human story, and the benefits we've gotten from farming out our tasks to machines are incalculable. But what happens when what we're farming out is consciousness itself—the ability to be ourselves, with ourselves, amid the glories of creation? Our portable digital guides have brought us to a strange and futile pass in human relations: when we're with others, we want to be alone; and when we're alone, we crave connection. We are constantly bailing out—escape artists, using digital wizardry to gratify our urgent need to be elsewhere.

I know that my friends tire of my diatribes on this subject. But why worship a technology that enslaves us to its near-constant use while diminishing our capacity to be together with our friends and alone with ourselves? Why does everyone think this is such a great idea? I honestly, honestly don't get it. ■

Rand Richards Cooper *is one of* Commonweal*'s film critics.*

FOUR
REASONS TO ADVERTISE WITH Commonweal

Award-winning Content

High-quality Audience

Well-trafficked Web Site

Multiplatform Marketing Programs

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

540.349.5736 OR COMMONWEALADS@GMAIL.COM