A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

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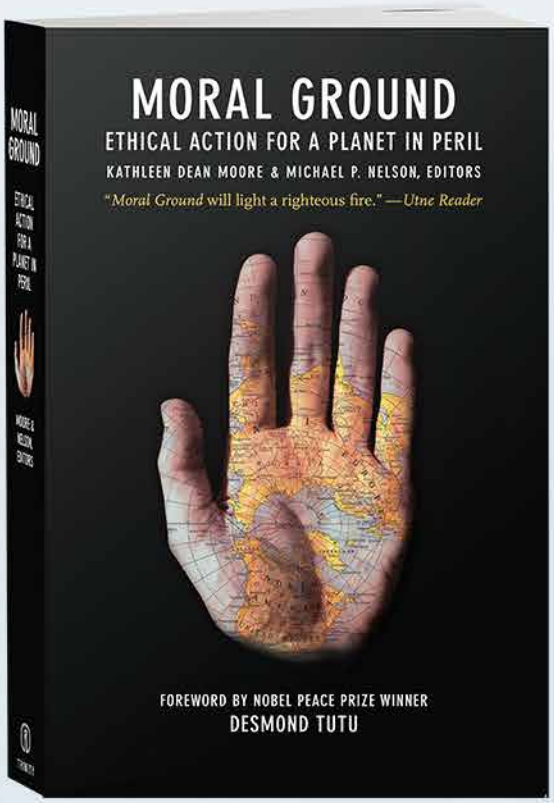

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LETTERS

Climate change, Labour pains, Jewish custom

FRUITFUL, MULTIPLIED

Anthony Annett's otherwise informative and succinct article on *Laudato si'* ("The Next Step," August 14) tends to obfuscate one key issue for which the encyclical draws criticism. The encyclical does not deserve the insidious criticism that sustainable development is merely a cover for population control—reducing the numbers of the world's poor. On the contrary, it should be criticized for not delving deeply into the connection between population growth and climate change. According to UN projections, world population is expected to reach 9.7 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion in 2100. The population of sub-Saharan Africa is expected to more than triple to 4 billion. While rich countries do consume a disproportionate share of the world's resources, the developing world is not standing still. Per capita carbon dioxide emissions in China grew from 2.7 metric tons in 2000 to 6.19 metric tons in 2010, beginning to approach numbers in Western Europe. (Recently China has made some progress in emissions reduction.)

Even if the rich countries miraculously reduced their emissions to zero, given current trends, the world will not be able to control global temperature change to 2 degrees Celsius unless the developing world also contains its emissions. A projected 50-percent increase in world population will have commensurate impact on emissions. An equally frightening prospect is the rapid depletion of critical minerals and paucity of arable land.

Pope Francis famously said that Catholics don't have to breed "like rabbits." How do we successfully reconcile that message with *Laudato si'*?

VIDYA KALE
Lake Oswego, Ore.

MAN DOWN

Yes, the title of Mark Greif's *The Age of the Crisis of Man* (reviewed in the June 12 issue) uses the word *man*. But why did the reviewer, Anthony Domestico, repeatedly employ "man" throughout his review? Did he want to parallel Greif's title and approach? It's 2015. Inclusive language is now standard. Not to see it is most distracting.

SUSAN RAKOCZY, IHM
Hilton, South Africa

OLD LABOUR & NEW

With all due respect to Shirley Williams, her, July 10 analysis of the May British General Election ("A United Kingdom?"), and in particular what she has to say about the Scottish National Party (SNP), reflects her own history in British politics, and fails to understand adequately the political tsunami in Scotland, better reflected in the question mark you put in the headline.

Like many others, unfortunately, in the British Labour Party and the U.S. Democratic Party these past forty years, she was too focused on what she perceived as unwelcome and dangerous radical left tendencies in her Labour Party during the 1970s, and missed the boat of the really dangerous and radical right-wing ideology and policies of the Thatcher/Reagan "revolution." Nowhere is this more obvious than in her description of the recent history of British politics, including that of her Liberal Democrats in coalition with the Conservatives, and her various references to the British "establishment."

She refers to "the tangled battles between 'old Labour'—the class-based party of the past—and the New Labour of Tony Blair, which was business-friendly and hewed to the center," as if only the "old" Labour Party was class-based, while Britain somehow lost its historic and virulent economic and social class system during the Thatcher years. Likewise significant is her implication that being "business

continued on page 37

From the Editors

Works of Mercy

The humanitarian crisis in the Middle East has been much lamented, but little has been done to alleviate it. The number of displaced persons is staggering, and the news stories and photographs of those who have perished trying to escape the carnage in Syria and elsewhere are heartbreaking. Humanitarian efforts are faltering. Only half the funds pledged by the international community to feed, clothe, and house refugees has been forthcoming. It is estimated that 7 million Syrians have been internally displaced, while 4 million have fled the country. Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey have absorbed the bulk of the refugees. One out of every three persons in Lebanon is a Syrian refugee. Overwhelmed and unable to provide for the influx of desperate migrants, Jordan and Lebanon have closed their borders. The refugees march on.

As a consequence of the international community's failure to broker a settlement to end Syria's five-year-old civil war, the chaos in the Middle East is no longer on Europe's doorstep, but deep inside its own house. Tens of thousands of Syrians are making their way from Turkey to Greece, in the hope of crossing the Balkans and Central Europe to Germany or Scandinavia, whose asylum policies are unusually generous—which is to say, humane. Germany alone will take in 800,000 refugees this year. Shocked by the recent death toll among those seeking refuge, German Chancellor Angela Merkel is calling on all EU countries to take in their fair share of asylum-seekers. Central and Eastern European countries are balking, their leaders indulging in xenophobic excuses. Great Britain and France have not been much better, content to let Italy and an economically precarious Greece contend with the greatest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War.

Whether Merkel will be able to exert the political pressure needed to get the EU to act is very much in question. The chancellor has made it clear that she thinks a failure to respond collaboratively to the refugee crisis poses a threat to everything the EU stands for. She's right. The EU's open-borders policy has done much to unite a once fiercely divided continent. If individual nations start policing their borders within the EU, the union's hard-won, if fragile, sense of solidarity will continue to fray. Only months ago EU members committed themselves to resolving the refugee crisis jointly, only to have that agreement fall by the wayside in the face of domestic resistance. No doubt, convincing Europeans to welcome hundreds of thousands of immigrants is a tough sell. The alternative, however, will be the senseless death of thousands and shame for Europe.

The EU is not the only one missing in action. The United States has accepted only fifteen hundred Syrian asylum-seekers since 2011. In May, fourteen Democratic senators proposed that the United States take in sixty-five thousand Syrian refugees, only to be rebuffed by the Republicans. Fair-minded people can disagree about conventional immigration policy, but why have we essentially closed our doors to people fleeing one of the most brutal wars imaginable? Surely, whatever potential threat a tiny minority of these refugees might pose can be easily managed. This country has refused asylum to those fleeing persecution and death in the past, and later deeply regretted doing so. Opening our doors to Syrian refugees is both just the right thing to do and a necessary acknowledgement of the responsibility the United States bears for the current chaos and slaughter in the Middle East. We went to war in Iraq in 2003 convinced that we knew best how to rearrange the political, economic, and social lives of those in the Arab world. That was a catastrophic folly, and our responsibility to those left behind in the bloodlands did not end when the United States withdrew its forces.

Pope Francis will soon be in the United States. During his visit, he will address the UN and a joint session of Congress. Francis has spoken out eloquently about the refugee crisis, calling it a disgrace. He has called on every Catholic parish in Europe to shelter refugees. How appropriate it would be if he were to challenge both the UN and the U.S. Congress to live up to their humanitarian obligations. He could hold up a photograph of the three-year-old Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi, drowned and washed ashore trying to escape to Greece with his family. "In another place, another time, this might have been your son, your daughter," Francis could say. "Stop looking over your shoulder at those who only want to divide humanity. Do the right thing: feed the hungry; shelter the homeless; clothe the naked; visit the sick and imprisoned; and bury the dead. Don't tell me there is nothing you can do about this." ■

September 8, 2015

'ALL LIVES MATTER' VS. BLACK LIVES MATTER

Gordon Marino

The Black Lives Matter movement, which emerged after the 2013 Trayvon Martin case, has been raising havoc on the presidential campaign trail, becoming the subject of heated debate. Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson complained, "The Black Lives Matter movement is focused on the wrong targets, to the detriment of blacks who would like to see real change." Said Rand Paul, another Republican candidate: "I think they should change their name maybe—if they were All Lives Matter, or Innocent Lives Matter." Some are even calling Black Lives Matter a hate group whose rhetoric is partially responsible for the recent shooting of a sheriff in Texas. In contrast, Cornel West, a proud member of the activist group, insists it is fighting a noble battle against state-sanctioned violence against African Americans.

According to the Black Lives Matter mission statement: "#BlackLivesMatter is an ideological and political intervention; we are not controlled by the same political machine we are attempting to hold accountable. In the year leading up to the elections, we are committed to holding all candidates for office accountable to the needs and dreams of black people." So far, the primary methodology of accountability has been to interrupt the public appearances of presidential hopefuls and bombard them with questions about their sense of responsibility for the current state of affairs and their plans to eradicate racial injustice. Black Lives Matter has crashed public appearances by Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, and Martin O'Malley.

At an O'Malley appearance a few weeks ago, lieutenants of the movement commandeered the mic, and demanded that O'Malley answer the seemingly rhetorical question, "Do black lives matter?" With great conviction, the former governor huffed, "All lives matter." The duo were not satisfied and reacted to O'Malley's answer as if to say "Wrong!" O'Malley, who has a strong record on civil rights, was profoundly perplexed. After all, you don't need to be a logic professor to understand that "all lives matter" implies "black lives matter." But despite his good intentions, maybe O'Malley in his puzzlement was missing something. There is more to meaning than the p's and q's of logical implication. When O'Malley's inquisitors pressed, "Do black lives matter?" they were essentially asking, "Do you fully acknowledge the unique injustices that have been and are being committed against African Americans?"

Recall that from the late nineteenth century and into the 1950s, thousands of African Americans were lynched. Few, if any whites, served any time for these grisly race murders. Sixty years ago, Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old African American was tortured and murdered in Mississippi. When brought to trial, his killers were acquitted, even though they later admitted to the murder. Mississippian William Faulkner famously wrote, "The past is never dead. It is not even past." It would be easy to fill pages with despair-inducing statistics. As of 2001, one in six black men had been incarcerated. According to a 2013 Pew Research Poll, in 2010 black men were six times as likely to be incarcerated as white men. The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice informs us that the rate of fatal police killings for African Americans is 4.5 times that for other races.

For the young people interrupting O'Malley's speech, the piety "all lives matter" dropped a few feet short of recognizing the dramatic inequities of current legal and law enforcement realities. While the laws of logic are universal, meaning is individual and has to be parsed. For example, years ago my graduate adviser confided that more than forty of his Jewish relatives had been consumed in the flames of the Holocaust. I didn't know exactly how to respond. If I had replied, " Yes, there have been many such acts of genocide throughout history," I would have been correct, yet I would have demonstrated insensitivity to the personal and communal catastrophe to which my mentor was trying to give voice.

Execrable as it is, the N-word means one thing coming from one person and another coming from someone else. In some mouths, though not O'Malley's, "all lives matter" would be an acceptable response to, "Do black lives matter?" I suspect that if pressed, the Martin Luther King of 1967, the man who was protesting the Vietnam War and fighting the war on poverty, would have echoed O'Malley's "all lives matter." Indeed, President Obama has been given to affirming just that.

Then, how could the same words be right from King or Obama and wrong from O'Malley? Again, words carry different resonances depending upon who utters them. Perhaps the license to answer "all lives matters" would come with having endured being constantly treated as though your life mattered less than a white person's. Martin Luther King and President Obama have been the objects of looks and patterns of behaviors that shout this twisted sense of priorities.

There are many Americans of all hues who believe that the ire of Black Lives Matter ought to be directed toward, or at least include, the plague of black-on-black crime. Maybe so. But for many, prayerfully intoning "all lives matter" is an oblique way of muting the hard truths of Katrina, Ferguson, Waller County Texas, Baltimore, Cleveland, and Charleston. It's a way of dismissing the special burdens that African Americans have endured in the biased, harrowing machine of American justice. ■

Gordon Marino *is a professor of philosophy at St. Olaf College, director of the college's Hong Kierkegaard Library, and editor of* The Quotable Kierkegaard *(Princeton University Press, 2014).* *A version of this article originally appeared on dotCommonweal on September 2.*

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Think Papally, Act Locally

OF ENCYCLICALS & RECYCLABLES

CNS PHOTO / ETTORE FERRARI, EPA

When Pope Francis says, "compulsive consumerism," I hear, "enough is enough." But what's enough? Francis admits he's no bean counter, so I turned to *The Economics of Enough* by the economist Diane Coyle. Francis and Coyle don't speak the same language, but they address the same problem. The "haves" need to recalibrate our over-use of the world's resources. Coyle, considering the long-term consequences of our rate of consumption, examines how to reduce the use of water, trees, soil, air, minerals, etc., so that future generations will have enough. Coyle's proposals are economic and statistical: change the way we measure, regulate, and allocate. In *Laudato si'*, Francis looks at the big picture too, but his response is moral and pastoral: examine our consciences, rethink our needs, learn to share. Coyle's solutions are macroeconomic: systemic change by governments and institutions. Francis wouldn't disagree, but his words tend toward the microeconomic: systematic change by individuals and families in how we use our resources, for example, buying, eating, and disposing of our garbage.

Consider the garbage.

Other places in the United States are far better at recycling than New York City (where I live), but over the past decade, I've seen a modest merger of macro and micro in "separating refuse"—as Francis puts it. In a city as large as New York, recycling is not uncomplicated. Some measures are mandatory, others voluntary; some people do it, some don't. But laws have been passed, regulations issued, and garbage trucks have been reallocated. The macros in place, the system is expanding. Once only newspapers were recycled. Gradually magazines, junk mail, and cardboard were added; now pizza boxes can go into the bin shared by five apartments in our back hall. Directly next to it is another container for plastic and glass, milk cartons, juice containers, and bottles (but corks?). The "real" garbage can is often half-empty, reducing New York's landfill needs.

Recently the civic-virtue ante has been upped: voluntary recycling of food waste. This requires willingness and organization. Buildings in pilot projects provide green buckets for kitchen waste that is dumped into a brown basket, collected by the sanitation department, and composted into soil for parks and gardens. Not in a pilot project? The able and willing cart their apple and orange peels, rotten carrots and onions, kale stems, lemon rinds, eggshells, coffee grounds—and that quintessential piece of garbage, banana peels—to "GrowNYC" farmers markets. Two are within walking distance of our apartment. I freeze the waste (to thwart the cockroaches), then fill a paper shopping bag (compostable), and walk the half-mile to the farmers market. New Yorkers gather before the huge containers at the market, as at the village well, to dump our stuff. It is inspiring, all this good will, all the smiling at our neighbors' virtuous behavior. A small sign next to the cans reports that so far in 2015 farmers markets collected over 5 million pounds of food waste. Good for us. Let's see what happens when food-waste recycling becomes mandatory.

Yet even after all those efforts, much more is needed. We could buy less, eat less, and waste less. We still ship tons of garbage to neighboring states—and to other countries. Will New York eventually export compost back to the places where bananas come from? The global challenge is both macro and micro. Yet, if the city of "compulsive consumerism" can rescue its peels, stems, and grounds for reuse, perhaps we can bask in Francis's reminder that "there is nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions." Every peel counts. ■

Rita Ferrone

Unction Dysfunction

LET NONPRIESTS ANOINT THE SICK

When we look into the eyes of someone sick and suffering, it tests our Christianity. It tests what we're made of, because it's hard not to look away. The gaze of compassion, "suffering with" another, does not come easily to most of us. Yet that is precisely what followers of Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, are called to do. It is what "communion" requires—not looking away.

So what does it say when we look into those pain-filled eyes, and are unable to provide that person with something that will help? Catholics have a gift of immense spiritual value to offer those weighed down by illness: the Sacrament of Anointing the Sick. Yet according to Catholic discipline only one kind of person can offer that: a priest. And there aren't enough priests to go around.

Let me be clear: I'm all for priests performing their priestly role with respect to the Sacrament of the Sick. But the church is suffering from a priest shortage, and it's getting worse. Increasingly, caregivers, chaplains, lay ministers, and others have become the face of compassion for the sick—the face of Jesus—but they cannot offer the sacrament, which the church so beautifully calls a "sacrament of healing." Paradoxically, reserving this sacrament to priests and bishops does not make it more cherished but less so, as people learn to live without it.

It's not as though the sacrament is altogether missing. Healing services are held in some parishes. Anointing of the Sick may take place at Sunday Mass. Parish priests do visit the sick. Hospitals usually have a priest on call for an emergency. But what happens in rural areas, where priests typically serve two, three, or even four parishes? How many sick calls can a parish priest make in today's mega-parishes whose flocks now number in the thousands? Something has to give.

The most obvious source of additional help would be deacons. The obstacle, however, is that the Council of Trent (based on James 5:15) said the sacrament of the sick forgives sins—and of course we can't have deacons doing that! But how many of the sick are even aware that this sacrament is a twofer? The idea made sense when anointing was called "extreme unction" and only administered at the point of death. It makes little sense today. The Second Vatican Council rightly restored anointing of the sick to the status of a repeatable sacrament for those who are seriously ill, impaired by old age or chronic illness, or facing surgery. For those at the point of death, the path is clear: they are anointed, their sins are forgiven, and they receive Communion (*viaticum*)—a trio the Catechism likens to the three sacraments of initiation. It is their preparation for "passing over" from this life to the next, just as initiation is a "passing over" to new life in Christ. But for others who are sick—and this constitutes the majority—a different approach makes better sense. Oil for healing. Laying on of hands. Prayer, faith-filled encouragement, compassion.

Detail of Table of the Mortal Sins
by Jheronimus Bosch

Sacraments are means of Christ's presence, a sanctifying presence that brings into the light the struggles of life, and showers on us the grace God freely gives. Sacraments strengthen us to bear the crosses we have been given. We already allow deacons and lay ministers to bring Communion to the sick, and the Eucharist is the premier sacrament, to which all other sacraments are ordered. Why be so stingy with oil for the sick?

Permanent deacons, hospital chaplains, and lay ministers to the sick and homebound could all be properly trained and deputed by the bishop to anoint the sick where there is need. Yes, it would be a change in discipline. But the care of souls demands that extraordinary times be met with boldness for the sake of the Gospel. The priest shortage is one of those times. It is not beyond our ingenuity to propose an adapted order of service for anointing the sick for use by deacons and the non-ordained, much as there have been services produced for Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest. I'd rather see more priests ordained. But there's a lock on that door. And until it opens, the spiritual needs of the sick are crying out to be met. Pope Francis has proclaimed a "year of mercy" that will begin in December. It should cause us to think again about the sacrament of the sick—and how we can offer it more generously. ■

Dominic Preziosi

'We Want Thinkers, Not Robots'

AN INTERVIEW WITH NYC SCHOOLS CHANCELLOR CARMEN FARIÑA

Carmen Fariña is chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, the largest school district in the United States, serving 1.1 million students in more than eighteen hundred schools. Named to the position in January 2014 by New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, she has worked some fifty years in education, including more than two decades as a teacher and a stint as deputy chancellor in the administration of former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg. She spoke with Commonweal *Digital Editor Dominic Preziosi about Common Core and student testing; her Catholic elementary- and high-school education; and how her upbringing as the child of immigrants continues to guide her in running one of the most diverse school systems in the country.*

DOMINIC PREZIOSI: Let me start by asking if you think that, as we hear so often, American public education is in crisis.

CARMEN FARIÑA: I can't speak for the rest of the country. But if there is a crisis, there's also an opportunity, and here in New York City we're seizing the opportunity. If you talk with parents who have been in public education you can see there are a lot of wonderful things happening. It could always be better. But it depends on what measures you're using to define success.

DP: There seems to have been an increase, nationally and in New York, in rhetoric that sets public education and unions against charters and privatization. Is this putting public education under pressure?

CF: We need to take these conflicting views and find where the commonalities are. Because of all my years in the system, I do not see unions as the "anti" by any stretch. And I was criticized for that in the beginning. I feel very strongly that my workforce is the teachers and principals of the city. So when we went into contract negotiations, we went in with more of a collaborative spirit. Sitting at the table as partners is crucial. In some other parts of the country, where they come at each other confrontationally, that's a mistake. A lot of the things we've been able to do in the past year-and-a-half, we've been able to do because we collaborate.

In terms of charters, I visit a lot of charter schools and I think they're all my kids. We have to stop saying "all charters" or "all public." There's good of everything and bad of everything. How do we get the best of both sides and learn from each other? The skill we use the least but is most effective is good dialogue. One-on-one conversations will get you a lot farther. The more we fight each other the less likely anyone is to win.

DP: What do you make of the increasing criticism of Common Core, coming from both ends of the political spectrum? Would you have imagined it becoming a possible issue in the 2016 presidential election?

CF: The problem with Common Core is that very few people know what it is. Common Core is not a curriculum but a series of strategies that the workforce saw the kids would need—such as: Can you speak before an audience and think analytically and critically?—things I can't see any sane person disagreeing with. I will say that Common Core may not have been implemented in the best possible way. Teachers were asked to do things without any training, and in New York we've gone back to try do a lot more professional development to address that.

The other thing about Common Core is that it was supposed to have said that across this country there were certain consistent expectations. If you look at countries that are admired in terms of educational outcomes, all of them have a state curriculum, all of them have state-level exams, all of them have certain expectations. I think it's become political because you always need a hot-button issue for people to rally around. But the thing is to explain it correctly, admit what went wrong—and the implementation could have been done a heck of a lot better—and then go back and correct the mistakes.

DP: It was reported that nearly 50 percent of public school students in Long Island opted out of Common Core testing in spring 2015, a phenomenon being seen to greater or lesser degree around the country. How are you trying to strike a balance between these competing needs—testing on the one side, and student well-being and even "parental rights" on the other?

CF: Look, I have twelve years of parochial school in my background, and I'm a firm believer that you need challenges. We took tests, private-school kids take tests—no parents complain when their kids take gifted-and-talented tests. But testing should be diagnostic; it should tell teachers what they did well. So getting the results after kids leave the classroom is not the best thing. And I don't think teacher evaluation should be focused totally on test scores.

DP: So does testing play too big a role in the evaluation of teachers?

CF: I think a portion of evaluation has to be based on test scores. I was a teacher for twenty-two years, and if my kids didn't progress, I hadn't done my job. But progress is different from absolute achievement. And I do think we have to strike a balance. You can't take a child who's been in this country for three months, for example, and expect her to take a test and get great scores. But if a child is with you over the course of a year, I expect to see some progress.

DP: You've spoken of the importance of principal leadership in turning under-performing schools around. What qualities do you look for in a leader?

CF: I look for a principal who knows her staff, and who knows her curriculum. A good leader listens to the people who work for her, and has high rates of staff retention. Leaders should be able to articulate a vision, and do more than use buzzwords. "I believe that all children can achieve"—as far as I'm concerned, that's nonsense. What do you mean "achieve"? How do you feel some children "achieve"? Do they do it in one way, or in another way? A leader also removes ineffective teachers, which I think is crucial. Leaders don't treat all their teachers the same, they differentiate the teachers, and they expect the teachers to be able to differentiate the students. Leaders know the student body, and they should also be able to build parent confidence. It's one thing to say to them, "Send your child to my school," and another to promise you're going to graduate a child better educated than when he or she came in.

DP: About those twelve years of parochial school: How did that shape your experiences?

CF: I was a student at St. Charles Borromeo in Brooklyn for elementary school. In those days, forty-eight kids in a classroom was the norm. Almost all of us were children of immigrants. I was taught by nuns, Sisters of Mercy, but even with forty-eight students in a class, they understood that children needed individual attention. There was always a personal touch, and that personal touch made a real difference. It helped me when I became a teacher—I wanted to be that teacher who saw kids as individuals.

For high school I went to St. Michael's Academy in Manhattan, and that was transformational. It was an all-girls school, and I had some of the brightest nuns—lay teachers too—but two nuns in particular took a special interest in me. One of them, Sr. Leonard, is the reason I'm here today. She understood that because my parents were immigrants, we didn't know the process for going to college. In those days, in my culture in particular, you didn't aspire to go to college. You'd like to go if you wanted to be a teacher, but my parents didn't know how to fill out applications and they didn't know about scholarships. Sr. Leonard in my sophomore year saw I wasn't on the right track to be able to apply to college. So she made it her business to change my trajectory. I got a commercial diploma—I know stenography, I can type—but I also was able to get things like the three years in math that I needed. I got my years in Latin. She made sure I got all the credits and then also helped me through the scholarship process. I ended up going to New York University on a four-year scholarship.

I learned a lot at St. Michael's. I learned by protesting things: I protested against Franco in Spain, I protested against the whole political structure. It was the McCarthy era, and all my teachers thought he was a god and I didn't. My father encouraged me to protest that. I was suspended for a day, but I lived through it. And I learned to have a lot of respect for the women who at that time were sacrificing to become teachers—Sr. Leonard in particular, who had a doctorate in mathematics.

PHOTO CREDIT: NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

You know, there's something about paying that back. That's one of the things about immigrant kids, they pay it back. As a regional superintendent I did a poll of my 150 principals and asked how many were first in their families to go to college as I was, and it was more than 70 percent. There's something to be said for that. When families care about education and you're the first in your family to go to college, you pay it back in a different way.

DP: How has being a child of immigrants affected your approach to education?

CF: I put a big emphasis on knowing another language. I really take exception to the idea that speaking a native language here is a deficit. No! How do we encourage these kids to keep their language while learning English? I started parochial school not speaking a word of English. We only spoke Spanish at home. I think that's great—families should keep whatever their language is, as well as learning another. I'm focused on new dual-language learning programs in the city; we'll have forty locations in September. I'd like to see, in a city like New York, everyone able to speak two or three languages. One of the things Common Core should have emphasized (but didn't) is that in this day, in this world, speaking two languages is an economic plus.

DP: How do you handle diversity in a system said to be the most diverse in the nation?

CF: We have something like a 156 languages, and I think that's wonderful. The biggest challenge, though, is making sure everyone's voices are heard. We've tried to do that by adding Muslim holidays to the school calendar [starting in the 2015–2016 school year, New York City schools will be closed for Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr]. I also have made a point of bringing social studies back to the schools, because that's a way to acknowledge and work with diversity, with different cultures. It's exciting.

DP: Was there a formative experience you had—either in your upbringing or in the classroom—that has really played a part in how you approach education?

CF: I was raised in a home where eating around the dining-room table and talking about politics was very accepted. So when I went into the classroom, in my beginning years, I thought that having open discussions with kids about serious topics was part of what I was meant to do. It got me into trouble more than once. But it showed me early on that we need to have thinking, analytical students. And then as a principal I always wanted a school where kids talked all the time, where they had opinions and wrote petitions when they didn't like what I was doing. Even today I don't expect people to follow everything I say. We want thinkers, we don't want robots. ■

TWO POEMS BY DIANE VREULS

HE CAME A BABY

To take on flesh,
  hunger and thirst.
    To learn pain.

Born without words
  the Word, where angels sang
    his cry rose in the midnight air.

He had to learn to trust us
  to feed him, give him drink,
    teach him to speak and walk.

And fed, he preached
  And walked the long walk
    to the cross

and drank the cup.
  His cry to heaven
    hung in the air

until he spoke forgiving words
  and swaddled in his grave
    left us, newborn.

WHICH

At the Fifth Station of the Cross
I am asked to "accept in particular
the death that is destined for me"
  Which I must keep myself from guessing
  Which I cannot refuse.

At the first Station of the Cross
I am asked to say to Jesus
"I love you more than I love myself"
  Which I long to believe
  And which is already a dying.

Diane Vreuls has published a novel, a children's book, a collection of short stories, and a book of poems. She lives in Oberlin, Ohio.

James VanOosting

Unmarked Territory

A DIAGNOSIS & ITS CONSEQUENCES

Dying is an adult activity. This has been one of its bigger surprises for me, so far. I find I'm needing to leave behind the child side of myself in order to go where I now need to go, in order to do what I now need to do. This child-self has been a constant companion of my adult years. It's helped me slog through the gobbledygook of career, mock the pomposity of achievement and, sometimes, levitate against the downward-sucking gravities of title and résumé. Death and I are walking toward each other, no doubt about that. We've made eye contact, and I get the feeling it's walking at a slightly quicker pace than I. Where I'm traveling to is not the kind of place a child should go. And my famous destination, about which so much has been written, is not marked clearly on the map, strangely. Instead, where X ought to mark the spot, there's merely a note telling one to go over to the other side. Any child, spotting this trap, would turn tail and run. That would be the right thing to do, the reasonable thing to do, for a child.

The first sign I had that something might be wrong appeared in London, where my wife and I had flown to mark my sixtieth birthday. My feet and ankles, hands and wrists, began to swell during the seven-hour trans-Atlantic flight from Kennedy. This swelling got worse, day after day, for a week, spreading up my arms and legs. When we returned home, my internist ordered lab tests and changed my blood-pressure medicine. The swelling went down but did not go away. Three weeks on, lunching at a chowder house across from Manhattan's Lincoln Center, my cell phone chimed. It was the internist. "There's protein in your urine. I've called St. Barnabas, and they're expecting you."

That first hospital stay extended through five days. Kidneys, I learned, filter about 200 quarts of blood daily, the equivalent of a person's whole supply passing through a couple of dozen times. Healthy kidneys recycle protein into the blood and dispose of something called creatinine; unhealthy kidneys do the opposite.

Discovering the cause of a kidney disease begins with noninvasive tests and, if these don't finger a culprit, a biopsy follows. This procedure turns out to be not as bad as one might fear. You lie flat on your stomach inside a CAT scan machine, extending your arms forward, as if diving from the starting block in a swim meet. A nurse stands in front of you and keeps asking if everything's OK. Somebody to your rear—invisible and anonymous—shoots anesthesia into a small spot in your lower back, predicting, "You'll only feel a pinch." (It's true.) For the biopsy itself, a long needle is inserted through your back into one kidney. This sounds perfectly horrid, but it doesn't hurt, just so long as you don't

use your imagination. A surgeon guides the needle into the kidney and then snips some renal tissue. You can actually hear these snips—three, in my case—which startled the heck out of me.

My disease is called Primary Focal Segmental Glomerulosclerosis, FSGS for short. Three adjectives cling to the name, none susceptible to ambiguity: *progressive, irreversible*, and *incurable*. At first, I had trouble repeating these. But not anymore. Now, sometimes, I perform a minor riff, switching in *fatal* for *incurable*. Not long ago, the diagnosis of a fatal disease would be accompanied by a confident textbook prognosis, as in, "You have between *this* and *that* amount of time to live." Today, predicting a person's dying can sound more like predicting the futures market. Survival keeps getting extended by the most wondrous, death-defying, inventions—alchemical pharmaceuticals, futuristic diagnostic machines, and surgical robots. Physicians resist putting a number on dying because there are always "a few more things we could try." Telling one's family and friends that one is dying can leave the question of *when* suspended high in the oxygen tent for an improbably long time.

My longest hospital stay to date has been eleven days. Experiencing acute kidney failure, I was admitted to the burn unit, because of its sterile environment. For the first several days, my wrists and hands, feet and ankles, face and abdomen, remained swollen beyond recognition. My legs became as rigid as an overstuffed doll's. Whenever I tried to get out of bed, I looked like the Michelin Man attempting the pommel horse.

My roommate and I—he was there for an amputation—watched demonstrations from the Middle East on our separate TVs. We watched the Super Bowl together. I cheered for the offense. He booed the defense. For four mornings in a row, a nice chaplain stopped by to bestow blessings.

My roommate always said "No, thanks." I always said "Yes, please." On the fifth day, I fessed up that I didn't share the chaplain's religion and had been receiving her blessings under false pretenses. She tried to mask her disapproval, soldiering on bravely. "Bless you anyway," she said, and blessed me anyway. After that, she didn't return.

Failing kidneys can be uncomfortable, but they're not painful. At least, mine aren't. Not yet. The sole exception was a particular potassium treatment, my third one. For this procedure, you lie on a hospital bed with a plastic bag containing clear liquid attached by IV to your right arm. Pressure cuff and oxygen clamp attach to left arm and index finger. Before starting the IV drip, a nurse warns that "you'll feel a burning sensation," and that "it's going to hurt." For my first two sessions, that was true: it did hurt, but not too bad. My third time, however, was a different story. Pain zoomed right past my threshold. "Stop this!" I screamed. My heart monitor went berserk. The nurse rushed around the side of the bed and stopped the IV.

She said it might help if she slowed the drip, and left the room to consult with her supervisor. A few minutes later, she returned to report, apologetically, "I'm not allowed to do that. The drip rate is regulation." I said I'd give it another go.

She waited while I took a few deep breaths, and then she turned on the valve. I watched the drip begin again into the plastic tubing. One. Two. Three. Four.

"*Stop*!"

My heart monitor went crazy, again.

The nurse turned off the IV drip, put a cool hand on my forehead, adjusted the rate to half, and started it again. For this act of insubordination, she risked getting written up. I felt the familiar burning sensation from previous treatments. Not bad, really, all things considered.

Two symptoms of kidney failure are fatigue and weakness, the first more annoying to me than the second. I've tried different approaches to ameliorating increasing fatigue. I've tried apportioning energy evenly throughout a day. I've tried banking it for two days and then spending it on the third. Neither works. The best approach, I've found, is to expend all my energy in one fell swoop. This surge usually lasts for about four hours, during which time I imagine that I'm giving a performance of *King Lear*. I pretend to be Derek Jacobi or Christopher Plummer—the first is seventy-six years old, the second eighty-five, and I'm sixty-four—and give it everything I've got, starting with "Attend the lords of France and Burgundy" and keeping up the intensity clear through to "Look on her! Look her lips, look there, look there!" In the future, as my stamina diminishes, I plan to switch from Shakespeare to Ibsen, probably *Ghosts* or *The Master Builder*. When energy declines still further, I'm debating between Samuel Beckett and Neil Simon. Simon would be more fun, but Beckett would be more challenging. There's time yet to decide. Meanwhile, it's *King Lear* all the way. Who could ask for anything more?

Some nights, I have trouble sleeping. That's when I tiptoe into the living room, lie down on the sofa, and listen to music. I've become a groupie of Hector Berlioz, wild for his *Requiem*. I've probably listened to the entire thing twenty times. It calls for an enormous chorus and orchestra, plus antiphonal brass choirs that play halfway back in Carnegie Hall, which means that Robert Spano, the conductor, must have eyes in the back of his head. Who'd believe that a Mass for the dead could be so majestic, so uplifting? Benjamin Britten is another composer I've come to admire. His *War Requiem*, however, does not inspire middle-of-the-night reveries. I've listened to the first two minutes of that composition exactly once. It's the scariest music I've ever heard, unless you count Elvira Gulch's maniacal bike ride with Toto trapped inside her handlebar basket. Both compositions are enough to make a boy want to run into the kitchen and hide under the table.

Our living-room sofa is made of leather and wonderfully cool to the touch. I'm almost always hot. Lying on it, on my back, I peer through the picture window at the silhouettes of trees. On occasion, in the moonlight, I catch a glimpse of our neighborhood hawk, perched on the highest branch of the center tree. Every night I spot at least one shooting star, sometimes four or five. Seeing them, I always wish for the same things. A left-handed starter for the Yankees. Calorie-free Girl Scout cookies. A lap pool. I should have known that my shooting stars weren't really shooting stars, but jetliners descending steeply into Newark Liberty, twelve miles away. If you wish upon a Boeing 737, you do not get a swimming pool. I keep wishing for one anyway, just in case some 3:00 a.m. United flight turns out to be a shooting star after all. Do not let cynicism screw up your chances for a calorie-free Thin Mint. That's what I believe.

Around sunrise, I like to play the piano. In the spring, for the past two years, a mama bird has nested her babies in a tall bush just outside our window. The babies, when they're not sleeping or eating, like to sing along with my piano. I'll play a slow arpeggio and then stop. They'll chirp a response. I'll play another arpeggio and stop again. They'll chirp another response. We can keep this up for minutes, like monks chanting in a darkened sanctuary, except our chants are jolly. The birds' favorite tunes are *Autumn in New York* and *Moonlight Becomes You*.

St. John of the Cross was a sixteenth-century Carmelite mystic, very spooky. The only thing I know about him is that he wrote a poem titled "Dark Night of the Soul." Today, that phrase refers to the deep end of depression, where, it happens, I once swam many years ago and nearly drowned. That was then. Nowadays, happy to report, despite having this fatal disease, I float on my back through starry nights of contentment. ■

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Libertarianism's Iron Cage

From Ayn Rand to Rand Paul

Alan Wolfe

In the past decade, libertarianism in the United States has come in from the cold. Once a fringe political movement associated with cranks, conspiracy theorists, and a few economists, it is now an ascendant force within one of our two major political parties. The change can be measured in the difference between the trajectory of Ron Paul, the Texas congressman who ran for president once as a Libertarian and twice as a Republican, and that of his son Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, a candidate for the 2016 Republican nomination. Despite having a devoted following, Paul *père* was never a real contender for the White House; he was always an outlier and long shot in the GOP field. Paul *fils*, by contrast, has been treated as a major player by the GOP establishment and the media alike. Meanwhile, causes long dear to libertarians have become nationally prominent, including same-sex marriage, the legalization of marijuana, and opposition to the government's surveillance programs—the last spurred by a self-described libertarian, Edward Snowden. In the United States today, libertarianism is hailed by many as the solution to an economy and society stuck in bureaucratic mud, and candidates of all stripes can be found flirting with libertarian themes.

The movement's growing momentum derives in part from the largesse of the billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch. The latter ran as the Libertarian Party's vice-presidential candidate in 1980, and the two brothers have continued to give generously to libertarian organizations like the Cato Institute, the D.C.-based think tank. The Kochs now spend even more money promoting Republican candidates who lean libertarian, and in the post–*Citizens United* era, this strategy has given them and their political philosophy enormous influence. But libertarianism has also been attracting converts from left of center, especially among younger voters who find its anti-political, live-and-let-live message a refreshing departure from the meddling of big-government liberalism and culture-war conservatism. Indeed, many advocates of libertarianism present their position as a pure form of liberalism, and describe themselves as "classical liberals," equally committed to economic and civil liberty, and equally opposed to state bureaucracy and the legal enforcement of moral codes.

Given such confusing alignments, it might be useful to sketch in some political terms and pedigrees. Is libertarianism in fact conservative, or liberal? In 1960, Friedrich von Hayek, the Austrian-born economist and political philosopher known for his unswerving advocacy of free markets, published an essay titled "Why I Am Not a Conservative." Though Hayek's work in economics has appealed enormously to the American right, his self-assessment was correct: the version of laissez-faire capitalism he promulgated allowed little room for tradition, religion, locality, or other core concepts embraced by conservative thinkers from Edmund Burke to Michael Oakeshott. This is not to say that Hayek's free-market fundamentalism is liberal, however. Where Adam Smith's free market would liberate individuals from the caprices of an inflexible mercantilism, Hayek's would chain individuals to a system of rules over which they have no control and which they cannot, by themselves, fully understand. As political philosophies, the liberal tradition to which Smith belongs, and the libertarian one, which includes Hayek, have little in common—and indeed are often mutually antagonistic.

Let me be clear that in criticizing libertarianism, I'm not dismissing its priorities wholesale. I am not condemning policies that break up monopolies in favor of a greater emphasis on choice, for instance; and while I have some misgivings about school vouchers, I also believe that inner-city parents should have the same flexibility of options enjoyed by wealthier, suburban parents. On another subject, there is nothing wrong with, and much right about, relying on private institutions such as churches to help those who cannot help themselves. A number of libertarian intellectuals, including a number of gay thinkers, have enriched our understanding of the importance of personal liberty. And of course we should be open to a variety of ways of making government function better.

Libertarianism, however, is not just a set of policy prescriptions, but an ideology. It is, moreover, a *total* ideology, one that addresses every aspect of how people live. There is a libertarian way of riding a bicycle, of taking your medicine, finding a spouse, giving blood, and even calling a cab (can

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you say, "Uber?"). Where liberalism raises questions, libertarians seek answers, and always find the right ones. Their philosophy is an antidote to the doubt, inconsistency, and vagueness that has always been built into liberalism. Libertarians come in different forms, and can argue vehemently over concepts and applications. Yet there nonetheless does exist a general libertarian outlook on life—and it is very different from the liberal one.

Ron (right) & Rand Paul

GAGE SKIDMORE

Perhaps the best place to begin distinguishing these two outlooks is the same place that liberals and libertarians themselves invariably start—namely, with that mystery known as human nature. What is the relationship between fundamental human capacities and the challenges—and rewards—of freedom? "He who lets the world choose his plan of life for him," John Stuart Mill famously observed in *On Liberty*, "has no need of any other faculty than that of ape-like imitation." Published in 1859, ten years before Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, Mill's essay was inspired by the writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who had added a touch of German romanticism to English ideas about individualism. We live for more than simply being free, Humboldt reminded his readers. We live to improve, to make and then remake ourselves in a never-ending state of self-development. Apes do not.

Were Mill writing today, his points of comparison with human beings would likely come from technology rather than biology. Computers do many of the things we human beings do, after all, and often much better than we do. But even those impressed with computers' ability to play chess or translate a language are generally unwilling to predict the capacity of such machines to love, be influenced by conscience, or change their minds in response to the contexts surrounding them. How can a computer be "free"? Liberty is for people. Its exercise requires a being capable of knowing how to put that liberty to good use.

Computers "think" by following mathematical rules known as algorithms. So, in the libertarian view, do human beings. Indeed, the libertarian conception of human nature seems curiously, even paradoxically, machine-like. Seemingly free to make our own decisions, in the libertarian utopia we would in fact be little more than slaves of rules that conform our choices to the rigidities of marketplace rationality. We would not give special preference to our loved ones merely because we love them. We would honor and admire our country, but only insofar as it followed libertarian ideals; if it did not—if its citizens voted, say, for a system based on altruistic precepts—we would hate it and seek its destruction, as John Galt and his followers did in Ayn Rand's popular novel *Atlas Shrugged*. At a personal level, emotions such as envy, guilt, and sympathy would be forbidden us. Human nature, libertarians insist, is one thing and one thing only: the capacity to make choices based on the rational calculation of self-interest. Great creative capitalists, they believe, understand this; everyone else is suffering from collectivism's version of what Marxists used to call false consciousness.

Better than any other political philosophy, libertarianism embodies Max Weber's nightmare of an iron cage, the apotheosis and province of "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart." But where Weber lamented the severe rationality that turns man into a "nullity," libertarians praise it. Any motive other than rationality is a lower one. We are born to think, and the best among us are those who think the hardest, no matter where their thoughts may lead. Consequences are irrelevant to the libertarian; one must never be distracted from the one true course.

If these ideas are familiar to Americans, it is mostly due to the ever-resurgent legacy of Rand (1905–1982), the Russian-born philosophical novelist, whose oeuvre established her as the quintessential libertarian and inspired a kind of pop philosophical cult. It is common among contemporary libertarians to deny Rand membership in the club, but that is mostly because her ideological stridency is so revealing of libertarianism's limits. Though Rand styled herself a heroic thinker about heroic thinkers, she did not in fact develop her ideas all by herself. As a young woman she met and befriended other libertarian thinkers, including Rose Wilder Lane (daughter of the author of *Little House on the Prairie*) and Isabel Paterson, a leading columnist for the *New York Herald Tribune*, who helped Rand's *The Fountainhead* become a bestseller. Rand eventually broke with Paterson, part of a lifelong habit of cultivating cult-like followers, only to renounce them once they showed themselves insufficiently devoted to her. Even Rand's most devoted follower

(and eventual lover), Nathaniel Branden, would be forced out of the closed circle, as Rand indulged another of her Stalinesque purges.

It was ironic, to be sure, that this woman who fled the Soviet Union in its infancy, and excoriated its political oppression, would mimick in her own life the regime's worst features. Rand's habit of brutally excommunicating her followers was not merely a personal quirk, however, but rather a tactic inherent in libertarianism itself, a creed obsessed with ideological purity and given to ceaseless sectarian purges. As soon as the Koch brothers bought themselves influence in the Cato Institute, for instance, they immediately began to rid themselves of those big-tent libertarians, such as Cato's president Ed Crane, who wanted the organization to attract libertarians from the left as well as the right. Like Ayn Rand, the Koch brothers took a "my way or the highway" approach, surrounding themselves with those who were in complete agreement with them. And that agreement had to be *truly* complete. "Koch called out Milton Friedman and Alan Greenspan specifically as sellouts to the system, merely trying to make government work more efficiently when the true libertarian should be tearing it out at the root," Brian Doherty, a historian sympathetic to the movement, has written.

This sort of denunciation is endemic to the school Ayn Rand did so much to promote. Name a libertarian, no matter how extreme, and another will turn up who finds that person too wishy-washy. Murray Rothbard, one of those cast out of the Randian inner circle for nonconforming views, hated the sectarianism of those who worshiped on the altar of *The Fountainhead*, calling them "posturing, pretentious, humorless, robotic, nasty, simple-minded jackasses." But Rothbard himself had no patience for anyone he considered soft. "Milton Friedman is the Establishment Court's libertarian," he once opined, declaring it "high time to call...a statist a statist." Ayn Rand herself described Friedman and George Stigler, another Chicago economist, as "a pair of reds," and dismissed Hayek as "'real poison' who does more good to the Communist cause than to our own." In the world of libertarianism, everyone is a suspect until proven innocent.

Why this closed-minded and tightly guarded boundary maintenance in the libertarian movement? The key may lie in the term "libertarian organization," with its obvious contradictions. It is difficult to be a passionate advocate for freedom and also a member of a tightly knit group. Individualistic to the core, libertarians practice what Margaret Thatcher preached: there is no such thing as society. Yet while they despise the left, they often copy leftists in their behavior. Take, for example, Rothbard, an extreme-right libertarian who behaved in a sectarian manner characteristic of the extreme left. "Always conscious of movement strategy, he looked to ideological revolutionaries of the past, such as Lenin, for strategic insights into how to effect ideological change on a national level," Doherty writes. "One of Rothbard's pet Leninist tropes was the idea of the cadre—the dedicated inner circle of revolutionaries, 100 percent reliable in ideology and action, around which a movement could crystallize."

Rand, as we have seen, approached politics in much the same way. And, as one of her biographers points out, her fiction closely resembled Soviet realism. When John Galt and his friends leave society behind for their hiding place in the mountains, they are acting as any Leninist vanguard would. "In essence," concludes journalist Jonathan Chait, in one of the best analyses of Rand's ideas, "Rand advocated a reverse Marxism. In the Marxist analysis, workers produce all the value, and capitalists merely leech off their labor. Rand posited the opposite."

Libertarians like to see themselves, in the tradition of Montesquieu and Madison, as wary of power and ever eager to limit its reach. In reality, these are people who hate the state but love power; they typically seek to advance liberty by exercising a distinctly authoritarian personality and politics. Everything must be their way—or they will work to destroy it. Here, more than anywhere else, is where libertarianism and liberalism take different paths. As thinkers such as Cass Sunstein and Stephen Holmes have demonstrated, rights are indeed checks against the power of an arbitrary state. But in the absence of power to protect their rights, people have no such guarantees; they require the state, and its ability to further human development, in order to limit the State. No such paradoxes are available to the libertarian mind, which abhors the messy reality of modern liberal democracy. A is always A, Rand repeatedly proclaimed; A is never B.

Nowhere do libertarians express more passionate conviction than in their abhorrence of coercion. The great sin of government regulation, in their view, is not that it seeks to promote equality (misguidedly, they think), but that it involves coercion. Regulation, as the libertarian law professor Richard Epstein calls it, is a "taking," and therefore unconstitutional. Each individual is entitled to what he or she owns, and if that person does not give permission for the government to take it away, then any such action by government is coercive. (The paramount bête noire in the libertarian panoply of enemy principles is eminent domain. *Kelo v. The City of New London*, a 2005 Supreme Court ruling that allowed cities to acquire private property in order to promote economic development, is the movement's *Dred Scott* decision.) In reality, however, the true unrestrained power in the world of Ayn Rand is the power of acting only in one's own self-interest. The potential violence of the state pales beside the violence required to build Howard Roark's skyscrapers; indeed, it is only by seeking the state's power that individuals can find any protection against the rapaciousness to which they are subjected in the workplace. Laissez-faire capitalism is not a beneficial harmony of interests to which we will return if we can only get government out of our lives. Far from constituting a refuge from violence, laissez-faire is a regime imposed by force. Unlike the rest of us, the

Koch brothers have sufficient funds to impose their vision of the good society on the rest of us. The Koch brothers do not hate the state; they crave its use.

And so while libertarianism may at first glance seem to have a fair amount in common with liberalism, in fact, a more revealing comparison from the history of political philosophy lies in the work of one of liberalism's greatest enemies—Carl Schmitt, the right-wing German political philosopher (and Nazi sympathizer) of the 1930s and '40s. Both worldviews divide the political world into two camps, friend and enemy. Both focus on times of emergency and crisis rather than on everyday life. No wonder that libertarians find in gun rights the ultimate vision of the good society: where the state is absent, vigilante violence will flourish. There are few pacifists among libertarian activists and thinkers; though the movement theoretically opposes force, it has no place in its ranks for those who reject war. At times a libertarian such as Rand Paul speaks in the language of isolationism; what he offers, however, are the sentiments not of a proponent of world peace, but of a loner hunkered down with his gun, waiting for catastrophe.

This dreary image reveals libertarianism's angst-laden vision of a society in perilous decline. It reminds us that libertarianism—like Puritan theology and unlike liberalism and progressivism—is declensionist, viewing our world as hopelessly tainted by sin, irretrievably distant from its Edenic origins. In libertarianism, the state is always growing, taxes are always rising, freedom is always disappearing, and the only hope lies in taking pride in being what libertarian social critic Albert Jay Nock called "a remnant." There is a reason all the good guys in *Atlas Shrugged* withdraw into their hiding place in the mountains. Libertarianism chooses exit over engagement. To work with a corrupt society is to be corrupted by it.

There is a reason all the good guys in *Atlas Shrugged* withdraw into their hiding place in the mountains. Libertarianism chooses exit over engagement. To work with a corrupt society is to be corrupted by it.

The overt preoccupation with decline leaves libertarianism politically vulnerable; citizens in a democracy want to hear a bit of good news every now and then. Although libertarianism is a more powerful political force in the United States than in Europe, its greatest thinkers were European by birth—Hayek, Mises, and Rand, but also Frederick Bastiat, Carl Menger, and Tibor Machan, among numerous others—and the Euro-pessimism that clings to it would seem foreign to the sunny American optimism that made Ronald Reagan so popular. It is surprising that Republicans today, especially those committed to libertarianism, view Reagan as a saint who did no wrong. Reagan's actual record—he left the welfare state by and large in place while raising taxes—hardly reflects a libertarian credo; and his appeal to the better angels of our nature is just as alien. Both Ayn Rand and Ronald Reagan spent considerable years in Hollywood, and seemingly absorbed opposing aspects of its aesthetic: Reagan its sunny happy endings, Rand its ominous *noir*. The lesson that routinely eludes proponents of libertarianism—a lesson that American preachers, even those associated with evangelical churches, have learned—is that contemporary Americans generally resist making too many judgments of others, and *vehemently* resist others making judgments of them. By and large, uplift has replaced sin in American preaching.

And uplift is hardly the libertarian forte. Randians do not generally advocate violence in order to bring about the society they favor. But there is a violent side to libertarianism nonetheless, a ready hatred that many libertarians have difficulty keeping under wraps. Rose Wilder Lane once let it slip that she hated FDR so much that she hoped someone would kill him. And Ayn Rand's fiction is drenched in contempt for those peons who fail to appreciate the benefits they glean from the creative class. In one of the greatest lines ever to appear in a book review, the ex-Communist Whittaker Chambers penetrated Rand's utopianism to expose the rigid state power that lay behind it: "From almost any page of *Atlas Shrugged*," he wrote in the *National Review*, "a voice can heard, from painful necessity, commanding, 'To the gas chambers—go.'" Men and women without a conscience, Chambers understood, are capable of doing anything.

Chambers comprehended both the rigidity of libertarian singlemindedness and the mercilessness it entailed. Such qualities, again, would seem to make the creed ill-suited to a diverse democracy. The political philosopher Isaiah Berlin grew up in much the same way—indeed, in some of the very same places—as Ayn Rand, but unlike her, he became a proponent of value pluralism. By all three criteria Berlin used to define pluralism, libertarianism fails, and does so via a threefold insistence: 1) that there is a true answer to all questions; 2) that such truths are discoverable through reason alone and will eventually be proven correct; and 3) that anything discovered as truthful cannot contradict anything else discovered as truthful. Take, for example, the Friedmanites who insisted that the free market would

have worked in Chile if it had been given a real chance, or the current governor of Kansas, whose faith in supply-side economics cannot be shaken: no matter how contrary the evidence, libertarianism can never fail, but can only be failed. There is no trial-and-error method, because there is no error. Strikingly modern in many ways, libertarianism has nothing in common with the most modern of all methodologies, the scientific one.

Berlin's objection to this kind of intellectual monism paralleled his objection to totalitarianism. For him, the good society was not one that proclaimed itself the embodiment of everything virtuous. He was far too Kantian for that, habitually citing Kant's dictum that "out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made." Rand, by contrast, viewed Kant as the most evil philosopher—her term—who ever lived. Beyond Rand's sometimes laughable efforts to appear Kant's equal in epistemology, it seems she was especially offended by the Kantian moral ideal of disinterest. In her view, the act of willing our actions to conform with a universal moral law marks the first step toward subjection.

Such dogged monism typifies a creed that goes out of its way to reduce the complexity of the world to one thing and one thing only—whether it be how we make decisions, what decisions we make, or what our decisions imply for others. The often-noted attraction of libertarianism to college students is, I believe, a reflection of this radically simplifying inclination. There is something deeply satisfying to young minds in the Faustian idea that all of reality can be unlocked with one simple key. Only when they grow out of that fantasy, and begin to understand just how complex the world actually is, do some adherents of libertarianism begin to realize the limits of what was once so appealing.

Finally, one must note libertarianism's abiding relationship to atheism. Ayn Rand hated God like she hated Kant, and for much the same reason. Not all libertarians necessarily follow suit; there is, for example, a certain kind of libertarianism that appeals to Baptists, who throughout their history often rejected the authority of the state. Among the many recipients of the Koch brothers' bounty, meanwhile, are the Acton Institute, an organization devoted to reconciling laissez-faire capitalism with Catholic orthodoxy, as well as those Catholic universities willing to establish special programs of study consistent with the Koch ideological agenda. Although the Kochs themselves are prochoice and pro–gay marriage, they have sought to make common cause with Catholic social conservatives willing to promote their creed of deregulation and privatization.

Still, Christian libertarianism is not a term one commonly hears—not least of all because the libertarian lineage traces to a form of Social Darwinism, embodied in writers such as Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner, that was aggressively atheistic in its very inception. Christian liberals, on the other hand, are plentiful, and have long been so. Indeed, it is because the social Darwinists so strongly endorsed the theory of evolution that religious believers of the time insisted on a Christian ideal of charity as an alternative: Walter Rauschenbusch, founder of the Social Gospel, and Leo XIII, who issued *Rerum novarum* with its justification of labor unions, filled the gap that social Darwinism left open. Some celebrated liberals, such as Mill, wrote rarely about God. Others, such as Thomas Hill Green and R. H. Tawney, did so frequently; even John Rawls grew up in a religious home and considered theology as a career. Liberals, in short, can opt to choose God. Libertarians either cannot—or must twist themselves in knots in order to do so. The church, to most libertarians, is just another state. If modern society witnesses a war between science and God, libertarians stand in opposition to both.

All of this helps explain the gyrations of those who insist on being both libertarian-minded and Christian. Take, for instance, Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, a Catholic and fiscal conservative—and chair of the House Budget Committee—who is routinely touted as the brain behind Republican fiscal policy. In a speech in 2005, when very few people were watching (save one who managed to get it on tape), Ryan allowed that "the reason I got involved in public service by and large, if I had to credit one thinker, one person, it would be Ayn Rand." After gaining the Republican vice-presidential nomination, Ryan, of course, changed his tune: now Ayn Rand was only one of the thinkers who influenced him—in general rather than in the specifics, and in any case not really all that much. But cynics think the true Ryan is the one who takes *Atlas Shrugged* as his Bible, and I agree. Behind all the charts and tables, a Paul Ryan budget is a blueprint for social meanness, and those who delve deeply into it cannot be faulted for concluding that Ryan is a Randian through and through. Like those who came before him—and in my view, fortunately—Ryan is too much the social Darwinist to be a significant Catholic force in American life.

Has libertarianism had its day? As a political force, perhaps not. Democracy, after all, requires an opposition party; and as an ideology for those out of power, libertarianism, with its relentlessly oppositional appeal, makes for a near-perfect fit. Yet democracy also requires ideals to live by, and that, I think, is where the severity of libertarianism's limitations becomes clear. Of course it may turn out that Americans dismayed by political cynicism and discord increasingly opt for a dysfunctional political system, preferring that nothing get done by government—in many ways, the actual libertarian program. But if we do ever long once again for leadership, and in that longing regain and express at least a modicum of trust in governance, then whoever ends up governing us well will need something more than a political philosophy based in pitilessness, rigidity, and a desiccated view of human nature. ■

CREDIT: BRET ROBERTSON

What Happened in Vegas

Battling Nevada's Underage Sex Trade

Frank Pierson

Andrea Swanson was raised in a Catholic military family in Virginia and married a military man. Her husband, Rod, served as an officer in the U.S. Army, became an FBI agent, then rose to supervision of the Joint Terrorism Task Force in Las Vegas. That's where the couple raised their four children, two girls and two boys. Andrea worked as a school nurse. Her husband was sent to Iraq and other foreign countries. Two of their four children would end up entering the armed services—one as a Marine lieutenant and the other as a sergeant in the Eighty-Second Airborne Division. Both deployed abroad.

And then there was Hannah, their youngest child. Hannah Swanson was attending one of Las Vegas's better public high schools when she met a man named Kobe. He was considerably older, said he loved her, made all the right moves, and had plenty of cash. In fact, Kobe was a pimp. He soon had Hannah, still a juvenile, performing acts of prostitution. When she was busted by the vice section of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, Hannah called Kobe, not her mother. But he refused to bail her out. Andrea Swanson discovered what had happened to her daughter only when she was notified by Vice Detective Chris Baughman. After posting Hannah's bail, Andrea got a crash course in how the Las Vegas sex industry works. She discovered that the calluses on her daughter's feet were from walking the streets of Boulder Highway, the Strip, and Tropicana off the Strip. The bruises were from encounters with johns or her pimp.

When stories of minors being lured into the sex industry began surfacing in churches and schools around the Las Vegas Valley in 2010, Nevadans for the Common Good (NCG)—a partnership between religious institutions and organizers with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)—decided to investigate. NCG discovered that minors had become an increasingly important but mostly hidden part of Nevada's thriving sex industry. Religious leaders could not ignore the situation once they understood it; they had to do something, but what? They weren't sure at first, but they knew that any serious effort to take on the problem would involve risks. There was a lot of money at stake in the pimping of underage girls, and those who profited most from it were not above using violence to protect their turf. And, of course, there would be no guarantee of success. The sex industry had a lot of friends in high places.

NCG finally settled on a clear public-policy goal: change state law to strengthen the hand of law enforcement and treat minors caught up in the sex industry as victims rather than criminals. Law-enforcement professionals, academics, judges, service agencies, and a state assemblyman were ready

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with specific proposals. But there wasn't nearly enough public pressure to drive legislation through both state chambers and to the governor's desk. This political problem became the focus of NCG as the organization grew in strength, numbers, and recognition.

The buying and selling of minors for the sexual gratification of adults has deep roots in Las Vegas, which has become the capital of prostitution in North America. From the nineteenth century on, the mining towns dotting the Nevada landscape were tolerant of prostitution, which was considered unavoidable, if not necessary, in communities populated mainly by fortune-seeking bachelors. As a result, Nevada's leaders grew to promote a kind of labor market—buying, selling, intimidating, brutalizing women—that would have disgusted polite society on both of the nation's coasts and most places in between.

During most of the state's early history, Las Vegas was little more than a dusty outpost, but today the metropolitan area has about 2 million residents, thanks mainly to the success of the gaming industry. Violence, sexual abuse, and drug addiction are the dark underside of the city's casino glitz. As the city's own ad campaign puts it: What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. That promise appeals to many different kinds of people, including some willing to pay more for a teenage prostitute than for an adult. Lieutenant Karen Hughes, who heads the vice section of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, reports that, between 1994 and 2013, her agency identified 2,377 victims of sex trafficking under the age of eighteen. The vice section identified 107 such victims in 2012 and 148 in 2013—a 38 percent increase in one year. Of the victims identified in these two years, 91 percent were between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, but the youngest was just thirteen. Five were boys. A majority of the victims were African American (67 percent), though African Americans make up just 11.1 percent of the city's population. Most victims are recruited locally by pimps and traffickers who meet their victims at schools, malls, service agencies, and local neighborhoods. The rest are brought in from outside the city.

Even seasoned professionals like Hughes are repulsed by what they have found among underage victims of sex trafficking. Hughes told me about one victim whose face was smashed with an aluminum baseball bat. Another was slashed with a straight razor. Some just disappear. Once minors get tangled up in the industry, they find it very difficult to get out: most go on to become adult prostitutes. Habit, fear, and stigma block the way out of the sex trade.

The politics and financing of Nevada's sex industry are obscure. No one is quite sure how much the industry's powerful moguls know about the highly lucrative trafficking of minors that goes on in the shadows of the legal sex trade. Dr. Melissa Farley, the author of *Prostitution and Trafficking in Nevada* (2007), claims that organized crime is heavily involved in the trafficking of minors in Las Vegas, which takes place covertly in the back rooms of the larger casino resorts and more openly in the smaller strip clubs. What's clear is that the power players in Las Vegas have not done much to put an end to the commercial exploitation of minors. Underage prostitution would not have continued for so long and on such a scale unless some powerful people had been willing to look the other way.

Underage prostitution would not have continued for so long and on such a scale unless some powerful people had been willing to look the other way.

Others, though, began to pay close attention, including the city's religious communities. Nevadans for the Common Good began a careful study of the cash flows and power relationships that sustain the trafficking of minors. At the same time, the organization began to build a large, nonpartisan political movement that could train a spotlight on the sex industry's illegal practices and galvanize public opinion against it. But NCG quickly ran into denial in some unlikely places, including the Clark County school police force. When NCG leaders complained about pimp networks recruiting in and around public schools, district law-enforcement officials replied that nothing like that was happening on their watch. And yet, NCG's worst fears were confirmed by cabbies, concierges, strip-club operators, bartenders, street vendors, and hotel check-in clerks, who were offered kickbacks for delivering paying customers to the city's purveyors of both underage and adult prostitutes.

In 2010, as they continued to do their research and began to organize, NCG leaders met Republican Assemblyman John Hambrick, a former Secret Service agent. Four years earlier, Hambrick had begun speaking out about the trafficking of minors. But even the fairly modest initiatives he sponsored went nowhere in the state's legislature. Hambrick was persuaded to join forces with NCG: while he continued the push for a new law, NCG mobilized a grassroots constituency to put pressure on lawmakers. The organization's leaders put together several hundred small-group meetings

where people affected by the problem could express their concerns and ask questions. The first fruit of this combined effort was another modest bill, sponsored by Hambrick, that vacated convictions for sex-trafficking victims who had been prosecuted for prostitution-related offenses. The bill was passed and signed into law in 2011. But three tougher bills—one that would have linked the penalties for those who buy sex from minors to the age of their victims (the younger the victim, the harsher the penalty), another that would have ramped up criminal and civil penalties for pimping, and a third that would have clarified precisely which crimes were related to the trafficking of minors—all died in committee.

The failure of these three bills led to a closer examination of the links between the sex industry and Nevada's elected officials. Who, exactly, were they afraid of offending? Meanwhile, NCG brought more and more people into its project. It organized training sessions, which led to neighborhood presentations, sermons, and position papers. The intensive organizing work came together on May 22, 2012. NCG convened over fifteen hundred leaders from sixty community-based institutions in the first Las Vegas Valley Community Convention. Assemblyman Hambrick was present, along with Lt. Hughes. Four bishops, three imams, and several rabbis also attended the convention, along with other local ministers and clergy. Significantly, the chief of staff for Nevada's Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto also showed up. Andrea Swanson was invited to tell her daughter's story to the assembled community leaders, who listened in stunned silence.

This event marked a turning point. The huge turnout, which included people from various backgrounds and both political parties, indicated that a serious effort to combat child sex trafficking was not only the right thing to do; it might also be politically feasible. Attorney General Masto assigned her top aide, Michon Martin, to scour other states for model legislation, then pulled together a task force that drafted a groundbreaking omnibus bill—Assembly Bill 67, which defined sex trafficking in Nevada as a crime, sharply ramped up penalties for pimps, gave law enforcement new resources for tracking and prosecuting offenders, and redefined children working in the sex trade as victims rather than as criminals.

Still, despite their organizing campaign's growing momentum, NCG worried that the new legislation would fall prey to the same political pressures that had defeated their less ambitious proposals three years before. The sex industry brings in hundreds of millions of dollars, and uses some of this money to influence state lawmakers in ways that are often difficult to track. There was of course no public opposition to an effort to prevent child sex trafficking, but powerful private interests would do everything they could to block it. Against these interests, NCG had to gather as large a coalition as possible, one that included academic experts,

Andrea Swanson

COURTESY FRANK PIERSON

various religious leaders, lobbyists, community organizers, and those, like Andrea Swanson, whose families had been directly affected by the market in underage prostitutes.

NCG leaders took their case to anyone who would listen. They met with their legislators, key committee heads, prominent gaming-industry executives, local public officials, and key social-service agencies like the Salvation Army. They spoke to reporters, sent thousands of emails and postcards, and worked the phones. Finally, they dispatched busloads of committed activists to the state capital, Carson City, to press for passage of AB 67. On the last day of the legislative session, the bill passed unanimously. For once, the voices of ordinary Nevada citizens had prevailed.

NCG leaders were encouraged by their legislative victory, but they know that there is still much work to be done: a single law, even one as tough as AB 67, won't solve such a complicated problem by itself. Now established as a nonpartisan political force, NCG is working with a growing cadre of neighborhood leaders, religious communities, schools, unions, businesses, and law-enforcement to protect young people in Las Vegas from an industry that will satisfy every kind of sexual appetite for a price. And the organization has expanded the scope of its efforts. Two years after its first assembly, NCG convened a larger gathering in May 2014 to put together a broad agenda of community improvement, one that addresses issues such as school funding, elder care, and immigrant rights. NCG members have come to understand that what was true of child sex trafficking is also true of many of the other major social issues facing Nevada: they will be successfully addressed by government only when active citizens—and the institutions they support—decide together that the time has come to do something about them. ■

Stop Protesting, Start Organizing

Unions & the Democratic Party

Steven Greenhouse

Toward the beginning of his new book, Thomas Geoghegan tells of a dispiriting conversation he had with a friend who works at a Ford assembly plant in Chicago. As part of the plant's two-tier pay scale, new workers begin at $14 an hour, half the rate of many of its experienced workers. Not only that, new hires receive no health insurance during their first nine months, and do not join the pension plan for thirty-six months, "and even then it's just a 401(k)."

"You see," Geoghegan's friend says of America's manufacturers, "they don't have to move to the South now to get $14 an hour. They can get it right here." Yes, even in Chicago, that long-time bastion of labor might. "We're all Southerners now," Geoghegan writes with sarcasm and regret.

In his brightly written book, *Only One Thing Can Save Us: Why America Needs a New Kind of Labor Movement* (The New Press), Geoghegan—a longtime labor lawyer in Chicago—lays out many of the depressing ways that American workers have been moving backward. He describes "the little, old white-haired" Starbucks barista who has to continue working into her "golden years" to make ends meet. Then there's the road dispatcher, "the guys who come out and jump your car" if you break down and you're in an auto club. They used to be employees, but now they're independent contractors, and after they pay for gas and leasing their truck, they barely make the minimum wage.

"It's eerie to think that in the famous Great Depression play, *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets, those cabdrivers who went on strike had more rights than many of us do today," Geoghegan writes. "At least in those days, unlike now, the cabdrivers still worked for actual employers; at least, unlike now, they could count on getting Social Security"—something that millions of workers who have been pushed, often fraudulently, into the independent-contractor box can no longer count on. In his let-me-count-the-ways-we've-moved-backward section, Geoghegan notes that in 1992, the richest 10 percent of Americans had twenty times as much wealth as the bottom 50 percent. By 2010, it was sixty-five times.

For Geoghegan, the overriding issue facing the nation is the decades-long slide in the wages, benefits, and treatment of American workers. And to his mind, by far the best solution to address—and redress—this problem is to rebuild the nation's languishing labor movement.

In the books's very first paragraph, he notes that he's often asked, "So, do you think 'labor' will ever come back?" His response (with a kick of the can down the road): The problem is not just bringing back labor, but bringing back the middle class.

A French venture capitalist tells the author that he sees two big differences between the United States and France. The first is the United States is much more open—it's easier to make contacts and start businesses, while the second is "there's no middle class." Geoghegan explains that middle-class workers, like clerks and construction laborers, have taken pay cuts and now start at $40,000 a year, putting their families in the "near poor" category. (I saw a recent study showing that the median wage for construction workers in Texas was just $10 to $11 an hour, around $21,000 a year—notwithstanding the industry's high fatality rate in Texas.)

A fluid writer, Geoghegan devotes the bulk of his engaging book to that famous question: What is to be done? He asks this at a time when unions seem to be going backward rather than forward in strength and numbers.

Geoghegan bemoans the enactment of recent laws that eviscerate the power of public-sector unions (Wisconsin) and sap union treasuries ("right to work laws" in Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin). He writes, "Our current American labor law model has been quite good at holding down unions, but conservatives can't seem to leave it alone." In other words, conservatives are all too happy to kick labor when it's down.

Geoghegan has various smart (and perhaps wishful) prescriptions for how labor might right its listing ship. He warns that traditional strikes—for instance, eight hundred workers at a tire plant walking out, with little public support and media attention—are not a recipe for success. It's too easy for companies to win by using replacement workers, relying on other factories, and waiting out the strikers.

Steven Greenhouse, *former labor reporter for the* New York Times, *is the author of* The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker *(Knopf).*

Strikers at a diner during the 1933 Dressmakers Union strike

Rather, Geoghegan argues, any union that hopes to emerge victorious from a strike needs to make sure its walkout is a very visible affair for which the union has lined up strong public support. That maximizes the chances of success and often helps show that unions are fighting not just for their members, but for a larger cause.

Geoghegan gives an A-plus to the Chicago Teachers Union's 2012 strike, holding it out as a model. That much-publicized walkout had overwhelming support from not just the 26,000 teachers, but also the parents of the 320,000 schoolchildren. The teachers were demanding smaller class sizes, and some held picket signs, saying, "Honk, if you want more arts education." And honk many drivers did. The union's march on City Hall drew thousands of raucous supporters and mega-media coverage. The teachers had such immense public backing that the normally super-confident mayor, Rahm Emanuel, was thrown on the defensive, and the final settlement was widely seen as a win for the teachers.

Like many union leaders, Geoghegan voices concern that the Democratic Party often takes a tepid, stand-offish approach to labor, while frequently tilting toward Wall Street and the wealthy (which is somewhat understandable, if deplorable, considering how many tens of millions of dollars are now needed for a Senate campaign, and hundreds of millions for a presidential campaign). Geoghegan complains that too many Democrats won't go to the mat for legislation that would make it easier to unionize—or legislation that would increase the 15-percent tax rate (lower than many middle-class workers pay) that hedge-fund billionaires pay on much of their earnings.

True, many Democratic lawmakers try to show their pro-worker bona fides by backing a higher minimum wage, but Geoghegan says that's not enough: "It's a way that grateful Democrats can be 'pro-labor' without actually having to be for organized labor. But raising the minimum wage absent a labor movement just keeps everything else in place. And so long as everything else is in place, the middle class keeps going down."

Labor, Geoghegan shouts as loud he can, needs to call out Democrats with the aim of transforming them from a namby-pamby, often pro–Wall Street amalgam into a solid Elizabeth Warren–Sherrod Brown–Paul Wellstone–John Lewis party, one that fights wholeheartedly for workers, and for unions. Organized labor needs to foment a crisis within the Democratic Party, the author argues, a crisis of the soul to force it to choose between Wall Street and workers. In the book, he often looks to Martin Luther King Jr., not just as a moral guide, but as a strategist. Geoghegan says labor should do the same thing to the Democrats that King and civil-rights protesters did to John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. They provoked a crisis inside the Democratic Party, by being bitten by dogs and water-cannoned in Birmingham, by being beaten in Selma. They forced the Democrats to become far more aggressive about fighting to stop racial discrimination and safeguard voting rights (even if it meant writing off many Southern white supporters).

So what does Geoghegan want his crisis to achieve? Eager to ensure that the voice of workers doesn't disappear inside today's American workplace, he hopes labor will use its crisis-fomenting to pressure and persuade Democrats to enact legislation that requires corporate boards to include worker-elected representatives. Unfortunately, Geoghegan evades a not-so-little problem: Republicans are likely to do their utmost to kill that idea, which they are likely to call socialist or communist, even though it is prevalent in capitalistic Germany.

Geoghegan says, perceptively, that in his desired crisis, weakness can succeed as much as strength. Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers were unarguably weak, but they knew how to create a spectacle, and that caused state and federal officials to respond. "If there is to be a real political disruption, better that it come now, before organized labor disappears," Geoghegan writes.

Still, he admits uncertainty about his strategy of semi-sabotage: "I worry that going out in a premeditated way to split the party may backfire. It may go way too far, or not far enough, or do both in disastrous sequence. But I also worry that with the money running out, labor has so little time. Before we disappear, we in labor have to appeal to the conscience of the party."

This book was written well before President Barack Obama—marvelously demonstrating how Democrats can do corporate America's bidding while stiffing labor—put his all into pushing through a fast-track bill to ease passage of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a twelve-nation trade and investment pact. American labor unions, joined by environmental, consumer, faith, and other groups, bitterly opposed TPP. They feared that like other trade deals—NAFTA, the South Korean trade agreement, and Chinese Permanent Normalized Trade Relations—TPP would mean a major loss of American manufacturing jobs. But Obama largely scorned labor, maintaining that TPP would help U.S. workers, although he never spelled out how (perhaps because he couldn't).

I never understood why Obama was not more forthcoming—and didn't open up and tell labor, "The United States needs TPP for geopolitical reasons, to help outmaneuver China in Asia. Remember, China is no friend of high worker standards. I, as president, recognize that TPP will hurt American workers (while it does many favors for corporations), so let's somehow engineer a grand bargain with Republicans and business to give labor some goodies it badly wants, perhaps increases in the federal minimum wage and in infrastructure spending." But Obama didn't do that. Instead he joined hands with John Boehner, Mitch McConnell, and business lobbyists and jammed fast track through, humiliating and enraging labor.

And as long as I'm criticizing Obama: Geoghegan maintains that it's stupid politically for Obama to warn that millions of Americans will be lost economically unless they get a college degree. "That means," he writes, "for 68 percent of your constituents, you're saying there's no hope, give up." He says Rick Santorum is right: Obama seems, in an insensitive, elitist way, to be writing off the 68 percent who haven't gone to college. Franklin Roosevelt, the author tells us, promised to save all of us, while Obama makes a more conditional promise—he'll just save those who obtain

college degrees. The nation is spending billions more to help those who go to college—and that's laudable, Geoghean notes, but "then the Democrats have a moral obligation to offer some kind of grand bargain to the 60 percent to 70 percent who are 'non-college.' "

As he cheers and prays for a union rebound, Geoghegan notes that in many ways the deck is stacked when it comes to unionization elections. Employers have access to workers twenty-four hours a day, can propagandize them twenty-four hours a day, while union organizers are not even allowed to set foot on company property. Often, companies fire the gutsy workers who lead unionization drives, a move that frightens other workers and cripples those drives. It often takes two to four years for the National Labor Relations Board and the courts to reinstate fired workers on the grounds that they were terminated for an illegal reason—namely, supporting a union.

Geoghegan was a pioneer in arguing that the United States needs a law under which such firings (or other punishments) would be treated as illegal discrimination, with a right to sue—just as it's illegal for an employer to discriminate against workers because of their race, religion, or sex. He wants Congress to enact a law that would make labor rights a civil right. He argues that this would go far to boost unionization efforts and deter anti-union employers from firing union supporters—with such a law, employers would fear getting sued by fired workers. The employers would then face not only lengthy litigation, but also possible fines. (Current federal law doesn't allow for fines against employers who illegally fire or otherwise penalize workers for supporting a union.)

Labor advocates will no doubt applaud this idea, but with Republicans controlling the House and Senate, it has as much chance of being enacted as a snowball in Scott Walker's or Jeb Bush's oven. So Geoghegan proposes a deal—that Congress enact a twofer, a nationwide right-to-work law (which Republicans will hail) and his labor/civil rights law. But there's a big problem with this grand bargain: in this day and age, the Republican-dominated Congress is likely to enact a nationwide right-to-work law, while scoffing at, and torpedoing, a bill giving civil-rights protections to labor rights.

In the passage from which the book takes its title, Geoghegan writes: "Labor is the one thing that can save us. But the thing that can save us is not the labor that we have now. The 'old labor' hunkering down on those big buildings in Washington can't be the instrument of our deliverance."

This book's principal failing is in not adequately laying out a vision for what a revamped labor movement would be. Moreover, Geoghegan goes too easy on organized labor. He is happy to apply the whip to Democrats and to corporate America, but not to unions. He fails to note that too many labor leaders, especially local leaders, are not bold enough. Too often union officials head their national unions or union locals for a decade or two while doing little to expand their unions or improve working conditions. In terms of elementary accountability, if union leaders don't produce, they should be voted out and replaced by people with more drive or vision. (Yes, I realize that it's hard to vote out union officials.)

Even as Geoghegan schemes and strategizes on how to revive labor, he fears that these rescue efforts might not succeed and that the voice of American workers might continue to fade. To his mind, that would be terrible—for workers' wages, for workers' happiness, and much more.

He is eager to ensure that American workers continue, somehow, to have "voice" at work. He praises Germany for its works councils—every sizable factory and workplace has a council in which rank-and-file workers join top managers to shape working conditions and company policies. He hopes that Volkswagen will soon establish a works council at its Chattanooga plant—and that it will set an example for other American companies. He also praises the way many German companies have workers on their boards of directors (called supervisory boards).

Geoghegan puts forward several shrewd, innovative strategies to expand the voice of workers, and some actually might work. With nonprofit hospitals needing charters from their states, he suggests that states—presumably beginning with liberal ones like Massachusetts or California—require nonprofit hospitals (as a condition for having their charters renewed) to have half of their board members elected by nurses, kitchen help, and other employees. With regard to for-profit corporations, he says states should exempt them from state income tax if they let employees elect one-third to half of their board's members. And he wants Obama to issue an executive order giving preference in federal contracting to companies that allow workers to elect some members of their boards.

For my money, Geoghegan leaves out a sine qua non for any renaissance of labor. There is scant chance of enacting any laws that help unions or require corporate boards to add worker representatives so long as the American political system is so driven and dominated by Big Money. Only when that is changed—perhaps through a constitutional amendment limiting the contributions by the mega-rich—will the nation elect a Congress or state legislatures truly attentive to the concerns of average Americans, and not so mindful of the wishes of corporate and billionaire donors.

Turning time and again to Dr. King for inspiration and insight, Geoghegan quotes a 1961 King speech that I found eerily prescient because King's words could just as well be delivered today: "This period is made to order for those who would seek to drive labor into impotency by viciously attacking it at every point of weakness.... Labor will have to intervene in the political life of the nation to chart a course which distributes the abundance to all, instead of concentrating it among a few." ■

Rand Richards Cooper

Narrative Control

'THE END OF THE TOUR'

In recent years, the troubled writer has been a theme in movies as disparate as *Wonder Boys, Adaptation, The Door in the Floor, Sideways*, and *The Squid and the Whale*. The writer-protagonists of all these films are fictional, and it's easy to understand why. Taking on the biopic of a famous real-life writer means tangling with a well-established public image; exploring an unknown gives a director more freedom.

In *The End of the Tour*, director James Ponsoldt abjures this freedom and addresses the life—and death—of a literary idol. For years before his suicide in 2008, and even more since, David Foster Wallace served as the Platonic ideal for a generation of younger writers, winning acolytes bedazzled by his virtuosity on the page and inspired by his personal combination of soul-searching vulnerability, rampaging intellectuality, and grandiose ambition. These traits shaped his magnum opus, *Infinite Jest*, a mammoth novel, set partly in a substance-abuse recovery center, that won the kind of critical praise most writers can only fantasize about (and obsessively do); Walter Kirn's review in *New York* magazine deemed the book "spectacularly good," announcing that "the competition has been obliterated...as though Paul Bunyan had joined the NFL or Wittgenstein had gone on *Jeopardy!*"

Yet Wallace was no one-book wonder. Indeed the impression he made was of an intelligence so lambent, and interests so promiscuous, that a book—any book—was too limited a vessel to contain them, to contain him. The subjects he addressed as a journalist-essayist ranged from John McCain's 2000 presidential campaign, to the U.S. Open tennis tournament, to the porn industry, to a Maine lobster festival (for *Gourmet*), to his famous piece on cruise ships, "A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again"; his nonfiction books included

Jesse Eisenberg & Jason Segel

a philosophical inquiry into the mathematical concept of infinity and a critical study of the work of American philosopher Richard Taylor.

Those unfamiliar with Wallace's literary m.o. might seek out that *Gourmet* article, "Consider the Lobster." It starts off like a standard travel-and-tourism piece ("The enormous, pungent, and extremely well-marketed Maine Lobster Festival is held every late July in the state's midcoast region..."), but soon devolves into something far stranger, a kind of self-interrogating ethical inquiry. "At the Festival," Wallace writes,

> standing by the bubbling tanks outside the World's Largest Lobster Cooker, watching the fresh-caught lobsters pile over one another, wave their hobbled claws impotently, huddle in the rear corners, or scrabble frantically back from the glass as you approach, it is difficult not to sense that they're unhappy, or frightened, even if it's some rudimentary version of these feelings …and, again, why does rudimentariness even enter into it? Why is a primitive, inarticulate form of suffering less urgent or uncomfortable for the person who's helping to inflict it by paying for the food it results in? I'm not trying to give you a PETA-like screed here—at least I don't think so. I'm trying, rather, to work out and articulate some of the troubling questions that arise amid all the laughter and saltation and community pride of the Maine Lobster Festival. The truth is that if you, the Festival attendee, permit yourself to think that lobsters can suffer and would rather not, the MLF can begin to take on aspects of something like a Roman circus or medieval torture-fest.... As far as I can tell, my own main way of dealing with this conflict has been to avoid thinking about the whole unpleasant thing.

The heavily footnoted article is classic Wallace: a scholarly hall of mirrors whose rollicking pedantry balances postmodern ironies with plaintive notes of sincerity and self-examination. And has any journalist ever adorned a *Gourmet* article with 2,000 words of notes?

Wallace was that rare writer whose mind itself was even more fascinating than what it produced, leaving readers peering through the words to watch him perform, pure ratiocination, a brain in a cage. His reputation has been shaped by the themes of drug and alcohol dependency that ran through his life and work—and the posthumous revelation that he was far more seriously depressed than his public knew.

The End of the Tour is largely limited to one week in late winter 1996, when a young novelist named David Lipsky finagled an assignment from *Rolling Stone* to write about Wallace, and hung

A24 FILMS

out with him for five days, visiting his writing class at Illinois State University, accompanying him to events promoting *Infinite Jest*, and conducting a nonstop interview. The article was never published, but after Wallace died, Lipsky dug out his old interview tapes and confected them into a book, *Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip with David Foster Wallace*. The film's script, by Donald Margulies, makes heavy use of the transcript of those conversations.

Margulies and Ponsoldt create a conspicuously endearing version of Wallace, bringing appealing traits to the fore: earnestness, awkwardness, loneliness; intensity, honesty, vulnerability. One suspects this wasn't the whole picture of Wallace. What about his famous brilliance? Or his galloping ambition and competitiveness? In a recent talk, Wallace's biographer, the *New Yorker* writer D. T. Max, pointed out that as an undergraduate Wallace was prone to boasting and rabidly intent on being the best at everything he did.

Not much of this makes its way into Jason Segel's portrayal of Wallace; and friends of the writer have complained bitterly that the film "gets everything wrong" about him. The journalist and film critic Glenn Kenny complains that "Wallace the artist and Wallace the conversationalist take a distant back seat to Wallace the eventual suicide," charging—accurately—that "even when he's cracking wise, there's no light or lightness to the character." At the same time, Kenny notes, "Segel's Wallace is never really dark, either. He's just Kinda Sad." Even Wallace's eccentric, leonine good looks suffer a bizarro-world distortion. At 6′4″ and heavyset, Segel is a lumbering, hulking figure on whom Wallace's trademark granny glasses look silly. His portrait of the artist presents a shambling, hesitant, junk-food-bingeing, sweet-souled and suffering giant.

But if you can put aside the issue of faithfulness to its real-life model, *The End of the Tour* has a fair amount to offer. There's nothing spectacular on hand. That's not surprising. Writers' emotional complexities, and the art they engender, are harder to capture on the screen than, say, painters', if only because there's nothing to look at. "What happens," novelist Michael Chabon has said, "is a lot of typing." What happens in *The End of the Tour* is a lot of talking, as Lipsky (played with twitchy intelligence, and more than a touch of weaselly envy, by Jesse Eisenberg) interrogates, cozies up to, and spars with the moody Wallace. Like his writing, Wallace was highly self-conscious, his thoughts habitually turning back on themselves; and Ponsoldt and Margulies succeed in capturing the nervous drama of Lipsky's skillful and highly goal-oriented mind chasing a far more elusive mind down labyrinthine alleyways in pursuit of a story.

The restrictive structure of the film presents Wallace in near-total isolation—no family, friends, colleagues or lovers, just him and his dogs—and the journalist out to "get" him down on paper. Ponsoldt, who directed 2013's *The Spectacular Now*, has a gift for close reading of relationships—his preferred scene sets two people in intimate, contested conversation—and he zeroes in on the fraught dynamic between the slightly older, celebrated writer and the worshipful-resentful, anonymous younger one.

In fact, the film's best moments are actually about Lipsky. In an opening scene, we see him lying in bed in his New York City apartment, holding *Infinite Jest* and complaining to his girlfriend about all those effusive reviews. When she retorts that "maybe it's that good," he grumbles, then finally starts to read—and moments later mutters an oath. In one of the film's closing scenes, we observe Lipsky on the last day of his week with Wallace, the two exchanging warm goodbyes. Wallace ducks out for a moment, maybe to the bathroom—whereupon Lipsky pulls out his tape recorder and races around the house, breathlessly describing random objects for possible use, rifling Wallace's room for valuables like a thief. Lipsky isn't portrayed as particularly nasty, just a typical instance of your basic runaway Manhattan ambition-plus-insecurity. When he asks Wallace why he's living in the nowhere-land of rural Illinois and not New York, the writer pointedly describes his aversion to "the enormous hiss of egos at various stages of inflation and deflation" that he says he always hears when visiting the city.

Implicating Lipsky in such ripostes, Ponsoldt and Margulies end up shedding more light on the questioner than the questioned. In the process they open up a Janet Malcolm–ish dimension in which the jousting exchanges between Lipsky and Wallace—with the latter challenging the former's intentions and continually focusing attention on the underlying professional purpose of their time together—explicitly raise questions of appropriation and control of the narrative. I find it difficult to imagine such cruxes in a film about, say, Lillian Ross's famous *New Yorker* profile of Ernest Hemingway, but it's fitting that a film about Wallace should turn on these kinds of meta-issues. They mark him as very much a writer for our era—not Hemingway off in Africa, or Scott Fitzgerald in Paris, or Ken Kesey in Mexico. "I live my life in the library," Wallace says at one point, and it seems true. There, and in his own relentlessly active mind.

The End of the Tour closes with a slow-motion shot of Wallace revolving in rapture during a group dance at a local church, followed by a glance at Lipsky in a New York bookstore years later, wiping a tear as he reads from his book about Wallace. These conjoined images, sentimental to the point of being maudlin, make for perhaps the worst moment in the film. I prefer the bracing honesty of, say, Capote, which ends with the ambitious young writer-journalist (Wallace and Lipsky, folded into one) brazenly hoping for Hicock and Smith, the murderers at the center of his still-unpublished manuscript, *In Cold Blood*, to be executed so that he can finish his book. Such mordant insights seems truer to the themes of Ponsoldt's film than the reverential notes on which he makes it close, folding its study of writerly cat-and-mouse into hagiography and the mistiness of myth. ■

Gary Greenberg

The New Inquisition

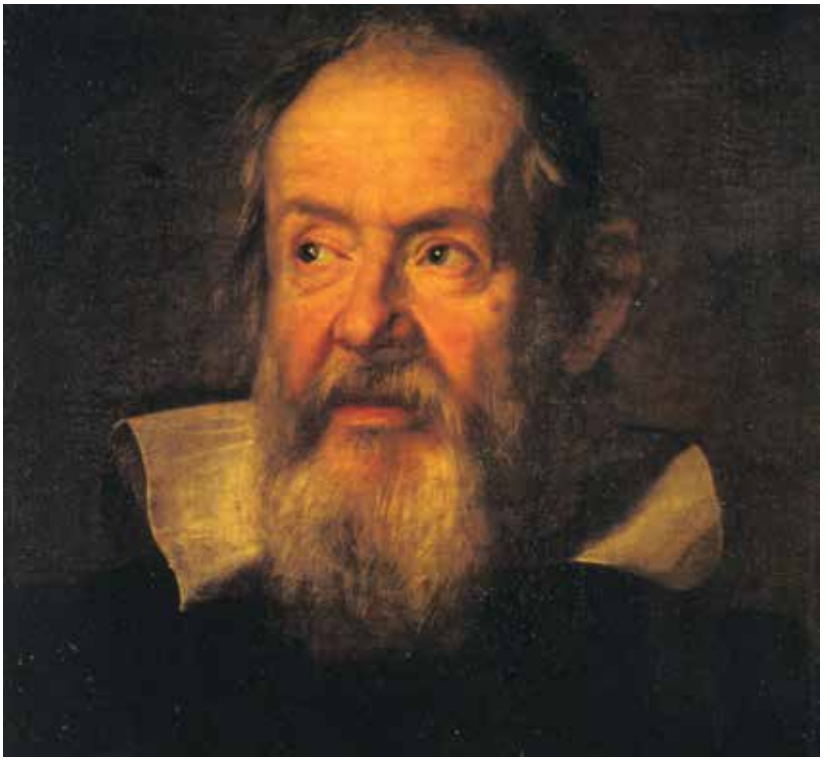
Galileo's Middle Finger
Heretics, Activists, and the Search for Justice in Science
Alice Dreger
Penguin Press, $27.95, 362 pp.

When Northwestern University psychologist J. Michael Bailey released *The Man Who Would Be Queen*, transgender activists were deeply affronted by his main argument—that some male-to-female transsexuals were not, as the prevailing account went, men trapped in women's bodies. Instead, he claimed, they were so turned on by the idea of being women that they were willing to undergo major surgeries and hormone treatments to become the objects of their own desire. The idea that erotic desire was at play threatened the consensus that had led to increasing acceptance of the transgendered—that they were not sexual perverts, but victims of a cruel trick of nature, and thus no less deserving than people with cleft palates or polydactyly of the surgeon's skills, the insurer's largess, and the sympathy of the unafflicted.

The response of transgender activists was vicious. They alleged that Bailey had conducted research without proper protocols, that he had practiced psychology without a license, that he had had sex with one of his subjects. They pressured the Lambda Literary Foundation to remove his book from consideration for an award, on the grounds that its inclusion was "like nominating *Mein Kampf* for a literary prize in Jewish studies." One activist published on her blog photos of Bailey's school-age children along with an attempt at parody that read in part, "there are two types of children in the Bailey household," namely those "who have been sodomized by their father [and those] who have not ."

Some of the attackers were fellow travelers of another Northwestern professor, sexuality researcher Alice Dreger. While initially sympathetic to them, she came to suspect that Bailey was a victim of a smear campaign, and after a year of investigation, she concluded not only that his science was sound but that the charges leveled by his opponents were "a sham"—and an "appalling" one at that. Doctrine had been allowed to supplant fact, and activism had ceased to be "evidence-based," as Dreger argued it must be. After she published these findings in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, the industry's flagship journal, the activists' guns were turned on her until, finally, she found herself "sitting on the kitchen floor and crying into my hands." She had, she realized, joined Bailey in "a fraternity of beleaguered and bandaged academics who [have] produced scholarship offensive to one identity group or another and who [have] consequently been the subject of various forms of shout-downs."

Dreger's experience set her off on a years-long quest to find her fellow victims, and *Galileo's Middle Finger* is the result of her travels. She profiles the biologist and anthropologist whose argument that rapists are motivated in part by sexual urges had outraged feminists wedded to the notion that rape was always an expression of power. She meets with the editor of a journal that published an article claiming that childhood sexual abuse was not always devastating to its victims, which became, according to Dreger, "the only scientific paper ever to



Detail of a portrait of Galileo by Justus Sustermans (1597–1681)

be condemned by an act of Congress." She spends considerable time with Napoleon Chagnon, the anthropologist whose study of the Yanomamo of South America had been the subject of a best-selling exposé alleging, among other things, that Chagnon and his colleagues had intentionally inflicted a measles epidemic on the tribe—charges that Dreger says are entirely unfounded.

Dreger offers these tales not simply to illustrate just how vitriolic academic debate compounded by political correctness can become or how scarred it can leave its participants, but to make a much larger point. Conservatives may portray climate science as a hoax and evolutionary biology as an atheist conspiracy, but the left, or at least its identity-politics sector, also knows the sin of trying to suppress science that contravenes its principles. Here's where Galileo enters Dreger's story: she and her fraternity, she claims, are facing a situation similar to the one faced by Galileo when he spoke the truth of the heliocentric cosmos to the power of the Catholic Church. If activists are willing to shout down scientific evidence that they don't like, then they are no better than Pope Paul V. Even worse, they are undermining the foundations of democracy, which, she says, flows from the same wellsprings as science: the Enlightenment belief in our ability to use reason to sort out the true from the false, which relies on a politics that leaves us free to do so. "Sustainable justice," she says, can't "be achieved if we [don't] know what's true about the world." On the other hand, if activists are willing to submit their prejudices to scientific scrutiny and to face the resulting truths, then they will be able to pursue just causes, and to do so effectively.

It's an ambitious argument, one that would be hard to support under any circumstances, and Dreger does herself no service by glossing over the many fault lines she must traverse. The idea, for instance, that science and democracy are inseparable, while appealing, is as naïve and contentious as the view that democracy and capitalism are blood brothers; ancient Islamic political culture, for instance (not to mention modern China), produced robust and sustainable science. Nor is justice, which, as any courtroom litigator will freely tell you, is at least as indebted to narrative as to fact, necessarily evidence-based; indeed, there is no truth about the world that proves we ought to strive toward justice, only belief. Dreger does not help her case when she writes that "the Founding Fathers… understood the usefulness of the scientific review model" and thus invented a system of checks and balances—an argument that blends anachronism with category error to yield incoherence. She does not account for the order-of-magnitude difference between the terror that activists armed with blogs and cardinals armed with the rack can commit—or between private citizens who shout down academics and lawmakers who shut down legislation on the grounds that climate scientists are hoaxers. She does not tell us how the "Galilean type"—"men and women who are smart, egotistical, innovative, and know they are right," among whom she includes herself—is to be distinguished from the arrogant crank. And her narrative voice—a snarky, bawdy version of the plucky detective Kinsey Milhone, who, upon viewing Galileo's mummified middle finger, thinks of him flipping the bird to the pope—does little to build a reader's confidence that she understands the complexity of her own argument, let alone that she has proven it.

Which isn't to say that Dreger is not smart, or a talented writer. Rather, she has missed an opportunity to use her gifts to shine a light on a problem bequeathed by the Enlightenment that bedevils the relationship between science and politics and which most of her examples illustrate nicely. Galileo's challenge to the authority of the Catholic Church, as she correctly asserts, was one of the seminal moments in the overthrow of ecclesiastical authority over individual judgment. But the wish for authoritative accounts of existence did not disappear, and science, with its promise of revealing the bedrock truth about us and our world, arose in religion's place. This is why it has become such contested, and coveted, territory: prove that transgenderism is "natural," and you have put yourself (and your cause) beyond debate. But surely there is no *scientific* proof that we should accept (or not) transgender people, or condemn (or not) rape. Unlike the question of whether the sun circles the earth or vice versa, these are moral concerns, about which science must remain mute. Dreger's book at its best, and despite her intent, shows us what happens when science is asked to do more than it can. It is about the limits of scientific knowledge, not about its potential to set us free. ■

Gary Greenberg *is a contributing editor at* Harper's Magazine *and the author, most recently, of* The Book of Woe: The DSM and the Unmaking of Psychiatry *(Blue Rider Press).*

Paul Lakeland

After 'Life After Life'

A God in Ruins

Kate Atkinson
Little, Brown and Co., $28, 468 pp.

Readers of Kate Atkinson's previous novel, *Life After Life* (*Commonweal*, March 10, 2014), will be both at home and disquieted in the world of her equally fascinating *A God in Ruins*. Here we are again at Fox Corner, the family home of the Todds, with Sylvie and Hugh presiding over the upper-middle-class lives of Maurice and Ursula and Pamela, Teddy and Jimmy. While Ursula was the center of *Life After Life*, Teddy is the protagonist this time out, in a novel that Atkinson describes as a companion piece and not a sequel to the earlier work, covering as it does much of the same time frame but from Teddy's point of view.

In *Life After Life*, Teddy disappeared on a bombing run over Germany, presumably either lost or taken as a prisoner of war, only for Ursula to see him unexpectedly across a crowded London pub. At one point Ursula had said to Teddy that "you just have to get on with life" because "we only have one after all." For Ursula, who had many deaths and many lives, this was a strange commentary on her own story, but perhaps a clue to the way Atkinson would play with time in this latest book, while Teddy's response, "What if we had the chance to do it again and again…until we finally did get it right? Wouldn't that be wonderful?" was exactly right for Ursula but definitely not what *A God in Ruins* is all about.

What is it about? Though both books focus on the Second World War, *A God in Ruins* centers mainly on Teddy's experiences as a Halifax Bomber pilot frequently en route to Nazi Germany. We meet new characters, not just Teddy's fellow crew members but also Nancy Shawcross—the girl next door whom Teddy marries—and their daughter, the frightful Viola; her wastrel husband Dominic; and their two children Sunny (a boy) and Bertie (a girl). But Atkinson's deeper interest is in the interplay of real life and the life of the imagination. Which, in the end, she seems to be asking, is the truer life? While what happens to us is determinative, what we wish had happened may be richer, and living within a story has its distinct advantages.

In *A God in Ruins* we see Teddy in his early years as charming, sensitive, and thoughtful. He is a "good boy" in the

EUAN MYLES / COURTESY HACHETTE BOOK GROUP

Kate Atkinson

best and worst senses of the phrase—so well-behaved as to be on the verge of dullness, so good that his aunt Izzie is inspired to create a series of books about a boy who's practically his polar opposite. But these qualities will define him all the way through: by his early twenties he is taking fatherly care of his bomber crew, and to the very end he seems genuinely to love his fabulously odious daughter Viola, as well as his two grandchildren, the mysterious Sunny and the down-to-earth Bertie, who is with him at his deathbed.

In *Life After Life,* Atkinson depicted the many lives of Ursula in more or less chronological order. But the story of Teddy's single life unfolds differently. The lives of his parents, siblings, wife, daughter, and grandchildren are recounted in what at times seems random order, but the whole is held together by the chapters that tell the tale of Bomber Command. Scenes of Teddy in later years alternate with scenes in the cockpit of the Halifax as it approaches Berlin or ditches in the North Sea or pancakes in an English field or is hit and begins to fall out of the sky. In the end, the searing realism of life as an RAF pilot and the richness of a long life well lived come together in a remarkable dénouement that plays off the very different story of *Life After Life*. Ursula has many lives, or at least many false starts, but they end quietly on a park bench in 1964. Teddy has one life that takes him into his nineties and yet, like so many men of his generation, he is never again quite as alive as he was in battle.

Teasing the reader who knows the earlier book, Atkinson sketches a scene in which Ursula is clearly pained by the saturation bombing the Allies perpetrate against German cities in the later years of the war. On the defensive, Teddy tells her he wishes he could "go back in time and shoot Hitler," which of course is exactly what had been possible in one of Ursula's lives. There is also a scene in which Ursula tells Teddy that "she liked the idea of reincarnation," though she couldn't actually believe in it. And at one point, Viola muses on the fact that there are no second chances in life (not at all how Atkinson sees things)—that if she could retake the journey she would "learn how to love," which, in the end, she does. Over and over again, Atkinson encourages us to move beyond the banality of everyday time and to let the imagination take over.

At the close of *A God in Ruins*, even more than its predecessor, we are left wondering what is real and what is not. Perhaps, too, we need to remember Atkinson's confession that her fiction is not just a story but also a story about fiction. If we yearn for the imaginary to be more real, we should remember that, in fiction, even the real is simply imaginary. ■

Paul Lakeland *is the Aloysius P. Kelley, SJ, Professor and Director of the Center for Catholic Studies at Fairfield University. His latest book is* A Council That Will Never End: *Lumen Gentium* and the Church Today *(Liturgical Press).*

Gerald J. Russello

The Word Alive

Letters of James Agee to Father Flye

Foreword by Robert Phelps
Melville House, $16, 240 pp.

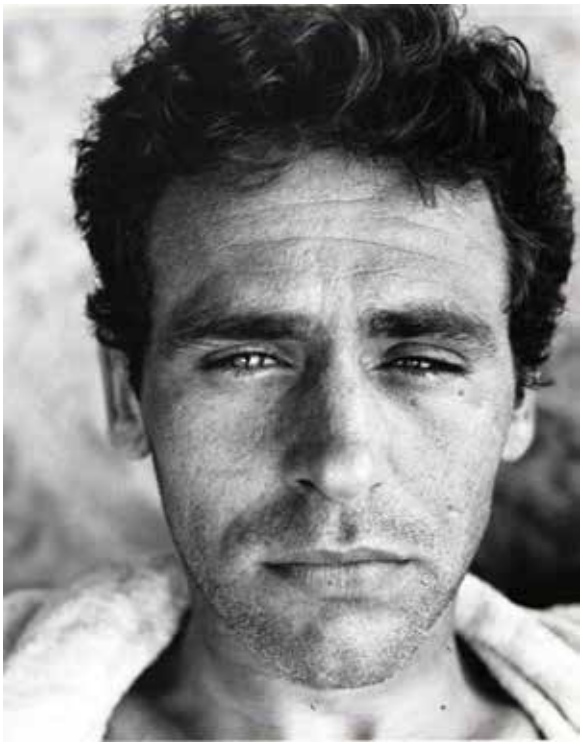
"The trip was very hard, and certainly one of the best things I've ever had happen to me. Writing what we found is a different matter. Impossible in any form and length *Fortune* can use; and I am now so stultified trying to do that, that I'm afraid I've lost the ability to make it right in my own way." This is an excerpt from a letter written in September 1936 by James Agee to his former teacher and lifelong friend James Harold Flye, an Episcopal priest. It is one of the earliest references to the project that would become *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, arguably Agee's best-known work. Agee, not yet thirty years old, and the photographer Walker Evans had spent the summer of 1936 among sharecroppers in Alabama and across the South. That article for *Fortune* never appeared—it was rediscovered only in 2003 and later published as a stand-alone volume. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a longer and different version of the unpublished article with photographs by Evans, sold only about six hundred copies when published in 1941. Since then, Evans's photographs have become part of the national memory, and Agee's accompanying text is now regarded as a classic of modernist literature, nonfiction with the rhythm of a novel.

The book later makes occasional appearances in these letters, though as only one among the rush of things Agee was working on at any given time. In the summer of 1939, Agee is still working on it, saying, "I feel almost nothing about it, pro or con except a wish to be done with it [and] a sense of serious gaps in it." When it was finally published, Agee thanks Fr. Flye for the kind words "to the point of shaming me—it is a sinful book at least in all degrees of 'falling short of the mark' and I think in more corrupt ways as well." He spoke similarly about the book that eventually became his masterpiece, the posthumously published *A Death in the Family*, which relates in fictional form the death of his father, which occurred when Agee was six. In 1948, he wrote, "I feel hopeful about it, and I certainly need to feel hopeful. Underlying the hopefulness is utter lack of confidence, apathy, panic, and despair." The book won the Pulitzer Prize in 1958.

Amid these fictional and nonfictional achievements, we see the other main aspects of Agee's work. Agee was an astute film critic, writing for *Life*, the *Nation*, and *Time* (where he essentially edited the books-and-arts section, along with Whittaker Chambers). He was also an accomplished screenwriter. He tells Fr. Flye of working with director John Huston on the script for *The African Queen*, which Agee thought would turn out to be a good, perhaps even great movie. Writing the script was a "great deal of fun: treating it fundamentally as high comedy with deeply ribald undertones, and trying to blend extraordinary things—poetry, mysticism, realism, romance, tragedy, with the comedy."

Other film work followed, but there was never enough consistent writing of any kind to provide much material comfort for Agee or his family. In this, the letters are reminiscent of those of J. F. Powers. Agee is always hoping another assignment will "tide him over" until the next thing comes along. (Alcohol, too, is a common theme in both sets of letters, so much so that it's a wonder either Agee or Powers ever got anything done. At one point Agee begs off a proposed visit to a Trappist monastery, figuring even a few days without alcohol would be too much for him to bear.) Powers was much less productive, in terms of raw numbers, but both felt as if there were too many opportunities missed and subjects forgone. For John Updike, who reviewed the original edition of these letters in 1962, the problem was Agee's fondness for "conversation over composition." The articles he wrote for the Luce empire on a range of subjects were short enough, and enough like talking, for Agee to get them down on paper. The longer-form items mentioned in these letters but never completed were of a different order.

The letters start in 1925—when Agee was sixteen and writing from Philips Exeter, where he had transferred after some years at the St. Andrew's School for Mountain Boys in Tennessee—and end just four



James Agee

WALKER EVANS

days before his death in 1955. Fr. Flye was Agee's most formative influence at St. Andrews, and the two took a trip to Europe together just before Agee transferred to Exeter. (One cannot help thinking how impossible that would be today, at least for a Catholic priest). During his school years at Exeter and Harvard, Agee sent reports to Fr. Flye on school news and on what he was reading and what movies he was seeing. Right away Agee began submitting stories and articles to Exeter's school magazine and continued writing for student publications at Harvard, cementing his vocation as a writer. There was little thought of being anything else, though significantly Agee did express early hope of being a screenwriter. The letters continued after Agee left Harvard and settled in New York. In the 1940s Fr. Flye found a position as a summer resident at St. Luke's in New York, which meant that he and Agee could meet up from time to time.

Agee's early reading, mostly self-directed, is impressive. At eighteen, he describes the "heady brilliance" of Dos Passos or Sinclair Lewis as contrasted with Dreiser, whom he was also reading: "You feel you're reading a rather inadequate translation of a very great foreign novel—Russian probably…. [Dreiser] has a tenderness, a love for his characters, that rarely slobbers and is usually strong and fine." For the next three decades, rarely a letter passes without some commentary on books, movies, or ideas, so much so that in one particularly intense letter, Agee apologizes for what he calls a "mouthful of sweet potato," a letter containing little about himself other than prospects for work.

Agee was not formally religious, and his personal life was complicated; he was married three times over the course of his short life. We see only glimpses of that life in these letters, with only passing references to his wives and children. In 1938: "the conceptions of chastity are to my very best effort to understand them most abominably cancelling of this 'sacramental fact' [of sexual love], and utterly unchaste, and productive only of ruin and pollution." Unfortunately, we don't know how, or whether, Fr. Flye responded to this commentary, and that particular subject does not come up again. In the same year we find him describing himself as an "anarchist" in both religion and politics, unwilling to accept the compromises either of democratic life or a corporate church community. Agee deals with the notion of an uncaring God, in the context of his dying stepfather, eleven years later. "Either he delivers autonomy to all His creation and creatures and in compassion and ultimate confidence watches and awaits the result, or He is a second-rate God, a sort of celestial back-seat driver." By the end of his life, however, Agee's relationship with God becomes more nuanced, tied perhaps to his regret at what he wanted to do but had not yet done, at the "shortness of time, and of time wasted." Writing in December 1954, Agee believes his sense of wonder and gratitude are lacking, that "much in myself [is] the enemy of all I owe most to God, and most want." Fr. Flye tells Agee, in one of the few excerpts from his letters included in this book, that he believes Agee is "naturally religious," in that he grasps intuitively the basic qualities of Christianity, but still must make his way to a clearer understanding of what that means. Surely his deep empathy for the subjects of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* illustrates a kind of Christian charity.

As a young man, Agee thought poetry was to be his medium as a writer. But it could not be a poetry filled with "archaism or 'literary' diction," because Agee felt that words "must be alive." He wanted a poetic language that "will cover the whole range of events as perfectly and evenly as skin," including use of comedy and slang. His two masterworks, though in a different medium, largely accomplished that project and mark Agee as an indispensible American writer. ■

Gerald J. Russello *is editor of* The University Bookman.

Tom Deignan

A Borough Apart

Small Mercies

Eddie Joyce
Viking, $27.95, 368 pages

A few months after the terror attacks of 9/11, the *New Yorker* ran a cover imagining New York's boroughs as Middle Eastern provinces. A section of Queens was dubbed "HipHoppaBad," while part of Brooklyn was rechristened "Fuhgeddabouditstan." And all the way to the south, toward the bottom of the cover, was the borough of Staten Island—redubbed "Stan." Which pretty much captures the way many still think of New York's fifth borough, if they think of it at all: not quite a part of things, a distant working-class wasteland of sports bars and tanning salons.

The inherent difficulty of telling a compelling story about a place like Staten Island (or South Boston or Buffalo or Providence, to name just a few similar enclaves) is the temptation to rely on satire or sentimentality. Only a handful of gifted writers—Richard Russo, Alice McDermott, among them—have managed to conjure from such seemingly modest landscapes fully realized characters, rather than mere saints or sinners. On the evidence of his novel *Small Mercies*, Eddie Joyce can be added to the list.

Joyce is a Harvard and Georgetown grad who quit practicing law in 2009 to help raise his twin daughters and pursue "his dream of being a writer," as his book jacket puts it. *Small Mercies* traces the effect of 9/11 on the people living in what one character calls "the servants' quarters of New York." These are the teachers and firefighters, the cops and sanitation workers, "the occasional accountant or lawyer thrown in; Italian or Irish or maybe something else but not likely."

Joyce's novel charts a single week in the lives of the Amendola family, headed by the grieving Gail—a Brooklyn Irish-American—and her husband Michael, whose external cheeriness masks a brooding streak rooted in a conflict with his Italian immigrant father. In brief, effective flashbacks, Joyce captures the terrible moments when neighbors gathered and Gail and Michael—along with the entire world—learned about the planes hitting the towers. The Amendolas' firefighter son Bobby was working that day. "They cry, hope, pray.... The ghost light of the television plays the same images over and over. They cannot watch. They must watch."

Small Mercies is ultimately concerned with family ties and the emotional impact of Bobby's death on his wife and child, his parents, and his two brothers: Peter, "the golden boy," who fled Staten Island and became a wealthy lawyer, and Franky, who fled to the bottom of a bottle, becoming "a drunken, ruined memorial to his dead brother." Joyce presents the Amendola family in full, their hard-bitten wisdom earned not only through tragedy but through the daily grind of life.

Joyce is particularly strong on the existential quandaries of parenting. As a new mother, Gail—in touching flashbacks with her mother-in-law—learns that "caring for an infant requires the energy of the young and the patience of the old." With grown children, retired-firefighter Michael laments: "He thought fatherhood would be like his job: you put in your twenty.... But it doesn't end. Not until you're in the ground." In the end, everyone must contend with the fact that "the days are long but the years fly by."

For such a thoroughly Catholic cul-

DETAIL OF *SMALL MERCIES* BOOK COVER COURTESY VIKING

ture, the presence of the church in *Small Mercies* is conveyed largely through mundane rituals ("They order a pie, usually pepperoni but plain last night for Lent."), which may well say just as much about the state of northeastern Catholicism as it does about the veracity of Joyce's realism. The novel also spends a bit too much time chronicling the cancellation of a legendary college basketball betting pool. Also, though it's easy to sympathize with the struggles of striving Peter, they occasionally come off as clichéd, like outtakes from a movie script by Ed Burns. Sentimentality shows itself from time to time, mainly in the form of Joyce's obvious affection for his characters, but he cannot be accused of ignoring a certain kind of political narrow-mindedness not uncommon on (or unique to) Staten Island. The parochialism is represented most vividly by Franky, who is angry, delusional, and, thus, unpredictable—which might actually leave some readers wanting more of him.

While Joyce delivers a touching portrait of a fascinating place, *Small Mercies* also achieves something of significance on the socio-historic level. Roughly 10 percent of 9/11's victims were from Staten Island—those cops and firefighters and secretaries who keep the city going. Decent yet unassuming jobs that will neither make you rich nor leave you poor, and which are readily available to second- and third-generation Americans who remain—in ways they themselves might choose not to acknowledge—proudly unassimilated. It is thus fitting that Joyce's story is set on an island stuck between the gleaming metropolis and the rest of the country. And it's about time that the borough has inspired a writer so capable of capturing its special character. ■

Tom Deignan *has written about books for the* New York Times, *the* Washington Post, *and the* Newark Star-Ledger, *where he is also an op-ed contributor.*

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friendly" somehow defines the center, but not, heaven forfend, trade unions.

By stating that the center-right orientation of the Conservative (Tory)/Liberal Democrat coalition government that ruled for the five years prior to May was "fairly popular," she further underlines the confusion among many English (and American) people between Britain and England. The coalition was so popular in Scotland that the Scottish Nationalists, not either of the two parties in the coalition, won forty-six out of the forty-nine constituencies, while the Scottish Labour Party self-destructed, since it was seen as a futile opposition to the Tories. This was the equivalent of Bernie Sanders winning next year's presidential election in a landslide.

When I was there in May, I even heard of English Labour Party people who were sorry they couldn't vote for the Scottish Nationalists, who better represented their opposition to Tory "austerity," and the continuing Tory affliction of poor people, than their own Labour Party. Even a well-informed friend who still voted Labour in Scotland admitted that the Labour Party had "sold us down the river," by signing up to the "Washington consensus," which produced the financial fiasco of 2008, followed by the rescue of the banks without accountability for their creation of the fiasco.

In these matters, Pope Francis has been a more relevant authority than most politicians, just as Catholic social teaching has been a better guide in economics for the past century and more than many (if not most) economists, except a few, like John Kenneth Galbraith.

While I regret that Shirley Williams did not stay with the Labour Party in the 1970s and help reform what needed to be reformed, while preserving the greater part of its social- and economic-justice tradition, I can never forget that the politician I most admired for her defense of working people as well as the poor, Margaret Herbison M.P., resigned from the Harold Wilson Cabinet, but not from the Labour Party, when she perceived a retreat from that tradition. Unless the Labour Party finds more people like her, soon there will be no "United Kingdom," because the Tories will force Scotland to go independent, rather than submit to Little Englander "austerity," for all but the Tory classes.

MICHAEL L. O'NEILL
De Land, Fla.

CORRECTION

In her August 14 column, Jo McGowan writes: "How would a Catholic wife feel about the Orthodox Jewish rule that she cut her hair and wear a wig?" I'm horrified by the ignorance of McGowan that dares to put in writing a canard about a Jewish custom that she knows nothing about. The custom (not rule) of married women cutting their hair is only practiced by a minority of Jewish women, and only those of Hassidic background. Most Orthodox women would recoil at the thought of engaging in such an act, even for religious reason like *tzniut* (modesty). By the way, women don't cut their hair; they only make it shorter in order to fit under the wig. Only women from Hungarian background shave their heads.

RAPHAEL FODDE
New York, N.Y.

When in Hebron

Mark Whitters

Last summer I traveled with a group of twenty-five professors and researchers to the Holy Land. We had spent the previous weeks together studying and discussing the history and politics of the region at Brandeis University's Schusterman Center, meeting for briefings, lectures, and dinners. Now we were going to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to see for ourselves. We would supplement what we had learned at Brandeis with the "facts on the ground." As it turned out, we arrived during a fifty-day conflict in Gaza that left over two thousand people dead. The facts on the ground were changing every day. Wanting to get beyond canned presentations and guided tours, I decided to take my own journey. I wanted to hear from other, less academic voices, and I soon found them.

In Ramallah I met "K," a fifty-seven-year-old Palestinian intellectual who had an MA in refugee studies from Oxford University and served in a variety of multinational concerns in the West Bank. K told me that the failure of the latest round of U.S.-led peace negotiations had to do with American naïveté. American officials thought that things could be worked out within short time frames if only all parties were willing to compromise, but attitudes that had developed over decades would not disappear instantly. K insisted that most Palestinians have accepted the fact of Israel, but fifty years of rhetoric have been drummed into their consciousness—and it would take more than John Kerry's nine months of "conflict resolution" to overcome them.

A chance meeting with a Canadian reporter led me to a compound on the outskirts of Hebron. There Shayk R, the highest-ranking West Bank member of Hamas, lashed out against Zionism. He was the mirror image of his Israeli adversaries: zealous, intransigent, deaf to the claims made by those on the other side of the conflict.

It was Sunday, but none of the churches in Hebron were open. There are virtually no Christian Palestinians left in this city of 250,000. So I marked the Sabbath on my own, perhaps a little unconventionally. It was Ramadan, so why not fast? When in Hebron.... But it was a brutal summer day, and the fast covers both food and drink. All the cafés are closed by day (many compensate by opening late and closing early). The Iftar my hosts celebrated that evening—the meal that breaks the Ramadan fast—was as joyous for me as for them. Evening was Easter to daytime's Lent.

But there were limits to my "going native," as I discovered that afternoon. Dr. Raghad Dwaik, president of Hebron University, took me to the Old City and its famed Mosque of Abraham. The mosque is the traditional burial spot for the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic "founding fathers and mothers"—Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and his two wives, Rachel and Leah. For Muslims, it is sometimes called the fourth holiest place on earth. I was in Hebron on the twentieth anniversary of an event burned into the memories of the city's Palestinians: the killing by Dr. Baruch Goldstein of twenty-nine Muslims at prayer in the Mosque of Abraham. To mark the day, Dr. Dwaik was going to join a march of Hebron youths to the site of the slaughter. She invited me along.

Israeli soldiers in Hebron's old city

The Old City used to be a district of tourism, commerce, and night life. But ever since five hundred Jewish settlers, mostly from the United States and Australia, decided to make it their home, the Palestinian natives have called this area the "Ghost Town." The alleys are eerily empty, all the storefronts shuttered. What happened? The presence of the settlers raised tensions in the Old City until Israeli authorities had to cordon off the whole district—Jews on one side, Arabs on the other. Even then, garbage and rocks were hurled back and forth whenever the two sides came together. Now barbed wire, stenciled boundary lines, and even protective roof netting are needed to keep a buffer between the two sides.

At the door of the Mosque of Abraham, there was a final checkpoint, but this time it wasn't Israeli soldiers who barred the way. Muslim monitors asked, "Are you Muslim? If not, it is *haram* (forbidden)." Dr. Dwaik's negotiating skills, which had been so effective with soldiers, now failed to sway the shrine's vigilantes. So we took refuge in a nearby shop. Mohammed, the son of the shop owner, was amusing in his simple solution to my problem: Come again when the monitors are not there, or—easier yet—just become a Muslim now!

There was a bittersweetness about that Sunday in Hebron, where I experienced both hospitality and suspicion. The desolation of the Old City seemed like an emblem of the current standoff between the Israelis and the Palestinians, a place where the bustle of ordinary life had been interrupted indefinitely, a place where everyone's guard was up all the time. It would take more than international diplomacy to restore what war and occupation had destroyed. ■

Mark Whitters *is a member of an ecumenical lay brotherhood of men called Servants of the Word and a senior lecturer in Jewish studies and the department of history and philosophy at Eastern Michigan University. He lives in Detroit, where he helps with urban youth outreach and community organization.*

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Pope Francis arrives to lead audience with children from Fabbrica della Pace group at Vatican (Photo by Paul Haring, courtesy Catholic News Service) May 11, 2015.

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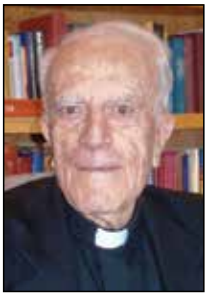

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