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JANUARY 2023

What Were We Thinking?

The intolerable inequalities we take for granted

George Scialabba

PLUS

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the humiliations of Simone Weil

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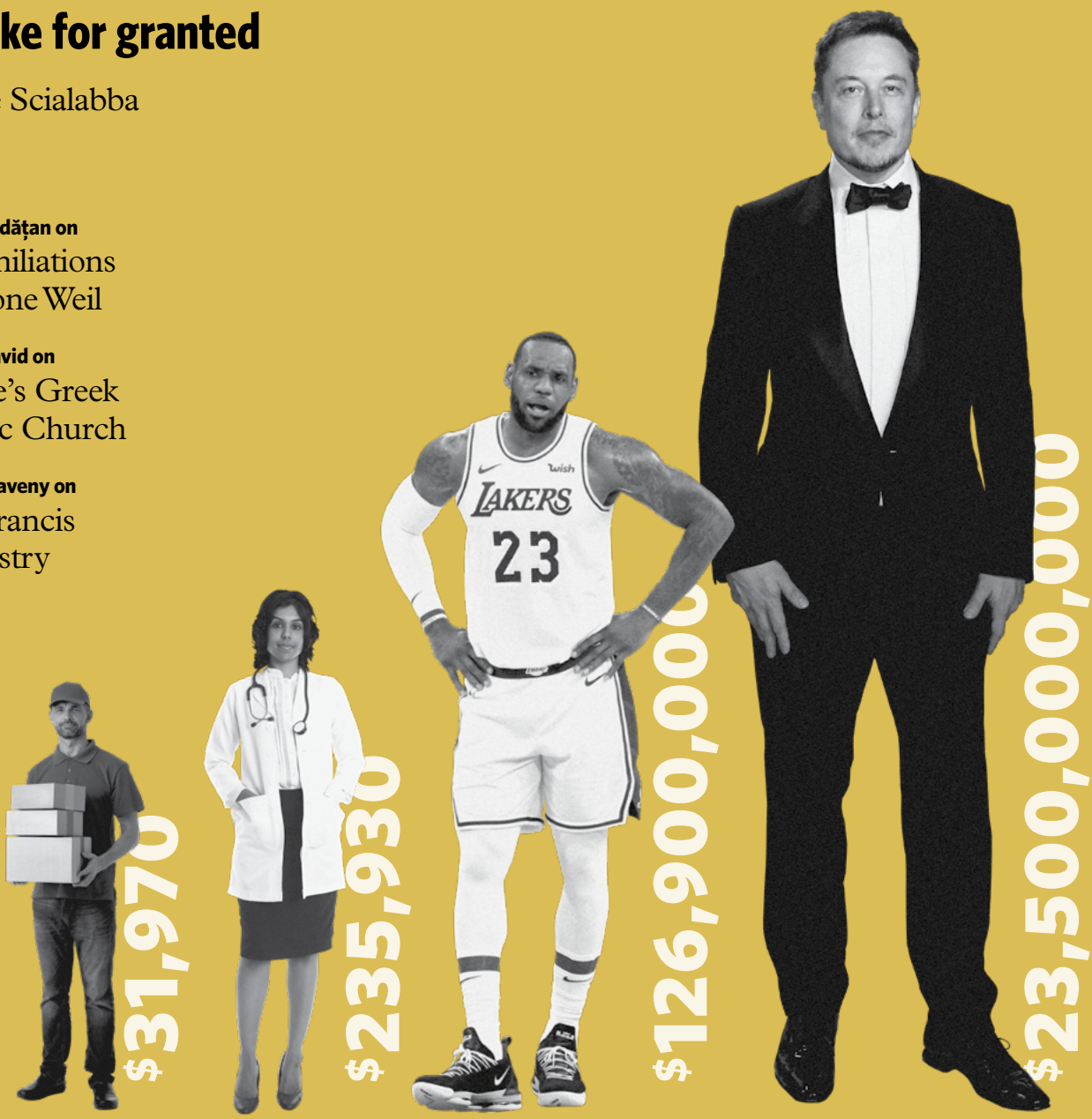

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LETTERS

The language of life before birth

MAKING SPACE FOR ONE ANOTHER

In Mary Gordon's worthy attempt to make sense of debates surrounding abortion in her article "This Pregnancy" (November), her treatment of miscarriage is careless, verging on cruel. To people who have experienced the pain and loss of miscarriage, allow me to offer an alternative perspective, one that will likely ensure healthier grieving.

Gordon writes about assisting her neighbor during miscarriage. During the process, Gordon reflects, "It seemed so much more like the kind of heavy period I'd sometimes had than anything like a human child that I was tempted to flush it down the toilet." After the miscarriage, her neighbor, although Catholic, "had no impulse to bury, to baptize, to name what had been lost, which was, whatever else it was, obviously not a child." Gordon also shares about her "unusually fertile" journey, from terminations to a healthy pregnancy to a second-trimester miscarriage, yet even still, Gordon maintains that her unborn child was "not the same order of being as the child to whom I had given birth."

My spouse and I recently lost our child to miscarriage. My experience of pregnancy was profound, and the experience of miscarrying was, too. For the longest time, doctors have classified me as infertile, only for me to have a "miracle pregnancy" (the doctor's words, not mine). My child is now dead. Gordon's claim that my child was "not the same order of being" as children brought to full term is resoundingly disturbing.

During the painful week in which I miscarried, my friends gathered around me. One of them had terminated a pregnancy in her college days, and she was my greatest comfort. She talked me through the process of miscarrying, preparing me for the contractions, blood, and pain. She also cried for me and cried for my child. I reflect on her emotional capacity to make space for my child alongside her own history of ending her pregnancy. I reflect on our open conversations about both our journeys. I can't help but hope that women make space for one another, rather than telling each other what is "obviously not."

To those parents who have watched the still frame of the ultrasound, listened to the nurse's words "your baby has no heartbeat," I honor you as a parent. I honor your grief, your loss, your pain, and most of all, I honor your child. Your child was "obviously" your child, however small they were, and I reject the proposal that they were "not the same order of being" as children brought to full term.

Ann-Marie Blanchard
Baton Rouge, La.

WHEN HUMAN LIFE BEGINS

Mary Gordon believes that a fetus of human offspring is not a baby, a conclusion that she has thought about seriously for several decades. Had she consulted the American College of Pediatricians' March 2017 statement "When Human Life Begins," she would have learned that every human embryologist worldwide affirms that the life of the new individual human being begins at the completion of fertilization when a one-celled organism with a unique genotype from its parents comes to be. Scientific reasons for the conclusion are concisely stated: from the time of cell fusion, the single-celled embryo consists of elements from both parents which function interdependently in a coordinated manner to carry on the function of its own development as a human being. While the experience of pregnancy does differ for each woman, all human beings began their lives as embryos.

Michael J. Degnan
St. Paul, Minn.

MARY GORDON REPLIES

Mr. or Dr. Degnan's letter sheds a light on the malicious attempt of right-wing thinkers to promote misinformation about abortion and LGBT issues. He cites the American College of Pedia-

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LETTERS

tricians' (ACPeds) assertion that life begins at conception, suggesting that this is a viable organization representing the majority of pediatricians in the United States. According to the ACLU, ACPeds was formed in 2002 when the American Academy of Pediatricians supported same-sex couples' right to adoption. It is a self-described "Judeo-Christian, traditional-values organization" open to pediatricians who hold the "core beliefs" that "life begins at conception, and that the traditional family unit, headed by an opposite-sex couple, poses far fewer risk factors in the adoption and raising of children." Meanwhile, the Southern Poverty Law Center has labelled ACPeds "a fringe anti-LGBTQ hate group that masquerades as the premier U.S. association of pediatricians to push anti-LGBTQ junk science, primarily via far-right conservative media and filing amicus briefs in cases related to gay adoption and marriage equality. [ACPeds] opposes adoption by LGBTQ couples, links homosexuality to pedophilia, endorses so-called reparative or sexual orientation conversion therapy for homosexual youth, believes transgender people have a mental illness and has called transgender health care for youth child abuse."

It would seem clear to me that the ethical compass of such an organization is not to be trusted and is, in fact, beneath contempt.

In response to Ms. Blanchard's letter, I am very sorry that she found my response to miscarriage callous, and I could only wish that she had taken into account my own history of late miscarriage to which I refer in the piece. Like Ms. Blanchard, I had to lie in wait for a painful process, and I was deeply grieved, as I know that she was. One of the difficulties about any question involving pregnancy and birth is that it involves so many intense emotions; another problem is that the experience of pregnancy, as I suggested, is unique in that it changes ontologically over time. I tried to suggest that pregnancy is not one thing; nor is miscarriage. One of the painful aspects of miscarriage is its liminal nature: it is hard to articulate exactly the quality of one's mourning. But I would ask Ms. Blanchard to consider that an early miscarriage, in which the product of the miscarriage is physically as I described it, is a different experience from a late miscarriage, particularly one followed by a history of infertility.

It is indeed a difficult task to think well about this complex issue, and perpetrators of false information like the American College of Pediatricians make everything infinitely worse.

TERRIFYING CONDUCT

I was interested to read Rand Richards Cooper's review of *Tár* ("Careening Toward Disaster," December), which filled in my understanding of the film while confirming my own impression of its uneven flow, lengthiness, and confusing message. I had the sense I'd seen an important film, and a commanding performance by Cate Blanchett, but also knew I'd been sitting there a long time and felt let down by the ending. My main question was: Why did he make this film? Being a musician myself and having performed under conductors, I actually wondered if he had an axe to grind. In our small, rural symphony, we once had the opportunity to play under one of the female conductors mentioned in the first interview. Some fifty years later, I still remember the terror she inspired in me, and reputedly in many others. Thanks for this great review!

Frances Rossi
Denver, Colo.

Commonweal welcomes letters to the editor. Letters can respond to both print and online articles, and should include your name, city, and state. Please send your submissions to letters@commonwealmagazine.org.

Three Years In

Anthony Fauci's retirement from the National Institutes of Health in December might be seen as a marker in the COVID-19 pandemic, which began its sweep around the world three years ago this month. As the public face of the government's response to the crisis, he was a competent presence amid the bunglers of the Trump administration. He was straightforward in dealing with the uncertainties of the pandemic, responding to new information with revised guidance even if it meant reversing himself on previous statements. His insistence on working with the facts and following the science was sometimes mistaken for, and often misrepresented as, arrogance or sanctimony. He was criticized and vilified, in public testimony and in conservative media, by characters like Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY), who thought his training as an ophthalmologist made him more qualified to pronounce on public health than a key adviser on infectious diseases to every president since Ronald Reagan. Fauci and his family have received death threats, while prominent social-media figures and right-wing politicians continue to target him with violent rhetoric. Now in charge of the House of Representatives, Republicans are promising to investigate Fauci and his handling of the pandemic, with some calling for his "indictment." Fauci, for his part, says he looks forward to testifying.

No one person deserves credit for whatever has gone right in the past three years, nor should any individual be blamed for all that went wrong. It was acknowledged even before a new coronavirus strain was detected in Wuhan, China, that the United States was unprepared for a pandemic. About 1.1 million Americans have now died from Covid—more than all the combat deaths of every war the country has ever fought in. As 2022 came to a close, the United States saw yet another spike in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. Uptake of the latest vaccine remains stubbornly low as efforts to persuade people to get boosted are undermined by politicized misinformation. Meanwhile, sub-variants of the virus continue to appear, new data is confirming the prevalence and severity of long-Covid symptoms, and nearly half of all U.S. adults report suffering severe pandemic-related psychological stress. The economic impact has been significant, not least on the labor market: Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said in December that close to half a million people who would have been working have died of Covid, and that excess retirements during the pandemic removed more than 2 million people from the workforce.

Meanwhile, the country's already-fragile social fabric has been further frayed. One can observe this not just in how Americans sort themselves politically in regard to the pandemic, but also in how individual experience so often seems to supersede concern for the collective. Repeated mild or moderate infections have inured many people to the risks of Covid, yet its normalization as a mere "nuisance" obscures the fact that a lot of Americans remain vulnerable to severe cases of the disease. Older adults, for example, are still dying at a disproportionately higher rate. We shouldn't simply accept these deaths as an unavoidable reality, as if Covid were just another complication of being old (or, for that matter, of being poor, or of not having health insurance).

Since the pandemic began, much has been learned about how to test and isolate, how to calibrate between restrictive closures and flexible reopenings, how to weigh the potential social and economic disruptions. More is known about how the virus moves and mutates, and about the effectiveness of ventilation, air filtration, and other technologies in mitigating its spread. The efficacy of vaccinations has been proven, in spite of deniers and the continued efforts of politicians like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis to cast doubt on them. It's unfortunate that he and much of the Republican party have disowned the Trump administration's one unqualified success: developing and distributing a vaccine in less than a year under its Operation Warp Speed program.

Other opportunities have slipped away: President Biden's original proposal for $65 billion to fund pandemic preparedness was whittled down to a fraction of that amount in negotiations for the Build Back Better Act. In his 2023 budget, Biden is seeking $85 billion over the next five years to build an early-warning system for detecting biological and viral threats and to fast-track the development of shots, drugs, and tests for various pathogens. But it's far from guaranteed that Congress will come through with all of that money. There were signs that a 9/11-style independent panel would be established to investigate and report on the nation's response to the pandemic, but that idea has been dropped. Both parties, along with the Biden administration, seemed uneasy about where it might lead. "Time after time we have seen how our response to this pandemic could have, and should have, been better," said Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), a cosponsor of the original proposal. "We owe it to everyone who has worked so hard to get us through this pandemic to take action so we are never in this situation again." Unfortunately, with every compromise and half-measure, we put ourselves at greater risk. Even as this pandemic lingers, another and potentially more deadly one looms. We will be in this situation again if we waste the lessons of the past three years.

Misery Amid Wealth

The long-running homelessness crisis in the United States has reached acute proportions in recent years, especially in the country's wealthiest cities. Between 2018 and 2020, Los Angeles experienced a 32 percent increase in its homeless population. San Francisco's homeless population has increased 35 percent since 2011, and homelessness will affect as much as 2.5 percent of its population in 2022. And in New York City, the number of homeless single adults has more than doubled in the past ten years.

COVID-19 has certainly worsened the crisis, but many other factors are involved. Inflation has raised rents and prices of basic goods, contributing to debt and evictions. Stronger synthetic drugs, like fentanyl and very pure meth, have become more widespread in recent years. Social disconnection and pervasive mental-health issues also contribute to the problem. But, as many studies have shown, one straightforward cause clearly outpaces others: a lack of affordable housing.

This helps explain why cities like New York, L.A., and San Francisco—with high-paying jobs, relatively low unemployment, and exorbitant rents—experience much higher rates of homelessness than more impoverished cities like Detroit and Philadelphia. As Jerusalem Demsas explains in the *Atlantic*, "superstar" coastal cities drawing elite "knowledge" workers also draw low-wage workers to provide the former with services. But when low-wage workers look for a place to live, they find a disordered housing market, where supply cannot be increased to meet demand because of housing and tax policies that favor property owners and regulations and advocacy (so called "NIMBYism") that restrict building. The result is a game of musical chairs that leaves many out in the cold.

Politics in these superstar cities, which tend to be governed by Democrats, have been roiled by homelessness in recent years. In New York City, Mayor Eric Adams has proposed aggressive use of a law that would enable the city to force homeless people with mental-health issues into treatment centers. Some critics have challenged the legality of the proposed policy, though a district court judge recently declined to block it. Others have questioned Mayor Adams's motives: they contend he is more interested in reducing the *visibility* of homelessness than in helping the homeless themselves.

In Los Angeles, a $1.2 billion housing-bond measure in 2016 was meant to build new units for the homeless, but projects have stalled and costs have soared to nearly $600,000 per unit, far beyond projections. The issue played a major role in the recent mayoral election in which Karen Bass defeated Rick Caruso (both Democrats, though Caruso was formerly a Republican). In Bass's first week in office, she declared a state of emergency and launched an effort to move homeless people into motel and hotel rooms immediately.

A similar attempt to provide formerly homeless people in San Francisco with permanent supportive housing, mostly in former hotels in the city's Tenderloin district, has been marred by deplorable conditions and bureaucratic failures. A report in the *San Francisco Chronicle* found that "many of the buildings…descended into a pattern of chaos, crime and death." Mayor London Breed is now, like Adams, considering a policy that would allow homeless people with mental-health issues to be involuntarily committed.

Republicans have used homelessness, along with crime, to argue that Democratic governance has sown chaos in American cities. There's some evidence that the tactic is working. Despite overall setbacks in the midterm elections, Republicans won surprising victories in some New York and California congressional districts. If Democrats are unable to address the crisis, it may pave the way for Republican mayors and governors to impose more draconian and punitive policies.

—Alexander Stern

Alfalfa in the Desert

Alfalfa loves the Southwest. In the heat, under the sun, it grows so quickly that it can be harvested up to eight times a year. But alfalfa is thirsty, guzzling trillions of gallons of water per year. In the deserts of Arizona and California, a significant amount of that water comes from the Colorado River, and the river is running dry.

The Southwest is suffering not just from a twenty-year mega-drought, but also from aridification. The river will never rise to its former levels, and the current distribution of its water will become more and more unsustainable as climate change reduces rainfall and raises temperatures, increasing evaporation. The original provision of water distribution, based on the century-old Colorado River Compact, divides water between Upper and Lower Basin states, Indigenous tribes, and Mexico, but many of the farms in the Southwest stake their claims based on even older agreements: places like Blythe, California, have prior water rights dating back to the 1870s. This grants farmers in Blythe unlimited access to extraordinarily cheap water (as long as it's used for "beneficial" purposes like farming, the farmers pay only the water district's overhead), while growing cities pay substantially more and Mexicans at the southern tip of the river are left with almost no water.

The entire system is only possible because of government-funded dams and dikes built in the 1930s, which funneled enormous amounts of taxpayer money into what is now a subsidy for farmers—who use 80 percent

of the region's water—and the industries they supply: dairy and beef. And the beneficiaries are not all American. Sixteen percent of the valley in Blythe is owned by a Saudi Arabian company that exports its alfalfa to feed cattle halfway across the globe, and farms in Arizona that rely on shrinking groundwater aquifers are leased to Saudis at shockingly cheap rates. (In Saudi Arabia, alfalfa farming is illegal because it's too water-intensive.) It isn't just the Middle East; U.S. alfalfa exports to China add up to the equivalent of 50 billion gallons of water a year.

Every state in the basin except California was forced to make water cuts in 2019 in the wake of drought protocols for Lake Mead, but senior water rights remain unaffected and states like Arizona resorted to using equally unsustainable groundwater reserves instead. Some states have begun paying farmers to fallow their fields, or paying them for the water they *don't* use. In 2021, Arizona finally rolled back the "use it or lose it" policy that incentivized farmers to maximize water use regardless of how much they really needed. The Biden administration has also put pressure on all the basin states to significantly reduce their water use by mid-2023; otherwise, the federal government will begin dictating cuts. So far, states have been reluctant to suggest any real plans, and until they do, nothing will force farmers to grow less water-intensive crops or adopt new technologies that would halve the amount of water required to irrigate alfalfa. The true cost of our dwindling Western water supply remains unreflected in dairy and beef prices.

It will always be difficult to muster the political will to make changes that increase consumer prices, and there is no way to reduce water usage to sustainable levels without major cuts to agriculture in the region. But the very least we can do is stop wasting our subsidies on carbon-intensive industries for *other* countries. Let the Saudis feed their own cows.

—Isabella Simon

Conscience Rights & Websites

When the Supreme Court issued its ruling on *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015 requiring states to recognize same-sex marriages, the majority opinion declared that those who disagreed on religious grounds must still have the right to advance their views. President Joe Biden's signing of the Respect for Marriage Act in December represents a step toward honoring that pledge, and the Court may take matters further depending on how broadly it rules in *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*.

That's the appeal of Lorie Smith, the Colorado graphics designer who says that, for religious reasons, she won't design wedding websites for same-sex couples. She says she tries to use her creative gifts to serve God. "Because of my faith…I am selective about the messages that I create or promote—while I will serve anyone, I am always careful to avoid communicating ideas or messages, or promoting events, projects, services, or organizations, that are inconsistent with my religious beliefs."

In oral arguments last month, a majority of justices were clearly sympathetic to Smith. But an unfortunate aspect of the case is that her lawsuit was preemptive; there is no gay couple to tell their story of what it was like to be turned away from getting the wedding website they'd hoped for. The "what-if" nature gave rise to a parade of hypotheticals. Suppose Smith used prepared templates for her websites and simply had to insert the names of the couple—could she still refuse a gay couple? (Justice Elena Kagan) What if a heterosexual couple wants a website that says both of them divorced to marry each other? (Justice Amy Coney Barrett) Can a photography business offering sepia-toned "Scenes with Santa," evoking nostalgia for 1950s-style portraits, refer Black families elsewhere? (Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson) Coverage has focused on how broadly the court will rule; anti-discrimination laws affecting businesses that serve the public would be severely undercut if the justices granted a wholesale exemption to anyone claiming religious exemption.

The somewhat bipartisan support for the Respect for Marriage Act suggests it's possible to achieve culture-war compromise. The backing of religious organizations opposed to same-sex marriage was key to getting enough Senate Republicans on board. They haven't changed their teachings; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, and others supported the measure only because they back its conscience protections. But the law doesn't protect the conscience rights of *individuals* who oppose same-sex marriage—which is why the U.S. Catholic bishops continue to protest. "Pope Francis wrote in 2016 that 'we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities.... We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer,'" Bishop Robert Barron, chairman of the Committee of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, said in a statement.

It's good to see the bishops quoting *Amoris laetitia*, but Barron neglected to convey the full context of the passage. Francis wasn't urging the bishops to be culture warriors. He was calling on the Church to do more to realize and express the beauty of a sacramental marriage, rather than to impose rules on others. The Catholic sacrament of marriage differs from secular marriage, which is essentially a contract. Sacramental marriage is a covenant rooted in faith, not secular law. The Seventh-day Adventists drew this distinction in supporting the Respect for Marriage Act: "The Seventh-day Adventist Church respects the right of others to believe differently, however, its view on marriage is not based upon a secular rationale and it will continue to teach and promote its understanding of marriage, sexuality, and family." Is it a distinction the bishops could make as well?

—Paul Moses

A longer version of this article is available online

Sam Bankman-Fried, then-CEO of FTX, testifies before the House Agriculture Committee, May 12, 2022.

TOM WILLIAMS/CQ ROLL CALL VIA AP IMAGES

MATT MAZEWSKI

The Crypto Crackup

Should we regulate it, ban it, or just let it burn?

Shortly after becoming New York City's mayor-elect in 2021, Eric Adams declared on Twitter that he planned to take his first three paychecks in Bitcoin, an unusual pledge supposedly intended to highlight his commitment to making the Big Apple "the center of the cryptocurrency industry." Since it is not in fact legal to pay workers in crypto, the city explained in a statement that the mayor's initial salary disbursements were really just being converted after the fact, which prompted one observer to quip that "Adams isn't being 'paid in Bitcoin' any more than using his paycheck to buy Shake Shack equals being 'paid in cheeseburgers.'"

It might be easy to write off this whole episode as a silly stunt, but Adams is just one of a growing number of politicians from both major parties promoting cryptocurrency as an economic boon for America. New Jersey Congressman Josh Gottheimer, one of the most corporate-friendly Democrats in the House of Representatives, has claimed that the "expansion of cryptocurrency offers tremendous potential value for our economy" and has introduced legislation to ensure it will "grow and thrive here in the United States, instead of overseas." Sen. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), nicknamed the "Crypto Queen" for reportedly being the first senator to own Bitcoin, has

cosponsored a bill with Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) that would establish a new regulatory framework to unleash the "substantial potential benefits" of crypto.

But what exactly are these benefits? Whatever other valuable applications there might be for the blockchain technology on which it is built, cryptocurrency as it exists today seems to be producing negative net value for society by creating myriad new occasions for fraud, channeling resources into unproductive speculative trading, and degrading the environment through the consumption of astonishing quantities of energy. It is concerning that so many elected officials—some of whom have substantial crypto holdings themselves or accept donations from major crypto players—are now hyping it as a ticket to prosperity.

The dramatic rise of cryptocurrency has taken place over an incredibly brief period of time. It was only fifteen years ago that the idea of Bitcoin was first proposed in a short white paper about how methods from the field of cryptography (the origin of the term "cryptocurrency") could be used to securely verify and record financial transactions on a "blockchain," a type of "distributed ledger" in which a database is maintained by the activity of an entire computer network rather than stored in one central location.

In theory, this held out the promise of creating a currency system that would not depend on faith in the trustworthiness of any particular governmental or banking institution. While acknowledging that the idea had legitimate appeal after the crisis of 2008, the economist Paul Krugman recently pointed out that it has in some sense "never been clear exactly why anyone other than criminals would want to do this." Crypto's image problems have stemmed not only from its obvious utility to crooks but also from its reputation as unserious business, a fringe hobby for tech geeks or an ideological obsession of libertarian anarchists. A former coworker once told me that her experience of visiting a physical cryptocurrency exchange in New York City was "like walking onto the set of a high school play about Wall Street."

Crypto's growth in recent years has been bolstered by a concerted effort to cultivate mainstream credibility, with prominent companies hiring famous spokespeople and even running commercials during the Super Bowl. But scams and fraud involving crypto and other blockchain-based products such as "non-fungible tokens" remain rampant, partly *because* they have gone mainstream: enormous amounts of new capital from "normies" now allow the scammers and fraudsters to operate on an even greater scale than before.

The most spectacular example of this can be seen in the recent collapse of FTX, a cryptocurrency exchange that allowed customers to trade crypto easily, in the same way that online brokerages like Fidelity have made it simple for non-experts to trade stocks and bonds. Founded in 2019 by Sam Bankman-Fried, the Bahamas-based FTX grew to become the second-largest such exchange in the world through high-profile advertising featuring celebrities like Larry David and financial support from venture capitalists like *Shark Tank*'s "Mr. Wonderful," Kevin O'Leary. At its peak, FTX was estimated to be worth over $30 billion.

Things began to go south in early November after the publication of a balance sheet for the crypto investment firm Alameda Research, also owned by Bankman-Fried, showed that it held a large amount of a cryptocurrency known as FTT that had been created by FTX itself. This suggested that Alameda could be at serious risk of insolvency if the price of FTT were to drop significantly—and indeed, that is exactly what happened.

Following the disclosure, FTX rival Binance sold off its sizable holdings of FTT, spooking many FTX investors and effectively triggering a "bank run." As masses of people sought to withdraw money from the platform all at once, FTX was overwhelmed; within days both it and Alameda filed for bankruptcy. Though no one should shed too many tears over sharks like Mr. Wonderful losing millions, many ordinary customers had their accounts wiped out too. Bankman-Fried and his supporters insist that the disaster was just an unfortunate accident, but what has since come to light suggests that he and his associates may well have committed real crimes.

Even if we put aside the pervasive criminality, there are still plenty of other problems with crypto. For one, the vast majority of trades are undertaken for purely speculative purposes. Speculation is not always harmful and sometimes can even improve economic efficiency, as when large price disparities between different markets are smoothed out by traders who "buy low and sell high." The German Jesuit economist Oswald von Nell-Breuning, ghostwriter of the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, posited a moral distinction between what he dubbed "stock market speculation" that produces nothing of value, and "tradesman's speculation" that helps guarantee the sustainability of businesses. In the case of crypto, however, speculative activity is not something that takes place alongside genuine commerce: speculation is the whole point.

The ecological costs of crypto are also steep. Until recently, the process that most cryptocurrencies have employed to verify transactions relies on a competition between many different computers on a network to solve complicated math problems; whichever does so the fastest receives a small payment in crypto. This process—known as "mining" because of the way it expands the supply of a particular cryptocurrency over time—has a substantial carbon footprint. The Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance has estimated that crypto now accounts for around half a percent of global electricity consumption, or about as much energy as Sweden uses in a year.

Given that crypto is by nature a speculative asset, cycles of what the

Crypto is essentially recapitulating the history of banking crises before the advent of modern regulation, and proving why safeguards like reserve requirements, deposit insurance, and central banks are vital for the stability of any monetary system.

economic historian Charles P. Kindleberger called "manias, panics, and crashes" are inevitable even in the absence of intentional chicanery. In a way, it is darkly funny that crypto is essentially recapitulating the history of banking crises before the advent of modern regulation, and proving why safeguards like reserve requirements, deposit insurance, and central banks are vital for the stability of any monetary system. Whether these should be applied to crypto itself, however, is an open question.

Crypto policy debates today feature roughly three competing camps. One, comprising those like Gottheimer, Gillibrand, and Lummis, maintains that crypto should be treated like any other type of investment asset, and that a sophisticated new set of regulations should be crafted to bring predictability to the markets, build investor confidence by weeding out the bad actors, and boost the industry's ability to realize its allegedly great potential.

A second camp thinks that such a project would be unwise, and could even make the entire financial system less safe. In an editorial for the *Financial Times*, business professors Stephen Cecchetti and Kim Schoenholtz insist that we should simply "let crypto burn." Attempting to regulate and supervise the sector would only encourage traditional banks, insurance companies, and pension funds to invest more of their own funds into it, magnifying the impact of crypto price crashes and setting the stage for financial contagion. "The overriding goal of policymakers," they write, "should be to keep crypto systemically irrelevant."

Finally, there are those who advocate putting legal limits on the use of cryptocurrencies or even prohibiting them outright, as countries such as Algeria, Bolivia, China, Ghana, or Nepal have already done. Although this position does not yet have much traction here in the United States, it does have some influential proponents. When asked for his thoughts on crypto, Warren Buffett's business partner and Berkshire Hathaway Vice Chairman Charlie Munger told one interviewer that "I wish it had been banned immediately, and I admire the Chinese for banning it."

Policymakers, then, seem to face a trilemma. Regulating cryptocurrencies more stringently might decrease the risks to individual investors, but granting the industry a regulatory imprimatur could make it seem more respectable than it really is and heighten the risk of systemic breakdown. "Letting crypto burn" while keeping it walled off as much as possible might prevent fires from spreading to other financial markets or the real economy, but at the cost of allowing swindlers to go on hoodwinking gullible investors. Keeping the sector "systemically irrelevant" while also cracking down on malfeasance might not be possible without banning crypto entirely—and even that might not solve the problem if black markets pop up to fill the void. To use an old slogan, it would appear that cryptocurrencies cannot be made simultaneously "safe, legal, and rare."

So which path to take? I lean toward some version of Door Number Three, since the priority should be to mitigate crypto's harm to society without legitimizing it further, even if that means resorting to legal restrictions. This should certainly include prosecution of fraud and other crimes under existing laws, but also targeted interventions to attack crypto's inordinate energy usage—like a ban on mining recently passed in New York. Critics complain this will only lead mining operations to migrate elsewhere, but, if enacted in enough places, such bans could also accelerate the adoption of less energy-intensive protocols for verifying crypto transactions.

At the same time, more public investment should be allocated to research into new applications for energy-efficient blockchain technologies, so that those with expertise in the field can put their talents to productive use. Such applications could include the use of distributed ledgers to organize unions and worker cooperatives or to create systems for anonymous and verifiable reporting of sexual harassment or abuse.

They could also have value within the Catholic Church, where interest in this area seems to be growing. For example, participants at a "Catholic Crypto Conference" held last year in Malvern, Pennsylvania, discussed ways that blockchain could be used to make parish bookkeeping more secure. As one speaker put it, the technology can have real benefits, but only "if it is accompanied by…a vision of the common good."

It is hard to see how large-scale cryptocurrency trading could ever fit into such a vision. Pope Francis once lamented the fact that dips in the stock market seem to get more media attention than the death of an elderly homeless person from exposure. With all of the real crises in the world today, why should the price of Bitcoin ever make the news?

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DOUGLAS LAYCOCK

The Only Way Forward

Religious liberty and the Respect for Marriage Act

On December 13, President Biden signed the Respect for Marriage Act before a large and enthusiastic crowd on the South Lawn of the White House. The new law protects both same-sex marriage and religious liberty with respect to marriage.

The bill passed its most crucial test in mid-November, when all fifty Democrats and twelve Republicans voted to open Senate debate. That required sixty votes under the Senate's rules—in fact, more than sixty were needed, because no one wanted to be the critical last Republican voting for the bill. The Senate later ended debate and passed the bill with sixty-one votes. All twelve Republicans held firm, but there was one fewer Democrat because Sen. Raphael Warnock was campaigning in the Georgia runoff election.

The new law recognizes, for all purposes of federal law, any marriage between two people that is valid in the state where the couple was married. And it requires the states to recognize most marriages from sister states. It does not enact a federal definition of marriage: the validity of any marriage still depends on the law of the state where the marriage was licensed and celebrated. Under the law, no state may refuse to recognize a marriage from a sister state because of the sex (or race, ethnicity, or national origin) of the spouses in the marriage. As long as there are states where same-sex couples can go to get married, their marriages will be recognized throughout the country.

None of this matters as long as same-sex marriage is constitutionally protected. But the Supreme Court recently overruled all its cases recognizing a

President Joe Biden signs the Respect for Marriage Act into law at the White House, December 13, 2022.

CNS PHOTO/KEVIN LAMARQUE, REUTERS

Like any good compromise, the law leaves both sides somewhat unsatisfied. But compromise is the only way forward.

constitutional right to abortion, and Justice Thomas pointed out that under the Court's reasoning, all the gay-rights cases should also be overruled. Justice Alito, writing for the majority, responded that abortion is unique and that no other right was implicated.

They were both half right and half wrong. The Court said that there is no constitutional right to choose abortion because abortion is not expressly mentioned in the Constitution and because there is no long tradition, going back to the nation's early years, of protecting that choice as a right. Those arguments are equally applicable to same-sex marriage, and that was Justice Thomas's point.

The Court also said that abortion is unique, because only abortion involves the taking of an unborn human life or—as others see it—a potential life. That was Justice Alito's point: same-sex marriage is different because no life or potential life is at stake.

Going forward, the Court is free to choose between these two rationales. It could reaffirm the gay-rights cases because same-sex relationships are so different from abortion, or overrule those cases because abortion and same-sex marriage rest on the same foundation—or lack of one—in constitutional text and history.

Especially now that it has seen the political reaction to overruling the right to choose abortion, it seems unlikely that the Court would also overrule the right to same-sex marriage. But no one knows how far the Court's new conservative majority will go. The Respect for Marriage Act is an insurance policy for same-sex couples: their right to marry will be protected by federal statutory law even if the Supreme Court decides that their rights are no longer protected by federal constitutional law.

In exchange for this insurance policy, the law also provides protections for religious liberty. First, it includes an express congressional finding that "diverse beliefs about the role of gender in marriage"—including the belief that marriage can be only between a man and a woman—"are held by reasonable and sincere people based on decent and honorable religious or philosophical premises" and that "such people and their diverse beliefs are due proper respect."

This is an express congressional repudiation of the frequent attempt to equate religious opposition to same-sex marriage with racist opposition to interracial marriage. It is unlikely to persuade the advocates who make the comparison, but it is principally addressed to the courts—and there, it is a powerful statement of national policy. This finding urges respect for religious organizations and believers that adhere to traditional views of marriage, and it denies that governments at any level have the same strong interest in suppressing traditional religious practices that they have in suppressing racist practices.

Second, the law provides that no "nonprofit religious organization" shall be required to assist with the solemnization or celebration of any marriage. And no such organization can be sued for refusing to do so. Nonprofit religious organizations are defined with an all-inclusive list of examples. This provision is like the protections for same-sex couples in one way: it is something of an insurance policy. Demands that clergy officiate at weddings, or that religious organizations provide facilities for weddings or receptions, have not been much of an issue so far. But the winners in any social conflict often escalate their demands as they become more dominant, so this could be an important protection in the future.

Third, the law says that nothing in it can be used "to deny or alter any benefit, status, or right" of any person or organization, including tax exemption, education funding, accreditation, government grants or contracts, government loans or scholarships, licenses or certifications, or anything else that individuals or organizations get from the government. Efforts to make government benefits conditional on support for same-sex marriage have already been an issue. This provision is both an important legal protection and another important statement of congressional policy.

The law is equally important as a model for further legislation. It shows what should have been obvious to all—that legislative progress on gay rights requires corresponding protections for religious liberty. The law is a compromise, and like any good compromise, it leaves both sides somewhat unsatisfied. But compromise is the only way forward.

Conservatives in Congress have introduced bills with names like the First Amendment Defense Act, which would provide absolute protection for religious beliefs and practices about marriage and zero additional protection for same-sex couples. Liberals have introduced bills with names like the Equality Act, which would prohibit sexual-orientation or gender-identity discrimination in every area of federal regulation that protects individuals, provide zero protection for religious liberty, and actually repeal existing protections for religious liberty.

Neither side can pass such one-sided legislation. But hard-liners on both sides have opposed any compromise. They would rather do without legislative protection for their own rights than permit any protection for the other side's rights.

A lone exception is an important statutory compromise in Utah a few years ago. One of the reddest of red states now has a statewide ban on sexual-orientation and gender-identity discrimination in housing and employment, with substantial protections for religious liberty. But hard-liners on both sides denounced the Utah bill, and they have prevented any similar compromise in any other state, or in Congress, until now.

Hard-liners on both sides are also denouncing the Respect for Marriage

Act. This time, conservative groups have been louder and angrier than liberal groups. And this time, more moderate conservative religious groups have spoken up. The National Association of Evangelicals, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Orthodox Union (an umbrella group for many Orthodox Jewish organizations), and the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance (an interfaith group that works to secure equal government funding for religious providers of social services) all wrote key senators to endorse the bill's protections for religious liberty.

Unfortunately, the Catholic bishops repeatedly denounced the bill as it moved toward passage. They complained that it did not solve every religious-liberty problem that might arise from religious conflict over same-sex marriage. That was true; it did not. But it solved the religious-liberty problems that might have arisen from *this* bill. And responding to the bill's own issues is all that it can be expected to do.

The new law provides that religious resistance to federal recognition of same-sex marriage shall not result in any lawsuit or any loss of government benefits or privileges. Broader legislative protections for either side in the conflict between same-sex couples and traditional believers will require negotiating correspondingly broader legislative protections for the other side.

And that is what the bishops appear to really oppose. Even if the law provided ironclad and absolute protection for every imaginable issue of religious liberty, it seems reasonably clear that the bishops would still oppose it, because it protects same-sex marriage. The bishops opposed the bill because its "rejection of timeless truths about marriage is evident on its face and in its purpose," according to a letter on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops letterhead from Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York and Bishop Robert Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, who chairs the bishops' Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth.

If the Catholic view of marriage is the only true one and all other views are false, and if such falsehoods can never be enacted in legislation, then the adequacy or inadequacy of religious-liberty protections becomes irrelevant. The bishops will oppose any legislation that provides any protection for same-sex marriage, because such legislation rejects what is true and protects what is false. Compromise becomes impossible given this view, and if compromise is impossible, then legislative protection for religious liberty on these issues is also impossible. This intransigence, from the bishops and from many conservative Protestant groups, has done enormous damage to the cause of religious liberty in America.

Thirty years ago, religious liberty had broad bipartisan support as a fundamental human right. In 1993, Congress passed sweeping religious-liberty legislation—the Religious Freedom Restoration Act—unanimously in the House and 97–3 in the Senate. And the three weren't opposed to the principle; they were just holding out for an amendment to exclude prisoner litigation. President Clinton, a Democrat, enthusiastically signed the bill.

The bishops opposed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act because the bill wasn't perfect, and they held it up for three years despite its overwhelming support. No bill is ever perfect. But it was that Act that later protected the right of bishops, religixous orders, and lay Catholic employers to refuse to provide contraception or possible abortifacients to their employees.

By 1998, bipartisan consensus in support of religious liberty had given way to gridlock—mostly on party lines, but at first not entirely so. The rise of gay rights, and conservative religious opposition to those rights, had completely changed the politics in just five years.

The politics have gotten steadily worse over the past two decades. Far too many liberal and progressive Americans have become hostile to religious liberty, mostly because they have come to see hostility to gay rights as the signature issue of American believers. Passing religious-liberty legislation has become nearly impossible at either the state or national level. By now, the gridlock is almost entirely partisan. Republicans oppose all gay-rights legislation, and Democrats oppose all religious-liberty legislation because of fears about gay rights, contraception, and abortion. Both sides have been intransigent; there is plenty of blame to go around.

In this political context, the Respect for Marriage Act is an important breakthrough. Fifty Democrats and twelve courageous Republicans (more courageous only because, this time, the political pressure on them has been more intense than that on the Democrats) stood up to their hard-liners. This law is the first significant religious-liberty legislation since 2000, when Congress enacted two narrow pieces of a much broader bill that had died in the partisan gridlock. This new religious liberty legislation is possible because—and only because—it is the fruit of compromise. It provides important partial protection for both sides.

The speeches and entertainers at the signing ceremony celebrated a new gay-rights law, not mentioning the religious-liberty provisions that had made the law possible. President Biden even called for passage of the Equality Act. He was probably just pandering to the crowd. But perhaps he doesn't understand why the Respect for Marriage Act could be passed and the Equality Act cannot be. With protection for both sides, Congress passed a law that benefits both sides. Without such mutual protection, Congress has been deadlocked on marriage and religious liberty for more than twenty years.

The Respect for Marriage Act should become a model for further compromise, and further protection for the human rights of both sides in this national debate.

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People hold blank sheets of paper to protest Covid restrictions and Chinese censorship after a deadly fire in Ürümqi, Beijing, China, November 27, 2022.

ELIZABETH M. LYNCH

Cracks in the Firewall

What the recent protests in China have—and have not—accomplished.

Three days before China's twentieth Communist Party Congress in October, a man dressed in an orange jumpsuit and yellow hard hat unfurled two large banners on a highway overpass in northwest Beijing. "No Covid test, we want to eat. No lockdown, we want freedom. No lies, we want dignity. No Cultural Revolution, we want reform. No supreme leaders, we want votes. Don't be slaves, be citizens," one of them proclaimed. "Remove dictator and national traitor Xi Jinping" read the other, a shocking critique of China's president and the man behind the country's draconian "zero-Covid" policy. The protester's statement was all the more surprising because in China the expression of any type of dissent is enough to land a person behind bars.

Within minutes, police surrounded Peng Lifa and tore down his signs. But Peng's message was noticed and, in the brief moment before the censors kicked in, photos of the incident flooded China's internet. Many shared Peng's frustration with zero Covid, where just a few positive tests have caused entire neighborhoods to be locked down for months, forcing thousands of people—even if they are asymptomatic—to isolate in massive quarantine centers for weeks. Just a few hours later, though, posts of Peng's action disappeared. China's algorithms had learned to erase all references to the incident, as if it had never happened.

Peng's protest was similarly nonexistent for the Party Congress, held October 16 through October 22 in Beijing. Xi had already amended China's constitution to eliminate the two-term limit for the president four years ago, so it was hardly surprising that the Congress anointed him with a third five-year term. Since Xi failed to signal a potential successor, it appears that he intends to rule for life.

Xi completed his consolidation of power on the Party Congress's final day, when he revealed the six men (and they are always men) who will serve on the Politburo's Standing Committee, the body that essentially runs China by directing the course of policy and rendering decisions on major issues. All are Xi loyalists. Not since Mao has a Chinese leader been so thoroughly surrounded by sycophants. And like Mao's, Xi's Standing Committee portends a China that may well be forced to follow a single man's vision, no matter the disasters that could follow. In fact, one of Xi's selections, Li Qiang, was the Party secretary of Shanghai, responsible for implementing the city's chaotic and much-criticized zero-Covid lockdown last spring. Zero Covid "puts people and lives above all else," Xi triumphantly told the Party Congress. His speech was also peppered with calls for greater "security and stability," code for more societal control, enhanced censorship, and the continued squelching of dissent, all regular features of Xi's decade-long rule.

By November, the Chinese people had had enough. On November 11, there was a slight easing of China's draconian Covid restrictions. But as cases inevitably rose, local officials reverted to full lockdowns, in accordance with Xi's insistence on zero Covid. On November 23, frustration again boiled over at an iPhone factory in the manufacturing

REUTERS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

city of Zhengzhou. When the promised bonuses meant to appease workers for enduring lockdown-like conditions never materialized, protests broke out. Police, masked and dressed in white hazmat suits, responded with tear gas and batons. Cell phone videos of the violence surfaced on the Chinese internet.

A day later, in Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang province, at least ten people, mostly members of the Uyghur minority, died in an apartment fire. The city had been under a Covid lockdown since August, and it's likely that the victims were unable to escape due to locked fire exits. Barricaded streets prevented firefighters from getting close enough to quickly extinguish the blaze. The next day, Ürümqi residents took to the streets, a rare moment of defiance in a region where the Chinese government randomly detains Uyghurs in internment camps for months or even years.

Videos of the fire, which captured the screams of dying residents, somehow seeped past the internet censors. Not long after, in multiple cities across China, people turned out to protest zero Covid, some out of solidarity with the Uyghurs (in Shanghai, participants coalesced around Ürümqi Street) and some simply because of lingering frustration with Xi's lockdowns. By the end of November, the protests had spread to nineteen cities. Large protests are not rare in China, but the government usually manages to confine them to one neighborhood in a single city. Not since 1989, when the Tiananmen Square demonstrations spread to other cities, have Chinese protests gone national. China's surveillance state has since become so powerful that it is difficult to organize even citywide actions, making the geographic sweep of recent events all the more surprising. But the sheer scale of the protests—and the number of videos and social media posts they precipitated—overwhelmed the country's censors.

In every city, protesters held up blank sheets of white paper, a nod to the 2020 Hong Kong demonstrations. That gesture had called attention to the fact that the Chinese government had made most political slogans illegal. The fact that the sheets were now spreading to the mainland was likely extremely concerning for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It proved that China's violent suppression of Hong Kongers's freedoms was known outside the island; worse, that mainlanders were now willing to sympathize and stand in solidarity.

Unlike what had happened at the iPhone factory a few days earlier, this latest round was not followed by violent suppression. Instead Chinese officials took a softer approach, with police erecting plastic barriers to prevent demonstrators from regrouping. But the protestors largely had no need. By the following Monday, many major cities began lifting some (if not all) of their Covid restrictions. On December 7, the National Health Commission drastically rolled back Covid restrictions: those with asymptomatic and mild cases can now isolate at home; entire apartment complexes can no longer be locked down; workplaces will remain open; and, in a nod to the tragedy in Ürümqi, fire exits and fire routes cannot be blocked.

While the achievement of the protests should not be minimized, China's future is not necessarily bright. According to most experts, China's Covid death rate will likely explode over the next three months, with close to one million deaths predicted, largely because of the low vaccination rate among the elderly. Shockingly, China never mandated vaccinations. When in early 2022 the omicron variant slipped into Hong Kong, another territory that practiced zero Covid and had a lightly vaccinated elderly population (20 percent of those over eighty), it went in just a single month from having the lowest Covid death rate in the world to one of the highest. China has a higher vaccination rate among its elderly (65.8 percent of those over eighty) but the shots are the less effective Sinovac. (The Chinese government allows its population to be jabbed only with its domestically manufactured vaccine.) Why the Chinese government, during the three years it closed itself off from the world, chose not to vaccinate its population with mRNA vaccines remains a mystery. It hardly comports with Xi's claim of putting "people and lives above all else."

Whatever happens in China in the next few months, Westerners are unlikely to see images of overrun hospitals and overflowing morgues. Foreign observers may have celebrated the bravery and technological ingenuity of the protestors, but from the perspective of the CCP, the protests revealed dangerous cracks in the country's internet firewall. How else could so many protesters post on officially blocked foreign social-media sites like Twitter? How did they know about Hong Kongers' use of blank sheets of paper as a protest tool?

Expect the CCP to target virtual private networks (VPNs), currently the only way for Chinese citizens to "jump" the firewall and connect to a free internet. Illegal since 1997, VPNs are at the moment tacitly allowed by the Chinese government. Chinese businesses and universities simply could not function without access to many of the websites blocked in China. It may very well be that fallout from the Covid protests will be enough to scare the CCP into fully enforcing the law and truly shutting down the Chinese people's only unsurveilled contact with the outside world. Prosecutions for VPN usage have increased over the past few years, and reports have emerged that Chinese police are currently searching protestors' phones for banned foreign apps.

Even if Xi is willing to roll back his zero-Covid policy, he is not about to relent on the brutal tactics that have enabled him to tighten his grip on power. Censorship, surveillance, and suppression of dissent are all likely to increase in the months and years ahead. Even as Chinese society emerges from lockdowns, its online life will be ever more restricted. Still, China's people give reason for hope. They've just proved themselves more unruly than Xi had imagined. Their recent successes online and in the streets could embolden them to continue their resistance.

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JOSEPH A. McCARTIN

Supplicant or Partner?

Lessons of the rail crisis

On December 1, at President Joe Biden's urging, Congress adopted legislation to block a rail strike and bind freight rail workers to a collective bargaining agreement that tens of thousands of them—including the majority of workers in four of their unions—had voted to reject. A last-minute effort to pass companion legislation that would have addressed the disgruntled workers' demands for paid sick leave (the agreement guarantees only one sick day per year) passed the House of Representatives on a party-line vote, but failed to gain the sixty votes necessary to overcome a Senate filibuster.

In the aftermath of the averted crisis, observers in the mainstream media and business press generally hailed Biden's performance as a victory for his administration, asserting that he had rescued a fragile economy from a devastating shutdown that would have created a "Christmas catastrophe." Many railroad workers and their allies disagreed, with one calling Biden's intervention an "outrageous insult" to the union workers Biden had pledged to protect. Notably, however, the vast majority of union leaders, even those who expressed the most anger about the Senate's failure to approve added sick days, refrained from criticizing Biden or challenging his stark framing of the choices before him.

While understandable, labor's failure to criticize Biden for stripping the right to strike from railroad workers was a missed opportunity to engage in the kind of delicate maneuver that the civil-rights movement mastered during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations: pushing a friendly president to do more for his allies than he otherwise might be willing to do.

Labor's criticisms could have begun with the way Biden falsely framed the crisis as a choice between two options, one distasteful and the other disastrous: either Congress had to force the workers to accept the flawed agreement that his administration prodded their leaders into tentatively accepting on September 15, 2022—an agreement which had since been rejected by several of the unions—or a prolonged rail walkout would plunge the economy into chaos. A strike would threaten to deprive communities of chemicals necessary to ensure clean drinking water and farms of feed for their livestock, Biden declared. The danger was so stark, he insisted, that it would be wrong for Congress to even try to improve the deal by adding sick days to it because "any changes would risk delay and a debilitating shutdown."

Biden's framing of the issue was intended to make his chosen course of action seem inevitable when he actually had other options. One would have been to allow the rail workers to make use of the only real leverage they have in their negotiations with the freight carriers—collective action—knowing that he had the power to stop a strike as soon as it truly threatened the larger econo-

Workers from the two largest rail unions rally near the Capitol in Washington, Tuesday, Dececember 13, 2022.

AP PHOTO/JOSE LUIS MAGANA

my. Even if the workers walked out for only forty-eight hours, they could have demonstrated how essential their work is, educated the public on the problems they face, and strengthened the hands of those in Congress who sought to add sick days to their deal.

Its public-education value alone would have made a short walkout worth some risk, for today's rail workers are—like their predecessors throughout much of American history—serving as the proverbial canaries in the coal mine, alerting us to dangerous power imbalances that threaten many workers who've never set foot in a train yard. In reality, the sick-day issue is only the most obviously unjust manifestation of the broader problem with which they have been grappling. They have experienced the wholesale reorganization of railway labor practices over the past decade with management's introduction of "precision-scheduled railroading" (PSR). PSR has allowed railroads to cut staffing by 30 percent in six years while increasing freight tonnage, thereby doubling profits. In the first six months of 2022 alone, the largest freight carriers reported $10 billion in stock buybacks and dividends. With staff cut to the bone by PSR, the railroads cannot tolerate worker absences without delaying and snarling traffic. Resiliency has been squeezed from the system in the interest of profits. A version of what railway workers are experiencing is increasingly common in all sorts of workplaces. Unfortunately, the railway workers never got an opportunity to name that problem for a public that might well have supported them. Nor were they given a chance to demonstrate their collective power, a demonstration that might have had a salutary effect on workers in many other settings.

If any president could have been expected to let a walkout highlight the exploitative system under which railway workers currently toil, it was Joe Biden. More than any previous president, he knows firsthand that railroads have held the upper hand in negotiations ever since Congress enacted the Railway Labor Act (RLA) in 1926. When the railways stiff-armed unions during negotiations in 1992, forcing a national strike and lockout, Biden was one of only six senators who refused to go along with forcing a bad deal on the workers. He knew that the rail companies never negotiate in good faith, always relying on political leaders' inability to tolerate a strike as their ace in the hole. "We need to restore a measure of balance to these negotiations," Biden said then. Yet the imbalance persists, and Biden knows it. It is that imbalance that allowed the railroads to impose the inhumane PSR model in the first place.

To be sure, Biden's response to the recent crisis is perfectly understandable in political terms. He would have undertaken a significant political risk had he allowed a strike to begin even if he planned to rein it in within days. Moreover, that risk would have been magnified by his self-identification as a union ally. Make no mistake, Republicans like Sen. Ted Cruz, who delightedly got to Biden's left by trying to add sick days to the deal that Biden urged Congress to pass unchanged, would have been the first to hang responsibility for the strike around the president's neck. Exactly those sorts of dangers tend to make presidents cautious with their political capital. Yet such caution can easily harden into rigid risk-aversion when they feel no pressure to risk that capital, and in this case, labor made it easy for Biden by focusing its criticisms on the railroads and Senate Republicans.

Labor's approach is also understandable. Whatever disappointment unions might feel about Biden's handling of the rail crisis, he is the most powerful ally labor has had in generations. He has done a lot for workers on a wide range of issues, and unions naturally do not relish criticizing a powerful friend. But, as history shows, the criticisms social movements make of their friends—if handled responsibly—tend to bear the richest fruit. The civil-rights movement repeatedly demonstrated as much in its often tense relations with its friends in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

Some unions and commentators now call for Biden to fix the rail deal by issuing an executive order mandating that railways with federal contracts grant sick days. That poses another question: Will the labor movement, in the posture of a supplicant, quietly lobby him to do this, or will it approach him as an indispensable partner who is willing to publicly challenge him to do the right thing? The answer to that question will help define labor's horizons of possibility over the next two years.

Ultimately, the degree of deference the rail crisis revealed in labor's relationship with Biden is limiting for both parties. If Biden hopes to accomplish the ambitious goals he originally set for his administration and to win reelection for himself or a worthy successor, he will need an energized labor movement *pushing him* to deliver for them and for all workers, one willing to cause disruption with strikes when necessary. For their part, if unions want their friend to fulfill his potential and become the president that the country's workers desperately need, they shouldn't hesitate to make him uncomfortable when the situation requires it.

The labor movement is facing a moment of unique opportunity. Union favorability polls are higher than they have been in a half-century; young people are leading organizing drives at Starbucks, Amazon, Apple, Google, and more; workers are reclaiming labor's most reliable lever of power—the strike—which had grown rusty since the 1980s. Nonetheless, the obstacles facing unions are daunting, thanks in part to aging and decrepit labor laws like the RLA. At this crucial juncture, workers need a Biden who is not content to be called "the most pro-union president since FDR." They need a president who is all in. Whether Biden becomes that president will depend in part on how hard his labor friends push him.

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Father Church and the Motherhood of God

Doris Grumbach

Editor's Note: Doris Grumbach, a longtime contributor to Commonweal *and author of fourteen books, died on November 4 at the age of 104. For nearly thirty years, Grumbach wrote extensively and fearlessly in these pages about motherhood, marriage, feminism, literature, and the Catholic Church. To mark her passing, we're republishing her December 11, 1970 article—a report on what is surely the only conference in history to have featured both Betty Friedan and Dorothy Day.*

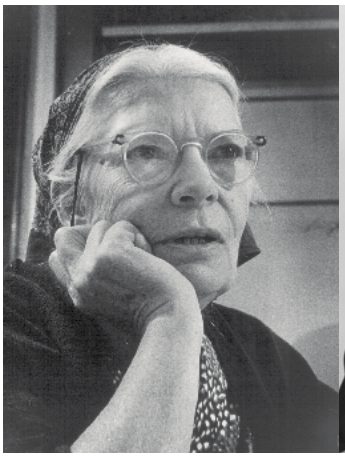
She is seventy-two years old, slightly stooped, and her scanty, yellow-white braid is wound about her head in the same way it always has been. Her eyes are red-rimmed from straining to see and sometimes tear-filled from disappointment at what is being said, and her head turns slightly as she strains to hear. She wears a blue wool suit whose skirt reaches her calves. Her cane is on the floor under her seat. All around her are seated sprightly, smartly suited nuns and laywomen and men with elegant hairstyles, and nattily dressed priests. There are 250 persons in this room whose windows look out over the hills of Garrison, New York, waiting, laughing, greeting each other, mostly on the young side, fresh faced and white, prosperous and well fed, and she seems an island among them, silent and eternal. A few well-pressed Graymoor priests hover around the edges of the meeting. The craggy-faced lady waits for the speakers to arrive. She is here to listen to a description of a new battle, alter the long loneliness of all her other battles during more than fifty years of her life. Her name is Dorothy Day. She is perhaps the oldest person in the room, the most personally courageous, in action and practice already the most liberated.

The conference was to be interconfessional, and to a small extent it was. A large majority of the participants were Catholic, but on the first afternoon the two speakers—Dr. Jaroslav Pelikan of Yale and Betty Friedan of NOW—were not. Except for Dr. Pelikan, all the speakers on both days were women, and women were the major portion of the listening and participating audience. Everyone there was, a priori, dedicated to the proposition that the position of women in the world and in the Church was now untenable. They were there to establish this conviction historically and with contemporary reference. So the temper of the gathering, to start with, was uniform and united.

Dr. Pelikan started by sounding some solid scholarly notes. He described Eve and Mary's images as the defining ones for women's role in the Church. Eve who was created second and sinned first becomes the basis of the theological theory of women's inferiority, and Mary is the model of perfect obedience: "Be it done unto me." Dr. Pelikan discounted the view that under Christ and early Christianity there was a period of equality for women, to be disturbed by the great villain of the woman-place, St. Paul; not at all, he said, the evidence seems to indicate that the Church historically "has always adjusted to the contemporary situation," which is to say, has reflected in its theory and practices the way society at the time regarded women, and then found theological justification for it. In reply to a query he proceeded to delight his audience by his ability to quote the title of John Knox's treatise, "A Trumpet Blast Against the Monstrous Legion of Women," and by pointing out that the discovery of the doctrine of evolution has enabled Christian doctrine to articulate a view of the action of God in the world that fulfills the deepest insights of the biblical story.

Betty Friedan was humorous, fluent, off-the-cuff, challenging. She said the things she has been saying and writing in and since *The Feminine Mystique*. More intelligent than the TV coverage has ever shown her to be ("The media enjoy all the jokes about bra-burning in order to avoid taking the issue seriously"), she used a shotgun approach to the central issue: every institution of Western society has been structured for the supremacy of men. Women have never been seen as human persons, a situation to be remedied only by restructuring those institutions (including the Church).

Mrs. Friedan described what she thought the direction of the present revolution in women's rights would take. Motherhood will no longer be the defining factor in women's lives; women, by virtue of the technological revolution, will lose their household-chore function; as a result of media publicity for all kinds of social revolutions, women will begin to apply "revolution" to their own condition ("she will no longer, by virtue of her sex, be an invisible person"); the character of their revolution will not be a bedroom war, and not a joke, and it will end only when women, with the help of men, are able to effect a change in society; no longer will questions concerning the bodies of women be



Dorothy Day

Betty Friedan

determined by men, politicians, priests, governors, representatives of the state.

Most important, and after all "the foolishness of making rag dolls out of dish-towels to sell to one another and the cooking of church suppers" are behind them, women will get down to the business of freedom for *both* sexes, for the present hostility between the sexes, Mrs. Friedan felt sure, is caused by the impotent rage, the dehumanizing sexual repression of women and the equally dehumanizing necessity men feel to be Hemingway-males, to assert and prove their supremacy.

The question of the future, she concluded, is not "Is God dead?" but instead, "Is God *He*?" The audience, ready for much of the widespread buckshot of the rest of her talk, gasped at this.

At the back of the long room a young mother nursed her baby who cried weakly every now and then. Relieved to be out of their seats, the audience adjourned to the Agape meal, where an ordained lady minister addressed God as "Father and Mother." The evening was full of constituent participation, and groups were formed to discuss subjects allied to the basic concern of women's liberation. It ended when Sally Cunneen called for a show of hands on the question of ordained women priests. The vote: 220 in favor, 20 opposed. And then the two sexes and several religious denominations resolved whatever differences remained at a long cocktail party in the friary.

Next morning started spiritually with a Taizé Morning Service conducted by an ordained minister of the female sex who spoke of "the priesthood of all believers," and a Mass concelebrated by seven priests, all male. Cynthia Wedel, first woman president of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, spoke with calm, dispassionate rhetoric of the ordained woman today, of her problem in obtaining posts with major parishes in the United States. She noted that such women are, however, beginning to serve campus and urban ministries and to teach in seminaries. She noted that the Churches in the Catholic tradition (Roman, Anglican) are the slowest to move in the direction of ordaining women, but said she was certain "no one can put the lid back on the change-process now going on in the Churches." Ordination for women, she suggested, is certain to be part of this, especially in the light of the death of all-purpose ministries and the beginnings of multiple-service ministries.

The meeting concluded with a rousing panel of "representative" women. A young Black activist, Joyce Richardson, noting that at present the women's liberation movement is composed of "privileged" women, hoped that it would go on to have some real impact on the rest of womankind. She stunned the polite listeners by reading "The Bitch Manifesto" which calls upon women to accept the designation with all its associated descriptions and characteristics and to be proud of it. "You may not like this new woman," she said to the world of men, "but you cannot any longer ignore her."

Sr. Mary Luke Tobin, more gentle in approach but no less forthright, described the future of women in religious life, writing their own rules, moving from institutional to communal forms of life, in every sense determining their own lifestyle. She saw the plight of women in the world as being in some way their own fault, and thought the role of religious women might well be "to inspire women with enough courage to face their problems."

Sidney Callahan sounded the last trumpet blast, from a woman who had, by good fortune and great ability, achieved what she thought she wanted quite early, "has had it all," was "free," financially secure, had a career, a family. Her problem now, she said ruefully, is to determine what to do with her freedom, the problem she expects many women will be faced with in the future, and she looks to some kind of community of friends and family in which she can "live the good life" and "serve." Hers was the only voice which indicated the ambivalence in the great questions of women's liberation; she brought down the house with the story of her son (one of six) who asked her, quite seriously, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

Dorothy Day was the last speaker. She said nothing about women's liberation, never mentioned the words, never stated her views on the subjects of economic equality, careers, chores, society's institutions. Instead she reminisced about her life, her daughter, the families she's known, the poor, the work she'd done, in jail, in the streets, in her Houses. If you tried you could remember, lurking behind her memories, the sentences from her autobiography:

> I again went to Washington to picket the White House with the suffragists.... The man I loved, with whom I entered into a common-law marriage, was an anarchist…he had always rebelled against the institution of the family and the tyranny of love.... Yes, we have lived with the poor, with the workers…the unemployed, the sick.... We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.

So it went, in mid-November, 1970, at a meeting for women's liberation in the Church.

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What Were We Thinking?

George Scialabba

Future generations will wonder why we took so much inequality for granted.

Unless we have reached the end point of humankind's moral development, it is pretty certain that the average educated human of the twenty-third century will look back at the average educated human of the twenty-first century and ask incredulously about a considerable number of our most cherished moral and political axioms, "How could they have believed *that*?" We do it every time a movie like *Twelve Years a Slave* or a novel like *The Handmaid's Tale* or a play like *Angels in America* or a work of history like *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* or of journalism like Michael Harrington's *The Other America* prompts us to ask, "How could decent, intelligent people have believed they were entitled to treat other human beings like that?"

Photo illustration by David Sankey

In the private economy, you can do whatever you like—create beauty, pursue truth, help others—as long as whatever you like to do makes someone a profit.

So let's interrogate some of our beliefs about political morality with the eyes of our descendants. Two four-letter words lie at the heart of contemporary America's public morality: "free" and "fair." "It's a free country" is every American's boast; "I only want a fair shake" is every American's plea. I doubt I need to remind many *Commonweal* readers of the more flagrant forms of unfairness in our national life—that one American child in five lives below or near the poverty line; that somewhere between 80 and 90 percent of our economy's productivity gains since 1980 have gone to the top 10 percent of the income distribution; that the top twenty-five hedge-fund managers earn more than all the nation's kindergarten teachers combined; that 100,000 Americans will die for lack of health care over the next ten years in order to give a large tax cut to Americans with incomes above a half-million dollars; and so on and so on, down the long and shameful catalog. You all read the newspapers. Our twenty-third-century descendants may ask—they *will* ask—how we could have tolerated such unfairness; but they won't ask how we could have believed such inequalities to be fair, because we *don't*, most of us, believe them to be fair. Let's instead consider a different question: whether our present-day ideals of fairness and freedom, even if we lived up to them, would satisfy our descendants.

The average CEO now earns around three hundred times as much as his or her average employee. Many people are dismayed at the contrast with the good old days of the Eisenhower administration, when CEOs earned only thirty times as much as their average employees and paid a far higher tax rate, and yet the country didn't exactly seem to be going to the dogs. But let's put aside our reaction to this striking change and ask more generally whether and why some people ought to earn more than others.

The usual answer, I suppose, is that people deserve whatever they get through the operation of supply and demand. The competitive marketplace quantifies the value that one's efforts have for others. Some people (like doctors) employ vital skills; some people (like baseball players) give exceptional enjoyment; some people (like corporate executives) assume extra responsibilities; some people (like investors) forego luxury consumption. All such people are rewarded in proportion to the satisfaction they furnish others, as measured by others' willingness to pay, directly or indirectly, for those satisfactions. No payment, no service. As Adam Smith wrote: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest."

Of course, it's not that simple. Consider those doctors, baseball players, and executives I used as examples of economic agents who exchange services for money. In fact, they—like you, like me—live with only one foot in a market economy and the other in a gift economy. Any doctor or scientist or athlete or nurse or teacher or carpenter worth her salt feels at least occasionally that she is making a gift of her best efforts; and as with all such gifts, the chief reward is internal: the pleasures of giving and of exercising one's faculties at their highest pitch.

Nowadays, the gift economy leads a precarious existence, appearing mostly in commencement-day addresses in which graduates are exhorted to follow their dreams, while most of the poor things are worrying frantically about how to pay their debts. The family is a gift economy, and so is culture, including both the arts and the sciences, as well as the shrinking public and nonprofit spheres. Ever since that most fateful of innovations, industrial mass production, has become virtually universal, the market economy has progressively squeezed out the gift economy. In a mature capitalist society, competition grows in both extent and intensity—that is, both between and within economic units. Creativity and generosity are not forbidden but they are no longer self-justifying; they are, on the contrary, subordinated, like all activity in the non-public sphere, to the goal of increasing shareholder value. In the private economy, you can do whatever you like—create beauty, pursue truth, help others—as long as what you like to do makes someone a profit.

I said earlier that people in a market economy are rewarded in proportion to others' willingness to pay. That willingness to pay is the measure of value in a market economy; and so, to say that a person deserves what she earns is to say that there is at least a rough correspondence between the value of what she produces and the value of what she receives. As Milton Friedman, the high priest of American capitalism, put it: "The ethical principle [underlying] the distribution of income in a free-market society is, 'To each according to what he and the instruments he owns produces.'"

This notion of desert rests on the assumption that two distinctions can be made rigorously: first, that one person's input—to any output or outcome at all—can be sharply distinguished from all other inputs; second, that merit can be distinguished from luck—that is, that diligence, good judgment, talent, and other productive qualities and character traits are not fully attributable to biological endowment, early environment, education, and other contingent and therefore morally arbitrary sources. I don't believe those distinctions hold up.

Let's take that CEO, and let's assume we know somehow that she produces thirty or three hundred times as much as her average employee. Causation is a transitive relation, and production is a kind of causation. If A is a cause of B, and B is a cause of C, then A is a cause of C. If A contributes to the production of B, and B contributes to the production of C, then A has contributed to the production of C. Now, who has contributed to the production of our CEO and, therefore, to the production of whatever she produces? Clearly, her parents, spouse, teachers, fellow students, predecessors, colleagues, rivals, and friends, along with all *their* parents, spouses, teachers, fellow students, predecessors, colleagues, rivals, and friends, along with all those who created the physical, organizational, and cultural resources employed in the production of whatever our CEO produces, along with all their parents, spouses, teachers, fellow students, predecessors, colleagues, rivals, and friends, and, it goes without saying, all *their* parents, spouses, teachers, and so on through what is, if one wants to insist on the point, an infinite chain of causes.

I do want to insist on the point. Einstein famously wrote: "I have all along been standing on the shoulders of giants." So has our CEO. Exceptional contributions, whether to art, science, or the Gross National Product, are prepared for by the whole previous development of the field. People who make brilliant, courageous, and illuminating mistakes, which may be indispensable to the ultimate success of a rich and famous artist, scientist, or entrepreneur, are not, in a competitive market system, retrospectively and proportionately rewarded for their contributions, even though Friedman's definition of justice would seem to require it.

My point is that all production is social production. The productive assets of every age are the joint product of all preceding ages, and all those born into the present are legitimately joint heirs of those assets. And the same arguments for joint rather than individual inheritance of wealth created in the past apply to the distribution of income in the present. If this seems counterintuitive, it is perhaps because there persists a deep and ancient distinction between luck and merit, according to which we deserve praise and reward for our good actions, though not for our good fortune. But what if our good actions are the results of our good fortune?

Philosophy assimilates scientific discoveries slowly. As a result, it is always riddled with archaic concepts and images, survivals from an earlier scientific epoch. One such survival, it seems to me, is the concept of merit. It has always been partly recognized (it is, indeed, implicit in the word "gifted") that talents and aptitudes come under the heading of luck rather than merit. But the inescapable implication of modern genetics, neurobiology, and psychiatry is that character, no less than talent, is inherited or else formed by very early experiences. Diligence, decisiveness, initiative, coolness under pressure—all these entrepreneurial virtues—are, no less than intellectual or manual abilities, part of one's natural endowment. And from a strictly moral point of view, no one deserves a reward for being born luckier than someone else. I imagine the twenty-third century will ask: "Why did you make talent and character the measure of an individual's desert rather than of her obligations? How could you have overlooked what is to us the obvious and elementary principle of fairness: from each according to her abilities, to each according to her need?"

I suggested earlier that causation is potentially an infinite regress. If that's true, does anyone deserve anything? Actually, potentially infinite regressions are perfectly commonplace and don't normally defeat us. We call a halt to them wherever it seems appropriate. Every parent has to decide when a child is genuinely curious and when it keeps asking "Why?" just to put off going to sleep. Every conscientious judge has to decide when to stop applying the maxim "To understand all is to forgive all," even though it's undoubtedly true. The point about these decisions is that they are arbitrary and fallible—in making them we rely on prudence rather than principle. So that when we decide to ignore the infinite chain of causes that produced the output of the CEO and pay her the whole market value of it, our decision is not a matter of justice, as Milton Friedman claimed it was.

I said "our decision," but of course you and I don't have anything to say about the just distribution of income and wealth. Indeed, the purpose of definitions like Milton Friedman's is precisely to prevent such distributions from becoming a matter of public decision. In the 1940s, an influential senator, trying to stifle criticism of Harry Truman's Cold War policies, demanded that "politics should stop at the water's edge." It worked then, and the proponents of the economic class war have had a similar success in preaching that democracy should stop at the economy's edge. In principle, the state is governed according to the rule of one person, one vote. Economic enterprises such as corporations are not even democratic in principle: there, the rule is, one dollar of shareholder value, one vote. In both areas, it hardly needs pointing out, principles count for very little. None but the largest investors have any influence on corporate management; while in politics, rich donors, in effect, have many votes, and the rest of us have none.

The case of politics is particularly egregious. Two political scientists, Martin Gilens of Princeton and Benjamin Page of Northwestern, recently summarized years of detailed statistical research into the relation between what voters want and what we get:

> In the United States, our findings indicate, the majority does not rule—at least not in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes. When a majority of citizens disagree with economic elites and/or with organized interests, they generally lose. Moreover…even when fairly large majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it.… For Americans below the top of the income distribution, any association between preferences and policy outcomes is likely to reflect the extent to which their preferences [happen to]

Our individualistic political rhetoric, appropriate to the frontier period but now a century and a half out of date, serves only to conceal the one-sided class warfare that its victims stubbornly refuse to acknowledge.

> coincide with those of the affluent. Although responsiveness to the preferences of the affluent is [not] perfect, responsiveness to less-well-off Americans is virtually nonexistent.

If democracy means one-person-one-vote, in what situations is it morally requisite? Here is an answer from Robert Dahl, perhaps the most eminent American political scientist of the twentieth century. According to Dahl, members of any association are entitled to insist that it be governed democratically when the following conditions hold: the group must reach some decisions that are binding on all members; discussion and collective decision-making are feasible; membership is stable, i.e. those who make the decisions will be subject to the consequences; there is a rough equality of competence, i.e. members are capable of judging their own interests and also of judging which decisions they must delegate to experts.

Now, why don't these conditions hold for corporations as well as for political communities? One possible objection might be that, unlike laws, management decisions are not binding—employees can quit. The answer to this objection is that in the real world, unlike the world of smoothly clearing labor markets and other fantasies of neoclassical economics, the costs of renouncing employment are frequently as great as the costs of renouncing citizenship. Another possible objection is that management requires special skills that workers may not possess. But surely workers are no less capable of hiring and supervising managers than shareholders are, and probably more so. Still another objection is based on the notorious "iron law of oligarchy," according to which any sizable association tends to be dominated by those with the most aptitude and ambition. But the same holds true for political democracy, which no one proposes abandoning on that account. Finally, there is the moral objection: Aren't shareholders entitled to control the firms they invest in? For the same reasons that entitlement theories fail to justify large inequalities in income—namely, that wealth is a social product and that differences in ability and character are morally arbitrary—they fail to justify large differences in the power to control our common economic destiny. And more: since one requirement of fair political competition is that all group members have equal access to relevant information about group decisions and equal opportunity to place items on the agenda for decision, it follows that in a society like ours, where economic resources translate into political resources, economic inequality must result in political inequality, a conclusion that is obvious to everyone except the conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court. Political democracy requires economic democracy; indeed, the distinction between the political and the economic is altogether artificial. How, our twenty-third-century descendants will ask us politely, but perhaps with a tinge of exasperation, did you manage to overlook *that*?

If you have the misfortune of being a left-wing social critic, the most galling part of each day is encountering the ubiquitous self-designation of apologists for capitalism as champions of freedom. One day a Tea Party Congressman introduces the Economic Freedom Act, which would free the four thousand or so people who pay it from the estate tax and liberate the rest of us from Social Security and the minimum wage. The next day some foundation with "freedom" in its name gives an award to Charles Koch for his stalwart defense of Koch Industries' freedom to render sizable areas of West Virginia, Arkansas, and Louisiana uninhabitable. And every day the House Freedom Caucus warns sternly that it will not rest until the tens of millions of Americans who cannot afford proper health care without assistance from the rest of us are finally free to go without it.

Where there is ideological smoke there is sometimes philosophical fire. The primitive intuitions about freedom to which defenders of laissez-faire capitalism appeal are widespread and at least superficially plausible. No one makes you shop at Walmart, after all, or work there either. If you don't like it where you live, you're free to move. If you don't like what you're hearing, change the channel. If you don't like Fords, buy a Chevy. This model of life as a series of discrete purchases and of citizens as sovereign consumers seems to lie in the background of many Americans' conviction that, whatever its other virtues or defects, capitalism relies exclusively or primarily on free choice and that regulations or taxes or public provision, even if sometimes justified, diminish freedom.

This everyday, rough-and-ready understanding of freedom was more or less adequate once, back when America was, uniquely in its time, neither a feudal nor a capitalist society. For a couple of centuries, because the land was rich and empty of any inhabitants whose rights a white man was obliged to respect, economic autonomy—the ability to make a living without selling one's labor—was widely, almost universally possible. Those two centuries formed the American imagination, which has not yet adjusted to the traumatic fact that the possibility of individual self-reliance, and therefore of economic autonomy in the sense presupposed by laissez-faire ideology, is gone forever. When the means of making a living were largely unowned and available to all, economic agents could confront one another as equals, capable of entering into genuinely voluntary agreements and morally binding contracts. Today, by contrast, employment contracts typically involve members of two groups that are radically unequal, since one group has

control over something the other must have access to in order to survive, but not vice versa. That is just another way of saying that we live in a class society. Our individualistic political rhetoric, appropriate to the frontier period but now a century and a half out of date, serves only to conceal the one-sided class warfare that its victims stubbornly refuse to acknowledge.

Those victims have some excuse; they are daily bombarded by laissez-faire ideology. Intellectuals, on the other hand, really ought to know better. The structural un-freedom inherent in class relations was authoritatively described by an early critic of capitalism and champion of labor unions. I'm referring to Adam Smith, who wrote in the first volume of *The Wealth of Nations*:

> [In disputes between masters and workmen,] it is not difficult to foresee which of the two parties must, upon all ordinary occasions, have the advantage in the dispute, and force the other into compliance with their terms. The masters, being fewer in number, can combine much more easily; and the law, besides, authorizes or at least does not prohibit their combinations, while it prohibits those of the workmen.…
>
> We rarely hear, it has been said, of the combinations of masters though frequently of those of workmen. But whoever imagines, on this account, that employers rarely combine is as ignorant of the world as of the subject. Masters are always and everywhere in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform combination not to raise the wages of labor above their actual rate.

Smith, a true friend of the working man, added this:

> [T]he masters can hold out much longer. A landlord, a farmer, a master manufacturer, a merchant, though they did not employ a single workman, could generally live a year or two upon the stocks which they have already acquired. Many workmen could not subsist a week, few could subsist a month, and scarce any a year without employment. In the long run the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him; but the necessity is not so immediate.

If we could speak with our nineteenth-century counterparts, we might ask questions like: "Why did you believe it legitimate for one person to own another? Why did women seem to you incapable of self-determination? Why did you consider that political authority could be inherited, for example by monarchs or aristocrats?" If they defended their morality against ours, we might learn a good deal by trying to rebut them and vindicate our own moral intuitions.

Similarly, we should try to imagine which of our current beliefs might seem benighted to our twenty-third century descendants. I suspect they will want to ask us questions like: "Why did you base desert on performance, which can't be measured and is in any case a function of one's endowments? After all, no one deserves her endowments. Why did you make that strangely artificial distinction between the political and the economic? It looks as though your only purpose was to prevent economic democracy. Why did you define freedom so narrowly, as the absence of constraints on one person's right to employ her capital but not on another person's right to realize her capacities? Why did you assume that contracts between parties with radically unequal resources could be free?"

Freud wrote, in a rare hopeful vein:

> The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest until it has gained a hearing. Ultimately, after endlessly repeated rebuffs, it succeeds. This is one of the few points in which one may be optimistic about the future of humanity, but in itself it signifies not a little.

The human intellect is already more than adequate to dispose of apologetics for greed. It is the human heart that needs instruction. In Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (the second-best-selling book in the nineteenth century), Julian West, the nineteenth-century Bostonian who wakes up in the twenty-first century, is told by his guide, Dr. Leete, that in the new world the helpless and disabled receive exactly the same income as everyone else.

> "The idea of charity on such a scale," said Julian, "would have made our most enthusiastic philanthropists gasp."
>
> "If you had a sick brother at home," replied Dr. Leete, "unable to work, would you feed him on less dainty food, and lodge and clothe him more poorly, than yourself? More likely you would give him the best of everything; nor would you think of calling it charity. Would not the word, in that connection, fill you with indignation?"
>
> "Of course," I answered, "but the cases are not parallel. There is a sense, no doubt, in which all men are brothers; but this general sort of brotherhood is not to be compared, except for rhetorical purposes, to the brotherhood of blood."
>
> "There speaks the nineteenth century," exclaimed Dr. Leete. "Ah, Mr. West…if I were to give you, in one sentence, a key to what may seem the mysteries of our civilization as compared with that of your age, I should say that it is the fact that the solidarity of the race and the brotherhood of man, which to you were but fine phrases, are, to our thinking and feeling, ties as real and as vital as physical fraternity."

This passage is a bridge to a surely very remote utopian future. But it also echoes an even more distant and yet very familiar past—the Sermon on the Mount, with its promise that "blessed are those that hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied." And later in the same Gospel, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus almost seems to have been admonishing Julian West and his hard-hearted contemporaries: "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters"—to the poorest of the poor—"you do to me." Those who hunger and thirst for justice won't be satisfied for a great while yet, except in imagination. But even that, as Freud said, signifies not a little.

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A Companion, Not a Judge

Cathleen Kaveny

Casuistry doesn't have to be rigid. It can be a tool for the kind of moral theology Pope Francis is calling for.

Pope Francis has made it plain on numerous occasions that he doesn't like "casuistry"—the case-based method of moral reasoning that has been a hallmark of Catholic teaching for centuries now. What is casuistry, anyway? And why doesn't the pope like it?

Within the Catholic tradition, casuistry has its roots in the sacramental practice of confession. Confession has always been important for Catholics. But after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), many Catholics were required to "make their Easter duty"—to take Communion during the Easter season. Since it was forbidden to receive Communion in a state of mortal sin, fulfilling that duty required Catholics to go to confession. Once there, they were required to confess to a priest each individual sin they committed, as well as the number of times they committed it. So the demand for good confessors increased exponentially. The priest hearing the confession was required to listen to the sins, evaluate their seriousness, and administer a penance designed both to punish and heal.

PETER HORREE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Francisco de Zurbarán, *The Apotheosis of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 1631

But how was the priest to know what to do or say in response? How was he to know whether an act confessed by a penitent was indeed a sin, and if so, how serious a violation of God's law it was? To provide guidance, a genre of literature known as the "manuals of moral theology" developed, which provided a taxonomy of sinful actions, usually under the rubric of the Ten Commandments. They considered the range of possible sins in great detail.

The manuals were a type of professional literature written by priests for priests, not for laypeople. They were composed in Latin, not the vernacular, well into the twentieth century. (Even after the switch to the vernacular, some manuals kept the parts about sexual sins in Latin.) They were focused on what *not* to do on pain of mortal or venial sin, not *what* to do in order to grow in virtue. The manuals were no more designed to provide a broadly accessible and inviting view of Catholic life than the federal penal code was designed to inspire patriotic commitment to American life. They had a narrow purpose. At the same time, it is fair to say that they had a disproportionate—and distorted—effect on the moral imagination of the hierarchy as well as that of ordinary Catholics.

Pope Francis's recent criticisms of casuistry, in my view, helpfully point to these distortions. Many of his most trenchant remarks have been given as part of his reflections during Mass at his residence, the Domus Sanctae Marthae in Rome.

In 2014, the pope suggested that casuistry is *inimical to faith*. According to a *L'Osservatore Romano* summary of one of his morning meditations, he claimed that

> "Casuistry is precisely the place to which all those people go who believe they have faith" but only have a knowledge of its content. Thus, "when we find a Christian" who only asks "if it is licit to do this and if the Church could do that," it either means "that they do not have faith, or that it is too weak."

Here, the pope seems to be calling out Christians who place their faith in the law rather than in Jesus Christ himself. They assume that following (their

Pope Francis emphasizes the need to pay attention to people's good-faith efforts to do the best they can, facing pain, brokenness, and limitations.

interpretation of) the law is sufficient to respond to all difficult situations, rather than relying on trust in God's mercy and a tender, creative response to human suffering. One of the cases he cites, for example, is the leaders who asked whether "a woman was widowed, poor thing, who according to the law had to marry the seven brothers of her husband in order to have a child." Casuistry, in this sense, focuses on the moral dilemma, rather than the child of God who is suffering within it. It does not interpret the law in light of the merciful intentions of the divine lawgiver.

Two years later, in 2016, Francis portrayed casuistical reasoning as a *malevolent snare*. In another morning meditation summarized by *L'Osservatore Romano*, he cites the

> "doctors of the law, who were always approaching Jesus with bad intentions." The Gospel clearly tells us that their intention was "to test him": they were always ready to use the classic banana peel "to make Jesus slip," thus taking away his "authority." They "were separated from the people of God: they were a small group of enlightened theologians who believed that they had all knowledge and wisdom." But, in "elaborating their theology, they fell into case law, and could not get out of the trap."

In this talk, Pope Francis sees casuistry as a mark of unjustified moral and intellectual pride, a tool for some people to view themselves, in deluded fashion, as morally superior to others and therefore more beloved by God. In the pope's view, knowledge is not in itself the problem. Using knowledge to build up oneself by making other people smaller, more vulnerable, or less significant is a problem because it violates the command to love our neighbors as Jesus loves us.

In a 2017 morning meditation, Pope Francis contrasts casuistry with *love of truth*.

> Francis observed, "casuistry is hypocritical thinking: 'you can, you cannot.'" A thought "that can then become more subtle, more evil: 'Up to this point, I can. But from here to there, I cannot,'" which is the "deception of casuistry." Instead, we must turn "from casuistry to truth." And, "this is the truth," the pope noted. "Jesus does not negotiate truth, ever: he says exactly what it is."

From this perspective, casuistry is a self-serving effort to comply with the letter of the law while subverting its spirit and purpose. It is a childish and ineffective attempt to reconfigure the radical demands of the Gospel to fit conveniently within our preexisting plans. This sort of casuistry can happen with liturgical requirements as well as moral requirements. A good example would be someone who finally puts the donut down while getting in the car on the way to Mass, figuring, "Well, it's a twenty-minute drive, ten minutes to park and walk, and a good thirty minutes in church before I will get communion—so I comply with the one-hour fasting rule. I'm in just under the line! A personal best!"

Most recently, Pope Francis told a global conference of moral theologians that casuistry is a *cramped and backward-looking form of moral theology*. More specifically, he judged that:

> to reduce moral theology to casuistry is the sin of going back. The casuistry has been overcome. The casuistry was my food and that of my generation in the study of moral theology. But it is proper to decadent Thomism.

But what exactly does he propose to replace it? It is clear from the context that Pope Francis rightly believes that moral theology encompasses more than casuistry.

> All of you are asked to rethink the categories of moral theology today, in their mutual bond: the relationship between grace and freedom, between conscience, good, virtues, norm and *phrónesis*, Aristotelian, Thomist *prudentia* and spiritual discernment, the relationship between nature and culture, between the plurality of languages and the uniqueness of agape.

Moreover, he urges Catholic moral theologians not to remain in their disciplinary ghettos; they must take into account the insights from other disciplines, including the sciences and social sciences. Moral theology is subject to development in at least two ways. First, it is always possible to grow in insight into the Lord's requirements of us. Second, many of the particular judgments made by moralists depended tacitly on normative accounts of how things are that have since been called into question by science, social science, and human experience. For example, in contrast to St. Thomas's view that women were in some sense "defective males," we now recognize that they are fully morally and intellectually equal to men.

In addition, Pope Francis encourages moralists to take seriously the particular experience of the faithful, in order to recognize the Gospel enfleshed in human lives, rather than treating it as an abstract ideal. "Theology has a critical function of understanding the faith, but its reflection starts from living experience and from the *sensus fidei fidelium*." Good moralists do not separate themselves from the lives of ordinary Catholics, but engage those lives with compassion and insight.

Most importantly, Pope Francis emphasizes the need to pay attention to people's good-faith efforts to do the best they can, facing pain, brokenness, and limitations. The task of the moralist is not to pile burden upon burden, but to open space for grace for the faithful, "who often respond as best as possible to the Gospel in the midst of their limits and carry out their personal discernment in the face of situations in which all normative schemas are broken." What does that

mean, concretely? Traditional casuists often considered one action at a time: Is such-and-such activity a sin or not? If it is, that's the end of the story—don't do it. But as Aquinas recognized, sometimes people (often, if not always, through their own prior choices) find themselves in situations where there is no perfectly morally acceptable path forward for them. Catholic moralists cannot simply say, "Too bad for you." They need to help people in these situations bring their lives into accord with God's will for them, step by step.

In my view, Pope Francis's criticisms of the dangers of casuistry are on point. In fact, the first definition of "casuistry" in some dictionaries concurs with his negative judgment on the practice: It is "the use of clever but unsound reasoning, especially in relation to moral questions; sophistry." (Another pejorative synonym for casuistry is "Jesuitical" reasoning.)

But at its best, casuistry doesn't have to be sophistry. Nor does it have to be the rigid and unyielding application of abstract rules to facts, like a TurboTax program for moral problems. In fact, good casuistry very much resembles the kind of moral theology the pope is calling for. Good casuistry is not mechanical, deductive reasoning solely focused on avoiding sin. It calls for the rules and the facts to be in dialogue with each other, press upon each other, and reshape each other.

Let us begin with human experience. At its core, casuistry is the practice of discernment about what to do in particular situations. It is not the practice of an armchair intellectual. Doing it correctly requires both prudential judgment, love of others, and a fair amount of self-knowledge. It is an everyday practice, not one reserved for priests hearing confessions. Say, for example, you have to decide whether to go visit a sick grandparent or prepare for an important meeting. You examine your motives—if you skip the visit, are you overly ambitious or merely fulfilling responsibilities to your coworkers? If you make the visit, are you honoring your elders in their frailty, or merely shirking an unpleasant work task? You look at circumstances—for example, you might ask whether one of your cousins is making a visit to your grandmother this weekend, or whether she will be alone. And very frequently, we ask for advice from wise people who know us well.

Whereas academic casuistry spends a lot of time focusing on intrinsically evil acts, in real life, if all goes well, acts that we think are intrinsically evil don't even come up as an option in our deliberations. For example, murder is an intrinsically evil act and therefore always wrong. When deliberating how to balance their obligations to their grandmother with their work obligations, most people (thankfully) don't say, "Well, I *could* kill my boss, and then the assignment would be postponed so I could go see Grandma. What do you think of *that* idea, Mom?"

The problem, of course, is that many Catholics don't think that certain acts that Church teaching has considered intrinsically evil are in fact rightly described in that way. Many people don't think contraceptive acts or homosexual acts are always wrong, but believe that their moral status depends on broader circumstances. While Pope Francis has not endorsed these positions, he has also not shut down discussion, or driven theologians or laypeople who hold those views out of the Church. He knows, for better or worse, the adage "*Roma locuta est, causa finita est*" ("Rome has spoken, the matter is settled") is not descriptively true anymore, if it ever was. So the pope is willing to talk.

We all engage in casuistry. As moral agents, our decision-making is about the particular moral choices we face on a daily basis. At its best, the casuistry of moral theologians supported rather than supplanted the casuistry of ordinary life. Consider, for example, the rule of double-effect, a mainstay of Catholic casuistical reasoning. It states that we are responsible for the effects that we purposely bring about in a different way than those that we merely foresee will occur as a result of our action. There is an enormous debate about how to apply the rule in difficult cases, but it makes intuitive sense at its core. We all know, for example, there is a difference between taking Tylenol with codeine *with the purpose of* getting high, on the one hand, and taking it in order to quell a bad cough, foreseeing but not intending that your mind will be thoroughly addled by the medicine, on the other. Let's stipulate that it is always wrong to get high on purpose—so the first scenario is not a morally acceptable option. Under certain circumstances, however, it is morally permissible to get high as a *side effect* of taking medicine, such as when you are safely tucked in your bed at home. But under other circumstances, knowingly *causing* the side effect of getting high, even if it's not part of your *purpose*, is morally irresponsible.

Despite their limitations, traditional moralists addressed many issues faced by Catholics in ordinary life. They had to, if they were to help parish priests distinguish sinful from non-sinful actions. For example, they addressed one type of situation under the ominous label "cooperation with evil." The question raised by the label is how far and in what respect one agent can contribute to the sinful actions of another agent without falling into sin herself. If my job is to maintain the heating system at a munitions plant that manufactures counter-population weapons, I am contributing, in at least some small way, to the making of such weapons by the company. Is my "cooperation" with their evil activity permissible, or do I have to quit my job? Does the fact that I have five kids to support affect the analysis? Would it make a difference if counter-population weapons were only a small part of their product range?

Agents who live in the real world face cooperation with evil questions all the time. Do you drive your alcoholic uncle to the liquor store so he won't drive himself? Do you look the other way when one of your friends cheats on a test? Do you type and mail the fraudulent letter your boss is sending to the firm's clients? These are not easy questions to answer. They require discernment, prudence, and attention to the facts. For many people, they also require consultation with others they consider morally wise. Good casuistry, in other

words, must be integrated with an account of prudence and the other virtues.

Is academic casuistry as a part of Catholic moral theology worth saving? I believe it is. But we need to ask: Can academic casuistry be reformed to reflect the place of the practice in ordinary life? Could it redeem its bad reputation in the eyes of Pope Francis? I believe it can, provided that it is oriented toward the imperative of "accompaniment" that has characterized his moral teaching. Academic casuistry can no longer attempt to replace the consciences of the Catholic faithful. It needs to function primarily as a companion and a guide, rather than merely as a judge.

What would a reformed casuistry of accompaniment look like? In his recent talk to moral theologians, Pope Francis stated that "the true Thomism is that of *Amoris laetitia*," which presents "the living doctrine of St. Thomas" because it "keeps us going, taking risks, but in obedience." Rereading *Amoris laetitia*, I see four elements that a renewed Thomistic casuistry would need to emphasize.

First, St. Thomas said that the acts appropriate for casuistic analysis are the acts of human beings (excluding merely mechanical acts like stroking one's beard). The manuals of moral theology tended to consider human acts in very abstract and schematic forms. By abstract, I mean that they don't actually invite the confessor to consider the act as something done by a particular person, for a particular reason, subject to particular pressures, at a particular time and place. They ask the confessor to fit the act into precut categories of Aristotelian moral philosophy, which looks at the object of the act (its immediate purpose), its end (its larger motive), and its circumstances.

These are very useful categories for analyzing an act. But they are not self-applying. And if they remain at the abstract level, they are not likely to capture all the relevant features of the acting agents. So a reformed casuistry needs to pay as much attention to the acting person as to the act itself, and to situate that act within the broad life course of its doer. In *Amoris laetitia*, Pope Francis reminds us that the people who are acting are thoroughly embedded in families, societies, and the responsibilities and limitations they have accumulated over time. They have goals they have set, goals they have abandoned, and goals they don't even articulate to themselves. They are subject to bad luck, social pressures, and internal and external limitations. Often, the circumstances of an action are not "mere circumstances." They are part and parcel of the life and identity of a socially embedded human person.

Second, Pope Francis often emphasizes that "time is greater than space." Whereas the classic manuals of casuistry analyzed sins, they did so by abstracting the act in question from the broader context of the penitent's journey of faith. By emphasizing time, as well as God's loving accompaniment of each of us through time, Pope Francis is asking casuists to consider where and how an act fits in a particular person's life. It may be impossible for the person to break all bad habits at once, particularly addictive ones like sex, drugs, and alcohol. Small steps might be necessary. Pastoral theology has always considered such issues, of course. What Francis is saying is that good academic moralists need to do the same thing.

This is where Francis runs into controversy with his more conservative critics. Francis accepts, in my view, the Church's teaching against all sex outside heterosexual marriage. In his terms, he would say it is an "ideal." By that he does not mean that it is not true or binding—although that is how some conservative Catholics interpret him. He means that it is very difficult for everyone to get from a disorganized and morally disintegrated situation to one that is organized and morally integrated. No one will ever get there all the way. Some people might get closer than others. But moralists have to be able to say something more than "Don't have sex. It is a mortal sin. You will go to hell." Their job is to help people discern a concrete and specific and workable path forward.

Third, and relatedly, Pope Francis asks moralists to recognize the interplay between circumstances and rules. It is not always possible to take an abstract rule and apply it mechanically to particular situations; sometimes, particularities generate their own exceptions in ways that cannot be fully anticipated by any moralist. Francis quotes Thomas Aquinas, who observes that "although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter defects."

Fourth and most importantly, an approach to casuistry inspired by Pope Francis would emphasize that the moral law has to be interpreted according to the intention of the lawgiver—Jesus Christ. In the end, moral theology is dependent upon Christology for its fundamental orientation. Pope Francis writes:

> [The Church] turns with love to those who participate in her life in an incomplete manner, recognizing that the grace of God works also in their lives by giving them the courage to do good, to care for one another in love and to be of service to the community in which they live and work.

This, in my view, is the most groundbreaking aspect of Pope Francis's approach to moral theology. It is also a point on which he breaks with Aquinas, at least as he is commonly interpreted. For Aquinas, and most of the casuists who followed him, a person who has committed a mortal sin has cut herself off from God's love and grace, which can only be restored with confession and repentance. In Pope Francis's view, God does not abandon us, even when we try to abandon him. God works with us patiently, gently, trying to turn us around without breaking us. The task of a Catholic moralist, and the challenge to a casuistry renewed in light of Pope Francis's teaching, is to be faithful to this understanding of a God who does not give up on anyone.

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PRO HORATIO

On reading *Odes: Book III*

Robert P. Imbelli

"I hate the unwashed herd,"
Horace huffed, and held his nose—
"I keep my distance."

But he was not loathe
to curry rich Maecenas' favor,
reaping a choice Sabine estate and
precious casks of sweet Falernian.

Still, cancel not too quickly
the ancient reprobate.

We all strive to erect fine monuments
"more lasting than bronze"; and
are not above obeisant bows
to any Monsignore or Professore
who might promote our cause or
smooth our way.

So, hail to thee, Horati:
"dimidium pars animae meae!"

ROBERT P. IMBELLI, *a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, is a longtime* Commonweal *contributor.*

Christ at the Assembly Line

Costică Brădățan

How a year of factory work transformed Simone Weil

From an early age, Simone Weil embodied a curious paradox: she was at once a child of extraordinary promise and a hopeless weakling, a prodigy and dangerously sickly. Steel and dust. A perceptive doctor who treated her when she was a child thought she was "too extraordinary to go on living." Despite the prediction, Weil did go on living, but hers was to be a precarious existence, perpetually on the edge. "From infancy," observes a biographer, "chronic illness imperiled her life, a pattern of ill-health from which she never completely escaped." In adulthood, Weil would associate this precariousness with some primal failure. Recalling her health troubles as an infant, she would remark, with characteristic self-deprecation, "*C'est pourquoi je suis tellement ratée*"—That's why I am such a failure.

She may have meant it as a joke, but failure is no laughing matter. No sooner do you utter its name than it takes on a life of its own—before you know it, it has moved in with you. Weil's precariousness would stick with her, causing her increasing suffering, both physical and mental, as she grew older. Yet the more she suffered, the more she understood, and since she came to suffer beyond measure, her understanding became prodigious. The combination of extreme fragility and extraordinary insight, which the good doctor had noticed in the child, would eventually define her. Weil was only too aware of the connection. Referring to her crippling migraines, she told her mother once, "You oughtn't be sorry that I have had headaches, for without them there are many things I would not have done."

Simone Weil during the Spanish Civil War, 1936

GETTY IMAGES/HULTON ARCHIVE

Throughout her life, Simone Weil was fundamentally clumsy, and in her dealings with the physical world she had to make a significant amount of effort. Her clumsiness, recalled Gustave Thibon, "was only equaled by her goodwill—the latter ended by triumphing over the former." It must have been one of the cruelest ironies: while intellectually and morally she was well above others, when it came to simple tasks that involved her body, she was below most. "Physically," a classmate recalls, when she was around ten years old, Weil looked like "a little child, unable to use her hands." She could write only with much difficulty, and would regularly fall behind others in her class. For all her intellectual promise, her childhood was marked by a desperate effort to catch up with her classmates in all things practical, from writing and drawing to sports or just walking down the street.

Simone Weil at age 12

A former schoolmate observed that Weil looked as if she "belonged to another order of being, and her mind didn't seem to belong to our age or our milieu. She felt like a very old soul." Even decades later, an encounter with her would have the same effect. Weil would invariably come across as awkward, her head dangerously in the clouds: "I had the impression of being face to face with an individual who was radically foreign to all my ways of feeling and thinking." To high-school colleagues who didn't know her well, she could appear weird, even arrogant. "I knew Simone Weil at Henri IV," one of them remembered. She was "completely aloof and unsociable." In the street, it was "only miraculously that she was not hit by cars." Sometimes her otherworldliness could reach hilarious proportions. In her twenties, and a graduate of the École Normale Supérieure to boot, she wrote her mother a letter asking, in all earnestness, "How do you eat bacon—raw or cooked? If you want to eat it with eggs on a plate, do you have to cook it first?"

This must have been one of the few occasions when Simone Weil felt the need to eat something. Most of the time, she didn't. To her, eating seemed "a base and disgusting function," her friend and biographer Simone Pétrement recalled. And you could tell. To those who encountered her, Simone Weil gave a distinct impression of *bodilessness*, to go with her otherworldliness. It was as though she was there, before your eyes, and yet she wasn't.

This ghostly quality, along with her unique demeanor, made her presence an unsettling experience. The poet Jean Tortel tried to convey her appearance: "A cone of black wool, a being completely without a body, with a huge cape, large shoes and hair which looked like twigs; her mouth was large, sinuous and always moist; she looked at you with her mouth." Her presence was at once fascinating and disturbing. George Bataille, who stated bluntly that Weil's "undeniable ugliness was repellent," admitted that few human beings "have interested me more deeply." He fell prey to her paradoxical charm: "I personally felt that she also had a true beauty.... She seduced by a very gentle, very simple authority."

Given her outstanding gifts, the École Normale Supérieure, one of France's top schools, was a natural choice. As a *normalienne*, after graduation she was expected to serve as a high-school teacher, changing schools across France as needed. But Weil was the unlikeliest of teachers. When she went to take up one of her teaching positions, her overprotective mother by her side, the custodian took her for one of the incoming high-school students and kindly asked her in which class she wished to enroll. In the common room, she would hardly interact with the other teachers. To provoke their bourgeois sensibilities, at staff meetings Weil would bring a Soviet newspaper in Russian (a language she did not know) and pretend to read it with concentration. In the cities where she taught, she was often labeled a "radical" and a "troublemaker," and respectable people were warned to stay away from "the red virgin."

When Weil first showed up in class, the students at the all-girls school didn't know what to do with their new teacher—she was so unlike any others they had had before or after. "So strange. At first, we laughed at her," one of them would remember. "She dressed badly and her gestures were awkward and graceless. She hesitated when she spoke. Her method was as odd as her appearance." As soon as they got used

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to her unorthodox ways, however, they were won over by her brilliance and the dedication she put into her work. Eventually, they came to love her, and to respect her "gentle" and "simple" authority. Weil's clumsiness was part of her charm. When, on one occasion, she came to school with her sweater on backward, the pupils discreetly drew her attention to this and "arranged things so that she could hide behind the blackboard, take the sweater off, and put it on right." The girls behaved maternally toward their childlike teacher.

Considering Weil's clumsiness, it was a good thing that she chose an intellectual profession. We would be suspicious of a thinker who comes across as too savvy in the ways of the world. But the choice came with its own challenges. She felt privileged and could not stand the guilt of pursuing the life of the mind while others were laboring to feed, dress, or shelter her body. That was why, as Weil reached adulthood, she became determined to take up a physically demanding job, if only on a temporary basis. She knew she was not meant for it, but that only stimulated her. So, even as she graduated from the École Normale Supérieure, which sealed her membership in the French intellectual elite, and embarked on a teaching career, Weil looked for opportunities to do a stint as an unskilled factory worker.

A year-long leave of absence in 1934 allowed her to do just that. The times were not ideal for guilty intellectuals playing factory worker: "In these days," she wrote to a former pupil, "it is almost impossible to get into a factory without credentials—especially when, like me, one is clumsy and slow and not very robust." But eventually she got her factory job—more than one, in fact.

Weil had some harsh bosses, but most oppressive of all was her own sense of inadequacy and the feeling that in servicing the machines, she was turning into a thing herself. For the duration of her employment (a little over a year), she lived in "the fear of not being able to meet the work quotas one must attain to stay in the factory." The movements of her body, the tempo of her inner life, her whole existence in the factory, she discovered, were now dictated by the speed of the machines to which she was attached. And she fell painfully short in that department. "I am still unable to achieve the required speeds," she wrote several months into her employment. The reasons were always the same: "my unfamiliarity with the work, my inborn awkwardness, which is considerable, a certain natural slowness of movement, headaches…"

When Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* was released in 1936, Weil not only recognized its formidable artistic vision and philosophical import, but found herself, whole, in the story: the Little Tramp was her. The film, she realized, uncannily captured the experience of the modern factory worker who, instead of using the machines, was being used and abused by them—to the point of being eaten alive. The poor worker became a tool at the mercy of alien forces: the assembly line, the factory, the whole capitalist system. Weil loved the film, even though watching it brought her no comfort; what she saw on screen was a replay of her own anguish. Just like Chaplin's Little Tramp, the factory turned her into a thing. A cog in a machine—depersonalized, replaceable, disposable. What made her situation particularly painful was her fundamental inability to adjust herself to the rhythms and demands of the machine she was part of. She could not even be a cog, it turned out.

If you think that someone as clumsy as Simone Weil—a pacifist to boot—would refrain from taking up arms in a time of war, you are wrong. No sooner did the Spanish Civil War break out, in 1936, than she jumped at the opportunity to join the republican forces in Barcelona. She had an absolute duty to fight, she thought. This time her awkwardness added an element of black comedy to the drama. Having attached herself to an anarchist group, she left for the frontline. Like everybody else, Weil received a rifle, but her handling of it gave her away: she was so shortsighted and maladroit that when the ragtag band of irregulars started target practice, none of those brave men wanted to be anywhere near her line of fire. Her clumsiness made her more dangerous than Franco's snipers. Later, when she described her exploits, she made light of their fears: "I am so nearsighted that I don't run the risk of killing anyone, even when I shoot at them."

At one point, she and her companions were camping at the frontline and preparing dinner. So as not to give away their position, the cooks dug a hole in the ground, started a fire in it, and placed a large pot over the coals. It took a while, but the method was relatively safe. Not for Weil. When dinner was almost ready, she stepped right into the pot filled to the brim with boiling oil. As her comrades tried to remove her stocking, parts of the skin remained attached to it. The burns were severe, and the pain must have been unbearable. She was in no condition to fight, if she ever had been, and was promptly sent back to Barcelona. As she lay in her hospital bed, most of her comrades were killed in combat. What saved her life was her spectacular clumsiness.

Weil could not stand the guilt of pursuing the life of the mind while others were laboring to feed, dress, or shelter her body.

When you are clumsy, your every contact with the physical world is a reminder that you have been brought into it in a state of incompletion. Some part of you is missing or poorly made or improperly designed. You look like others and, in most respects, you are like them, except for the missing bit that sets you apart, which you experience painfully whenever you try to accomplish something using your body. The discomfort thus caused, and the attending embarrassment, shapes pretty much every aspect of your worldly existence.

To be clumsy is to be born with a thorn in the flesh, which you can neither pull out nor ignore. Yet if you manage to find a way to live with the thorn, or even befriend it, the rewards make up for the pain. For when you can't insert yourself smoothly into the flow of things, and any dealing with the world brings you discomfort, you are uniquely positioned to observe its course and study its workings. The insights are considerable: your clumsiness puts a distance between you and the world, and the depth of your insight is in direct proportion to that distance. The more painful it gets, the more discerning you become. At the limit, as the thorn becomes of a piece with your flesh, your understanding will have reached uncanny proportions. If it hasn't ruined you, it will have made you wiser than most.

The process is worth considering in some detail. It starts with an annoying feeling of inadequacy: as you try to apply yourself to some physical job or another, you find that your body is not up to the task. In some important way, your body remains ill adapted to its environment. Some fateful mismatch puts it perpetually at the wrong angle: you can't place your hand where you should, or the hand does not talk to your eyes, or the eyes to the brain; you don't apply the right amount of pressure or else you press too much; you let an object go when you should hold it tight, or you hold it so tightly that you break it, or you fail in some other embarrassing way.

As you experience the unfolding of this mismatch, you come to see your own body in a new light. It appears to be lacking a necessary harmony between its parts and with the physical world—each limb seems to be going its own way. It is as though your body—or some part of it—is acting up, rebelling, proclaiming its autonomy. This is how you discover a province of yourself that you have little control of, a foreign enclave of sorts—a part of you that is not really you. Certainly, you can try to train your body in hopes of subduing the rebellious faction, but you realize that you will never fully succeed. Eventually, you will have to learn to live with the enemy within.

Clumsiness is a peculiar form of failure. It is one that is at once yours and not yours. It is *yours* because you are the one who does the failing: owing to poor motor coordination, you are unable to accomplish something that most people have little trouble accomplishing. And yet since this is due to a part of yourself that you can't fully control—indeed, a rebellious part that is not you—it's *not* exactly your failure. You suffer the consequences—shame, embarrassment, humiliation, or worse—just as Weil did throughout her life, without much fault of your own.

This failure, which gradually colonizes the clumsy and determines the contours of their lives, is not properly a human failure; it belongs to the things of the external world. And it is precisely its brutal *thingness* that makes it so disturbing when found in humans. Human as you are, you are supposed to have only "human" failings—errors of thought or judgment, of memory or affection, moral shortcomings, and so on. But when you exhibit a failure that normally belongs to the physical world, a technical malfunction, you become a unique spectacle that cannot fail to unsettle people. You are positively *creepy*. Others will seek to stay away from you and will end up seeing you as "out of this world." You are certainly out of *their* world.

Weil knew this only too well. "I am not someone with whom it is good to cast one's lot," she confided to her friend Simone Pétrement. "Human beings have always more or less sensed this." Pétrement intuited the link between Weil's physical awkwardness and her otherworldliness: her clumsiness "seemed to spring from the fact that she was not made out of the same crude materials as the rest of us."

When Simone Weil was six years old, and the First World War was being fought, she decided to go without sugar because, as she told her flabbergasted parents, "the poor soldiers at the front" could not afford any. This was to be her signature gesture: if she thought someone was deprived of something somewhere, she wanted to experience the deprivation herself. Throughout her life, Weil displayed an uncanny capacity to empathize with the suffering, the vulnerable, and the underprivileged. She lived in unheated rooms because, she believed, workers could not afford to heat theirs; she ate poorly because that was how she thought the poor ate. When on one occasion her money disappeared from her rented room, her only remark was, "Whoever took it undoubtedly needed it." Not only did she feel for others, but she also thought she had to push her life to its breaking point for them; in England, albeit seriously sick and exhausted, she didn't take the food she needed because the French under occupation were deprived of theirs.

Ironically, this capacity for empathy could make Weil blunt, impatient, even intolerant toward others. In *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, Simone de Beauvoir describes her failed encounter with Simone Weil. It must have been in 1928. "A great famine had just begun to devastate China, and I was told on hearing the news she had wept," remembers de Beauvoir. "I envied her for having a heart that could beat right across the world." When she approached Weil, however, de Beauvoir was in for a shock. No sooner was small talk over than Weil declared that the only thing that mattered was a "revolution that would feed all the people on earth." As de Beauvoir attempted to voice dissent, Weil cut her short: "It is easy to see you have never gone hungry." And that was that.

Simone Weil's factory administrative card

PHOTO 12/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

As Weil lay in her hospital bed, most of her comrades were killed in battle. What saved her life was her spectacular clumsiness.

It is not entirely clear what kind of revolution Simone Weil had in mind, but it was unlikely to be a Communist one. She was increasingly critical of the Soviet Union and the Moscow-sponsored Communist parties in Europe. At a time when few left-wing Western intellectuals would dare say anything against the Bolshevik regime, Weil articulated a remarkably lucid and prescient critique of the Soviet system. Whatever was accomplished during the Russian Revolution of 1917, she thought, was destroyed by the Bolshevik regime born out of it. The first Communist state was the gravedigger of the first Communist revolution. Soviet Russia, in Weil's estimation, was under the control of a bureaucracy that had at its disposal an amount of power (military, political, judicial, economic) that the capitalist states in the West could never even dream of attaining. And the result? Nowhere, she wrote in 1934, is the working class "more miserable, more oppressed, more humiliated than in Russia."

For all her criticism of revolutionary politics, Weil was not a reactionary. She cared for the workers as few of her fellow intellectuals did.

As Weil familiarized herself with the revolutionary milieu in France and elsewhere, she became convinced that the workers would fare much better *without* a Communist revolution. "The revolution is not possible," she wrote in 1935, "because the revolutionary leaders are ineffective dolts. And it is not desirable because they are traitors. Too stupid to win a victory; and if they did win, they would oppress again, as in Russia."

For all her criticism of revolutionary politics, Weil was not a reactionary. She cared for the workers as few of her fellow intellectuals did. Pétrement recalls that while they were still in high school, Weil told her, looking tenderly at a group of workers, "It's not only out of a spirit of justice that I love them. I love them naturally. I find them more beautiful than the bourgeois." Class guilt had fueled the leftist sympathies of generations of middle-class intellectuals in the West, and Weil had her share of it. A worker who got to know her well would recall:

> She wanted to know our misery. She wanted to free the worker. This was the goal of her life. I would say to her, "But you are the daughter of rich people." "That's my misfortune; I wish that my parents had been poor," she would say.

Yet it was much more than just class guilt. Having realized that revolutionary politics would not help the working class, and that revolutionary leaders were either crooked, incompetent, or both, Weil decided that the workers could only help themselves. Revolutions generate bureaucracies, and "bureaucracy *always* betrays," she said. If intellectuals truly want to understand and help the workers, there is one path they can pursue meaningfully: work alongside them, share their hunger, feel their pain, let themselves be crushed along with them.

Weil's decision to become an unskilled factory worker was driven by the same fundamental empathy toward the underprivileged that shaped her entire life. Working and living like a "beast of burden," she hoped, would give her the chance to experience human life at its most naked and brutal. And here she got more than she bargained for.

Barely a few months into her new existence as a factory hand, in January 1935, she wrote to a friend, "It is not that it has changed one or the other of my ideas (on the contrary, it has confirmed many of them), but infinitely more—it has changed my whole view of things, even my very feeling about life." Nothing would be the same again for her after *l'année d'usine* (the year of factory work). She would come out of it a changed person. "I shall know joy again in the future," she went on, "but there is a certain lightness of heart which, it seems to me, will never again be possible."

The social reality burst open for Weil in the factory, and she could now see right through all the shallowness of revolutionary talk. As she was trying to keep up with the impossible work quotas, the overbearing bosses, her crippling migraines and her clumsiness, she realized that the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution who were speaking so grandly in the name of the proletariat had no idea what they were talking about. From the perspective of the assembly-line worker, it was all imposture and demagogy. The Communist leaders, it appeared to her now, were no different from the bourgeois politicians they were trying to overthrow:

> Only when I think that the great Bolshevik leaders proposed to create a *free* working class and that doubtless none of them—certainly not Trotsky, and I don't think Lenin either— had ever set foot inside a factory, so that they hadn't the faintest idea of the real conditions which make servitude or freedom for the workers—well, politics appear to me a sinister farce [*une sinistre rigolade*].

The most consequential discovery Weil made in the factory was the state of complete dehumanization that assembly-line work brings about in the worker. In April 1935, in a letter to Boris Souvarine, she repeats what a female worker, who was servicing a conveyor belt, had told her: "After a few years, or even a year, one no longer suffers, although one remains in a sort of stupor." Weil found that intolerable. "This seems to me to be the lowest stage of degradation."

Even though she would not spend enough time in the factory to reach that stage herself, she could easily place herself in her fellow worker's shoes. Eventually, it was her empathy for her fellow workers that helped her survive that year. Her fundamental need to *understand* brought some meaning to what otherwise seemed meaninglessness itself. "I don't feel the suffering as mine, I feel it as the workers' suffering," she told Souvarine. Whether "I personally suffer it or not seems to me a detail of almost no importance." The urge to "know and understand easily prevails." "I swore to myself," she writes in another letter, "that I would not give up until I had learned how to live a worker's life without losing my sense of human dignity. And I kept my word."

L'année d'usine allowed Weil to make some important observations about what happens to human beings as they are reduced to a cog in a social machine. "Nothing is more paralyzing to thought," she would write in 1936, than "the sense of inferiority which is necessarily induced by the daily assault of poverty, subordination, and dependence." If you happen to be assigned to a cog's position, you eventually become a cog—not just in others' eyes, but also in your own. The most

difficult thing to retain in the factory, she discovered, was a sense of human dignity; everything there conspired to keep you in a "state of subhuman apathy." Once you've surrendered to this state, anything can be done to you. You are no longer a person, but an object at anyone's disposal.

When Weil summarized her factory experience, she singled out two lessons she had learned. The first, "the bitterest and most unexpected," was that oppression, beyond "a certain degree of intensity," does not generate revolt, but "an almost irresistible tendency to the most complete submission." The second was that "humanity is divided into two categories": those "who count for something" and those "who count for nothing." Both these lessons would stay with her for the rest of her life.

As Weil was processing the significance of her factory experience, she started using a new term to describe it: *slavery*. Observing the workers' "complete submission," their "inhuman apathy" and increasing alienation, she could not come up with a better name for them than "slaves." From her study of the classical world, Weil knew what it meant for one human being to belong to another, and she found the modern worker to be a replica of the ancient slave. In addition to social degradation, which had always been the slave's mark, the factory worker was reduced to a non-thinking entity. The "absence of thought" required of the worker was "indispensable to the slaves of modern machinery." Finally, slavery is the domain of "affliction" (*malheur*), which, as Weil wrote in *Waiting for God*, is "quite a different thing from simple suffering [*souffrance*]." Affliction "takes possession of the soul and marks it through and through with its own particular mark, the mark of slavery [*la marque de l'esclavage*]." For the rest of her life, "affliction" would be central to her understanding of herself and of the world around her.

As an unskilled factory worker, Weil felt that she had become a slave herself. Toward the end of her factory experience, she internalized the slave condition to such an extent that she could see the world through an enslaved person's eyes, feel what the enslaved felt, and say the things they would say: "How is this that I, a slave, can get on this bus, use it by paying my twelve sous in the same way as anyone?" she once wondered, in all earnestness, as she boarded a bus to work. "What an extraordinary favor! If they had brutally forced me to get off…I think that it would have seemed completely natural to me. Slavery has made me completely lose the feeling of having rights."

When *l'année d'usine* was over, Weil found herself shattered and devastated, yet oddly renewed. Writing to a friend in October 1935, soon after the end of her factory employment, and referring to it as "those months of slavery" (*ces mois d'esclavage*), Weil explained that she regarded the experience as a gift. Slaving for those machines enabled her "to test myself and to touch with my finger the things which I had previously been able only to imagine." In another letter, Weil makes a striking confession: "It seemed to me that I was born to wait for, and receive, and carry out orders—that I had never done and never would do anything else."

She is talking here about the routines of factory work, but something more profound and more consequential seems to be emerging. It is the voice of *a new Simone Weil*—the mystic, the visionary, the deeply heretical religious thinker—born out of the experience of affliction. It was as a slave that she was degraded, but also as a slave that she would be redeemed. Thanks to a swift, spectacular move, Weil turned slavery on its head, and found glory in it. How is that possible? Slavery, Weil discovered, gives us direct access to the ultimate, redeeming humility. "There is no greater humility than to wait in silence and patience," she wrote in one of her notebooks. "It is the attitude of the slave who is ready for any order from the master, or for no order."

As she pondered and internalized the meanings of slavery, affliction, and humility, Weil stumbled upon a central Christian idea: when he was incarnated, Jesus Christ took "the form of a slave" (*morphē doulou*), as we learn from St. Paul in Philippians 2:7. Weil went into the factory to find out more about the social conditions of the modern worker in capitalism. Instead, she found Jesus Christ.

Weil may have been raised in a secular Jewish home, but her whole education was shaped by France's Catholic mindset. In the factory she started to use Christian notions, symbols, and images liberally to make sense of what she was going through. First among them was affliction itself, which defines both the slave condition and the Christian experience. In her "spiritual autobiography," she describes how the "affliction of others entered into my flesh and my soul." Because of her profound empathy for the oppressed, she felt the suffering around her as her own. That's how she received *la marque de l'esclavage*, which she likens to "the branding of the red-hot iron the Romans put on the foreheads of their most despised slaves." That's also how she was transformed: "Since then," she wrote, "I have always regarded myself as a slave."

An intense religious experience, which occurred soon after her factory stint, sealed the transformation. Finding herself in a small fishing village in Portugal, she witnessed a procession of fishermen's wives. Touring the anchored ships, they sang "ancient hymns of a heart-rending sadness." Weil froze in place. There, a conviction was "suddenly borne in upon me that Christianity is preeminently the religion of slaves, that slaves cannot help belonging to it, and I among them." Nietzsche, too, had said that Christianity was the religion of slaves. He was right, but for all the wrong reasons.

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St. George Greek Catholic Cathedral in L'viv, Ukraine

Into the Breach

Kathryn David

How Ukraine's Greek Catholic Church supplied what the country's rulers could not

In February 2022, as the Russian military crossed into Ukraine and marched toward Kyiv, Ukrainians and foreigners alike spilled into L'viv, a city thought to be safer because of its proximity to the Polish border. More than six months later, L'viv has become more than a temporary refuge—it has become a center for humanitarian aid, a cultural capital, and a safe haven for thousands of displaced people. As the world has turned its attention to L'viv, observers have recalled the city's past as the diverse Austro-Hungarian city of Lemberg. An urban center in the borderlands of the Habsburg Empire, Lemberg produced political activists, artists, and writers who wrote in Ukrainian, Polish, German, and Yiddish. These figures were critical to the creation of a transnational European culture.

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Still overlooked, however, is the city's role as a Ukrainian spiritual center: under the Habsburgs L'viv became the seat of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. While most Ukrainians today identify as Orthodox (80 percent), a sizable minority are Greek Catholics belonging to this Eastern-rite Catholic Church. These nearly four million Greek Catholics, about 9 percent of Ukraine's population, are concentrated in L'viv and its surrounding area. Indeed, most of the historic churches in L'viv's downtown are Catholic.

The Catholic presence in L'viv is not simply a historical curiosity. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has played an outsized role not just in the local culture, but in the creation of the Ukrainian nation. Historically, it has been in the moments when the fate of Ukraine hung in the balance that the Greek Catholic Church made its largest impacts. As L'viv takes on new importance in the Ukrainian war effort, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has again become more visible, not only locally but throughout the region. What can history tell us about how this current war will influence this overlooked religious community? Will the Church yet again be in a position to shape Ukrainian history?

Ukraine's Greek Catholic Church is a product of the shifting borders that have characterized so much of Eastern Europe's history. When an alliance of principalities coalesced to form the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569, its leadership had to figure out how to absorb Orthodox Slavs from the territories of what is now Ukraine into their Catholic realm. The nobility and the clergy settled on a church union in 1596, which would allow locals to continue to practice the Eastern-rite customs of Orthodox Christianity while accepting the spiritual authority of the pope, creating what was known then as the Ruthenian Uniate Church and is known today as the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Although the institution was founded in 1596, this Church traces its Christianity to Grand Prince Volodymyr (Vladimir in Russian) who adopted Byzantine Christianity for his kingdom in medieval Kyiv in 988. In this way, Greek Catholics see their spiritual heritage as emanating from the same source as the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches.

When the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth weakened in the late eighteenth century, its territories were partitioned and Greek Catholics found themselves divided between two empires with radically different approaches to this Church: the Russian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Imperial Russia saw the Greek Catholic Church as an imposition of Catholicism on a population that it deemed part of the Orthodox world. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the imperial Russian state banned the Church and forcibly transferred clergy, believers, and properties from the Greek Catholic Church to the Russian Orthodox Church. All the while, they called this process a "reunification," claiming they were "reunifying" Greek Catholics with their Orthodox brethren as their lands and sacred spaces were annexed by Russia. Tellingly, Putin and his allies use similar rhetoric of "reunification" to justify Russia's current war in Ukraine.

The treatment of the Church by Catholic Austria-Hungary was quite the opposite. As Catholics, the Habsburgs poured resources into the Greek Catholic Church to place it on more even footing with the Roman Catholic Church. This included state funding for seminaries, programs to allow Greek Catholic clergy to study in Rome, and money to build opulent cathedrals in the styles of the day. In 1817, the support of the Habsburg emperor allowed the Vatican to establish a metropolitan in Lemberg for the Greek Catholic Church. For the Habsburgs, this move was also meant to fight Russian influence. A well-funded and state-supported Greek Catholic Church, it was thought, would insulate the population from Russian state-funded Orthodox missions in the borderland city.

Yet, perhaps the most consequential impact of Habsburg state support for the Church was the creation of a highly educated clergy deeply ingrained in European networks of both religious and secular scholarship. And because the Greek Catholic Church, like the Orthodox Church, permits married clergy, these highly educated clergy soon became scions for families that served as the foundation of an intelligentsia in Austria-Hungary. It was these educated priests and their children who laid the foundation for the Ukrainian national movement in the late nineteenth century, a movement that emerged alongside Russian, Polish, and Jewish national movements in the region. These activists sought to forge connections with Orthodox Ukrainians across the border in imperial Russia, grappling with a key question: Could a population that straddled multiple empires and confessions become one people?

It was these educated priests and their children who laid the foundation for the Ukrainian national movement in the late nineteenth century.

Sheptytsky may have condemned radical nationalism as counter to the Church's teaching, but his parishioners and even members of the clergy did not always see it that way.

As Europe entered the twentieth century, the clergy of the Greek Catholic Church found that their visions for the Ukrainian nation were quickly being overtaken by more radical forms of nationalism. At the same time, some of their parishioners were eschewing national identifications altogether, embracing socialism and class-based solidarities along with it. How could the Church remain a meaningful presence in the lives of its flock with all of these shifts? This question fell to the man who was selected as metropolitan in 1900, serving until his death in 1944: Andrei Sheptytsky. The Church's history in the twentieth century came to be defined by Sheptytsky, not just because he was an extraordinary leader, but because in those forty-four years, Sheptytsky radically redefined the Church's role in society and left a legacy that shapes the Church to this day.

From 1900 to 1944, the seat of the Church, then Lemberg and today L'viv, and its surrounding region changed hands from Austria-Hungary to Poland (1918), and later Soviet Ukraine (1939), weathering two world wars. There were also short-lived but incredibly consequential occupations as imperial Russia fought Austria-Hungary during War World I; Reds fought Whites during the Russian Civil War; Soviets fought Nazis during World War II; and partisans of various loyalties fought each other, all in the city of L'viv. In the absence of a stable government, Sheptytsky positioned the Church to serve as a government for his stateless flock and, as metropolitan, was given a seat at tables normally reserved for diplomats. A statesman as well as a churchman, Sheptytsky used his own family's vast personal wealth and the Church's holdings to create institutions where the string of states in the region had failed, founding museums, schools, and charities to serve L'viv's vulnerable population, including veterans of the countless wars. With each new government, he used his position as head of the Church to advocate not just for Greek Catholics but for the Ukrainian minority as a whole, lobbying for Ukrainian-language rights and religious tolerance for both Orthodox and Catholic Ukrainians.

Despite this advocacy, Sheptytsky would have bristled at the suggestion that he was a nationalist, at least in the way it was understood at the time. Indeed, Sheptytsky was a vocal critic of radical nationalist movements taking hold in the region. He especially criticized violence between Poles and Ukrainians, using his platform to condemn the Polish government's treatment of its Ukrainian minority in the 1930s, as well as terrorist acts committed by right-wing Ukrainian nationalist groups against Polish rule.

But there were limits to his influence among a population of believers that then numbered around three million. Sheptytsky may have condemned radical nationalism as counter to the Church's teaching, but his parishioners and even members of the clergy did not always see it that way. The combination of the Great Depression and an increasingly repressive Polish government left the local population desperate for fundamental change. The Church's refusal to engage in a real way with mass politics caused many to search elsewhere for advocacy, including among the local nationalist and socialist movements. In letters preserved in the Vatican's Archive for Eastern Churches, Sheptytsky wrote to the Vatican in the 1930s about these developments, fearing that nationalist politics were replacing Christian values among his flock, including within the priesthood. He feared the consequences of a population committed to the nation above all, instead of service to God.

Even with these prescient insights, Sheptytsky could not have predicted what he and his Church would face during the Second World War. In 1939, L'viv and its surrounding region were annexed to Stalin's Soviet Union after the Nazi–Soviet pact split up Poland. From 1939 to 1941, Sheptytsky did his best to serve as a diplomat yet again, negotiating with the officially atheist Soviet state to protect his Church in exchange for a promise that the Church would not criticize the new Stalinist order. For their part, the Soviets understood that because of the Church's influence in the region, an all-out assault against Sheptytsky and the clergy would only inspire anger. That assault would come later—once the Soviet Union had decisively won the war and Sheptytsky was no longer alive to combat it.

In letters to the Vatican that Sheptytsky managed to smuggle out during this first Soviet occupation, he did not hide his true feelings about the regime he publicly declared loyalty to. He documented the crimes perpetrated against the local Polish population, which was singled out by Soviet authorities for mass arrest and deportation as a remnant of the old regime. He noted that the ubiquitous secret police presented the population with a series of impossible choices and commented on an overall moral degradation in the face of the violence of Soviet occupation.

When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Sheptytsky was forced to face a new reality. The series of choices Sheptytsky made in this

Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky

CNS PHOTO

period have come under a great deal of scrutiny by historians and remain a topic of debate. Although many avoid engaging with the complexities of the Church's history during World War II, the full picture offers insight into what Ukraine faced during this era, and crucially, what the Church might mean for Ukraine today.

Like many other L'vivians, Sheptytsky initially saw the Nazi invasion in 1941 as a liberation from Soviet rule. While some locals, especially radical nationalist groups, welcomed the opportunity to participate in violence against Jews and "Soviet collaborators" in service to the Nazi regime, this was not the case for Sheptytsky and many of his fellow clergy. Rather, Sheptytsky simply believed that nothing could be worse than the imposition of Stalinism his community had faced in the past two years. He took seriously promises from the Nazis that they would honor religious freedom and support movements for Ukrainian independence. It was this hopefulness that perhaps explains why Sheptytsky said nothing when pogroms against the local Jewish population broke out in the first months of Nazi occupation in the summer of 1941. Many of his own flock were the perpetrators of these pogroms, and, according to reports gathered later, Greek Catholic priests condoned the violence as revenge against the Soviet secret police, blaming local Jews for the crimes of the Soviet state.

But Sheptytsky's compliance with Nazi authorities was short-lived. As the Nazi occupation grew more violent and repressive, Sheptytsky used the little freedom he had to make his views known. His pastoral letters were banned by the Nazis, but he found ways to circulate them anyway to his parishes. In these letters he condemned those who had collaborated with the Nazis and the violence being committed by both the German occupiers and the local population against Jews and later Polish civilians. He was the first religious leader to report to the Vatican about the mass killings of Jews that later became known as the Holocaust and pleaded that these crimes be made known to the world.

Considering how many of Europe's religious leaders openly collaborated with Nazi occupation, this alone distinguishes Sheptytsky and the Greek Catholic Church from other religious institutions. But Sheptytsky went further. He and his brother Kliment, also a Church hierarch, were instrumental in helping conceal Jews from the Nazis, allowing them to hide out in rural monasteries, ultimately saving the lives of over a hundred local Jews. He managed to orchestrate all this while confined to a wheelchair by injuries and illnesses caused by old age and the trauma of war.

Still, despite Sheptytsky's objections, Nazi authorities hoped to use the Church and its symbolism to give themselves moral authority. As Soviet forces were closing in, the Nazis formed a special SS unit to be made up of local Ukrainians and asked for the Church's assistance in mobilizing it. While Sheptytsky sanctioned this, he also lobbied for this unit to have Greek Catholic priests serve as chaplains—making it the only Nazi SS unit with a chaplaincy. Scholars have been split on the meaning of this decision: Was it an attempt by Sheptytsky to encourage these draftees to remember their values and the Church's teachings as they fought a thoroughly unjust war? Or was it a way for the Church to give its blessing to these soldiers, in support of their ultimate mission to defeat the rapidly approaching Soviet army?

Here lies the central dilemma in interpreting the Greek Catholic Church and its leadership during a cataclysmic war. Those who denounce Sheptytsky as a "collaborator" ignore both the moments he risked everything to resist, and even more signifi-

The Church's ability to draw on Roman Catholic war relief networks allowed the Greek Catholic Church to fill in gaps left by the Ukrainian state.

cantly, the limitations imposed on anyone trying to negotiate between Hitler and Stalin. At the same time, Sheptytsky himself argued that war should not be used as an excuse to abandon one's values. Therefore, to get a full picture of the complicated people and institutions of the Church, it is necessary to acknowledge the moments it did not lead the way it should have.

Andrei Sheptytsky died in 1944, a few months after the Soviets retook L'viv and annexed it to Soviet Ukraine, where the city would remain until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Soviet state authorities allowed Sheptytsky an official funeral in acknowledgement of, if not respect for, his authority. In Soviet state reports from the funeral, informants said that mourners came from all sectors of society—including workers, peasants, students, and members of the intelligentsia—and remarked upon the massive influence this man and the Church had on the local population. Soviet authorities took this to mean that his death had left open a power vacuum and an opportunity to repress the Church once and for all.

Indeed, a few months after his death Soviet authorities began attacking the Church and Sheptytsky himself, claiming the Church had supported Nazi occupation and had to be punished along with all other "collaborators." Soviet authorities banned the Church and forcibly transferred its clergy, property, and believers to an official, state-run Russian Orthodox Church, echoing the policies previously pursued by imperial Russia. Those who resisted faced arrest, exile, and death. Under duress, some clergy and parishioners accepted the imposition of Orthodoxy, finding ways to outwardly appear dedicated members of the Orthodox Church while holding on to their Greek Catholic faith. Others formed an underground Greek Catholic Church that operated in secret throughout the rest of the lifespan of the Soviet Union. When movements for independence gained momentum in Soviet Ukraine in the 1980s, members of the underground Greek Catholic Church played a pivotal role. Once the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was once again permitted to operate legally from its seat in L'viv, now a city in independent Ukraine.

What lessons does this history offer the Greek Catholic Church today, as it once again confronts an unexpected war? The Church of today wants the public to understand its historical role as a moral authority for Ukrainian society. In this way, it can offer a powerful alternative to Russia's narratives about Ukraine. Unlike the Orthodox Church, its spiritual heritage is separate from Russia. The role of its clergy and believers in the Ukrainian national movement in Austria-Hungary ties Ukrainians to Europe. In response to Russian charges of Ukrainian "fascism," the Church can demonstrate that it was one of the few churches in Europe that resisted full collaboration with Nazi rule.

But how to apply the lessons of history in practice? In some ways, the legacy of Sheptytsky is carried on through the Church's active engagement in Ukrainian civil society. In the early 1990s the Church's ability to draw on European Catholic networks, as well as the Ukrainian Greek Catholic diaspora in the United States and Canada, gave the institution access to people and resources that other Ukrainian institutions did not have. Through these networks the Church helped to found one of Ukraine's most prestigious universities, Ukrainian Catholic University in L'viv, in addition to a plethora of humanitarian organizations and NGOs. Critically, the Greek Catholic Church's access to global Catholic institutions allowed the Church to mobilize a Ukraine-wide network of social outreach that extends far past west Ukraine and has outpaced smaller charitable endeavors by Ukraine's Orthodox Churches.

A true test for the Church's role in post-Soviet, independent Ukraine came with the outbreak of war in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and backed a separatist movement in eastern Ukraine. Between 2014 and 2021, over fourteen thousand soldiers were killed fighting in eastern Ukraine and over one million Ukrainians were internally displaced. While the battles took place in eastern Ukrainian regions with few Greek Catholics, the Greek Catholic Church managed to mobilize extensively for the war effort—far more so than Ukraine's Orthodox Churches. As anthropologist Catherine Wanner has argued, the Church's ability to draw on Roman Catholic war relief networks allowed the Greek Catholic Church to fill in gaps left by the Ukrainian state, including through direct support for the Ukrainian armed forces.

Most critically, in 2010, the Greek Catholic Church established a military chaplaincy that took on a new urgency when the war began in 2014. These chaplains were called to address the spiritual needs of Greek Catholic soldiers, overrepresented in the armed forces due to west Ukraine's high level of military service, as well as the needs of soldiers from various Orthodox denominations.

The Church's role as a spiritual bulwark for Ukraine's armed forces takes a physical form in the Garrison Church in L'viv, which is run by Greek Catholic chaplains and dedicated to soldiers and their families. While the church structure and much of its sacred art date back centuries, the church intentionally mixes traditional religious objects with modern symbols of warfare, like shell casings and pieces of shrapnel. Reporters who have attended Mass at this church note the presence of military families among the congregants and sermons that are specifically about the challenges of the war. As a *Times of Israel* journalist recalled, priests at the Garrison Church were as likely to be found packing up food and supplies for soldiers, military families, and refugees as they would be leading the liturgy. This building offers a clear example of how the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church sees its role: not simply as a spiritual guide, but as an active participant in shaping Ukrainian society at war, just like Sheptytsky's Church.

Still, debates that engulfed the Church in the previous century remain unresolved. What is the role for a minority Catholic Church in Ukrainian nation-building, especially for a nation that draws so much on its Orthodox heritage? In 2019, the Orthodox world recognized the existence of an independent (autocephalous) Ukrainian Orthodox Church, separate from the Russian Orthodox Church. While Russia denies the legitimacy of this independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, its existence has been a powerful tool for the Ukrainian state to assert a religious foundation that cannot be claimed by Moscow. Where does this leave non-Orthodox religious groups like the Greek Catholic Church? There is an opportunity for the Greek Catholic Church to advance the same idea some Ukrainian activists supported in the nineteenth century: a Ukrainian nation with roots in multiple spiritual traditions. Just as Sheptytsky advocated for the rights of Ukrainian Orthodox alongside Ukrainian Greek Catholics, the present-day Church has supported the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's campaign to be recognized as autocephalous. But the two Churches remain in tension as they grapple with the idea that only one Church can claim to be the moral authority of the Ukrainian nation.

And just as in the twentieth century, many Ukrainians remain unsure of the Church's capacity to address the problems Ukraine faced before this war and that have only worsened since. The Church remains more conservative on social issues than the rest of Ukraine's population, recently opposing Ukraine's participation in the Istanbul Convention on preventing violence against women. As Ukraine attempts to promote an image of itself to the world as more progressive than Russia on women's and LGBT rights, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church consistently opposes legislation meant to protect these communities from violence and discrimination. Moreover, in the project of reckoning with Ukraine's complicated past, the Church has remained mostly silent. In some cases, Greek Catholic organizations have even sponsored initiatives to present a whitewashed version of Ukraine's history, such as in the case of the controversial Lonsky Prison Museum, which lionizes some radical nationalists whom Sheptytsky himself condemned.

In wartime it is tempting to gloss over these complexities. It is clear to Ukrainians of all faiths that the Church is involved in multiple projects to sustain the country through this brutal war, building on a tradition of serving the needs of the Ukrainian people when other institutions fail them. In this way, the Church is certainly molding itself in the image crafted by Sheptytsky.

In a recent piece for the *Economist*, Fr. Andriy Zelinskyy, chief military chaplain for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, offered his view of the Church's role during this brutal war: "There was never a reason for this war and the Russian army has never had a mission. It was void of sense right from the very beginning. That's why it is imperative that, if we are to restore global security and personal dignity, we answer the questions it raises."

In the twentieth century, Sheptytsky's Church saw itself in the same role as it endured brutal occupations by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The Soviet Union's repression ultimately made it difficult for the Church to confront the trauma of war and reckon with life after. Today, as Fr. Zelinskyy reminds us, it seems that the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine may have the chance to answer the questions raised by the war. What answers it will provide, and whether they are the right ones for today's Ukraine, remains to be seen.

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Building Back Better?

An interview with Max Holleran

Griffin Oleynick

Max Holleran, a sociologist at the University of Melbourne, is the author of Yes to the City: Millennials and the Fight for Affordable Housing. *It's a detailed ethnographic study of the growing YIMBY (Yes In My Backyard) movement, which seeks to solve the U.S. housing crisis by "building more of everything." Holleran spoke about it recently with Associate Editor Griffin Oleynick for the Commonweal Podcast. This interview has been edited for clarity and length.*

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK: Before we get into the origins of YIMBYism, could you give us a brief summary of how Americans' views on cities and the desirability of living in them have changed over the past hundred years?

MAX HOLLERAN: Americans are famously suspicious of cities. They're places of immigration, of ethnic and racial difference, and of new ideas, some of which seem rather dangerous. And then there's the structural aspect, including the federally funded highway system built in the postwar era. We subsidized new housing at the edges of cities—the first generation of American suburbs erected in the 1960s. All of that has made the United States a highly suburban country. West of the Mississippi, there's a debate about whether true cities exist at all. There are sprawling metropolitan regions without true centers. Some have downtowns, strip malls, and shopping centers, but in general they're very dispersed.

For a long time, that was the ideal: you have a family, a middle-class job, and a house away from the city center that provides a safe place to raise children. You prioritize the nuclear family, and owning a suburban house becomes your primary asset, which gives your family equity.

That started changing with the critiques of suburbanization that emerged in the 1970s. Suburbs began to be seen as culturally deadening places—not just boring and soulless, but also sometimes creepy and unwelcoming. They advertised a sense of community, but didn't actually deliver. The kind of neighborliness that you'd see in a more compact neighborhood just wasn't there.

Suburbs inspired criticism for environmental reasons, too. They were devouring land near cities, forcing municipalities to build highways and services far from city centers, and forcing people to drive long distances. All those critiques added up to a general dissatisfaction with suburbia that then translated into a resettling of cities beginning in the 1970s and '80s and really accelerating in the 1990s.

Despite the pioneer metaphors about coming back to the city, American cities weren't actually empty. They'd always had people—fewer people, but they had poor people, people of color. They had residents, just not necessarily ones who specifically chose to live there.

Max Holleran

COURTESY OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

And the services that those people received were horrendous. The streets were in disrepair. Schools and infrastructure were quite bad. But people fell in love with cities again in the 1990s and engaged in the process we now call gentrification. That's a uniquely American concept because most cities in Europe and around the world never lost their wealthy residents.

GO: Gentrification is a word that we hear often. How would you define it as a sociologist, and how does that compare to the popular understanding of gentrification?

MH: "Gentrification" comes from the gentry—that is, wealthy people—leaving their expensive suburbs to move back into the city. So there's an economic dimension: people are searching for cheaper housing at the individual level, and real-estate developers are searching for housing to flip.

There's also cultural gentrification, when people, usually middle-class and white, move into immigrant neighborhoods and find an appealing level of authenticity there. The new residents like the fact that the neighborhoods are denser and more urban, and they sometimes even celebrate the grittiness, the sense that they're "real" places with "real" problems. However, when people move to those neighborhoods—they're often middle-class artists, students, or young people looking for cheap rent—they quickly change them, which increases their prestige and value, displacing the original residents. And then, ironically, the first and sometimes second wave of gentrifiers are also displaced.

GO: I want to turn to the economic and social crisis at the heart of your book: inequality precipitated and perpetuated by the lack of affordable housing across the country. Rents and home prices have risen to all-time highs. What are some of the chief causes of this crisis? And how do YIMBY groups emerge as a response?

MH: Even before the pandemic, there was an enormous surge in prices not just in coastal cities, but everywhere. One major reason is general economic inequality. Real wages haven't increased since the 1970s. Most people, particularly younger people, are living with far fewer financial assets than they would have had thirty years ago. And there's been a steady erosion of the middle class. That's the macroeconomic problem.

On a physical-space level, cities haven't been building enough housing—not just public or affordable housing, but housing in general and apartments in particular. Many cities should have grown much more. Sometimes, they passed growth off onto nearby suburbs, because they didn't want to be bothered with it. Or they refuse to grow altogether, most famously in San Francisco, where YIMBYism originated. San Francisco *should* be a much larger city. Instead, the Bay Area has taken on a lot of that burden, which means that people are saddled with extremely long commutes. They're also often housing-insecure—couch surfing or lacking a stable place to stay.

In response, the YIMBYs have a simple argument: because this is a supply problem, we need to build more housing in

order to achieve affordability. And we need to build more housing in every category. It's not just about building public housing. It's not just about building nonprofit housing. We also need to let developers build for-profit housing—which is not a popular position because, in most circles, developers are not popular people.

GO: Are the YIMBYs right that simply building more housing will increase affordability in American cities? What are some of the objections to that argument?

MH: Building more housing is in some ways a pressure valve that will help address the issues of gentrification and people getting priced out of their neighborhoods. At the same time, building market-rate housing is not going to solve the major problems because many people cannot afford the market rate. So there has to be some form of subsidy, whether from a nonprofit or the government—something that looks like Section 8 vouchers, or something that involves mandatory affordability in the zoning process, where developers must set aside 15 percent of new units in a building as permanently affordable. Building alone will not solve the problem, particularly for people in danger of being homeless and those on the lowest rungs of the income ladder.

GO: How do you explain the rapid growth of the YIMBY movement? What is the source of its appeal?

MH: It's a really simple message. It has a base of more affluent supporters than most previous housing movements—middle-class people who are struggling to pay the bills. You can criticize YIMBYs for worrying mainly about the middle class, but the movement has been effective at translating wonky urban-planning knowledge to a big audience.

It's huge on Twitter and Instagram, with a lot of memes and snappy sayings. The strong presence online is also controversial because YIMBYs aren't shy about saying what they want or calling out people who don't want more housing. YIMBYs have been successful in going to zoning board meetings and saying, "We have to build this building. We don't care if it increases traffic. We don't care if it casts a shadow over your backyard." So they have that really powerful foil of NIMBYism.

I think most of us are at least partially NIMBYs in the sense that we want to protect our homes as sources of value. Most people would probably say: "I'm a sensible homeowner. I don't want to say no to a preschool, or something that's socially purposeful"—but in the end, most people usually do. They say no to the hospital, the assisted living facility, the methadone clinic. NIMBYism is predictable and understandable, but it also makes it hard to build urban-planning policy. YIMBYs would say their movement is successful because people were so tired of exceptions being made for individual neighborhoods and tired of having to go through massive amounts of red tape to build anything because so many neighbors' groups protested.

GO: YIMBY activists also use generational framing: the younger, assetless renters against the older, well-off homeowners. Why?

MH: YIMBYs often divide themselves into renters versus homeowners, and also into younger people versus older people. That's partially because it was much easier and cheaper to buy a home thirty years ago. Buying a home now seems like a real luxury, even for people with pretty good incomes. That generational story—that older people just can't understand how different the housing market is—has power. It universalizes the concept to everyone under forty-five in the United States, and that's a big group of people.

It also touches on other issues within the Millennial cohort, which was adversely affected by the 2008 financial crisis. Their savings were depleted and their lifelong earnings were permanently affected by unemployment or lack of promotions. They feel like they're living in a gerontocracy, and housing policy is just one part of that. Everything is controlled by older people who have nice homes and more money. Heads of government are all in their late seventies. Millennials as a generation, even though they're approaching middle age, haven't gotten as much of a political voice.

Now, younger people are proud of living in a much more urban and diverse generation. They didn't come of age in an era of white flight and suburbanization. They place cultural value in cities, arguing that it's good to rub shoulders with people—to embrace the Jane Jacobs dream of living in a "sidewalk ballet." That's a bit of an idealization of city life, but it captures the sense that things are changing quickly in the United States, and that if we could live a bit closer together, perhaps we could better understand each other and make less polarized decisions.

GO: You've made case studies of different cities, including Boulder, Colorado. Many people associate it with freewheeling environmentalism, but you explained that environmentalism actually *prevented* growth, making Boulder one of the most unaffordable, unequal places in America. How did that develop, and how have densification activists tried to combat it?

MH: Some people remember Boulder as a hippie haven—a town "between the mountains and reality." It's a leader when it comes to environmental policy: the city bought a green belt in the late 1960s, using public tax dollars to secure municipally managed land. The result is an incredible infrastructure of trails, an "emerald necklace" around the city that has made it rightfully famous in the United States as an outdoor enthusiast's paradise.

The issue is that Boulder never changed zoning rules to accommodate more apartment buildings. Now, they're slowly building more and increasing the population, but for a long time they were very influenced by an idea of almost-zero population growth. Many of the former city council members were adamant that the population not grow by more

than 1 percent per year, which allowed it to remain a city of about a hundred thousand people for decades. They slowly started losing residents with smaller incomes who moved to the satellite cities around Boulder and commuted in—which, if you think about the green belt as a way to reduce suburban sprawl, made it a complete failure. Boulder is home to a large university, but many college professors now can't afford to live in the city. Many other people who have fairly high incomes have been forced out of what has become a luxury resort city.

Boulder has always had a fraught relationship with seeing itself as a city. It wants to be a college town, despite having important industries and over a hundred thousand residents. But I think it's also a good metaphor for a lot of other places that refuse to grow and build new housing, particularly multi-family units. They act like everyone should just go "somewhere else"—to the suburbs, the nearby cities—because the city doesn't want to be bothered, and the residents got there first. The YIMBYs rightfully see that as a perverse refusal to acknowledge economic inequality or people's desire to be mobile. People want to follow economic opportunities, which are in cities. Places like the University of Colorado in Boulder are at risk of losing students because they're just too expensive. Like so many places, the city can feel more like a walled medieval town, excluding all the people who weren't part of the original populace.

The result is a polarization of cities: some really wealthy cities and then the "service cities" next door, where the people who work in the kitchens, the nurses, and the essential workers live. But people don't want to be banished somewhere else, even if the other place is nice. They want to feel like they're part of a community. They don't want the bifurcated identity of working in one city and living in another, or to be consigned to what Pope Francis calls "the periphery."

GO: You've also studied Austin, Texas, one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States. How has development in the past ten or twenty years in Austin affected lower-income neighborhoods, especially in East Austin?

MH: Austin is the state capital, but it also had the vibe of a cool, slacker city more famous for live music and a countercultural scene than for having a large economy. That really changed about twenty years ago.

Austin has one of the country's top research universities, which has always been incredibly productive in developing intellectual property and tying academic discoveries to business. But more and more, Austin became a destination not just for people who liked going out to hear live music, but for large companies and startups. It's a huge tech center now, partly because of Texas's growth in general.

But Austin has also lost a lot of its population, particularly its African American population. It's become a much more expensive place to live. And that means that people have been moving to East Austin, a Black and Latino neighborhood separated by the highway. It's an urban-planning artifact of residential segregation.

There's been a push to grow more, to build new houses and multi-family accommodation. Because so much of Austin is dominated by bungalow houses, there's a particular need to build multiple buildings on the same lot—but rezoning parts of Austin is a major battle. Sometimes, there are minimum-lot-size requirements that necessitate building a large house. You need the entire neighborhood rezoned or you need to get zoning approval on a particular plot of land.

Building a more vertical, walkable city, where people are located near their jobs and commerce, is difficult to do in a place dominated by cars and single-family homes. You don't get the density that gives a sweet spot of shops people can walk or bike to.

GO: How do you think responsible development should happen? What are some policy alternatives to building market-rate housing?

MH: One major issue is that we ask urban planners and architects to solve a lot of problems for us. One of those problems is poverty and a lack of fair wages. We're not going to solve this problem unless we start paying people more. People who are paid by the hour and haven't seen the minimum wage go up are going to find it hard to afford any kind of housing.

There needs to be a meaningful reinvestment in durable public housing that can withstand natural disasters, heat waves, and flooding. We can also support more cooperative and grassroots endeavors like community land trusts, where people set up nonprofit groups to collectively buy land for housing. It's not crazy to give federal subsidies to nonprofit groups to build permanently affordable housing. It could be done by people in the business of urbanization. It could be done by social-justice organizations. It could be done by religious groups.

We need to stop thinking that the market can provide for everyone—it's just not going to happen anytime soon. Having a place to live should be a universal right. We have to do that because it's ethical, but also because creating a productive society in which people can do essential work requires that they have a stable place to live close to their job.

Aside from the ethics, housing is an overlooked part of having a functioning economy. The pandemic should be a reminder to everyone that the people who are working in essential services, who we are absolutely reliant on, are sometimes the people who are struggling the most in American cities. Ensuring that workers have a place to stay, where they feel happy and fulfilled in their neighborhood, is of the utmost importance.

LISTEN Hear the full interview with Max Holleran on Episode 90 of the Commonweal Podcast. **commonwealmagazine.org/podcast**

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK

When the Models Stare Back

'Matisse in the 1930s' &
'Modigliani Up Close'

It was an afternoon in May, 1933, and Henri Matisse, then sixty-two, had just returned to the Barnes Foundation in suburban Philadelphia. He was there to supervise the installation of his recently completed, monumental mural *The Dance* beneath the three soaring arches of the main room's south wall. With its eight plump female silhouettes leaping, tumbling, and reeling against a barred background of black, blue, and pink, the work is mesmerizing: visit it today, and you'll wonder at how Matisse's riotous celebration of motion, pleasure, and connection makes a room full of masterpieces by the likes of Cézanne, Renoir, and Picasso seem somehow staid. Matisse had spent more than two years perfecting *The Dance*, working feverishly in a rented garage in Nice, sketching across huge canvases with charcoal attached to a long stick. Naturally, he was excited to show off the results.

So excited, in fact, that he gave himself a slight heart attack. In a wry letter to Matisse's son Pierre, Albert Barnes recounted how, despite the presence of an expert gallerist, Matisse had "insisted" on climbing the scaffolding and mounting the first of the panels himself, working for hours with a hammer and nails before Barnes finally "gave him some whiskey and made him rest." Barnes also sent for a heart specialist, who sternly cautioned Matisse against further exertion. "When a man reaches your father's age," Barnes explained to Pierre, "it is necessary for him to readjust his life to the changed conditions which advancing years bring on.…With proper care your father may still have many years of good life in front of him."

Fortunately—as the Philadelphia Museum of Art's phenomenal show *Matisse in the 1930s* confirms—Matisse didn't listen. *The Dance* had helped him overcome a paralyzing creative crisis ("In front of the canvas, I have no ideas whatsoever," Matisse had written in 1929) and he now felt more energized than ever. More than two decades of extraordinary work followed. Ceasing to worry about his reputation and in possession of a newfound confidence, Matisse's subjects became simpler, his sparer lines more evocative, his compositions freer and more expansive.

That's not to discount Matisse's earlier modernist works, made in Paris during the 1900s and 1910s, including masterpieces like *The Joy of Life* (1905–6) and *The Red Studio* (1911). But by the late 1910s, those ideas had run their course. From Paris, Matisse relocated to Nice, where he began a sensuous series of seaside interiors and "odalisques," a traditional (and highly Orientalist) genre of French painting. In these works, semi-nude female models laze amidst sumptuous furniture and fabrics "in the manner of harem concubines." *Arabesque* (1924), *Odalisque in Grey Pantaloons* (1926–7), and *Odalisque with Red Box* (1927) dazzle viewers with a hypnotic array of patterns and objects, but the women, faces and bodies submerged in a sea of color, seem mere afterthoughts. Besides the problematic sexual and colonial politics, Mattise's odalisques struck me as repetitive, more likely to bore than scandalize. Though Matisse always defended them, his 1927 *Woman with a Veil* hints at a different story: here Matisse's jaded, fully clothed subject, holding her chin in hand with her eyes screened by a black veil, leans forward and stares penetratingly, as if offering a quiet rebuke.

Thankfully, Matisse didn't stay stuck. The same processes he developed while working on *The Dance* (charcoal tracing, movable cartoons, a reduced palette) were put to powerful new use in works like *Large Reclining Nude* (1935), in which his desexualized model (and future caretaker) Lydia Delectorskaya appears as a spiraling geometrical abstraction, the wild curves of her limbs spiking like asymptotes against the lined Cartesian grid of her bed. Abstraction is present too in the minimalist black-and-white drawings Matisse began producing for illustrated books, including French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé's *Afternoon of a Faun* (1933) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1934). The few details Matisse provides—a nymph

Henri Matisse,
Woman with a Veil, 1927

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK: THE WILLIAM S. PALEY COLLECTION

Matisse's work from the 1930s, with its exaltation of contact and motion and its frank admission of aging and vulnerability, contains the seeds of a quiet revolution.

reclining beside a row of trees, an oared ship gliding down the face of a wave—feel provisional and evocative, as if Matisse, instead of competing with the text for readers' attention, is content to suggest a partial sketch for our own imaginations to complete.

A similar spirit of collaboration animates Matisse's costumes and set designs for *Rouge et Noir* (1939), an avant-garde ballet choreographed by Léonide Massine. Set to music by the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich and conceived as a "vast mural in motion," in which masses of spinning dancers alternatingly gather and scatter from opposite ends of the stage, the ballet incorporates the farandole, a Provençal folk dance that Matisse had studied as he was preparing sketches of *The Dance*. The installation, which recreates the arched backdrop of the set and features Matisse's paper models of red-and-gold bodysuits mounted alongside a video of a performance, is the highlight of the show. It reveals a Matisse who conceives of art no longer as rivalry (his feuds with Picasso were legendary) but as collaboration, both with other artists and with earlier versions of himself. The show's final gallery, filled with botanical still lifes and quickly drawn portraits that Matisse made in the 1940s while recuperating from a cancer operation, drives home this last point: revisiting and reworking former motifs with a less guarded, sloppier style becomes a way forward.

In his insightful review of *Matisse in the 1930s*, *Washington Post* critic Sebastian Smee observes the absence of politics in Matisse's work in this period. It's especially glaring because Matisse's daughter Marguerite, who collaborated with the French partisans, was arrested and tortured by the Gestapo. In one sense, that's true: instead of confronting Nazism and fascism head-on, Matisse plunged himself into form, color, myth, and art for art's sake—and often for the sake of the rich, like Albert Barnes and Nelson A. Rockefeller, for whom Matisse made *The Song* (1938), a floor-to-ceiling mantelpiece that drew on earlier portraits like *The Three Sisters* (1917). It's tempting, then, to dismiss Matisse as an aesthete. But is attentiveness to the beauty of the body and the spark of imagination it inspires—in short, the cultivation of humanism—*really* apolitical? If anything, Matisse's work during the 1930s, with its exaltation of contact and motion and its frank admission of aging and vulnerability, *does* contain the seeds of a quiet revolution.

Had he lived past thirty-five, Italian painter Amedeo Modigliani might have arrived at abstraction, too. His distinctive modernist portraits, with their elongated features and mysterious blue-eyed gazes, are often paired with Matisse's throughout the permanent galleries at the Barnes, highlighting their similar subject matter and overlapping time in Paris. If during those years (the early 1900s and 1910s) Matisse appeared as the consummate insider, his unimpeachable status as an artistic "influencer" bolstered by his methodical work habits and buttoned-up bourgeois appearance, Modigliani, a Jew from Livorno, was chronically on the outs, his career hampered by his propensity for drinking and affairs.

There's a lot more to Modigliani than that, though, a point gracefully made by the Barnes's new show. *Modigliani Up Close* features around fifty objects—portraits, nudes, and sculptures—grouped across five thematic galleries. Modigliani's comparatively small output is partly a result of the short time he was active (he arrived in Paris in 1906 and died of tuberculous meningitis in 1920 in Nice). He only had one solo show in his lifetime, in 1917, and only gained recognition as one of the greatest artists of the twentieth century after his death. Modigliani's works are now among the world's most valuable; in 2015, a Chinese billionaire paid $170.4 million for *Reclining Nude* (1917), the second highest price ever recorded for a single painting.

A novelty of the Barnes show is the way it incorporates "scientific" or material analysis, which expands the study of art beyond biography and visual interpretation to include details about paintings and sculptures as physical and commercial objects. Mounted beside Modigliani's canvases and sculptures are x-ray images accompanied by granular information about thread counts, paint pigments, and rasp marks. Visitors can use their smartphones to zoom in and learn more, though I confess I didn't see too many doing so. Occasionally, it's interesting. Drill marks confirm that in the early 1910s Modigliani likely robbed construction sites to obtain stones for making sculptures; wax residue hints that he probably mounted lighted candles on top of them in his studio, using them as makeshift lamps for his nocturnal painting sessions. For the most part, though, such information is too specialized and tends to get in the way of the works themselves.

If Matisse's odalisques were evidence of artistic impasse, for Modigliani, nudes (he made about thirty of them in 1917) constituted a real breakthrough. From a technical standpoint, there's much to admire: by layering bright, warm pinks atop a gray-blue base, Modigliani makes

Amedeo Modigliani, *Jeanne Hébuterne*, 1919

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK: GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. NATE B. SPINGOLD, 1956

his subjects appear to glow against their darkened interior surroundings. He lavishes great care and attention on facial features and hairstyles, the precise brushwork mimicking a gentle caress. Still, there's a kind of surface sterility inherent in such explicit, hypersexualized poses. (Modigliani was censured by Parisian critics for his inclusion of pubic hair.) It's as if by showing too much, Modigliani *reveals* nothing. We get a lot of flesh, but not much else.

That all changed, though, after Modigliani also moved to Nice. He'd fallen in love with the young painter Jeanne Hébuterne, with whom he had a daughter in 1918. The Barnes show conveys this abrupt shift with a progression of increasingly *clothed* portraits—no longer of hired models, but of ordinary people Modigliani encountered in the south of France. The cast of characters ranges from fidgety peasant boys in shorts to circumspect middle-aged women and haughty industrialists. It's at this point that Modigliani's paintings—which combine the facial elongation of traditional African masks, the grave postures typical of Renaissance portraiture, and the experimental color schemes of French modernism—really start to gel.

Portraits of Jeanne pregnant with the couple's second child are particularly poignant, and among the best in the show. In one, Modigliani depicts her seated placidly on her bed, her hands resting on her swollen belly in the fifteenth-century manner of Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto*; in another, Jeanne appears in a loose white shift, balancing her arm on a side table as her long fingers rest delicately across her cheek. It's as if Jeanne has taught Modigliani to shift his gaze away from the dead end of sexual voyeurism and toward an appreciation of the subtle grace inherent in minute gestures.

Taken together, *Matisse in the 1930s* and *Modigliani Up Close* are important shows, arriving five years after the beginning of #MeToo and just months after the *Dobbs* decision, as well as at a fraught moment for museums, which are under increasing pressure to mount more exhibitions that foreground the accomplishments of women and artists of color. Both Matisse and Modigliani were white men who paid female models a pittance to pose nude in order to create paintings that are now worth millions—status objects that show the institutional and economic prowess of museums and private collectors. Photographer Nan Goldin, painter Celia Paul, and countless others have documented the devastating ways in which art's default "male gaze" degrades and does violence to the women it supposedly admires. Matisse and Modigliani didn't quite abandon this way of looking at their subjects, but both, in their own ways, came to understand the limits and ultimate shallowness of such a vision.

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK *is an associate editor at* Commonweal.

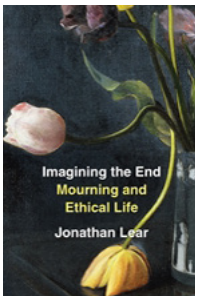
Mourned or Lamented?

PAUL J. GRIFFITHS

Mourning is important to every human life that gets as far as adulthood. That is because every such life is framed and inflected by the unpreventable and irretrievable loss of everything that contributes to its flourishing: love, health, meaning, happiness, accomplishment, wealth, beauty, and eventually itself. Pascal writes that the last act is bloody no matter how fine the rest of the play, and that the end is always the same: the grave. The situation is made worse by the fact that the grave opens not only for you but also for everyone and everything you have ever loved. Christians, and some others, have the consolation of hope. But the losses are nevertheless unavoidable, and mourning is one of the few things we can do in the face of them—perhaps the *only* thing we can do that does face them.

But what, exactly, is mourning, and how does doing it well contribute to a fully human life? These are good questions, addressed too rarely. In *Imagining the End*, Jonathan Lear takes them on with his usual learning, verve, and lucidity. Lear, who has taught at the University of Chicago since the 1990s, has written prolifically on various fundamental aspects of human life—including hope, love, illness, and irony, with Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Freud, Kierkegaard, and Wittgenstein among his most frequent interlocutors. He is always concerned with the texture of human life: how it is woven, how it can become unwoven, what its principal virtues are. He wants to know how we should live, and on that question he is among our most intelligent guides.

Lear has addressed mourning before, in *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life* (2000), and more tangentially in *A Case for Irony* (2011) and *Wisdom Won from Illness* (2017). But *Imagining the End* is by far his fullest treatment, and even though its chapters were first given as lectures or published as essays on disparate occasions during the past decade, they have been turned into a unified, non-repetitive book. Mourning appears here prismatically, seen from a number of angles and through the lens of a number of cases; but the focus is consistent and tight, and the payoff considerable.



IMAGINING THE END
Mourning and Ethical Life
JONATHAN LEAR
Harvard University Press
$29.95 | 176 pp.

Lear understands mourning as evidence of health, human well-being, and a life well lived. Mourning shows that we have attachments, or loves: we mourn when they are taken from us as a way of accommodating that loss. One of mourning's modes is reverie, directed reparatively and reconstructively toward the lost as they were and are for the mourner, in a context where mourning is free and unchallenged in the way that a child at play is absorbed with a toy. Not to have played and not to be able to play is to fail to be human; so also with mourning. It is a "play-like activity of imagination and memory in which the loved one is remembered," and as such it both contributes to and is evidence of human health. It shows that the mourner recalls and accommodates the good that was lost, incorporating it into a life that continues. This element of mourning is largely therapeutic: it is focused upon a lost good. It has little to do with the kind of response that can only howl with anguish at what has been lost.

Lear understands mourning to be repetitive, a repeated response to what is given and taken that has no end. He is concerned here with differentiating a positive understanding of repetition—nonidentical repetition, we might call it—from the overwhelmingly negative one evident in the work of Freud and his successors. The repetition of mourning is not about being stuck in the mud of neurosis or shackled to a Sisyphean labor. Rather, it is evidence of hope: of the possibilities evident in thinking again of that loss, imagining again the place of the lost in this life now being lived, of doing the same thing again and again (as in the liturgy) as a person now different from the one who did it before because of that prior mourning. "The unity and novelty of repetition lends unity and novelty to a life," Lear writes, and this applies especially to repeated mourning.

For Lear, acts of mourning are attempts to turn loss into gain by imaginative alchemy. This makes it clear that mourning is not, for him, properly directed at states of affairs

Jonathan Lear

about which there is nothing good to be thought or said. He recognizes that there are such states of affairs, but he does not believe they are mournable. They do not respond to imaginative alchemy. The sharpest and most interesting chapter of the book, "The Difficulty of Reality and a Revolt Against Mourning," enters this territory.

In that chapter, Lear discusses, with the philosopher Cora Diamond's help, Ted Hughes's poem "Six Young Men." That poem is about a photograph of six young men, smiling and cocky and vivid, taken in 1914. Six months after the photograph was taken they were all dead, slaughtered on Europe's bloodfields. Lear's discussion follows Diamond in taking the photograph and Hughes's poem to witness not only to the difficulty of comprehending and transmuting such states of affairs by mourning them (that would be a psychological reading of the problem), but also to reality's active and actual difficulty, to wounds (flaws, lacks, absences, rifts) internal to reality itself, however we might respond to it. Not only do these difficulties resist our comprehension; they belong to a reality that exceeds our concerns with it, whose difficulties obtain no matter how we respond to them. We cannot, on Lear's understanding, mourn states of affairs like this because "mourning has internal to it the idea of eventually restoring our proper balance in the relation of the living to the dead," and these difficulties—difficulties internal and proper to reality—preclude any such balance.

Lear is right, I think, to affirm that there are difficulties, of the human condition in particular and of reality in general, that elude mourning's repair. We have a good word for the characteristic human response to horrors of this kind: lament, the howl of agony in the face of the incomprehensible. Lament is far from what Lear means by mourning, and it is a word that occurs, so far as I can tell, nowhere in his book.

Lament's absence from Lear's book is a sign of what seems to me a significant misstep. It is not that he is wrong about the reparative work that mourning does, or that he is blind to states of affairs that resist mourning and instead invite what I would call lament. It is rather that he shows a strong, dualistic tendency to separate the one from the other. If a state of affairs is mournable, then it is, for him, not lamentable—and vice-versa.

This bright-lined separation in Lear's thought is matched and perhaps required by another: between human lives that resonate to some degree with the good, the Aristotelean *kalon* (a favored term of art for Lear), and those that fail to do so and are therefore wasted. That separation is clean and clear in his lovely and fascinating, but surely wrong, chapter "Good Mourning in Gettysburg and Hollywood" on our failure to properly mourn the Confederate dead of Gettysburg. (Hollywood is the place in Virginia where those Confederate dead, or most of them, were eventually buried.) Lear is right

ERIELLE BAKKUM

There are no armies of light and no armies of darkness. It is a Manichaean mistake to think so, and always a violent one.

that we have failed at that necessary act of mourning, and his description of how and why is to me persuasive. What is not persuasive, however, is his consistent claim that the Confederate lives that ended on that battlefield were ordered *entirely* around an error—believing chattel slavery to be a good—which excludes the *kalon*. The result, Lear says, is that their whole lives were "failed attempts at the *kalon*," which "has no room for such terrible error." They were wasted lives. He is explicit about that. This distinction, between lives that get some way toward living in accord with the good and those that fail utterly to do so, mirrors the distinction between what is mournable and what is lamentable. Neither distinction can be sustained.

It is possible to do better. The first step would be to renounce the sharp distinction between reparable mournables and irreparable lamentables, and to replace it with an acknowledgment that all the horrors with which we are faced are woven with threads of both, and therefore require both mourning and lament. My father died suddenly and unexpectedly many years ago, when he was forty-five and I was nineteen. I have mourned him since, off and on, with many of the healing effects Lear so clearly describes. But there is that in his death which, as Lear would put it, resists mourning or, as I would prefer to put it, requires the howl and dirge of lamentation. It is one and the same event, though; and not to see that it both requires and resists mourning is to fail to see it for what it is.

There is a second step. It is not that there are some human lives wasted by being closed to the *kalon*, and others open to it, however imperfectly and incompletely. There are no armies of light and no armies of darkness. It is a Manichaean mistake to think so, and always a violent one. Lear's treatment of the Confederate dead of Gettysburg involves this mistake, and I doubt that it is coherent even on its own terms. He advocates, rightly, mourning the Confederate dead without memorializing or valorizing them. But according to his argument, for a life to be mournable there must be good in it—it must not have been completely wasted—so the lives of the Confederate dead cannot have been as separate from the *kalon* as he seems to take them to be. He could have written that all human lives are malformed, oriented in part to the good that gives life and in part to the blankly lamentable absence that is evil. As the Augustinian adage has it: everything is good to the extent that it is, which entails that everything is evil to the extent that it is not. All human lives are alike in this, and any response to them that denies or obscures this is itself blankly lamentable and always violent, usually in the distinctively American mode of self-righteousness. The lives of the Confederate dead of Gettysburg were not wasted, as Lear says; those men were slaughtered for a cause that included chattel slavery, which is beyond defense; but none of them, not a one, is reducible to that cause. Each of them, every one, was a human creature whose battlefield death shares the features of all such deaths: participation in evil's absence as well as in good's presence.

Lear's two dualisms are both evidence of a single uneasiness. It is an uneasiness about mixing—not being able to say that there were good men among the Confederate dead is of a piece with not being able to say that there are properly mournable events that also call for lament at their inaccessibility to mourning. But we must say both things. Saying the first permits us to look at and describe what was good in the social, economic, and political life of the Antebellum South, while being clear about what was evil in that life. Saying the second permits us to observe and shudder at the lamentable horrors beyond all mourning entwined with everything, everywhere, always. Lear's refusals tend to exile the lamentable and the evil into the elsewhere, placing them anywhere but here. He does not *quite* do that; he does recognize that there are states of affairs, even here and now, that resist mourning. But the tone of much of his writing about mourning shows that he is on the way toward affirming the Manichaean separation.

I have been critical. But I am also glad to have read this book, and grateful to Lear for having written it. His work has been a companion to me these past three decades or so, and I have never failed to be edified and instructed by it. That is true for this book as well. There are excellent things in it I have not touched on in this short review, including an analysis of gratitude in its relation to mourning, and of the practices of the humanities in the same context. Anyone interested in mourning—and since we are all mourners, that leaves no one out—should read this book.

PAUL J. GRIFFITHS *is a longtime contributor to* Commonweal *and the author of many books, most recently* Regret: A Theology *(University of Notre Dame Press) and* Why Read Pascal? *(Catholic University of America Press).*

SILENCE IN HEAVEN

Maud Burnett McInerney

The master of the rebel angels let
them fall, their beating wings swept up
behind, forcing hot wind across
a crackled golden sky. They fell like dragonflies
at first, they glowed, but as they fell they
shrivelled, blackened, crisped into small
things, gnats or horseflies, cinders even,
motes of soot. They crashed into the world.
He turned his eyes away.
Upstairs in heaven
things were orderly, the saints sat quiet
in their castled chairs, the air hummed
with an unsung hymn, the floor was clean
and cruel as glass and every feather, every
eye fixed in its bright perfection.

MAUD BURNETT MCINERNEY *teaches medieval literature at a small liberal arts college. Her work has previously appeared in* Cleaver, Descant, *and* Witness.

A Boy at the Border

JULIA G. YOUNG

Javier Zamora

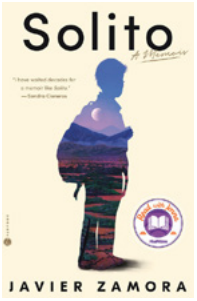
In 1999, a nine-year-old boy from La Herradura, El Salvador, crossed the border into the United States near Tucson, Arizona. His name was Javier Zamora, and the three-thousand-mile-long migration journey from his home village to the border took him about nine weeks. For seven of those weeks—forty-nine terrifying days—neither his parents in the United States nor his extended family in El Salvador knew where he was.

Solito: A Memoir is Zamora's powerful and vivid recounting of the period between March 16, when he learned he would be leaving La Herradura to reunite with his parents in "*La USA*," and June 11, when they picked him up on the morning after his arrival in Tucson. Now thirty-three years old, Zamora was able to recount his story only after extensive therapy, and after first publishing a 2017 poetry collection, *Unaccompanied*, filled with haunting poems about migration, the desert, El Salvador, loss, and longing.

I am a historian of Latin American migration who has spent years writing and thinking about the border. I am also the perennially anxious mother of three children, none of whom has ever disappeared for more than a few minutes. And so I read *Solito* with fascination, but also in a state of semi-panic, terrified for young Javier and always conscious of the agony his parents were feeling. As Zamora tells us in the final chapter, they "became insomniacs" as they waited in vain to hear from him during his journey.

Yet *Solito* is a book written entirely from the child's—and not the parents'—perspective. Appropriately, the narrator does not preoccupy himself too much with the feelings of others or make broader arguments about the world at large. Zamora does very little to situate his story within the context of the mass emigration of Salvadorans in the wake of the U.S.-funded Salvadoran Civil War (1979–1992) and the subsequent endemic violence and persistent poverty that have plagued the country. Nor does he overtly connect his plight to that of the thousands of other unaccompanied child migrants who have arrived in the United States from Central America in recent decades.

Instead, the book's value for readers—beyond the vivid prose and photorealistic scenes of bus terminals, highways, deserts, and all the other landscapes of the migrant journey—is the way it allows us to step fully into the world and perspective of the child migrant. This is unique among the growing body of scholarly and trade books about Central American child migration. Works such as Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother* (2006) or Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me*



SOLITO
A Memoir
JAVIER ZAMORA
Hogarth
$28 | 400 pp.

PHOTO BY GERARDO DEL VALLE

How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions (2017) are narrated by journalists rather than child migrants themselves. (These books would be valuable companion texts for anyone wishing to better understand some of this migration's root causes—namely, endemic Central American poverty, violence stemming in large part from U.S.-funded civil wars, and an utterly broken U.S. immigration system.)

Still, *Solito* offers something different from these more investigative migrant narratives. At its core, it is a story about the fundamental emotions behind child migration: love and longing, loss and trauma, deep faith, and challenges to that faith.

The memoir's title resists direct translation into English: "*Solito*" can be translated simply as "alone" or "by himself," but for Spanish speakers, it also conjures the image of a little boy going out into the world without his parents. Indeed, up until the very end of his journey, Zamora is without his parents, yet he is never actually alone.

After his mother and father had finally earned, saved, and sent the money necessary to bring him to the United States, his grandfather, Don Chepe, accompanied him on the first leg of his journey, from El Salvador to Guatemala. Once in Guatemala, the ordeal begins: a smuggler named Don Dago assembles a group of seven migrants who will make the journey together. After they leave for Mexico, however, Don Dago promptly disappears, leaving Javier in the charge of Marcelo, a man from La Herradura who turns out to be callous and uncaring and who will eventually abandon Javier and the rest of the group.

As the child of a loving family, Javier knows to look for love in the midst of this abandonment. He quickly bonds with three people in his group: Patricia ("a mom, short like my mom," he writes, and with his mother's name to boot), her young daughter Carla, and Chino, a skinny young single man who "looks kind, like a good person." Over the course of the harrowing journey—which involves a nauseating and terrifying boat trip from Guatemala to Mexico; endless excruciating bus rides through Mexican cities, towns, and migrant checkpoints; and three searing attempts to traverse the desert from Sonora to Arizona—the four of them become a makeshift family.

After they arrive in Tucson, however, they must go in separate directions. Javier would never see them again. This loss seems to have been as traumatic as any of the agonies he experienced up to that point. As they say goodbye, he recounts,

> Carla's face pressed against her mom's chest, my face pressed against Carla's back. Chino's chest on my cheeks. I love them. I really love them. A pond, a lake in my eyes. I don't want to go. None of us wants to let go. A river.
>
> "Ya. Ya [Okay. Okay]," Patricia says. My head hurts all over. I hear Patricia sniffling. My tears fall on Carla's back. Chino's tears fall on my face.

Solito is in large part a love letter to this found family. "My hope for this book is that somehow it will reunite me with Chino, Patricia, and Carla," Zamora writes in the final chapter. "I want to thank them now, as an adult, for risking their lives for a nine-year-old they did not know."

Zamora's birth parents, by contrast, are defined more by their absence. The reader never actually meets them in the book, and we hear only briefly about his childhood with them in the final chapter and the acknowledgements. Yet clearly Javier loves them deeply as well and does not blame them for the decision to leave him in El Salvador, nor for what happens to him after he migrates.

Rather, throughout his book he recounts his childhood self's visceral longing for them. He pines for his father—who had gone to the United States when Javier was just shy of two years old, and who he barely remembered—but he yearns far more for his mother, who migrated when he was five. "I'll come back, I promise," he remembers her saying to him as she left early one morning, and he regrets not waking up as she goes. When he finds out his own trip to the United States is finally happening, he talks to his mother and father on the phone:

> "¡Finally, Chepito!" She's almost crying, I know she's happy. I'm happy. Her voice like a wet good-night kiss to my forehead. Full, like a hug. She says more things. I can barely understand. Dad says something similar. His voice, ¡his voice! I will finally see it come out of *his* mouth. Touch *his* mustache. *His* hair.

Despite the fact that he is surrounded by love in El Salvador—he lives with his mother's parents and her sister (Tía Mali), who raise him as their own—this powerful longing for his parents governs Javier's life up to the point he leaves and throughout his journey. He watches American movies and plays with the American toys they send him (a Red Power Ranger, a glow-in-the-dark ThunderCats Lion-O sword—his mother works at Toys "R" Us). In order to make his parents proud, he throws himself into his studies, winning awards at his Catholic school. On some level, he lives this part of his childhood knowing that his future is in the United States and not El Salvador. Indeed, his descriptions of this longing can help readers understand why so many children like him willingly undertake the difficult journey to reunite with their parents.

After this reunion, however, he will experience a new kind of longing, absence, and loss: not only does he lose the constructed migrant family of Patricia, Carla, and Chino, but he will go nineteen years without seeing his homeland—or his beloved *abuelita* (grandmother). His legal status, he explains in the epilogue, prevented him from visiting El Salvador until he was twenty-eight.

Love and longing, loss and trauma—all of these themes are gently wound through with another, more subtle one: faith. Javier comes from a country and a culture where many people have a deep daily relationship with God. Blessings and prayers are everywhere. "Que Dios te bendiga [May God bless you], here, everywhere, always. We'll be waiting for you. Praying you'll make it there safely," his grandmother says as he leaves. People reflexively cross themselves, bless each other, ask for each other's blessings, see signs, light votive candles, and remind themselves

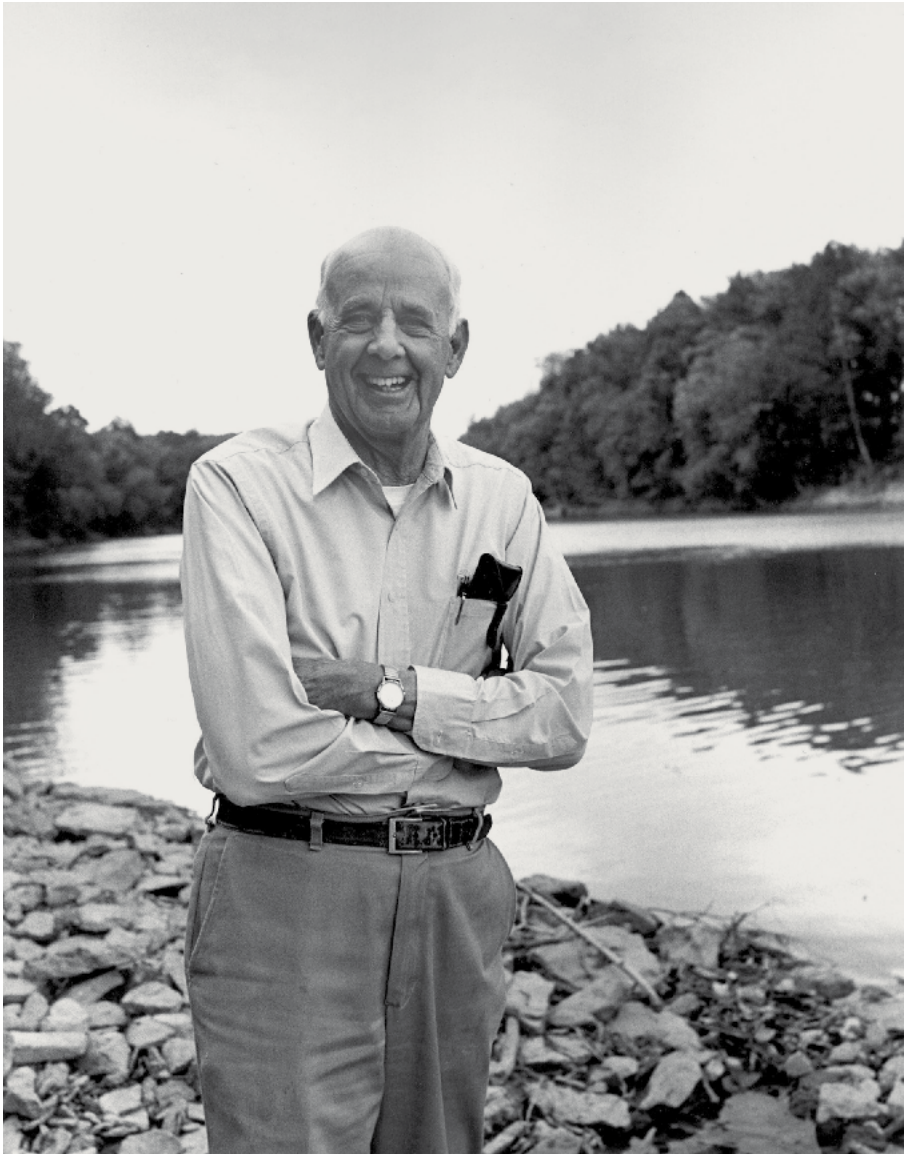
that nothing happens that is not the will of God. And then there is the *cadejo*: the dog-like spirit animal with glowing red eyes—a part of folk religion in El Salvador and Honduras—whose protection young Javier invokes throughout the trip. Throughout *Solito*, the adults in Javier's life are full of faith. Zamora himself, however, emerges from the desert with his faith in his *cadejo*—and perhaps in God as well—challenged.

This shaken faith, this trauma that takes decades to unravel, this great grief-filled rending of children's primal attachments to parents, grandparents, and constructed families: these are among the many harms of the great wave of Central American child migration to the southern border over the past thirty years. Not all of these child migrants will be as lucky as Zamora was and find a therapist who can help them process their trauma.

This is not to say that migration is wholly harmful; ultimately, the United States offered unprecedented economic and educational opportunities for Zamora, his parents, and countless migrants like him. Yet in the absence of both comprehensive immigration reform and political and economic stability in Central America, parents and children from the region will continue to take unfathomable risks to reunite with family members and to access those opportunities. (Indeed, Zamora alludes to this by dedicating the book to "every immigrant who has crossed, who has tried to, who is crossing right now, and who will keep trying.")

For those of us who have never had to experience the trauma and agony of family separation, Zamora's narrative invites readers to look through the eyes and into the minds of children and parents who have. At the same time, *Solito* humanizes the abstract problems—poverty, violence, the broken U.S. immigration system—that compel parents and children to separate, and then cross countries and deserts in order to reunite once again. In this era of ongoing migration, detention, and death along the border, *Solito* is essential reading.

JULIA G. YOUNG *is associate professor of history at the Catholic University of America.*



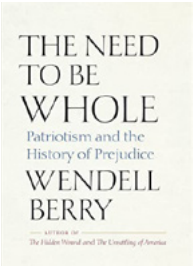
Wendell Berry

GUY MENDES

One or Many?

CLIFFORD THOMPSON

Those who seek to identify common ground among Americans—seekers who, in this era of extreme polarization, may qualify as an endangered species—tend to focus on the values that the vast majority of us share. Those who set out to address wrongs committed in this country generally identify particular groups as the victims. What is unusual is to combine those two approaches, to point to historical factors that have made sufferers of us *all*, whether or not we know or want to admit it. That is the task that Wendell Berry has taken upon himself with *The Need to Be Whole: Patriotism and the History of Prejudice*, a thoughtful, illuminating, sometimes frustrating, occasionally mystifying, utterly profound book that, whether or not one agrees with it (and no one will agree with all of it), will leave readers with a new way of looking at things.



THE NEED TO BE WHOLE
Patriotism and the History of Prejudice

WENDELL BERRY
Shoemaker & Company
$24 | 528 pp.

Berry, now eighty-eight, is himself unusual, a difficult man to pigeonhole. The author of more than fifty books of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, he has received upwards of two dozen honors, including the National Humanities Medal, awarded by President Barack Obama. He is also a farmer in Kentucky, where his family's roots stretch back more than two centuries. Those who nod vigorously as they read Berry's view that "race prejudice or white supremacy is the original and fundamental mistake in the European conquest of this country" may stop abruptly when they come upon his defense of Robert E. Lee. Those who raise a glass to Berry for criticizing the campaign against Confederate monuments may pause mid-sip when they see his self-description as "a would-be follower of the teachings of Jesus and of Martin Luther King, Jr." How do such seemingly contradictory views coexist in one person's head?

Berry's take on American history makes all of these ideas dance to the same melody. To hum a few bars: Berry believes that we Americans are suffering from a lack of wholeness, both the separation of different groups from each other and the separation of most Americans from the land; that while American slavery was obviously a hardship for Black people, it harmed whites too, planting the notion that working directly with the land was beneath them (since that's what slaves were for), an idea that would eventually make for the separation of land from people; that this rupture is what has allowed us to treat the land, and the rest of the natural world, of which we are a part, so horrendously; that Lee's fight against the Union can be seen as a defense of his native Virginia, as a "fidelity to the bond between land and people"; that the "total industrialization of total war"

that occurred with World War II "produced a dream of total industrialization that would dominate the national and then the global economy for the rest of that century and on into this one," and would displace many small farmers, including more than half a million Black farmers, in favor of the big-business approach that has wrecked the land; that the seemingly forgotten concept of forgiveness is necessary to bridge the gaps between groups of Americans, while the drive to remove Confederate monuments serves to "renew and lengthen the Civil War."

The author sees Americans as one people, made up of different races whose histories cannot be understood in isolation. He opposes whatever will set American people against one another. For that reason Berry, who is white, writes, "I think that a program of monetary reparations exclusively to black people would be ruinous. It could be done only as another contest, like the Civil War, that would divide us again into winners and losers." Echoing the thoughts of this Black writer, Berry adds, "And there would be nothing then to keep white people from declaring the problem solved. 'Now we have paid them off, as they asked. Now at last we are free of each other. Let us go our separate ways.'" Elsewhere, Berry writes that "the subject of race prejudice, contrary to the assumptions of political correctness and present racial politics, cannot honestly be simplified or specialized or treated as a single subject.... I do not think of the chattel slavery of the antebellum South as a problem that is isolatable or unique." Many will disagree passionately, even bitterly, with Berry on this point. Indeed, it is curious, to put it mildly, to identify white supremacy as the nation's "fundamental mistake" while arguing at the same time that the chief victims of that mistake deserve no special consideration. And yet, given Berry's commitment to wholeness, his argument is coherent and consistent.

If anything, Berry could be called too consistent. To his credit, he acknowledges that very risk: "Because I write as a rural American, from the point of view of the land and the land-communities, I am obliged in honesty to worry about that point of view as possibly a limitation." Having said that, he is off and running, and to read some passages of *The Need to Be Whole* is to think of counterarguments that seem so obvious that readers may feel they're missing something. For example, Berry's clear reverence for farmers and farming (he also seems to tolerate people who run small shops), and his sincere concern for the natural world, prejudices him to a startling extent against work that is not tied to the land. "The good jobs in industry and the footholds on the corporate ladder," he writes, "are available only to employees, people willingly answerable to bosses. Whatever ability and ambition may be involved, so also is a certain passivity or submissiveness, an attitude that Nate Shaw would have condemned as 'slavish.'" (Shaw was a Black Alabaman sharecropper and the subject of Theodore Rosengarten's *All God's Dangers*, which won the National Book Award in 1974.) Readers of that passage, wondering if Berry is actually saying what he appears to be saying, perhaps suspecting a trap, nonetheless venture nervously forward to ask: Uh, does Berry really want us all to be farmers (or, failing that, small business owners)? Does he understand that the U.S. population has more than doubled since 1950, and that most of us could not do such work even if we all wanted to, which, by the way, *we don't*? Does he get that some jobs cannot be done outside, and that while some of us do not love those jobs, many of us do? Does Berry really see America as being divided between the self-employed—among whom farmers constitute the elite because they work directly with the land—and the self-enslaved?

Others of Berry's risks pay off. Readers may hold their breath when he begins to tell stories of the African Americans he knew in his youth, thinking, *Please, God, don't let him tell us some of his best friends are Black.* But, as it happens, they are—or, more accurately, Berry learned farming and fellowship in large part because of the close relationships he formed in his youth with Black people. Those experiences allowed him to do what he urges the rest of us to do: stop identifying one another, and ourselves, primarily as members of groups and see our fellow Americans as flesh-and-blood people. Some of the most moving parts of *The Need to Be Whole* concern the late African-American writer Ernest J. Gaines, with whom Berry had a long friendship; Berry quotes Gaines's novels at length for the way they illustrate the points Berry is trying to make.

A large part of forming bonds with others, for Berry, comes back to the idea of forgiveness. He asks, referring to a specific instance of "cancel" culture, "What...may be the point or purpose of opposing race prejudice and its consequences—what are the protestors asking for—if there is to be no forgiveness, no grant of kindness, to people... who change their minds?" The problem with our current conception of sin, in Berry's view, is that we care only about those sins we can pin on other people (those sins, depending on who you are, being abortion or racism). Such a view, he notes, obscures the fact that we are united in our imperfection and makes us ever less accepting of one another.

A society "cannot do for its people what it will not do for its land, and vice versa," the author writes on the second page of *The Need to Be Whole*. Berry has written a peculiar, powerful book whose central ideas we reject at our peril: that we need to treat our fellow citizens, and our home, much better, and that, as one presidential candidate told us, we are stronger together. Refreshingly, Berry sees his book not as the last word but as "my part of a conversation," and he enters that exchange, in spite of his own cussedness, with proper humility: "I am, after all, a fallible and struggling writer, intent upon pursuing the truth that finally only God can know."

CLIFFORD THOMPSON *is the author and illustrator of* Big Man and the Little Men: A Graphic Novel, *just out from Other Press.*

William Low, *A Day in Parkchester*, 2011, in the Parkchester subway station, Bronx, New York

Yes, Thonx

MILES DOYLE

Early in his memoir, Peter Quinn shares what his mother told him and his siblings when they were growing up: "Wherever we went we should bring back a story."

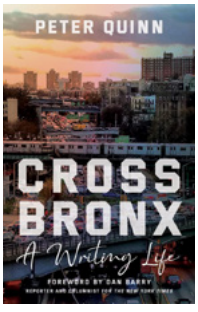
Quinn took his mother's advice to heart, collecting and crafting stories from his native Bronx and the political backrooms and corporate boardrooms he later inhabited. A speechwriter for New York Govs. Hugh Carey and Mario Cuomo, he later did the same for executives at Time Inc. and, in between, authored the American Book Award–winning novel *Banished Children of Eve: A Novel of Civil War New York*. His memoir, which he started writing during the pandemic, is as much a celebration of his beloved borough as a recounting of his days penning important—and not-so-important—speeches for some of the twentieth century's most influential politicians and power brokers.

In the memoir's first section, Quinn concentrates on his childhood. He writes evocatively about the Bronx, specifically his native Parkchester neighborhood, a planned community of twelve thousand apartments and forty thousand tenants conceived, financed, and built by Metropolitan Life Insurance. "When I think back to my early childhood, most of all I remember brick. My mother pushed the baby carriage with [my twin brother] Tom and me through canyons of brick. Learning to walk, I held her hand and looked up at walls of brick."

Noting that he likely traveled the circumference of the Earth without leaving the Bronx, he boasts that no matter where he went later in life—Albany, Belfast, the White House, Kansas City, Hot Dog Beach—he always took the borough with him. "Geography is the place we're grounded, the place we never leave, the mind's terrain, our native land." (Quinn is such a part of the Bronx that, as an infant, he urinated on Babe Ruth's white duck pants.)

Looming over his childhood was his father, Peter A. Quinn, an imperious and imposing figure who was about as emotionally available as the red brick surrounding the younger Quinn. A New Deal Democrat fully committed to Roosevelt's progressive agenda, Peter A. Quinn was a member of the New York State Assembly and served one term as a congressman. After serving as a justice on the municipal court of New York City, he was elected to the New York Supreme Court.

He delivered the first speech Quinn ever saw. It was at the Communion breakfast of the NYPD Holy Name Society, held in the "football stadium-sized grand ballroom" of the Commodore Hotel, when Quinn and his twin brother, Tom, were in the second grade. Initially embarrassed by the performance, Quinn believed for years the loud applause his father received that morning was an



CROSS BRONX
A Writing Life
PETER QUINN
Fordham University Press
$28.99 | 256 pp.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

"appalling mockery," and he was afraid his father might blame his mother for making his sons bear witness to his failure. "If we had the kind of relationship we didn't, I'd have tried in some way to let him know that, whatever the audience thought, we were proud of him."

Like most writers, Quinn (a regular contributor to *Commonweal*) made the most of good timing and even better connections. After writing a series of essays for *America*, a close associate of Gov. Hugh Carey contacted him about becoming a speechwriter. Admittedly wet behind the ears, Quinn had enough self-awareness to recognize that Carey only reached out to him because of his last name. (On his first day, a longtime member of the assembly—"since the days of Tom Dewey, or maybe those of Grover Cleveland"—told Quinn the assembly used to wait to hear his father speak.)

Quinn penned commencement addresses, eulogies, keynotes, speeches about insurance reform—anything asked of him.

> Speeches came in all sizes and styles. Sometimes more care and attention went into three pages than fifteen. Speeches I thought significant, the speaker approached casually, and vice versa. Speeches by committee were the type of cruel and unusual punishment the Eighth Amendment was intended to exclude.

On one occasion, a colleague asked Quinn to write his letter of resignation. Quinn did. After reading it, the governor was struck with the letter's generosity and goodwill. He asked Quinn to write a response to the colleague in that same spirit. He did. "My friend got in touch to thank me. 'The governor wrote back,' he said. 'I appreciate he took the time.' I appreciated that he didn't ask me to respond."

He is also candid about the onerous, often thankless, task of putting pen to paper, noting that a writing style is more process than gift. "If you can't learn from your failures (which are inevitable), accept them and move on. The writing life is the business of moving on."

A speechwriter for nearly thirty years, Quinn attributes his longevity in part to the fact no one else could be bothered to do the job. "It was brutally simple: you produced the speech on time, or you didn't. There's no way to postpone a deadline. If several speeches in a row bombed, it was time to look for another line of work."

At one point, Quinn describes the process of writing the State of the State address as the stations of the cross, a metaphor he cribbed from his twin brother, who followed Quinn as a gubernatorial speechwriter. And perhaps no cross was heavier to bear than Mario Cuomo. Noting the governor's "complex, impenetrable opaqueness," Quinn readily admits Cuomo could be temperamental and brusque. "I never saw him take wanton pleasure in humiliating subordinates. Fierce competitiveness was sometimes mistaken for cruelty." Rather than interrogating Cuomo's infamous "dark side," he instead offers readers a scouting report about Cuomo submitted to Branch Rickey for his Bushwick Pirates minor-league baseball team. "He is not an easy chap to get close to but is very well-liked by those who succeed in penetrating the exterior wall. He is another one who will run over you if you get in his way."

After Cuomo's star-turn at the 1984 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, Quinn—who watched his boss's keynote address at his New York apartment three thousand miles away, mouthing along to the speech he helped write—welcomed the governor back to his office in the World Trade Center. Instead of acknowledging Quinn, he basically blew him off, leaving Quinn to stare forlornly at the same reproduction of Hans Holbein's famous portrait of Thomas More that once hung on the wall of his father's chambers. A few years later, just as Quinn was getting ready to become a father himself, a keen therapist pointed out this connection to him. Approval from either man, the therapist told him, was forever out of his reach.

A centerpiece of the Albany section is Cuomo's controversial speech at Notre Dame about religious belief and public morality. He delivered it two months before Ronald Reagan's reelection, which came thanks in part to the ascendant pro-life Evangelical political movement. Though personally opposed to abortion, Cuomo publicly supported *Roe v. Wade*. Cuomo's position drew the ire of New York Archbishop John O'Connor. He rebuked the governor, just as he had previously rebuked vice-presidential candidate—and fellow Catholic—Geraldine Ferraro. Before Cuomo even delivered the speech, it was already getting national attention.

Invited by Fr. McBrien, chair of Notre Dame's theology department, Cuomo made clear that he had no intention of arguing morality. Instead, he wanted to articulate the delicate balance between the role of religion in the public sphere with the limits placed on it. The hope, according to Quinn, was to move the opposing sides away from their scorched-earth position by framing abortion as "a nuanced issue that raised complex questions politicians couldn't easily solve." Cuomo's advisors were dubious, and most told him to turn down the invitation. Press Secretary Marty Steadman famously quipped, "the idea is to flee a fire, not jump in."

Before Cuomo delivered the speech, Quinn handed the governor his father's rosary, which his mother had given to him. When Quinn told her he was never good at saying it, she replied, "Then carry it. It can't hurt." Cuomo likely changed few minds, but the speech resonated, and forty years later, Quinn observes, few politicians have added to it in any substantial way.

Though Quinn would eventually move on to the private sector, he kept in touch with his former boss. When rumors circulated about Cuomo's run for president in 1992, Quinn believed Cuomo intended to bring him back. He went so far to tell his new colleagues at Time Inc. that he was stepping away to join the campaign. "It was a way to dot the I in my family's quasi-religious identification as Democrats." At a press conference, however, Cuomo announced he wasn't running, which left Quinn blindsided and red-faced.

Despite their complicated relationship, Quinn still holds Cuomo in high

regard. "If his accomplishments as governor were less than memorable, his heart was always in the right place. When it came to the country's slide into economic inequality and the rise of predatory capitalism, he was also a prophet."

Through years of therapy, Quinn was similarly able to come to terms with his relationship with his father:

> Instead of following the biblical commandment to honor my father, I'd been possessed by silent resentment and rage, and the guilt that followed. It was only after I allowed myself to feel and articulate the full measure of those emotions that I could confront the lode of sadness and regret that I'd done my best to leave unearthed.

Quinn admits he was never good at transitions, a remarkable understatement from a man who courted his future wife for fourteen years before finally tying the knot. And yet, while writing speeches for Cuomo, Quinn was crafting an exit plan. Stealing hours before the workday commenced, Quinn started researching, writing, and revising the novel that later became *Banished Children of Eve*. Though his mother chided his "pornographic imagination," the novel nevertheless won the American Book Award, and Quinn found sustained success with his later works, *Looking for Jimmy: A Search for Irish America* and a trilogy of historical detective novels—*Hour of the Cat*, *The Man Who Never Returned*, and *Dry Bones*.

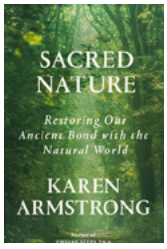
Quinn is a wonderful writer and a masterful storyteller. Where he shines brightest, however, is as a witness, specifically to the end of things. Throughout his memoir, Quinn expertly chronicles the most essential pieces of the American experience in the twentieth century, taking honest stock of their importance and, in their passing, eulogizing their loss. New Deal Democrats, the liberal state, legacy publishing, even his native Bronx—Quinn gives full voice to each one's measure and, having watched their compromise, celebrates the stories that keep them alive while continuing to look out for the stories yet to come.

MILES DOYLE *is* Commonweal*'s special projects editor.*

BOOKS IN BRIEF

THE MAGIC KINGDOM
A Novel
RUSSELL BANKS
Knopf
$30 | 352 pp.

Russell Banks's novel features an elderly first-person narrator reflecting on his coming-of-age as a member of the (real-life) New Bethany Shaker settlement in central Florida at the turn of the previous century. Banks's depiction of the routines in this particular religious community is compelling, while the presence of a charismatic father figure and a beguiling off-limits beauty promises an absorbing character-driven narrative. The novel doesn't quite achieve the heights of his most successful works (*Continental Drift*, *The Sweet Hereafter*, *Affliction*): drama occasionally deliquesces into melodrama along the way, with moments that strain credulity and dialogue that periodically slips its "authentic" Shaker homeliness and rings jarringly contemporary. Yet Banks, now eighty-two, pens some vivid set pieces in returning us to the Florida of the early 1900s, suggesting that what it is today should not be all that much of a surprise to anyone.



SACRED NATURE
Restoring Our Ancient Bond with the Natural World
KAREN ARMSTRONG
Knopf
$28 | 224 pp.

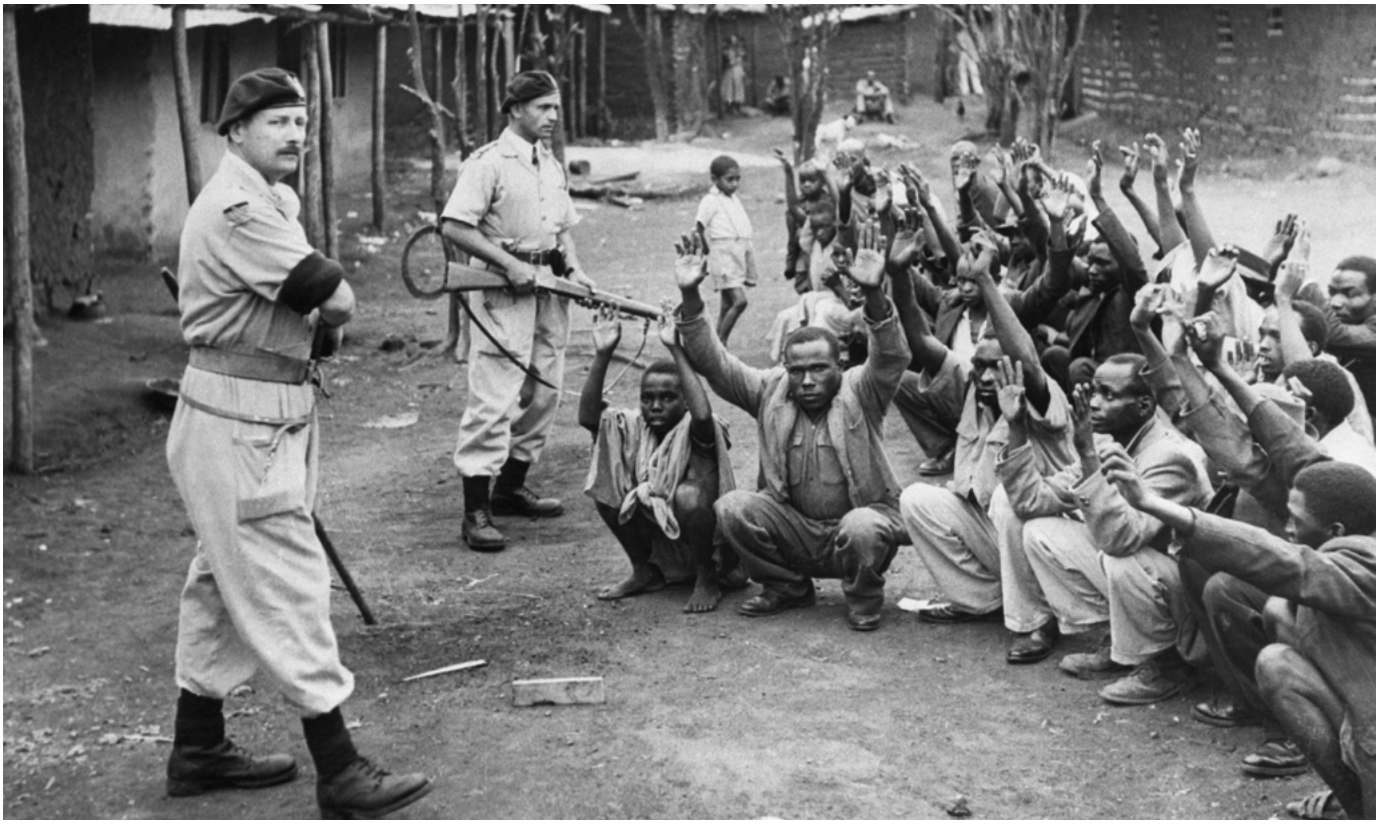
What will it take to address climate change? More regulation? More recycling? More renewable energy? In her latest book, *Sacred Nature*, Karen Armstrong posits that what is instead required of each of us is a rethinking of our relationship with the environment, a renewed recognition of its spiritual importance. Without recovering "the veneration of nature that human beings carefully cultivated for millennia," she warns, "our concern for the natural environment will remain superficial." Though she never quotes Pope Francis—a notable omission in a book that draws with great admiration on many different faith traditions—her thesis often echoes his: we cannot protect the environment if we do not strengthen our connection to it and to its most vulnerable inhabitants.

JUST PASSING THROUGH
A Seven-Decade Roman Holiday: The Diaries and Photographs of Milton Gendel
ED. CULLEN MURPHY
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
$35 | 272 pp.

When he wasn't having tea with Princess Margaret at Kensington Palace in London, he was getting lunch with Salvador Dalí at the Ritz Hotel in Rome. Born in 1918 to Russian-Jewish immigrants in New York City, Milton Gendel moved to Rome in his early thirties, and ended up staying for seventy years. With his self-effacing curiosity and gentle wit, Gendel became a fixture among the eternal city's intellectual and aristocratic circles. But he also maintained an expansive inner life, documenting his solitary Roman perambulations in serendipitous photographs and recording his encounters with the likes of novelist Gore Vidal, Fiat's Gianni Agnelli, and biographer Iris Origo in lucid, insightful journal entries. Gendel captures life in the Italian capital during the sixties and seventies—when the *miracolo economico* and Fellinian *dolce vita* yielded to the political terrorism of the *anni di piombo*, or "years of lead."

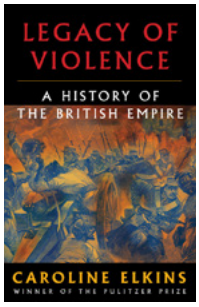
Legalized Lawlessness

ROBERT E. SULLIVAN



British policemen hold villagers from Kariobangi, Kenya, at gunpoint while searching for Mau Mau rebels, 1952.

Caroline Elkins, a professor of history and African and African American studies at Harvard, won a Pulitzer Prize for her first book, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (2005). Grounded in documents and interviews with elderly survivors of internment and torture, *Imperial Reckoning* is a masterly case study of how Britain "used violence and repression to maintain rule over its twentieth-century empire." The book received wide praise, but it was also criticized for relying too heavily on oral evidence or for adding only details about what was already known. Elkins said she felt "roasted over the coals." Then a lawsuit for reparations in a British court led to the discovery of voluminous colonial files preserved from destruction and sent to the UK in advance of Kenyan independence. As Elkins recounts in her new book, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*, those files vindicated her account of widespread "violence and repression" and helped win reparations for the survivors. The number of Kenyan victims and the extent to which officialdom in London controlled the destruction of incriminating evidence are still disputed.



LEGACY OF VIOLENCE
A History of the British Empire

CAROLINE ELKINS
Knopf
$37.50 | 896 pp.

Legacy of Violence extends the basic contention of *Imperial Reckoning* that "violence and repression" maintained the British Empire during the last century. Once again Elkins's approach is what social scientists call "emic"—concerned above all with the point of view of colonial subjects. But in the new book, that means writing from the perspective of people about whom she has read rather than people she has interviewed. She has read widely but also selectively. We hear relatively little from colonial subjects who have good things to say about the British Empire. The Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott, for example, once

GETTY IMAGES/BETTMAN

said, "What I felt as a colonial young man or boy was that I was part of this Civis Brittanicae or sum idea, you know, we're all one; New Zealand, Egypt, you know, one-seventh of the world." He is absent here. In contrast, Elkins devotes four pages to the rage of Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian playwright who won the Nobel Prize for Literature six years before Walcott did. Soyinka was as unsparing of "liberals, humanitarians and reformers [who] had taken up the cause of justice for victims" as of imperialist victimizers: "kindly keep your comfortable sentiment to yourselves."

Elkins's style is raw, accessible, and often deeply moving, and the cruelties she evokes are horrifying. Occasionally, her method tempts her into a prosecutorial stance. Of Hersch Lauterpacht, a prodigy reared in a Galician shtetl, she writes: "he left continental Europe's anti-Semitism for that of Britain, where he let his Jewish identity fade into the background as he assimilated." The comparison fails. Lauterpacht was nonobservant but never disguised his ethnicity and enjoyed the patronage of the American Jewish Committee. That did not keep him from earning a knighthood. Among his family in continental Europe, only a niece survived the Shoah. To note Elkins's omission of voices like Walcott's or her misunderstanding of cases like Lauterpacht's is not to urge balance, much less to defend the smug boast that the empire was actually a "Good Thing." It is simply to note that her book's scope is not as broad as it might have been.

Elkins cites a famous passage in Max Weber's lynx-eyed "Politics as a Vocation":

> The early Christians knew full well the world is governed by demons and that he who lets himself in for politics, that is, for power and force as means, contracts with diabolical powers and for his action it is not true that good can follow only from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true.

In politics the stimulus is power—desiring it, competing for it, exercising it, and retaining or losing it—and power is always shadowed by the threat or use of violence. St. Augustine knew as much. Elkins acknowledges that "all empires are violent" and that anti-colonial insurgents and postcolonial regimes can also act diabolically. But the ruthlessness of the latter is sometimes slighted in these pages, as if it were only a legacy of the empire's "use of state-directed violence." Elkins's account of the IRA's assassination of Louis Mountbatten is riveting, but she does not mention its collateral damage, which included two boys and an old woman.

Elkins begins her grim story with the failure in 1795 of the impeachment of Warren Hastings for oppressing Bengal. As the nineteenth century unfolded, imperialists learned to be more discreet about the human toll required to fulfill Britain's civilizing mission. In 1838, Thomas Macaulay regretted Oliver Cromwell's unfinished conquest of Ireland: "It is in truth more merciful to extirpate a hundred thousand human beings at once, and to fill the void with a well-governed population, than to misgovern millions through a long succession of generations." Macaulay succeeded in stifling the newborn Aborigines' Protection Society, founded by abolitionists looking for a new cause "to ensure the health and well-being and the sovereign, legal and religious rights of the indigenous peoples while also promoting the civilization of the indigenous people who were subjected under colonial powers." As late as 1853, Karl Marx hailed England's "double mission in India": "The annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia." In 1897 Joseph Chamberlain, then colonial secretary, used a culinary metaphor to justify imperial violence: "You cannot have omelettes without breaking eggs; you cannot destroy the practices of barbarism, of slavery, of superstition, which for centuries have desolated the interior of Africa, without the use of force." During the twentieth century, talk of "breaking eggs" went the way of "extirpate" and "annihilation."

An emanation of the Aborigines' Protection Society was liberal imperialism. Elkins describes it as "radically both" for coercion and reform. On the ground, reform prospered symbiotically with acquiescence, even enthusiasm, for imperialism. Informing this liberal imperialism was a common faith in "Universal Onward and Upward Progress," a this-worldly misappropriation of providence. The bloodbath of the Great War leached some of the credibility and appeal of Progress and empire (though faith in capital-P Progress still refuses to die). There had been foreshadowings of the twentieth-century regime of "violence and repression" in the face of colonial resistance in India, Jamaica, and South Africa, but in the nineteenth century the "diabolical" power of imperial Britain was still mainly directed toward expansion rather than maintaining rule. Between 1802 and 1902 the British Empire engaged in twenty-nine conflicts or wars outside Europe—from Washington D.C. to Bhutan—and it usually won.

Elkins stresses that World War I "was pivotal to the institutionalization of coercion and reform" in the empire, beginning with the suppression of the 1916 Easter Rebellion in Ireland. This rebellion was a prototype of anti-imperialist nationalist movements from Palestine to India. Because Elkins's focus is colonial, she slights the paradoxical result of the Great War. It diminished the British Empire's military, wealth, and prestige, but the peace settlement actually added new territory to the empire. It gained 1,800,000 square miles and thirteen million new subjects. The Covenant of the League of Nations demarcated much of this imperial expansion. The covenant's article twenty-two exuded paternalism toward "peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world." Britain and France, the chief mandatory powers, were to obey "the principle that the well-being and development

By the Second World War, Gandhi was urging the British to 'quit India,' but more than 2.5 million Indians still volunteered for military service. More than 87,000 of them were killed.

of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization." There would be some reforms, usually too little and too late, along with increasing coercion. Elkins calls this "legalized lawlessness." Carl Schmitt, a German legal theorist of sinister genius, called it "a state of exception."

Edward Gibbon described the decline of the Roman Empire as

> the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principles of decay, the causes of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest, and as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial support, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight.

This could also serve as a decent description of the British Empire's trajectory in the twentieth century. The dissolution was sudden and largely unanticipated. Elkins rightly insists that in 1947 "India's pending freedom did not portend a sweeping moment of liberation for the rest of the empire." Neither the Labour Party nor the Conservatives wanted or foresaw this moment. The Great War was a trauma, but the Second World War brought devastation. Bombed at home, humiliated by the Japanese in Singapore, effectively bankrupt, Britain was no longer a great power. Elkins aptly calls World War II "An Imperial War." Richard Overy's recent magisterial *Blood and Ruins: The Last Imperial War, 1931–1945* complements and amplifies Elkins's account. Refusing to accept that Britain and its empire were now dependent on the United States, Britain's leaders were slow to recognize their diminished position. They misunderstood the significance of Indian independence. As it turned out, the end of the Raj exemplified the pattern of imperial collapse: widening alienation of Indigenous elites; eroding enthusiasm and acquiescence among increasingly politicized subjects; growing cruelty, incompetence, and denial on the part of their imperial overlords; and breakdown.

So much had changed so quickly. In the spring of 1918, with the Allies teetering on the western front, Britain's viceroy in India appealed to Indian leaders to rally volunteers for the war. Mohandas K. Gandhi, sometime barrister of the Inner Temple, London, and future leader of the Indian National Congress, became an energetic recruiter. He believed that Indian troops embodied a token of loyalty to Britain that would hasten the grant of self-rule. By the end of the war, nearly 1.3 million Indians had volunteered for military service. Within months Gandhi was calling for nonviolent noncooperation with the Raj. A massacre by British forces in the Punjab was followed by widespread rioting. Things were falling apart quickly. During the interwar period, London employed both carrots and sticks in its doomed effort to maintain control. By the Second World War, Gandhi was urging the British to "quit India," but more than 2.5 million Indians still volunteered for military service. More than 87,000 of them were killed.

In 1943 a famine in Bengal claimed millions. Economists and historians continue to debate its origins. Initially, Winston Churchill, an old India hand, was dismissive of the appeal for relief from his secretary of state for India, a close friend whom Elkins calls "a bellicose imperialist": "Winston, after a preliminary flourish on Indians breeding like rabbits and being paid a million a day by us for doing nothing about the war [sic], asked… [the minister of war transport] for his view." Months later, fifty thousand tons of food were offered, but it was too late. Just as the Russian famine of 1891–1892 helped delegitimize tsarist rule, the Bengal famine accelerated the end of the Raj. On August 15, 1947, India became independent.

Britain's imperial dreams and exertions persisted even after 1956, when the United States pulled the plug on the Anglo-French-Israeli campaigns to regain control of the Suez Canal by invading Egypt. As Elkins writes, the new line in London was that "Britain didn't have to be a superpower to retain its empire." This was, among other things, a case of the sunk-cost fallacy: Britain's leaders felt that huge past investments and gains, not present self-interest or future prospects, should determine its policy. If this seems implausibly foolish, recall our project of "Vietnamization," the Iraqi Surge, and the recent redeployment of troops in Somalia. But, to repeat Gibbon's judgment, eventually the stupendous fabric yields to the pressure of its own weight.

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The Parenting Pendulum

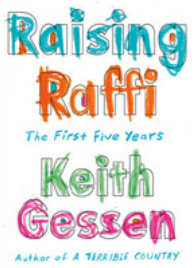
BURKE NIXON

Just after I started reading *Raising Raffi: The First Five Years*, Keith Gessen's captivating new book about the perplexities of parenting and fatherhood, I made a brief spectacle of myself at a swimming pool. I'd invented a game in which my kids took turns riding on my back as I swam underwater with my eyes closed, with each child leading me to a certain spot in the pool using a series of taps on my shoulder. They loved it. To the other swimmers at the rec center, I must have seemed like an excellent father at that moment: playful, fun-loving, inventive. Then my seven-year-old daughter led me face-first into the pool's concrete edge.

"WHAT ARE YOU *DOING*?" I yelled, opening my eyes and clutching my face, which felt broken. "You ran me into the wall!"

Keith Gessen with his son Raffi

EMILY GOULD



RAISING RAFFI
The First Five Years
KEITH GESSEN
Viking
$27 | 256 pp.

I got out of the pool to tend to my wounds, storming past my wife, who was having a conversation with another parent nearby. A lifeguard walked by and informed me that my nose was bleeding. My wife eventually came to check on me, the look on her face indicating that she was both amused and disturbed by my behavior. When my nose and forehead stopped hurting quite so much, I realized that I needed to apologize to my daughter and explain that it wasn't her fault. I got back in the pool with her and kept swimming. We had a good time.

I offer this anecdote as a parable of fatherhood. To be a dad, and a parent in general, is to find yourself at the mercy of an emotional pendulum that swings more suddenly and more frequently than in your daily non-parenting life. You are forever *reacting* to the little person or people you love—and reacting to their reactions, and reacting to your own reactions—moving back and forth between joy and exasperation, between tenderness and impatience, between enthusiasm and exhaustion, between the cool water and the concrete wall.

Raising Raffi is the first book I've read that manages to articulate what it feels like to experience some of these baffling, amusing, disturbing extremes. Gessen's book focuses on his son's first five years of life, recounting the quirks and difficulties of each stage in Raffi's development. Gessen and his wife, the writer Emily Gould, face these difficulties together, and he acknowledges that she's the more informed and effective parent. But the book focuses mostly on his own complex reactions to his son, examining the "contradictory mass of feelings" he experiences as a first-time parent, especially once Raffi transforms from a helpless, screaming newborn to a "cuddly one-year-old" and then into something more difficult: an unruly child.

Gessen wants to be a kind, compassionate father—more than once, Raffi tells him that he's "not nice"—but he also wants Raffi to actually listen. He wants Raffi not to hit or scratch. He wants Raffi to eat his dinner. He wants Raffi not to yank on his infant brother's

Rather than adopting the knowing tone of an expert, Gessen takes the reader along with him as he tries his best to figure things out, relying on actual experts and reflecting on his own mistakes.

head. He wants Raffi not to pick up a glass of water at dinner and douse his father with it. But Raffi, being a child, sometimes willfully refuses. Gessen doesn't want to yell, doesn't want to spank, doesn't want to endlessly badger his child, but he also doesn't want Raffi to continue to do these things. So what should a nice but extremely frustrated parent do in such moments?

One of the delights of this book, for me, was accompanying Gessen on his enthusiastic and largely unsuccessful mission to find a solution in various books on discipline and parenting philosophies. While reading *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child*, a highly regarded book on child behavior, he has a revelation that made me laugh out loud:

> Everything we'd been doing was wrong: the time-outs, the yelling, the belief that if we told Raffi to stop doing something enough times, he would actually, like a normal person, stop. And yet weirdly I was not discouraged to learn this. We'd been doing everything wrong but now we would do everything right: we just had to do the *exact opposite* of what we were doing.

During a particularly difficult time with my own kids, I was inspired by the same book, responding in an almost identical way. (Gessen tells us that his wife finds the book's sticker-chart reward system "philosophically revolting," likening it to giving their son "a quarterly performance review at the corporate job that was his childhood," although she reluctantly agrees to try it. My spouse was equally skeptical.) Gessen finds, as I did, that while the book offers some genuine and lasting insights, its methods don't quite fit his family's reality. Subsequent books on discipline lead him to other revelations and little permanent change. No book offers a magic solution.

In the end, the most lasting insight he encounters in his reading isn't about how to discipline Raffi. What most helps him survive an especially trying period of family life is a "patient and generous" older book: *Your Three-Year-Old: Friend or Enemy* by Louise Bates Ames and Frances L. Ilg. Their descriptions of the emotional lives of small children remind Gessen to attend a little more closely and empathetically to Raffi's inner life and the "turbulent and troubled" experience of being a small child. "This was new to me," he writes, "this idea of Raffi not as a problem to be solved, but as a person going through difficulty, a little person but a person still."

You wouldn't know it from the book's cover (or from reading this review so far), but *Raising Raffi* is actually a collection of essays rather than a memoir. In an author's note, Gessen outlines the content of the book: "nine essays, arranged by subject: birth, zero to two, bilingualism, discipline, picture books, schools, the pandemic, sports, and cross-cultural parenting." Each chapter can stand alone, although they all contribute to the narrative of Raffi's first five years. Most of the essays were previously published in the *New Yorker* and elsewhere, but they've been revised to form a coherent whole, and there isn't a dud among them.

A novelist and journalist by trade—he co-founded the literary journal *n+1*, has written extensively about Russia and Ukraine, and teaches journalism at Columbia—Gessen explores each parenting topic with openness, intelligence, and bracing honesty. The book manages to be both really funny and deeply thoughtful. Rather than adopting the knowing tone of an expert, Gessen takes the reader along with him as he tries his best to figure things out, relying on actual experts and reflecting on his own mistakes ("Here is where we screwed up, I think…") to try to make sense of the many complicated dimensions of raising a child.

And raising a child *is* complicated. Take, for example, the task of choosing a school for your child. Gessen and his wife are raising Raffi in New York City, renting in Bed-Stuy. Private schools seem to be out of the question, for both financial and philosophical reasons. Should they choose the public school closest to their house? What if they can get him into a *better* public school that's a little farther away? But what, exactly, constitutes a "better" school, anyway? And what about diversity? What if the "best" school for Raffi clashes with their sense of justice?

As he wrestles with these questions, Gessen refers to Nikole Hannah-Jones's extensive reporting on segregation and U.S. education. He's even able to get Hannah-Jones to speak to one of his classes about one of her celebrated *New York Times Magazine* articles, "Choosing a School for My Daughter in a Segregated City." Gessen doesn't want his family to be part of the problem. But he also finds that every possible choice offers only an imperfect answer. As the process moves forward, he comes to recognize his own "moral vanity" and realizes that he has misunderstood one of Hannah-Jones's key points, reading her work "too literally, or self-servingly." In the end, this chapter is illuminating not because of the school they choose for Raffi, but because of Gessen's willingness to reflect on the limited knowledge, information, and understanding that went into that choice.

Having emigrated from Russia with his family as a boy, Gessen wants Raffi to inherit the Russian language and some Russian culture. But accomplishing this in reality also turns out to be far more difficult than he'd imagined, full of unexpected complications. Likewise, having played hockey and football as a young man, he wants Raffi to take an interest in sports. But Gessen recogniz-

es the moral ambiguities and practical difficulties here as well, especially when Raffi seems to show very little interest in hockey ("Sometimes, especially at the rink in Queens, he would lie down on the ice and start eating ice shavings"). In each case, he holds his own hopes up to honest and nuanced self-examination. He also reflects more generally on the fraught nature of burdening our children with our aspirations for their lives. After recounting the parallel stories of two hockey-obsessed fathers, one of them "monstrous" and the other widely admired as the father of a hockey legend, Gessen offers this striking reminder: "Children are their own people, yes, but they are also so much at our mercy—at the mercy of our moods, our insecurities, even our dreams."

I read the latter chapters of *Raising Raffi* in my backyard in Houston as all five of my kids played together, from the three-year-old to the eleven-year-old. The scab on my nose from the pool incident was almost healed. It was overcast and cooler than usual, one of the few days all summer when the temperature never threatened to reach one hundred. I felt, strangely, like we were back in our early pandemic days.

After playing a bit, my kids decided to go eat their "elevenses," a term they'd learned the day before from a *Paddington* picture book. When they returned, I began making some notes about their activity in the margins of my book. My older son asked me if I could time him as he ran around the tree three times. ("Yeah!," shouted one of his siblings. "Can we do timing?" I said we could.) A few pages later, I noted that I had to tell them not to throw rocks. A few pages after that, I had to tell my youngest to stop swinging a sharp piece of wood. Soon they were all sitting in a circle, playing Duck Duck Goose, except they were saying "zombie" instead of "duck." Later one of the kids brought me a dragonfly wing and told me to go inside and show it to Mama. Another brought me a "heart leaf." I traced an outline of it in my book.

Gessen's generous and highly readable book reminded me to pay a little more attention to all of this. Despite all the frustrations of parenting a willful and difficult child (and every child is willful and difficult at some point), Gessen's affection for his son, and the delight that his son gives him, animates every essay. Raffi may baffle and infuriate his parents, but he also constantly surprises them. And this is a quality Raffi shares with my children and everyone else's: you never know what they might say or do next. That's just one of the reasons they're so difficult to raise and so easy to love.

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RAND RICHARDS COOPER

The Life of a Song

Relistening to Glen Campbell's "Gentle on My Mind"

Recently I made a mixed-tunes CD for the sixteen-year-old in the family, a newly minted driver who happens to love all things vintage, including CDs. The collection is called "New Driver, Old Tunes," and its list of pop hits from the 1960s and '70s—my childhood and teen era—includes songs by megastars (Smokey Robinson, The Beach Boys) along with one-hit wonders such as "Venus" by Shocking Blue and "Pillow Talk" by Sylvia. Growing up in Connecticut, I was not at all a country-music kid, and the forty-song playlist I assembled for *my* kid features exactly one country tune: "Gentle on My Mind," by Glen Campbell.

I'm interested in how a popular song can figure in your life, disappearing and resurfacing down the decades—as if the song has a life of its own within your life. The story of Glen Campbell in my life begins with my father singing. My father, Don Cooper, trained in the Philadelphia church choirs of his youth, had a terrific singing voice. It was glossy and supple, with a big range. When I was a kid, I thought everyone's dad went around singing all the time; the weekends of my childhood were set to the sound of "Coop" singing as he did stuff around the house.

My father liked show tunes and favored the crooners of his era—Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Perry Como, Mel Tormé, Tony Bennett. They were a distinctly urban lot, which made sense for a guy who'd lived in Philly until he was almost thirty. But somehow he made room among the Rat Pack for an Arkansas-born-and-bred good old boy who graced his country-inflected ballads with a wistful twang. My father's favorite Glen Campbell song was "Wichita Lineman," and I can still hear the glee in his voice as he yodeled it out while shining his shoes or changing a light bulb, "I am a lineman for the count-eeeee / And I drive the main road / Searchin' in the sun for another overload!"

Of course, for a thirteen-year-old in that era, Glen Campbell was about as uncool as you could get. Today it's not easy to recall how vast the gulf was between parent and teen music back then. Were your parents going to listen to "Smoke on the Water"? And what in God's name was a teenager supposed to do with Mel Tormé? As for Campbell, everything about him was wrong, beginning with that perfect hair. In the anything-goes, post-post-modern era we live in today, it can be hard to comprehend the stark dichotomies of style that held sway in 1971. If you were a rocker and you wanted teenagers to like you, you were supposed to look like you belonged to Black Sabbath or Aerosmith. You needed to have long, wild hair and be brazenly unkempt. Well, Glen Campbell was totally and embarrassingly *kempt*. That perfect bowl was a hairstyle that fifty-year-olds might approve of in order to feel they were, you know, keeping up with the times. It was hair Nixon might like.

Then there was Campbell's TV variety show, *The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour*. I'm sure I found it lame, one of those kitschy, inoffensive variety shows where humor and music alike were safely homogenized, made bland for mass consumption. The goodtime hour: it even sounded milquetoast.

And yet…the problem was that I secretly *liked* Glen Campbell's songs. Their lonesome heartfeltness appealed to me. Sometimes, when none of my friends were over, I would take one of his albums from the record chest in our family room and play it. I liked the brassy, sunny, swinging tempo of

Glen Campbell in 1972

ZUMA PRESS INC/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"Galveston," which belied its lyrics' haunted sadness, and found I had to suppress a distressing impulse to cry at "By the Time I Get to Phoenix," another song my father liked to sing.

"Gentle on My Mind" was not one of the Campbell songs my father sang. With its rush of words like a babbling brook, it was hard to memorize—a song you listened to rather than sang. The future writer in me liked songs that told stories, and "Gentle on My Mind" told an inviting one, channeling both the hardships and freedoms of life on the road while summoning warm thoughts of a loved one left behind. Here's how it opens:

> It's knowing that your door is always open
> And your path is free to walk
> That makes me tend to leave my sleeping bag
> Rolled up and stashed behind your couch

The ballad goes on to develop themes that would become my own preoccupations: the mellow-melancholy realities of our passage through time and place; the allure of memory; and the call of a country vaster than I could imagine, "the wheat fields and the clothes lines / and the junkyards and the highways" of the America beyond the confines of a New England I had never left. All this, plus the anchoring strength of the love that the traveler carries with him—a love whose steadfast persistence "keeps you in the backroads / By the rivers of my memory / That keeps you ever gentle on my mind."

To a child of the suburbs in the late sixties, the lyrics conjured my grandparents' era, the Depression, and life lived

What I couldn't know at thirteen is that the mass-marketed singer I mocked as Mr. Milquetoast represented the taming of a prodigious and unruly talent.

in a country of scarcity, with the constant lure of a better destiny that might exist elsewhere. My grandparents recalled the "hobos" who came to their door during those years; and my grandfather, Clarence Cooper, had often told me the story of his older brother, Bill, who as a teenager had jumped a train on the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad, which ran directly behind their house, and disappeared. Bill would show up every few years, unannounced, and would stay until the spirit moved him to leave again.

The family's father had died young, and Bill's leaving put a heavy burden on my grandfather, who was forced to quit school at thirteen to help his mother support younger siblings. Not having his older brother there to help must have stung, but my grandfather revered Bill, and the stories he told me many decades later bore no trace of resentment—merely love for his vagabond brother, along with wonder at all he must have seen out there in the great wide world beyond. For me as a kid, it was easy to catch the ghost of the train tramp Bill Cooper in "Gentle on My Mind":

> I dip my cup of soup back from a gurglin'
> Cracklin' caldron in some train yard
> My beard a-rustling, coal pile, and
> A dirty hat pulled low across my face
> Through cupped hands 'round the tin can
> I pretend to hold you to my breast and find
> That you're waiting from the backroads
> By the rivers of my memories
> Ever smilin' ever gentle on my mind

It's the genius of popular music to invoke mythic themes—themes that often contain more than a little heartbreak—and serve them up to us with the pain alchemized into precious memory. For my grandfather, the passage of time had rubbed away whatever hurt his brother's abandonment of the family had caused, leaving only the gleam of romance and a warm impression of love. Time had smoothed the rough edges, in much the way the song does.

As I grew older, the romance of the road in "Gentle on My Mind" dovetailed with other cultural inputs. There was Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and a high-school English course on "The Myth of America," in which we read James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie* and *Huckleberry Finn* and John Updike's *Rabbit, Run*. We watched the 1962 film *Lonely are the Brave*, with Kirk Douglas as a twentieth-century ranch hand who clings to the life of the cowboy and refuses to accept the modern world. At the end of the film he crosses a highway on his horse and is hit by a trucker (played by the younger Carroll O'Connor, who would go on to become Archie Bunker). These themes of American adventure and dreaming, the hope of discovery elsewhere, Huck Finn lighting out for the territories—all of it solidified my own dreams of travel and of the enormous world that awaited a traveler. It can't be a coincidence that a kid who loved Glen Campbell's vagabond ballad would end up living chunks of his twenties and thirties far away, in countries where other languages and other realities held sway.

As for Campbell, it would be a long time before I caught up with the reality of the actual man. What I couldn't know at thirteen—partly because the internet did not yet exist—is that the mass-marketed singer I mocked as Mr. Milquetoast represented the taming of a prodigious and unruly talent. Like many other regional American performers, Glen Campbell wanted to reach bigger audiences. And in the mid-twentieth century, that meant mainstreaming his music and himself to connect with the huge horde of middle-class Americans who spent their evenings watching network TV.

One of twelve children of an Arkansas sharecropper, Campbell had taught himself to play on a five-dollar guitar his father bought him from a Sears catalog. He was formed by a welter of diverse influences, from music played at county fairs and church picnics to records of Django Reinhardt that he listened to over and over. Emerging in adulthood with a significant talent, he was canny enough to shape that talent for audiences of people like my parents, whose tastes and backgrounds could hardly have been more remote from his own. And it worked: the final tally of his fantastically successful career includes twelve gold albums, four platinum albums, and sales of 50 million records.

Only later, when I came to understand how popularizing performers like Campbell connect regional American music to the mainstream, would I be able to discern the authentic guitar player hiding within the mass-market, variety-hour guy. I now know that "Gentle on My Mind" was written and first recorded by John Hartford (1937–2001), a St. Louis–born fiddler, banjo player, and purveyor of Mississippi River lore. Hartford was a country-bluegrass musician of the type known to everyone inside the industry but relatively few outside it. Interestingly, he wrote "Gentle on My Mind" after watching the movie *Doctor Zhivago* and being thrilled by its epic love story. RCA released the

song but didn't promote it—and then Campbell heard it, loved it, and released his own single of it just a month later. Far from being resentful, it seems Hartford was glad that a song of his had made it to a mass audience. In fact, for a while he regularly performed on the *Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour*—where his composition served as the theme song, Campbell playing it every week to open the show.

Some of the things I've learned about Campbell stunned me. One was that for a brief moment he'd been part of the Beach Boys, spending half a year (late 1964 and early 1965) filling in when Brian Wilson had had a breakdown and couldn't perform. And indeed, you can find pictures of Campbell with the band, wearing one of their trademark striped button-down short-sleeve dress shirts. How had I, a devoted Beach Boys fan as a teenager, not known this?

The other thing was learning just how highly the music world regarded Campbell, revering him as a brilliant guitarist. When he died in 2017, the accolades poured in. Jimmy Webb, who wrote many of his songs, called him "an extraordinary genius." Paul McCartney deemed him one of the best guitarists he had ever met. Alice Cooper described him as "one of the five best guitar players in the industry." (I love that tribute from the ultimate wild-haired rocker to Mr. Smooth Hair. The two, it turns out, were not only friends, but golf partners.) Cooper likes to tell about the time that Eddie Van Halen—one of the greatest rock guitarists ever—came to him and meekly inquired, "Do you think you could get me a guitar lesson with Glen?"

This admiration within the guild—along with the song's inherent appeal—may explain why so many singers have covered "Gentle on My Mind" down the years, including some unlikely ones. The list features Frank Sinatra (crooning lazily in an arrangement drowning in strings); Patti Page (the lyrics rewritten from a woman's point of view); Dean Martin (jaunty, breezy, with upbeat trumpets, a disaster); Elvis Presley (poignant, throbbing vibrato); and Aretha Franklin (a soul version, enjoyably weird). To my ear, most of these covers, like John Hartford's original, miss the wistful quality hiding beneath the ballad's quick-skipping tempo, the loneliness sitting like a rock in the clear stream of the song.

As for Campbell's own many performances of "Gentle" over the years, it's hard to resist him at age thirty-one, dressed like a Western churchgoer in a brown blazer and playing a big, red guitar with his name gaudily emblazoned across the fretboard. But my favorite video is the one made in 1999 at "the mother church of country music," Nashville's Ryman Auditorium, former home of the Grand Ole Opry. It was a musical party thrown for Campbell's sixty-third birthday, where he was joined onstage by Willie Nelson, Roy Clark, Waylon Jennings, Lynn Anderson, Chet Atkins, and other pals. Campbell talks about hearing John Hartford's "Gentle on My Mind" on the radio all those years ago and falling for it. "I like what the song says," he observes, simply.

And then, with the assembled gods of country music sitting around him, Campbell performs "Gentle on My Mind"—slipping an impressive guitar break into the middle and making it look easy. As the gods show thrilled admiration at his offhand virtuosity, it is not at all difficult to imagine the kid in a farmhouse in Delight, Arkansas, circa 1949, playing his Django Reinhardt record, laboriously resetting the record needle again and again, bent on perfecting a skill and setting his life's course by a far-off melody. When he's done playing at the Ryman, Campbell looks up with a startled little laugh. "Just to look around and see all these faces hearing me singing," he says, shaking his head. "Whoa—something went through me!"

I found myself returning to "Gentle on My Mind" during the final phase of Campbell's life. I recall a photo that ran in the newspaper, sometime around 2010—a scowling police mug shot, taken after some bar altercation or drunk-and-disorderly arrest. It was shocking to see Glen Campbell looking unshaven, disheveled, and mean.

What the article did not disclose was that Campbell was already suffering from dementia. His subsequent decline is the subject of a heartbreaking and beautiful documentary, *Glen Campbell: I'll Be Me*, that chronicles his 2011–2012 "Goodbye Tour." Alzheimer's had torn away much of Campbell's self, but not yet his performing self, and it's shattering to watch him yielding ground to an implacable illness that is the opposite of gentle on the mind, and that wraps him in a cruel paradox—losing his memories, even as he continues to perform the ballads that evoke so much memory. At times he seems momentarily baffled between songs. But then he plays and sings, and smiles; and for an evanescent, sparkling moment, all is well again.

Campbell's movement into old age tracked with my father's. Like anyone fortunate enough to reach extreme old age, my father has suffered significant physical decline. He is ninety-four now and uses a walker to get around. But he still does get around…and he's still singing. Two months ago we celebrated Thanksgiving with him in Arizona, and one night he enthusiastically joined in a round of karaoke, crooning "Stardust" to my stepmother in that mellifluous tenor of his and leaving nary a dry eye in the house.

It is strange to think of Campbell gone, and my father, eight years older, plowing onward. I cherish the memories of him singing; and with the indelible power of the human voice to stay with us, perpetually vivid, I will surely cherish them even more when he is gone. Meanwhile, my teenager and I listen to "Gentle on My Mind" as we drive the streets of our town: Glen Campbell's ballad of memory and homecoming, passed from my father to me, and now from me to my child. The life of the song goes on and on.

RAND RICHARDS COOPER *is a contributing editor to* Commonweal. *His fiction has appeared in* Harper's, GQ, Esquire, *the* Atlantic, *and many other magazines, as well as in* Best American Short Stories. *His novel,* The Last to Go, *was produced for television by ABC, and he has been a writer-in-residence at Amherst and Emerson colleges.*

PALINDROME

Steve Kronen

Not a question like, *Shall we gather at the river?* but a statement
traveling in two directions

at once. *A Man, a Plan, a Canal, Panama,*
for instance, which speaks of the human river forged

through the wasp-waisted isthmus
of Central America as the U.S. grew weary

of the 19th century. By August 1914, a third of its workers
(yellow fever, bone-break, malaria)

are dead, the last shift punching out, handing
its trenching tools to the new shift punching in because

in faraway Sarajevo, Archduke Ferdinand's limousine
is stuck, has taken the wrong turn, cannot

back up, and Gavrilo Princip levels his pistol
at the sitting Duke and Duchess and shoots them

dead. The canal, east to west and west to east is,
either way you look at it,

a win-win: your rare gold for my rare spices, my rare nuts
for your big pruning shears. *A palindrome*,

is a running back, say the Greeks, resembling its cousin
nostalgia—a longing *to* run back—as if you'd awakened

as did, magnificently, so Milton tells us, our "grandparents,"
in a loud and too-bright country far from home.

Madam, I'm Adam, says the one, and she says back to him,
Eve, and you know right away

that they're made for each other. Their interwoven eyebeams
are the one bridge back and forth

to safety, the two of them so soon banished (a clock
has started ticking) beneath a flaming sword,

forever (though still, says Milton, hand in hand).
Their eyebeams are not the beams

their great, great, great grandson (seventy-six times great, says Luke)
insists that we remove from our own eyes

lest we dwell
too long upon the speck that mars another's, and who,

from every passing moment, peers far
into the future, and far

into the past, and who, at every passing moment, steps once
and always down onto the disturbed waters

rising at his feet, and whose elders, some thirty begots back,
will wake weeping by a river

in faraway Babylon. Every backward glance is a salt
rubbed into the wound: Sodomites, Iraqis,

Palestinians, Poles, Cherokees, Syrians,
Sudanese, Guatemalans, Nigerians, Ukrainians.... No one,

not even the banishers, is immune.
Able was I ere I saw Elba, says Napoleon

plotting his return, and this to-and-fro, out-and-back
motion say the Greeks, is *boustrophedonic*:

a farmer's turn of ox and plow
down one row and up the next, a winding serpent

of a field unearthed in the hectares behind them, a configuration
the Greeks will etch into their stone and ink onto their scrolls

so that even now, we might move our heads
from side to side, combing the texts, checking for loopholes, searching

and searching and searching, back and back
and back, parsing and parsing, kicking

the chariot wheels, back and back past Odysseus
stuffing his ears, back past his joy

at the puppy Argos jumping at his feet, back till
there you are again, unlatching someone's hand again:

Look both ways before you cross, and you will,
a little light-headed now, stepping down

into the crowded boat that sets out soon in one direction.

STEVE KRONEN'*s poetry has appeared in or is forthcoming from* Image, Columbia Journal, Plume, On The Seawall, upstreet, One Hand Clapping *(UK)*, Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review, *and* Poetry Daily. *His collections are* Homage to Mistress Oppenheimer *(Eyewear)*, Splendor *(BOA)*, *and* Empirical Evidence *(University of Georgia)*.

O Blessed Bus!

EVE TUSHNET

A few years ago, I was coming home on a nonstop intercity bus from New York City to Washington D.C. when the driver swerved off I-95 and made an unexpected announcement. A woman on board had received word that her son was at a hospital in Baltimore. Would we be okay with making a little detour? There may have been a moment when people were thinking about grumbling. But we'd already left the highway, and in the end, how can you say no? We pulled up in front of the ER and the woman disembarked, to a chorus of "Good luck, honey," and "God bless you, driver."

And that's never happened to me on an Amtrak.

Train travel is a pleasure for some, even a hobby, but nobody loves a bus. Train fans are mostly people who love to ride trains; bus enthusiasts are mostly people who enjoy looking at buses and jotting down all the different kinds they can spot. Websites dedicated to bus fandom deal exclusively with make and model. Nobody thinks a birdwatcher is weird for not wanting to catch a ride on a great horned owl, but I have to admit I think it's odd for love of a form of transportation to completely bypass the bit where it gets you from point A to point B. I've never felt the aesthetic pull of a bus. Any positive feelings its appearance evokes are the result of actual bus trips I've taken.

I used to think that my love of the bus was ironic and kind of obnoxious: a way of sending up my friends' NPR-tote-bag paeans to Amtrak and high-speed rail. But when the lockdowns hit in 2020, I realized that I missed the bus more than I missed almost any other feature of city life. My bus love had always been much less ironic than I was willing to admit. The bus is simply the city on wheels. If you really love a place, you'll love its buses.

My impression is that some subway systems, like New York's, have the anarchic quality of a good bus line, but at least here in D.C. the bus is more personal and unregulated. The bus is a faceful of human nature, for better and for worse. On the bus people flirt, preach, sing, sleep, and gamble; they reminisce about the good old days, when Marvin Gaye might turn up at the after-hours club, or when kids respected their elders because the paddle still hung on the principal's wall. They sell DVDs and clothing and grocery items of unexplained provenance.

I stopped reading my Bible on the bus, because it seemed to invite strange men to propose marriage. But then again, one Thanksgiving I was heading to my parents' house when my seatmate began a quiet, urgent conversation about how much he missed Ethiopia, and he's the only man who ever spoke to me on a bus who didn't even ask me if I was single.

The bus has every kind of Christian faith. There's the kind you get from the driver who comments, as he saddles up for the first round of the day, "I'm blessed to be on this bus." There's the kind you get from the psalm someone has posted in place of the schedules, or the sticker on the window that says, "REPENT and RISE WITH Jesus!" There's also the kind where a woman stands at the front of the bus loudly proclaiming the Gospel, and some people are ignoring her and some people are nodding along, with expressions of slight social strain, until she swerves into what she believes to be God's opinion of homosexuality and everybody decides to look out the windows. There's also the kind where the person is not so much preaching as just talking to himself, peppering his moral and religious opinions with, "And they call *me* crazy!"

One day the 70 was stopped at a long red light up by Gallery Place. The driver spotted a friend on the sidewalk, opened the bus doors and called him over. They exchanged a few pleasantries ("Are you having turkey for Thanksgiving?" "Naw, man, I'm having my *jay*-oh-bee!") and then the friend began to talk about his faith. The incredulous driver said, "You're a Muslim now? You were Christian last week! I know you!" And then the driver opened up his mouth and allowed this poem to take wing: "I see you on the corner saying, 'Salaam alaikum.' But when they give you pork chops—you *take* 'em!" Hey, Anna Karenina: Can your train do that?

People fight on the bus. I've never seen a physical fight break out, but I have been on a bus that pulled over and stopped so the driver could call the police on a passenger who was threatening her with a beatdown. I've been on a few buses where the riders formed a noisy democracy to demand that the driver eject a passenger who smelled bad. The driver always acceded to these requests eventually. Those buses were bad, and I admit that I didn't stand up for the targets. The bus is the city: a place where some people do their suffering in public, while other people pass them by.

But the only friend I've ever made on public transportation, I made on the bus. I was in high school, with an hour commute each way, and she was a young woman who rode my first bus on her way to work. We chatted every morning as we struggled to stay upright in the seven o'clock crush. I don't remember why she gave me several long passages from the Gnostic gospels—at the time, I had little interest in religion—but I'll never forget her plump, precise handwriting, in purple ballpoint on ragged pages torn from a spiral notebook. She copied all those pages out of her library book for me.

Travellers on a Harlem bus, 1956

MARIO DE BIASI/MONDADORI PORTFOLIO/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

Nobody loves the bus because nobody chooses the bus, not if they have other options. The bus rattles and lurches. The bus is cheap and so the bus is crowded, and the bus is probably late. (Amtrak is also probably late, but not cheap.) The seats are small. On an intercity bus there's no café car, and there sure isn't any quiet car. The bus isn't a respite. It takes everything about your life that you wouldn't have chosen and crams it right into your lap.

And this is how the bus brings people together. When I interviewed the urbanist writer Addison Del Mastro for an article in *America* magazine, he speculated that perhaps "what we think of as good urbanism is just an accident of having been poor." When we have a choice, people usually choose privacy, control, and comfort—and then we're shocked when we wind up lonely. We put up "privacy fences," and then complain about how nobody knows their neighbors anymore. But communal bonds have always been tightened by necessity.

Look, I love the bus because I love being an ironic observer. The bus is the stage on which I watch the human comedy. But if you forced me to develop a bus philosophy, maybe it would be this: Real communities are made of the duties you accept toward the people you wouldn't have chosen to live with.

D.C. just announced that all buses will be free within city limits starting July 1, but I don't expect to enjoy this civic bounty for long. Late last year I fell in love with a woman who lives in one of those California cities where the car is an indispensable prosthetic. (They've been like this for a very long time: in 1883 Helen Hunt Jackson called early Californians "a variety of Centaur" who "mounted [horses], with jingling silver spur and glittering bridle, for the shortest distances, even to cross a plaza.") If all goes well, I will be moving. I'll learn to drive. The bus will retreat to the margins of my life. Speed and comfort will replace REPENT stickers, spilled sodas, and that one guy who reacts to a bicyclist swerving out in front of the bus with a frustrated, "Just hit him!" I never thought I would leave my hometown, and so I never thought I'd leave the bus. Nothing will ever replace it—nothing anybody would choose.

EVE TUSHNET *is the author of two nonfiction books, most recently* Tenderness: A Gay Christian's Guide to Unlearning Rejection *and* Experiencing God's Extravagant Love, *as well as two novels,* Amends *and* Punishment: A Love Story. *She has lived most of her life on the 70 and S2/S9 bus lines.*

A LARGE ELM ON ROUTE 5

Elizabeth Poreba

You ask what I am at last but
understand the answer is not

subject to form or rather it is in
the form of myself,

cellulose compounds
endlessly recomposing.

I am standing by dint
of parts in tension,

for living is motion,
ends are beginnings

and hydrogen's cleaving
begets all shining.

I am molten, ongoing,
shot from the heart

of all making
always giving up

to the gladdening
river that is myself.

ELIZABETH POREBA *is a retired New York City high school English teacher. Her work has appeared in the* Southern Poetry Review, *the* Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, *and* Commonweal, *among other print and online publications. She has published two poetry collections,* Vexed *and* Self Help: A Guide for the Retiring, *and one chapbook,* The Family Calling. *Her work can also be found in the anthology* This Full Green Hour *(One O'Clock Poets).*

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Associate Professor of Christian Ethics and Chair of the Department of Religion at LaSalle University

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Chair of Religious and Theologies Studies and Associate Professor of Practice at Merrimack College

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