

VOLUME XIV, NUMBER 2, SPRING 2014

# CLAREMONT

## REVIEW OF BOOKS

*A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship*

William  
Voegeli:  
**Redskins  
&  
Thin Skins**

Gabriel  
Schoenfeld:  
**Whistle-  
blowers  
& Traitors**

Steven F.  
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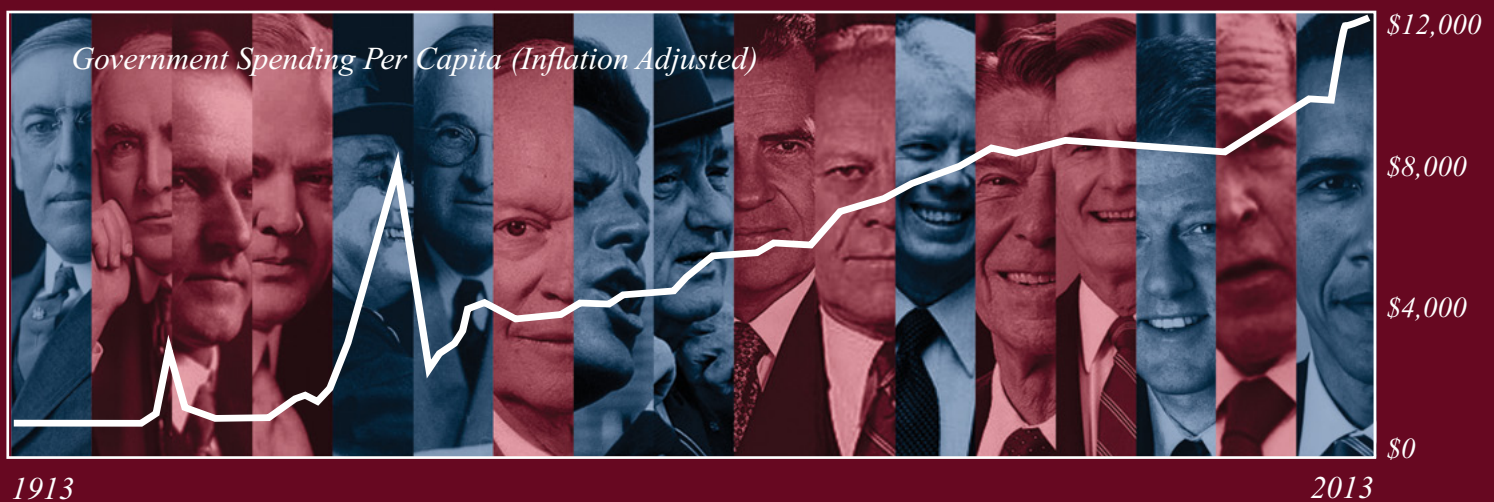
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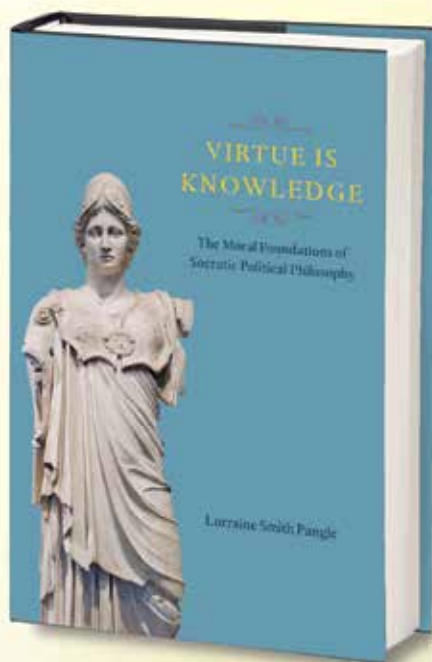
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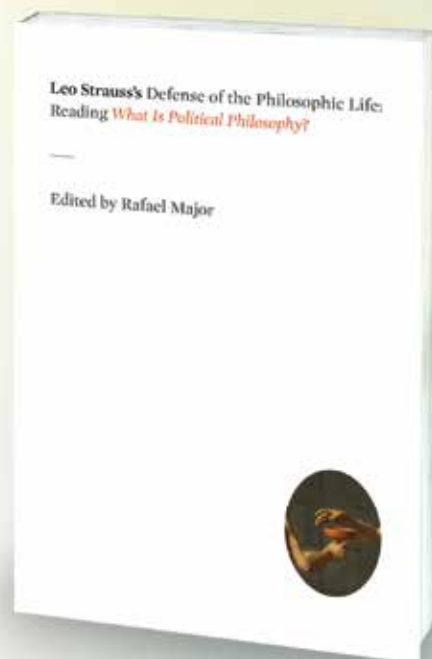
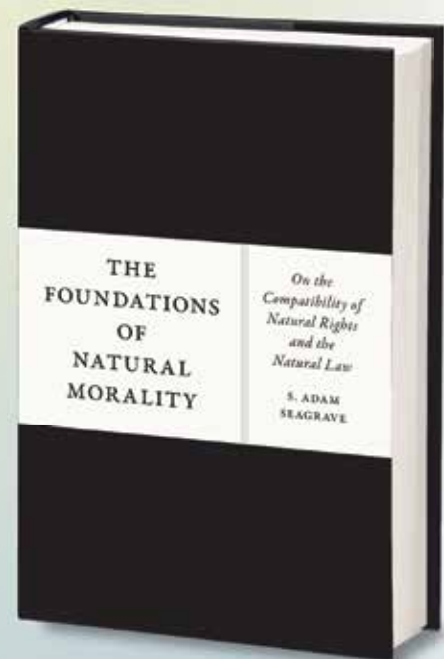
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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

# THE APOLOGY GAME

by Charles R. Kesler

APOLOGIZING IS RAMPANT THESE DAYS. HARDLY A WEEK goes by without some public figure (or unlucky private citizen, become a public figure) offering to apologize, usually at the demand of some group or other who has taken offense at something said or done. If extorting apologies were an interstate crime, the FBI's hands would be full fighting the crime wave spawned by the apology mafia.

"Taking offense" is certainly on the offensive in our highly sensitive age. For some people it is a living. What else does Al Sharpton do, exactly, except lie in wait for someone who utters a thoughtless or indiscreet remark that can be ambushed as "racist"? American universities employ squads of such thought police. These sensitivity thugs, on and off campus, seldom put away their cudgels until the offender recants and, of course, apologizes—publicly, tearfully if possible, and sometimes with the kind of shake-down side payment that acknowledges "I can never afford to do this again" and that Don Corleone could only envy.

Do I have to add that the tears needn't be sincere? Sincerity has very little to do with this racket. The apology game is about power, about bending or breaking the offender's will, about exalting the will of the "offended."

It's all done in the name of a sort of justice, to be sure—the kind that would make Karl Marx smile. For the "offended" substitute Marx's category of the "oppressed," and for "offender" substitute "oppressor," and the quasi-Marxist roots of the exercise will be plain. Whatever brings the bourgeois class down and the oppressed proletariat up, counts, for Marx, as just, no matter how vile the tactic may be. For the apology gang, led by the far Left, the analysis is similar though they like to think that America's racist, sexist, class-ist offenders can be humbled without a revolution. It's enough, for now at least, that the bad guys acknowledge who's in charge and admit that resistance is futile.

Oh, and if people who offend *against* the Left are themselves offended *by* the Left, that doesn't count. Don't expect any sympathy if you are revolted by, for example, Oliver Stone's version of American history or your local high school's version of sex education. That kind of grievance shows you deserve scorn, not an apology.

THE BUSINESS OF DEMANDING APOLOGIES RESEMBLES THE disputes over honor that preoccupied aristocratic societies, except that honor is typically rooted in an individual or social sense of inequality. By contrast, today's apologetics arise, nominally at least, from a festering insistence on ever more egalitarianism, rooted in the familiar race, class, and gender groupings that so dominate the contemporary liberal "self." Individual worth plays only a limited role, because in leftist theory group identity decisively shapes the individual. So only *public* apologies matter, and apologies to the supposedly offended group matter most.

Reason, which could be called on to judge the old disputes over honor and justice, is presumed now to be enlisted on the side of the oppressed or the offended. The with-it liberal's moral world is divided between offenders and offended; there is no possibility of a third party, an outside stance from which reason could judge disinterestedly. It's not for offending against reason but for injuring people's feelings, actually their feelings about their feelings, that the guilty are now called to prostrate themselves.

As a result, the old meaning of "apology" as a speech of vindication is slowly dying out. This sense, derived from the ancient Greek *apologia*, remains recognizable from Plato's *Apology of Socrates*—Plato's version of his teacher's defense speech when he was on trial for his life before an Athenian jury. One thing the *Apology* is not is an apology in the contemporary sense. Socrates never said he was sorry he had offended the Athenian majority's feelings by philosophizing. On the contrary, he claimed their feelings deserved to be chastised! The majority ought to be ashamed, he argued, of miseducating their children, betraying the common good, and prosecuting a benefactor like himself.

Increasingly in today's culture, we're not interested in a person's reasons. What defense could possibly be given of racism or sexism, after all? The only possible trials are therefore show trials.

With the liberal vanguard on and off campus now effectively defining racism as "treating individuals equally regardless of race," you'd think there would be a lot of arguments the public should consider. But we'll never get to hear them if we keep playing the apology game.

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Claremont Review of Books, Volume XIV, Number 2,  
Spring 2014. (Printed in the United States on May  
16, 2014.)

Published quarterly by the Claremont Institute for  
the Study of Statesmanship and Political Philosophy,  
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CA 91711. Telephone: (909) 621-6825. Fax: (909)  
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# CORRESPONDENCE

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## LIBERALISM'S ORIGINS

Fred Siegel has written a truly important book and Wilfred McClay's excellent review focuses on its central insights ("The High-Low Coalition," Winter 2013/14). McClay sees that the most important contribution of *The Revolt Against the Masses* is to provide an alternative explanation for the rise of modern American liberalism. The conventional narrative sees modern American liberalism as rooted in Progressivism, treating it as a necessary, positive response to 19th-century industrialism and the robber barons who came to control and exploit much of the economy. As McClay writes, "Siegel's book is asking us to reconsider the history of the last century or so through a different lens—the lens offered by our tracking the moves and motives of the aspirant intellectual class."

This alternative lens has the great virtue of placing human agency at the heart of the story of liberalism's rise. In Siegel's analysis, American liberalism's ideas and policies did not constitute an inevitable response to objective economic forces; they arose from the thoughts and longings of individuals exercising their own free will. Because the 20th century's

key political and policy developments were not inevitable, Siegel invites us to revisit them—most importantly, how a seminal group of thinkers during the 1920s set liberalism along the path it has followed ever since, a path rooted in fear and loathing of common opinion and disparagement of business.

This highly influential group included such otherwise disparate thinkers as H.L. Mencken, Herbert Croly, Sinclair Lewis, and their English soulmate H.G. Wells. Their negative appraisal of America (and in Wells's case, Britain too) stemmed as much from the successes of American free-enterprise economics and democratic politics as from their shortcomings. America's prosperity and political stability deserved no celebration because those very accomplishments bred a numbingly boring culture, political timidity, and social life dominated by small-minded, parochial, and vulgar nincompoops. Though they shared Nietzsche's contempt for bourgeois life, this cadre of intellectuals had a much less cataclysmic vision of how it was to be transcended and transformed. Their *Übermenschen* were social engineers, people of superior intellect and taste who could manage away the banalities and inefficiencies produced by competitive, profit-driven economics and disorganized, dysfunctional democratic politics.

Not only does Siegel demonstrate the essential role of these intellectuals in spawning modern liberalism, he makes a critical distinction between them and the Progressives with whom they are normally conflated. These liberals did not share the Progressive preoccupation with taming capitalist excess nor did they identify with the bourgeois moralism, religiosity, and majoritarianism that pervaded Progressivism. Progressives celebrated "the people." Liberals despised the people. While Progressives were often willing to

use government as an instrument of coercion, liberals were much more protective of personal privacy and suspicious of government compulsion.

Siegel highlights the distinction between liberalism and Progressivism via the writings of a much overlooked but deeply influential pioneering liberal, Randolph Bourne, best known for his opposition to U.S. intervention in World War I. As Siegel points out, that opposition stemmed not from a hatred of war per se but from an overweening admiration of German culture, especially its powerful Romantic streak. Bourne, said his friend and fellow critic Van Wyck Brooks, wanted to "think emotions and feel ideas." Bourne favorably compared the "sheer heroic power" of German ideals to the "shabby and sordid" life of Americans. Presaging the 1960s, he looked to the youth of America to throw off the shackles of conformism and stultifying morality and to strive to create a new civilization devoted to personal fulfillment and the pursuit of beauty.

Thus, Siegel is able to show that key tenets of contemporary liberalism—especially its cultural condescension, anti-majoritarianism, and quest for the liberation of the individual—are rooted in the watered-down Nietzscheanism of 1920s' intellectuals rather than in the Progressivism that preceded them. This naturally leads to the question that one hopes will be the subject of Siegel's next book: why did this not very impressive brand of thinking become so dominant in American life and thought? It is not surprising that some intellectuals would scorn the civilization that commercial liberal democracy had created. But it is astonishing that such an outlook should prevail. Why was there not a more robust response from learned, thoughtful Americans to this disdainful attack on so much of what Americans purport to hold dear: the wisdom of the common man, pride in honest

labor, respect for success, the nobility inherent in providing well for one's family and in sustaining decent community life?

Marc Landy  
Boston College  
Chestnut Hill, MA

Wilfred McClay's thoughtfully written review was so beautifully wrought that it's difficult to take issue with it. The review's opening discussion of narrative was conceptual catnip for one of my sisters, a Hollywood screenwriter, who's been trying to understand academia's descent into an ill-mannered incoherence. But there is one short passage I found off the mark:

How can liberals, and they alone, be motivated by the pure pursuit of justice? So turn their own premises against them, and show that, sadly, and infuriatingly, the power of liberalism has translated into the steady enrichment of those who wield it, and into steadily diminishing prospects in the lives of the very people it first rose to serve.

But liberalism first arose in the early 1920s to serve the aspirations of intellectuals and writers who would benefit from it and who felt insufficiently appreciated by the American public.

In retrospect, I wish *Revolt Against the Masses* had included the essay on Richard Hofstadter I wrote for the *New Criterion* in February. In it I tried to show how H.L. Mencken's style, which was crucial to the development of liberalism, was carried on into mid-century by the famous historian of American liberalism:

Hofstadter, dubbed "the second Mencken" by the distinguished English professor Kenneth Lynn, adopted elements of Mencken's style and antidemocratic attitudes

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while rejecting the “Sage of Baltimore’s” depreciation of the New Deal.... After World War II, two of the most prominent liberals, Hofstadter and the economist John Kenneth Galbraith, were acclaimed for what was in effect, though rarely discussed, their meld of Mencken and Marx. In Hofstadter’s case it was a meld of Mencken and the economic determinist historian Charles Beard even more than Marx.

Near the end of Marc Landy’s lucid comments he asks why liberalism, a “not very impressive brand of thinking,” went on to “become so dominant in American life and thought?” Briefly, I would answer that liberalism triumphed in the academy not only because it promised to enhance the power of academics, but because what came to be called conservatism—though it seemed intuitively true to most Americans—was late to present itself as a coherent alternative. Conservatism emerged not only as an articulation of what seemed experientially true but as a reaction to the triumphs—disastrous though they were—of left-wing ideology. Walter Lippmann’s *The Good Society* and Friedrich Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* were largely discrete achievements, and even the creation of *National Review* in 1955 was of limited impact until the 1960s forced both conservatives and those liberals who became neoconservatives to rethink their worldviews.

Liberalism, I would suggest, maintains its current political influence not so much because its ideas have emerged victorious. They haven’t. Rather, the Great Society’s patronage politics, Black Nationalism, mass unskilled immigration, the McGovernite expansion of “legalitarianism” (redistribution through litigation), the postmodern replacement of information with attitude on college campuses, and the rise of public sector unions has produced a formidable political machine. What we saw in 2012 was that liberalism, buttressed by an increasingly fawning press, can survive numerous policy failures so long

as the constituent components of the machine continue to thrive.

Fred Siegel  
The Manhattan Institute  
New York, NY

Wilfred M. McClay replies:

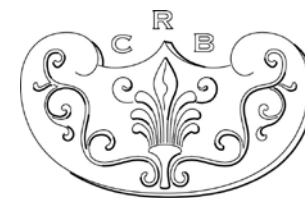
To my mind, one of the most valuable insights of *Revolt Against the Masses* lies in its insistence that liberalism, for all its professions of generosity and high-mindedness, has been pervaded by self-interested and self-serving elements from the start. In other words, Siegel argues, the problem with liberalism has always been something much greater than, say, the unanticipated consequences of purposive action—that hoary old bromide which is taken to explain why good intentions are so often mugged by reality. A familiar adage, as I say, but not quite the whole story. Siegel also wants to underscore the inconvenient truth that key figures in the liberal movement were motivated by less attractive forces, high among them being a disdain unto loathing for middle-class American life. If Henry Adams was right when he said, at the opening of his *Education*, that politics is the “systematic organization of hatreds,” then liberalism’s seeming incoherence becomes entirely explicable; it’s largely a matter of how the diverse hatreds—of bourgeois life, big business, great wealth, authoritative organized religion, moralizers and prudes—have ended up being organized.

I completely agree with Siegel about Richard Hofstadter’s debt to Mencken; this was an observation about him made not only by Kenneth Lynn, but also by Hofstadter’s friend Alfred Kazin in his book *New York Jew*, among other places. Indeed, Mencken influenced a whole generation of writers who celebrated his irreverent style and sought to imitate his irreverent attitude (minus his animus toward Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, of course, which is silently edited out of his memory). I grew up near Baltimore, reading the now-defunct *Evening Sun*, which routinely glo-

rified Mencken as its patron saint, making him into a kind of benign civic icon, a sort of Baltimore version of Will Rogers. He was nothing of the sort. He was a nasty piece of work—a social Darwinist and vulgar Nietzschean; a foe of most every aspect of religion, very much including its more generous aspects; a fervent opponent of Anglo-Saxon culture; and an inveterate mocker of all things that common Americans held dear.

And yet I think it’s safe to say that Mencken would be utterly contemptuous of Obama-era liberalism, and disclaim nearly all connection to it, whether the issue in question were the nationalization of health care, the demonization of smoking and trans fats, the deference to feminism (not to mention LGBT sensibilities), affirmative action in hiring, speech codes and other restrictions on expressive rights, and so on. Which raises a problem that, following Marc Landy’s lead, I propose as a subject for Fred Siegel’s next book, namely, how did this happen? How did American liberalism turn from a regime of robust freedom to a regime of busybodying control? Even if one accepts the view, which Siegel restates in his response to my review, that liberalism was entirely a matter of self-interested motives from the start, the question remains: how did a doctrine of freedom so easily become transformed into its seeming opposite? How did the ebullient free spirit of the “lyrical left” in the ’10s and ’20s become the regime of what James Pierson has aptly called “punitive liberalism,” in which the assignment and transference of historic guilt, and the exploitation of that guilt in others, is the name of the game?

Part of the answer, I suspect, will be found in studying the ways in which liberalism and Progressivism, analytically distinct and discrete in theory, have turned out to be thoroughly intertwined in practice. Take a figure like John Dewey. He was most certainly a liberal, and most certainly a Progressive, and that fact becomes a recipe for confusion, in which the word “liberal” becomes equivocated upon almost as often



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as the word “democratic”—and for the same reasons. Isaiah Berlin’s famous distinction between negative and positive liberty was a way of getting at the difference between the two, and explaining how Progressivism could see itself as a way of being “liberal”—because, after all, it was forcing those under its sway to be free by “educating” or “engineering” them into that condition.

The arrogance that looks upon the actual lives of ordinary people with pity or disdain is, at least potentially, the same arrogance that *knows* what would be better for those pathetic folks, and presumes itself fit to impose upon them a new way of life that is more fitting and fulfilling than their present condition, had they the wit to realize it. Following that logic, it’s not hard to see how Mencken leads to John Galbraith, or how figures like H.G. Wells and Randolph Bourne managed to maintain simultaneously the libertarian and statist aspects of their outlook—even though in many respects those aspects are incompatible with one another.

It does seem to me, however, that there is a danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, if one attempts an overly comprehensive indictment of liberalism. I think there is still plenty to be said for liberalism, when it is rightly understood as: an assertion of the dignity of the individual; a generous reaction against the exploitation of vulnerable and weaker individuals; a guarantor of the rights of minorities; and an affirmation of intellectual, moral, and spiritual liberty, even unto (as Kevin Hasson has put it so memorably) the right to be wrong. That the people who call themselves conservatives are often the most valiant defenders of these things today—and as Siegel suggests, an argument can be made that American conservatism has been mainly a corrective response to liberalism’s excesses—doesn’t change the fact that it is a form of liberalism that they are defending. I don’t think Fred Siegel wants to go so far as to deny that there are those who embrace liberalism because they

honestly believe it serves the lives of ordinary people. I believe there was a time when such people did, and it made sense for them to do so. Where I would agree with Siegel is that to do so today is to be deluded. It is to believe, say, that public teachers’ unions have the interests of their students at heart, or that the American Civil Liberties Union cares about civil liberties irrespective of who is in power, or that Obamacare is all about serving the needs of the uninsured.

That is what I meant in that passage to which Siegel took exception. I don’t want to defend what liberalism has become. But I do think that one of the supreme ironies in the story he tells is that there was a time—before liberalism became the theme song of cyber-billionaires, lifestyle radicals, academics, guilt merchants, and public-employee unions—when it really did seek to honor the common man. Not anymore.

*For more discussion of the origins of modern liberalism with Marc Landy, Fred Siegel, and Wilfred McClay, visit our online feature Upon Further Review at [www.claremont.org/ufr](http://www.claremont.org/ufr).*

## A NATION UNDER GOD?

Peter Lawler has well articulated the remarkable blend of reason and faith in the Declaration of Independence when he writes that “The Declaration harmonized, so to speak, Virginia’s proud and selfish particularity with the personal universalism of New England Christianity” (“Southern Discomfort,” Winter 2013/14).

If I understand Professor Lawler correctly, self-interest and evangelism are the products, respectively, of the Enlightenment and the Reformation. In his joining together of each of these aspects of the Declaration—which partisans of one or the other are usually disinclined to do—he points to the larger question of what sort of nation America is. Some hold it to be a Christian nation; others assert it to be wholly

secular. James Madison observed in *The Federalist* that the proposed Constitution “is in strictness neither a national nor a federal constitution; but a composition of both.” I would be very interested to know whether Lawler believes the Declaration, properly understood, is evidence that America is neither a religious nor a secular nation, but a composition of both.

Richard H. Reeb, Jr.  
Helendale, CA

*Peter Augustine Lawler replies:*

My answer to Richard Reeb’s thoughtful and appreciative question is “you are right, sir.” Let me explain.

America’s most wonderful and effective theological balancing act is our Declaration of Independence. It gets its greatness by being a legislative compromise between the Deistic and the more Calvinist (or residually Puritan) members of Congress who amended Thomas Jefferson’s draft—“mangled” it, in Jefferson’s own opinion, but actually improving it. By reconciling the modern philosophers’ (particularly John Locke’s) unrelational, past-tense God of nature and the Puritans’ personal, judgmental, providential Creator, our Declaration can be called a kind of accidental Thomism—an affirmation of St. Thomas Aquinas’s core teaching of personal natural law. As John Courtney Murray put it in his book *We Hold These Truths*, through their statesmanship and democratic deliberation the American Founders built better than they knew.

Had our Declaration been the exclusive product of the original Puritans, it would have been theocratic—that is, unorthodox. Although they were authentically Christian in their political belief that all persons are made in God’s image and therefore equal, the Puritans were heretics, Alexis de Tocqueville observed, in the sense that they sought to criminalize every sin by basing their political laws on the Torah. The American Founding’s genius was to incorporate the Deistic or individu-

alistic criticism of the Puritans’ intrusive, highly personal idea of Christian citizenship while allowing the New Englanders’ sometimes fanatically egalitarian idealism to balance Lockean selfish indifference to anyone’s well-being beyond one’s own. The Puritans, from our view, displayed too much political concern for people’s souls; the Deists aimed, in the name of personal freedom, to empty political and even social life of much of its properly relational or participatory content.

Our Declaration suggests that we are free and relational beings by nature—natural persons, without referring at all, of course, to Biblical revelation. Our natural longings as free persons point toward a certain kind of Creator, even if we don’t have particular knowledge of, or faith in, who that God is. Our “transcendence” is not merely freedom for self-determination, nor is it the philosophers’ “freedom of the mind” that’s elitist, selfish, and fundamentally amoral. We are free from political determination, as James Madison wrote, in order to fulfill our conscientious duties to our Creator—duties that even Madison didn’t sufficiently recognize are not lonely and inward but social and relational. For Americans, freedom of religion, properly understood, is freedom for churches, for personal authority embodied in “organized religion.”

## AQUINAS AND THE EUCHARIST

Although I appreciate Fr. Guilebeau’s comments on my little monograph on Thomas Aquinas (“Divine Doctors,” Winter 2013/14), I am unimpressed by his criticism that I failed to emphasize Thomas’s doctrine of transubstantiation when addressing his views on the Eucharist. He may want to disagree with me, but downplaying transubstantiation can only be regarded as a failure if one looks no farther than the *Summa Theologiae* and not, as I do, to Thomas’s *Reportatio* on John’s Gospel and his liturgical texts for the feast of Corpus Christi. I do insist that

transubstantiation is for Thomas the only way to account for the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. I thought it a pity, however, that his eucharistic theology should be, as so often it is, reduced to the mechanics of eucharistic change, losing his striking emphasis on the connection between Jesus' Eucharistic presence and his Kingdom's eschatological presence in history. I suppose it is possible to prefer scaffolding to the building, but for my taste I prefer the beauty of Chartres Cathedral to its engineering principles.

Denys Turner  
Yale Divinity School  
New Haven, CT

*Aquinas Guilbeau, O.P., replies:*

Professor Turner echoes the criticism of the late William Barden, the Irish Dominican missionary and archbishop of Isfahan (Iran), whose commentary on Aquinas's Eucharistic theology appears in the multi-volume

edition of the *Summa Theologiae* edited by Thomas Gilby. Like Turner, Barden warns against allowing curiosity to distract from what one can say more surely, as Aquinas does, about the nature of the Eucharistic change—transubstantiation—*itself*. "What it should suggest to us here," Barden writes in summary of Saint Thomas's teaching,

is the total passing over of the complete reality of the substance of the bread (matter and form; essence and existence) into the reality of Christ's body which is in heaven: but in such a way that, as a result of this passing over, the accidents [of bread] are not left hollow symbols of Christ in heaven, but are filled as really containing him who is locally there [in heaven], yet also here [on earth], non-locally, non-naturally, really, uniquely, sacramentally, miraculously, *per modum substantiae* [substantially].

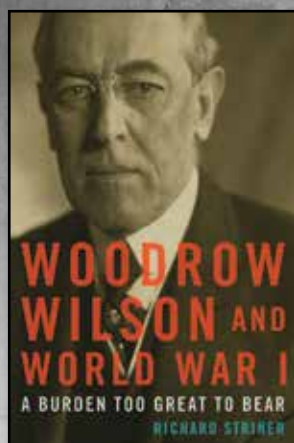
Barden addresses Turner's concern directly by making clear that transubstantiation is not mechanical but metaphysical, accessible to all who can distinguish between a substance and its accidents.

For Aquinas, the Eucharist as banquet, food, memorial, instrument of grace, and pledge of future glory—the aspects of the Eucharistic mystery he lists in his *O sacrum convivium*—achieve their full intelligibility only when ordered beneath transubstantiation's soaring and form-defining vaults. The Eucharistizing action transubstantiation describes is not the scaffolding but is itself the building that encloses all the rest. Here is the cathedral Turner seeks, and it is found everywhere a priest stands at his altar.

So while I agree with Turner that one should look to the whole of Saint Thomas's corpus for his broad explanation of the Eucharistic mystery, I do not agree that what we find in the *Summa Theologiae*—that is, Aquinas's last instruction on the Eucharist—is

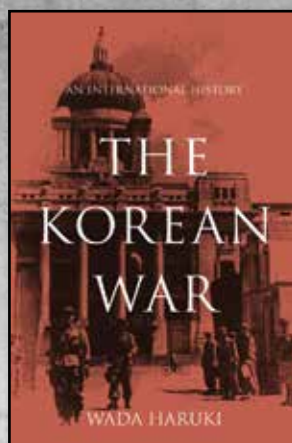
somehow reductive of his overall understanding of the sacrament. Nor, based on his final teaching, do aspects of the mystery other than transubstantiation—and sacrifice, a point of emphasis for Aquinas that receives nary a mention by Turner—form "the reason why the Eucharist appeals so directly to Thomas." Professor Turner's insights into these other aspects are enlightening as far as they go, but the two or three on which he focuses cannot be said to "constitute the heart of Thomas's Eucharistic theology." In the Thomistic scheme, as Barden notes, the only thing more fascinating than the Eucharistizing action itself is the purpose lying behind its divine authorship: "Only a divine ingenuity could have devised that means of communion which is the real presence of the body and blood and of the whole Christ under the appearances of bread and wine, that we may get close to him in the bread of life and take it into our very hands and eat it."

## A CENTURY OF WORLD CONFLICT



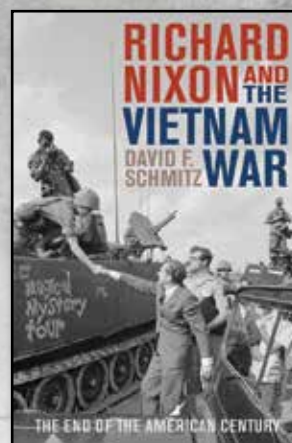
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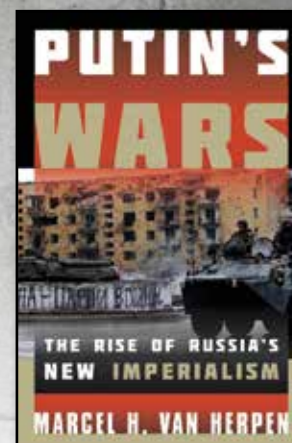
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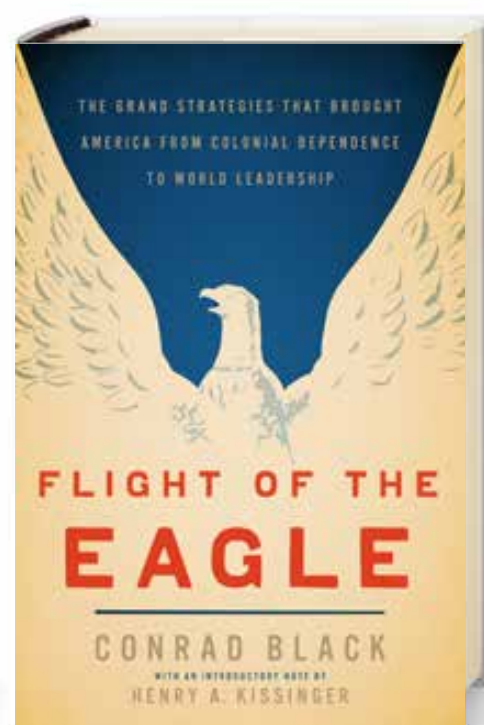
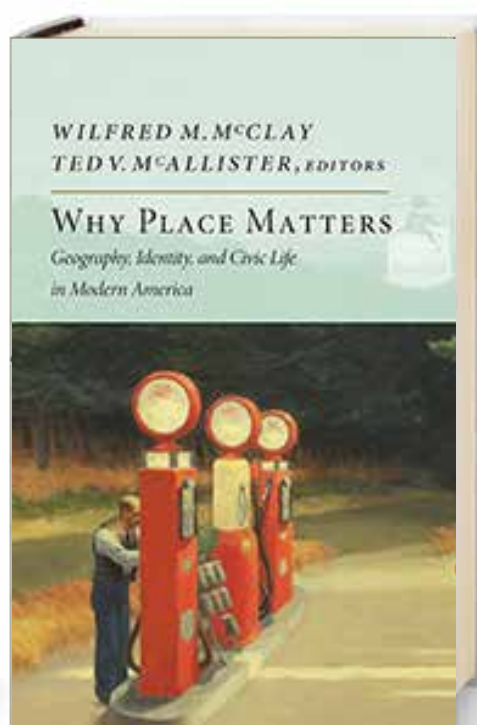
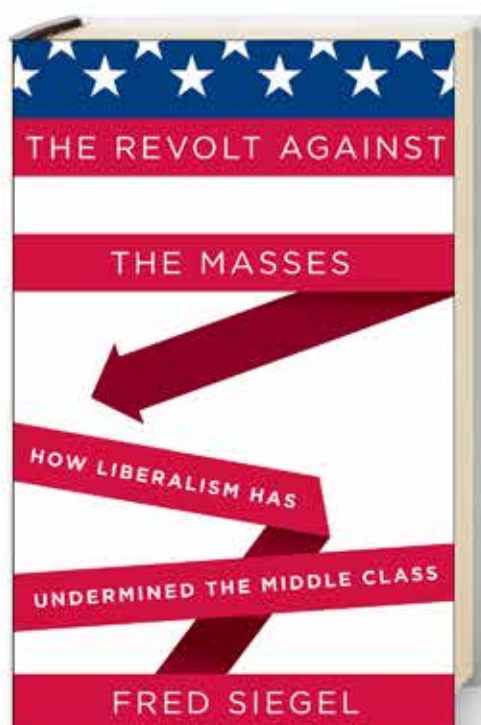
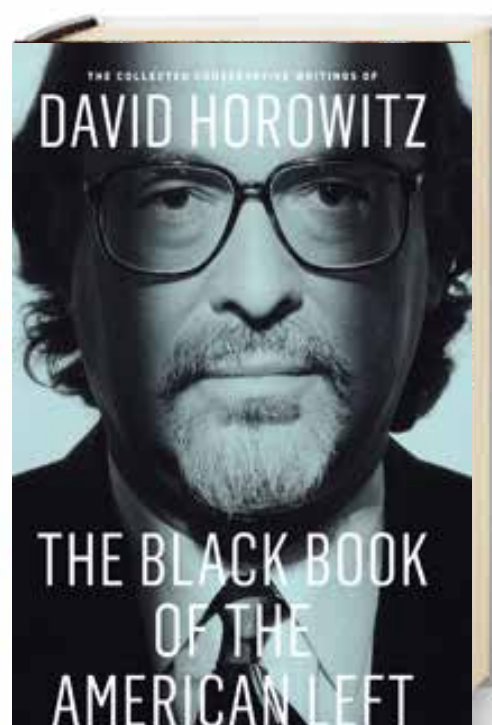
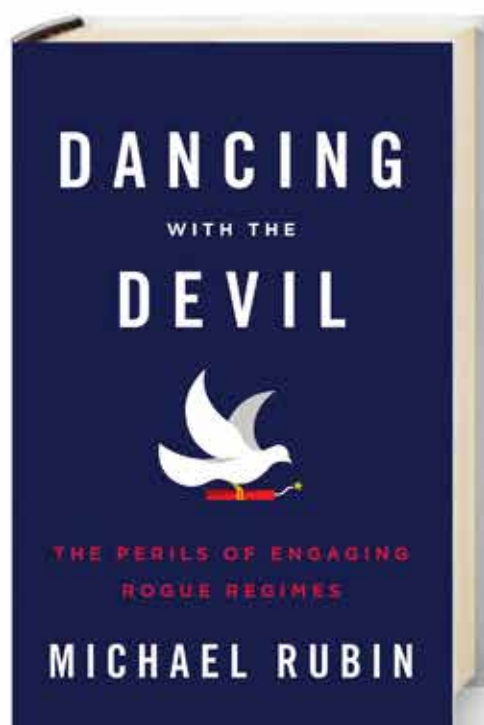
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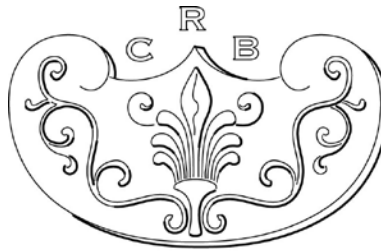
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Book Review by Christopher Caldwell

## FREUDIAN SLIP

*The Americanization of Narcissism*, by Elizabeth Lunbeck.  
Harvard University Press, 384 pages, \$35

“PENISLESSNESS” IS AN ODD WORD, one that fairly leaps off the page when it appears in Elizabeth Lunbeck’s new book, *The Americanization of Narcissism*. A professor of the history of psychiatry at Vanderbilt, Lunbeck is quoting something the psychoanalyst Theodor Reik said about the feminine condition in 1957. One would hardly have paused over such a word back then. The theories of Sigmund Freud used to provide American intellectuals with their main language for understanding human character. Freud’s hypotheses about infantile sexual traumas and their repression, his theories of erotic drives and the way civilization is built on “sublimating” them, his complexes and cathexes, his phallic symbols and Oedipal conflicts, penis envy and castration anxiety...most of these concepts have stood up very poorly against the contemporary scientific study of the brain, and all of them today sound quaint and slightly ridiculous. Except in France and Argentina, Freudian psychoanalysis is a dead religion.

But in the middle of the last century, almost every year a new book would be hailed and showered with awards for translating Western wisdom into Freudian language, or shining the Freudian searchlight onto some previously obscure corner of our culture. The classicist Norman O. Brown made a psychoanalytic reckoning with destruction and war in *Life Against Death* (1959). Anthropologist Ernest Becker won a Pulitzer Prize in 1974 for the way he applied Freud and Otto Rank to the problem of evil in *The Denial of Death*. And in 1979, the University of Rochester professor Christopher Lasch, a skeptical populist historian of progressivism, used the concept of “narcissism,” first hinted at by Freud in a series of essays written on the eve of the First World War, to capture the emptiness of American life in the aftermath of the 1960s.

Narcissism, for Lasch, was the besetting vice of a counterculture that, in Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell’s words, “produced little culture and countered nothing.” It also hap-

pened to fit in with his two main political pre-occupations, which sat uncomfortably together even at the time. Lasch was both a ferocious opponent of capitalism and an uncompromising defender of the family. Narcissism allowed him to tie together Wonder Bread and hot tubs, air pollution and no-fault divorce. It summed up a culture in which people cared more about money and glitzy cars and having interesting experiences than about honor and duty and raising their children. Book-buyers across the country recognized in his sophisticated critique the United States of their quotidian nightmares, and this work of speculative sociology turned into a national bestseller. Its insights look truer with every passing year. In contrast to other Freudian books of the time and to Freudianism itself, *The Culture of Narcissism* has only grown in influence.

ELIZABETH LUNBECK DOES NOT SEEM terribly happy about this. Psychoanalysis still has a lot to teach us, in her view. So does the concept of “narcissism,” and



she objects to the way Lasch handled it. The 1970s were actually a time when innovative clinical psychologists, tacking away from the Freudian mainstream, were broadening our understanding of narcissism, showing that it could be a healthy thing. The “self-psychologist” Heinz Kohut saw narcissism as a source not only of self-centeredness but also of creativity. His rival Otto Kernberg saw it as seductive and dangerous—more the way Lasch did—but also as relatively rare. Lasch and other social critics who wrote bitterly about narcissism in the 1970s, Lunbeck believes, drowned out or misrepresented the message of Kohut and Kernberg. As a young scholar, she had a close-up view of these battles, since she had been hired by Lasch at the University of Rochester—a connection that goes unmentioned in the book. *The Americanization of Narcissism* is not confined to examining the 1970s. It is a much, much larger project that ranges across the 20th century. It addresses the views on narcissism of Philip Rieff of the University of Pennsylvania, Daniel Bell, and the journalist Tom Wolfe. But it is always Lasch for whom Lunbeck reserves her harshest words.

**T**HE CULTURE OF NARCISSISM WAS not just a disruptive argument in psychoanalytic circles. It became a political scandal. Jimmy Carter read the book—thanks, he said, to his having “mastered the art of speed reading”—and invited Lasch to the White House to discuss it over dinner, in the company of Bell, Jesse Jackson, and Bill Moyers. According to the historian Eric Miller, author of a splendid biography of Lasch called *Hope in a Scattering Time* (2010), Lasch was uncomfortable that evening, but stayed in touch with Carter aide Jody Powell. Carter’s speechwriters would pillage the *Narcissism* book for a few turns of phrase to use in the president’s much-ridiculed address to the nation on July 15, 1979—later known as the “malaise speech.” Lasch was disappointed to see his words used to berate the American people. He later wrote to Carter’s pollster Patrick Caddell that his book condemned “above all the culture of...the managerial and professional elite that gets most of the social and economic advantages.” That places Lasch in a curious position, as both the most insightful critic of the Carter Administration’s disconnection from American society and the inspiration for its single most disconnected moment.

Lasch wound up publishing the book at W.W. Norton because his editors at Alfred A. Knopf feared it would be little more than

a ragbag of essays. They were wrong. Even so, *The Culture of Narcissism* is hard to summarize pithily, even for those (including the present reviewer) who revere it. It is a remarkably thorough description of American culture in the aftermath of the dismantling of institutions and constituted authority that took place in the ’60s. Lasch thought that the counterculture had managed “to liberate humanity from...outmoded ideas of love and duty,” and that this was a catastrophe. Without such ideas, people would have no way of devoting themselves to larger purposes or making the connections with fellow citizens the way they used to. They could only focus on their own comfort, titillation, and self-esteem—they could only be narcissists.

**L**ASCH’S CANVAS IS REMARKABLY BROAD: empty ambition (there is a section called “Changing Modes of Making It: From Horatio Alger to the Happy Hooker”), new therapies (the weekend therapy meetings

Lasch thought that the  
counterculture had managed  
“to liberate humanity from...  
outmoded ideas of love and  
duty,” and that this was a  
catastrophe.

known as “est,” Scientology, and something called “rolfing,” a kind of soft-tissue massage that Lasch enjoyed making fun of), the meaning of the big and (back then) relatively new role of professional sports in American life, the impossibility of carrying out education when authority has collapsed, sex and the family, and—most ominously of all—Americans’ fear of aging, the source of some of the profoundest writing in the book. In breaking Americans’ relation to their own history, Lasch argued, the counterculture broke the American personality type. It turned us into narcissists. The narcissist, he writes, “takes no interest in the future and does nothing to provide himself with the traditional consolations of old age, the most important of which is the belief that future generations will in some sense carry on his life’s work.... When the generational link begins to fray, such consolations no longer obtain.”

When Lasch writes in this vein, it is evident that he is thinking less about Freud than about the Narcissus of Greek mythol-

ogy. That is why the book has become canonical. One reads Lasch for his factual analysis, for his strong sense of right and wrong, and—as in all his books—his sense of the sociology of intellectual fashion. One tends to skate past the Freudian vocabulary, when it appears, as a source of obscurity linked to the fads of the time. When he writes that the narcissist is “[u]nable to achieve satisfying sublimations,” one understands him to be saying clumsily that the narcissist values trivial, fleeting things over important, lasting ones. The book has nonetheless been persistently misunderstood, even by the author himself. Lasch thought he was unfurling a probing critique of capitalism—for example, confining his critique of feminism to the way feminists insisted on bringing the capitalist division of labor into the household. Others saw him turning into a conservative grump.

**L**UNBECK IS LESS INTERESTED IN associating him with a hidebound school of politics than with a hidebound school of psychoanalysis. Lasch fits with Freud’s more conservative, tradition-defending side, the side that, as mentioned above, Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg were hoping to emancipate themselves from in the 1970s. Because Freud spoke openly and graphically about sex, Americans have a tendency to assume his ideas about social order were radical, but they were not. What Freud’s therapy aimed to produce, after the patient had identified and “worked through” his complexes, was independence—the ability to stand on one’s own two feet. Lasch was alarmed to see this ethic dissolving. Lasch’s biographer Miller also sees Lasch using Freud cleverly (but probably not consciously) to make traditionalist points in a not-so-traditionalist-sounding way. Kohut, by contrast, was speaking as a real man of the 1960s and 1970s when he told an interviewer: “Values of independence are phony, really. There is no such thing.”

Modern Americans will also consider Freud conservative for his belief in essential differences between men and women—a belief that strikes Lunbeck as “retrograde.” Although sexism is not an accusation that can easily be leveled at Lasch (whose mother held a doctorate in philosophy), he, too, had an “essentialist” view of the family. Lunbeck is reluctant to give Lasch any credit for his difference with Freud on such questions as, say, penis envy. “That women’s defining anatomical disability is nowhere to be found in Christopher Lasch’s critique of vanity, and that he did not see it as a specifically female disposition,” she

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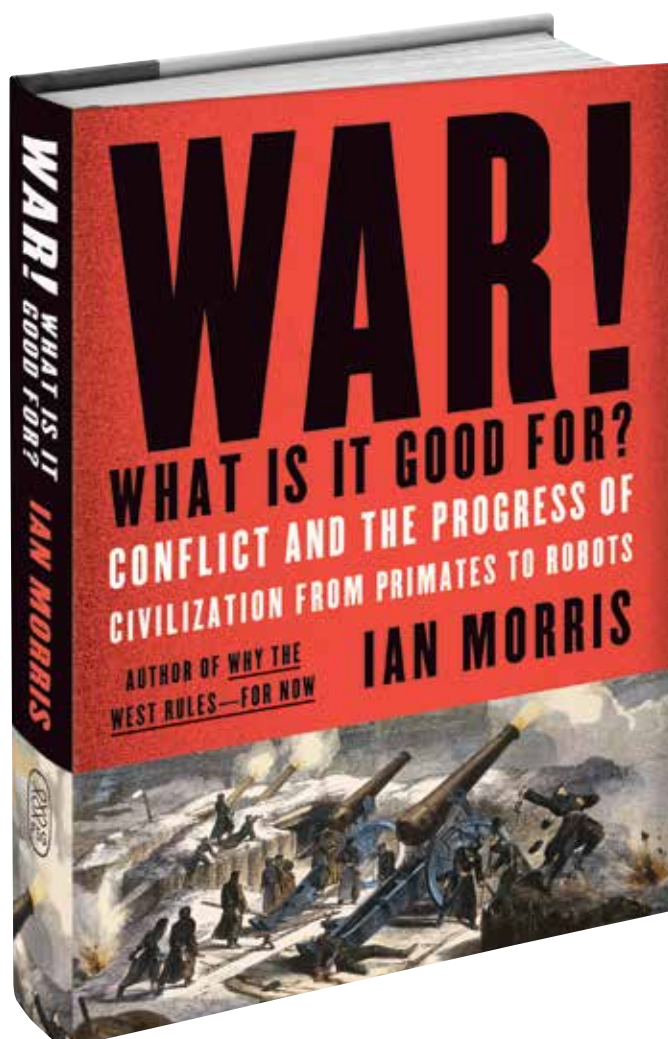
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writes, “testifies to how decisively the conversation around it had changed.”

There is a tone-deafness in Lunbeck’s work. You would think, to read her, that Lasch was a Viennese shrink rather than a Nebraskan historian and that *The Culture of Narcissism* was a monograph on Kohut and Kernberg, to whom he devotes barely a half-dozen pages each. Narcissism, for Lasch, is a slangy term, a metaphor. Lunbeck sees it as a dumbing-down and complains of the way, in Lasch’s and others’ hands, “narcissism was transformed from a clinical concept signaling emotional impoverishment to a very different cultural indictment of an unseemly material plenitude.” But in using the word narcissism, the “culture” (i.e., Lasch) was only reappropriating what the “clinic” (i.e., Freud) had taken from it in the first place. Lasch owes the reader no more apology for borrowing from Freud than Freud does for borrowing from the Greeks.

THERE WAS REALLY NO ONE LIKE Lasch. Lunbeck—whether despite having known him or because of it—seems less attentive than she might be to his ideology’s distinctiveness. Keen to cast him in an anti-feminist light, she notes that “Lasch’s tendentious take on consumption” had its roots in a tradition which “divided economic activity between a highly valued and well-disciplined sphere of productive activity and a devalued, suspect, and impossible-to-control sphere of consumption associated with women”—a tradition she identifies with Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*. But there is nothing Lasch laments more than capitalism’s tendency to produce specialization (or the division of labor) over time. A passage at the start of *Haven in a Heartless World* (1977), the book Lasch wrote before *The Culture of Narcissism*, hints that the free market is little more than a figment of Smith’s imagination. Similarly, Lasch’s contention that prostitution tells us a lot about American life is not as “bitter” as Lunbeck would have it. At the end of the Carter Administration, those who wanted to liberate the bedroom tended to want to crack down on the boardroom, and vice versa. Lasch saw corruption in both places. Prostitution, like narcissism, was to him a concept, a place for discussing his two preoccupations—empty sex and empty consumption.

In the end, Lunbeck is more interested in psychoanalysis than in Lasch, and rather early in the book her mind begins to wander from the fight she has picked. A hundred pages in, we are following her along on her



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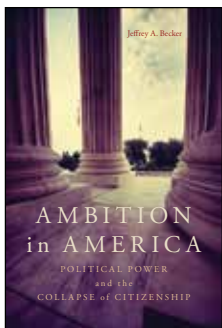
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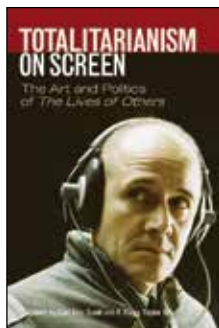
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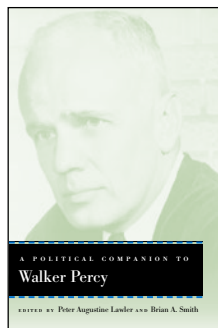
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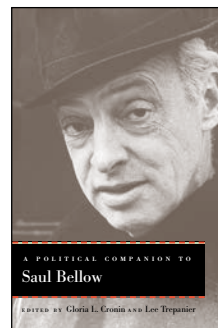


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real project: a psychoanalytic history of certain ideas of the self over the last century, narcissism among them. If her book is not immediately recognizable as such a survey, it is because she (or her editor) has taken the last three chapters, chronologically speaking, and shuffled them to the front. The first quarter of the book gives us a narrative of the 1970s while the last three quarters carry us from World War I into the 1960s. The polemic against Lasch's handling of narcissism disappears for long passages. By the time the reader closes *The Americanization of Narcissism*, Lasch's work seems a half-remembered hobby horse or a news hook.

LUNBECK WINDS UP USING NARCISSISM as Lasch did. It is a concept, a symbol, a very convenient—because very broad—

subject for polemics. Freud himself hinted in his pre-World War I papers that he was interested in something that went far beyond the tightly defined condition of narcissism. He spoke of *Selbstgefühl* or "self-regard," although it is unlikely he would have made much of it. But soon Freud found himself clashing with colleagues who wanted to put such considerations at the center of clinical treatment. Freud felt that in a rigorous course of treatment there were grounds for withholding consolation even from desperately hurting patients. His protégé Sandór Ferenczi professed to want to draw out the patient's secrets like "an affectionate mother."

Over time, this school triumphed, because as the 20th century progressed and certitudes waned, the kind of person who came to psychoanalysis looking for help changed.

The center of gravity of the psychoanalytic movement shifted from Central Europe to urban America, and the conflicts that society spurred on opposite sides of the Atlantic had much less in common than one might have assumed. The German refugee analyst Erik Erikson, who settled in Massachusetts in the 1930s, saw this most clearly. He was fascinated by Americans' "strangely adolescent style of adulthood." The New World ego, Erikson said, was "a fashionable and vain 'ego' which is its own originator and arbiter." This brought more freedom than the continental shrinks were used to seeing in their patients, but it brought wholly unheard-of problems, too.

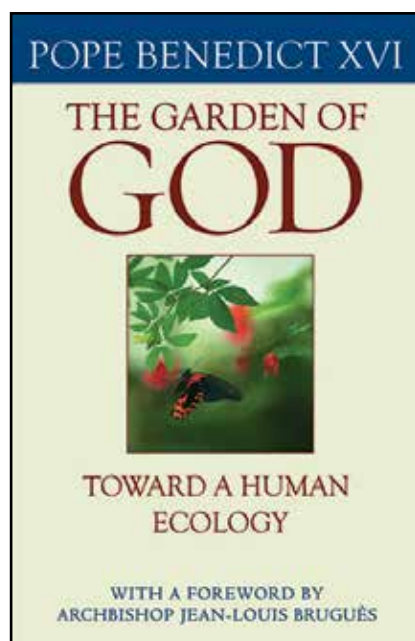
Early Freudian psychiatry had been about adjusting patients to norms that almost everyone would agree were good. Modern life undermined this aim. "The patient of today," according to Erikson, "suffers most under the problem of what he should believe in and who he should—or, indeed, might—be or become." These were problems of identity, or what Erikson called "ego-identity." Lunbeck believes that this search for identity has much in common with what Lasch and others derided as narcissism. Thus it is not such a surprise that narcissism was both discovered and derided at the same time in the 1970s. Narcissism was not just a club to beat the counterculture with; it was—for its defenders—a route into both the "self-esteem" movement and what we now call identity politics.

THE STRANGE THING ABOUT THIS book is that Lunbeck gives next to no acknowledgment that she is standing in the Ozymandian ruins of a vanished cult. She notes that Erikson and Kohut, in their prime, were both dimly viewed by the Freudian establishment, and that both succeeded nonetheless. For her this is a sign of liberation and new beginnings, of "mainstream classical psychoanalysis on the eve of its 1970s reorientation around narcissism." But it may also show the waning authority of psychoanalysis more generally. Cultures collapse as systems. Remedies for alienation collapse along with alienation. *Perestroika* felt like a "reorientation," too. The approaching agony of an institution can often present itself to reformers as a joyous liberation or new beginning. In 1979, when psychoanalysis was reaching certain exceptionally acute conclusions about dying institutions, it was a dying institution itself.

Christopher Caldwell is a senior editor at the Weekly Standard.

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Essay by William Voegeli

# THE REDSKINS AND THEIR OFFENSE



THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE, barely a decade old and barely solvent, saw three franchises disband before the start of the 1932 season. It added one more, for a total of eight, when the new Boston Braves took the same name as the major league baseball team with whom they shared a stadium, Braves Field. Because baseball was far more popular than professional football in the 1930s, NFL owners were not bashful about laying claim to a bit of the brand loyalty already enjoyed by baseball franchises. Other teams in the league that year included: the New York Giants, who played in the Polo Grounds, home of the baseball Giants; the Brooklyn Dodgers, who shared Ebbets Field with their baseball counterpart; and the Chicago Bears, who played in Wrigley Field, where the Cubs played baseball and, after a fashion, still do.

When, before the 1933 season, the football Braves relocated one mile east to Fenway Park, the owners changed the name to the Boston Redskins, encouraging Red Sox fans to make a connection to Fenway's more famous occupant while obviating changes to the logo and uniforms. According to some accounts, the name was also an attempt to wring a marketing advantage from the fact that the coach,

Lone Star Dietz, was part Sioux, or at least claimed to be.

The franchise remained the Redskins after relocating to Washington, D.C., in 1937, but the future use of that name is doubtful. Denunciations of it as an insult to American Indians reached a point during the 2013 football season that an interviewer asked President Obama for his position on the controversy. He replied, cautiously, that an owner should "think about changing" a team name if it "was offending a sizeable group of people."

Of more importance to conservatives, columnist Charles Krauthammer also endorsed dropping "Redskins"—not as a matter of "high principle," but in order to adapt to "a change in linguistic nuance." "Simple decency," he wrote, recommends discarding a term that has become an affront, even if it was used without a second thought or malicious intent 80 years ago. A few days before Krauthammer's column appeared, on NBC's "Sunday Night Football," the highest-rated TV show throughout the football season, studio host Bob Costas called for Washington to pick a different team name. "Redskins' can't possibly honor a heritage or a noble character trait," he said, "nor can it possibly

be considered a neutral term." Rather, it's "an insult" and "a slur."

The *New Republic* and *Slate* are among several journals that no longer use the name in their articles. Few football fans rely heavily on either publication, of course, but many of them read Gregg Easterbrook's Tuesday Morning Quarterback column on ESPN.com. By calling the team either the "Washington R\*dsk\*ns" or "Potomac Drainage Basin Indigenous Persons," Easterbrook both observes and spoofs the growing de facto ban on "Redskins."

Sadly, the republic faces challenges more dire than naming a sports team. This slight question, however, entails weightier ones about comity—how a diverse nation coheres; discourse—how Americans address one another; and power—not only how we make decisions, but how we decide what needs to be decided, and who will do the deciding.

## The Right Side of History

KRAUTHAMMER, COSTAS, AND MANY other "Redskins" critics contend that because sensibilities change, terminology must follow. That seems undeniable as an abstract proposition, but doesn't settle



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