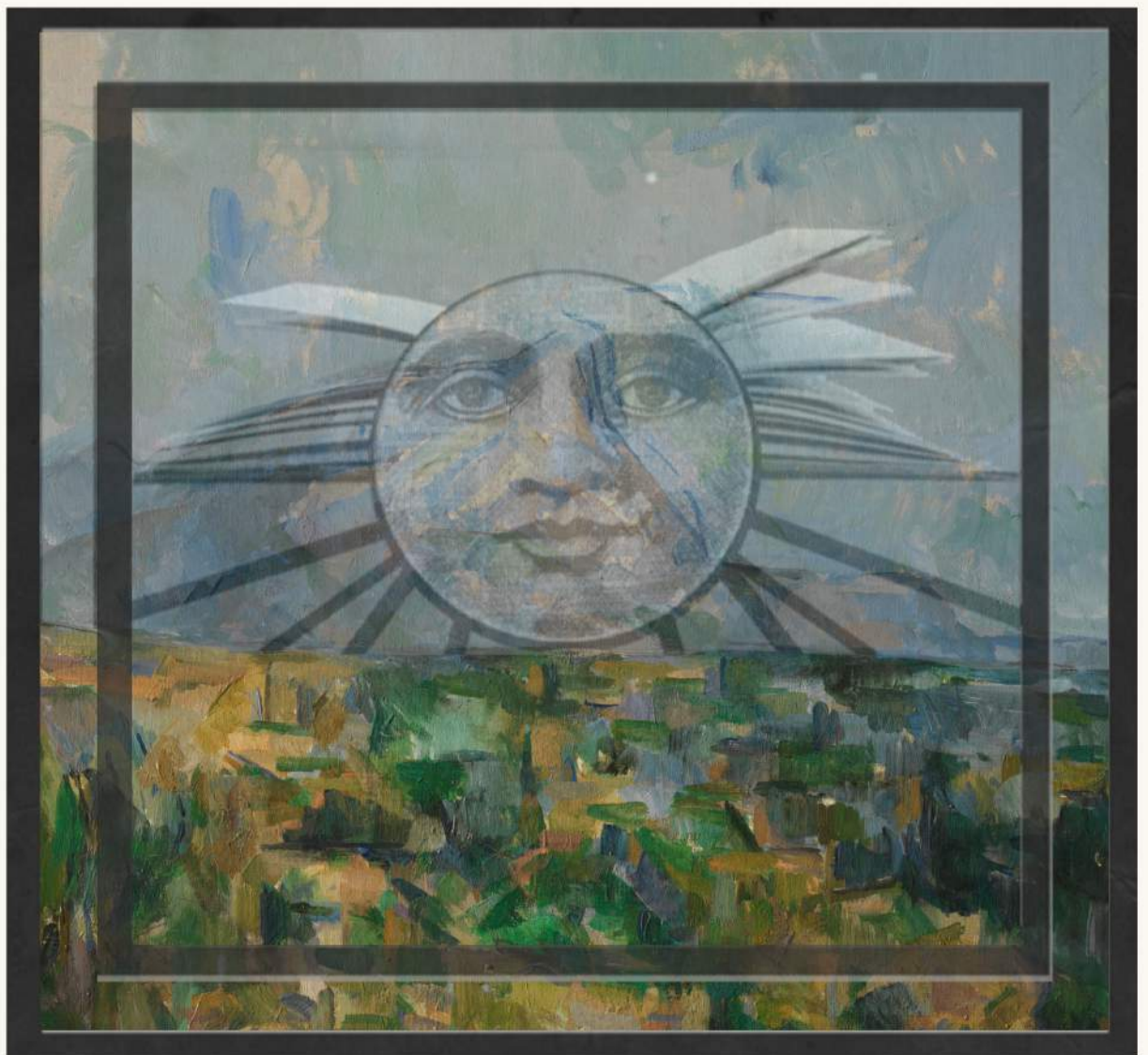


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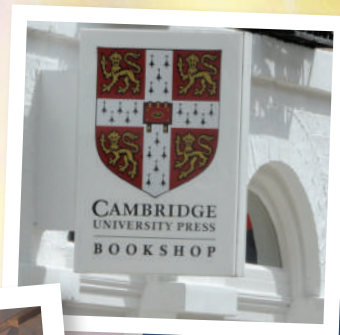
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PAUL SAGAR

THE STRUCTURE  
OF INEQUALITY

A REVIEW OF  
*CAPITAL IN THE  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY*

BY THOMAS PIKETTY

(HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014)

If one had to summarise Thomas Piketty's best-selling 700-page academic tome by quoting just one of its sentences, it would have to be: 'Money tends to reproduce itself'. A more expansive précis might go as follows: capitalist societies tend towards inequality. The observed and much remarked post-1980 shift in this direction is not a new and abnormal departure from the more egalitarian period of 1945–79, but a reversion to the long-term norm established from the eighteenth century up until 1914. Economically speaking, the twentieth century was an aberration for capitalism. Two world wars, the collapse of the global economy after 1929, the emergence of an economically interventionist state, rearmament, postwar reconstruction, and the rise of what Piketty calls a 'social state' (a nod to American sensibilities; we'd call it a welfare state), were historically unique circumstances, external shocks that massively influenced the trajectory of economic development. Those effects are now fully receding, and economic inequality is reasserting itself as the natural outcome of relatively undisturbed capitalism. In terms of who owns what, the twenty-first century is more likely to resemble the nineteenth than the twentieth.

Amidst the acclamation and hype that Piketty's book is receiving, it is worth recalling that he is not the first to advance a thesis of this essential sort. At the heart of Tony Judt's magisterial *Postwar* is the insistence that the welfare states of Western Europe were not the vanguard of an egalitarian revolution, but a political response to the internal threat of communist revolution and the external threat of fascist aggression. European social democracy was a contingent historical response to the unusual circumstances of the twentieth century, and its achievements in social and economic policy began to be rolled back when those circumstances changed. A similar outlook to Judt's, but examining our current predicaments via their eighteenth century origins, was that of Cambridge historian of political thought István Hont. On Hont's view, liberalism, i.e. the form of politics that accompanies capitalist economic organisation, was originally distinguished from rival idioms by its suggestion 'that legal and political equality could coexist with economic inequality without causing endemic instability in modern Western states'. Economic inequality was both the essence and the unavoidable outcome of capitalism. The job of politics in such a system was not to attempt to eliminate economic inequality, but to contain its tendency to be socially disruptive.

To these views Piketty adds two important contributions: hard statistical data, and a theoretical explanation of capitalism's tendency to inequality. With the help of many collaborators, Piketty has assembled a vast quantity and array of data covering, in particular, France, Britain, and the USA, but also Sweden, Germany and Canada, and emerging economies like China, stretching back to the eighteenth century, where records allow. Piketty's purpose is to discover and examine truly long-run trends in economic development, rather than focusing on periods too short, or data sets too small, to yield reliable results. I am not qualified to assess Piketty's efforts on this score. But granting that what he reports is correct, his central thesis – that capitalism tends towards concentrations of wealth and income for a tiny minority who rapidly begin to outpace everyone else if left to their own devices – seems abundantly well supported. (If it isn't we'll find out soon enough from Piketty's opponents.)

To this data, Piketty adds theory to explain the trends that can be observed: predominantly an economic analysis, but one integrated with astute use of intellectual history and political science to build his case. Piketty's theory is too complex to summarise fully here, but the most essential points I take to be as follows. In the long run, average growth in capitalist societies is of the order of about 1.5% of GDP. By contrast, the rate of return on capital is more like 4-5%. Because returns on capital outstrip rates of return on growth, this means that on

average having capital makes one richer, and richer more quickly, than can be achieved through receiving remuneration for labour. And this cycle is self-reinforcing: the more wealth you have which earns a return, the more you have to reinvest for a high return, and so on. By contrast income from labour remains much more constant, and is not self-perpetuating in an analogous way. Even if income increases year-on-year through pay-rises (and in real terms not even this much has actually been achieved for many workers in developed nations over the past few decades) it cannot keep pace with the proceeds of returns on wealth, which get larger. Yet the vast majority of people can only support themselves through selling their labour, and only a few have the levels of wealth required to start seeing the benefits of money reproducing itself.

Moreover, if capital accumulation outstrips productivity – which it does if the rate of return is greater than economic growth – then capital gets concentrated beyond its productive value (think of investments in gold or art, which can bring a healthy return to investors whilst contributing nothing to productivity). A long-standing and often-heard justification for capitalism, and hence implicitly for inequality, is that more money for capitalists means more investment in the economy (think ‘job creators’). The implication of Piketty’s theory is that this is, if not simply false, at least dramatically over-stated. Under capitalism, an awful lot of the money just stays with the capitalists and is reinvested for high returns in ways that contribute nothing to wider productivity, and thus do not benefit those lower down the social scale. It also means that it is much easier to make serious money through inheritance than entrepreneurship, and certainly more than from income derived from ordinary wage-labour. Piketty says Balzac got it right when he had one of his characters in *Le Père Goriot* conclude that if one wants to get filthy rich, one better stop wasting time working and instead marry the daughter of somebody who has already made their fortune.

The result Piketty presents is that the rich not only get richer, they also pull away faster from the rest. Unless the economic game is frequently re-set between generations, then despite what its right-wing defenders say, capitalism is *anything but* meritocratic. If you absent the state imposing hefty estate taxes to prevent the children of the rich simply inheriting wealth, and significant taxes on wealth to control the returns on capital investments, then capitalism does not reward the hardworking and deserving, not even the fabled pioneer-entrepreneur of the Reagan-Thatcher imagination. It benefits those who are already very wealthy.

If that is the fundamental economic logic of capitalism, why between 1914 and 1980 did we see something like the reverse? Because from a strictly economic point of view the twentieth century was a very illogical century: politics made all the difference. The two world wars had a devastating effect upon existing capital stocks, and reduced the capacity for rentiers to earn returns from their invested wealth. Post-war reconstruction saw exceptionally high (by long-run historical standards) rates of growth, meaning that earnings from income increased at a rapid rate. In addition to this, the pressures of war empowered democratic states to demand that the wealthiest contribute a great deal more, something receive-

ing broad social support and enabling the introduction of higher income and wealth taxes to help reduce inequality, as well as social provisions to lift up the worse-off. But what the French refer to as *Les Trente Glorieuses*, the period from roughly 1945 to 1979, when many believed that ‘mature’ capitalism had begun to exhibit a natural tendency towards reduced inequality, was only a passing phase. After postwar reconstruction, growth inevitably slowed, and the political will to control inequality dissipated along with the social solidarity required to prevent self-interested plutocratic elites exercising disproportionate influence upon policy-makers.

The above is only a partial summary of Piketty’s case. But enough has been said such that we might now focus our attention, more single-mindedly than Piketty does, on the question of why inequality is something about which we should worry. Here it is useful to consult the venerable pedigree of thinking about this question that is already available in the history of economic thought.

Given that systems of private property produce economic inequality, and that such inequalities are typically passed down to subsequent generations regardless of the justice or otherwise of original acquisitions, we might ask: why should we allow any inequality resulting from such a system? Why not abolish it? The most powerful reason for permitting inequality advanced in the western tradition, emphasised for example by John Locke and Adam Smith, is that the overall economic improvement that goes hand-in-hand with systems of private property make the poorest much better off than they would be if no system of private property were permitted. When it comes to capitalism, the Faustian Bargain we have made is that although the poor are much worse off than the rich, they are much better off than they otherwise would be.

After the twentieth century we also know that programmes aiming at forcible economic equalisation invariably come at enormous human cost enacted through violent political repression. Furthermore, the technical expertise required to replace markets in private property with some alternative method of economic allocation have in many (though by no means all) cases turned out to be less efficient than allowing the market some role, even if the upshot of market allocations is considerable disparities of wealth and income. Capitalism breeds inequality, but in the long term it also makes everybody better off. This is not to deny that the plight of the poorest under capitalism is real and frequently extreme, or somehow doesn’t matter because of the putatively inherent justice of market forces. It is simply to point out that their plight would be worse under any known or possible alternative system. Reform to aid the worst-off must come from *within* the capitalist system, precisely because supposedly egalitarian economic alternatives for modern peoples have turned out to be a deadly mirage. We should live with some form of material inequality. The crucial question turns out to be: *and how much is that?*

Very broadly speaking there are two kinds of answers that can be given to this question, which I will label ‘moral’ and ‘political’. This is a highly artificial distinction: in practice the two sorts of concerns almost always overlap and influence each other, but it is nonetheless helpful to separate them for analytic purposes. Let’s

consider the ‘moral’ response first. This starts from the premise that inequality is morally objectionable, either in itself or because of the bad moral consequences it is attended with or brings about. (We can here be agnostic as to what exactly makes inequality bad; a vast academic literature exists out there for those who wish to delve deeper.) Accepting that capitalist society, despite producing significant economic inequality, makes the worst off better off than they otherwise would be, the ‘moral’ response is to demand that strict limits must be imposed on how much of it is permitted to obtain.

The most famous ‘moral’ response in recent years has come from the American philosopher John Rawls. Rawls argued that when conceiving of society as a fair system of co-operation between bearers of equal rights, the dictates of impartial treatment of citizens meant that strict limits had to be placed upon the levels of material inequality permitted to obtain between them. Rawls was sensitive to the fact that applying the dictates of impartiality to practical politics could not be done with blithe disregard for the contingent facts of institutional politics, and especially human psychology, and carefully blended ‘moral’ concerns with what I’ll refer to in a moment as ‘political’ ones. But what matters for present purposes is that irreducible to Rawls’s vision was that to some important extent, morality – understood as impartial fairness – set limits upon how much inequality should be permitted.

The idea that morality sets limits on what inequality may or may not be permitted, and that the task of politics is in turn to enforce those limits by finding a way to apply moral principle to practical reality, is the dominant programme of research in contemporary left-wing Anglophone political theory. We may, however, contrast this sort of ‘moral’ approach to the question ‘how much inequality should there be?’ with what I’m calling a ‘political’ response. This second outlook bypasses the question of whether economic inequality is morally objectionable or not, and focuses on the fact that extensive economic inequality is likely to be *politically destabilising*. If the massed poor have too little to survive, and know that a tiny elite of rich overlords live in opulence, then the potential for massive social disruption – in extreme cases wholesale revolution – becomes more likely. Insofar as inequality threatens social stability, the basic ‘political’ response to the question ‘how much inequality should there be?’ is: ‘not so much that society experiences endemic instability’. This is not likely to be an egalitarian response in its practical proposals. Achieving basic social stability is compatible with drastic levels of material inequality in many political circumstances (see: the entire world as we presently know it).

What should be clear is that the ‘political’ and ‘moral’ answers to the question of how much inequality there should be are likely to come out very differently indeed. If your interest is primarily in riot prevention, your distributive priorities will be unlike those of somebody who thinks that the impartial demands of justice require a relatively egalitarian distribution of economic resources. Only the most cynical would adopt the ‘political’ response alone, and indeed most people have sincere beliefs about what the moral limits to economic inequality should be, over and above crowd control. And Piketty himself is clearly preoccupied by both sorts

of objections to inequality, although he tends to run them together as a single package:

[T]here is no ineluctable force standing in the way of a return to extreme concentration of wealth, as extreme as in the Belle Époque, especially if growth slows and the return on capital increases, which could happen, for example, if tax competition between nations heats up. If this were to happen, I believe that it would lead to significant political upheaval. Our democratic societies rest on a meritocratic worldview, or at any rate a meritocratic hope, by which I mean a belief in a society in which inequality is based more on merit and effort than on kinship and rents. This belief and this hope play a very crucial role in modern society, for a simple reason: in a democracy, the professed equality of rights of all citizens contrasts sharply with the very real inequality of living conditions, and in order to overcome this contradiction it is vital to make sure that social inequalities derive from rational and universal principles rather than arbitrary contingencies. Inequalities must therefore be just and useful to all, at least in the realm of discourse and as far as possible in reality as well.

From an intellectual, as well as a polemical, perspective, there is nothing necessarily wrong with Piketty’s coupling ‘moral’ and ‘political’ objections to inequality together: one can reasonably object on both grounds simultaneously, and it may be prudent to do so. But it is a good idea to disentangle these sorts of objections if we want to think carefully about the prospects for tackling inequality in the twenty-first century.

The central difficulty to be faced up to is that ‘moral’ objections to economic inequality have proved astonishingly impotent when it comes to the realm of practical policy. Rawls may be famous in academic circles, but he has never been cited by the U.S. Supreme Court (a useful barometer of real-world influence), whilst America has grown only more unequal since he published *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. The clear evidence from 1980 down to today is that policymakers, and most ordinary people, have not rallied to the banner of this or that moral limit which it is claimed must be imposed upon economic inequality insofar as practical political circumstances allow. Indeed, the opposite seems largely to be the case: social science data indicates that poorer individuals tend to think that the rich are rich because they deserve to be, and that higher rates of tax upon the well-off would accordingly be unfair, even though this could benefit the poorer. Frequently, such beliefs are not based on any relevant facts available or known to individuals (and matters are made even more complicated by the fact most people are very bad at estimating their position in the social distribution of wealth and income) but appear instead to be the result of cognitive biases. That is, it is much easier to go on living in a world where you are poorer than others if you think that they deserve to be richer than you, and so that is indeed what people end up believing, regardless of whether it is true.

In any case, there is clearly little political appetite in the developed economies for serious measures that would reduce inequality, such

as redistribution of wealth or its proceeds, or a return to high marginal rates of income tax for the best off. And we can make good guesses at some of the reasons for this. As Adam Smith pointed out, the poor imagine to themselves the joys of being rich, and this causes them to empathise with the lives of those who have more than them. This empathising is pleasurable, and so people tend not to resent those better off than themselves but to love and esteem them (think of modern celebrity worship, or the mania surrounding the Royal Weddings). Given the simultaneous demonisation of welfare recipients presently rampant in our political culture, the logic also appears to apply in reverse. In both cases, the psychological pull is away from efforts to mitigate inequality.

Yet if moral objections to inequality in practice cut little ice, it is unlikely that the political worry – the threat of social revolution – will cut much more. The crucial question from the purely political perspective is ‘how much inequality can a modern human society accommodate without imploding?’ And the answer of the past few hundred years seems to be: an awful lot indeed. If the task is simply to keep the masses from revolting, ensuring that the poorest have enough to survive and do not become politically radicalised requires only a minimum of social provisions coupled with a moderately repressive state apparatus, something made easier given that serious ideological rivals to liberal capitalism have now effectively disappeared. Furthermore, if those with little are kept focused on the threat of becoming like those with even less – through precarious employment status, an inadequate social safety net, and effective political demonisation of the have-nots – then there is little reason to think they will spend long turning their eyes upwards to those who have more than they do. And if Smith is right, even if they do look upwards they may esteem rather than envy what they see.

Piketty’s book contains scholarship of the highest order. It blends accessible economic analysis with an esteem for what is to be learnt from other intellectual disciplines, as well as a refreshing appreciation for the intellectual history of economic thought (including, to Piketty’s great credit, the work of Karl Marx, that black sheep of modern economic theory). Piketty’s insistence that economics be practised not as a branch of science that dogmatically privileges abstract mathematical modelling, but as one amongst equals in the social sciences, is most certainly to be welcomed. As Piketty puts it, he favours a return to thinking of his discipline as ‘political economy’, not ‘economic science’. This is for the simple and correct reason that in the real world economics cannot be properly understood except as part of irreducibly political processes.

And Piketty refuses to be a pessimist. Rather than consigning ourselves to an acceptance of capitalism’s tendency to inequality, he urges that we take measures to empower a strong social state to halt, and if possible reverse, the process of inequality’s acceleration. He is clear, however, that the only measure truly capable of bringing the growth of inequality under control in the modern world would be a global tax on capital. By Piketty’s own admission the level of international co-operation and information exchange this requires is simply not going to happen, especially in a world where offshore tax havens increasingly serve to undermine the financial

transparency required to even track global wealth, let alone tax it. But he suggests that the idea is nonetheless a useful utopia: something to aspire to, even if we have no realistic prospect of getting there. That may be so, but it all depends on whether there is any sort of political willingness and ability to aspire in that direction, and it is hard at present to believe that there is, or soon will be.

Short of a global capital tax, Piketty believes that it is nonetheless both economically and politically possible to institute domestic tax reforms in the developed economies so as to at least mitigate some of the effects of the rise of overpaid super-managers and high-income elites for whom tax regimes have effectively become regressive. Again, I struggle to see the likelihood of this happening in any developed western economy. For all his good intentions and the righteousness of his cause, I cannot join Piketty in his hopeful optimism that awareness of the facts, honest debate, and a commitment to the ideals of a social state which regulates the excesses of capitalism, might stem the inexorable tide he so unerringly identifies.

As Piketty makes clear, ‘it was the wars of the twentieth century that, to a large extent, wiped away the past and transformed the structure of inequality’. This is not just because of the economic shocks these conflicts caused, but because of the political climate their aftermath fostered, which for a brief spell enabled the breaks to be put on the self-reinforcing tendencies of our economic Faustian Bargain. Absent such cataclysmic occurrences – a rerun of which nobody could sanely wish for – and we are apparently headed back to the sorts of dramatic economic inequality that characterised the nineteenth century. Of course, the poor of this century will likely be vastly better off than the poor of two hundred years ago, thanks to the rising productivity that capitalism experiences alongside the increasing concentration of material inequality. Whilst that may be interesting to the economic historian and the political theorist in the academy, it leaves painfully little that can with decency be said to those suffering at the bottom of the social pile. Amidst all the excitement surrounding Piketty’s book, we must not lose sight of the fact that the book’s own central message – even if this is not quite what the author intended – may be that it takes much more than books to change the course of capitalism’s progress.

It depends what you mean by ‘late’. Now published for the first time, *Echo’s Bones* is eighty years stillborn, a revived short story which was once going to form the final piece of Samuel Beckett’s 1934 collection *More Pricks Than Kicks*. The print run was prepared; the ten chapters were written, proofed and hot for the press; then Chatto & Windus editor Charles Prentice was so dizzy with anticipation that he asked Beckett for a little more, to cap the lot, ‘another 10,000 words, or even 5,000 for that matter’. Duly tractable, the author set about answering the call, and spent October to November working away, producing *Echo’s Bones* and sending it off. The response from Prentice was something else.

It is a nightmare. Just too terribly persuasive. It gives me the jim-jams. [...] This is a dreadful débâcle – on my part, not on yours, God save the mark. But I have to own up to it. A failure, a blind-spot, call it what I may. Yet the only plea for mercy I can make is that the icy touch of those revenant fingers was too much for me. I am sitting on the ground, and ashes are on my head.

And with that, *Echo’s Bones* was never properly born. *More Pricks Than Kicks* was printed, published, sold at a fairly dire rate, and then quietly forgotten until the late Fifties, when a couple of its constituent chapters – strands of a loose narrative which could be unwoven without too much effort – were reprinted. (A full reprint took until 1964.) In the meantime, this ‘recessional’ tale never saw the light, except when scholars’ hands lifted it out of its box, whether at Dartmouth College or the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. This means that *Echo’s Bones* is itself something of a revenant, recapturing a light it always sought to see, finally making its way up onto the earth of which, intermittently, it’s been fretting the fringes for decades.

Its story isn’t quite new, because Beckett didn’t write stories the way crime novelists do: the hero, or anti-hero, or whatever, is Belacqua Shuah, an indolent Irish chap who pays transitory affections to Dublin girls, and is as capable of saying things like ‘Gnaeni, the pranic bleb, is far from being a mandrake’ as he is of saying ‘Fecks’. *Echo’s Bones*, like *More Pricks Than Kicks*, is a kind of dancing palimpsest, constantly poking the reader’s nose into a shard of Joyce, a snatch of St. Augustine, or an immense resounding echo of Dante. The editor of this volume, Mark Nixon, has it about right when he says it’s ‘evasive in stating its business’, because the whole piece, and Beckett’s prose in general at this early point, reads like a concentrated attempt to find different things for prose to do other than state, or say, or even allude. That last fact might seem to set itself against the colossal dead weight of Beckett scholarship, much of which forcefully points at phrase X as a distant version of line Y in author Z – and there’s a place, and a germaneness, to that – but the fun of something like *Echo’s Bones* isn’t confined to noticing, say, that Belacqua is lazy and self-interested just as his Dantescan namesake was, that his initial sitting down ‘without shifting his position’ responds to the ancestral Belacqua’s ‘tandar su che porta?’. Instead, you think all that through, then come to understand that the story has one up on you already, because it’s showing you how an allusion can be a kind of literary lens, an optic through which to see differently not only this new piece of thought, but the original too. Maybe if Dante’s Purgatory were in twentieth-century Ireland, rather than the Southern Ocean, it would have been the kind of landscape to encourage an indolent man to sit on a rickety fence, ‘day in day out, having this palpitation, picking his nose between cigars, suffering greatly from exposure’.

And this is what Belacqua does. At first, having returned from the death he suffered in ‘Yellow’ (the penultimate story of *More Pricks Than Kicks*), he’s accosted by Zaborovna, a prostitute understandably bothered by how he doesn’t cast a shadow. Some Cuban rum and garlic later, he’s hit by a golf-ball, from the club of one Lord Gall, an impotent aristocrat who needs someone to impregnate his wife. After some extensive play in dialogue, Belacqua duly acquiesces, goes to the Lady, and a cutely ironic daughter is born. The story ends with Belacqua in the fields again, overseeing the digging of his own grave by Doyle, a grave-digger from elsewhere in *More Pricks*; to the undead man’s surprise, he is indeed turned into a ‘handful of stones’, like the Echo of Ovid’s myth. Faced with this ‘triptych’, as it calls itself, it’s hard to know what cast of mind to set upon *Echo’s Bones* – what does it want you to take from it, or give back? The lack of publication, at least, has given critics good reason to treat the work as a literary curio, more

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A REVIEW OF  
*ECHO’S BONES*

BY  
SAMUEL BECKETT

(FABER & FABER, 2014)

valued in the mining than the telling. S.E. Gontarski gives an airily brief example:

The story is difficult, and full of enigmatic echoes, yet is a vital missing link in the reconstruction of the early SB. Its lack of easy access is to be regretted.

...as if reconstructing an author's 'early' persona were the point of reading fiction, which might be true of S.E. Gontarski, or, differently, me, but perhaps not you. Better, then, to note that this is a book which needs to be read in a number of different ways, maybe several at once, and to wonder what ways there are of going about that.

The allusiveness, as a kind of structural principle, is what lends Beckett's early prose fictions their kaleidoscopic beauty, even if that beauty is at times frustrating, and still irritating when the frustrations are salvaged. Zaborovna, for instance, is derived from the Russian 'zabor' ('fence'), with a gesture at 'zabornaja literatura' ('literature of the fence', a.k.a. pornography), and the patronymic suffix '-ovna' appended. Her name thus carries something of illegitimate gestation and birth, equally illegitimate business, and, more prosaically, fences. This Russian pun is something you could miss and not miss, in the sense that it's a kind of window on a corridor: you can pass it by, and pass up the chance to look outside, for the sake of moving on, perhaps to see from a more propitious spot, to be beguiled by a different game. The elegance of this edition of *Echo's Bones* is in how it paves the road for those varied intentions: Nixon's helpful, concise and extensive Notes – from which the above observations are taken – aren't graphically linked to the text, so there's no mess of superscript and you can take them or leave them. It's hard to know what this story would sound like to somebody who wasn't attuned to a single one of the allusions, plays, jokes and puns; that might make an interesting experiment, were it not for the sense, prompted by the way those aspects are not just woven into the writing but form the whole strength of the thing, that it isn't possible to read such a story without becoming intensely aware of even the littlest things you know and feel. Whatever it is to read with zero intellectual preconceptions or trigger-points, it's still to extend a form of receptive mind towards the text, even if a notionally blank one, and to engage in some rapport. *Echo's Bones* makes the experience of reading feel strangely two-paced: deft, as you skip through reams of opaque phrases without wanting to consult the Notes, and yet sluggish, as you feel the tug of centuries upon each moment of opacity. If you read it again, you're confronted by what you've irrevocably lost and gained by using (or not) the Notes first time round, and the self which you've let pass by, the past being decanted through a person, as Beckett described in Proust:

The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multi-coloured by the phenomena of its hours.

The difference made here is the printing of Beckett's words in a

book, published in 2014, which can be handled as a curiously potent object. Whether or not our own decanting process is beyond our control, the way in which the process operates through something like *Echo's Bones* – that's in the hands, eyes and ears of the reader. You can keep your eyes on your bookshelf, or not, as you like it, tingeing the fluid that flows past with different sorts of learning, dyes injected into the flow, and can experiment with the readerly self that you're yet to become.

*Echo's Bones* is busy engaging in this sort of experiment too, being in dialogue with itself, haunted by the texts it might have become. Many of its allusive fabrics draw upon Beckett's 'Dream notebook', not a sleep journal but the book he kept while researching the equally stillborn predecessor to *More Pricks*, titled *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. You can trace the gestation of a phrase from Notebook to *Dream* and now to *Echo's Bones* in all its different unborn shapes. For instance, Napoleon's remark 'Who made all that?', apropos of the starry night skies, recorded by J.G. Lockhart and picked up by Beckett; this was lifted from the Notebook into Belacqua's 'Who said all that', in a *Dream* passage gently lampooning the solitary monologue of the posing hero; then a few years later, in a similar vein, 'Sedendo et quiescendo, yes, who said that?', in *Echo's Bones*, somewhere between Belacqua's voice and the narrator's, which lends another edge to it, a voice one circle further out looking on the motions and words of the companion below. You'll find the phrase 'sedendo et quiescendo' (sitting and meditating) elsewhere in the *Dream* notebook – it's from Benvenuto da Imola's commentary on Dante's *Commedia* – as well as in the title of a short prose excerpt from *Dream*, 'Sedendo et Quiescendo', put together for the journal transition a year or two before *Echo's Bones* was written. That extract is, in turn, the very same section which contains 'Who said all that', although it doesn't contain the eponymous phrase. And so it goes on. These literary paths, with their little marshlights flaring up here and there, can be crossed and criss-crossed in a number of ways: through a few small phrases, you illuminate several Beckett works pointing at each other, with a lashing of Dante and a gentle dust of archival digging, all of which adds up to the very stuff of Beckett scholarship. It's true that *Echo's Bones* is, to an unusual degree amongst the components of *Dream* and *More Pricks*, the text which wilfully plunders the Notebook's riches; whether or not it's strictly true that, in Nixon's words, 'there is hardly a sentence in *Echo's Bones* that is not borrowed from one source or another', it matters that the reader coming across this new volume does feel that weight of years. Take, say:

Doyle was a natural man of the world.

'Réchauffé cockles' he said.

This little effort, worthy of the Communist painter and decorator in his palmist days, transported Belacqua and caused him to ejaculate:

'Hah! There she spouts, the Mick I know, the great greedy wild free human heart I know!'

...a passage looking into a variety of its own pasts: English idioms,

a character from earlier in *Dream*, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Thomas Carlyle and through him, Martin Luther. The difference between *Echo's Bones* and the rest of *More Pricks* lies partly in the extraordinary degree of allusiveness in which this story is soaked, and partly in the key to its mode, its form of attention: that invocation of Melville. Beckett read *Moby-Dick* in the interval between writing *Dream* and *More Pricks*, and Melville's densely-woven novel haunts this lost story as much in spirit as in the substance of quotation. Belacqua's final, purgatorial return bears out, in a topography of the literary mind, Charles Olson's observation in reading Melville and *Moby-Dick* that what was central was 'SPACE [...] geography at bottom, a hell of wide land from the beginning'. *Echo's Bones* isn't literally American in setting, but nor is much of Melville's novel, where the ocean is the new frontier, blankness made into an endless possibility. It's about a state of promise, made incarnate in the waters stretching over the horizon both ahead and behind. Beckett's story, too, has a kind of hellishly wide scope, constantly attentive, like Ishmael, to the endless rolls of the mental sea, comparable both to everything – from Scripture

to poetry, scholasticism to the tang of an Irish curse – and to nothing. Beckett's revenant is his Ahab, made aimless, sitting forever on the fence while walking through quotation after quotation, allusion after allusion, the long stretches of learning that complexly produce this story. *Echo's Bones* reads now like a kind of map of minds past, journeys through pages and thoughts, clinging to its dead characters and lost fragments, and still pacing on today in undead form. These paces will always go on: there are always new readers, new ears to catch snatches that Beckett might or might not have intended. Nixon's admirable Notes can show you some of them, while suggesting all the time that there's more to be found and said. (If you want to be that sort of grave-digger.) The story is past using allusion as decoration, though: it's one of the walking dead, a spectral mariner telling its sea-stories in borrowed voices, stitching them all together to animate a weirdly impersonal personhood. 'The dead die hard, they are trespassers on the beyond' – where this text begins.

# PATRICK COOK DIVES AND LAZARUS

A REVIEW OF  
*THROUGH THE  
EYE OF A  
NEEDLE:  
WEALTH, THE  
FALL OF ROME,  
AND THE  
MAKING OF  
CHRISTIANITY  
IN THE WEST,  
350-550AD*

BY PETER  
BROWN

(PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
PRESS, 2012)

Peter Brown is often credited with having invented late antiquity as a field of study. Whether or not this is entirely accurate (and one feels that Gibbon should be entitled to a prior claim), it is certainly true that it is very difficult for a present-day student of late antiquity to imagine a world without Peter Brown. Late antiquity is a vast subject, defined by Brown's own periodisation, which extends from the second to the eighth century AD, and moving beyond the traditional narrative of 'decline and fall' to encompass the connections between the late Western Roman Empire, Sasanian Persia, the first few hundred years of the Byzantine Empire, the rise of 'barbarian' kingdoms in Western Europe and of Islam in Arabia, and forward to the Carolingians. In intellectual terms, it covers the compilation of the Babylonian Talmud and the Quran, as well as all the Christian Patristics and the last great triumphs of pagan philosophy. This sprawling canvass both rewards and requires a historian of Brown's singular abilities. In addition to vast erudition formed by a range of reading in well over a dozen languages, Brown has something of the cinematographer's ability to compose a narrative by moving between panoramas and individual close-ups. The results are often dazzling.

Brown's latest book, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, is a highly individual, even slightly eccentric work. It is a history of wealth, but it is no sense an economic history—anyone expecting graphs and tables will find it woefully innumerate. Nor is it a work of social history in the normal sense of that term. It is instead a study of the developments of the 'semiotics of wealth' and attitudes toward wealth amongst Latin-speakers and particularly Christian Latin-speakers, between the third and sixth centuries. It is a characteristically vast topic, although the self-imposed geographic limitation is a novelty for Brown, who has previously treated the Latin West alongside Greek and Syriac speaking regions in the East, with a slight emphasis on the latter. His topic is one of wide appeal, namely how it was that a religion whose scriptures state that 'He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away' became the wealthy Church of the Middle Ages, and how it justified that transition.

Brown has two major theses. Firstly, he argues that categories of wealth and poverty are constructed rhetorically, so that 'the poor' may mean different things in different contexts (we may draw a comparison to the recent rhetorical category of 'the 99%'). Those who spoke of themselves as 'the poor' were not necessarily the most economically destitute in a society. When understanding the construction of the poor as a category in Christian thought, it is important to remember that the Psalmist who wrote 'I am poor and needy' was traditionally assumed to be King David, who was by most measures neither. Secondly, Brown sees a development from the civic benefactions of pre-Christian Rome made to the *plebs urbanus* or the 'poor of the city' (the type of gifts satirised by Juvenal as 'bread and circuses') to Christian gifts to the *plebs dei* or 'God's poor', a group that grew to include Christian clergy, even those of relative prosperity such as Saint Jerome. Giving money to the 'deserving poor' remained a social duty for the rich, but the definition of that category shifted. So too did the

expected reward: the civic benefactors hoped for civic recognition, whilst the Christian donors sought to 'store up treasure in heaven'; in giving to 'God's poor' in the church, the rich man might pass into heaven, more easily than a camel through the eye of a needle. So it was that the Church made its peace with wealth. This is inevitably a simplification and sounds more judgmental than Brown ever does, but for all of its sophistication, Brown's argument is as appealing in its simplicity as it is persuasive in its argument, and far-reaching in its ramifications.

One senses that this is a book Brown has been intending to write for some time, delayed perhaps because, as he states in the introduction, he found it the most difficult of his eleven books to write. The themes of the book are ones that Brown has been drawn to since his first book, a 1967 biography of Augustine of Hippo, and more recently in his 2002 book *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*. Beyond this specific concern with wealth, power, and the relationship between social classes, the book reflects a more fundamental aspect of Brown's work. The most enduring influence on his works has been the *Annales* school, with its emphasis on the role of geography and on change and continuity over great expanses of time. *Through the Eye of a Needle*, more than any of Brown's earlier works, is an epic history of the Mediterranean, something that has emerged as a genre in its own right since the publication of the first edition of Fernand Braudel's *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* in 1949, with more recent examples including Horden and Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea* and Cyprian Broodbank's *The Making of the Middle Sea* (reviewed by Paul Cartledge in the last issue of the *CHR*). Critics of this style of historiography have sometimes labeled it, not entirely fairly, as 'history with the people written out', but Brown has no interest in history without individuals. From his first book onwards, there is an implicit and persuasive argument that we cannot write a history of mentalities without taking into account individual thinkers.

As with Brown's previous works, *Through the Eye of a Needle* is filled with vivid pen-portraits of individual actors. Many of these, such as Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome, are household names; others, such as Symmachus, will be well known to historians of the period; still others, such as the calligrapher Furius Dionysius Filocalus, are lifted from their customary obscurity in footnotes and given starring roles. This approach, although exhilarating, is always at risk of treating anecdote as the singular form of data. Sometimes an anecdote can capture a much wider zeitgeist, and historians of antiquity in particular must take what they can get when it comes to sources. The problem only arises when Brown's uniformly assertive tone sometimes obscures just how thinly attested his claims sometimes are.

A rather more serious concern is how easily Brown can slip into a Carlylian historiography that is 'but the biography of great men.' The individuals and classes Brown discusses are not treated equally: his interest bears primarily on the elite and those at the base of the socio-economic pyramid. Brown states the importance of the role of the *mediocritas*, those in the middle who were neither very rich nor poor, but in actual fact his writing focuses on the very rich. Slaves are barely discussed at all. For a work on wealth and social

relations in antiquity, this is a very serious omission. The problem is, perhaps, an inevitable one, particularly given Brown's focus on individuals—we may never be able to reconstruct the life of an ancient slave in the same way that we can that of Augustine—but it does mean that this history is fundamentally one 'written from above.' As a book about the relationships between the rich and the poor in early Christianity, it is written more from the perspective of Dives than of Lazarus.

One happier aspect, carried over from Brown's earlier works, is his justly praised prose style. This is no small factor: 'men and dynasties pass, but style abides', as one eminent historian of Rome said about another. Brown's style is so excellent that it seems churlish to point out places where it fails him, but there are a few places. Sometimes his desire to draw modern parallels is more distracting than illuminating: I remain unconvinced that ancient Madauros (modern M'Daourouch in Algeria) was a 'university town', however erudite its inhabitants may have been (although I see that Brown has used this description since 1967, so it is clearly one to which he is attached). In other places, Brown's assumptions about modern culture can seem alien, as when he writes that 'even in a secular age we tend to give priority to religious beliefs [...] as the most profound and most genuine of all emotions', an observation that one suspects may have been more true during Brown's childhood in de Valera's Ireland than it is for younger generations, for most of whom religion is a peripheral part of culture at the most. There are other minor problems, most suggesting a lack of editing: for instance, the Apennines divide Italy between east and west, not north and south as Brown implies at one point.

*Mega biblion, mega kakon*—a big book is a big evil. This snarky epigram of Hellenistic poet-librarian Callimachus has long provided ammunition for classicists who wish to be nasty about the sort of books that are otherwise described as 'magisterial'. Brown's erudite and eloquent book is certainly not a great evil, but I must confess that I find it something of disappointment, despite being convinced by its argument. The astonishing popularity of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (published a year after Brown's book went to press) has demonstrated that there is indeed a wide audience for weighty tomes on the history of economic inequality, however improbable that might have seemed even a few years ago. Brown's choice of topic seemingly anticipates the present zeitgeist, but it would be difficult to categorize *Needle* as a work on the cutting edge of critical inquiry. It is solid without being particularly provocative and more worthy than revolutionary.

A senior member of my own faculty recalls being disappointed as an undergraduate by the lectures of Moses Finley, the Marxist doyen of Cambridge ancient historians in the mid-twentieth century, which seemed to rehash at length points that he had made decades earlier in print. It was only later that he grasped the root of the problem: as he put it, 'Finley didn't realise that, as far as we were concerned, he had already changed the world'. After reading *Through the Eye of a Needle*, I am inclined to think the same may be true of Brown. Such, perhaps, is the consequence of the progression from young Turk to elder statesman.

Forty years ago, a slim volume *British Agricultural Cooperatives* appeared in print, a copy of which has recently fallen into my hands by way of a second hand bookshop discard box. In a short foreword, the Chairman of the Central Council for Agricultural & Horticultural Cooperation opined that, ‘In this troubled second half of the twentieth century it is only by working together that mankind will be able to survive.’ Cooperatives, he thought, needed ‘leaders gifted with imagination, and backed by a sound understanding of the possibilities inherent in cooperation as a means of development.’ With the Cooperative Group now unravelling daily before the eyes of the British public, his comments perhaps read as wishful thinking from a former, less hard-headed era.

Yet the need for cooperation for survival and the role of cooperation in development is precisely what a new volume of essays, *Evolution, Games, and God: The Principle of Cooperation*, sets out to explore. The product of an extended collaboration between the co-editors Martin Nowak, a major mathematical biologist at Harvard, and Sarah Coakley, a prominent Christian theologian at Cambridge, the book includes essays by fellow biologists and theologians along with historians, psychologists, and philosophers. The driving aim of this remarkably interdisciplinary collection is to assess the role of cooperation in contemporary scientific theories about evolution and to draw out the potential implications—if any exist—for cooperative and altruistic practices in the human realm. The authors of the twenty chapters reach no common conclusion. But their arguments—based on the history of debate about evolution, recent discoveries underlining the ubiquity of cooperation in biological systems, and new game theoretic models for explaining strategic behaviour—combine to suggest that today’s received understanding of evolution as determined entirely by selfish competition is erroneous and leads to an impoverished view of how the development of life has actually unfolded. In short, to quote Martin Nowak, ‘Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of evolution is its ability to generate cooperation in a competitive world. Thus, we might add ‘natural cooperation’ as a third fundamental principle of evolution besides mutation and natural selection.’

Intrinsic to Nowak’s bold claims of a ‘third fundamental principle’ is the assertion that cooperation, which the volume’s introduction defines as any situation in which one individual pays a cost and another derives a benefit, is more than just a developmental quirk in need of an explanation. Instead, in Nowak’s words, ‘Evolution is constructive because of cooperation. New levels of organisation evolve when the competing units on the lower level begin to cooperate. Cooperation allows specialisation and thereby promotes biological diversity.’ In other words, key transitions in evolutionary history—such as the move from prokaryotes to eukaryotes or the move from single-celled to multicellular organisms—are characterised by smaller entities coming together to form larger ones. As biologist Jeffrey Schloss puts it in another of this volume’s essays, these transitions entail ‘obligate interdependence’, in which ‘individual entities relinquish former capacities to survive and/or replicate on their own and come to require the aggregate.’ Thus, in what have been called ‘evolutionary transitions in individuality’, a new, more complex ‘individual’ emerges in place of a number of simpler ones.

What is the upshot of such shifts in scale? For Martin Nowak, the point is that game-theoretic models must reflect that several different levels of interests are at work in evolution. Nowak mentions the resurgence of ‘multilevel selection’ theories in recent years, and his own article in the volume is a case in point. When listing five rules which could render the evolution of cooperation intelligible to a game theorist, he offers one mechanism that reflects the interest of individual genes (‘kin selection’), three that reflect the interest of individual organisms (‘direct, indirect, and “network” reciprocity”), and a final mechanism of ‘group selection’ whereby cooperative tendencies are conserved in individuals because they benefit the overall group in its competition with other groups. This last idea was advanced by Darwin himself in *The Descent of Man* (1871), as the historian John Hedley Brooke discusses in the opening chapter of this volume.

But Darwin had no notion of Mendelian genetics, and Nowak’s final point is nowadays controversial for strict adherents of the ‘selfish gene’ theory (popularised by Richard Dawkins, the rarely-mentioned *bête noire* of this volume). According to that view, genes masterfully manipulate the biological superstructures above them in order to secure their own replication. And if

KENZIE  
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THE  
SELFLESS  
GENE

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*EVOLUTION,  
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EDITED BY  
MARTIN NOWAK  
AND SARAH  
COAKLEY

(HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
PRESS, 2013)

all trait conservation can be reduced to explanations at the level of a gene's 'interest' in persisting, then attempting to offer explanations at the level of groups just unnecessarily muddies the waters. Nowak's rejoinder is that, in some cases, the survival of a trait cannot be made sense of outside the context of how it contributes to the interests of the group. Higher-level interests—of populations, organisms, whole genotypes, etc.—are not always reducible to the interests of their composite genes. Nowak thinks game-theoretic models bear this out; their explanatory power can be improved by eschewing reductionism. By so arguing, he is firing a salvo in the ongoing scientific debate between gene-centric views of selection and multilevel ones. This debate has raged in earnest for the past twenty years, with the likes of Dawkins, W.D. Hamilton, George C. Williams, and John Maynard Smith arrayed on one side and Stephen Jay Gould, Ernst Mayr, and E.O. Wilson on the other. But the war of words between Dawkins' 'New Atheists' and defenders of religion has tended to obscure from public attention this second, internecine quarrel among biologists.

The quarrel is fundamentally a conceptual and interpretive one, not to be quickly settled by experimental findings one way or the other, and is therefore being played out on a timescale more typical of philosophy than biology. The gene-centric theorists are surely right to argue that simpler and more basic explanations ought generally to be preferred; if all biology can be adequately explained by the workings of genes, then choosing to stop at levels of higher complexity is just laziness or obscurantism. Yet implicit in gene-centrism is a deep concession to the multi-level perspective. For if reductionism were followed to its logical conclusion, one might empty the biology departments to make room for physicists. Biophysics is indeed a burgeoning field, emphasising how the simple physical properties of atoms and molecules can be used to predict vastly complicated biological phenomena. But the reason so many biologists still fixate on the gene is that doing so can provide useful and illuminating explanations, ones that enable them to understand and manipulate processes better than a tallying of physical effects at the atomic level. In order to answer certain questions, genes are best regarded as discrete entities rather than as bags of atoms. And this point mirrors what multilevel selection is driving at: larger subjects of biological study, such as organisms or even populations, are sometimes best regarded as entities unto themselves rather than as bags of genes. The prerogative to adjust scale in this way is justified by the realisation that regarding anything as an integral unit is ultimately a mental feat. Genes do not have some special ontological priority that makes them deeply real while other perceived units are mere mirages. Do we think the viewer is delusional to see people depicted in *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* when all Seurat painted were dots?

The philosophical underpinnings of this debate are the reason so many of the non-scientific contributors to this new volume take an interest in Nowak's work. Criticisms of Dawkins by philosophers and theologians have often been animated by the lurking question of whether genetic determinism leaves any room for human identity, let alone human agency. But what becomes the focus here is a different point: gene-centrism and its narrative of selfishness

obscures the ubiquitous cooperative tendencies evident in evolution when one analyses natural selection at multiple levels. An honest account of evolutionary history demands such analysis, this volume asserts. Furthermore, as Schloss insists, the history of major evolutionary transitions belies Stephen Jay Gould's famous contention that evolution is the random progress of a stumbling drunk, bouncing off obstacles but possessing no overall direction. In Schloss's view—and the general view of *Evolution, Games, and God*—evolution is a story of successively more complex cooperative ventures, even as such ventures enable more successful competition.

The first three essays of the volume, all written by historians, are devoted to showing that this view of evolution as crucially cooperative was present from the beginning of evolutionary theory in the mid-nineteenth century. John Hedley Brooke traces Darwin's firm commitment to the view that group selection operated in favour of cooperative tribes and that such a mechanism had ensured the evolution of sympathy and would lead human beings to continue to develop greater moral virtue. Thomas Dixon shows how 'altruism', a neologism invented by Comte in 1851 for use in his atheistic 'Religion of Humanity', was co-opted by Herbert Spencer, stripped of agency (such that altruistic acts were simply those that benefitted another, regardless of intent), and declared ubiquitous in evolution. According to Spencer, the twin primordial instincts of egoism and altruism had shaped the whole subsequent development of life. Human culture was the result of a tilting of the scales towards altruism. Henry Drummond expanded on this point in his 1893 Lowell Lectures in Boston and in *The Ascent of Man*, published the following year. For Drummond, evolution was a deeply gendered 'epic love story', and the development of the altruistic impulse reached its apotheosis in the human mother. Heather Curtis's essay explores how Drummond's arguments were key resources for American Protestant preachers at the turn of the century seeking to integrate Darwin's theory with Christian theology. As the minister Washington Gladden put it in a review of Drummond's book: 'Surely our ethical doctrine must be in harmony with the nature of things.'

What Gladden articulated is still a felt need. This new volume is motivated in large part by a desire to counter the perceived contemporary delegitimation of cooperation by showing that twenty-first century biology brings us back, in a more sophisticated way, to an older tradition in which cooperation has been recognised as central to nature. And in light of the longstanding tendency for people to move from theorising about evolution to reasoning about society, this recognition is intended to perhaps strengthen the hand of those arguing for social cooperation.

But this last step might seem bizarre. After all, if we can agree that cooperation is socially desirable in a given case, such as combatting climate change, why does it matter whether cooperation is labelled natural or not? For the same reason it mattered to Richard Tuck in *Free Riding*, published five years ago, to demonstrate that cooperation ought to be considered rational rather than irrational: because of the implicit normativity of the term. 'Rational' is used in everyday discourse to describe a state of mind one should seek

to inhabit when making decisions. Similarly, naturalness is often used as a standard by which to judge human actions—‘it’s only natural,’ ‘boys will be boys,’ etc. One does not need to subscribe to a natural account of morality—such as the Aristotelian ethics of ‘natural kinds’ articulated by Jean Porter in *Evolution, Games, and God*—to see that the idea of the natural has this force in moral judgements. Even Friedrich Lohmann, representing the Kantian position in the volume and rehearsing a classic intuitionist view of ‘the naturalistic fallacy,’ concedes that Kantianism touches naturalness in the realm of establishing possibility. Only the humanly possible act can be a duty. As Alexander Pruss puts it in his contribution to the volume, ‘If cooperation is not normal in our species, what right have we to expect it of our fellows, indeed to compel it?’ There is a deep sense in which trying to impose artificially on nature is regarded with suspicion and as an effort ultimately doomed to fail. ‘The truth will out,’ humanity murmurs. ‘It’s just lipstick on a pig.’ *Evolution, Games, and God* is written in an attitude of alarm that the reductive, exclusively selfish line on what is natural and thus practicable for *Homo sapiens* has become widely and reflexively accepted over the course of the twentieth century, relegating cooperation to the category of artificial niceties that melt away when the chips are down.

This is perhaps one reason why we come to the aspirations of contemporary cooperatives and find them endearing but outdated. Traditional banks have, of course, been collapsing all around us, proof positive that the invisible hand is not without its tremors. But it is the collapse of a cooperative that chimes with our background notion that cooperation is for suckers. *Evolution, Games, and God* is trying to tell a different story—that cooperation, both theoretically and historically, is for survivors, and the way that both creatures and people actually do pursue their self-interest. In arguing this so urgently, the volume implicitly recognises that the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves affect what we do. In the past, these stories were Biblical traditions or ‘natural histories’ based on real or imagined primitive societies, all frequently alluded to by philosophers, theologians, and social theorists. Nowadays, the new authoritative narratives to which we appeal are evolutionary and economic ones, with a common theme of selfish individualism running through both. Yet these narratives are contestable, and *Evolution, Games, and God* aims to wrestle the former back into compatibility with robust human cooperation, just as Richard Tuck has tried to do with the latter. Not to argue that cooperation is inevitable, but that it is at least practicable; a table made from crooked timber may wobble, but it can still serve.

The trouble, however, is that the sort of cooperation addressed thus far is chiefly coordination in pursuit of collective self-interest. Nowak is clear that this is the only sort of cooperation his game theory equips him to discuss. And the social theorist can carry ideas about such evolved cooperation fairly far, as Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid* (1902) surely demonstrated. But many of the volume’s contributors wish also to discuss altruism, defined by the co-editors as ‘a form of (costly) cooperation in which an individual is motivated by good will or love for another (or others).’ Can this addition of intention be a mere extension of cooperative behaviour, or is it a horse of a different colour entirely? Contributors

to the second half of the volume, secular philosophers and theologians alike, disagree over this question. The philosopher Justin Fisher, for example, argues that none of the traditional reasons for treating human beings as exceptional—mind-body dualism, free will, and complexity—are reasons for saying their cooperative behaviour can’t be described by game theory, just that it requires more precise models. Such models should in principle be able to describe human cognition, including altruism.

In contrast, Harvard philosopher Ned Hall warns against the tendency to seek elegant ‘cross-platform explanations’ that in fact only render cases parallel by obscuring crucial distinctions between them. Such lazy analogising, he argues, is responsible for the anthropomorphising of genes as selfish and manipulative and, conversely, the reduction of all human motivations to self-interest. The former is nonsense because genes have no means of forming intentions or hatching plots; the latter ignores the whole structure of what we mean by a motivation or a reason. Even if one is a fully-paid-up materialist, Hall writes, ‘There is, finally, no good empirical evidence for the dark view that all ultimate motivations are—the obvious appearance to the contrary notwithstanding—at bottom selfish. It is a distressing feature of modern intellectual life that a position on human altruism tends to be deemed ‘hard-nosed’ or ‘scientific’ to the extent that it doubts its very possibility. I think that this is sheer fraud. There is nothing intellectually respectable about being an empty-headed cynic.’ Hall’s essay, a witty dialogue between a ‘Sophisticated Christian Theist’ and a ‘Reductive Atheist Physicalist’ that gives each perspective its due, is one of the best in the volume. And while pinpointing many challenges, it is fundamentally sympathetic to the kind of ‘harmonising’ work—bridging science, philosophy, and theology—at which the book aims.

Perhaps the contributor most suspicious of carrying this project too far is Timothy Jackson, a Christian ethicist. In Jackson’s view, there is no way to explain altruism as an extension of biological cooperation without instrumentalising it to render it ultimately self-interested and thereby not altruism. When Christians speak of altruism, he insists, they properly speak of an imitation and infusion of God’s self-sacrificial agape love, not a set of cooperative behaviours that tend to redound to one’s own benefit. There is and must be a radical disjuncture between the former and the latter, Jackson insists. In so arguing, he is continuing the tradition of Karl Barth and a wide array of ‘neo-orthodox’ Christian thinkers from the mid-twentieth century who emphasised the gulf between divine holiness and mere creatureliness, attacking natural theology for attempting to build a bridge of human understanding across a chasm that only God could span.

Sarah Coakley, since her 2012 Gifford Lectures and before, has been making a deliberate effort to rehabilitate natural theology. Certainly an attempt to fit the history of evolutionary adaptations into a theological narrative is worth the effort, she observes, since dogmatic scientific atheism, intelligent design, and the ‘lazy no-contest stance’ in which science and religion are declared to answer different questions are all so philosophically and theologically unsatisfying. Furthermore, as a believer in a Creator God,

Coakley thinks her understanding of God must link up with the unfolding of creation. The tendency for cooperative behaviours and systems to emerge as part of the evolutionary process, she argues, sows ‘the seed bed for higher, intentional forms of ethical virtue,’ even though the development of such higher virtues is nourished by human freedom and therefore not, in Coakley’s view, to be ‘reductively subsumed under mathematical prediction.’ In employing the metaphor of the seed, Coakley is drawing upon a rich Christian tradition—stretching back to the Pauline letters and the parables of the Gospels—whereby seeds are often used to illustrate how entities possessing the same potential can wither or flourish depending on the ground they are planted in. Here, then, is a way of saying that the evolutionary story lays the groundwork for human morality without being sufficient to explain it.

But the metaphor leaves indeterminate how far Coakley wishes to push her natural theology. Her late-nineteenth-century predecessor James Bixby, as Curtis notes, asserted that, ‘In the simplest cell which, in obedience to the expansive tendency of life, splits into two, the philosophic eye beholds the germ of the moral law and the promise of the Beatitudes.’ Coakley, with a keener awareness of the suffering implicit in this march of evolutionary ‘progress,’ is less willing to sound so triumphalist a note. She concedes that cooperation in and of itself can lead to great good or great evil; we have certainly seen plenty of historical evidence of the catastrophic results of coordinated group hate. But she does seem to suggest that this messy evolutionary process might have been the only way to achieve the possibility of free human creatures living in loving community with God and one another, and that the suffering embedded in creation can be redeemed by a Christological lens. Perhaps this is a resolution to the Christian tension with science and the classical problem of theodicy, all rolled up in one. Yet if God has chosen to do his creative work through the natural mechanism of evolution, where does the human freedom, which Coakley insists cannot be derived directly from an evolved trait, come from? It is not clear that Coakley has managed to legitimately wriggle out from Weber’s declaration in ‘Science as a Vocation’ that ‘one can, in principle, master all things by calculation’ in the scientifically ‘disenchanted’ world. To confront Weber on this point would still seem to require a more direct assertion of disjuncture, such as Jackson insists upon.

But Coakley seems right to say that a planet in which life flourishes due in large part to cooperation is at least more hospitable to a vision of divine providential love and the potential for altruism between human beings than it would be otherwise. Maybe both the important connection she is trying to flag up and an element of disjuncture can be captured if we turn our attention to the phenomenon of language. As summarised in ‘Bacterially Speaking,’ a review article published in *Cell* in 2006, recent years have seen the discovery of ‘a microbial agora: a bustling polyglot of languages’ at the unicellular level. Bacteria use chemical signals, for example, to sense when the necessary quorum is present for some activity to be successful, ensuring that they do not go to a costly effort in vain. According to article authors Bonnie Bassler and Richard Losick, such behaviour was considered anomalous for many years, but ‘it is now clear that intercellular communication is not the exception

but, rather, is the norm in the bacterial world and that this process, called quorum sensing, is fundamental to all of microbiology.’ These findings can help us to recognize that communication is encoded in cooperation at every level of nature; the human case is just an extension of that rule. So to urge communication in order to resolve disputes or achieve a common purpose is not a transcendence of nature but rather a fulfilment of one of its laws.

Yet on the other hand, bacterial signalling and human language are different—and this seems important to how we might identify what makes moral claims applicable to humans but not to bacteria. Bacteria may ‘communicate,’ but the chemical signals involved automatically set off a chain of events; the bacteria do not choose whether to respond to the signal. For this very reason, some bacteria have developed the capacity to send out false signals which will cause their competitors to mistakenly disarm. For humans, by contrast, there is a choice of how to respond and even whether to acknowledge another’s speech at all. As any number of modern theorists have suggested, there is a need for—and no certainty of—recognition. Maybe this indeterminacy tilts human language towards establishing a community of all participants, since the very exercise of reason-giving tilts in favour of common interests and militates against solipsism and egotism. Why would the solipsist speak to another at all, and how can the out-and-out egotist rationally expect another to respect his or her reasons? To engage in conversation is perhaps inherently to embark on a common project that pulls us beyond our initial, self-oriented aims.

In which case, maybe language is the heart of what actually links the principle of cooperation to human morality. What allows a gene to be selfish and yet not subject to moral judgement does not apply to a human. Indeed, this is perhaps the most pernicious effect of anthropomorphic talk of ‘the selfish gene’: in forgetting that the gene, unlike us, has no consciousness of pursuing its self-interest nor any capacity to decide against doing so, we can reverse the elision and forget that we do have that consciousness and that capacity. Once we recognize this mistake, perhaps we find in human language a development that is an extension of something natural, yet also transcends previous natural dynamics by introducing a new dimension of conscious choice. This line of argument might also have some theological promise, especially in a tradition that holds that in the beginning was the Word.

Nevertheless, the way here is still murky. The hinge in this volume between the consideration of self-interested cooperation and genuinely selfless altruism remains awkward. All the old challenges of relating the natural and the normative still rear their heads. The ‘naturalistic fallacy’ seems too glib a dismissal of our sense that moral aspirations should not be so beyond our natural constitution as to be futile, yet we also harbour the suspicion that the moral dimension of our lives cannot be fully identical with the natural one. The reader closes *Evolution, Games, and God* considerably enlightened, but no magic synthesis has been achieved. More than ever we know what we are, but still not what we should be.

BRENDAN

GILLOT

COUNCIL  
DEEP-THROATS  
WITH SECRETS  
TO TELL

A REVIEW OF  
*WOLF TONGUE:  
SELECTED POEMS,  
1965-2000*

BY BARRY  
MACSWEENEY

{BLOODAXE, 2013}

It is not uncommon for a poet's work to go out of print. Poetry has a relatively small audience in this country, and its dissemination is, mostly, an unprofitable activity for all involved. So when a poet spends the great majority of his writing years publishing exclusively in samizdat pamphlets and underground Letraset-mags called things like *Greedy Shark* and *Postcards from Hitler*, all the while hurling invective at the nation's major publishing houses ('We want new sounds not neat Faber and Faber / We want new sounds no Simon Armitage'), the work's posthumous unavailability might seem less an unfortunate function of economic necessity and more an embrace of elective oblivion, the wages of an overzealous pariah. Barry MacSweeney died in 2000, and his selected poems were published by Bloodaxe in 2003 in the volume *Wolf Tongue*. In the subsequent decade there was silence. *Wolf Tongue* was bought, read and filtered through the second-hand market; before long it was out of print, along with the rest of the MacSweeney corpus. However, interest in MacSweeney's writing continued to grow, and last year Bloodaxe published a book of essays on the poet, *Reading Barry MacSweeney*, edited by Paul Batchelor, alongside which it has reissued *Wolf Tongue*.

This is a faithful reprint of 2003's *Wolf Tongue*, and longtime MacSweeney partisans may want to cling to their macerated copies of that edition rather than invest in what is essentially an identical object. That it is a reprint and no more is both the disappointment and advantage of this new printing; almost nothing has changed. Though published posthumously, *Wolf Tongue* is the product of MacSweeney's own labour; he was working on the volume when he died of alcohol-related illness in Newcastle, aged 51. This gives *Wolf Tongue* the aura of an authentic MacSweeney product; it is, the blurb assures us, 'how he wanted to be known and remembered'. It must nevertheless be observed that *Wolf Tongue* is in some ways a slightly odd selection of MacSweeney's writing. It contains only two poems from MacSweeney's first (and stratospherically popular) volume, *The Boy from the Green Cabaret Tells of his Mother* (1968), and only one, 'The Last Bud', from 1971's *Our Mutual Scarlet Boulevard*. True, *The Boy from the Green Cabaret*, published when the poet was nineteen, is a deeply uneven volume whose style and influences MacSweeney publically abandoned and vilified for the rest of his life (his unfortunate experiences with the book's publisher, Hutchinson, turned him against mainstream poetic culture for good), and 'The Last Bud' is very much the strongest poem in a collection whose main interest to readers today is as a chronicle of the poet's mimicry, working-through and abandonment of various poetical models and masters (the influence of Basil Bunting can be strongly felt in some parts of *Our Mutual Scarlet Boulevard*; as can that of Charles Olson in others). The selection, nonetheless, provides only a scant sense of the early stages of MacSweeney's writing; it smacks of how MacSweeney wanted his past to be, rather than how it in fact was. A similar narrowness becomes evident in the latter part of the volume. MacSweeney's extremely successful versions of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, under the title *Horses in Boiling Blood*, stand amongst the most sensitive and affecting poetry he ever wrote, bringing his skill for typographic and visual poetics to the fore and to its culmination; sadly their also-posthumous publication, again in 2003, made them unavailable for selection. More puzzlingly, the short poems from 1998's *Postcards from Hitler* are included, but the longer and arguably more successful poems of that collection, *I am Lucifer* and *My Former Darling Country Wrong or Wrong*, are not. 1999's *Sweet Advocate*, another highlight of MacSweeney's late career, is cut in two, with the six-page title poem included but the fifty prose-poems entitled *Letters to Dewey* left out. Whilst these omissions by no means wreck the book, they resultantly fail to do full justice to the range and variety of MacSweeney's writing, whilst much that is not included remains inaccessible to the general reader.

It also worth noting that *Wolf Tongue* contains none of the prose, and whilst such an inclusion ought not to be expected of a 'selected poems', it is important to bear in mind that MacSweeney was, as journalist, correspondent and editor, a prodigious prose-writer. Some of this material is available in 2012's *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer*, but most, particularly 1970's *Elegy for January*, a critical life of the Bristol boy-poet Thomas Chatterton, is much harder to come by. It was unlikely that any major changes would be made to *Wolf Tongue*, and the book stands as it did previously, with its virtues and flaws intact,

horrible cover-photo and all (it was MacSweeney's choice, what can you do?).

Having expressed these reservations, it should be made clear that there is an enormous quantity to admire and celebrate here. Even with defects, *Wolf Tongue* was the best and most representative path into MacSweeney's poetry ever produced, and this reissue will hopefully find a new readership for a poet whose time, it increasingly seems, has come. Its companion, Batchelor's *Reading Barry MacSweeney*, is a welcome addition to a growing body of work on the poet, and the first volume devoted solely to his study. It contains a mixture of critical assessment and personal reflection, with particular highlights including John Wilkinson's essay on the hysterical anti-Thatcher rhetorical violence in 1981's *Jury Vet* and Peter Riley's semi-biographical reflections on the later life and poems, and is likely to act as a strong foundation-stone for what looks like it might be a renaissance moment for MacSweeney.

There is no doubt that *Wolf Tongue* is full of accomplished, challenging and often beautiful poetry; it is also a record of MacSweeney's conflicted and sometimes unstable poetical development, and as such can be patchy. Much of the early work is too obviously indebted to Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara or even 'Merseybeat' to hold poetic interest over an extended period, the taut lines and cutting wit of *Brother Wolf* and other strong moments notwithstanding. It is not until the late Seventies or early Eighties that MacSweeney really starts to find his own voice, in works such as *Black Torch* (1977), *Colonel B* (written 1978–9) and *Liz Hard* (written 1982). It is here that he begins to develop a rhetoric for poetry as a marginal or secret language, on the edge of the comprehensible:

I deal in secret financial reports  
confidential manpower utilisation documents  
council Deep-Throats with secrets to tell  
I must protect my sources  
to weld Press trivia  
in low-key suburban rags. (from *Black Torch*)

The 'suburban rags' are both the nondescript cladding MacSweeney imagines these secret messages travelling in (the shoestring budgets of the 'little magazines') and the local newspapers for which he worked, and which gave him a voracious appetite for influence, reading material, information (he boasted that Basil Bunting, his boss on the first newspaper job, taught him how to lay out tide-tables, and to write with 'no frills'). Both the tabloid hyperbole and the Cold-War paranoia collide with unsettling effect in *Liz Hard* parts I and II, and even more so in *Jury Vet* ('abandoned' 1981), as political anger and impotence are vented against the two women who occupied MacSweeney's personal demonology, Margaret Thatcher and Elizabeth II (*Liz Hard* was completed in the year of the thirtieth anniversary of the monarch's reign). In what Peter Riley describes as the 'central disaster of Barry's career', *Jury Vet* matches punchy, sloganeering dynamism, pleading with imperative and splutteringly alliterative, with pornographic sexual violence, a misogynistic rave that turns the female body into a battered, glistening eidolon:

BREVE ME BRYGHTE clean green pearl. Breve  
brine supercharging urchin spunkette  
dribblings into. All you  
drab caffeine mums-to-be.

Stylistically, MacSweeney's work of this period shows the influence of the American poet Michael McClure, but the spitting, snarling compulsiveness of the rhetoric and its view of its object here goes on to be recognisable as characteristically MacSweeney's. It is unfortunate that this paranoid viciousness floats to the surface of the writing just as MacSweeney comes into his majority poetically; 'Jury Vet' is in many ways amongst MacSweeney's finest work, but it marks the entry of a black, hopeless rage into the poetry which it took him some time to come to terms with, and which he never finally exorcised.

In a long poem of 1983, *Wild Knitting*, the claustrophobic hysteria of MacSweeney's middle-to-late verse swallows personal circumstance and cultural ephemera, obsessing over empty bank accounts as the lyrics of Elvis Costello ('Everyday I Write the Book') become a Sisyphean curse: 'everyday I write this Book, Arcadia defunct, Albion / sucking up to calamity.' At times like these the poem's despair threatens to turn its violence on itself, to dismiss writing as the price of a world which is just not worth it:

Deadlines  
bang me & the phone is hell. One day  
I'll disconnect this tinkling  
red fucker. That will be that, Pal. Down  
in the Stuka hole  
all the whistles blow  
at once.

Yet this is immediately mollified in a turn to pastoral release and personal solidarity:

Naff it, cool blade,  
I'm with you,  
in the mintbed  
beside the peachy feel  
of sheep

MacSweeney's verse is at its strongest and most compelling in moments like this, when the fast, percussive consonants of a building rant find space to sidle into a softer, more sensuous sound field, a place of rest from which the toxic anger and futility characteristic of the middle works is rendered empty and bathetic, itself not worth the candle, 'Naff it'. It is characteristic of the writing to stalk the rim of plausible sense, too outraged or overcome to fully enter into the light of social dialogue, but too articulate to slink off into the dark. Here, on the thin line between the impassioned and the inchoate, MacSweeney's verse gains its real traction, the vertiginous helter-skelter of a ranter's righteous monologue caught in combat and/or dance with a plaintive, bardic singing.

These two MacSweeneys find their most celebrated expressions

in *Pearl* and *The Book of Demons*, both of which are included in this volume in their entirety. Though the drink-sodden, self-loathing struggle for a liberated voice which constitutes *The Book of Demons* (oppressed by a mouth full of knives and a dry, flapping tongue, watched over by a self-imposed Stasi; 'I AM THE NIGHTMARE' the poet declares at one point) has dominated the standard account of MacSweeney's work since it was published in 1997, it is in the companion-collection *Pearl*, which made up the first half of that book, which finds MacSweeney at his most accomplished, and most at ease. The titular muse of the poems, the mute girl Pearl, allows MacSweeney an avenue for voice-throwing which releases the heretofore suppressed sympathy of his verse, and enables him to contradict or speak over his more destructive tirades:

Wander Pearl distemper pale, queen  
of Blanchland who rode mare Bonny  
by stooks and stiles in the land  
of waving wings and borage blue  
and striving storms of stalks and stems.  
Pearl, who could not speak, eventually  
wrote: Your family feuds are ludicrous.  
Only my eyes can laugh at you.

Such level-headed moments are few and far between in MacSweeney's writing; *Pearl* is the eye of the storm, and in the fi-

nal years of his life the poet sank back into despair, ventriloquising child-murderers and dictators in an obsessive exaggeration of outsiderdom which becomes increasingly limp as it becomes increasingly insistent. The last work never quite matches *Pearl*'s lustre.

It is a shame that MacSweeney is primarily remembered as an 'alcoholic poet'; this perception has much to do with the success of *The Book of Demons* as a chronicle of addiction, garnering MacSweeney 'a limited celebrity in a culture more interested in a poet's personal suffering than in poetry', as Wilkinson has it in his essay. *Wolf Tongue* emphatically demonstrates that 'addictive' states of compulsion and tic, obsession and alienation are much more widely and more interestingly at issue across the entirety of MacSweeney's writing than could ever be accounted for with some overeasiness about 'the demon drink'. I hope that this new print of the book will reintroduce a reading audience to MacSweeney's poetry, and not to the myth of the suffering artist which destroyed him and nearly destroyed his writing. Rather than some limiting image of the poet as a sozzled refugee from *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet*, it is the wolf of his title which best encapsulates MacSweeney as a poet: a hunter, a scavenger, a troubled and troublesome outsider; a thwarted pack-animal.

An affable, seated, smiling figure greets the visitor to the present exhibition at the Ashmolean: the American businessman Henry Pearlman, self-made founder and director of the Eastern Cold Storage Insulation Corporation, whose collection provides a temporary display of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painting. The position of Pearlman's portrait at the beginning of *Cézanne and the Modern* nicely acknowledges that, though the title of the exhibition might suggest that its subject is Cézanne and his impact on the course of modern art, it is in fact an exhibition about the taste and pictures of one highly individual and confident collector.

Pearlman sat for Kokoschka in London in 1948, and in his memoir recalled conversation during the sittings as 'one of the highlights of my life'. He at once invited Kokoschka to come and stay with the family in America, an invitation the painter took up the following year. Four years later, he described sitting for a Jacques Lipchitz portrait bust as: 'sitting on a revolving stool, with my painting collection all about the room, and few distractions. If I had received nothing else for the money I had paid the artist, the experience would have been worth it'. Lipchitz was to remain a lifelong friend. Pearlman's pictures seem to have brought him happiness of the kind he clearly felt in the company of these artists, and he devoted to them the same sympathetic engagement. As he wrote, 'I haven't spent a boring evening since my first purchase'.

By this, he meant the first which really mattered: Soutine's *View of Céret*, spotted in a New York auction house in 1945, 'very colourful, in blue, red and golden colours, slashed on as if by a trowel'. Thereafter he added two more landscapes, similarly urgent, dynamic, and forceful, and a few portraits, equally intense. These include a distracted choirboy, suggestive of caricature and reminiscent of some of

DR LINDA  
WHITELEY

THE TASTE OF  
HENRY PEARLMAN

A REVIEW OF  
*CEZANNE AND THE  
MODERN: MASTERPIECES  
OF EUROPEAN ART FROM  
THE PEARLMAN  
COLLECTION*

ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM,  
OXFORD UNTIL  
22 JUNE 2014

Daumier's early painted heads, as well as a self-portrait which like the landscapes is clearly inspired by Van Gogh, though theatrically presented as if to an audience. Faintly puppet-like in structure, one might think while looking at it of the artists and musicians of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, part of the Paris world in Soutine's time.

In the exhibition room in which the most modern works are gathered, there are only hints of Cubism's impact. It is just perceptible in a limestone head of Modigliani, archaic as well as possibly exotic in inspiration and carved from a reused piece of stone from a building. A clearer response to Cubism is evident in Lipchitz's refined and virtuoso *Acrobat on Horseback* of 1914, though the same artist's powerful and much later *Theseus wrestling with the Minotaur* is of a very different order, reminiscent of an earlier Romanticism. The room as a whole speaks of friendships and affinities and this is one of the leitmotifs of the collection. It was Lipchitz who introduced Soutine to Modigliani, who then remained close for the rest of Modigliani's short life. Lipchitz became in due course a close friend of Pearlman himself, exemplified by Lipchitz's portrait bust of Pearlman on display.

If we are looking for connections between what may at first seem disparate parts of the collection, then the bronze head of a woman by Wilhelm Lehmbruck in the exhibition room of modern works shares its noble character with a painted head by Courbet in the room which follows. The label perhaps acknowledges this, pointing to Courbet's classicising tilt of the head as a sign of affinity with the practice of David and Ingres, but the picture also shows affinities with Manet's teacher Thomas Couture, whose strong outlines and heavy impasto was admired by several young artists during the 1840s. Daumier was one of these, though his small *Head of an Old Woman*, hanging next to the Courbet, is most indebted to Rembrandt. But in this central exhibition room it is arguably Van Gogh's painting *Tarascon Diligence* (The Tarascon Stagecoach) which is the key image of the entire exhibition. Janus-like it links Cézanne's *Provence* and that of Soutine and early twentieth-century Paris.

Van Gogh referred repeatedly to Alphonse Daudet's mock-heroic novel *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1872) in letters to his brother Theo. Daudet's evocation of the light and gaiety of the warm south of France had been a factor in encouraging Van Gogh to leave Paris and set up a studio there. Writing one letter in a state of exhaustion after completing the painting of the Tarascon stagecoach hanging here, Van Gogh included a reminder of the page in the novel which had come to mind on encountering this coach. It is the moment when the hero Tartarin, on his travels, comes across an old Tarascon coach, exiled like many horse-drawn coaches, to the colony of Algeria after the opening of the railway had rendered them obsolete in France. As if in a fairy tale the coach begins to speak, uttering a prolonged lament telling of neglect and homesickness, painful experiences familiar to Van Gogh. The firmness and emphatic character of the drawing, the brilliance of colour and vigour of handling, recalls how the fictional coach might have appeared before its exile, giving extra poignancy to the image.

The exhibition room which holds Van Gogh's *Tarascon Diligence*

also holds a varied range of works by artists loosely grouped under the label Impressionist, a display which encourages the viewer to think about those alliances, friendships and affinities which provided cohesion for that movement. One highlight is a work by an artist who Van Gogh presciently predicted would find his inspiration in the Tropics: a beautiful painted clay model *Woman of Martinique* by Gauguin. Martinique was the island where Gauguin made a brief and celebrated stay the year before a short and disastrous stay with Van Gogh in Arles in the south of France, the latter's own place of inspiration. Van Gogh expressed admiration for the art Martinique inspired in Gauguin, writing to Emile Bernard, with a heartfelt hatred of attempts to 'civilise' the island: 'this is high poetry [...] and everything his hands make has a gentle, pitiful astonishing character. People don't understand him yet [...]' Another Gauguin work on display is the wilfully primitive carved wooden relief *Te Fare Amu* (House for Eating), made some six years later after journeying to the South Pacific, which exhibits, as Alastair Wright suggests in the catalogue, a Symbolist character and striking depiction of the nude form.

The relief contrasts sharply with the nude *After the Bath, Woman Drying Herself* by Degas which is hung near it. This is despite the fact that Gauguin was drawn to some formal aspects of Degas's work in general (the little clay figure is a compelling example), with Degas in turn admiring and buying some of Gauguin's work. The Degas picture is set in an enclosed interior, with an airless character heightened by the heavily patterned wallpaper and the burst of red colour. The odd pose of the model, like an unfamiliar movement recorded by a camera, is difficult to interpret. The viewer may turn with relief to its neighbour, a late luminous river view by Sisley with the dry and worked paint surface typical of Monet and Pissarro in the late 1880s, though in appearance more artless.

An uncharacteristically dramatic work by another admirer of Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, depicting the wings of a theatre during the performance of an opera hangs opposite the Degas. From the faintly comic repetition of arms in the foreground, we might imagine we are hearing Offenbach, but it was Isidore de Lara's recent lyric tragedy, *Messaline* after which the painting is named. Toulouse-Lautrec saw it in Bordeaux not long before he died, and confessed himself fascinated, making a number of drawings and six paintings, of which this seems to be the most successful. There are some obvious links with Degas's café-concert and ballet subjects, but the composition and intensity of colour have more in common with later Expressionism. As for the *femme fatale*, who sits at the centre of the painting, this is typical of the fascination which this archetypal figure across all the artistic disciplines during the *fin-de-siècle* period. It should be said that this picture came to Pearlman as an exchange for Matisse's great *Bathers*, now in Chicago. Pearlman parted with the Matisse for the simple reason that when it arrived from Paris, he discovered that it was impossible to find a space big enough to hang it.

Diagonally opposite hangs Manet's profile portrait of an unnamed woman in blue, with a small, near-monochrome still life by Pissarro hanging beside it. The latter is dated 1872, the year in which Pissarro began working with Cézanne at Pontoise on the edge of

Paris, and owing to this it was no doubt of particular significance for the collector. Still life, not common in Pissarro's work, became an exercise and a practice to which Cézanne returned throughout his life, something revealed in the exhibition which contains both an early and very late example. When the two artists worked together at Pontoise, a certain motif became of enduring interest to Cézanne: the simple contrast of trees and houses. This was something capable of endless variation, as one of the two great oils by Cézanne in this room makes clear, the *Cistern in the Park of Château Noir*. Here, it is not a house, but a very house-like piece of rock, alongside smaller forms including the antique cistern of the title, which constantly oppose their permanence to the movement of the trees.

The first room of the exhibition, which might just as easily have been the last, since it represents some of Pearlman's latest acquisitions, evokes the full complexity of Cézanne's life and work. It also represents the central and rarest part of the collection (as well as rarely exhibited, on account of the fragility of works on paper) and deserves close and prolonged attention. The two small oils at the beginning are of great beauty. One, a boy bather seen from behind, is based on an antique sculpture and reminds us, as do the two versions of the meeting of Dido and Aeneas, of Cézanne's early literary interest and love of the ancient classical history of Provence.

The two late oil paintings in the second room, *Cistern in the Park of Château Noir*, and particularly the *Mont Sainte Victoire*, show the translation into oil of the angled strokes revealed over and over again in the watercolours collected here, conveying minimally the forms and spaces they represent. The powerful intensity of these two great oil paintings counters any thought that Cézanne was progressing towards a classic sense of form at the expense of his early imaginative temperament.

Pearlman found his way to Cézanne through his discovery of a type of painterly expressive art that owed a certain debt to Van Gogh and to Cézanne himself. Had he followed a more conventional route from Cézanne into modern art, he might have been drawn towards Cubism and later abstraction, following standard accounts of Cézanne's influence. Neither seems to have interested him. An exhibition entitled *The Taste of Henry Pearlman* would have begun with Soutine and ended with Cézanne, though as a title it would have been less alluring. It might also have avoided the question inevitably raised by this exhibition, about the nature of the influence of Cézanne on modern art. The later artists in Pearlman's collection suggest a history of modernism which begins with Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin, bypasses Cubism, and leads, by way of Soutine and specifically the Céret landscapes, to the First New York School and new American painting.



Van Gogh, *Tarascon Diligence*  
Henry and Rose Pearlman Collection ©

JON  
SANDERS  
THE FIFTH  
PHASE OF  
HISTORY

A REVIEW OF  
*ON LOVE: A  
PHILOSOPHY  
FOR THE  
TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURY*

BY LUC FERRY

(POLITY, 2013)

Call me Anglo-American, but when Luc Ferry proclaims that the ‘revolution of love’ has brought ‘secular salvation’, that ‘in this history, we are always moving towards something more human’, and that his philosophy describes ‘what really happens, without imposing principles from the outside’, my frequent response is to scribble *Define* in the text’s margins. His book is just 173 pages – a lengthy conversation rather than a treatise – yet my tally of tired imperatives numbers 32, an indication both of Ferry’s perpetually loose style and the prompt physical reaction it provokes. Unlike those rare and astounding pieces of philosophy that seem to incorporate the reader, anticipating and answering his or her thoughts with telepathic power, or transcend altogether the separation between writer and reader, Ferry’s new book is distastefully pompous. It refuses to listen.

Ferry – French philosopher and Minister of Education under Jacques Chirac (a questionable conflation of roles, the book helps us note) – takes his title from Stendhal’s 1822 essay, *On Love*, though the text is only vaguely in dialogue with Stendhal; it does not mention him after the introduction. The book’s name also alludes to several items published on love in recent years, in particular Alain Badiou’s *In Praise of Love* (2009) and Jean-Luc Godard’s film of the same title (2001). In contrast to these contemporary works, Ferry’s book purports to be an entire *Weltanschauung*; it peddles a philosophy of history and progress, diagnoses the current problems of European societies and advances a blueprint for a new era of ‘civilisation’. In the preface, Claude Capelier announces that the book ‘has succeeded in developing an altogether original philosophy based on a new principle that gives us a much more direct and profound access to the experience of the world’. By endowing our lives with overall meaning, Ferry’s ‘revolution of love’ is comparable, he states, to those generated by Hegel on history, Marx on class and Nietzsche on power.

The book’s subject matter is commensurate with such grand assertions. Describing the current ‘global crisis’, in which ideas no longer cohere with reality (*Define*), and representations – political, moral, philosophical – no longer match up with the truth of our chaotic experiences (*Define*), Ferry grounds his project in a set of ideas which has received a number of formulations in recent years. For him, it is no less than the fundamental stalling of what, since the French Revolution, Europeans have thought would bring about a more prosperous, fairer and wholly better way of life: democracy, liberalism, socialism and (in France especially) republicanism. Ferry contests that the concepts which motivated political action in the twentieth century – the nation on the political right, revolution on the left – have lost that capacity. They are, he argues, stale terms, neither accurately describing nor animating contemporary politics.

Behind the waning of twentieth-century political concepts lies the ‘revolution of love’ (an ineptly chosen phrase, since it has no relation to the idea of revolution that motivated those on the political left, and little to the 1960s and the Summer of Love, whose name it recalls). Based in the social shift from marriages of arrangement or convenience to marriages of love – a process which began, according to Ferry, in the seventeenth century, and became finally ‘universal’ (*Define*) by the 1950s – the revolution sees love rise as the organising principle of our lives. The contrast is with four previous historical eras, which imagined the apotheosis of the ‘good life’ in: i) union with the cosmos (a vaguely Greek conception); ii) faith and adherence to God’s laws (Judaean-Christian); iii) contributing to the progress of human history (humanist); iv) dispelling illusion to live life more immanently, intensely and freely (deconstructionist). The fifth phase of history entails the view that a good and meaningful life is one which is or has been transformed by love. This ‘second humanism’ has already had a profound effect on our private lives, and, Ferry emphasises, will soon necessitate a different understanding of public intercourse.

The corollary of the principle of romantic love is a general fellow-feeling for all humanity. Coupled with the effects of globalisation, love moves us beyond egotism, making no-one’s suffering irrelevant to us, and raises collective sympathy to an unprecedented level. Far from being an age of individualism, Ferry notes, there has never been a time of greater fraternity both within and across state borders. Behold: charities, humanitarian work and foreign aid budgets, the welfare state, legal protection for the vulnerable, a peaceful Europe. It is in democracies that the impact of love on public life is most clear, since it is the essence of democracy, he remarks, to be receptive to the influence of the private.

In the public arena, love crystallises into the specific political cause of concern for our children and future generations. Ferry cites ecology as predicated on precisely this, and as the only new political movement since the French Revolution. The revolution of love is at the root an upsurge in long-term political planning, since such a commitment can only have come out of 'the modern family' where children are a product of love, not merely carriers of names or economic insurance packages. According to Ferry, concern for future generations will unite citizens otherwise divided by economic, social, cultural and racial differences. It will provide a maxim for the making of government policies and enlarge the scope of human freedom.

Beyond this point, *On Love* digresses with Nietzschean presumption. The section on politics concludes with Ferry's analysis of the European economic crisis and his insistence on the necessity of retaining the monetary union – all of this tenuously related to his concern for future generations. In the final part of the text we are shown Ferry's wisdom on educational and aesthetic matters. His diatribe against 'the cult of youth' and eulogy for 'authority' prescribe the correct apportioning of love required in the rearing of children. His discussion of postmodern art teaches us both that if we disagree with his tedious opinions, we know nothing, and that if we have not done so, we ought to read the 'great' modern novelists Milan Kundera and Philip Roth. Apparently this has something to do with the revolution of love; Ferry sees no need to explain what.

The peremptory discourse on education and art is the eruption of an arrogance latent in the text's first two sections. In the opening pages, he tells us that 'Romantic love, as everyone knows (or should know) lasts for only a few years'. When reading an article by Felix Guattari, he is 'torn between laughter and pity'. But Ferry has no right to criticise, since he is prone to unscholarly generalisation. On the Industrial Revolution, he writes with myopic satisfaction: 'Thanks to their wages, [women] were finally freed of the suffocating supervision of the village and could choose a companion following their own inclinations'. Glossing an essay by Montaigne, he comments:

Marrying the woman you love passionately, erotically, is in his view a complete catastrophe: it means, he says, and I'm here quoting his exact words, 'shitting in the basket before putting it on your head'. This eloquent formula shows how, in Montaigne's day, people had the lowest possible opinion of marrying for love.

There is irony only in the word 'eloquent' – not in 'shows how' or 'people' or 'lowest possible'. Clearly for Ferry, a humorous simile makes for convincing historical argument.

Explicitly basing his analysis in the notion of history as progress, Ferry displays high-handedness, too, in some of his broader assumptions. He does not, for instance, give any explanation of why we have moved through the cosmological, theological, humanist and deconstructionist eras. In classifying all four as 'philosophies of the past' giving us 'an ever more indirect and partial access to the contemporary experience of the world', he does not recognise,

either, that many people still live by these principles. A Christian or a Muslim or – let us find someone far from Ferry's vision – a Sikh does not, in Ferry's terms, live by the theological principle whilst knowing that humanism and deconstruction and love will give them more direct and less partial access to the world. The beginning of the book notes that complex and legitimate forms of diversity are one of the defining features of modern societies, but Ferry's central argument refuses to enter into dialogue with diversity, instead forcibly asserting a narrow view of reality. The book is unashamedly Eurocentric. Having invented the 'unique and precious' culture of the autonomy of the individual, democratic Europe, Ferry writes, exists as the 'adulthood' of civilisation, the place in which the cause of love is most far advanced. Quoting from one of his most important influences, Kant's *What is Enlightenment?*, Ferry states that other societies – autocracies, theocracies – are still 'minorly'. He gives no justification for his standpoint, other than the continual references to 'progress'.

A number of problems arise from Ferry's approach. The first is that his Eurocentrism sometimes verges on regionalism – that is, a celebration of Europe per se which is reminiscent of the very imperialist nationalism he condemns. The second is that it pits Ferry against relativism (political, cultural and ethical), which, though recognising it as 'the dominant ideology', he makes no attempt to discredit. It may be objected that the cause of love is opposed to, even transcends, philosophical argument, therefore that love is not at all compelled to discredit relativism. Yet here is precisely the sticking point of Ferry's theory. What defines contemporary ethical and political dilemmas is the capacity of people to hold incommensurable beliefs: utilitarianism and respect for moral laws, absolute liberty and absolute equality, political unity and cultural difference, universal love and cultural, religious, political relativism. Ferry's book bypasses this characteristic of modern ethical life, dismissing relativism too casually, when for most people relativism – and the beliefs it validates – give as direct and impartial an experience of the world as love.

While *On Love* is nominally a dialogue, periods of sustained and fruitful discussion are sparse. More often, Claude Capelier's occasional comments serve as prompts or contrived misunderstandings that enable Ferry to 'clarify' his position. Such clarification could have been achieved more nimbly. In that his argument is dependent on a particular view of history, it would have been worthwhile for Ferry to have engaged with the wider conversation about love in contemporary French philosophy or the history of writing about love in French literature. To have put his theory up against Badiou – who writes of love as the construction of a life for 'Two', whereas politics attempts to create 'One' from a heterogeneous collection of citizens – or Godard – one of whose most intriguing characters muses that 'the state is the opposite of love' – or to have developed a response to Stendhal, would have been to reveal more of love's complexity and to have made the text's argument more lucid. A passionate engagement with such thinkers, rather than a dalliance with ill-defined abstractions, might have made that 'secular salvation' which Ferry promises a more tangible prospect.

The centenary of the outbreak of World War I this year has prompted renewed historical reflection on the conflict that tore apart Belle Époque Europe. Last year saw the publication of Christopher Clark's *Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* and Margaret Macmillan's *The War that Ended Peace*, two works which have added new insights to what is perhaps the most widely debated question in modern history—why did the Great War happen? The origins of the conflagration that inaugurated the bloody twentieth century are certainly intriguing. However, the outcome and aftermath of the war have raised a whole range of questions of their own: why did the major combatants relapse into conflict twenty years after Versailles? Was the interwar system of states inherently unstable or did megalomaniacal leaders who were out for revenge deliberately sabotage it? Did the Great Depression fatally cripple an otherwise resilient liberal system or was it simply a matter of time before the house of cards called the League of Nations came apart? It has been normal to answer these questions by examining the roles of the Great Powers. In these terms, what made the outcome of World War I special was that it confirmed the entry onto the international stage of the United States, which had hitherto remained outside any entanglements with European politics and Great Power rivalry.

But to see the United States as simply a new contestant in an old game is to understate the significance of the changes involved. Adam Tooze's new book, *The Deluge*, persuasively makes the case that World War I was a watershed moment in world history because it raised a new problem of global order. The United States entered a world that had been dramatically overturned by the combined impact of nationalism, democratisation, industrial warfare and major population movements. By the second year of the war, in 1916, all the warring powers already understood that the balance of international power after the war would be radically and permanently different. As the armies of Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary slugged it out in the Western trenches and on the Eastern steppes, their governments were rapidly heading towards total financial and political exhaustion—and in some cases, outright collapse.

By contrast, America only seemed to grow more powerful as the war dragged on. American capitalism had developed spectacularly during the nineteenth century. It seemed to many that the United States was emerging as 'a new kind of 'super-state', exercising a veto over the financial and security concerns of the other major states of the world'. What is striking about this transformation of global power is how suddenly it happened, how large the responsibilities were that America inherited, and how qualitatively different its ability to deal with them was from previous hegemonies. No one knew exactly how preponderant it would be after the war. That the world would be irrevocably changed, however, was an opinion that was widely shared in the old world of Europe: everyone from Churchill to Trotsky to Hitler agreed that after the war, it was Washington that had the final say in global politics.

Tooze's main goal is to recount the story of this remarkable emergence, how it appeared to contemporaries, and how they responded to it. No one was particularly elated by the rise of a young and inexperienced power like America, but some accepted that a way of restructuring the architecture of international order had to be sought in cooperation with America. Others were frightened by the prospect and rebelled against it during the interwar years. This latter group Tooze calls the 'insurgents': the Italian Fascists, the Soviet Union and the Comintern, the Nazis, and Japanese militarists. Impressed by the economic, military and diplomatic power of American capitalism, the insurgents launched their own attempts to redesign the world order. There was therefore a basic dynamic running throughout the interwar period which resulted in either compliance or radical insurgency.

NICK MULDER

PAPER SHACKLES

A REVIEW OF  
*THE DELUGE: THE  
GREAT WAR AND THE  
REMAKING OF GLOBAL  
ORDER*

BY ADAM TOOZE

(ALLEN LANE, 2014)

Yet this division of the world into two camps after 1931 was by no means foreordained in 1916. When America entered World War I, Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that his goal was to achieve a 'peace without victory'; no country would be allowed to emerge victorious from the war. The only basis for lasting stability was a peace on equal terms. Often this has been taken to mean that Wilson saw himself as a purely neutral arbiter in the European war. Wilson has entered history as a tragic president: a passionate proponent of liberal internationalism whose project to create a peaceful order under the League of Nations was scuttled by the malice of Great Power politics and the intransigence of domestic opposition. Toose applies a series of vital correctives to this worn-out image of Wilson. First, he emphasises that far from suffering from an excess of idealism, it was his mix of aloofness and high-mindedness that weakened American diplomacy during and after the war. Wilson was willing to force his vision of a peace without victory onto all combatants, his allies in the Entente (Britain, France, Italy and Russia) as much as on the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary). Wilson imagined a world 'in which the exceptional position of America at the head of civilisation would be inscribed on the gravestone of European power [...] he was making an exorbitant claim to American moral supremacy, rooted in a distinct vision of America's moral destiny'.

Second, Wilson's internationalism was not a campaign for the establishment of an impartial authority to govern world politics. It was a proposal to end traditional Great Power conflict and substitute in its place a pacifistic order under the auspices of Washington. Making the world safe for democracy was also making the world safe for American foreign investment. What Wilson and his headstrong advisor Colonel House were seeking was nothing less than the implementation of the Open Door Policy (unrestricted access for American goods and capital) throughout the entire world. This ambition was spurred by the phenomenal indebtedness in which all the Entente powers found themselves. The financial leverage enjoyed by Washington could now be employed to turn the erstwhile imperialist bullies of the Old World into docile adherents to the new doctrine of international peace and security that would ensure American prosperity.

The paradox at the heart of America's rise was that exactly at the point where it became more powerful than ever before, its political leadership had an essentially conservative vision of its own role in world affairs—Wilson's proclamation about 'making the world safe for democracy' was the logical precursor to his successor Calvin Coolidge's 'return to normalcy'. After humbling the exhausted old world into submission, America would return to its role as the dormant supervisor of world politics.

Once the Germans made the fateful decision to declare unrestricted submarine warfare against all merchant shipping on the Atlantic in January 1917, Wilson's hand was forced. In April Congress declared war against Germany. American capitalism sprang to the help of the Entente with men, money, and material. The combined power of American business and Wall Street finance was enormous, but this strength was initially difficult to control and direct. Wall Street, led by the banking heavyweight J.P. Morgan,

had already supplied generous loans to the Entente to finance the summer offensives of 1916. However, this weakened the American government's control over the national economy, which was starting to mobilise for military production to fulfil British orders even though no decision to go to war had yet been taken. During the fall of 1916, a war economy emerged in the US, not out of government direction but due to the transatlantic power of capitalist business and finance. The existing institutions of the federal government were barely strong enough to stabilise this economic mobilisation in peacetime; the Federal Reserve was less than four years old when America went to war. A host of new agencies and regulations were therefore necessary to avoid unfocused production and logistical chaos (tellingly, to lead the War Industries Board Wilson appointed a string of business executives, entrepreneurs and bankers). Nonetheless, the immense power of American capitalism and its rise as the epicentre of a new global economy was recognised by everyone from London to Vienna and Paris to Petrograd.

In Central Europe, another vision of modern economic power emerged in the form of the German planned economy, the blueprint of which was provided by Walther Rathenau. As the head of AEG, one of the great German electronics conglomerates, he took charge of the provision of raw materials and industrial inputs to German industry and set up a system of War Corporations in which businessmen organised to place joint orders and maximise productive capacity. Rathenau was an immensely prolific publicist and charismatic public speaker, and his accomplishments were trumpeted as the pinnacle of German industrial, technological and administrative genius. Ultimately, however, even his valiant efforts were not sufficient to prevent the severe dislocation of the German economy in the final year of the war. However, the idea of the German war economy as a state-directed national powerhouse assumed a larger-than-life character in the wake of the war, and found many admirers—including Lenin, who saw Rathenau's productivist utopia as the blueprint for Soviet industrialisation.

There was a third 'model' of war economy that came out of the war. Largely ignored by posterity, it had the potential to provide a stable foundation for the post-war order. Under favourable circumstances it could even have averted the Great Depression and perhaps World War II. This was the model of transnational economic administration. The development of genuinely intergovernmental economic policy was an improvisation undertaken by French, British and Italian administrators. Initially intended to manage supplies of coal and grain, it later came to encompass mutualised debt, control over the Entente's entire shipping and transport fleet, and a unified Allied military command overseeing all troops from Flanders to Salonika. The men involved in this effort included famous economic policymakers and institution-builders like John Maynard Keynes and Jean Monnet. Their vision would famously re-emerge in the European Coal and Steel Community and its successor institutions. The origins of the European community lie in Franco-German reconciliation after World War II. But the techniques of transnational economic governance were already being developed a century ago. Moreover, they came about not as the result of careful deliberation in stable conditions but as stopgap measures devised in the midst of the most violent conflict

that modern civilisation had ever seen.

One of the distinctive virtues of Tooze's book is its remarkably global reach. The development of transatlantic dependence is integrated skilfully with the enormous transformations wrought in Russia, India, China and the Middle East in the years 1917–1927. What made this period novel was not just the arrival of American power and plenty in the European arena, it was also the overturning of centuries (and in the Chinese case, millennia) of centralised monarchical rule in Eurasia. In the spring of 1917, it seemed as if both Petrograd and Beijing might join the United States in a new worldwide constellation of democratic states. What ultimately precluded this was in large part the reluctance of Wilson to take a strong stand on the future of Russian and Chinese politics. The Provisional Government in Russia faltered as it strove simultaneously to keep the Germans at bay and the Allies satisfied while edging into a position from which to negotiate peace. But without external support from Wilson or the Entente, and under strong pressure from domestic rivals, the Petrograd government lost control of the situation. On 7 November 1917 the Bolsheviks stormed the Winter Palace. With Lenin in power, there was even less of a chance of a successful rapprochement with America.

In the case of China, the failure of the Entente to provide adequate assistance to a budding democratic government would have even more destabilising long-term consequences. The racially and strategically motivated hesitance to engage with the Chinese republican movement played into the hands of Japan, which thereby acquired a foothold in Chinese politics that it could exploit in its own imperial interest. In India, the British initially managed to stave off a wave of democratic radicalism by conceding far-reaching local administrative reforms in 1919, allowing several million Indians to vote. This very limited experiment in colonial suffrage enabled London to maintain its Indian empire, but only at the cost of destabilisation elsewhere. These and other interesting and often forgotten struggles help to broaden our understanding of World War I as an event that affected much more than just the future map of Europe. With large Asian states attaining the trappings of sovereignty, the task of global governance in an unstable world economy was more challenging than ever before.

The Treaty of Versailles was a very flawed peace agreement. Yet this was not primarily due to the brutality meted out to Germany. In fact, by historical standards the Treaty was remarkable in accepting the basic legitimacy and integrity of a German nation-state. Tooze therefore pushes back against the depiction of Versailles, popularised by Keynes in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, as a vengeful and irrational reckoning of the Entente. Yet Keynes was right at a more fundamental level, he insists, in that the really damning failure of Versailles was its lack of a vision of international economic management. The major powers did not adequately recognise that a return to the pre-war world economy of free markets and the gold standard would not happen automatically. As Tooze writes, 'if the liberal economy was to be saved, if unpolitical international markets were to be restored, the precondition was a political masterstroke'. In particular, Keynes thought, the European combatants needed to be freed from the

'paper shackles' of inter-Allied debt. It was this reluctance to use state power to positively reconstruct economic liberalism, rather than any vindictiveness on the part of the Allies, that weakened the treaty in the long run. As a result, the 1920s would see successive American interventions in European economic affairs. America remained unable to disconnect from the troubled continent that it had sought to discipline.

Tooze's verve for relating economic history to political developments comes out in brilliant detail in his account of the difficult years of stabilisation and adjustment that took place between 1920 and 1926. America's first priority after the war was to restore economic stability at home. The war had fuelled significant inflation. The logical course of action was therefore to raise interest rates, slowing down credit and bringing down prices. Yet in an intricately interconnected world economy, this move had profound consequences. A worldwide deflationary wave went around the world, lowering prices and strengthening the forces of order. The great recession of 1920–1921 was 'probably the most underrated event in twentieth-century world history', and it was the key to economic stabilisation from the British Empire to Japan. The social costs were high, but thanks to disarmament initiatives such as the Washington Naval Conference held in 1921–1922, it seemed as if the world was steadily moving towards a more peaceful international order.

Only France and Germany bucked the trend. When Germany failed to pay reparations in time in January 1923, the French occupied the Ruhr, triggering one of the great diplomatic crises of the interwar period and contributing to the rapidly escalating hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic. Ultimately, the crisis was resolved by a combination of American and English pressure and domestic reform in Germany. In 1924 the American-negotiated Dawes Plan suspended German reparations obligations for five years. Once more, American assistance had made the difference in a European stalemate. Without its help, the democracies of the interwar period could not have held out. And later during the decade, initiatives such as the Kellogg–Briand Pact, which banned war as an instrument of foreign policy, solidified the progress that had been made since the end of the Great War.

Yet fundamentally, the tools of American power were unsuited to the complexity of the problems encountered. Every American presidential administration in the interwar period clung strongly to the belief that under the benign pressure of repayment and financial markets, hot-headed European politics would eventually sort themselves out. If individual countries refused to fall into line, the pressure of outstanding war debts would be brought to bear. Washington punished the French in this way in 1925 by refusing to consider cancellation of war debts and instituting an embargo on all new loans to Paris. The French were understandably outraged. What made the situation worse was that simultaneously a massive wave of private American investment was flooding into Germany. Manipulating the European balance of power through its financial leverage over the continent was an easy and cheap way for Washington to conduct foreign policy during a decade when the American public had little stomach for foreign entanglements.

Chronologically, the book's focus is somewhat uneven. World War I and the Versailles Treaty take up about three-fifths of the work, whereas the entire period between the relative stabilisation of the European economy in 1924 and the depth of the Great Depression in 1931 is covered in only two final chapters. If Tooze's claim that the liberal order erected after World War I was more stable than is commonly assumed is indeed true, then a deeper exploration of the vistas at the height of stability in the late 1920s would have made a worthwhile addition.

Overall, the narrative of *The Deluge* is more ambiguous and less dramatic than the epic of Tooze's previous book *The Wages of Destruction*, an account of the Nazi German war economy. But the two works do share a common point of reference: the rise of the United States to global political and economic prominence in the first half of the twentieth century. Whereas the latter focused on the fearful reaction provoked by the spectre of impending Amer-

ican hegemony in the Third Reich, *The Deluge* explores the earlier attempts to cope with America's emergence in London, Paris, Rome, Petrograd, Beijing and Tokyo in the 1920s and 1930s. The common denominator between these two important stories is the problematic of international power that they develop. By deftly mixing economic history, political narrative and grand strategic considerations, Tooze outlines the problems of what Trotsky called 'uneven and combined development': a world in which some countries get ahead, others gain at the expense of their opponents, yet others fall behind, but no single country, not even the strongest, is able to escape the need to engage with the problems and challenges raised by all the others. Tooze's book grippingly reinterprets this convoluted past. It thereby forms a refreshing and topical contribution to the enduring historical study of the Great War and its consequences.

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ARABELLA

MILBANK

THE SWETE  
KYRNE

A REVIEW OF  
*SACRED AND  
SECULAR:  
MEDIÉVAL  
CROSSOVER*

BY BARBARA  
NEWMAN

(UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE  
DAME PRESS, 2013)

What Barbara Newman proposes in *Sacred and Secular* is nothing less—and perhaps something more—than a new paradigm for reading medieval literature. The hermeneutic 'principle of double judgement', her 'both/and', is not just a postmodern capacity but is inherent in theology and exegesis in the Middle Ages. This principle, threaded through the book, permits the sacred and her—various—forms of the profane (or non-Christian sacred) to be in textual and intellectual symbiosis. As in the motet, her 'crossover genre *par excellence*', a sacred *cantus firmus*, the tenor voice which intones a liturgical phrase, is both foundational and yet strangely in counterpoint to middle and upper voices singing longer—perhaps themselves contradictory—vernacular lyrics. The whole sounds out precisely as it contrasts, melds and agrees in a harmony musically dependent on difference. Newman finds this situation, with its interpretative dilemmas, more the medieval rule than the exception.

Gorgeously written, full of piquantly scented and coloured phrases and paradoxes, this book is a garden to be walked through, and not just by medievalists. Indeed it stands as a contribution to the cross-disciplinary secularisation debate in its own right. For if the holy and the seemingly unholy engage and co-contribute even in the sacrally normative Middle Ages, this opens the way to a more capacious understanding of sacred content in later literature, including (as Newman explicitly does not) the early modern period. Identifying such a complex sacred-secular 'spectrum' implicitly questions the existence of an end-closed 'secular'. Along the way, she provides fruitful new readings of old and well-carved oaks: engaging with the convergence and divergence of Celtic pagan and Christian chivalric strands in Arthurian romance through *Gawain and the Green Knight*, Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charette*, *Perceval*, the *Queste del Graal* and the ending of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. She also cultivates some fertile new crosses—the heresy-accused mystic Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* is located in the soil of a diverse Picard literary culture, but cross-pollinating with the ecstatic poetry of the female semi-religious Béguines, and even with the 'profoundly profane' *Roman de la Rose*—and its sacralisations. She introduces us to some rarer and more dangerous strains in her chapter on parody—the *Lai d'Ignaure*, the Middle French *Dispute between God and his Mother*, and the poisonous bloom that is the Latin *Passion of the Jews of Prague*. Finally she renews two old varieties—in her last chapter unravelling the complementarity of René d'Anjou's devotional and amorous allegories, the *Mortifiement de Vaine Plaisance* and the *Livre du Cœur Epris*. Demonstrably here, Newman's medievalism is firmly European, acknowledging vernacular exchange and English francophonía as well as latinity.

Barbara Newman's new paradigm is framed partly as a recuperation of, or at least a return to, the questions addressed by, an (in)famous critic of the second half of the twentieth century. To his revilers, and they were vociferous, Durant Waite Robertson and what was termed his 'exegetical criticism' represented the apex of a monolithic and nostalgic vision of the Middle Ages, and a resultantly narrow interpretation of medieval texts. Robertson was himself an atheist, but

one whose revulsion for modernity's solipsism and cruelty gave him a powerful affection for a medieval other world. Robertson's 'exegetical' approach risked viewing the Middle Ages itself as *hortus conclusus*, as a fair enclosed garden of moral and hermeneutic alterity. Within this garden, all critical interpretation tended towards his understanding of allegoresis as a perfect decoding; no tree could grow that was not also either tree of life or tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He read with what he considered to be the correct, and medieval, mode of interpretation after Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*. This meant a 'wheat-and-chaff hermeneutics' whereby the form exists only for the sacred content, the husk only for the aesthetic pleasure of the hulling. Whilst his own sense of double-reading tended to result in either deep irony or deep sacrality, charity upheld or cupidity revealed, it did result in some durably valuable insights. Robertson was amongst the first to really read Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore*, long interpreted as a serious exposition of the creed behind the 'religion' of courtly love, as deeply riven with an elusive irony.

For Newman, the main problem is that, in the wake of the rejection of Robertsonianism, medieval studies has seen something of a scorched earth policy on these questions. Whilst many cultivators are working individually at their plots, the terrain has been barren of any fresh attempts to posit large-scale interpretative paradigms. Amidst such dearth, she suggests, has arisen the alternatives of either literary 'subversion' whereby texts are archly and anachronistically read to be working against the sacred 'norms' or the endlessly mobile and infinitely differentiated Middle Ages, a permanent indeterminacy which can exercise its own effective tyranny. Newman, refreshingly, picks up the rake where others have been tempted to either to tear Robertson's garden to pieces or to question its existence.

The fourteenth-century contemplative author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* writes that all dreams and visions have 'goostly bemenynges,' spiritual senses that in the manner of a text require allegorical interpretation. 'Ther-fore,' he says, 'late us pike of the rough bark, and fede us of the swete kyrnel.' Nut-and-nutmeat is wheat-and-chaff's close cousin here, but despite the *Cloud*-author's at times sharply articulated Christian neoplatonic suspicion of outward substance, he abhors the abandonment of form for content the metaphor might imply. Rather 'we schul not so fede us of the frute that we schul dispise the tree; ne so drynke that we schul breke the cuppe when we have dronken.' In his new (and notably Eucharistic) metaphor, to fling the vessel away once drained is the stratagem of a 'wode man,' a madman. So too for Newman: the sacred metaphor or the secular genre, the pagan topos, the erotic or even obscene story are vessels which condition and converge with what they bear—not to be cast aside. Moreover, for Newman, two fruits can grow on one tree, and—to use her own figure—two liquids can exist in one cup or transformative chalice—be they like water and oil 'layered but stubbornly distinct' or like water and wine 'producing a blend that may or may not be inebriating.' Furthermore, the very difficulty, the very ambiguity and interplay is part of the sense. When we 'kiss the cup,' as the *Cloud*-author puts it, like a sherry-casked whisky, we taste both liquids and the wood—and the sum is a mystery larger than its parts. As Newman says

'ambivalence is itself a key part of the meaning that must not be exegeted away'.

Newman rightly realises that a proper critical return to 'exegetical criticism' requires a new account of medieval exegesis. The relationship of scriptural reading modes to literary ones cannot be got rid of; texts such as Dante's *Epistle to Can Grande* tell us explicitly that vernacular poets could suggest their work be read using a typological process. Newman joins a recent array of critics concerned with the both/and, the paradox and the irony innate in medieval exegesis and allegoresis: Sarah Kay, Catherine Brown and Larry Scanlon, to cite just a few. What is particularly innovative in Newman is that she argues that the very division we find in reading medieval texts—which can appear to be between the possibilities of a 'profane' or secular versus a 'sacred' sense—is paralleled, if not originated, in both exegetical practice and the theological ideas which underlie and inform it. Her 'principle of double judgement' is rooted in fundamentally theological ground as she points out that salvation history itself involves a 'double-ness' principle, and hence a possibility of double-reading, in the idea of the 'fortunate Fall'. The theological principle of *felix culpa* is that by which the narrative of the Fall is necessarily a part of the narrative of salvation: the way down is the way up. This gains historical credence in Newman's account by the coincidence of the re-assertion of this doctrine and the passage of the Easter Exultet which celebrates the 'necessary sin of Adam' at the beginning of the thirteenth century, precisely in conjunction with the period of Arthurian romance she is examining. Second—and evidently in a related fashion—reading the *sensus mysticus* in scripture frequently involves interpretation 'against' the literal 'grain' with its perhaps self-evident immorality. Hence David's adultery with Bathsheba can be, mystically, the rejection of the old law for the new. Exegesis in Newman's account envelopes and even celebrates such paradoxes—and suggests the distinct possibility that medieval readers would find the both/and had a certain sense—just as they could read both in moral and mystical senses.

Newman runs her principle of double judgement through five chapters, each of which is in its own way a significant contribution to the field of criticism on which it touches. 'Theorizing Crossover' establishes her new critical paradigm, salvaging a reviled Robertsonianism into a form of medieval literary criticism which can take the sacred seriously and subtly by appreciating that deeply symbolic, religiously allegorical senses converge with 'straighter' or more literal readings of texts, as well as with other formally-derived elements such as the Celtic pagan. In 'Double Coding' this approach is applied to the series of Old French and Middle English Arthurian texts already mentioned. Here she argues that both the 'wheat' of the sacred and the 'chaff' of the erotic or the comedic must be taken seriously, the cup kissed. Her readings of *Lancelot in the Morte* and the *Chevalier de la Charrette* challenge the sense that he must be either an erotic hero or an ideal of Christian chivalry or, indeed, an adulterous anti-hero. Lancelot's quest in the latter to rescue Guinevere from the giant Meleagant includes Christ-like elements of humiliation and ordeal which, in the (in) famous reading of Jacques Ribard, relates it so strongly to Christ's humbling Passion as to render the whole a spiritual allegory of the

redemption of the Soul or the Church—the sexual consummation being read in the manner of the Song of Songs as spiritual union. This is that same moment which C.S. Lewis found the most ‘ridiculous’ of all in what he still thought of as the ‘Religion of Love’. Robertson’s equally moralistic interpretation can draw the inverse conclusion: that the sacred elements are only there as a raucous and biting funny indictment of the deeply anti Christ-like mode of Lancelot’s cupidity, no real love at all. Critics have, needless to say, moved on—and Newman takes new steps here not just with the Arthurian tradition but with the entire question of the relationship of the discourses of profane and sacred love. The text remains both/and: ‘Lancelot’s love is sublime and idolatrous, his behaviour heroic and ridiculous.’ What is particularly refreshing, and could perhaps be taken further here, is that Newman appears to navigate between both the danger of ignoring the possibility of sacred sense in the seemingly profane hero and that of capitulating to the inexhaustible polysemy of the text. Rather the both/and is itself a reading based in theological ideas—although one feels that here Newman could sometimes carry her own *felix culpa* argument further. In application, this nuances questions of ‘justice’ and can question a moral perfection so rigid it refuses space for gracious action—such as that of Gawain before his encounter with the Green Knight. One could argue that the double judgement on Lancelot has something to do with that realisation that our sinful natures are the means of our redemption. This is perhaps in itself a critique of too-high minded chivalric and romance ideals, which might explain why Lazarus and indeed Gawain have to be a little mocked.

Forms of sacred mockery are explored in the fourth chapter, which is centred on parody. Before the sixteenth century *sacra parodia* meant precisely the opposite of what it might to us now—not the subversion of the sacred but its elevation by imitation, as when lines from Virgil were pieced together to create full Gospel narratives. Even the parodies with more like a modern sense Newman is careful to acknowledge have meaningful sacred content. In the case of the cannibalistic mock-Eucharist of an adulterous lover in the *Lai d’Ignaure* religious satire is framed through secular *fabliau*-romance. However this is not some wildly avant-garde parody of the sacrament of the altar itself, but a parody of one mode of extreme Eucharistic piety in the Beguines—still sacredly serious, as its seemingly ‘other’ reading as romance tragedy might also suggest. Most troubling, but given a fascinating treatment at Newman’s hands, is the *Passion of the Jews of Prague*. This is ‘ancient’ *sacra parodia* which takes the historical narrative of a fourteenth-century Jewish pogrom and narrates it in Latin as a patchwork of Latin gospel texts in the form of a Passion. Here, she argues, whilst the authorial intent is unremittingly (and sickeningly) justificatory, the text may unwittingly parody itself. Jews occupy the parts of both the populace who condemn and the Christ condemned—turned upon for their attack on a Host procession they nonetheless also play disciple and Christ roles up until their actual crucifixions. Here the idea that no generic ‘convergence’ can be merely the adoption of forms, but involves the convergence too of real content, salvages some redemptive possibility for the text. Newman convincingly argues that the very use of the Gospel citations and the identification of the victims with Christ must have

made it possible for a medieval reader to see horror in the plight of the Jewish victims, and the whole to become the darkest of satires on their persecutors.

One problem or query which is perhaps more of a meta-comment than actually impacting the immensely illuminating content of her individual studies lies with the use of ‘secular’. This, throughout the book, displays a certain *mouvance* as a term which sometimes gives a hunt of ‘yoking’ wonderful ‘double’ accounts into a dichotomy to which they do not belong. If Celtic paganism, classical paganism, the ‘courtly’, historical narrative *per se*, and seemingly any literary form outside a narrow range of ‘sacred’ ones—hagiography, mystic devotion—can all be ‘secular’ the term seems to have become too laden. Does it stand for the non-Christian—or just for the non-clerical or ecclesiastic? Newman does in passing acknowledge that the first two are actually their own forms of the sacred, and of course her Chapters 4 and 5 hinge on describing the interplay of the discourses and metaphysics of *fin’amor* and devotion. If the sacred has early been categorised as the medieval ‘norm’, then the secular is basically the neutral, the generically or the formally constrained—the cup for the wine. And yet what Newman herself shows is that—by her principle of convergence—the cup itself is hybrid, potentially mundane, potentially sacramental. So the ‘secular’ escapes conventional definition constantly into a series of alternative forms of the sacred, be they the ‘metaphysics’ used to speak of romantic love, the ghosts of pagan rite in beheading rituals and reborn kings, or indeed the classical pagan world which interlopes into both to allow such possibilities as personified Amor. As Augustine used the term *saeculum* it meant something more temporal: precisely the worldly intermixing of the ‘two cities’ with their two loves. This is the state of the world’s perpetual middle age, its *medium aevum* between Eden and Jerusalem, whose ‘new’ is a perpetual renewal of the eschatological orientation of ourselves and the world—arguably what happens, albeit in an extreme form, with the Renaissance and Reformation as a hyper-medieval moment, rather than any ‘end’. Newman could even have exchanged her ‘principle of double judgement’ for a theory of the ‘saecularity’ of medieval literature in this sense.

Hence a further caution I have with regards to this book would be one of periodisation. Newman identifies an ‘early modern shift’ which ends her ‘crossover’ period and the possibility of double judgement and represents the entry of the ‘properly’ secular. She argues that this shift allows the imagining of a ‘purely secular realm’ for which the Middle Ages required the classical, and could never really accomplish. Framing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as a ‘perfectly secular comedy’, the move with which she opens the book, might have its doubters—Beatrice Groves, for example, has written on the echoes of medieval drama in Bottom’s burlesque resurrection. Newman identifies its fairy-world as unquestionably secular—and yet surely her own development of how pagan, giant and fairy forces in *Gawain and the Green Knight* can appear to represent divine will has not entirely lost its relevance here? That comedy is patterned through with questions about the stability of the governing supernatural order and its relationship to the human one—themes which do not become radically secular overnight.

Prophethood, like show business, is unforgiving. Moviegoers and believers demand results, though the latter are generally more patient. The rewards are similarly lucrative, as successful prophets and movie stars alike enjoy enviable afterlives. They part, however, over spectacular failures. An actor can outlive a miserable performance given enough time and previous accomplishment. We forgave Al Pacino for *Revolution*, mainly because he had already done *The Godfather* by then. Marx on the other hand, hasn't been as lucky, despite a more distinguished track record. He's best remembered, of course, for his botched predictions about capitalism, only to experience brief revivals every major recession. Only within the academy does he enjoy the respect he arguably deserves, and even that respect is qualified; Marx the political philosopher is well and alive, respected if not loved by professors worldwide, while his economics remain of antiquarian interest (though Thomas Piketty might have something to say about that).

If Marx is our classic failed prophet, then Alexis de Tocqueville is his mirror image. The concluding pages of the first volume of *Democracy in America* are well known, where Tocqueville apparently predicts the Cold War a century in advance. The second volume, published five years later, only seems to confirm his prophetic credentials. There, Tocqueville probes the democratic psyche and warns his readers of the threat to liberty posed by a growing state and pervasive materialism. Those warnings remain especially poignant for our current situation, where we confront an increasingly invasive state and respond with a sort of tired rage and cynical despondence. Tocqueville, it seems, was speaking to and for us and it's only natural to move from that intuition to concluding that he had captured the nature of modern mass democracy *avant la lettre*.

That Tocqueville was also a Frenchman who happened to live during a unique moment in French history is often ignored lest that get in the way of a much sexier narrative of a mind in and beyond its time, guiding future generations with timeless wisdom. Lucien Jaume's recently translated *Tocqueville: The Aristocratic Sources of Liberty* is an important corrective to our often-selective view of Tocqueville. Translated by the distinguished Arthur Goldhammer, who has translated numerous important works from French, including those of Pierre Rosanvallon and Thomas Piketty's *Capital*, *Tocqueville* is a book firmly set in Restoration and Bonapartist France. Jaume, a senior researcher at Sciences Po in Paris who has published extensively in French on French liberalism, brings his considerable knowledge of French intellectual history to bear on Tocqueville. In Jaume's able hands, Tocqueville is thoroughly Gallicized and we come away understanding how Tocqueville's French audience might have read him.

Jaume, it must be said, isn't the first scholar to examine Tocqueville in his French context. Melvin Richter, for instance, has written insightfully on Tocqueville's relationship with François Guizot, the short-lived Prime Minister of France and Orleanist historian. More importantly, Jaume's sources include many French works on Tocqueville that have been written in a similar vein. Nevertheless, *Tocqueville* is the most thorough intellectual biography of the Frenchman in English, though biography might be a misnomer. A biography usually gives an account of a thinker's life and development, highlighting different sources and influences as the author sees fit. Jaume departs from this standard model, reconstructing Tocqueville's French context – his opponents, debates and idiom without advancing a particular interpretation. In each chapter, Jaume brings to life the issues concerning Tocqueville in his various roles as 'sociologist', 'moralist', or 'theorist of democracy'. Only after extensive archaeology does Jaume turn to Tocqueville and his treatment is usually very brief. The final result is a rich patchwork of separate episodes, each recounted in great detail. Yet the absence of a central argument – the closest we get is the claim that Tocqueville must be understood as writing for a French audience with French concerns – results in a disjointed reading experience.

The lack of a central argument isn't fatal and each of the five sections of the book is independently valuable. After a brief introduction in which he lays out his methodology, Jaume turns to Tocqueville's notion of democracy. Tocqueville was notoriously slippery on what he

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PROPHET OF  
DEMOCRACY

A REVIEW OF  
*TOCQUEVILLE:  
THE ARISTOCRATIC  
SOURCES OF  
LIBERTY*

BY LUCIEN JAUME

(PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS,  
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meant by the word and Jaume decides on a three-part definition: democracy as local government, public religion, and 'promise of material enjoyments.' This is a wise decision, as the categories are sufficiently expansive to capture many of the things Tocqueville was interested in. More importantly, Jaume conveys to us the relative instability of the term 'democracy' before and during the July Monarchy. Today we have a rough conception of what a democracy looks like – representative assemblies, an inclusive franchise, political parties and freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly. We might disagree around the margins (gun rights are a morbid example), but we broadly recognise the fundamentals. This was not the case, however, in the years immediately following the French Revolution. Historians familiar with the debates in the Constituent Assembly and thereafter know this well, but with Tocqueville, France often fades from view. Jaume helpfully reintroduces important French interlocutors, such as Michel Chevalier and Pierre Guillaume Frédéric le Play. The former, a Saint-Simonian, emphasized industrial development and the need for top-down coordination of the economy. Without a rational reorganisation of society, Chevalier believed true democracy would never be realised. Moreover, Chevalier was sceptical about the power of local government, which was central to Tocqueville's understanding of popular sovereignty. Le Play, conversely, criticised Tocqueville from the opposite direction. On his view, Tocqueville had misjudged the ability of the masses to govern and in so doing kept the possibility of revolutionary fervour alive. Pressed between two distinguished technocrats, Tocqueville becomes a reluctant defender of the popular government.

Jaume's exploration of Tocqueville on religion is equally interesting. That discussion occurs in two different places. The first continues his analysis of democracy, this time as 'public religion.' As many readers have noticed, Tocqueville often speaks of democracy with great enthusiasm. In the introduction to the eleventh edition of *Democracy in America*, he even describes the spread of democracy as an act of providence. Central to his confidence in democracy and its eventual success is the power of public opinion. According to Jaume, Tocqueville's account of public opinion anticipates Durkheim's notion of religion as a social fact roughly a century later. For Tocqueville public opinion exerts an important normative constraint on democratic citizens, who recognise their own insignificance and relent to the wisdom of the crowd. Tocqueville's relative skepticism about the power of individual reason, Jaume argues, also brings him closer to Joseph de Maistre and Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais. These latter thinkers saw the Catholic Church as central to a peaceful society with a clear locus of authority and it is striking how Tocqueville adopts their sociology, but replaces the Church with collective opinion. Tocqueville thus becomes less theoretically innovative but more politically subversive.

Jaume's second discussion of religion in Tocqueville involves casting him as a latter-day Jansenist. Here, Jaume is less persuasive and ambitious, as the textual evidence linking him to Port-Royal divines like Antoine Arnauld and Blaise Pascal is thin. Jaume wants us to understand Tocqueville as engaging in a sort of moralism similar to that of the Jansenists, where both of their works show

us how our self-interest aligns with the broader social good. While there certainly is a resemblance between Tocqueville's notion of 'self-interest properly understood' and healthy 'amour-propre' in the Jansenists and in Rousseau, the latter's moral psychology is considerably more complex and retains a distinct theological hue; the Jansenists, like Rousseau and Mandeville after them, were interested in how fallen man's worst instincts could coordinate in ways that benefitted all. Tocqueville writes in a decidedly less religious register and his democratic citizens strive more for material comfort than for social recognition, the main desire of amour-propre. Jaume, who is seemingly aware of these and other difficulties, limits himself to the suggestion that Tocqueville wrote in a broadly Jansenist style, without venturing much more.

Two other sections of the book, those concerning Tocqueville's 'romanticism' and his engagement with Guizot, are also rich in detail but short on argument. In those chapters, we learn much more about Madame de Staël and Guizot than we do about Tocqueville. Moreover, Jaume does not provide us with a definition of liberty anywhere in the book, which is very unhelpful given his choice of title and the importance of liberty in Tocqueville's broader worldview. In fact, Jaume self-consciously borrows the term 'aristocratic liberty' from the Italian scholar Dino Cofrancesco and introduces the term in the last twenty-five pages of the book. This is certainly an error in signposting, and it detracts from the quality of the book, since we're left wondering how the previous three hundred pages relate to a distinctive understanding of liberty grounded in values of self-control and disinterestedness.

*Tocqueville* is not a book for the uninitiated. There is a large supporting cast with a somewhat absent lead, and readers unfamiliar with thinkers like Guizot or de Maistre will find themselves even more confused as Jaume adds new and lesser known figures like Bonald, Ballanche, and Kergorlay. Moreover, Jaume often refers to these thinkers without introducing them. This isn't a criticism of Jaume, but rather an indication of his intended audience. *Tocqueville* is a serious book written by an immensely learned man, rich in suggestions for future research. Despite being a warehouse of ideas, however, *Tocqueville* lacks a thesis. Instead, it reproduces the very ambivalence of Tocqueville's own thought. According to Jaume, Tocqueville is a sometime defender of popular government and sometime Cassandra of democratic despotism; that really isn't very different from how many scholars understand him and in that regard Jaume isn't saying anything new. Ultimately, *Tocqueville* reminds one of Silvestre de Sacy, who having read *Democracy in America*, wrote: 'The reader puts down the book and asks himself anxiously, 'Is that really democracy?' We might similarly ask, having read Jaume's book, 'Is that really Tocqueville?'

# HARRY DADSWELL IN SPITE OF IT ALL

A REVIEW OF  
*FIRE AND  
ASHES: SUCCESS  
AND FAILURE IN  
POLITICS*

BY MICHAEL  
IGNATIEFF

(HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS,  
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Political memoirs can be a turgid and self-important genre. Nay-sayers of the past are rebutted with all the condescension of posterity, inner doubts are airbrushed away and history distorted into a flattering backdrop for the author's foresight and decisive action. By contrast *Fire and Ashes*, the recent memoirs of Canadian academic and ex-politician Michael Ignatieff, break from this mould. The reason for this is simple: Ignatieff's political career was such an unmitigated disaster that even including the word 'success' in the book's subtitle seems unwarranted. Rather than attempt a futile rehabilitation of his reputation, Ignatieff's failure has freed him to write with humility about the traumas and challenges of modern democratic politics.

The memoir begins one night in October 2004, when three shadowy magnates of the Canadian Liberal Party (dubbed the 'men in black') arrive in Cambridge Massachusetts and take Ignatieff and his wife to dinner. At this point Ignatieff was a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government who had spent thirty years in America and Britain as a writer and academic, including a period as a fellow at King's College Cambridge where he collaborated on a book with the late István Hont. That evening, after a couple of drinks, an astonishing offer is put to him: would he consider returning to Canada to lead the Liberal Party? It was a proposition which, looking back, Ignatieff wishes he had laughed off as preposterous. Many of the intellectuals who attempt the difficult transition into politics, such as Mario Vargas Llosa in Peru, Václav Havel in the Czech Republic and Carlos Fuentes in Mexico, have achieved only a limited degree of success. Their efforts have sometimes been treated with disdain by their academic colleagues, a sentiment captured best in the poet Oliver Goldsmith's barbed description of Edmund Burke:

*Who, born for the Universe, narrow'd his mind,  
And to party gave up, what was meant for mankind.  
Tho' fraught with all learning, kept straining his throat,  
To persuade Tommy Townshend to lend him a vote.*

The thoughts that crowded Ignatieff's mind as he walked home that night along the banks of the Charles River were very different from these. Unsure whether it was patriotism, raw ambition or 'some long-suppressed longing for significance', Ignatieff nonetheless felt himself knocked off his moorings. He sums up the book that follows as:

The story of why – soon after, and against the better judgement of some good friends – I said yes to the men in black. It is the story of a brutal initiation, followed by a climb to the summit of politics in the largest democracy by physical size in the world. I want to explain how it becomes possible for an otherwise sensible person to turn his life upside down for the sake of a dream, or to put it less charitably, why a person like me succumbed, so helplessly, to hubris.

When the offer to return to politics was first made, Ignatieff's excitement perhaps prevented him from fully heeding the warnings which accompanied that offer. He had been told that back home the Liberal Party, in government at the time, was 'heading for a train wreck'. The Prime Minister Paul Martin had been a respected finance minister before he took the top job, deposing his long-serving and charismatic boss Jean Chrétien. Having fulfilled a long-held ambition, Martin found the crown crumbling to dust in his hands, giving the appearance, rightly or wrongly, of being out of his depth and hobbled by indecision, leading a Party divided by hostile factions which had run out of ideas and was bleeding votes. In 2006 the Liberals would go on to lose the elections to the Conservatives. The men in black hoped that the return of Ignatieff, an outsider without a dog in the paralysing internal fights of the Liberals, would revive the Party's fortunes. Ignatieff took the plunge, returned to Canada and within a few years was leading the Liberal Party in Opposition.

Ignatieff describes this slim book as an 'analytical memoir'. Rather than simply provide an autobiographical account of his political career, Ignatieff uses his experience of the seven years after that fateful dinner to consider modern democratic politics as a vocation. Having entered politics so late in life, Ignatieff's book demonstrates a keen eye for the many challenges of the profession: the need to find common ground (or the winning critique) in a pluralist society

with a cacophony of viewpoints, to make contrivance look uncontrived and to harness that mysterious ability to make a connection with the electorate. Ignatieff is candid about his own failings: a certain social awkwardness, a habit of avoiding eye contact with strangers, a tendency to blurt out the first thing that came to mind, even on occasion alienating an audience by mispronouncing the name of the town he was giving a speech in. One can detect a hint of envy in his description of a meeting with Obama: 'I will never forget the grip on my elbow, the quick mention of a book of mine, a reference to a mutual friend [...] and his casual grace, together with the capacity to make you feel, when you were speaking, that you were the only person of interest to him in the room.' Only by attempting to do these things did Ignatieff come to realise how difficult they are, giving him newfound respect for the professionals.

Ignatieff also found communication a challenge, complaining that, 'you leave a charitable realm where people cut you some slack, finish your sentences and accept that you didn't quite mean what you said [...] you enter a world of lunatic literal-mindedness where only the words that come out of your mouth actually count.' Ignatieff made some catastrophic blunders on this front. For example when in 2006 war broke out in Lebanon, Ignatieff told an interviewer that he wasn't 'losing sleep' over casualties in Hezbollah-held areas in Lebanon. When the Canadian Lebanese community reacted with fury, he suggested that Israeli forces had committed 'war crimes'. The result was achieving the near impossible feat of offending all parties in the conflict. The problem with Ignatieff's whingeing that 'the missing context for my remarks was actually my whole life' is that if the electorate shouldn't take the words that come out of your mouth at face value, how else should they judge you?

Ignatieff was soon to find that the electorate soon did turn to the narrative of his life as a means to judge him, though not in the way he would have hoped. It was a profound shock for him that on entering Canadian politics, many of the attacks directed against him were not so much at what he said, but his right to say anything at all. Ignatieff argues that 'standing', a term from law meaning the right granted by a judge to have your day in court, has become the primary area of combat in modern politics. Ignatieff had first been recruited because of his outsider and untainted status, securing the party leadership only three years after his arrival in parliament. Yet it was precisely Ignatieff's outsider status that formed the basis of relentless Conservative attack ads with slogans such as 'Michael Ignatieff: just visiting' and 'he didn't come home for you'. What made it more difficult to bear was that many of Ignatieff's party colleagues, resentful that a Harvard professor with little political experience had been parachuted into a leadership position above them, thought the same.

As Ignatieff's own approval ratings began to plummet his response to the ads, attempting to paint himself as a prodigal son returning to the motherland after decades abroad, failed to connect with the electorate. With the Liberal party lacking the funds to pay for attack ads of their own, Ignatieff decided to counteract his carpetbagger image by spending a summer undertaking a gruelling tour to give speeches across Canada. Unfortunately, delivering these speeches, preaching to the converted core vote, did nothing to shift the

polls. In addition, the heavy demands of time criss-crossing such an enormous country had some unfortunate consequences. At the televised debates before the 2011 elections the fact that Ignatieff had the worse parliamentary attendance record for any MP was seized upon: in a widely reported remark one opponent said that if Ignatieff was campaigning for promotion, he ought at least to show up for work. In the elections that followed, Ignatieff would lead his Party to the worst electoral defeat in its history, losing his parliamentary seat with over half his fellow Liberal MPs.

Looking back at his ham-fisted response to the negative attacks of the Conservatives, Ignatieff finds a ring of truth to the insights of Machiavelli, whose own political career in Florence had ended in a similarly dismal fashion. In a passage of *The Prince* which can leave a bitter taste in the mouth of modern readers, Machiavelli describes the task of politicians as wooing the mistress of their fates, the fickle goddess Fortuna. His version of 'fortune favours the brave' has a sado-masochist and misogynistic twist:

It is better to be headstrong than cautious for Fortune is a lady. It is necessary, if you want to master her, to beat and strike her. And one sees she more often submits to those who act boldly than to those who proceed in a calculating fashion. Moreover, since she is a lady, she smiles on the young, for they are less cautious, more ruthless and overcome her with boldness.

From this passage Ignatieff takes the insight that politics is 'the ceaseless attempt of wily humans to adapt to what Fortuna throws in their paths'. The negative attacks made on Ignatieff's standing were no exception. All politicians are challenged as to why they deem themselves worthy of high office. If they are wrong-footed when these challenges come, the electorate will either conclude that the accusations are true or the politician lacks the backbone to stand up for himself. Ignatieff's experience brings to mind the 2004 American election campaign, when John Kerry faced the 'swift-boat' attack-ads. Featuring Vietnam War veterans, these ads attacked Kerry's military service which formed a central plank of his candidacy. Ignatieff says he found Kerry's failure to stand up for himself at the time, or to point out how George W. Bush had been protected from service in Vietnam thanks to the machinations of his father, to be completely baffling. When Obama faced a comparable challenge in 2008 with the Reverend Wright controversy, his bold response strengthened his candidacy as he asked why the civil rights revolution had failed to bring closure to the racial divisions of his country. Looking back Ignatieff draws the lesson from this comparison as: forget about dignity, if you don't defend yourself, why should the people think you will stand up for them? Yet while Kerry might have missed an opportunity to pivot on the challenge posed to him by the swift-boat ads, Ignatieff had comparatively little to go on. There was no denying he had lived out of Canada for thirty years, and so the ads did their worst and struck a mortal blow to his standing.

If Ignatieff couldn't have done much to rebut the negative attack ads, there was one moment when boldness might have averted the eventual disaster. The opportunity came at the very start of his

tenure as Liberal leader, which Ignatieff gained after a general election held at the height of the financial crisis in 2008 delivered a hung parliament. In contrast to the last British elections, the third largest party (the left-wing New Democratic Party) was eager to ally with the Liberal opposition, despite the fact that the Conservatives had gained the most seats. Yet it was Ignatieff himself who refused to take power in this unsatisfactory manner. Given what later transpired, it is hardly surprising that Ignatieff admits to often replaying the events of this critical juncture in his mind. Ignatieff justifies his decision by saying that a 'coalition of losers' would have been branded an act of opportunism and tested the patience of the voters. This would certainly have been the case. Nonetheless, by taking power at a time of tremendous economic uncertainty, Ignatieff would at least have gained the opportunity to garner credibility by the act of governing. If he had been effective and competent at this, then the Conservative attack ads could have been rebutted with a record in government. Instead, by doing what he deemed the right thing, Ignatieff was left with the cruel fate of betraying a lack of self-belief. If you don't want to fight for leadership of the country and tackle this global economic crisis, perhaps you don't think you're up to it. So why should we think that you're up to it?

That underlying lack of self-belief is perhaps owing to the fact that Ignatieff couldn't pinpoint what his cause was when he re-entered politics. Rather than simply coming into politics to enact a pre-conceived ideology or deep-held convictions, Ignatieff stressed that it was the sedimentation of thousands of conversations with the electorate that shaped his politics. To those cynics who see politicians seeking to make a difference to their own lives, rather than anyone else's, Ignatieff remarks that meeting the electorate one by one can give you a cause. Unfortunately for him, trying to generate convictions from myriad personal interactions with people was going to be slow and difficult. If he felt that he had a firmer grasp of Canada's problems by the time of the 2011 election, it was too late. Politics had introduced Ignatieff to the people he wanted to do politics for, now he could do nothing for them.

When *Fire and Ashes* was published, it didn't take long for some newspapers in this country to look for parallels between Ignatieff and figures in British politics. If Jean Chrétien most resembled Tony Blair and Paul Martin Gordon Brown, who was the British Michael Ignatieff? The answer, according to *The Times*, was Ed Miliband, 'an aloof, awkward intellectual incapable of convincing the voters'. Yet it is important to remember the differences that separate Miliband from the inexperienced intellectual fallen amongst politicians that was Ignatieff. For all Miliband's stress on the importance of ideas in politics (it is claimed that Piketty's *Capital* is his current bedtime reading) and his past patronage of intellectual gurus such as Michael Sandel and Maurice Glasman, an examination of his formative political environment suggests that this is combined with a tactical political sense honed by many years at the centre of government. Gordon Brown's former spin doctor Damian McBride suggests in his memoirs that this has something to do with his development in the Treasury alongside Ed Balls as a protégé of Brown. McBride notes that in their discussions, the two Eds and Gordon combined complex social and economic the-

ory with a strong political and tactical instinct. All three stressed the critical importance of straddling theory and politics. They dismissed colleagues with too much of the former as 'off in the clouds', whilst hacks who treated politics as a tribal game devoid of principles were 'lightweight' and 'superficial'. None of them, however, would have described themselves as intellectuals in politics. When Brown (the first Prime Minister to have a PhD) visited Oxford University to deliver a lecture in 2009, he joked that 'the qualities of academia: objectivity, rationality, impartiality, the disinterested pursuit of truth and knowledge, these were all the qualities I had to leave behind when I went into politics.'

As someone who crossed from the academy into politics (and back again), Ignatieff rejects the easy disdain felt by politicians and academics towards each other. He believes the latter, like most people, fail to appreciate how difficult a job being a politician can be. In the political arena he found the 'lofty disdain' of political commentators in the stands particularly difficult to bear, especially given that he had once felt free to dispense such lectures himself from the sidelines. He ends his memoir by warning those wanting to enter politics that it is a tough old game, quoting the words of Max Weber's celebrated lecture *Politics as a Vocation*:

Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards. It takes both passion and perspective [...] man would have not attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible [...] Only he has the calling for politics who is sure that he shall not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say 'In spite of all' has the calling for politics.

For those men and women who see politics as their calling, Ignatieff's memoir serves as a warning as well as an inspiration. Politics can be a noble struggle to defend what you believe against the odds and the whims of Fortuna, but this must come with an acceptance both of failure with equanimity and a refusal to allow success to distort your character for the worst. If Ignatieff bears the scars of a career which ended in failure, at least he can console himself with the thought that there are few other memoirs which can do more to inspire others to the success which eluded his own grasp.

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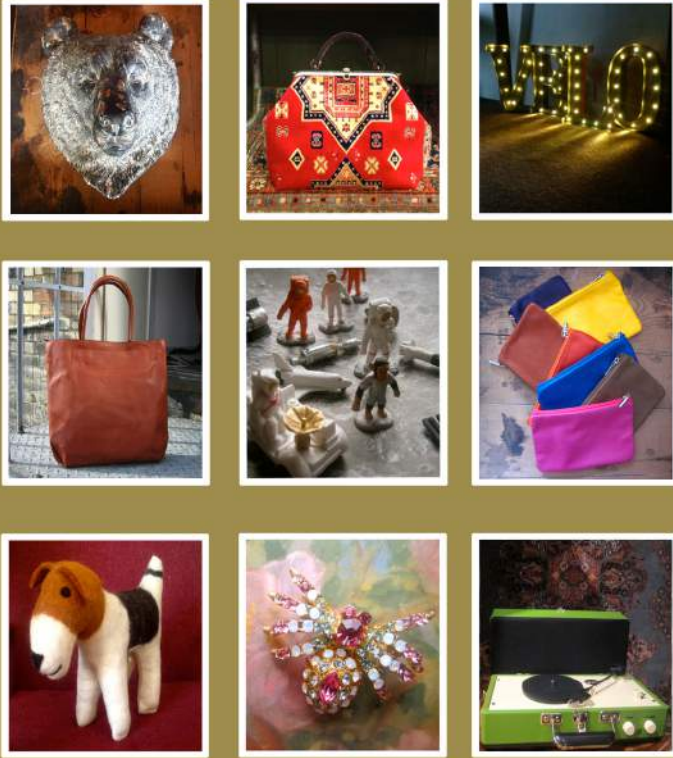
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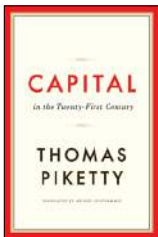


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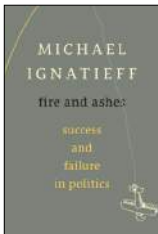
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