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Students often surprise their teachers. Today's students are no exception. After a few decades of fretting about student cynicism and apathy, educators are confronted with a generation of students described variously as "optimistic," "confident," and even "comfortable with authority." This is the so-called "Millennial" Generation, which includes those born in the mid-1980s and later. Every generation develops in response to the conditions of the age and ends up puzzling its elders. So, what has made the "Millennials" into what they are? Obviously, the existence of the Internet and other information technologies is a factor. For today's students, the world is available at their fingertips in a matter of seconds. They plug a computer into a data port in their dorm or log-on to a wireless signal while sitting in the quad and gain access to almost any information in the world. This has created a different kind of student. With so much available, Millennials have learned to consume information and dispose of it rapidly. They can find so much information on any given topic that, instead of searching through an article or a book for the most useful section, they rely primarily on a process of eliminating articles by the hundreds until they find the few that give them everything they need in the most accessible form.

This skill at filtering is important in their personal lives as well. Millennials are bombarded with white noise, some of it commercial, some of it personal, some of it just plain noise. They have cell phones at the ready to interrupt any conversation. Most can't sit at a computer without turning on an Instant Message program that will bombard them with stunted salutations from distant friends and families. To cope with these distractions, they develop their own sorts of survival skills. They learn how to rearrange the noise to their liking. Instead of listening to whatever is playing on the radio, Millennials download the songs they want to hear onto their iPods and slap on little white headphones so that they don't have to hear anything else.

This is not meant as a lament for a lost generation. I leave that to others. In his last novel, *I am Charlotte Simmons*, Tom Wolfe drew an ugly portrait of students on today's elite university campuses. In Wolfe's telling, Millennials are self-absorbed and spoiled. Their college days are a period of extended adolescence during which they feed insatiable appetites for sex, drugs, and popularity. A curious lot they are not. Wolfe seems appalled by a generation that has no noble passions, no compassion, and—perhaps worst of all for Wolfe—no sense of style. These are not the students I have come to know. I like today's students. It is true that they are an optimistic and confident group. They have seen the world (if only through their computer monitors), and they saw nothing of which to be afraid. This untutored worldliness—even if often naïve—makes many of these students eager to learn and open to new experiences. Yet these students do present new challenges.

Among these challenges is the Millennials' belief that they have seen it all. In some ways, they have. Every sort of lifestyle is on display somewhere on one of thousands of television shows on hundreds of cable channels. Any sort of ideological tract or tirade can be downloaded in a moment from anywhere in the world. There is little mystery left in a world that is always available at the end of your fingertips. The Millennials' world is disenchanted—barren of surprise. "Been there. Done that," is their mantra.

This leads to another, more serious problem. When one is used to a world in which so much is readily available, it becomes difficult to appreciate things that are less immediately accessible. Our students are great with information. They know how to grab tiny pieces of the world and rearrange them to suit their own preferences and purposes.
They are not so good with wisdom—with powerful minds who challenge them, with ideas that are less useful than they are transformative. Unfortunately, so much of what a university education can offer students is not something easily and quickly achieved. I assign Plato's *Republic* almost every semester. My strategy toward teaching this dialog is simple. I try to pique my students' interest in this difficult text by helping them understand what is at stake. I can demonstrate appropriate interpretive tools and help them to ask the right questions, but I don't believe that I can truly teach the *Republic*. At least, I cannot teach it in the sense of condensing it into easily consumable sound bites. If my students want to learn this dialogue, then they will have to spend hours working through and testing its arguments on their own. It is the kind of learning that requires patience, focus, and discipline. There are no short cuts. "Fine things are hard," said Socrates.

Perhaps I exaggerate the problem. A number of my students have doggedly engaged even the most difficult texts I have assigned. Maybe the problem is not so new. No doubt, students of all generations have preferred easy assignments to hard, but there is also no doubt that Millennials live in a culture that reinforces their worst tendencies. My students too often remind me of the democratic souls that Socrates describes in the *Republic*. They are charming, pleasant young men and women—tolerant and uninhibited. They are curious in the sense that they will try anything once. And they are so used to having access to everything, that they seem intent to try it all. They are curious about everything, serious about nothing.

Sometimes teachers should tailor their teaching methods to the tastes of a new generation, but students also can benefit from a more counter-cultural approach. Our classrooms should not always be models of the "Information Age" in which students are bombarded with streams of data from multiple directions. Sometimes, they should be models of a more patient, focused sort of learning. In our classrooms, students should find a refuge from the white noise that fills their world, as well as a place where they are not allowed the benefit of quick and easy Internet answers. We must encourage our students' curiosity without promot-
Dear Editor,

Congratulations on a job well done. Your first issue augurs for an editorial tenure marked by new voices and interesting articles. I found the essays by von Heyking, Creech and Meilaender (even though I disagree with his views) engaging, balanced, and informative. Regrettably, none of these virtues marked the column by Robert Benne. To dismiss the problem of diversity as merely a “phony” issue masking “liberal hegemony” constitutes partisan propaganda of the least enlightened sort. Can’t we get beyond this refusal to address the most pressing issues facing higher education? Would Benne look suspiciously at the thoughtful essay on ozone by Professor Morris because the ratio of Democrats to Republicans in the “hard sciences” is 7.6 to 1? The absurd notion that “political liberalism reigns (my emphasis) in most sections of academia” carries the false implication that “ideological homogeneity in the academy squelches the genuine discourse on great issues.” Instead of such baseless claims, The Cresset and its readers deserve the thoughts and opinions of writers deeply concerned with the real issues confronting universities: the restriction of education to the brightest and the wealthiest; the freezing of salaries and benefits at a time of escalating tuition; the disappearance of liberal arts traditions in the face of increasing professionalization and credentialism; the presentist bias within the disciplines themselves; the loss of federal support for education; the continuing decline in proficiency in mathematics, foreign languages, and other disciplines; the failure to address discrimination in hiring and recruitment of minorities; the ongoing lack of employee benefits comparable to those of business professionals; and so on. Whoever addresses these issues in a serious and critical spirit, be she conservative or liberal, will have my attention. Let me conclude by saying that my irritation with Benne’s article was provoked in part by its contrast with the rest of the pieces in a fine issue, one that promises to raise the journal to a well-deserved prominence. I look forward to the success of The Cresset under your editorship.

William Olmsted
Professor of Humanities in Christ College
Valparaiso, Indiana

Robert Benne replies:

I’m sorry that Professor Olmsted found my column so lacking in the qualities he found in the rest of the last issue of The Cresset. I plead guilty to being unbalanced, since indeed I was making a polemical point—that in all the talk about diversity several major kinds of diversity (political and cultural) are conveniently left out of the discussion. Perhaps I was overly suspicious in suggesting those other kinds of diversity—race, gender, sexual orientation—were used as camouflage for liberal hegemony, but the effect of political and cultural hegemony is the same. Genuine discourse on many great issues—ecological, foreign policy, cultural, judicial—is impeded. One voice does not a dialogue make. Further, such hegemony filters into many parts of the educational system, though I would agree that many classes in the university are not politicized.

On the same day that I received Professor Olmsted’s letter, I received an e-mail from a pretty perceptive young Christian in his first year at a large, nearby university. He writes: “It is amazing to see how many classes are politicized as well, usually from a Marxist perspective. I am constantly bombarded with the propositions that American society is grossly unjust, that our Constitution and our founding are jokes, that capitalism is evil, that white males are the world’s oppressors, that Christianity is bigoted and homophobic as well as intellectual suicide, that George
W. Bush is on the same moral level as Hitler and bin Laden, and that our country is a two-class system of a few wealthy oppressors and hordes of people who can barely survive. In my freshman seminar we were forced to take a ‘diversity test’ to find out our level of tolerance. Most students were labeled ‘unconscious oppressors and bigots’ and I was chastised for being a member of an organization (Christian ministry group) that excludes other belief systems.”

That sounds pretty much like the complaints I heard from a cross-section of students at one of our Lutheran liberal arts colleges, about which I wrote in my column. Perhaps Professor Olmsted is deaf to these sorts of things because he enjoys the homogeneity of the academy and doesn’t want to be disturbed by contrasting opinions of a political and cultural sort.

I agree that many of the issues Professor Olmsted lists are worthy of discussion, but I find it curious that he can angrily shrug off the major points I made. They are at least worthy of a counterargument with supporting data rather than an easy dismissal. Concern about this issue is fast becoming a national conversation that deserves debate, not dismissal.

Robert Benne
Director of the Center for Religion and Society
Roanoke College
Salem, Virginia
Robert Maynard Hutchins, John Dewey,
and the nature of the liberal arts

Lisa Heldke

In 1936, University of Chicago president Robert Maynard Hutchins published a slim volume entitled The Higher Learning in America. In it, Hutchins argued that higher education had fallen into incoherence, and was headed for tragedy and destruction (his actual words were “vocationalism, empiricism and disorder”) unless it turned from the path on which it had embarked—a path violating both the spirit and the letter of the liberal arts tradition (100). Hutchins also proposed a means to avert this disaster; a model of higher learning conceived as “the single-minded pursuit of the intellectual virtues” (32) and of “truth for its own sake” (33).

When Hutchins wrote The Higher Learning, he was thirty-seven years old and already had been president of Chicago for seven years. Even after seven years at the helm, the institution on which he sought to leave his mark bore the unmistakable stamp of another man, a man who had left the institution when Hutchins was still in knee pants.

That man had gone on to Columbia University where, some thirty years later, he was still teaching and publishing (voluminously) at the age of seventy-seven. His ideas could not have been more antithetical to Hutchins’s—and they had come to exert enormous influence on educational theory in this country. While Hutchins argued that truth “for its own sake” was a pure quantity that must be dispensed in an atmosphere uncontaminated by vocational interests, empirical sciences, or attention to current events, this philosopher understood “knowledge for its own sake” to be inextricably and valuably intertwined with “vocational knowledge,” both within higher education and in the larger society.

Thirty years after his departure from the University of Chicago, philosopher John Dewey was still a burr under Robert Maynard Hutchins’s saddle, still shaping curricular and pedagogical thinking at that institution.

When The Higher Learning was published, Dewey, predictably, reviewed it. This was not snide mean-spiritedness on Dewey’s part. Hutchins had written a high profile book about higher education that attacked ideas clearly identifiable as Dewey’s, or traceable to Dewey’s influence. He wrote a measured review, concurring that higher education was in a mess, but sharply disagreeing with Hutchins’s prescribed means for cleaning up that mess. (To his credit, he never once called Hutchins “young whippersnapper” or “snotnose kid.”) For a year, the two published increasingly vituperative essays debating Hutchins’s proposals. Their debate simmered for another eight years.

I dredge up the dispute between Dewey and Hutchins because this very public episode in an age-old debate about the nature of the liberal arts bears striking, potentially fruitful similarities to episodes in our own time. The debate over which studies properly belong in—or legitimately could be added to—the liberal arts is at least as old as liberal arts institutions—and probably as old as the codification of the trivium and quadrivium themselves. In fact, one could argue that it is as old as classical Athens. Plato worried about essentially this matter in the Republic, as did Aristotle in his Nichomachean Ethics. Indeed, both Hutchins and Dewey appealed to tradition—particularly to the ancients—in pleading their respective cases. But their views of that tradition—and of the lessons to take from it—differed significantly.

Hutchins emphasized the contents of the education proposed by the Greeks, but largely ignored its context—the fact that this was education for a particularly constituted citizen of a particular kind of democracy, who must be “liberated” from particular forms of intellectual bondage. In contrast, Dewey adopted the most general aims of Greek education—namely, that education ought to liberate students and also prepare them for citi-
zenship. He recognized that, just as the Greeks designed their education for a particular time and place, so too must we. It will not do to adopt the content of Greek education whole cloth, for they and we understand liberation and citizenship in some fundamentally different ways.

Perhaps we can find insights in the Dewey/Hutchins exchange to guide our own work as liberal artisans.

Robert Maynard Hutchins: "truth for its own sake"

Hutchins conceives an unambiguous distinction between liberal learning (as he puts it, "knowing why") and vocational learning ("knowing how"). Knowing why is the "pursuit of truth for its own sake," while knowing how is merely "the preparation of men and women for their life work" (33). These aims are not simply different from each other, but directly antagonistic to each other. To pursue truth requires one to do nothing less than abandon one's efforts to develop the roles that define our human lives—worker, citizen, family member, community participant (33). Such "vocational" studies, along with endeavors like "body building and character building," "social graces and tricks of the trade" (77), current events and even empirical sciences, prevent one from searching for knowledge for its own sake. (The elimination of character building is rather surprising. One might expect Hutchins to subscribe to the widely-held view that the liberal arts are centrally concerned with building moral character—a view having its roots in Aristotle.) Vocational efforts thwart the project of liberal learning, either by failing to prioritize knowledge of the truth that is "everywhere the same" (66), or by denying that such truth even exists.

In both his critique of the current university and his proposal for reform, Hutchins hearkens back to the Greeks, and seeks to develop a system of education that embodies what he understands to be its virtues. He credits the Greek system of knowing for its centralizing of metaphysics, its emphasis on eternal truths, its distinction between immediate and final ends, and its distinction between liberal and servile arts.

Hutchins's arguments may sound familiar. After all, he hardly represents the lunatic fringe. It is not crazy to argue that the liberal arts are the single-minded pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Hutchins simply elucidates a view of the liberal arts that is held (if not always explicitly) by many contemporary "purist" defenders of the liberal arts. I hear echoes of Hutchins in my friend, a 1940s graduate of Smith College, who decided to stop giving money to her alma mater because it instituted an engineering degree—a degree she regards as vulgarly vocational.

At my own institution (a liberal arts college that offers, in addition to the expected courses of study in the humanities and sciences, majors in finance, accounting, nursing, education, and athletic training), I hear, not infrequently, the harumphing complaint that various departments don't belong at this institution, because they're not genuine parts of the liberal arts tradition. The problem? These majors are too practical/vocational/professional in their focus. While at least some of these maligned departments can reply by claiming squatters' rights (they've been here longer than some traditional liberal arts departments, including my own), and while many can also identify specific ways in which their curricula fulfill Gustavus Adolphus College's mission statement, it's nevertheless true that they won't be found on anyone's list of "true" liberal arts disciplines. On a widely-held understanding of the liberal arts, the disciplines in that tradition stand in diametric opposition to the vocational and the practical; they are "useless"—and proud of it. Hutchins unquestionably stands on firm ground with his critique.

After hermetically sealing the liberal arts from all things vocational, Hutchins nevertheless finds himself defending their study on the basis of their deep and long-lasting utility—in other words, their value as preparation for, well, for life work and membership in the human community.
True, there is nothing strictly inconsistent about Hutchins doing so. He is simply pointing out that, while utility oughtn’t be the aim of education, we can, fortuitously, achieve it by these means, so isn’t that a terrific bonus for your four years of effort?

Nevertheless, while it is not logically inconsistent, Hutchins’s admission of the vocational utility of knowing for its own sake does point to the permeability of those two educational aims—and thus to an alternative understanding of the liberal arts tradition, an understanding that argues that the division between the “vocational/practical” and the “purely abstract/intellectual/theoretical” is not nearly so sharp as some of its defenders wish to claim. Advocates of this alternative perspective use very different criteria for deciding which studies do and don’t “belong” in a liberal arts college—and come up with a rather different understanding of what belonging means. A more promising—and potentially liberatory—model of the liberal arts arises when we begin by understanding these aims—“knowing why” and “knowing how”—not as discrete and oppositional, but as deeply, fruitfully, humanly intertwined. Enter John Dewey.

John Dewey: the instrumental and the consummatory

To elucidate Dewey’s vision of the liberal arts, I begin at a more general level, with his concept of human knowing. Knowing for Dewey must be understood as always emerging from, and responding to, a particular context—a time, a place, a problem, a situation. Knowing, furthermore, has both “instrumental” and “consummatory” facets—it aims at solving identifiable problems, and it is also potentially beautiful and worth contemplating. Any kind of knowing is like this, whether it be the study of recently-discovered ancient texts or the study of recently-uncovered ancient plumbing in your just-purchased house. Plunge into any inquiry, and you will find yourself, at various points, pursuing the answer to very practical questions (“why is there a drip in the living room ceiling?”) and also contemplating abstract, even profound matters that have no particular or immediate connection to any situation presently at hand (“is the water stain on my ceil-

ing a work of art if its creation was accidental and not intentional?”).

My example is trivial; the point is not. The human activity of knowing is a complex, indissoluble mesh of consummatory knowing “for its own sake” and instrumental knowing, pursued for the sake of accomplishing some practical, concrete, or vocational aim. To attempt to saw, chisel, plow, winnow, or otherwise divide the instrumental and the consummatory into two conflictual endeavors, as Hutchins does, is a supremely paradoxical act. It is paradoxical because, upon making the division, one is then forced to turn around and explain the apparent paradox that abstract understandings regularly present themselves as useful solutions to all sorts of ordinary, day-to-day, practical problems we humans encounter. If we don’t begin by dividing the instrumental from the consummatory, that paradox never materializes.

Dewey believes that this division, which Hutchins takes to be a foundational fact about the nature of knowledge, is more properly understood as an artifact of history, a reflection of the particular social organization of ancient Greek society, in which sharp divisions separated leisured citizens from those who served them. This social division, Dewey suggests, lies at the bottom of the Greek division between the instrumental and the consummatory. The liberal or “free” arts stand in direct contrast to the servile arts—those arts of making and doing that are the exclusive purview of slaves, servants, wives, and all those who are not free. Greek liberal education aimed to develop those consummatory intellectual capacities taken to be ends in themselves. For the Greeks, the employment of such intellectual powers was necessarily the activity of leisure; it was not to be taken up by someone whose life was manual labor. Indeed, it was a mark of the citizen’s leisure—provided “courtesy” of the workers who served him—that he could pursue this higher order thinking. If we no longer adopt the Greek social distinction between leisured citizens and those who labor on their behalf, then we must also question this epistemological distinction.

Though Dewey rejects the Greek distinction between instrumental and consummatory, he nevertheless embraces certain of Aristotle’s general educational aims: that education ought to 1) fit
one for citizenship, and 2) liberate humans, enabling us to attain to the highest, broadest level of thinking, acting, and living possible in our world. As I've already suggested, the world for which we are being educated differs dramatically from the one for which Plato and Aristotle conceived their education. Contemporary American conceptions of the nature of citizenship differ markedly from the Athenian model, on which the manual labor of the many freed up some few men—those called citizens—for lives of contemplation and reflection. So too does our understanding of liberation and its requirements differ from the Greeks'. Because the vocation of citizenship and the liberation it requires are the very goals at which Greek liberal education aimed, it stands to reason that we must retool the Greek model of education in light of our very different conceptions of these aims.

In the remainder of this essay, I suggest two preconditions upon which a Deweyan model of the liberal arts will rest. First, while Dewey and Aristotle agree that citizenship ought to be at the center of our educational enterprise, their fundamental disagreements with respect to the meanings of citizenship and leisure require that we significantly revise the Greek prescription for education—specifically, that we set aside the sharp division between liberal and servile arts. Second, we must reconceive human liberation in light of our particular context. A conception of liberation cannot be generic, but must address the fact that humans are prevented from intellectual flourishing in ways that are very particular to the societies they inhabit. It won’t do for us to adopt whole cloth an understanding of liberation designed to free the intellectual capacities of the Greek citizen.

citizenship: different concepts for different contexts

I’ve suggested that, when we embrace the Greek tradition out of which the liberal arts grew, we must also attend to the principles and presuppositions upon which it rested—including the social and political presumptions. Dewey’s model of liberal learning does so. As a result, he takes from the Greeks a commitment to liberatory education for citizenship, but rejects those aspects of Greek education and Greek society that speak particularly to Greek conceptions of citizenship and liberation—and that fly in the face of his contemporary concept of democratic citizenship.

One important difference between Dewey and the Greeks lies in the fact that citizenship is no longer a full time occupation for most citizens of contemporary democracies, as it was in the democracy of which Plato wrote. Our democracies are not structured to require such a level of participation, and most of us don’t have the wherewithal to make citizenship our job even if we wanted to. Our concept of liberal arts education must address the fact that, unlike those Athenian citizens, we are being educated for a world in which we are citizens, but also paid workers and home-keepers. In other terms, it must incorporate both instrumental and consummatory knowing.

In one respect, such a move represents a sharp departure from the Greek model. In mingling instrumental and consummatory knowing—the “practical” and the “for its own sake”—it mixes the work of citizen and slave in a manner Plato would find entirely unacceptable. (Hutchins, of course, also refuses this mixing; thus does he reject the suggestion that the “practical” could have any place in the liberal arts.) In another crucial respect, however, Dewey’s model embodies the very spirit of Greek education. After all, Greek liberal education was deeply vocational. It trained students for the vocation of citizenship. Dewey’s model embraces the Greek emphasis on education for citizens, but recognizes that the contemporary vocation of citizenship requires us to mix instrumental and consummatory knowing. A pure “for its own sake” education won’t do the job for us (as it allegedly would have for a Greek citizen).

For Dewey, the interrelationship between vocational and liberal learning rests upon a fundamental epistemological relationship between the practical and the theoretical. As he puts the matter, “theory, properly understood, [has] a practical value and practice an intellectual function and content” (“Theory and Practice,” 354–55). This recognition, in turn, leads him to assert that there can be no sharp division between the vocational and the liberal—between work aimed at fulfilling basic human needs and that aimed at the highest intellectual achievements of which humans are capable.
In short, once we attend to the different conceptions of Greek and contemporary conceptions of citizenship, we must embrace a different understanding of the relationship between "pure" and "instrumental" knowing—a difference that necessarily has an impact upon our understanding of the liberal arts.

In a society in which most all citizens also work at paying jobs, we need a distinctly "un-Greek" sense of vocation that integrates these activities and acknowledges their roles in citizens' public lives. It would be the height of insanity to adopt a model of education that fitted one well for the life of a well-placed Athenian citizen—a model focused entirely on "knowledge for its own sake." It would also be the height of stupidity to relegate mountains of workers to intellectual ignominy because they are "mere" laborers. We need a Deweyan sense of vocation that sees the two goals of education—the "for its own sake" and the "practical"—as intertwined.

A Deweyan understanding of the vocation of citizenship requires us to challenge the notion that the free citizen exercises the highest form of freedom when engaged in pure contemplation. In a society such as ours, why would this be the highest goal? While a liberal arts education ought to foster the highest level of thinking of which humans are capable, abstract contemplation undertaken at leisure may not (always, necessarily) constitute that highest level. The consummatory and contemplative might always be a component of our highest reasoning, but it won't be the component that makes that reasoning the highest human achievement.

In our world, the distinction between labor and leisure—so sharp in the Athenian vision, and so implicated in the whole understanding of what liberal education is—loses its edges. Indeed, it loses its descriptive usefulness altogether in many contexts and becomes a downright hindrance. What does become—what should become—of the Greek veneration of knowledge "for its own sake" in a context in which the definitions of labor and leisure are much more interdependent? We defenders of the liberal arts tend to continue to venerate the notion of knowledge for its own sake—and to police the borders of our venues of "useless knowledge," to make sure no one is doing anything to make it practical and thereby sullying it. Some advocates of the liberal arts venerate this "good for nothing" aspect of the tradition above all other aspects.

But from Dewey's perspective, a liberal arts education cannot afford to ignore the fact that labor and leisure, in our world, are deeply intertwined. As Dewey puts it in *Democracy and Education*:

> While the distinction [between labor and leisure] is often thought to be intrinsic and absolute, it is really historical and social. It originated, so far as conscious formulation is concerned, in Greece, and was based upon the fact that the truly human life was lived only by a few who subsisted upon the results of the labor of others. The problem of education in a democratic society is to do away with the dualism and to construct a course of studies which makes thought a guide of free practice for all and which makes leisure a reward of accepting responsibility for service, rather than a state of exemption from it (270).

Perhaps a liberal arts education has a particular obligation to draw our eyes always higher, to the most abstract of our vocations—namely, to be human—but that occupation itself is in the end also always the most supremely practical one. Thus, it is "higher" not in the sense of being purer, but in the sense of being more important, and more universally important. But part of its importance lies precisely in its being so very "practical," so relevant to the practices of our everyday lives.

**the liberal arts as liberating**

The second element of this Deweyan alternative addresses the sense in which the liberal arts are liberating. While Greek education sought to liberate its citizens by freeing them from the twin dangers of ignorance and prejudice, a Deweyan conception must address our much different contemporary understanding of human liberation.

What becomes of the old link between education and citizenship in contemporary democracies, in which invidious, hierarchical restrictions on citizenship have slowly, incrementally fallen away?
Freedom and citizenship, in Athens, were conceived in relation to slavery and servitude. Dewey argues that this social distinction between the contemplative life of the free man and the manual work of the laborer who supported him became reified as a division "between a liberal education, having to do with the...life...devoted to knowing for its own sake, and a useful, practical training for mechanical occupations, devoid of intellectual and aesthetic content" (Democracy and Education, 270). Such a division made sense in the Athenian democracy, where citizens could devote themselves to intellectual pursuits, secure in the knowledge that someone—someone prevented by birth from being a citizen—was taking care of dinner. Dinner-makers needed all and only practical training in dinner making; citizens needed education liberating them from ignorance and prejudice, preparing them for abstract thought at the highest level.

But how does such a model translate to a contemporary democracy such as the United States, a democracy that rejects, at least in principle, the distinction between free citizens and dinner-makers? What happens to the liberatory aims of liberal education, when we reject the very notion of inherent servitude and the concept of freedom that rests on it? Dewey asserts that we must change the very nature of the education, when we reject the very notion of inherent servitude and the concept of freedom that rests on it? Dewey asserts that we must change the very nature of the education, such that it does not encode the division between elite/leisure citizenship and brute/servile labor in the first place. The lives and work of citizens in the democracy to which we aspire would, ideally, be those of thoughtful dinner-makers, characterized by modes of knowing in which contemplation informs practical action, and action guides and grounds contemplation.

Everyone in such a democracy would need access to education that would prepare them to live lives of thoughtful practice. Or, as Dewey more eloquently puts the matter, "The present function of the liberal arts college, in my belief, is to use the resources put at our disposal alike by humane literature, by science, by subjects that have a vocational bearing, so as to secure ability to appraise the needs and issues of the world in which we live. Such an education would be liberating not in spite of the fact that it departs widely from the seven liberal arts of the medieval period, but just because it would do for the contemporary world what those arts tried to do for the world in which they took form" ("The Problem of the Liberal Arts College," 280).

What, then, becomes of the liberal arts in a Deweyan picture? What is left of Hutchins's tradition, of pure knowledge that gets thrown into the hurly burly of everyday life where it is forced to try to concentrate while vocational knowing has its radio cranked up too loud? Something very important—something that has in fact lain at the heart of liberal learning since its germination in ancient Athens. What remains when we reunite knowing how and knowing that, is the recognition that a liberal arts education ought to liberate us, and enable us to contribute to the liberation of others. I can think of no greater wish for students of the liberal arts than that they depart their undergraduate institutions as skilled "liberal artisans," prepared to continue their inquiries wherever they might take them, but always attentive to the ways, large and small, that their work as thoughtful practitioners might contribute to the liberation of others.

Lisa Heldke is Professor of Philosophy at Gustavus Adolphus College. This essay is based on remarks made to the Gustavus Adolphus College Commencement Exercises held on 29 May 2005 and is part of the author's ongoing exploration of various facets of liberal arts education motivated by her experiences at Gustavus Adolphus College.

Works Cited


The soft thud above me might be the cat, but I know it is my son placing the barbells on the carpet. Derek works at the weights in a way that makes me worry it is hopeless. On the first night he tried to lift, he struggled to push just the empty bar over his head.

Now, without walking upstairs to check, I know there are two small doughnuts, two and one half pounds each, he presses ten times. He has asked for a bench; he has rummaged through the medicine chest for talcum powder, equating his efforts with the delicate needs of a billiards expert.

These workouts sustain his faith in growth. Only one boy in his class is smaller. Derek understands heredity, and he is frustrated by the disparity between our heights.

I have reminded him about favorable odds and time. He finishes three sets and starts down the steps to check for results in a mirror by the side door. When he sees I am watching, he turns his back to the glass. “No more ‘Wimp,’” he says. “Or ‘beanpole.’ I’ll ring the bell this summer when the carnival comes to the Rotary field.”

I tell him there’s a secret to the carnival’s test of strength, that the game he’s asked me to try three summers in a row is rigged. “The wire that the weight’s on is slack,” I say. “No matter how hard you swing the hammer, the weight won’t rise all the way to the bell.”

Derek shakes his head and recounts the number of bells rung by older boys and fathers, unlike me, who are willing to test themselves. “The carnival guy always takes the slack out for a swing or two,” I explain. “He makes sure somebody rings the bell occasionally, or else nobody else will play after a while.” Derek thinks for a second. “You’re just embarrassed,” he finally replies.

At the end of one of those nights when I return home late, my wife is waiting for me with an expression of crisis stitched onto her face. Liz is otherwise unmarked, so I expect to hear about my mother’s heart or splints applied to Derek or one of our other two children.

This time I am wrong. It is Derek, all right, but instead of a doctor, a policeman. What does a boy just turned eleven have to do to be detained for questioning? In a small town like ours, not much, but this is serious, Liz insists, a fire in a public rest room, the near-catastrophic spread of flames through a community theater.

Or something close to that. Paper towels had been lit. They had flared, according to what Liz has been told, threatening the brittle wooden walls of the converted barn, but Derek and the theater were still standing. Nevertheless, a confrontation was waiting for me in the theater office, and I was expected to drive back across town to meet it.

Derek claims, Liz says, that he had been only an accidental witness, standing in the rest room when another boy had tried to prove himself with matches. After I ask why I am needed then, Liz shrugs.

When I arrive, Derek is sitting across a table from a policeman who simply nods when I enter. I figure him at once for a tyrant or a fool. SELINSGROVE SEAL is printed in white, block letters on the front of the red cap Derek wears. I check off a series of hard-edged possible responses to the stupidity of what I anticipate is about to happen.

“Tell me what happened while your father listens,” the policeman says.

There were long pauses in the rehearsal, Derek explains. His part, as well as the other boy’s, was small, and they had time to fill. When he watched the other boy light the towels, it had seemed like a performance, something he was expected to watch. He had not even helped throw water when the towel roll opened up across the floor, flames traveling like thick thread. Even when it was over, it still seemed like the other boy’s role, and Derek hadn’t said anything to any-
body because nothing looked to him like it was damaged.

Except, I think, now Derek is accused because he expects everyone to be truthful and doesn't understand the word-against-word dilemma of investigation. I look to the policeman to see how he's interpreting, but instead of saying anything, he nods again and leaves the room.

Sometimes I am surprised by things. Sometimes there are moments when the world is pliable enough for hope. When the policeman returns, he is pleasant and articulate. Derek is believed. The other boy has lied so badly he could do nothing, eventually, but confess.

"It's because you had a coat and tie on," Liz says when we get home. "Being dressed like that at 10:30 at night impresses the police." Derek twirls his hat on one finger, blurring the stylized blue seal below the white letters. A couple of revolutions and it flies off into the centerpiece of dried flowers.

"Everything is going soft on this planet," the policeman had said while Derek was retrieving his jacket. "You need to keep a watchdog now just to keep from sinking into the world."

"We have a cat," I had said, and he had looked quizzically at me. He had laughed, too, although a beat was missed. The hat with the aggressive blue seal displaces the flower arrangement. "He's still in the play," I say. "The other boy is being replaced."

"On such short notice?"

Derek reaches out to pull the hat free. He begins to twirl it again.

"It doesn't take DeNiro. Somebody can learn it in a few days."

This time the hat lands by my feet. I pick it up in a way that keeps Derek from asking for it back.

At breakfast, before his brother and sister come downstairs, Derek explains the urgency of his recurring dream. It is my fault, Liz reminds me, that he has it.

He is running from the pods. All of us have changed, invaded by aliens. Beginning with the remake seen more than two years before and ending with the original watched last month, Derek has sat through both versions of Invasion of the Body Snatchers. After watching the remake, he'd gone to sleep, as usual, with his Darth Vader punching bag—one of those tall, weighted balloons that sways and bounces and always returns to upright—standing beside his bed. An hour later he'd woken to the certainty of an attack by the pods. A life-size one stood near his face.

"Am I changed?" he had screamed. "Am I changed?"

I had tried to reason with him. I had turned on the light to show him Vader's plastic face.

"You're pretending," he had said. "You're a pod man. The real you is in the garbage."

Vader had to be deflated. A night light had been found in a drawer. "Eight years-old," Liz had said, "and you've given him a changeling complex."

The pods have returned several times a year since then, and his horror stories, when I try to extract them, break off in him like ticks. I imagine holding some kind of medicinal flame to each of them. I imagine his watching the original film when he is eleven will show him it is time to stop worrying. Instead, I listen, this time, to his revelation that everyone who is not real has a tiny red mark behind his ears. After I pour the orange juice, I allow him to check near my hair line.

"Every time," he says, "I am the only one left who isn't changed." When I ask him what he sees behind my ears, he shrugs and returns to his cereal.

That night we watch a television show that shows clips of famous televised magic. Near the end, a magician makes the Statue of Liberty disappear. The statue weighs 225 tons, we learn, seeing an audience follow the action in person.

The magician prattles on about freedom and immigrants and his mother, an enormous curtain tellingly closed behind him. "I remember this one," I say, "but I didn't watch."

A set of commercials comes on. "He can't do it," Derek says. "It's just a trick."

After the commercials, when the curtain finally opens, the statue is gone. Searchlights play over the empty space; the live audience is astonished.

And then the magician closes the curtain again and begins to preach about the importance of freedom, running on so long I tell Derek he's moving the audience, not the statue. "They think they're
looking at the same space, but he’s turned them,” I say. “Now he’s stalling while he turns them back.”

Derek leans forward and stares. When the statue reappears, he sits up and says, “You’re wrong. It’s a fake statue. He’s changed it just like the body snatchers.”

“It’s him, Dad,” Derek says a few weeks later, pointing at the newspaper. I am watching a Pittsburgh Pirate relief pitcher walk the winning run into scoring position.

He places the paper on my lap and shows me the picture on the front page. I glance down at one of those faces you know but don’t know. “Who?” I say.

“The policeman at the playhouse.”

“Oh.” I think of how reflexively I wave at such people, hoping a gesture is enough. A lefthander trudges into the nearly hopeless situation. The heart of the lineup will surely drive in the run that will put the Pirate losing streak at five.

“He got killed. Somebody shot him four times.”

“Around here?” For a moment, just before I pick up the newspaper and begin to read, I think of how many times someone has said this, looking around the vulnerable spots in his house as if insulation could keep out every kind of weather.

The killer, the paper says, had been seeking revenge. He had stepped out of the darkness and fired four times through the patrol car window.

“Bad news went down when you messed with him,” he said at the close.

For fifteen minutes, I have been brushing the gnats away and watching the lot in front of the college auditorium fill with police cars. Five hundred uniformed mourners have been promised. An equal number of civilians.

The black flies break into small clouds and cover the crowd. Derek walks across the grass toward me. He looks strange in pants—school has been out for a week. His expression is equally out of place. A first funeral should be some vague great-uncle who seemed to have been born old.

We sit far to the side. There are, perhaps, a dozen people we know here. None of them are policemen. The service is a Catholic one. Several priests stand on the stage, but only one is elaborately dressed. He will say the important things.

The program, I realize, is exactly like a church service. At least until the homily, which is filled with allegories for hope and faith. Derek looks straight ahead. He may be afraid to turn, believing someone will lecture him immediately about behavior. However, when I don’t read the
responses or sing the hymns, he is silent, too.

When the policemen who choose to take communion file through the aisles, all of them cup their hands in front of them. Some lessons stay. No one is self-conscious.

An hour of this, prayer and praise. A large picture is mounted above the closed casket. Even from thirty rows back I can tell it's an enlargement of the photograph in the newspaper.

The priest concludes by telling the story of a little girl's fantasy of heaven. She claimed, when asked, that everyone had the same expression of happiness. It was that perfect smile, she said, the one that animals have in my picture books. Derek appears to be listening closely.

And then the five hundred policemen exit. They are forming, I am sure, an elongated corridor of grief through which the coffin and the family will pass.

Gary Fincke's fourth collection of short stories, Sorry I Worried You, which won the 2003 Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, and Amp'd: A Father's Backstage Pass, his nonfiction account of his son's life in two signed rock bands, were both published in 2004.

PLAYING CARDS IN HEAVEN

There's a card game in heaven, where our mothers sit at square card tables, on folding chairs, with cross-stitched tablecloths, party favors, pastel mints.

The sibilance of shuffles, the triumphant slap of a trump card well-played.

Dollie, Izzy, and Tan are sitting at poker, fan their cards, their laughter making them young again, housewives with small children, who are, down here, accountants, teachers, priests.

They break for dessert: tiny marshmallows and fruit cocktail suspended in jello, mixed nuts, Winnie's lopdippy cake, rich mahogany devil's food, boiled icing.

They pass to the dealer, cut the deck, start a new hand.

Barbara Crooker
Talk of decline and decay abounds as the twenty-first century opens. Political commentators note the ever-decreasing percentage of eligible voters who actually cast ballots. Communitarians lay a steady decrease in public involvement and civic-mindedness squarely at the feet of an increasingly predominant liberal ethic that, in their view, sanctions selfish individualism and personal gratification. A number of prominent religious commentators view the rise of a “neutral state”—the gradual removal of religious imagery and rhetoric from the public square—as sparking a steady decline in the nation’s moral (and thus political) character. Environmentalists often view the rise of modern science as initiating the steady decline of harmonious relationships between the Earth and its people. The ubiquitous nature of such decline narratives in both popular and academic circles makes a closer examination of them both timely and important.

The decline narrative itself is perennial, of course. Hesiod lamented his birth among the “iron” as opposed to the lost “golden” race in the eighth century BC. A number of Roman commentators blamed the rise of Christianity—the turning away of their society from its traditional religious foundations—for the empire’s decline and fall. Rousseau’s Second Discourse traced the decline of “natural” man at the hands of the “civilizing” process. In the twentieth century, Spengler’s monumental Decline of the West provided testimony to the continuing power of the declinist approach to social and political life.

My attention is more specifically directed at a subset of contemporary decline narratives that I shall call “narratives of liberal decay.” These accounts of contemporary society trace its ills to something peculiarly modern, generally called “liberalism” (as the political corollary of “the Enlightenment”) when assessing responsibility for cultural, political, and moral decay. Such narratives generally view modernity as beginning in the seventeenth century, focusing on the Scientific Revolution or the important philosophical figures of Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Newton. I argue that contemporary narratives of liberal decay present an inversion of what is commonly called “Whig history,” an outlook on the writing and interpretation of history that motivated Herbert Butterfield’s famous polemic more than seventy years ago. Whig thinkers, to generalize, view history as gradually but inevitably progressive and trace the growth of individual liberty and constitutional government from humble beginnings to their flowering in the modern age, triumphing over the resistance of kings, popes, bishops, and aristocrats. Those who invert Whig history, on the other hand, see not progress, but decline; liberal ideas as the motor, not of human improvement, but of creeping alienation and the death of community and real citizenship; the “founders” of modernity not as heroes but as villains. Both Whigs and their inverters, though, agree about the linear directionality of history, the appropriateness of judging the past by contemporary standards, and the role of the historian as moral judge.

What is Whig history?

The most trenchant exploration (and critique) of the phenomenon of Whig history is provided by Herbert Butterfield in The Whig Interpretation of History, a work that appeared over seventy years ago but remains keenly relevant to the writing of history. Butterfield uses the term “Whig history” to denote a common mode of historical writing that is intensely and inherently present-centered (a “study of the past with direct and perpetual reference to the present” (Butterfield, 11)), subscribes to a notion of historical progress, and presents history as a clash between good and evil, passing moral judgments on historical figures and developments.

Whig history tells a tale that is centered in and
constantly points to the present. What differentiates Whig history from more genuine historical work (by which he means the attempt to understand the coherence of the past on its own terms), says Butterfield, is that this present-centeredness causes the historian to overlook the complex and often-circuitous nature of the interactions between past and present. Instead, the Whig historian looks for “roots” or “anticipations” of contemporary ideas and practices (18). In Quentin Skinner’s words, “the tendency to search for approximations to the ideal type yields a form of non-history which is almost entirely given over to pointing out earlier ‘anticipations’ of later doctrines, and to crediting each writer in terms of this clairvoyance” (Skinner, 11; see also 9).

Thus the Whig historian inevitably leads a “quest for origins” more interested in identifying supposed precursors to liberal ideas than in understanding, in all its richness and complexity, the muddled ways in which past leads to present (Butterfield, 43). Certainly when one goes looking for such anticipations, one can find them, or rather create them. Medieval conciliarists were proto-social contractarians. The Reformation sought to assert the sovereignty of individual conscience, and so on. In Butterfield’s view, the Whig historian too often forgets that he or she is creating, not merely tracing, this purported line of development, and we are left with a crude view of historical figures and texts, with subsequent commentators positing meanings that the figures under consideration could not conceivably have meant to propose, and which may have only the most tenuous relationship to the affairs of the time in which the texts were produced.

Not only do these processes—“line-drawing” through history and the search for anticipations of later ideas—result in abbreviated, abridged accounts that gloss over vast differences to emphasize purported similarities, they also present an oversimplified version of the almost-inevitable triumph of currently prevalent ideals.

If we can exclude certain things on the ground that they have no direct bearing on the present, we have removed the most troublesome elements in the complexity and the crooked is made straight...By seizing upon those personages and parties in the past whose ideas seem the more analogous to our own, and by setting these out in contrast with the rest of the stuff of history, [the Whig historian] has his organization and abridgment of history readymade and has a clean path through the complexity (25, 29).

This glorification of the present at the expense of the past, of course, is part and parcel of theories of progress (v). The notion of progress is fundamental to Whig history: the contemporary era is not merely the product of historical change, but of historical improvement. The task of the Whig historian then becomes to elucidate within the historical record those thinkers and actors who have helped us reach our privileged position.

The present-centeredness of Whig history combines with the notion of progress, leading the historian to “[classify] historical personages...into the men who furthered progress and the men who tried to hinder it...” (11). This classification produces a third feature of Whig history, the tendency to pass moral judgments on historical figures. When we consider both the present-centeredness and the progress narrative inherent in Whig history, it becomes apparent what sorts of judgments are most likely to emerge: ones that suggest “the modern world...[emerged] as the victory of the children of light over the children of darkness...” (28). Thus Whig history is in fact the antithesis of an attempt at genuine historical understanding, “the result of the practice of abstracting things from their historical context and judging them apart from their context—estimating them and organizing the historical story by a system of direct reference to the present” (30-31).
what is a decline narrative?

Several aspects of the decline narrative will be important for the analysis I put forward in this essay, and I shall outline them briefly here. First, of course, decline narratives are narratives, and thus they organize historical material into a story intended to teach a lesson or drive home a theme. Definitions of narrative are both widespread and widely varied, but Michael J. Toolan's definition of narrative as "a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events" is a worthwhile place to start (7, 4). Hayden White, who has done as much as any scholar to raise issues of narrative in historical inquiry, portrays narrative as, most basically, the imposition of story form on historical events or social reality: "narrativization produces a meaning quite different than that produced by chronicalization...the narrative serves to transform a list of historical events that would otherwise be only a chronicle into a story" (White 1984, 19-20; see also White 1987, 2). Donald E. Polkinghorne calls narrative "a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions" (11). The definitional questions surrounding narrative have spawned a literature all their own, but I take the elements raised in this paragraph—an emphasis on storytelling, the stitching together of discrete events into a thematic account of meaningful change over time—as an appropriate starting point for this essay's concerns.

With regard to the substance of these narratives, decline accounts identify a specific phenomenon or group of phenomena as central to understanding the contemporary social condition and as illustrative of the seriousness of contemporary decline. Declinists claim that contemporary society has gone badly wrong and offer vivid examples and/or statistics to back up these claims. Alongside claims about the prevalence of decline go claims about the causes thereof. The narratives of liberal decay I shall examine here extract specific features of something called "modernity" and its political and philosophical counterpart, liberalism, as the root cause of contemporary decline. Generally speaking, declinists ascribe causality to ideas. Although at times social, economic, or other material causes are included in their explanations, the declinists considered in this essay tend to see these features of contemporary society as the caused manifestations of wrong-headed ideas about human nature, society, or epistemology.

The identification of symptoms and causes of decline leads naturally to reflection on its timing. Decline narratives generally look to a time in the past that initiated the current decline and trace out the implications of these nefarious ideas as they are progressively realized in subsequent years. As mentioned above, the notion of "modernity" being associated with instrumental rationality or skeptical epistemologies leads many narratives of liberal decay to point to early modern natural science or moral philosophy for these beginnings. Others think the decline began more recently—the 1960s, for example. But all narratives of liberal decay suggest that degenerative potential is inherent in liberal modernity and awaits only a fortuitous set of circumstances to break forth.

Narratives of liberal decay thus present accounts of actual historical developments with an explicitly evaluative dimension, a normative or moral judgment. In important ways, critics aver, previous times were better; current times are worse. Of course, all narratives contain some organizing principle, a driving aim that structures the discussion and by which each author decides what gets included and what does not. After all, narratives represent ways in which human beings attempt to order events sensibly and coherently and in doing so are invariably drawn to reflect on the meaning and significance of historical changes. What differentiates decline narratives in this respect is the overt, explicit, and moralistic nature of those judgments. Declinists do not merely organize their accounts of historical developments around specific trends or organizational themes—the rise of technology, the influence of patriarchal ideas, or the growth of market economies, for example—but inherent to the decline account is an explicit condemnation of those developments. Social change has not been morally neutral or progressive, but represents a setback along important social dimensions.

Decline narratives thus present a notion of linear directionality in human affairs, insisting that society is moving steadily away from a desirable, and toward a recognizably inferior, state of affairs. Declinists often signal this linearity by using terms like "increasingly" and "more and more" when
referring to undesirable outcomes (or, conversely, “less and less” in reference to desirable outcomes), as well as biological metaphors such as “atrophy” or “entropy,” and the more straightforward signifiers “declining,” “decaying,” “decadence,” or “degeneracy.” Sometimes the imagery is quite graphic, as when the authors of Habits of the Heart refer to contemporary individualism as “cancerous” (Bellah, vii) or when Robert Bork refers to “the spreading rot” of liberalism in today’s culture (153). Linear directionality, however, need not imply inevitability. Indeed, the rhetorical power of decline narratives lies largely in their exhortations to their audience to recognize the error of their ways, rectify the root problem that gave rise to the decline, and rededicate themselves to the values that will put their society back on the road to civic, moral, spiritual, or ecological health. But declinists hasten to point out that the situation is dire, the time for action now.

narratives of liberal decay: a few examples

In what follows, I offer a few examples of the main categories in which narratives of liberal decay have appeared in recent years. These categorizations are meant to be heuristic and suggestive, not mutually exclusive, and certainly not exhaustive. I suspect, however, that the general outlines of the arguments will be familiar to readers.

the environmental narrative of liberal decay.

For many contemporary environmental thinkers, the notion of decline carries distinctly ecological overtones. Environmental theorists clearly identify a problem in the health of our natural environment, identify its ideological root in the past, and trace the destructive influence of those problematic ideas over time. The contemporary world, on this account, represents the culmination (or, more appropriately, the nadir) of a process that began with the Scientific Revolution in early modern Europe. The mechanistic worldview that took shape and became dominant during those years has become our governing scientific—indeed, social—metaphor, leading us to an increasingly alienated relationship with our natural world.

On this view, simply put, late twentieth-century society has “transgressed the limits [of the carrying capacity of the ecological commons] and has begun to destroy our life-support system” (Ophuls, 10). This ecological transgression takes many forms: global warming, destruction of the ozone layer, rampant pollution and deforestation, overpopulation, uncontrolled technology, unsustainable consumption of fossil fuels, and an increasingly fierce competition for increasingly scarce natural resources. Behind the physical decay, moreover, lies an existential sense of crisis. We no longer view nature as a “living being,” and thus the modern age has witnessed “the accelerated exploitation of both human and natural resources in the name of culture and progress” (Merchant, xxii). The destructive effect of contemporary humans on the environment—the outgrowth of this alienated relationship with our natural surroundings—has resulted in an ecological catastrophe that threatens our very existence.

What, specifically, has caused such damage to the natural environment and humans' relationship with it? According to this environmental critique, the mechanistic paradigm characteristic of modern science has sanctioned (if not explicitly celebrated) the pillage of nature for human purposes and the exercise of human power and domination over nature. Ophuls stresses that “the mind-matter and man-nature dualism that is intrinsic to modern thought” represents the root of the ecological crisis we face, claiming that “the language of modern life is fundamentally anti-ecological,” and “few comprehend the degree to which ecology contradicts the modern way of life” (Ophuls, xi, 2). The modern scientific worldview championed by Bacon, Descartes, and Hobbes that emerged in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, is largely to blame for our current ecological situation. In Carolyn Merchant’s words, “Between 1500 and
1700, the Western world began to take on features that, in the dominant opinion of today, would make it modern and progressive" (Merchant, xxiii). In these years, more specifically, "an incredible transformation took place...The world in which we live today was bequeathed to us by Isaac Newton and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz..." (Merchant, 288, 275). Fritjof Capra uses strikingly similar terminology: "Between 1500 and 1700 there was a dramatic shift in the way people pictured the world and in their whole way of thinking... The notion of an organic, living, and spiritual universe was replaced by that of the world as a machine, and the world-machine became the dominant metaphor of the modern era" (37-38). Recall too, that for such thinkers historical claims are evaluative claims, thus the previous holism and organicism that characterized society was superior in key ways to modern society. The "new mechanical order...and its associated values of power and control" replaced "animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos." The result was, quite simply, "the death of nature...the most far-reaching effect of the Scientific Revolution" (Merchant, 190, 193). The organic philosophy prevalent in medieval Europe, for all its drawbacks, "placed people within rather than above nature" (Merchant, 83). From its earliest days, modern science has walked hand in hand with nascent capitalism, commercial values, and the destruction of nature.

liberal decay and the decline of community.

The decline of community has become a prominent theme in discussions about the state of contemporary American society. The core problem, according to communitarians, consists of a nexus of factors: the ever-increasing presence of individualistic, rights-oriented rhetoric within the citizenry; the corresponding decline of community cohesion, faith, and participation in government, and the notion of civic obligation; and the erosion of personal ties, particularly but not exclusively family and traditional communities. The National Commission on Civic Renewal, for example, laments the fact that "[t]oo many of us lack confidence in our capacity to make basic moral and civic judgments, to join with our neighbors to do the work of community, to make a difference...[This crisis of citizenship results in the] degradation of our civic environment."

Such concerns are voiced by a wide variety of critics. As Sandel puts it, "two fears—for the loss of self-government and the erosion of community—together define the anxiety of the age" (3). Robert Bellah and his collaborators voice their concern that American individualism "may have grown cancerous—that it may be destroying those social integuments that Tocqueville saw as moderating its more destructive potentialities, that it may be threatening the survival of freedom itself" (Bellah, 1985, vii). Amitai Etzioni describes a "society that increasingly threatens to become normless, self-centered, and driven by greed, special interests, and an unabashed quest for power" (1993, 254; see also 1996, chapter 1).

What lies at the heart of these pathologies? Sandel blames the "procedural republic" and "unencumbered selves": a government dedicated to neutrality between citizens' competing conceptions of the good, and the individualistic notion of an antecedent, willing self independent of its claimed ends. Clearly the procedural republic represents the victory of a language of individualism over other, more corporate, traditions in American history. The rise of market capitalism undermines community cohesion and broader notions of obligation. In Henry Tam's words, market individualism's "cancerous effects on community life" creates a society in which "selfishness becomes a moral code" (3-4).

How did this state of affairs come to pass? Generally speaking, communitarians agree that "liberalism" as a school of thought, stretching back to the seventeenth century, set in place a destructive individualistic potential that was not immediately realized. Locke's "radical philosophical defense of individual rights" became important due to his enormous influence in America, says Bellah (1985, 80). The communitarian narrative of liberal decay notes the connection between Lockean ideas and the emerging market system, agreeing with many environmental critics that liberalism and capitalism share coequal blame due to their closely interconnected hegemony over the modern world.

Furthermore, communitarians argue that the predominant individualist understanding of American freedom does not accurately represent
either the theory or practice of American life for much of the nation's history. In Bellah's words,

[W]e have never been, and still are not, a collection of private individuals who, except for a conscious contract to create a minimal government, have nothing in common. Our lives make sense in a thousand ways, most of which we are unaware of, because of traditions that are centuries, if not millennia, old. It is these traditions that help us to know that it does make a difference who we are and how we treat one another (1985, 282).

Sandel argues that the more specific and troubling consequences of liberal thought—radical individualism and state neutrality—have arisen only in the past forty or fifty years. As Etzioni puts it, "Once, rights were very solemn moral/legal claims." He lays responsibility for decline more recently, noting that no consensual values have emerged in American society in the wake of the widespread questioning and rebellion of the 1960s (Etzioni 1993, 6, 24; see also 1996, Introduction).

**modernity's moral decay: a neoclassical critique**

The specific manifestations of contemporary decline are, according to the neoclassical critique, symptomatic of a deeper crisis in contemporary society: far more serious than the specific immoralities that dot our landscape, contemporary individuals have lost the capacity to talk meaningfully and consistently about—and take action on the basis of—morality itself. As opposed to classical philosophy, which emphasized such concepts as virtue, duty, and the common good, liberalism eschews a public vision and celebrates a hedonistic, instrumental morality. Our moral landscape is little more than "emotivism," in which despite our protestations of rationality we consider moral arguments to be incommensurable statements of preference. In Leo Strauss's words,

The original notion [of liberal democracy] was that this sovereign individual was a conscientious individual, the individual limited and guided by his conscience.... This change which has taken place and is still taking place may be called the decline of liberal democracy into permissive egalitarianism. Whereas the core of liberal democracy is the conscientious individual, the core of permissive egalitarianism is the individual with his urges.... This is the moral decline which has taken place (Strauss 1972, 222–223).

According to this critique, modern liberalism's rise and increasing hegemony have produced a society in which taking moral stands is virtually impossible. Modernity is, in effect, subjectivism writ large. Our sights are lowered, away from classical concerns about the best city and toward pragmatic and programmatic questions of practicality. According to one Aristotelian account, "talk about the common good has been all but abandoned" (Smith, 625).

Why have these things come to pass? The most fundamental reason, on this account, lies in the Enlightenment project itself, that formative philosophical undertaking that defines modernity. Enlightenment thinkers rejected the teleology inherent in classical thought, proclaiming a view of humans as preference-maximizers without any more transcendent goal than relatively short-term gratification. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, the effect of "the [Enlightenment's] joint rejection of both Protestant and Catholic theology and the scientific and philosophical rejection of Aristotelianism was to eliminate any notion of man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos" (54).

[The history of contemporary moral crisis] cannot be told adequately apart from an account of the attempts to provide a rational justification for morality in that historical period—say from 1630 to 1850.... A central thesis of this book is that the breakdown of this project provided the historical background against which the predicaments of our own culture can become intelligible (MacIntyre, 39).

In such a society, we note the tendency for impersonal bureaucracy, with its claims to dispassionate rationality, to displace democratic, deliberative, or nonscientific ways of proceeding.
This particular narrative of liberal decay, then, points to the Enlightenment project that attempted to ground morality solely on rationality, as destructive of a commitment to public virtue and the pursuit of excellence. The three waves of modernity identified by Strauss culminate in Nietzsche's view that "all human life and human thought ultimately rests on horizon-forming creations which are not susceptible of rational legitimization" (1959, 56). Such a view of morality leaves us with no firm moral footing, with what Macintyre calls an "emotivism" that cannot distinguish moral sentiments from expressions of preference. Modern liberalism initiates, and spurs on, moral decay.

**the spiritual narrative of liberal decay**

What is wrong with contemporary society in the eyes of those proposing a primarily spiritual account of liberal decay? Contemporary American society is awash in the fruits of a disordered spiritual condition; one might say "sin": crime, divorce, illegitimacy, drug use, abortion, dishonesty, sexual libertinism, and so on. Richard John Neuhaus notes the understandable reaction to the lethal liberationisms that reached their frenzied apex in the late sixties and early seventies. Drugs, cults, mass murders, the explosion in divorce, teen-age pregnancies, and abortion—all these have, in the eyes of conservatives, vindicated their warnings about the consequences of cultural decadence (1984, 140).

Traditional restraining and moderating institutions such as family, religion, morality, and law have been undermined progressively by a spreading radical individualism and egalitarianism that celebrates individual choice as its cardinal value, idealizing "the unconstrained self" (Bork, 125). This spreading individualism represents the loss of a formerly prevalent moral consensus. Divisive issues like obscene art, multiculturalism, and affirmative action highlight the deep cultural and political fissures that beset a society that once agreed on a basic moral code. The gradual exclusion of religion from the public square both signals the triumph of a new liberal ethic (that of state neutrality) and contributes to a continuing process of moral and cultural decline.

Robert Bork blames much of the contemporary situation on the baleful effects of the 1960s, "the decade that changed America" (17). Student radicals were, in his words, little more than "antinomians," literally a law unto themselves without moral or religious grounding (54). Abetted by rising affluence, technology, and the growth of universities, among other things, the 1960s "saw an explosive expansion of certain American (and Western) ideals and a corresponding diminution of others." The moral order that lay behind the Declaration of Independence's calls for liberty and the pursuit of happiness were forgotten in the stampede for personal fulfillment (56; also 57–61).

But for Bork, investigating the roots of these contemporary problems pushes us further back into the meaning of modernity itself. According to Bork, Enlightenment thinkers—Locke, Montesquieu, Smith, Jefferson—presumed that individuals could and would create a pacific social order free of the confines of religion, tradition, and other conventional restraints. Unfortunately, such optimism proved unwarranted. "The Enlightenment optimists made a serious mistake about the nature of the individual human in whom they placed so much faith...Though they surely did not envision a society resembling ours, they set in motion a tendency which, carried far enough, could and eventually did free the individual from almost all moral and legal constraints" (Bork, 58). Neuhaus pinpoints the increasing relegation of religion to the private sphere as part of a "secularizing mythology" that distorts the nation's history and founding values (Neuhaus, 98). Such a mythology ignores the fact that "the values of the American people are deeply rooted in religion," and that "their religious allegiances are identifiably Judeo-Christian" (21, 95). On this reading, the hostility to religion in the public sphere represents "a novelty, a break with the one tradition of the republic" (102). Using terms like "amazingly recent," "relatively recent," "recent decades," "recent years," and "the very recent past," Neuhaus stresses the break with tradition that signals the downfall of public religion in America, and its consequent social and political pathologies (24; 28; 37; 99; 112; 112).
structural similarities, normative inversions

What could Whig history, with its progressive historical narrative, possibly share with the tales of decline and decay outlined above? Indeed, hasn't faith in progress been largely eradicated from contemporary historical writing? No longer do we encounter the confident assertion that the future will be better than the past that characterized so much eighteenth- and nineteenth-century (not to mention mid-twentieth century) historical writing. The violence, savagery, and rapacity of the twentieth century has made such a belief in progress difficult to sustain, almost comical. Instead, scholars generally present a much more chastened, nuanced version of the relationship between past and present and the nature of historical research. In the history of political thought, this new understanding is best illustrated in the Cambridge School, most notably in the work of Quentin Skinner, John Dunn, and others. In the history of science, traditional forward-looking linear narratives have fallen largely by the wayside in the wake of Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and the work that followed it. If this is the case, though, aren’t we dealing with a fundamentally different sort of historiography and political context of historical research?

Still, a number of important and intriguing areas of convergence do exist between contemporary narratives of liberal decay and more traditional Whig history. Recent narratives of liberal decay retain two of the central and problematic characteristics of Whig history: its present-centered focus and its tendency to pass moral judgments on historical figures and developments. At the same time, each of these structural similarities appears with a corresponding *inversion* that illuminates the ways in which narratives of liberal decay *reverse the normative judgments* of traditional Whig history.

The present-centered focus—the practice of searching back into history for the roots of modern outcomes for which we may then assign blame and praise—is an integral part of the Whig tradition of historiography. Yet the declinist is as much engaged in a “quest for origins” as was the traditional Whig historian who sought to glorify the present at the expense of a benighted past. Recall that the decline narrative begins with a recitation of present degeneracy.

Once the symptoms of decline are clearly laid out, the search for historical culprits is on. For example, what Robert Bellah and his collaborators call “the improvisational self”—the autonomous pursuit of individual wants free of religion, family, or moral example as constraints—so they tell us, “is derived not only from psychotherapy, but much more fundamentally from modern philosophy, from Descartes, Locke, and Hume, who affect us more than we imagine” (80). Carolyn Merchant admits early on in her insightful historical account of the Scientific Revolution and the emergence of modern mechanism that “[t]he central problem of this book is informed by the concerns of the present” (xxii). Michael Sandel tells us that “[t]imes of trouble prompt us to recall the ideals by which we live” (3): determining “how the liberal conception of citizenship and freedom gradually crowd out the republican conception” (6) thus provides the impetus for Sandel’s incursion into the history of the American republic (Sandel, 3, 6).

Alongside this structural similarity—the present-centeredness of both Whig history and narratives of liberal decay—lies of course an *inversion* of the evaluative claim that each attaches to the present. Instead of a Whig notion of historical progress and contemporary superiority over the past, declinists posit a theory of *decline*. Behind the evaluative claim about the reality of present decline lies an historical-ideological one, the claim that the roots of this decline are to be found in past ideas. In Robert Bork’s words, “The mistake the Enlightenment founders of liberalism made about human nature has brought us to this—an increasing number of alienated, restless individuals without strong ties to others, except in the pursuit of ever more degraded distractions and sensations” (Bork, 63). Previous eras were not darkened ages yearning for enlightenment, but instead were—slavery, patriarchy, and racial discrimination notwithstanding—*superior* to contemporary society in key ways. Both Whig and decline narratives present historical directionality in a linear and cumulative manner. Declinists merely change the direction of the arrow, painting the line in a downward, rather than ascending, direction.

Second, both Whig history and decline narratives share a tendency to view themselves as moral arbiters of historical developments. The inversion
of this structural similarity—the moral judgment of history—appears, most vividly, in the ways in which different groups and individuals get evaluated and judged. At times, these judgments border on the anachronistic. For example, Carolyn Merchant criticizes Francis Bacon for supporting “antifeminist” legislation in the late-sixteenth and early seventeenth-century (Merchant, 165). But the general phenomenon is more widespread. Consider, for example, the contemporary debate between liberals and communitarians. Beginning from the methodological assumption that contemporary concerns animate historical research, and from the normative claim that contemporary society is mired in decline, it seems natural then to ask, “Whom shall we blame for what has come to pass?” Perhaps Thomas Hobbes and John Locke are to blame for our contemporary anomic situation, disaffection with government, and aggressive accumulation of property, suggest Ophuls and Bellah. “When all is said and done, Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes, and the other authors of the Enlightenment paradigm were megalomaniacs: their aim was not merely to dominate nature but to do so violently, brutally, absolutely” (Ophuls, 186). “In seventeenth-century England, a radical philosophical defense of individual rights emerged that owed little to either classical or biblical sources.... John Locke is the key figure and one enormously influential in America” (Bellah 1985, 143).

Earlier Whig accounts often presented heroic figures from the past, struggling for representative government and religious liberty against the concerted efforts of ignorant or self-interested elites (For example Macaulay 1828; Jordan 1932). Narratives of liberal decay, instead, invert Whig history’s sympathy for history’s winners and its excoriation of losers. They suggest that we emulate those who opposed trends that we associate with the “modern” age. The logic is straightforward. If we can identify those thinkers who, on some reading, most closely resemble modern ideas—Locke, Hobbes, Bacon, Mill, Kant—and we know that the modern age is declining and decadent, then clearly those figures must be, at least partially, to blame. A long list of blameworthy parties emerge from contemporary narratives of liberal decay: liberals, rationalists, secularists, individualists, to name just a few. These figures are typically considered, by declinists, to have brought us to this unpleasant pass. Those who opposed them represent the opposite position—community, religion, morality, holism, and so on—and are considered not only worthy of praise for attempting to withstand modernity’s relentless (and eventually victorious?) onslaught, but also as possessing insights into how to correct our own decline.

This tendency, in which historians propose assessments of blame on long-dead political thinkers, rests on the assumption that such thinkers are somehow responsible—and thus can justifiably be “blamed”—for the uses made by their views long after their promulgation, indeed long after the thinkers’ death. Often this tactic appears somewhat obliquely. Many of the narratives of liberal decay considered in this essay, as we have seen, note that full-blown liberalism is a relatively recent phenomenon. But declinists also suggest that the damaging potential was present all along, and often take on a tone of denunciation when describing the thought of early modern thinkers like Locke and (especially) Hobbes. This kind of blame-mongering has a destructive effect on any hope for historical understanding and rests on controversial and unstated hypotheses about the intention of historical authors and the “responsibility” of such authors for the uses to which their ideas are put centuries after their deaths.

Many of the disputes brought on by the above two problematic features of contemporary narratives of liberal decay—its present-centeredness and its moralistic
tone—have to do with broader explicit or implicit claims about “modernity” or “the Enlightenment.” We have seen above how often something called “the Enlightenment” or “modern” thought—be it modern science, rationalist philosophy, or secular understandings of public life—are often claimed to lie at the heart of contemporary social decline. But talk of, for example, a unitary “Enlightenment project,” as does Alasdair Macintyre (1984, chapters 4–6), perpetuates a myth created by critics and reduces a philosophically and politically diverse movement to an undifferentiated mass, flattening out national differences and philosophical nuance in the search for a stick with which to beat contemporary society. Only a highly truncated understanding of modern thought could so quickly subsume modern views of political authority this way. What becomes of the Scottish Enlightenment, or the English? What of the multifaceted American Enlightenment, or the work of Catholic social thinker Charles Taylor or Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams?

These overstated claims about “the Enlightenment project” are deeply troubling, since they prevent us from confronting the complexity of our own times. On this view of modernity at war with religious values, or true community, or the environment, or moral principles, the continued presence of any of these values (widespread religious belief, or authentic community, or environmental consciousness, or firm moral standards) can only be explained as a kind of vicarious holdover from earlier times, and not, for example, as authentic examples of a more complex and religion-friendly modernity than one might expect from merely reading Hobbes and Kant (see also Yack 1997).

Butterfield was right. Whig history distorts the past and places historical research in service of a polemical narrative about present superiority and past ignorance. But in getting beyond such overt Whiggism, we seem not to have displaced a defective way of studying the history of political thought but merely to have inverted it, reversed its normative valuation. Unrealistic celebrations of present superiority have given way to unrealistic denigrations of contemporary degeneracy. Whig history understated the contributions the past had made to our complex contemporary situation and passed moralistic judgments on historical actors and outcomes. Narratives of liberal decay do the same thing in reverse. Neither of these ways of approaching history and its relationship to contemporary events is helpful or enlightening. Neither helps us understand the past, assess the present, or think seriously about the future.

Andrew Murphy is Assistant Professor of Humanities and Political Philosophy in Christ College, Valparaiso University.

Works Cited


Announcing the

Arlin G. Meyer Prize 2006

The National Network Board of the Lilly Fellows Program in the Humanities and the Arts is proud to announce the 2006 Arlin G. Meyer Prize.

The Meyer Prize is awarded annually to a fulltime faculty member from a college or university in the Lilly Fellows Program National Network. Work that highly exemplifies the practice of the Christian artistic or scholarly vocation in relation to any pertinent subject matter or literary and artistic style will be considered. The Prize will be awarded in different years for works of creative imagination and for works of scholarship. The 2006 Arlin G. Meyer Prize will reward the author of a creative work that emerges from his or her practice of the vocation of the Christian visual artist, in accord with the principles and ideals of the Lilly Fellows Program.

The Prize honors Arlin G. Meyer, Professor Emeritus of English at Valparaiso University, who served as program director of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts from its inception in 1990 until his retirement in 2002.

The Prize of $3000 will be awarded at the Lilly Fellows Program National Conference at Xavier University-Cincinnati, October 13-15, 2006.

The 2006 Arlin G. Meyer Prize will be given to an original work of visual art in one of the following categories:

- Sculpture
- Water color
- Sketches
- Fabric Art
- Photography
- Painting
- Drawing
- Ceramics
- Printmaking

Nomination Procedure
1. Each Lilly Fellows Program National Network institution may nominate one work for the 2006 Arlin G. Meyer Prize. The institution may select its nominee through any process.
2. The work must have been created by a fulltime faculty member or administrator at a current Lilly Fellows Program National Network institution.
3. The work must have been exhibited for the public during the calendar year 2003, 2004, or 2005.
4. A nomination must include:
   - A cover letter of nomination signed by one or both of the two official LFP representatives from the nominating institution
   - CDs of the nominated visual art
   - A statement or narrative of approximately 500 words by the author explaining how the work exemplifies the practice of the Christian academic or artistic vocation
   - The artist's curriculum vitae
5. Nominations must be sent to the selection coordinator for the 2006 Arlin G. Meyer Prize:
   Dr. Lisa DeBoer, Meyer Prize Coordinator
   Dept. of Art, Westmont College
   955 La Paz Road
   Santa Barbara, CA 93108
6. Nomination deadline: March 1, 2006. Nominations received after this date cannot be considered.

Future subjects of the Arlin G. Meyer Prize

2007 NON-FICTION • 2008 PERFORMANCE ART • 2009 MUSIC
MAYBE IN POLISH PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO WRITE ABOUT THIS MUSIC. I HEARD THE LANGUAGE ALL AROUND ME WHILE LEAVING THE CLUB, INSISTENT WHISPERS IN THE MISTY NIGHT. DISPERSING UP WET SIDEWALKS, COUPLES AND GROUPS OF THREE AND FOUR CONVERSED IN HUSHED, EXCITED TONES ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE WE’D JUST EXPERIENCED. AND THEY SEEMED TO KNOW WHAT TO SAY, THEIR POLISH FLOWING LIKE THE FLUTTERY TRUMPET LINES WE LISTENED TO FOR NEARLY TWO HOURS. THERE MUST BE ADJECTIVES, IMAGES, I THOUGHT, PHRASES IN HIS NATIVE LANGUAGE THAT CAN CAPTURE WHAT THIS ARTIST DOES. CONFINED TO ENGLISH, I WANDERED TO THE CAR SILENT, MY MIND A BLANK PAGE, WONDERING IF I’D EVER FIND WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE MUSIC OF THE TOMASZ STANKO QUARTET.

The usual routine at Yoshi’s Jazz and Sushi in Oakland is that an act will play two sets, 8:00 and 10:00 p.m., for separate seatings. For some reason, this stop on Stanko’s North American Tour was limited to one show at 10:00, and the club was packed. The usually diverse crowd Yoshi’s draws was more so. High anticipation was upped by the night’s humidity. I met several people who came on the strength of what they had read or heard of Stanko, knowing next to nothing about his music.

Stanko (1942) is one of Poland’s greatest jazz artists, and the first to achieve an international reputation. While much of the music he’s known for was released only in Europe, a new “Selected Recordings” compilation in the “rarum” series (number XVII) presents a cross-section of his mostly-1990s work for ECM. This is glorious stuff, as heavy and uplifting as a rain storm. But serious Stanko-watchers agree with Brian Morton of The Nation that “it was with the creation of his current quartet that Stanko cemented his position as a bandleader and composer, as well as a trumpet player.”

The quartet’s material deals in transformation. On Suspended Night and 2002’s Soul of Things, Stanko plays against the beautiful backing of his young cohorts to create endlessly fascinating variations on a theme, plainly stated within emotionally complex settings. The music is pastoral, calm, passionate, but not “romantic.” There is a narrative quality to Stanko’s long solo passages; however, this is not storytelling in the familiar Lester Young sense of jazz communication. Stanko is into something more abstract, but he himself is so intentional that each listener is addressed, their own story called forth.

And there is no received context—such as swing or free or homage to Miles Davis (though Miles and Chet Baker are undeniable influences)—that determines every move. Just as there is no self-interpreting text, Stanko’s music does not come with its meanings predetermined. This does not mean it is free beyond form or a series of ran-
dom, if interesting, bleats and blurs meant to provide a musical experience. The melody is always present, considered. Each variation has a definite shape. The trio impresses at all times with its understanding of itself as the canvas to which the composer is adding his strokes.

And Stanko himself is the loveliest, most probing, pointed trumpet player I've ever heard. You could say he does not go in for parenthetical statements, just long, warm sustains that seem to have your whole life in them. But his is a beauty born of weakness. Stanko's tone is often frail or fragile, the dashed line of a freeway below your elbow rather than the hard whites of an off-ramp. The tone is not introverted. His brooding melancholy, unlike Baker's, does not draw the listener into itself. This is not "mood music" any more than the French New Wave was "mood cinema."

Both Soul of Things and Suspended Night use for their cover art stills from Jean-Luc Godard films. Interviewing fellow director Michelangelo Antonioni in the 1960s, Godard asks him about Red Desert, a film thought to condemn industrial society and its deadening effect upon the individual, not to mention the landscape. But Antonioni insists that "the line ... the curves of factories and their smokestacks are perhaps more beautiful than a row of trees."

Stanko began his professional career with Krzysztof Komeda, a composer who contributed scores to several Roman Polanski films. Stanko's Litania album is a tribute to Komeda's work. And the music on these new discs can best be described as cinematic. This means not that it is "soundtracky," lending itself well to visual accompaniment, but that this music is image. It is the visual experience. Live, this effect is heightened. The experience is not what you're seeing (four musicians on stage, etc.), but what is being created to be seen. It is jazz for the eyes.

For Godard, filmmaker and critic, there is "a clear continuity between all forms of expression... The important thing is to approach it from the side which suits you best." After years in the avant-garde, Stanko found that what suits him best is the ballade approach, free and romantic, sharp as a sword. Urging me to hear a copy of Stanko's From the Green Hill he'd just burned, a friend sighed, "This music hurts, it's so beautiful." There, his tone is more Miles-like than elsewhere, Stanko swings out from behind bandoneon and violin, leaving fresh cuts in the tunic of the present moment.

But now we're back to the necessity of my learning Polish to do this music justice.

The same week I viewed the Quartet's creations at Yoshi's, a more famous Pole was dying. While protesters demanded that Terri Schiavo should be made to live forever on a feeding tube, Karol Wojtyla—Pope John Paul II—was quietly allowed to die with dignity. It was said in Time that his papacy was so exceptional because, unlike the many out-of-touch Popes before him, Wojtyla "lived in the early twentieth century world about as intensely as it was imaginable to do and still survive it." This is a quality we often admire in our jazz greats, men and women who become spiritual symbol-makers for generations to come. Stanko says of Wasilewski, Kurkiewicz, and Miskiewicz (who have their own album, Trio) that "they are rooted in the traditional, but sensitive to the contemporary." Such "fresh and mature" players lend a sense of having survived something they have not yet lived.

In Godard's First Name: Carmen, the director plays Uncle Jean, a man who has survived too much. When his wild niece tries to coax him out of his hospital bed to make a movie, he complains, "We should close our eyes, not open them." The Stanko Quartet wants us to open our eyes—to jazz; to a European, peculiarly Polish jazz; to another beauty, as smooth and startling as the line of smokestacks.

J. D. Buhl has upgraded his day job, but is still looking for full-time teaching work. He remains adjunct faculty at Holy Names University, St. Mary's College, and the University of San Francisco
The last picture shows

James Combs

In the town where I grew up, there stands the forlorn and empty remnants of the Russell Theater, which was the county movie house for many decades before it closed in 1959. For me, that otherwise unused building remains a monument of sweet nostalgia. In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, that place was where I was educated. A lonely, shy boy, I hated school and small-town life, but I dearly loved the movies. I saw everything, from the kiddy Westerns, the serials, the Saturday double features, up to and more memorably the great films, the imagery from which was unforgettable to a gawky boy awed in the dark—John Wayne standing in the doorway at the end of The Searchers, Montgomery Clift playing taps for Maggio in From Here to Eternity, Marilyn Monroe singing “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend” in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Audrey Hepburn looking regal in Roman Holiday. The most electric moment was watching the recently deceased James Dean in Rebel without a Cause. The guy was dead, yet there he was up on the screen as if he were still alive. And he was, and amazingly, still is, as the recent ceremonials in Fairmount, Indiana, testify.

It was thought in those days that Hollywood and the stars were indeed immortal. Tinseltown was the ultimate dream factory, and the stars were our reigning pantheon of gods. Alas, immortality is hard to sustain, and Hollywood was beset in subsequent decades by forces which seemed to threaten the movies—television was only the first technological innovation that disturbed the Olympian order. As each new way of viewing came about—the invention of the VCR, cable movie channels, downloading movies off the Internet, and so on—all threatened movie going. And yet movie going survives, and despite drops in attendance when moviemakers make a string of lousy flicks, the multiplexes thrive. Many small towns where “the last picture show” closed now have profitable and busy multi-screen theatres wherein thousands turn out weekly to see the latest movie on the silver screen.

From the larger view of the early twenty-first century, we can look back on the over century-long history of the movies and see some patterns that might assist us in our own movie going. Looking back on the origins and development of the movies, the first thing one is struck with is that they were new, but not so new. The movies had been preceded by various kinds of moving pictures, such as the famous magic lantern, but they brought a larger and more urgent immediacy to the tricks of magic and the stage show. What was happening on that screen looked real, but it was more than real. It was a heightened and larger reality which offered vicarious transport for audiences ready for imaginative mobility. However, the universality of popular appeal meant that movies had to meet some of the expectations of popular entertainment. The imaginative power of movies quickly was grounded in narrative tradition. The movies told familiar stories, only with more visual power and agility than hitherto possible. We now look at many of the early silents as excessively melodramatic or aesthetically crude, even though their contemporary audiences largely did not think so. Entertain us with your cinematic tricks, they asked, but in narrative forms with which we are comfortable.

So at the inception, moviemakers learned all the visual gimmicks we became used to. They inherited their conventions and narrations from storytelling, but learned to use them in their own compelling way. The Western was the stuff of nineteenth-century dime novels and Wild West shows, but it doesn’t really come alive until you can see the classic tales unfold in that spectacular movie country of imaginary pictorial power—the stagecoach winding through Monument...
Valley, the cattle drivers discovering the railroad tracks leading to Abilene, Shane descending from the Grand Tetons like a god. The genres of film became a tradition, and if after awhile viewers began to think they had seen this story before, they had. It was these variations on familiar themes that kept genres alive, and when they were exhausted, they would almost disappear. The Western almost vanished for adults in the 1930s, and the musical was lost to view in the 1960s. Yet such movie genres show amazing resilience. Westerns and musicals are still made, and often enjoy box office and critical success. One of the keys to the survival of the movies is genre flexibility, their amazing ability to make the old new again. The travails and perils of young love are a troubadour's tale, but you can see that old, old story played out once again at the nearest movie theater.

At every stage of their history, there has been much intellectual grousing about how the movies don't live up to their potential and hand wringing about how many lousy movies are made. As long as the movies are a popular art, they will try to cater to changing and less than exalted tastes. A glance at Leonard Maltin's plot synopses will reveal how many dreary or sleazy movies have been made in the past. Even though there are conventional restraints on mainstream movies, someone is always trying to censor the movies, and various observers recurrently decry the low state, or subversive state, of the movie art. Throughout their history, the movies have been accused of "glorifying" something: war, gangsters, sexual freedom, drugs, bourgeois normalcy, an ideology, the latest fads and fashions, you name it. Such "glorifications" are usually in the mind of the critic. The legend still survives that in the 1930s and 1940s left-wing Hollywood screenwriters somehow inserted pro-communist propaganda into the movies they wrote. They were so effective that they sneaked it through the elaborate studio system and watchdogs like Jack Warner and Louis B. Mayer. Even movie audiences were totally unaware of it, not to mention the folks who ran Comintern, which regularly condemned Hollywood as producing bourgeois tripe. Their propaganda, it seems, succeeded by being totally invisible. Such subversive "themes" are found because they are sought, but it is a tribute to the perceived social power of the movies that someone is always finding invisibilities in the visible.

A LAS, IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT GOOD MOVIES—admittedly a vague aesthetic judgment—are so seldom found because they are so seldom sought. By good movies, I mean meaty stuff for adults. I do not necessarily mean the classics, or avant-garde, or "art films." I have in mind accessible movies that try to deal with something that takes some degree of maturity to understand and appreciate. In a country that is notorious for its immaturity, such fare often comes and goes quickly at the average cinemall. The worst habits of moviemaking—the copycat principle, the loss of nerve, waves of fads, appeal to juvenile mentalities—make looking for good movies something of a task. The current wave of television programs turned into movies—Bewitched, The Dukes of Hazzard, and so on endlessly—are still television, small-screen and small-minded tales appealing to familiarity and predictability. This is not to say that borrowing from outside or previous sources is always bad. The current thriller Flight Plan is obviously ripped off from Hitchcock's The Lady Vanishes, but the intriguing mystery works in both films.

The good movies we should seek are not necessarily at the margins or only seeable in the local "arts array" series. Actually, if we want mature fare, we can find it at the center. Clint Eastwood's last two films—Mystic River and Million Dollar Baby—strike me as exemplary for my loose criterion. They deal with people who are quite ordinary but identifiably complex, tasked with the burden of their past imported into the present, and faced with events which are problematic and less than happy. In other words, the "surface realism" of such movies is utilized to portray a world where the usual easy answers and predictable outcomes don't apply. Movies with larger social themes that ensnare identifiable "round" characters can be found too. For example, The Constant Gardener shows us people enmeshed in a world where power cynically exploits poverty and shows the very real personal consequences for those who question the machinations of the powerful (in this case, Big Pharma, a current conspiratorial villain...
of choice). And in *Lord of War*, a very candid international arms dealer gives us a tour into the ghastly world of illicit weapons made easily available to anyone who can pay. The movie transforms this grim practice into a comic grotesque, including a hilarious paean to the Kalashnikov AK-47 rifle which sustains “militants” everywhere (and indeed, may be a more important military innovation than the atom bomb or the guided missile).

Both movies portray a world without comforting redemptions and characters that are too human to be anything but what they are and do, very much like those of us in the dark watching them. These two contemporary movies invite hard questions. The first suggests that the world is becoming more sinister, and the second that the world is becoming more preposterous.

It is useful, I think, to understand movies, or for that matter any medium, as something of a social movement which mobilizes resources and diffuses communications in a way that alters our way of seeing the world. The movies certainly have done that, so much so that our imaginative universe has been enriched in the process. But the danger now to the movies is not overpricing, or bad scripts, or corporate imbeciles. Rather it is supercession, the possibility that movies will be superseded by visual media which can be accessed by means other than going to the movie theater. This last summer, people watched more DVDs and fewer movies, and there are many venues on the Internet where one can watch a movie on the computer. But like the VCR cassettes many readers are familiar with, something important is missing: bigness, the stature and breadth of mythic adequacy which the movies more than any other medium have given us. The big screen of the movie theater gave us a sweeping and breathtaking vision of the world, which the small screen makes look minute and limited. The wonder of the movies is that they portray a world of magnification, not diminution. The big screen is a public experience for groups of people sharing that largeness; the little screen is a private experience for individuals or small groups sharing that smallness.

We may fondly hope that in the future somehow we will continue to seek out and enjoy what is called “the movie experience.” The technology is now developing so that the larger view accorded us by movies is increasingly available. (My local cinemall is running a long series of classic films on the big screen. You haven’t lived until you’ve seen *Lawrence of Arabia* in the full glory of its magnitude.) If we appreciate the movies, we all have a stock of films we love to see again and again, and seeing them fully projected, as they were intended to be, is a sheer delight. It is said of Susan Sontag that even to the end of her life she had a repertoire of about *four hundred* films which she watched again and again, once telling an audience that these movies were enduring passions. I agree. Age cannot wither, nor custom stale the infinite variety of the movies we love. I can watch the recognition scene in *Chinatown* or the seduction scene in *The Graduate* or the final scene in *City Lights* with ever-renewable wonder and wish that generations to come will appreciate and share the joy of the movie experience. We may hope that there are no last picture shows.

In his memoir of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Norman Malcolm recounts that the terribly intense Wittgenstein was exhausted but disappointed by his lectures. At the end, with everyone leaving, he would often implore someone, “Could you go to a flick?” He could forget his philosophical agonies by immersing himself in a movie, insisting that they sit in the first row. He watched the movie, no matter how dull or trivial, with the same intensity he gave to philosophy, except his complete absorption in the film made him forget the questions which were his life’s work. He once whispered to Malcolm, “This is like a shower bath!” Movie lovers know what he meant. We are like worshipful parishioners totally attentive to the ritual drama unfolding before us in the dark, and we love our faith for the baptism of total immersion it offers us. The flicks may be a Gnostic heresy, but the faithful who attend to the kingdom of shadows know they are in touch with something transcendent.

Jame Combs is a former Valparaiso University faculty member who now lives in the Virginia woods, surrounded by various woodland animals, seven cats, and Sara. He’s not complaining.
THERE WAS NO WAY FOR BISHOP JAMES MADISON to know the effect of the words that he spoke in honest answer to a student’s thoughtful question. That is the way of historical events; it is also the way of teaching. Any infinite number of things can lead to another infinite number of outcomes. For the teacher, however, the surest way to exercise contingent influences is through words spoken honestly and truly.

The student was Edward Coles, a young man from Nelson County in central Virginia. His family owned land throughout the northern part of the county, including a tract along the Rockfish River, which still flows down from the heart of the Blue Ridge. Coles was far from home, studying at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, once the small yet grand capital of a vast Virginia that stretched from the Atlantic to the Great Lakes and the Mississippi. Now Williamsburg, like the state, was sadly reduced in size and wealth.

Bishop Madison, a cousin of the Virginian statesman and future President of the same name, had been President of William and Mary since 1777. An ardent patriot, the future Bishop served as Captain of a Williamsburg militia company. By Anglican canon law, this should have led to a forcible laicization; however, not only did Madison remain an Anglican minister, but in 1790, he was consecrated as the first Anglican Bishop of Virginia by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Trained originally as a lawyer after his own graduation from William and Mary, he was appointed to be both President as well as Professor of Mathematics at the college. He must have been skilled in the subject, for he was one of the principal members of the commission that re-mapped the Mason-Dixon Line, the border between Maryland and Pennsylvania. Moreover, he created the first map of Virginia since Jefferson and Fry’s survey in the 1740s.

While Madison seems on the account of subsequent historians of the Episcopal Church in Virginia to have been a much less successful bishop than man of science, he was able to tell the truth. When Edward Coles asked him if slavery in Virginia was justified, Madison said to him what he never dared to write. No, Madison told Coles, it could not be justified. Slavery was not rightfully done, and it existed only because it had been so long in Virginia that it would be difficult to be rid of it.

In 1808, Coles inherited his family’s plantation on the Rockfish River in Albemarle County, Virginia: 782 acres with twenty slaves, nine of them children. Apparently it was at that time that he determined, somehow, to emancipate them. But events conspired to delay his plans. From 1809 to 1815, he was private secretary to President Madison. In 1816, he was part of a delegation to the Russian Imperial Court in St. Petersburg. During this time, his slaves remained in bondage on the Rockfish plantation.

But Coles had not forgotten Bishop Madison’s words. On April 1, 1819, he began a trip westward. He had determined that he would immigrate to Illinois, and take his slaves with him. This he did against the advice of his venerated Albemarle County neighbor Thomas Jefferson, who attempted to dissuade Cole from his plan.

Coles was undeterred by the Sage of Monticello. He bought land in Illinois, and sold his lands in Virginia. Then he marched his property up the Valley of Virginia and across the Appalachians to Pittsburgh, where they all began their voyage to a new future.

Not until they were all floating down the Ohio in flatboats did Coles reveal to his slaves that they were free as of that moment. “...I commenced by saying it was time for me to make known to them what I intended to do with them...” he subsequently wrote. “I proclaimed in the shortest and fullest manner possible, that they were no longer Slaves, but free—free as I was, and were at liberty to...”
proceed with me, or to go ashore at their pleasure. The effect on them was electrical. In breathless silence they stood before me, unable to utter a word, but with countenances beaming with expression which no words could convey, and which no language can now describe.” There is a lovely folk painting that shows Coles, a lone white man on a vast raft, surrounded by rejoicing people who were now free.

Coles was determined not only to free his slaves, but to establish them properly in their new lives. On arrival in southern Illinois, he gave each family a deed to 160 acres of prairie. He too settled in Illinois, beginning a new life as a farmer without the benefit of slave labor. Three years after his arrival, he was elected governor of the Illinois Territory.

Thus began the most important of his public periods of office. As governor of the Illinois Territory, he suppressed the importation of slave labor into Illinois from the South, and at the ratification of statehood he successfully fought to preserve Illinois as a free state. He thereby almost single-handedly stopped the spread of slavery into the Old Northwest, which, according to the act of 1784 drafted by Coles’s old neighbor, Thomas Jefferson, was supposed to remain free soil. Had slavery taken hold in Illinois, it is possible that Illinois might have become a slave state simply by default. The result of that counterfactual is almost too wild to consider.

Coles was one of a number of Virginians who, wishing to free their slaves, were forced to leave their native state in order to do so. While Coles was on the very elite end of the social scale, there were others of more humble social origins who were moved by their faith to do much the same thing. The majority of these seem to have been Primitive Baptists who moved northwest out of Virginia (or Kentucky, which often had been their first place of settlement after leaving the Old Dominion) into Ohio and Indiana. One of these was Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham. Others were Methodists like Thomas Worthington of Berkeley County who in the 1790s, when that growing denomination was still opposed to the institution of slavery, left Virginia for Ohio rather than live in a state where slavery was tolerated.

All left for their own reasons, to be sure, and these reasons included many besides their abhorrence of slavery. In the case of Edward Coles it was the honest words of a teacher who never said or wrote such words publicly, who probably never dreamed of doing such a thing. The words that Bishop Madison spoke in a classroom to an enquiring student, words spoken in a moment of honesty, made all the difference.

Al Zambone lives deep in the heart of Virginia.
what is America? Mark Helprin’s Freddy and Fredericka

Ken Masugi

[In America] he had discovered that the aim-point of the impossible is the best aim-point of all. He had made his way with only the princess at his side and no advantage other than that which was within them. In America he had learned to be a king, not least because in America he discovered the sacred principle that every man is a king (552).


This is a comic novel about two ugly characters—Freddy and Fredericka, a.k.a. Prince Charles and Princess Di—who become beautified by a long march through democratic America. Their education through American experiences—work, political involvement, immersion in wilderness—brings forth their true natures. As in Plato, the good, America, becomes the new definition of the beautiful. Such argumentation, that utilitarian America might beautify the aristocracy, runs counter to Alexis de Tocqueville’s classic portrayal of democratic America to an ambivalent France. But this particularly vulnerable aristocracy requires such education. America turns out to contain nobility of soul that enables the royal couple to be true rulers of Britain. In turn, the true aristocratic legacy in Freddy calls America back to its best purposes. Once Americanized, Freddy and Fredericka reflect the best about aristocratic men and women and their democratic counterparts. From Silly and Snobby they become manly and womanly. There is something about America that corrects British corruptions of the pseudo-aristocracy. In the course of this education, the reader encounters faithful servants, eccentric royalty, scheming media giants, and politicians, all embraced by a bizarre “magical realism” that sees Merlin become (switching not just letters) a common “Mr. Neil.”

This is not a novel about the monarchy or court politics. Its first and last lines are worth recalling here: “Though it is hard to be a king, it is harder yet to become one” (1). Its last words: “Everyone is interested, it is said, in kings, but I myself am interested in kings before their time. For kings before their time are like us all, and may God bless them for that, and save them, too” (553).

“Kings before their time.” Helprin is interested in the British monarchy not only because he believes in Anglo-American union, but ultimately because he believes in the power of virtue. Virtue is the only basis for the love and honor at the heart of all Helprin novels.

Why does Helprin think that monarchy matters? Only because visible virtue matters. Political deeds matter. And Freddy/Charles does not disappoint in manly acts of physical courage, grasp of technology, and statesmanship. Unless the expectation of virtue is met, the moral order collapses. In the face of such perils, we require both confidence in good instincts and a sense of humor. Thus the novel is Twain and Trollope. It is the Prince and the Pauper set in the contemporary United States. It is The Pallisers set across the water, over a century later.

But knowing the depths of the novel requires more than just noting parallels. The novel is narrated by a character who heard about the events of the novel during Freddy’s hypnotic sessions while he memorized, read, and recited “backward the Karachi Yellow Pages at high speed, all the while simulating with intense bodily jerkings the paroxysmal death struggle of a salt-water game fish.” The narrator has “taken some liberties of narration” (2). We readers are invited to complete the tale ourselves, by retelling it to those who can imitate its highest aspirations, the ultimate addressees of Helprin’s novels.

Can the poet correct or refashion history? The real Mark Helprin could not have revived Bob Dole’s presidential campaign. Helprin wrote
speeches for the now-Viagra spokesman's ill-fated 1996 presidential campaign, including his brilliant speech resigning from the Senate. Yet chance and art can combine to produce the best regime—at least in speech. Helprin is bolder than Tocqueville (whose bicentennial we celebrate this year) in what he makes of America.

The preposterous names and inane wordplay (Freddy's mistress Lady Boylinghotte) are intended to produce an atmosphere of frivolity to accompany serious speculation on the modern world. This moderates Helprin's most didactic novel. Ultimately, the purpose of the novel is comic, in the sense that the world can be redeemed by virtuous action, the purposeful actions of Americans and British together.

Freddy and Fredericka may be said to elevate Tocqueville's argument about the Anglo-Americans by showing how noble they can be and thus how virtue can survive in a democratic age. Helprin saves the best of the Old World, the world of Marlborough, Shakespeare, and Locke, by reviving it through the New. The aristocratic Freddy and Fredericka use the examples of Lincoln as well as what was best in their own lineage to succeed.

At the Lincoln Memorial, a then-homeless Freddy and Fredericka gaze on Lincoln's face:

"Of all the kings of England, none was half as noble. Nor Nelson, nor Wellington, nor Marlborough, nor Churchill."

"In the middle of this crazed, materialistic, common country, where the lowest of the low is turned up by the strong currents of progress and rides upon the glittering surface of national life more buoyantly than an aristocrat; in the midst of all this that I thought so unimpressive—Gypsies, Cadillacs, houses with flat roofs—we have been outdone by the visage of a peasant, a soul speaking through marble, in a history not our own."

"Who is that?" Fredericka asked.
"Lincoln."
"He's the one who shot Kennedy?" (255)

Later we see the real princess (a descendant of the Duke of Marlborough) emerge, while cleaning public restroom toilets. But the political adventures of Freddy show him at his best.

Freddy, by virtue of having successfully passed himself off as a dentist, is recruited by the desperate Republican candidate for President, Senator Dewey Knott. He is hopelessly behind President Self in the polls, but Freddy's candor makes Knott competitive. Freddy is willing to demand the best of Americans. He has seen them work and sacrifice—one even gives her life for him.

Speaking before the Republican convention (I omit some important part of the plot as not to spoil it for the reader), Freddy-Helprin denounces current politics and affirms the best possibilities for America and the West:

"I think the model of a president should be a man who comes before you and says, 'This is what I have seen, this is what I believe, this is how I live, and this is what I love'.

'I have read your Declaration and your Constitution, and though at first I found the former personally injurious, I came to see that these are lucid and perfect documents, and that if you return to them as faithfully as they have served you since the beginning, they will not fail you.

'You have neglected them, and are unclear about the duties of a citizen and what comes by right. You seem to have forgotten the ancient battles in which you prevailed, and, more importantly, those that you merely survived. You seem to have forgotten that your original principles arose in a land that was carpeted with virgin stands of trees, and that the principles by which you lived—inmaterial and bright, ever enduring—grew up just as strong and fresh. Return to them. They are waiting for you, as are reserves of honour as vast as the stands of trees that once spread without end....

'I was born to be a king, and you were born not to have one. America does not need and cannot have a king, for it is majestic in itself as perhaps no country has ever been. And its greatest majesty is not the splendid landscape or the long
and sunny coasts, not the Mississippi or the snows of the Pacific Crest. Its greatest majesty, its gift to the world, is that it has carried out God’s will to make each man a king, subservient only to Him. From the beginning, this has been the underlying force of every footfall, smile, and blink of the eye in this country. It, and not your power, is what has lifted you up, is what distinguishes you from others, and has made you the leader of the world” (496–500).

After several months in America, Freddy and Fredericka reemerge in London (having returned, everyone else thought, from a brief vacation in Pakistan). We are told that Freddy eventually assumes the throne, leads the nation through troubles and in wars, and forms an Anglo-American Union. “In America he had learned to be a king, not least because in America he discovered the sacred principle that every man is a king” (552).

Churchill said on coming to leadership at the beginning of World War II: “Facts are better than dreams.” But dreams such as Helprin’s make us better appreciate how we might mold those facts that become our lives.†

Ken Masugi is Director of the Center for Local Government of the Claremont Institute. His latest book, co-edited with John Marini, is The Progressive Revolution in Politics and Political Science (2005). He is currently working on two books on multiculturalism and American citizenship.

WORD, INCARNATE

Words sicken when the pulse
Of deeds beats low in them.
We grow confused
When all our noble words lie, dying,
Because they’re not transfused
With sacrifice.

Even the first Word
Who, in the beginning burst
Life’s glory open as God spoke it,
Bid to be heard
When in silence he took up death
And broke it.

Charles Strietelmeier
IN MY FAMILY, WE HAVE A CHRISTMAS EVE TRADITION—Chinese food for supper. This all started years ago when my grandmother refused to cook on Christmas Eve, because she had to make a big breakfast, big midday-meal, and suppertime snacks of the leftovers on Christmas. She went on strike every Christmas Eve. Grandpa always had to work late and forgot his annual obligation. Annually, Ho Toy Lo on Main Street, the only open restaurant between his office and home, saved him.

This Christmas Eve my wife went on strike at 3:00 p.m. She’d been cooking all day. I’d been doing dishes and running interference with our boys, Peter-8, David-3. They were two live wires. “McDonald’s for supper,” Mary announced. David, a vegetarian, would only eat the french fries, but the rest of us would be filled, if not nourished, by a rare fast food supper. First, we had to visit the pair of cats we were taking care of. We stopped by their house about 4:15 to feed, water, clean their boxes, and play with them. Tabby and Sandy are ready purrers and very affectionate. We left a few minutes before 5:00 and arrived at Mu Delta at 5:01, just as they were locking up for their long winter’s nap.

No problem, Burger King is less than a mile away. Problem: Burger King also closed early, as did Pizza Hut and both supermarkets on our end of town. We were left with getting food from the only business open anywhere near us, Eastside Amoco, known in our family as “Gas-O ‘n’ Treats.” (We’d entered this name in a contest to name the store two years ago. We didn’t win.) Gas-O is as close to a corner grocery store as exists in this modern age. The staff is nice and the clientele are all regulars.

As we drove there from the last shuttered supermarket the Packers won their game on a last-second field goal. When we got to Gas-O, there was a long line of people who had been waiting to get their smokes and batteries until the game ended. We bought our two dollar frozen cheese pizza and bottle of orange pop and headed home, much later than Mary expected.

“Next time...” she started.

“Next time we’re out on Christmas Eve and can’t find food, I should give up right away?”

We were a little tense. I’d hoped to get to church by 6:00 for the evening service. The pizza, Orv’s, was not our usual brand. It was a little thinner and had more of a chemical taste, but we ate it all and I made it to church in time to go over my sermon once and get things ready for the holy day.

We had a guest organist, as we’ve had for nearly two years, since our organist died suddenly one Sunday morning. This guy was good. During the distribution of the bread he played some of the background music from the Charlie Brown Christmas special. I mentioned the special, as I do most Christmas Eves, because it ends with Linus reciting the lesson from Luke’s gospel. It is very familiar for that reason.

FOR THE PAST TEN YEARS OUR LAY READER HAS been a morning drive DJ for one of the local radio stations. He’s everybody’s friend, the sort of man you call “Slugger” the moment you meet him. Since he DJ’s for a lot of wedding receptions, he sleeps late Sunday mornings and is rarely able to attend worship, but he’s always free to be lay reader on Christmas Eve. He does a marvelous job. And he always has jokes for me.

Two fish in a tank, one says “I’ll drive, you man the gun.”

What did the fish say when it swam into a wall? Dam.

What do you call a fish with no eyes? Fsh.

This year I had one for him: Man dies and goes to heaven. He asks St. Peter if he can speak with the Virgin Mary. Pete looks into it. A little while
later St. Peter shows the man to the Virgin Mary's office. The man asks, "Every time I see you depicted in paintings or sculptures, you're never smiling. You've got a look of wonder, or awe, or fear on your face. Did the artists get that right? Why don't you look happy?"

"I wanted a girl."

There is a little confusion about lighting the Advent wreath. It's being lit by four people, all of whom were born on different continents. The European, age 6, and his Asian-born brother, 2, will be accompanied by their North American-born, adoptive father. The other Asian and the South American need to divvy up the speaking part.

As the lay reader begins the Old Testament Lesson, Psalm 96, "Sing a new song..." an infant I baptized over the summer begins to cry. "There's a new song!" Chuck ad-libs. It was perfect. After the New Testament lesson, I expect him to say something like, "Traffic's next, after this message from Druck's Heating and Air Conditioning!" instead of, "This is the word of the Lord."

The elder who serves the choir forgets to serve Chuck and me. We're whispering "Psst, Keith, psst, Keith!" Finally, someone in the choir prompts Keith to serve us. "Thanks be to God," I say as I always do when celebrating the sacrament. "Thanks, Keith," Chuck adds. This is the kind of thing Keith will feel bad about, but to me it is as serious as not passing the potatoes on to Aunt Pat at Thanksgiving.

During the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving, I screw up the opening litany. I say, "It is right to give our thanks and praise," which the congregation is supposed to say, after I've said, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God." We're all confused momentarily. Then I say, "My bad. Let's try that again, Let us give thanks to the Lord our God." They chime in with the correct response and I tell them they are the smartest Presbyterian church in Oshkosh.

At the invitation, I point out that people will come from all directions, just as our candle lighters for tonight came from different continents, because the Good News we celebrate tonight is for "all peoples." So, of course, everyone was invited to share the sacrament with us.

As we stand to sing the closing hymn, "Silent Night," (It's the law: you must close the Christmas Eve service with "Silent Night." ) Chuck says, "I am having a stroke." He's a cut up, so I figure he's pulling my leg. But no, he's really serious. Then I point out he's trying to read the German lyrics. He feels much better. After we walk out the center aisle at the end of the service, I check my watch. It reads 8:32. Pretty good for a service with communion, additional special music, a guest organist, and communion. Chuck gives me a high five.

People always linger after a Christmas Eve service, even though we don't offer coffee and cookies as we do following Sunday worship. On Christmas Eve, the grown children of the congregation who are making their annual pilgrimages home catch up with their peers and show off their children. It's lovely, but I want to get home, because of three little words, "Some assembly required."

David is excited because "Santa is coming and Gram is going to sleep at our house tonight!"

I spend a few minutes talking to the recent seminary graduate who will fill the pulpit the following Sunday. I realize that she'll probably have her own call next year and not be able to preach here. I tell her about a wedding I did a few weeks ago in which I quoted both Glen Campbell and The Smiths in my homily.

"No way!" she exclaims.

"Way!" I respond. Then I turn off the sound system and the chancel lights and head home, having put on the holiday for another year.

It was a pretty good service. The sanctuary was lovely, the music was glorious, the last minute difficulties, always present, were dealt with. Only as I was falling to sleep did I realize that I didn't once say, "Jesus" in the sermon, and I didn't get an egg roll. Oh well, maybe next year.

The Rev. Thomas C. Willadsen pastors First Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.
Quite a few years ago, when I was still teaching at Oberlin College, the father of a student for whom I was faculty advisor telephoned me one day in my office. He was, he said, flying from his home halfway across the country to Oberlin, and he wanted an appointment to talk with me about his son's decision to become a religion major.

That young man had not come to Oberlin intending to major in religion. Indeed, almost no student ever did, nor were they required to take any religion courses. But, given the opportunity to elect courses of interest from the very start of his college career, this student—like quite a few others—had been drawn in. Having taught him and come to know him a little, I had agreed to become his advisor when he declared his major.

His decision clearly bothered his father, a tough-minded physicist who could see little point in a religion major. His concern wasn't primarily that he thought religion a useless major when it came to future employment, though he may have thought that as well. He simply thought there were many subjects on which his son's time would be better spent.

He wanted to understand. He wanted to talk with me about what a religion major involved, about why one might pursue it, whether it could make sense to do so. He'd come because he cared deeply about his son and didn't want him to make a terrible mistake. So he wanted to talk, to understand, and to come to terms with a choice that by his lights seemed foolish.

I thought this was terrific. That a father should care so much about his son's decisions that he would want to come and take my time discussing it struck me—and strikes me still—as a wonderful thing, which I could only welcome. That he wanted his son to get things right, and that he was by no means certain that the faculty (or his son's faculty advisor!) would be all that wise about such matters, that he had to come and see and inquire for himself—all that seemed exactly right. I have never forgotten the impression it made upon me, and it is one of my favorite memories from thirty years of teaching. Moreover, it forced me to think more carefully about two deeply moral relationships—that of father to son and that of teacher to student.

I have called to mind this occasion more than once of late when I have heard comment about the phenomenon now labeled "helicopter parents." These are parents who hover. They do not simply send their children off to college but remain in close contact with those children. They have questions for the professors teaching their children, for faculty advisors, and for administrators. Most of the comments I hear about these copter parents take the form of complaint and criticism about them.

On the whole, I find that I can share neither the complaint nor the criticism. I'm told, for example, that such parenting displays an inability to let go of one's children, an unwillingness to allow children to fend for themselves. Now, we can stipulate that conscientious parents may sometimes hover too much and stifle a child. Let's grant that a cell phone call every few hours is probably overdoing "staying in touch." But I cannot believe that in an age that has celebrated autonomy and self-determination in destructive ways, an age in which we have deliberately structured life in ways that strain family ties and encourage us to think of individuals simply as isolated and self-interested, that in such an age our top priority should be that parents let children fend for themselves. On the contrary, we should be delighted when we see signs that the corrosive individualism which characterizes so much of our culture has not succeeded in producing parents who don't much care how their children manage the first time they leave home for an extended period of time.
Sometimes, though, the moral flaw of such parents is described in different terms. It's not that these parents can't let go of their children. Rather, it's that these parents—coming, for the most part, from the narcissistic Baby Boomer generation—always have questioned authority and want to question it still. And now that their children are off at college, the authorities whom they want to question are their children's teachers, advisors, and administrators. Here again, let's stipulate that the Baby Boomers are probably far from the most virtuous of generations, and that they (we!) can be insufferably self-centered.

Nonetheless, this argument is certainly striking and intriguing—especially when put forward by faculty and administrators at colleges and universities. After all, who—according to this argument—are the "authorities" who are being questioned and who (evidently) should not be so questioned? Why it's the faculty and administrators, of course. That they should fall into the trap of thinking of themselves as authorities, suited to step into the lives of these young people at the time their parents are gracefully to recede, tells us a good bit about their image of themselves.

But it is an image we ought to question, an image the parents of our students do well to question. It is by no means obvious that a Ph.D. in an academic discipline makes any of us a wise or good guide for the choices students should make about the course their lives will take, what they should believe, or what they should value. In fact, part of the problem with what happens in many classrooms in colleges and universities—certainly part of the problem with the way my own discipline, religion, is often taught—is that we faculty too often suppose we are there not simply to teach the subject matter of our discipline (a task for which we presumably have some training and competence) but also to shape the souls of our students (a task for which we may be ill-suited and which, in any case, is a misuse of our role in the classroom). And it is at least as hard to think of reasons why parents should suppose that mid-level administrators at colleges and universities—the folks who run orientation programs and oversee student and residential life—are any better suited or qualified than parents themselves to give guidance and advice about decisions their children will make.

Those who teach at and those who administer our colleges and universities should probably get down on their knees daily, giving thanks for the touching faith of parents that continues to move them to send their children (with accompanying checks) off to study with us. In exchange, we should welcome the concern—and the questions—of these parents. We should be glad when we see signs of parental affection and concern. We should practice a kind of self-denying restraint, especially in the classroom, when we are tempted to subvert or mock the beliefs our students bring with them from their homes or when we are tempted to imagine that we have been asked not just to train the minds of our students but also to form their character.

All honor to the memory of that father who came to see me years ago in Oberlin. He is, I happen to know, no longer alive, but I like to think he would be pleased and proud—even if still affectionately concerned—to know that his son now has a Ph.D. in religious ethics and is himself a college professor. A professor, I trust, who is always ready to hear from the parents of those he teaches. 

Gilbert Meilaender teaches theology and ethics at Valparaiso University.
The Advent season on the liturgical calendar is a time when Christians prepare to remember Jesus Christ's birth at Christmas, but it also is the occasion for Christians to anticipate and get ready for Christ's return. We believe that someday the kingdom of God that Jesus embodied and inaugurated will come, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer, and be established fully "on earth as it is in heaven." Only then will there truly be "peace on earth, good will toward all." In the meantime, we Christians prophetically experience this kingdom way of life as we worship, pass the peace of Christ, and go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord in a world still wounded by sin.

Sounds fairly straightforward enough, doesn't it? However, when conflict erupts due to the continuing presence of sin, may Christians ever resort to the use of force, including killing, in order to restore or establish peace? If, for example, an enemy, whom we are called to love, threatens an innocent neighbor, whom we are also called to love, what should we morally do?

This particular Advent season also occasions for Roman Catholic Christians the fortieth anniversary of the official closing of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). This gathering of the world's Catholic bishops was initially convened by Pope John XIII in order that the Church might bring itself up to date, address contemporary problems, and take part in the discussion of the major questions of the day. One of the last documents promulgated by the Council was Gaudium et Spes, "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," which in its final section addressed "The Fostering of Peace and the Promotion of a Community of Nations"—an appropriate topic given the Advent season during which it was issued.

One of its most quoted lines called upon the entire Church to "undertake an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude" (§80). However, four decades later, after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, a number of Christian ethicists are still searching for such a new attitude, as evident in their calling into question the "war" approach to dealing with terrorism. Of course, many moral theologians continue to draw either upon pacifism or just-war theory, the two traditional Christian ethical perspectives on political violence, in order to evaluate the war on terrorism. Yet, interestingly, both pacifist and just-war Christian ethicists also have suggested that a "police" approach would be ethically more appropriate.

I wish to reflect briefly on the legacy of Vatican II on war and peace for Catholics and others forty years later in our post-9/11 world. In short, did it really mark an advent of a new attitude for evaluating war? And, would a police approach actually constitute such a novel perspective?

The Council's main reason for suggesting a new attitude was, in the wake of two catastrophic world wars, the development of "scientific weapons" during the arms race of the Cold War that "can inflict massive and indiscriminate destruction far exceeding the bounds of legitimate defense" (§80). Total warfare, which by its very nature encompasses and indiscriminately harms civilian population centers, was condemned unequivocally by the bishops as a crime against God and humanity. This was one of only two condemnations—the other being the condemnation of abortion—to be found in the entire corpus of Vatican II documents. Moreover, the Council presciently warned about terrorism as a new way of waging such warfare.

At this point in the document, however, no new approach for evaluating war really has been offered, for the criticism about indiscriminate destruction is based on the traditional just-war criterion of discrimination, which is also known as non-combatant immunity. Accordingly, citizens
are not supposed to be directly and intentionally targeted. The Council's use of this principle therefore is not evidence of the rejection of the just-war tradition, even though its serious application would evaluate much of modern warfare as immoral.

Similarly, given that the danger of war remains due to the continued presence of sin in the world, the Council did not revoke the traditional right of national self-defense: “As long as the danger of war remains and there is no competent and sufficiently powerful authority at the international level, governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defense once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted” (§79).

Notice that here the Council was invoking the traditional just-war criteria of just cause (i.e., defense) and last resort. Again, it does not appear that a new approach for evaluating war was being offered or employed.

The mode of reasoning found in traditional just-war theory, with rules governing when and how the use of force is employed justly, remains evident here as well as in the Council’s other remarks in this section prohibiting wars that seek to subjugate other nations and forbidding soldiers’ blind obedience to commands that violate these principles. Obviously, these norms continue to possess relevance, as seen in their invocation by both those supporting and those criticizing the U.S.-led war in Iraq and in the moral uproar that occurred at Abu Ghraib prison. Admittedly, the criteria of the just-war tradition have been misused numerous times over the centuries; however, a fundamental rule of thumb in Christian ethics is that the abuse does not negate the use.

Still, these moral considerations offered by the Council and still invoked today are not a new approach for ethically evaluating war. They come to us via the just-war tradition that in Christian teaching traces back to the fourth century with Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine. In recent centuries, this mode of ethical reasoning about warfare, along with its rules of engagement, has also become incorporated into international law. Furthermore, subsequent Church documents—for example, the United States Catholic Bishops’ pastoral letter, The Challenge of Peace (1983), the Vatican’s Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), and the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2005)—have continued to maintain a nation's right to legitimate defense as long as it adheres to these criteria. So, if they were not jettisoning just-war thinking completely, what did the Council mean when it called for “an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude”?

Indeed, the Council did clear away some new ground. It strongly emphasized that all Christians work toward the establishment of peace. In this vein, and in an unexpected departure from previous official Catholic teachings, the Council praised those who renounce the use of violence and who employ nonviolent methods in seeking justice and peace. Although pacifism was normative in early Christianity, this was the first time that a Church council ever commended nonviolence as a way of life for lay Catholics. Related to this, the Council did another first by adding that governments should make laws recognizing conscientious objection. Moreover, the subsequent Church documents mentioned above have continued to acknowledge and encourage nonviolence as a legitimate way of life for Christians.

Nevertheless, the Council did not replace the just-war approach with a pacifist approach for evaluating war. Official recognition of the latter perspective is certainly evidence of a new attitude, but it does not seem to constitute an “entirely” new attitude. The Council, however, did not stop their treatment of war and peace there.

It went on to call for the abolition of war through international institutions and law: “It is our clear duty, then, to strain every muscle as we work for the time when all war can be completely outlawed by international consent” (§82). Here the Council proposed the establishment of a universal public authority having effective power to protect a peaceful and just order in the international community. Beyond international laws, institutions, and courts, the bishops seemed to suggest some sort of international police capacity to enforce such laws, to protect the peace, and to bring perpetrators to justice. This brings me back to the current appeals to a police approach by many
Christian ethicists today. Does this really represent "an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude"?

I regard these more recent invocations of a police model as curious, especially given that little prior work has been done by Christian ethicists on the topic of policing itself. Indeed, I find it strange that these theologians are calling for a police approach when hardly anyone has examined what such a model might look like and entail, especially with regard to the use of force. Twenty-one years ago, I first began to wrestle with the question of whether I should use force, especially lethal force, when I applied for a job at various police departments that, when interviewing me, asked some form of the following question: "Would you really, if necessary, shoot someone?"

Simply put, though most of a police officer's time is devoted to helping people in need, directing traffic, defusing domestic disputes, and other services, there remains the possibility that force will be required to protect lives from harm and to apprehend offenders. Even in nations such as Great Britain, where the police are relatively unarmed, they still have this capacity to use force, including lethal force, when necessary. Of course, such police use of force must be in accordance with strict guidelines—especially for the use of lethal force. That is, it must be a last resort, proportionate, and discriminating. Also, deadly force may be used only as a legitimate defense against a grave and imminent threat to the officer's life or the lives of other persons. Obviously, these rules governing when and how the use of force is justified resemble the criteria of the just-war tradition.

To simply call for a police approach is not enough. As the Rodney King beating by some Los Angeles police officers in 1991 and the more recent incident with New Orleans police officers in the wake of Hurricane Katrina demonstrate, not all policing is just policing. There is, after all, such a thing as police brutality and excessive force. So, if Vatican II forty years ago and Christian ethicists today propose outlawing war, they are right to suggest also the need for some sort of international police institution to enforce this law. But this might furthermore require the use of force, including lethal force, if a rogue nation or terrorist organization breaks the law that outlaws war. Thus there will be the ongoing need for rules governing when and how such force may be used by such a policing entity. In my view, while this would be new and better compared to nations unilaterally taking it upon themselves to defend against the threats posed in today's world, a police approach would still be more akin to the just-war tradition, at least with regard to the criteria that would need to govern when and how force would be justified. Indeed, just-policing is the best exemplification of the just-war tradition.

As such, a police approach, like the older pacifist and just-war approaches, would not be a completely new way to evaluate war or the use of force. Upon closer examination, however, the Council called for a new attitude, not a new approach, for evaluating war, and the current calls for a police approach certainly evince the way in which the Catholic Church and many Christian ethicists in recent years share a strong presumption against war and take it seriously as an ethical matter.

Tobias Winright is a Roman Catholic moral theologian who teaches at Saint Louis University.
MORNING SUN

Today the bedroom's dim cold
leads down the tunneled hall
into shocked brightness
after days of rain—
the front room windows
stream their broad surprise,
like friends bursting in
with new flowers.

Outside, golden light
holds a dozing cat,
the drooping garden plants—
rosemary, tomato, and basil—
a potted geranium.
Chrome gleams from a car backing into a street.

At the table, I settle
into my hot teacup.
Wholegrain toast,
fresh orange juice,
and—as if to name
this early sweetness—
honeydew.

While Mark lugs in patio plants
against predicted frost,
I read the dark, daily news:
two refugee girls weep
in the sunlight
for their small sister,
exploded by rocket fire;
a mother in town
finds her girl at dawn,
strangled with a phone cord.
Out west the lava dome
swells its eerie light.

The same sun, I tell
the brilliant window,
shines on them. Outside,
hoar fuzz on a windshield
softens in the light, as if wishing
could melt the cold away.

Carol Gilbertson
the peril and promise of dual citizenship: part two

Jeanne M. Heffernan

In my last column (Trinity 2005), I explored one of the difficulties contemporary citizens face as members of two cities. Noting the problematic assumptions that many, including Jeffrey Stout, associate with the democratic ethos, I argued that our political culture poses a danger to our primary allegiance to Christ. Specifically, I underscored the way in which individualism, considered by Tocqueville a close counterpart to democratic equality, undermines the tradition of Christian discipleship.

Now if what Tocqueville observed in fact reflects the inexorable logic of democracy, namely, that it fosters social fragmentation, undermines all hierarchical structures, and promotes the sovereign self, then the Christian-democratic synthesis taken for granted at least in Catholic circles for the last half-century requires serious re-evaluation. Robert Kranak in his provocative book Christian Faith and Modern Democracy (University of Notre Dame Press, 2001) does just that, and his observations should give us pause. Kranak argues that modern liberal democracy rests upon a flawed anthropological and political vision—evident in its expansive schema of private rights—which runs contrary to the basic assumptions of a Christian worldview. It has generated a host of ills that threaten not only our political but also our spiritual well-being. And those Christians who have too readily embraced modern democracy have, in his words, underestimated “the corrosive effects of a culture of rights and the leveling effects of mass democracy on the human soul and on the institutions that are necessary to sustain a sense of the sacred” (168). The democratic ethos championed by Stout faces a serious indictment on these counts.

While Kranak and other critics of the Christian-democratic synthesis have rightly questioned whether traditional Christian beliefs and the presuppositions of liberal democracy are compatible, we ought not let the matter rest there. Instead we need to ask whether Christianity is compatible with democracy in its various forms, for there have been different philosophical foundations behind the many instantiations of democracy, and these foundations have given rise to very different practices. Surely the theoretical inspiration and activities of the French Republic under the Jacobins differ in kind from the democracy practiced by pious Christians in the New England townships. Recall that Tocqueville described the latter as embracing the spirit of liberty as well as the spirit of religion. These good folks perceived a basic difference between the church and the city, between discipleship and democracy. For them, Tocqueville noted, in the field of religion “everything is classified, systematized, foreseen, and decided beforehand,” whereas in the field of politics “everything is agitated, disputed, and uncertain. In the one is a passive though a voluntary obedience; in the other, an independence scornful of experience, and jealous of all authority.” “These two tendencies,” he marveled, “apparently so discrepant, are far from conflicting; they advance together and support each other.” Whether or not one subscribes to the Puritan understanding of theology and politics recounted here, this example of the pious Christian and ardent citizen at least suggests that democratic institutions—when animated by a non-liberal anthropology—are not in fundamental tension with the Christian faith.

Profound Christian thinkers of other persuasions have made robust arguments in this vein, and we who recognize the danger in Stout’s thesis and the sober truth in Kranak’s, would do well to revisit these arguments before abandoning the democratic project. I would propose that the best way to address the problems associated with democracy, human rights, autonomy, and the like, is not to abandon their usage but to clarify their deepest meaning. This is a work of education.
involving nothing less than a full-scale renovation of our public philosophy.

In this regard, a relatively little-known source comes to mind, the work of Yves R. Simon. Simon was a twentieth-century Catholic philosopher and French émigré whose reflections on politics, ethics, and metaphysics repay careful study. While on the faculty of the University of Chicago, Simon delivered the prestigious Walgreen lectures, later published as *The Philosophy of Democratic Government* (republished by University of Notre Dame Press, 1993). His argument helpfully clarifies the difference between a faulty and a sound philosophical foundation for democracy. As to the former, Simon perceives a common error in various flawed theories of democratic government, namely, the dissolution of genuine political authority in favor of an unconstrained popular will—limited neither by governors nor by the natural law.

A Thomist, Simon grounds his alternative defense of democracy in a Christian anthropology, consciously avoiding the pitfalls of liberalism. After appealing to Thomas, Cajetan, Bellarmine, and Suarez for the basic groundwork of his argument, Simon states that he favors representative democracy over other forms, because he thinks it actualizes most effectively what Aquinas calls the *political* (as opposed to despotic) nature of a regime, since the governed have the institutional means of resistance to bad government readily at their disposal in the electoral process. It is right, he insists, that democratic means be available to all. Popular sovereignty and representative government imply a natural tendency toward universal suffrage. “That the multitude in charge of selecting the governing personnel should comprise all citizens follows from the nature of political society. Other societies are built on the basis of exclusive membership; not so the state, which is, by essence, the concern of all” (87). Universal suffrage affords the common man (who has little but strength of numbers on his side) an indispensable form of power to counterbalance the many advantages possessed by elites. The people ought to retain this power not only as a guard against tyranny. In accord with the principle of subsidiarity (which holds that when a task or decision can be satisfactorily achieved by the initiative of the individual or small social units, it should be, so that the intellectual and moral capacities in such persons or groups be developed most fully), they ought to remain actively engaged in political decision-making at various levels of government.

It is this kind of active citizenry that Tocqueville glimpsed in the American townships. Struck by the stark contrast between the average American citizen and his continental counterpart, Tocqueville noted, “The native of New England is attached to his township because it is independent and free: his co-operation in its affairs ensures his attachment to its interests; the well-being it affords him secures his affection; and its welfare is the aim of his ambition and of his future exertions.” Unlike Tocqueville’s *confreres*, described as so many tenants in a territory of a distant landlord, the American citizen exhibited a kind of ownership of his political community, one that summoned his care and sacrifice. “He takes a part in every occurrence in the place; he practices the art of government in the small sphere within his reach; he accustoms himself to those forms without which liberty can only advance by revolutions; he imbibes their spirit; he acquires a taste for order, comprehends the balance of powers, and collects clear practical notions on the nature of his duties and the extent of his rights.” Tocqueville’s self-governing citizen, though initially tempted toward individualism, comes to recognize his deep dependence on his fellows. He is very far from the sovereign self rightly criticized by Robert Kraynak. Likewise, the democratic citizen envisioned by Simon exercises an autonomy that bears no resemblance to the liberal antinomism Kraynak fears. Genuine autonomy, Simon would say, is not the independent will exercising indeterminate choice in opposition to authority; rather, it is the state of fullest freedom whereby the moral law has been interiorized and definitively guides our decision-making. For Simon, the glory of the autonomous individual is precisely his freedom to reflect on a whole range of means to achieve his end: happiness.

But this deliberation is not carried on in isolation. As Simon insists, the quest for autonomy is pursued in community, and the moral law with which autonomy accords concerns not the isolated
individual, but the person in community. Thus, autonomy is essentially related to the common welfare, and to achieve the common welfare requires political authority. Contrary to the assumptions and instincts of liberalism, Simon contends that political authority and personal autonomy do not in principle conflict but rather complement one another. Each is necessary for a healthy polis. Some organ of the community must choose the means to the common good—those conditions that allow for the full development of persons. This, for Simon, is the charge of political authority, but the exercise of this authority must promote human development by respecting the principle of subsidiarity. A democratic form of government, in Simon’s estimation, uniquely facilitates human development on the widest scale.

Both the governed and the governing in this schema consider themselves dependent upon each other and obligated by a higher law, created neither by statesmen nor citizenry. Instantiating the requirements of this law, borne of divine wisdom and love, is the task of every democratic citizen. This seems to me to be the kind of authentic democracy appreciated by Christian democrats across the denominational spectrum—a form of democracy that is consonant with the tradition of Christian discipleship and which deserves our commitment as members of an earthly and a heavenly city.

Jeanne Heffernan teaches in the humanities program at Villanova University.

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law

allegiance to first principles

HIS IS A TIME OF TRANSITION ON THE United States Supreme Court, not just in personnel but also regarding the establishment clause. Over the past two decades a divided Court has split the difference concerning government recognition of religious belief. But an issue percolating in two federal appeals courts, along with the addition of two new Justices, provides a chance for needed clarity about what the Constitution truly requires.

The rulings in the two Ten Commandments cases last June is only the latest example of this confusion. By a 5-4 vote, the Court affirmed a longstanding monument on the grounds of the Texas State Capitol, but by another 5-4 vote it rejected a more recent display at a courthouse in McCreary County, Kentucky. These decisions produced a total of ten written opinions, with only Justice Breyer joining both majorities. In announcing the opinions, Chief Justice Rehnquist stated, "I didn't know we had that many people on this Court."

With these decisions, the Rehnquist Court continued its constitutional indecision in this area. In 1989, the Court upheld a county's menorah on public land while striking down a crèche displayed by the same county at another building. Before that, the Court had invalidated nativity scenes on government property unless they were surrounded by secular elements such as a snowman, a talking wishing well, and plastic reindeer.

The most notable opinions in the recent Ten Commandments cases were those of concurring and dissenting justices. Breyer explained his split vote by stating that he could not draw a single formula or test in borderline cases, but had to exercise prudent legal judgment to avoid political divisiveness over religion. Dissenting in the Kentucky case, Justice Scalia argued that government can constitutionally favor monotheistic religion over irreligion because "our national tradition has resolved that conflict in favor of the majority." Justice O'Connor voted to invalidate both displays. She criticized Scalia, asking "why would we trade a system that has served us so well for one that has served others so poorly?" One might question whether her endorsement test, which provided a basis for previous split decisions, really had served us all that well.

As two new members take the seats of Rehnquist and O'Connor, the Court faces a new challenge concerning the Pledge of Allegiance. Edward Myers, a Mennonite father, sued to prevent the daily recitation of the Pledge in the Loudoun County, Virginia, public school his sons attend. He claimed teacher-led recitation of the phrase "under God" in the Pledge violated the establishment clause. In August 2005, a three-judge panel of the Fourth Circuit unanimously upheld the Pledge in Loudoun County schools because it is a patriotic exercise, not a prayer. This decision conflicts with the rulings of the Ninth Circuit. In 2002, it upheld a similar challenge brought by atheist Michael Newdow against his daughter's California school district. The finding for Newdow led to great public outrage, and Congress immediately passed a resolution condemning the decision.

The Supreme Court heard an appeal of Newdow's case in 2004, yet characteristically avoided the substantive question. The Supreme Court reversed the Ninth Circuit, but a majority of Justices did so on the narrow ground that Newdow, a non-custodial parent whose domestic status was in dispute, lacked legal standing to bring the suit on behalf of his daughter. Three Justices—including Rehnquist and O'Connor—reached the merits of the case, ruling that recitation of the Pledge in public schools is constitutional. In the meantime, other California families represented by Newdow have brought suit, and in September 2005 a district court judge

Frank Colucci

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found they had standing and reinstated the Ninth Circuit’s 2002 decision striking the pledge.

These conflicting rulings, along with a 1992 Seventh Circuit ruling that upheld recitation of the Pledge in Illinois public schools, make it likely that the Supreme Court will finally have to decide this case on its merits. While politically controversial—and, to some, perhaps inconsequential—this case provides a welcome opportunity for the new Roberts Court to clarify the reach of fundamental constitutional principles.

Against the establishment clause challenge, the main arguments of Rehnquist and O’Connor as well as the Fourth Circuit appear quite sound. It is hard to see how the mere phrase “under God” constitutes an establishment of religion. After all, the pledge is not a prayer or religious exercise. Further, the scope of Newdow’s legal activity seems to bristle with hostility to religion. He first challenged the very constitutionality of the pledge—naming Congress and former President Clinton as co-defendants—then, after losing his daughter’s case in the Supreme Court, filed another lawsuit attempting to block prayer at President Bush’s inauguration. Such arguments arise out of the tangled web of past Supreme Court doctrines including the Lemon test, O’Connor’s endorsement test, and the metaphor of a wall of separation, high and impregnable.

While every federal court outside the Ninth Circuit has rightly refused to accept the establishment clause argument, I nevertheless believe the Supreme Court should strike government-led recitation of the Pledge in public school classrooms. It should do so not because the pledge contains a religious element, but because this recitation violates the basic principles of free speech and personal liberty the Constitution seeks to guarantee.

This argument is rooted in the 1943 case West Virginia v. Barnette, where the Supreme Court evaluated the constitutionality of a state requirement that public school students salute the flag and recite the pledge. Barnette sued, although the Court had rejected an earlier challenge just three years earlier. The Court reversed itself, finding for Barnette. While the Court formally reached this decision on free speech principles, its justification transcended the text of the First Amendment and invoked larger considerations of personal liberty. As Justice Robert Jackson stated for the majority, “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.”

In light of the principles of *Barnette*, it does not resolve the constitutional issue to describe the Pledge of Allegiance as a patriotic exercise and not a prayer. That resolves establishment clause concerns, but doing so makes us lose sight of what the Pledge is—an oath of loyalty to the flag, and to the republic for which it stands. In the public school context, the recitation of the Pledge, defended as an exercise in national unity, becomes a loyalty oath administered to minors and led by government officials. The phrase “under God” is thus constitutionally irrelevant. Were the phrase removed—and it was not added until 1954, eleven years after *Barnette*—the outcome should be no different.

It is also not enough to say that today—unlike in *Barnette*—students are free not to recite the Pledge. Here, invocation of the Court’s establishment clause decisions in the public school context does become relevant. In striking government-organized prayer in the classroom, at graduation exercises, and at high school football games, the Court has emphasized the public school context, where minors face pressure from authority figures and from peers to conform. State-led recitation of political orthodoxy by minors in public schools, whether it takes the form of a civic religion or not, should be just as impermissible as state-led recitation of religious orthodoxy.

A closer emphasis on coercion would exemplify prudent legal judgment and temper the excesses of recent establishment clause arguments. Striking down recitation of the Pledge on free speech grounds would not require the wholesale removal of God from public life. Courts could uphold most government recognition of religion in public places (an exception: the two-ton Ten Commandments monument placed in the
Alabama Supreme Court by since-impeached Chief Justice Roy Moore). They would not have to remove “under God” from the Pledge, take “In God We Trust” from currency, or ban legislative prayers or presidential proclamations of Thanksgiving. None of these actions establish a political or religious orthodoxy or compel anyone to make an unwanted statement.

Focusing on coercion would end the continuing debate over whether such invocations of God in the public sphere are substantive or merely ceremonial. Further, striking daily recitation of the Pledge would not drive civic education from public schools. In fact, mere recital of the Pledge likely desensitizes students to the flag and republic to which we pledge allegiance, and it may well impede rather than advance discussion about whether this is truly one nation, under God, invisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The constitutional dispute over government-led recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools affords a chance to clarify unsettled jurisprudence in two important areas. It would allow the Court to streamline convoluted establishment clause jurisprudence and reiterate the ability of government to recognize the religious beliefs of its citizens. More fundamentally, it provides an ideal opportunity to reaffirm the broad principles of personal liberty the Constitution was intended to protect.

Frank Colucci is assistant professor of political science at Purdue University Calumet in Hammond, Indiana.
DRIVING LESSON

Once I jumped the curb, confusing the brake and accelerator; or maybe my parallel parking approached a calamitous sideswipe. Picture this: Dad and I sit sunk in our quarrel, losing steam, as gardens around us undulate shade and light. When you appear in the rear view mirror, I am not surprised. This is your street; I brought you the galleys in March, when you broke your leg. Poised on the top step, dressed to go out in your blue patterned blouse I remember from high school English, you read a letter in your hand.

I ache for that summer. What if I had run down the sidewalk waving? Would you have been glad to see me, and Dad, storming there in the front seat, never really understanding why I chose poetry over science and safety, would he have said, “Go talk to your teacher. You might not get this chance again.”?

There is no turning back over the road we litter with those futile tears and lost moments. His clean carpentry, our front door with its intricate white panels and little panes of glass, planed to perfection; and the pure craft of your poetry, with its neatly stitched seams, so beautiful and exacting: what are these but the art of living true? You taught me, both of you, before you died in the same month of a year still distant from that wide and leafy day. The faith you had in me! So fierce I almost could not believe it, squandering myself in fitful starts and bursts of speed, popping the clutch.

Maybe it was not a good time. Clearly you had someplace to go (off to ride camels in Egypt again, as you did one holiday, or to Machu Pichu, which you wrote me about later, in your last week); and I, in my girl’s life, had to learn to drive. Standing in front of your dark red brick house on the corner, probably (though I can’t quite remember) in sight of your father’s roses that you would one day write poems about, you did not look up.

Diane G. Scholl

Near the end of his new biography of C. S. Lewis, Alan Jacobs cites the novelist Philip Hensher who criticizes the “doctrinaire bullying” in Lewis’s Narnia stories, which, he says, were, “written to corrupt the minds of the young.” He also says, “Let us drop C. S. Lewis and his ghastly, priggish, half-witted, money-making drivel about Narnia down the nearest deep hole as soon as is conveniently possible.” Jacobs also quotes the English author, Philip Pullman, who thinks Lewis’s “supernaturalism” is life-denying and that the stories are littered with racism, misogyny, and essentially dishonest. In his view, “There is no shortage of such nauseating drivel in Narnia, if you can face it.” (307). If “drivel” is indeed what these critics think of Lewis’s stories, what explains the intense vehemence of these criticisms? Drivel is best ignored. These authors do not ignore Lewis, but, with their criticism, honor the force of his ideas and the skill with which he communicates them. These criticisms recognize that this is not a tame Lewis and that his ideas cannot be ignored. Jacobs tells us why this is so.

At the center of these dangerous ideas is Lewis’s imagination and Jacobs’s biography aims to tell the story that “traces the routes of Lewis’s imagination” (ix). Lewis wrote in *A Preface to Paradise Lost* that “The great moral which reigns in Milton is the most universal and most useful that can be imagined, that Obedience to the will of God makes men happy and that Disobedience makes them miserable”(xvi). Lewis goes on to note that this “dazzlingly simple” idea about the relationship of obedience to happiness is, at once, “the commonest of themes” in children’s stories and is roundly missed by “great modern scholars” (xvii).

One of the most important parts of Lewis’s story is the near loss of his imagination. Lewis writes in *Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare*, “I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning.” To be rational does not mean what the rationalists of his time meant. Lewis came to see that to be rational was to be truthful and meaningful. We need critical reason because knowing the difference between truth and falsehood matters. We need imagination because the absurdity and futility of our lived experience undermines the sense that our lives and actions have meaning. The third element in Lewis’s anthropology is will. C. S. Lewis scholar Michael Ward maps out Lewis’s idea of the rational human being. Imagine concentric circles with the imagination on the outside ring, critical reason in the next, and the will at the center. If our will is cut off from critical reason and
informed only by the imaginative, we lose the ability to decipher the truth among the various competing but incompatible possibilities floating in our imaginations. When our will functions without imagination, we cannot see the meaning of our choices, actions, and indeed our whole lives. The story of the near death of Lewis’s imagination is really a story about the proper relationship between the will, the imagination and the rational.

*The Abolition of Man* is an extended argument that provides insights into Lewis’s struggle to sustain his imaginative life. Lewis argues that without the imagination (i.e., the organ of meaning) our moral choices will be guided either by the dry rational thought of the head or by the emotional feelings of the gut. When the head is in control, the will tends toward cold calculation, emptied of the romance of heroic action. When the gut is in control, we have no way to discern which of the conflicting feelings we ought to follow. We need “habits of the heart” (xxiii) that can combine the furious opposites of critical reason and imagination so that our moral choices are truthful and meaningful. The problem is that these habits of the heart are under attack by the “bitter, truculent, skeptical, debunking, and cynical intelligentsia” who work through the educational system (34).

Lewis thought that the near destruction of his imagination began with his schooling. In *The Silver Chair*, his dislike for modern education is depicted in a “progressive” school where psychology is the “master science,” with “its emphasis on understanding rather than correcting or punishing errant students, and its belief that children require personal freedom rather than rules if they are to flourish” (19). In *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Edmund, the one of the four Pevensie children who eventually betrayed his brother and sisters, began to go wrong “at that horrid school” where he learned to pick on anyone smaller than himself (33–34). Of his own schooling, Lewis thought it caused “a great decline in [his] imaginative life” (26). Lewis’s most cherished educational experience was under the private tutelage of William Kirkpatrick, who, ironically, abetted the ruin of Lewis’s imagination by introducing him to Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy. According to Jacobs, a poem by A. E. Housman best captures the essence of this pessimism:

> Therefore, since the world has still Much good, but much less good than ill, And while the sun and moon endure Luck’s a chance, but trouble’s sure, I’d face it as a wise man would, And train for ill and not for good (47).

Imagination is the organ of meaning. If one’s life seems meaningless, imagination cannot but wither. Though Lewis found Schopenhauer depressing, his pessimism hit home as Lewis came to the conclusion, “Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought to be grim and meaningless” (49). Lewis’s experience of trench warfare in the First World War did nothing to dissuade him from his pessimism. In his poem *Spirits in Bondage*, written during his convalescence from his war wounds, Lewis gives poetic voice to his pessimism as he writes:

> The ancient songs they wither as the grass and waste as doth a garment waxen old, All poets have been fools who thought to mould A monument more durable than brass (76).

The line “poets have been fools” reflects the slow death of Lewis’s imaginative life which was “unable to resist the combined forces of philosophical pessimism and the horrors of the Great War” (80). Nor did the end of the war make any difference. In fact, upon returning to Oxford to study, Lewis realized the war’s “‘absolute suspension and waste’” (88). It is then, in 1920, that he writes, “I am more worried by what goes on inside me: my imagination seems to have died…I go round and round on the same subjects which are always those I least want to think about” (100).

This pessimism at least had the positive effect of bringing Lewis to recognize that, having no idea about what was “the real Good,” he had “no business to object to the universe as long as I have nothing to offer myself—and in that respect we are all bankrupt” (101). For a time this bankruptcy had been a negative fund of “energy that had driven the poems… in which he was ‘defying heaven,’
hurling contempt at the Jailer-God.” But this too “had run out, and in the process his imagination had been starved” (102). With the loss of his “poetry” — his imaginative life (109) nearly completed, Lewis was left:

“kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape”; had he remained in that state his ultimate fate would have been that of the Dwarfs at the end of The Last Battle, who in the midst of the glorious landscape huddled together and face each other, insisting that “rich red wine” is but “dirty water out of a trough” and a magnificent feast no more than an old turnip and raw cabbage leaf. When the children beg Aslan to help them, he tries—the wine and feast are his efforts—but must conclude, “They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief” (134).

Jacobs sees Lewis faced with this decisive either/or decision between cunning and belief. Without imagination, cold reason would turn to cunning, but in order to preserve the imagination he would have to admit that he was not the author of his own story.

We know how the story turned out, as Lewis’s conversion has been examined over and over again, but there is something unique in Jacobs’s retelling of this familiar story. Like any story we read repeatedly, its goodness is not in the unknown ending, but in remembering the unlikely events leading up to the end. Jacobs succeeds in fixing readers in the middle of Lewis’s story by making connections with texts and events in Lewis’s life and with insightful analysis of Lewis’s books and letters. This brings about a renewed recognition of the angst-ridden struggle Lewis experienced when caught between cunning and belief, and a renewed appreciation for the unlikely event of Lewis’s choice of the way of belief. Lewis thought that a good story had a way of giving readers a “sense of the story of which their own lives are a part, of the moving course of their own action and experience.” As Jacobs performs a good retelling of a good story, he brings us into Lewis’s story in a way that lets us think imaginatively about our own either/or experiences and appreciate better the importance of the well-formed imagination for choosing against cunning and for belief.

In a letter to his father, Lewis once wrote, “It will be a comfort to me all my life to know that the scientist and the materialist have not the last word... It leaves the whole thing rich in possibilities: and if it dashes the shallow optimisms it does the same for the shallow pessimisms” (120). This recognition of life’s rich possibilities is what Lewis would come to call joy, which is that consciousness “of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy” (146). If the natural world of modern rationalism was the whole show, this desire for joy would only fuel our disenchantment with our lives. But if it is true, as Tolkien wrote, that “the legend-makers with their rhyme” pointed to another reality “of things not found within recorded time,” (146) then the desire for joy, makes even our sufferings in a way unimportant. Until that fulfillment of joy is realized, Lewis saw the role of poets and storytellers as helping us overcome our many disenchantments with images of a more enchanted world. Lewis once observed, “When the old poets made some virtue their theme, they were not teaching but adoring, and that what we take for the didactic is often the enchanted” (xxiv). Narnia is neither “doctrinaire bullying” nor drivel, but the imaginative adoration of one saved from the cunning of cold pessimism. If Lewis seems, to his critics, untamed, it is because he has given us stories that reflect the truth and beauty that he saw in obeying Aslan, who is not a tame Lion.
the attic

where is Christmas?
(first published in December 1964)

Dear Stephen:

Yesterday as the sun went down, the maple west of our house was a riot of gold and red and brown . . . During the night the first cold wind came down from the North, and this morning the tree stood stark and bare against the hill . . . I looked at it as the coffee was brewing on our stove—and I knew it was time to say something about Christmas . . .

Exactly twenty years have come and gone since I wrote my first Christmas letter to your brother John . . . Both John and Mark have now gone away to see if Christmas still has a place on the campus of a great university . . . When dusk comes down over our house on Christmas Eve, I hope they may be able to hear the crying of the Child in the loudness of our time . . .

Tonight I remember, too, that ten years ago, just before Christmas, you were playing on the floor before the fire when you looked up and asked: “Where is Christmas?” . . . I did not answer at the time because I certainly knew that this was a very hard question . . . You had put the finger of a little child on one of the ultimate problems of life and time . . . If we always knew the answer and would live under its great light, we would be much happier than we are now and our world would be so much better for it.

In one way the answer to your question is easy enough . . . Christmas is in every place where people have heard about the Baby, the Mother, the cave and the shepherds running to their God in the night . . . Christmas is even in Chicago as people rush up and down State Street . . . in the carols sung from the Tribune Tower . . . in the lonely church bell in the Chicago Loop as it sounds more alone on Christmas Eve . . . in Christmas trees huddled around the doors of grocery stores . . . in the stars of Christmas flaming in their courses . . . in the Virgin Mother making the bed of straw . . . in the quiet sleep of the Christ Child . . .

Christmas is where man has been and God has come to forgive . . . The nine tolling monosyllables, “There was no room for them in the inn,” are the story of man; and the simple words, “For God so loved the world,” are the essence of God . . . Christmas is where people believe that it is both fact and faith . . . It is where there is wonder at the folly of men and the pity of heaven . . . It is where trumpets sound again at dawn . . . It is where men hear a song out of the heart of God—no mortal melody but the divine symphony of peace and the forgiving of sin . . .

Where is Christmas? . . .

When all is said and done it finally must be in your heart . . . The events of Christmas Eve and Christmas Night must be lived again in the hearts of all of us who believe that in the Child was the final answer to the troubles and anxieties which disturb us these days . . . Christmas is a quiet interior thing which finally only God can see in all its power and glory . . .

Christmas is also in a famous cartoon which I saw just forty years ago . . . There was a dark, cold, windswept street and a brilliantly lighted mansion with holly wreaths in the windows . . . In the snow before the house were two ragged and huddled figures . . . a mother and her son . . . The boy is saying to his mother: “Ah, don’t cry Ma, ya singing swell.” . . . Christmas is here, even here, even in our crying in the night . . . in the fellowship of those who bear the marks of pain . . .
on the cover—

Will Vawter was a well-regarded Indiana Impressionist painter who, along with such artists as T. C. Steele and William Forsyth, concentrated his artistic efforts in Brown County. Vawter, in addition to his lovely works of fine art, was an accomplished illustrator. This small drawing by Vawter, a fine image for the Christmas season, was donated to the Brauer Museum’s permanent collection by long-time Brauer supporters Josephine and Byron Ferguson.

on reviewers—

David Weber
is assistant professor of theology at Valparaiso University.

on poets—

Barbara Crooker
recently won the Word Press First Book award for her collection, Radiance. In 2003, she received the Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Prize, judged by Stanley Kunitz.

Charles Strietelmeier
is an ELCA pastor in Hobart, Indiana.

Carol Gilbertson
teaches at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, where she directs the Luther Poetry Project. She recently won the National Council of Teachers of English 2004 Donald Murray Prize for best creative essay about teaching or writing.

Diane G. Scholl
teaches English at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.
IN FORTHCOMING ISSUES

Religious Liberty and Perfectionist Theories of Liberalism
Geoffrey Bowden

Benedict XVI and World Politics
Steven Brady

Thomas Mann's Joseph and His Brothers
Harlan Bjornstad

Tian-Ming Wu's King of Masks
Crystal Downing