

culture



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KNOWLEDGE WORKERS

**Virtues of a Global Citizen
Disability and the Knowledge Economy**

PRODUCING PEOPLE

IN HIS 1950 STUDY, *THE LONELY CROWD*, DAVID RIESMAN ARGUED THAT social institutions build into the young a “mode of conformity” that shapes their character and works, more or less successfully, to secure the types of persons the society requires. He famously created a taxonomy of such modes based on features of social organization. In a relatively unchanging society, characterized by highly structured rituals and social etiquette, conformity of the individual tends to be dictated by obedience to tradition. By contrast, in more modern, dynamic societies or social sectors, which require individuals who can manage a greater scope of choice and initiative, tradition is too rigid a guide. Early on these societies inculcate enduring principles that help keep the individual “on course” through life. In even more fluid social environments, where goals and principles are also in flux, yet another characterological control mechanism is instilled: the individual’s sense of direction comes from reading the cues of others.

Talk of conformity has fallen out of fashion, but, if too sweeping in scope, Riesman’s typology has the virtue of drawing our attention to the relationship between social change, socially expected behavior/ideals, and characterological formation. This relationship, never seamless or complete, is important because Western countries, especially, are in the midst of a shift toward a “knowledge economy” and “global society.” New modes of conformity are emerging to realize new social demands.

Schools provide a window into the efforts to “produce” the requisite people, both in pedagogical strategies (see “Teaching the Virtues of a Global Citizen”) and in the struggles of individuals and communities to adapt (see “Disability and the Knowledge Economy”). At stake, we are told, is the specter of being left behind.

Notice: Beginning in Spring 2010, *Culture* and our other publication, *The Hedgehog Review*, will be joining together. Our website and eNewsletter will continue to be reliable sources for IASC news and information. Please see the back cover for further information.

—JED

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TEACHING THE VIRTUES OF A GLOBAL CITIZEN

The demands of a 21st century education

Jeffrey Dill

IN RECENT YEARS, SO-CALLED “21ST CENTURY skills” have garnered a place of prominence in the popular rhetoric of educational reform. Our schools, our instructional strategies, our curriculum, our assessment criteria—all are outdated, we are told, and need to be repackaged for a changing economy and a global society. A public-private collaborative effort, “Partnership for 21st Century Skills,” has recently formed, bringing together corporations like Apple and Microsoft with the National Education Association to “serve as a catalyst to position 21st century skills at the center of U.S. K–12 education.” And they are not alone. President Obama’s education speech in March called upon teachers to develop “21st century skills like problem-solving and critical thinking and entrepreneurship and creativity.” A recent bill has been introduced in the United States Senate, with bipartisan support, to provide matching federal funds to states that focus on 21st century skills in their classrooms in order to increase our competitive advantage in the global market.

When politicians, businesspeople, and educators talk about “21st century skills,” they speak of collaboration, innovation, flexibility, adaptability, media and technology literacy, and

global awareness. These are the skills that “global citizens” must possess in order to thrive in the global economy and to help save a world in crisis.

The new global society is a world of rapid change, complex problems, and shifting solutions. For this environment, according to educational reformers, the ideal is to be a flexible thinker, an inquirer who is innovative and creative in his or her approach to learning and the acquisition of knowledge. The model citizens are “risk-takers,” who approach uncertainty with courage and ambiguity with comfort. They are not passive

The new global society is a world of rapid change, complex problems, and shifting solutions.

receivers of a body of knowledge; rather, they are “knowledge creators.” As a social studies teacher I interviewed put it: “In my history class, they don’t just study history; they have to perform the acts of a historian. So there’s a very different approach in that students have to understand what it is to create knowledge, to be involved in the creation of knowledge.”

To be involved in the creation of knowledge means that students are self-directed learners. Rather than learn about science from an external source, such as a teacher, they plan

and design their own labs in order to “do the acts of a scientist.” The global citizen must approach learning with the assumption that “nothing is certain” because we live in a multifarious world with a plurality of ideas and choices. It is not enough for students to simply study history, or even to know it; they must also be active participants. Teachers value this kind of inquiry because it leads to an “independence of learning,” rather than the “static reception” of knowledge.

The flexible thinking of the global citizen also means that he or she is open to other perspectives and viewpoints. Collaboration is important because there may be more than one way to solve a problem. Innovation and getting things done is largely dependent on one’s ability to adapt to and skillfully navigate a cooperative setting of diverse opinions.

The 21st century skills method shares many features with general human capital approaches to education. The theory behind these approaches is that teaching certain skills and knowledge in schools will translate into national economic growth. Though logical on the surface, this idea has been extremely difficult for social scientists to demonstrate. There is little empirical evidence that connects economic growth to educational reforms, even those reforms that are direct attempts to respond to the needs of the market. Such efforts may tell us more about ourselves than have any demonstrable impact on the GDP.

Perhaps it is more accurate, then, to refer not to 21st century “skills” but rather to “virtues.” More than merely utilitarian skills, proponents uphold these traits as the qualities our society embraces and must cultivate in the next generation. They reflect an idealized self that is the goal of our educational practices, a particular vision of a virtuous person. In order to flourish in the new global society, people will need to be flexible and adaptable, able to collaborate and problem-solve. These qualities, educators argue, are not only essential for individual success, but also necessary for making a better world.

And make a better world we must. The global citizens idealized in 21st century classrooms have obligations beyond their local attachments. They are committed to the global community, whose problems are typically expressed in catastrophic moral terms. Failure means nothing less than planetary destruction and the end of human civilization.

In order to flourish in the new global society, people will need to be flexible and adaptable, able to collaborate and problem-solve.

It is not lost on educational reformers that the 21st century skills are on the whole taken from the culture of the new, flexible corporation. For educators of global citizens, the virtues taught in the classroom are the virtues of the cubicle and the short-term venture. They are the virtues of an enterprising self, which can be remade and adapted as a situation, opportunity, or problem requires. But as Richard Sennett has argued, the flexible corporation and the enterprising self create their own quandaries. Not least, interactions with others become primarily transactional rather than relational. And a transaction with another person has a different quality than a relationship. In a flexible organization, transactions with others, even though they may be collaborative, are short-lived. We may be able to solve problems and create knowledge together, but we move on to the next task before we can know each other well. Successful selves in this world are measured without reference to and even against virtues of trust, commitment, and loyalty.

Some argue that the current economic crisis is in part due to the progressive disintegration of the moral fabric upon which capitalism depends—a culture of trust, fidelity, and responsibility. If there is truth in these claims, it seems at least ironic that we would be interested in cultivating qualities and personality traits in our children that *de-value* the very virtues that many deem necessary for restoring our confidence.

Historically, education has been understood to be, as the French sociologist Émile Durkheim stated, “the means by which a society prepares, in its children, the essential conditions of its own existence.” In this sense, education is always an exercise in the transmission of a culture, a passing on of inherited understandings of the self and the world. The movement to teach 21st century skills and cultivate global citizens is no exception. What it reveals has less to do with better education or economic outcomes than it does with the growing influence of a particular vision of the future and the cultural ideals that it embodies. ■



Disability and the Knowledge Economy

The case of Clear River County

Regina Smardon

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED CLEAR RIVER COUNTY, a rural Appalachian community, as a statistic in a public health journal. In an article on the statewide use of methylphenidate (brand name Ritalin), the authors noted considerable variation by geographic region. By far, the place with the highest concentration of children taking Ritalin was Clear River. Subsequently, I discovered that over 20 percent of the schoolchildren in Clear River were labeled with a disability or mental disorder, more

than doubling since 1992. Few communities in the country label such a large proportion of their children with disabilities.

In upper-middle class, suburban communities, like Greenwich, Connecticut, the expansion of childhood disability has been linked to parental efforts to enhance the performance of their children in the scramble for spots at elite universities. In some large, urban districts, the expansion of special education has



Not just a tool for self-enhancement, the expansion of disability labeling is also a community mechanism for responding to the advancing specter of the global knowledge economy.

been linked to racial bias and educational exclusion. In rural, poor, 95 percent white Clear River, I found a different dynamic. Not just a tool for self-enhancement, the expansion of disability labeling is also a community mechanism for responding to the advancing specter of the global knowledge economy.

It has long been American policy to address the problem of distributive justice through educational reform because public

education is one of the few universal benefits provided by government. In the United States, disability has become a master metaphor for resolving the cultural contradictions generated by what Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson call, in their 2004 book of that name, the “education gospel.” While over a century old, the education gospel in recent decades has emphasized the economic over the civic function of schooling. The belief is that more schooling for more people will bring technological innovation and economic salvation. But the education gospel has always had two sides, one focused on equity and the other focused on national competitiveness. In its most recent manifestation, it has driven efforts to close the “achievement gaps” between subgroups of students while at the same time promising to enhance international competitiveness by producing the innovative knowledge workers of the future.

With formal schooling increasingly regarded as essential to realizing the American Dream, equity has come to be measured on the basis of students reaching the same learning standards at the same time. In this context, disability labels provide some interpretative flexibility and serve as a kind of medical substitute for the old notion of the “noble poor.” The disabled want to work and participate fully but may not be able to without accommodation.

If equity ideals are the warm front in the storm of expanding disability, the cold front is economic change and global competition. In Clear River, schools have become central to the community’s collective fears and fantasies about their economic future. The context for expanded disability labeling is a prolonged economic downturn and hopes for a reversal of fortunes premised on high quality schools and well-educated workers.

THE ECONOMIC POWER OF EDUCATION

Clear River experienced economic boom times between 1865 and 1940, a period that many grandparents still recall. Coal mining and trains brought the region wealth and a growing population. Unlike the typical Appalachian coal-mining area, Clear River miners tended to own their homes, state law prohibited the insidious company-store system, and mines were constructed with horizontal rather than the more dangerous vertical shafts. Like most communities, they suffered during the Great Depression but the auto industry moved in to replace diminishing coal-mining jobs in the 1950s. During the 1960s, the population of Clear River began to shrink, and in the 1980s,

Fearing that their child will be “left behind,” parents who lack social standing sometimes redouble their efforts to secure a disability label.

deindustrialization hit hard, culminating with the closure of a major tire plant in 1987. The once plentiful, union-protected manual labor jobs were never replaced; job growth has primarily occurred in healthcare, tourism, and prison construction. Since the 1980s, the unemployment rate has been above the national average.

In Clear River, hopes for renewed economic prosperity have been firmly linked to the education gospel. “A quality educational system,” according to the president of a downtown business association, “is the key to economic development in [Clear River] County.” Community leaders imagine a future that looks like Silicon Valley, and they have made attracting high tech businesses a priority. Of the various steps taken in this direction, including the adoption of a risky and expensive plan to construct a wireless internet service, the key strategy has centered on improving the schools. A “quality educational system,” leaders believe, will both attract businesses to the community and equip local people with the requisite skills for the knowledge economy.

THE NARRATIVE POWER OF DISABILITY DISCOURSE

During the period of special education expansion in Clear River, standardized test scores for individuals, schools, and the district did improve somewhat. But in a resource-poor district with a growing low-income population, there remain contradictions. Many of the ordinary citizens of Clear River do not look forward to a high tech future but are instead nostalgic for the community of their childhood. They did not attend college themselves and fear that, even if community leaders do attract high tech employers, these companies will bring in “outsiders” (read: urban dwellers) to fill all the “good jobs.” While parents juggle shift work and periods of un- or underemployment, they worry how their children will make the transition into the knowledge economy.

The worries of parents are intensified by the rationing of resources through the local status system. To an outsider, Clear River may appear homogeneous in terms of race, culture, and income level, but from the inside, status distinctions are

actually rather stark. Clear River is comprised of a rigid status system of “good” and “bad” families. Reputations are created and reinforced by channels of gossip. Teachers often rely on local knowledge about families to interpret a child’s learning or behavior problems. Those with a “broken brain” are perceived to be more educable than those with a “broken home,” and limited special education resources are allocated accordingly. Fearing that their child will be “left behind,” parents who lack social standing sometimes redouble their efforts to secure a disability label.

Although many parents may not be as optimistic about the education gospel as community leaders, they are in search of a narrative structure to describe their experience. Unsure how to protect their children, they turn to the discourse of disability that helps them to negotiate, and sometimes disrupt, the moral judgments attached to a hierarchy of “good” and “bad” families. One young mother, whose son I followed in my ethnographic research, described how she managed to orchestrate her son’s advancement to the third grade despite his teacher’s insistence that he be held back. She was able to go to a doctor and secure Ritalin as part of her strategy for helping her son. It worked. Her son was promoted to the third grade, and the principal overruled the teacher’s judgment. This mother assumed, accurately, that the teacher—who had also been her second grade teacher—doubted her parenting skills.

The narrative power of disability fills the gap between the promise of the education gospel and the experience of economic globalization. The narrative gap in Clear River is more dramatic than most American communities. Yet, the narrative power of the education gospel is more resonant within American culture than any other. This is why Clear River’s attempt to find a balance between ideals of competition and equity through a discourse of disability is quintessentially American. ■

THE NOVEL AGAINST GOD

Questioning the form's inherent secularism

Justin Neuman



WRITERS AND CRITICS OF FICTION COMMONLY hold that there is something anti-religious about the novel as a genre. There are many reasons why this view has maintained widespread credence for over a century. First, unlike other literary genres that predate the written word, the novel, in its earliest expressions, dates to the sixteenth century; its development parallels the rise of secular humanism in Europe. Second, it is precisely on questions of immanence that scholars differentiate novels from other prose forms. Novels tell the stories of ordinary individuals amidst their material and social relationships, repudiating the transcendental frames of reference within which allegories, romances, and epics forge their meanings. No critic would deny the existence of religious novels, but according to the dominant lines of reasoning, works of religious fiction achieve their religiosity despite the form, structure, and history of the genre. Finally, in terms of style, novels tend to be open-ended and non-hierarchical, and present a multitude of voices and styles with which the active reader must negotiate. These are all characteristics at odds with religious certitude and the monolingualism of a divinely authored text.

In the first decade of the 21st century, it is clear that the decline of religion is not a necessary consequence of modernization. The tide of secularist iconoclasm in the European tradition—beginning with Nietzsche and cresting in the middle of the twentieth century—has receded. In retrospect, the secularization narrative posited as inevitable by Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Max Weber seems like a provincial European exception rather than a universal rule. With the collapse of this secular consensus, scholars in many fields have begun to pull at the frayed edges of the secularization thesis. Uncritical ideologies that champion secularism as religion's agonistic opposite have given way to more subtle approaches to the experience of transcendence and immanence. Rather than bifurcate into tidy polarities, scholars seek to illuminate a spectrum that contains many different shades of experience, including those marked "secular" and "religious," as well as those overshadowed by this opposition. This moment of reassessment offers opportunities for exchange across the most sharply policed barriers of our time: the barriers of faith—between different religions, between church and state, between believers and atheists. Yet, within the field of literature in general and fiction in particular, concepts of secularism and religion remain oppositional, and the secularity of the novel as a genre persists as a cherished axiom.



The Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) in Prison. Engraving by the French School, 19th century.

The aggressive secularism that has long been central to the intellectual history of the novel can usefully be called the motif of the “novel against God”—a motif that has in turn shaped the self-understanding of secularism. Surveying the history of this motif offers an array of insights into the way concepts like secularism and religion are constituted and maintained. In his “Reflections on the Novel,” the Marquis de Sade is among the first to emphatically assert the relationship between the novel and what he calls “secular customs.” For de Sade, the novel is, “for the philosopher who wishes to understand *man*, as essen-

In the first decade of the 21st century, it is clear that the decline of religion is not a necessary consequence of modernization.

tial as is the knowledge of history.” A sense of moral purpose has long inhered in the notion that the novel is an agent of secularization, thus endowing secularism and the novel with a kind of existential heroism visible in de Sade’s substitution of man for the divine as the ultimate object of inquiry. In our time, both this sense of embattled heroism—the heroism of the opposition—and the importance of fiction as a soldier in this struggle continue to play out in the aftermath of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. If nothing else, the *fatwa* issued against Rushdie and his novel by the Iranian government proves that fiction can be a crucial battleground, not only for Iranian Shi’ism after the Khomeini revolution but, ironically, for the readers of *The Satanic Verses* and the broader literary world.

The consensus on the secularism of the novel offers an uncommon point of agreement across an influential range of critics, novelists, and public intellectuals. During the days leading up to the First World War, for instance, Hungarian philosopher and literary critic Georg Lukács famously asserted that “the Novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God.”

Sermonizing about the novel’s secularism is an ironic act indeed, and the shrill tones that characterize these assertions signal the need for increased critical reflection.

For Lukács, convinced of the bankruptcy of both individual heroism and transcendence, the novel offers the catharsis of the orphan’s grief. The ironic mode he associates with the genre refracts freedom from God through a nihilistic lens; the novel’s “psychology” he writes, “is demonic.” Though Lukács later clarified the historical contingencies that produced *The Theory of the Novel*, the work remains a potent symbol and touchstone for discussions of the novel’s secularism.

In his 1957 *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt makes a convincing and oft-cited case for regarding Daniel Defoe as the seminal figure in the English tradition. Watt treats *Robinson Crusoe* as the type specimen of the genre: “the novel requires a world view which is centered on the social relationships between individual persons,” Watt writes, “and this involves seculariza-

tion as well as individualism,” both defining traits of Defoe’s work. More recent iterations of this argument include Michael McKeon’s historicist account in *The Origins of the English Novel*, in which the novel’s connection to modernity derives from its status as a mode of mediation between scientific and religious “truth” during “the early modern secularization crisis.” For McKeon, the novel’s style (characterized by a juxtaposition of different voices under the umbrella of an omniscient narrator) and its content (everyday life in the contemporary world) ease the crisis of status-indeterminacy brought on by capitalism and Protestantism. While epics foreground action, novels privilege interior life. At the same time, religion came to be seen less as a matter of outwardly visible behaviors and more as a province of individual belief.

Focusing more on reader response, novelist and literary critic James Wood observes in *The Broken Estate* that “there is something about narrative that puts the world in doubt...it was not just science but perhaps the novel itself which helped to kill Jesus’s divinity, when it gave us a new sense of the real.”

In his role as a reviewer for publications like *The New Yorker* and *The Guardian*, Wood’s assertions are often more normative than descriptive, especially when his prose style leans toward that of the sermon: “despite its being a kind of magic, [the novel] is actually the enemy of superstition, the slayer of religions, the scrutineer of falsity.” In a similar vein, in the essay “Is Nothing Sacred?” Rushdie insists, “literature is, of all the arts, the one best suited to challenging absolutes of all kinds because it is in its origin the schismatic Other of the sacred (and authorless) text.” Sermonizing about the novel’s secularism is an ironic act indeed, and the shrill tones that characterize these assertions signal the need for increased critical reflection. A positive feedback loop has developed between scholarly ideas about the novel as a genre and a forcefully prescriptive secular mandate, resulting in ever-higher barriers between “secular” literary critics and “our” religious others.

At most, these are but representative claims cited to give a general sense of the motif I have identified as the “novel against God.” Taken as a whole, several implications of this tradition become clear. In each instance, we see that belief is the defining feature of religious experience. A transcendent, omnipotent God constitutes the axis of “religion.” As those like Talal Asad, Charles Taylor, and William Connolly have argued, this perspective, while somewhat justified in the context of



Pakistani Shi'ite Muslims march during a protest in Islamabad on June 27, 2008, against the British author Salman Rushdie's knighthood. Two days earlier, Queen Elizabeth II had knighted Rushdie, setting off Muslim protests around the world.

the monotheistic religions, marginalizes devotional practices, ethical and dietary regulations, and strategies of social organization that do not conform to “religion” thus constituted. The tendency toward oversimplification and sermonizing that characterizes the novel against God motif is a symptom of an underlying problem: the idea of secularism that emerges achieves meaning only in opposition, obscuring the way secularism produces knowledge in its own right. The motif of the novel against God appropriates those aspects of religiosity that privilege questioning, debate, and polyvocalism, and grafts these branches onto an expanding secular ideology.

As a reader and a teacher of novels myself, and someone skeptical of the continuing accuracy or utility of notions of the novel's inherent secularism, I submit that the strong claim of the novel's secularism no longer fits the evidence.

Contemporary novels have been telling a different story, a story of enchantment, for quite some time. This narrative is not new; indeed, it is romantic in the strict sense of the term: in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous formulation, fictions are sustained on a willing suspension of disbelief. We suspend judgment on the fictive nature of the text and immerse ourselves in story. Those like Rushdie, Wood, and Lukács, who insist on the secularism of the genre must draw a firm line in the unstable sands between belief in fiction (a simulacrum of authentic belief) and “real” religious belief. In doing so, they miss an opportune moment to illuminate the nuanced aesthetic and imaginative resources of literature and to claim the novel as the genre of a postsecular world. ■



The “New” No Religionists

An historical approach to why their numbers are on the rise

Christopher McKnight Nichols

RECENT NATIONAL POLLS SHOW A DRAMATIC increase in the number of those declaring “no religion” when asked about their religious affiliation. The number of “no religionists”—a category that includes Americans identifying as atheists, agnostics, humanists, secularists, and the like—now stands at roughly 15 percent of the population. This is an all-time high. The number has nearly doubled since 1990. What is going on? Taking an historical approach, my aim here is to briefly examine this trend in its domestic, cultural, and geopolitical context.

While there is little reliable survey data for the period before the interwar years, what evidence we do have shows that the willingness of people to identify publicly to pollsters and social scientists as having “no religion” is a new development. Of course, a small minority has always declaimed any religious affiliation, and some agnostics have been prominent figures in American public life. Famous among this group was the so-called “Great Agnostic,” Robert Ingersoll; his debates against theists and his espousal of the philosophy of “freethinking” made him one of the most well-known orators of the late-nineteenth century.

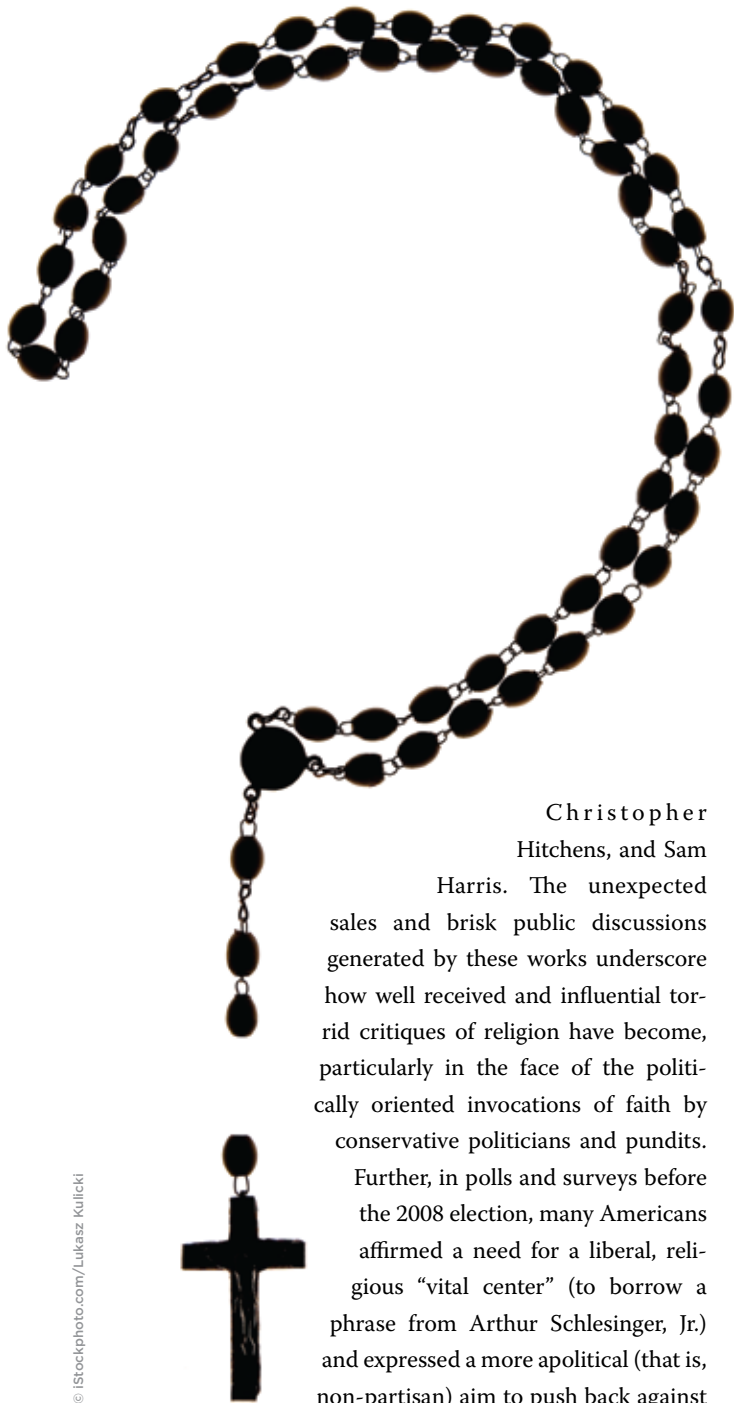
Nevertheless, Ingersoll-type public agnostics have been rare, very rare indeed. Historical scholarship on religion and on secular thought in America demonstrates that there have long been cultural pressures to affirm religious membership. The available data, including the off-year Census of Religious Bodies compiled by the federal government, are imperfect, but they support the conjecture that the influence of denominational and community-religious institutions in public life, combined with the force of cultural norms, historically undercut the reporting of “no religion.” These factors persisted at least through the 1960s.

The best benchmark for assessing recent trends came in the process of testing an explicit question on religion for the 1960 national census. A 1957 nationwide poll to investigate the viability of the question was undertaken by Robert Burgess, director of the Bureau of the Census, and demographer Conrad Taeuber. The poll found 2.7 percent of respondents expressed “no religion”—fully three quarters of whom were men—while another 1 percent did not reply to the question. (After a substantial battle in Washington and across the nation, the Census Bureau did not place a religious affiliation question on the 1960 national census.)

In the period from 1957 to the present, the number in the “no religion” category grew five-fold (500 percent!), with the sharpest increase coming after 1990. In 2008, more than 30 million were “no religionists.” Like other large groups, this amalgam is heterogeneous. However a few commonalities do emerge. “No religionists” tend to live on a coast, particularly the West Coast, rather than in the center of the U.S. They are often younger Americans. In fact, the single largest bloc is comprised of young males; nearly a quarter of all men between 18 and 34 identify as “no religionists.” To put this in perspective, there are more Americans professing “no religion” than all Episcopalians, Methodists, and Lutherans combined. Interestingly, while the public caricature of a “no religion” person seems to be as an individual atheist raging that “God is dead,” in fact fully 45 percent of the group “strongly agree” that God exists and another 22 percent “somewhat agree.” Although concentrated among the young, this group comprises members of all ages, all socio-economic strata, and all ethnic groups (but especially Asian-Americans). Demographers consistently note that this trend does not appear to be an anomaly. It represents a significant and expanding segment of the population.

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In a preliminary way, I suggest that the growing tendency of people who are not necessarily atheists to reject a religious identification reflects at least three political and cultural transitions. First, over the past few decades there has been a marked trend toward sharper polarization among religious outlooks. With the decline of membership in the so-called liberal churches, explicitly and unabashedly faith-centered political factions have grown and have brought their views to bear in the public square on an array of social, political, legal, and economic issues. Most prominent has been the electioneering activism of evangelical Christians, whose ascendance to power since the 1970s is epitomized by the presidency of George W. Bush from 2001–9. These developments prompted an outcry from liberals over the past three decades. But recent evidence of cultural polarization appears most persuasively in the bestselling appeal of works by “new atheists” such as Richard Dawkins,



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Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris. The unexpected sales and brisk public discussions generated by these works underscore how well received and influential torrid critiques of religion have become, particularly in the face of the politically oriented invocations of faith by conservative politicians and pundits.

Further, in polls and surveys before the 2008 election, many Americans affirmed a need for a liberal, religious “vital center” (to borrow a phrase from Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.) and expressed a more apolitical (that is, non-partisan) aim to push back against the rise of unambiguously religiously inspired and directed political blocs.

Second, diverse changes on the geopolitical stage have had profound impacts on images of public religion. From the 1930s through 1989, Americans imagined their enemies as deeply “godless”: first, Germany and Japan, then, the godless atheism of the communist Soviet Union. The apparent “opponents” to the U.S. in the twenty-first century, most notably Islamist extremists fostering terrorism, are suffused in religiosity and

the languages of political theology. Quite an inversion. No doubt there will be important consequences for American civic culture now that affirming America’s godliness no longer serves to distinguish “us” from “them,” the national enemy. And, though speculative, if irreligion abroad encouraged identification with religion, if not greater religiosity, at home, then it seems logical that defining the national “other” in terms of religious extremism may well encourage U.S. citizens to distance themselves from formal religious affiliations.

Finally, alienation from organized religion is growing for other reasons. Granted, it is hard to find reliable data on “alienation” and how that process might be impacting a rise in “no religionists.” Still, the survey data is suggestive. A January 2002 *USA Today*/Gallup poll, to give one example, found that roughly 50 percent of Americans consider themselves “religious” (down from 54% in a *USA Today*/Gallup poll in December 1999); while 33 percent consider themselves “spiritual but not religious” (up from 30 percent); and approximately 10 percent regard themselves as “neither spiritual nor religious.” What these responses, and others like them, mean is not self-evident. But, if nothing else, they highlight the voluntarism with which people view religion and the widely held belief that one can be “spiritual” without also being “religious” or, perhaps, as numerous surveys have indicated, one can believe in God and yet have no religion.

Statistical models predict that those professing “no religion” will continue to grow in the coming years. Mapping onto this trend we also have had some time to adjust to the rise of extreme forms of Islam and their frequent branding of America—and the West—as explicitly Christian. In combination with those geopolitical changes, there is related evidence that the politically engaged conservative wing of evangelical Christianity is splintering and in decline. If the rise of “no religionists” has in part represented a backlash against these foreign and domestic developments, then this trend may not be sustained. Predictions of America’s impending rejection of religion, as we argued in *Prophesies of Godlessness*, a book I edited with Charles Mathewes, have been made countless times throughout American history—and countless times those estimates have proven mistaken. ■

In the News



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Ritual and Sincerity

On November 18, 2009, Professor Adam B. Seligman will give a lecture at the Institute on “Ritual and Sincerity: Certitude and the Other.” In the lecture, he will present a comparison of ritual and sincerity as two modes of framing our human experience in the world. Ritual, on the one hand, creates a subjunctive or “as if” space through which relations between persons can come into being even while recognizing the fractured nature of the world. The sincerity trope, by contrast, so common to modern cultures of self realization, has a predilection towards wholeness and totality. As such, this mode of relation abhors all ambiguity and is potentially dangerous, for selves and for polities, threatening that plurality and heterogeneity which is the very stuff of the world and our relations within it.

Adam B. Seligman is Professor of Religion at Boston University, Research Associate at the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture, and Director of the International Summer School on Religion and Public Life. He is the author of many books, including *The Idea of Civil Society*; *The Problem of Trust*; *Modernity's Wager: Authority, the Self and Transcendence*; and, most recently, *Ritual and its Consequences*. ■

Recent Publications

The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right

Jon A. Shields

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. 216pp.



The Christian Right is frequently accused of threatening democratic values. Exploring this charge, Jon Shields argues that

religious conservatives have in fact reinvigorated American politics by mobilizing a previously alienated group and by refocusing politics on the contentious ideological and moral questions that motivate citizens. He also finds that they are more civil and reasonable than is commonly believed.

Jon A. Shields is Assistant Professor of Government at Claremont McKenna College and a former Doctoral Fellow of the Institute.

Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work

Matthew B. Crawford

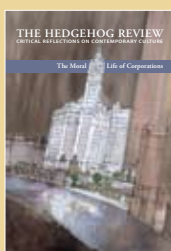
New York: Penguin, 2009. 246 pp.



In our ever more abstract world, we are losing the once-common experience of making and fixing things with our hands. In this

reflection on manual work, Matthew Crawford questions the educational imperative of turning everyone into a “knowledge worker,” based on a misguided separation of the work of the hand from that of the mind. He shows how this separation degrades work for those on both sides of the divide.

Matthew B. Crawford is a Research Fellow at the Institute.



THE HEDGEHOG REVIEW

is the Institute's award-winning journal of critical reflections on contemporary culture. The current issue focuses on the moral life of corporations. Order a copy for only \$12 or get it as part of a 2009 subscription (3 issues for \$25).

www.hedgehogreview.com

Secularism in the Late Modern Age

A \$30,000 grant from the Metanexus Institute on Religion and Science (with the generous support of the John Templeton Foundation), awarded to Institute Faculty Fellow Slavica Jakelić, will support a working group and conference dedicated to exploring “Secularism in the Late Modern Age: Between New Atheisms and Religious Fundamentalisms.”

Contrary to the usual focus on the clashes between secularisms and religions, the project will bring together an international group of scholars from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences to consider areas of consensus between religious and secular worldviews as well as the philosophical, historical, political, and institutional conditions conducive to their coexistence. The analytic goal is to investigate the range of meanings of secularity and secularism and how they play out in encounters with religion in specific contexts and communities. The normative goal is to consider the following questions: Must the relationship between religions and secularisms be one of animosity and confrontation? And, if, as Charles Taylor reminds us, both modern Western Christianity and most forms of modern Western secularism were shaped by the same moral drive—the impulse to reform individuals so that they might apply themselves to creating a better world—can we retrieve that moral drive for our age and in our pluralistic world?

More information about “Secularism in the Late Modern Age” will be forthcoming on our website <<http://www.virginia.edu/iasc>>. ■

The Therapeutic Origins of Policy

The Institute co-sponsored a conference in May on “The Therapeutic Origins of Politics, Public Policy, and Citizenship in the Post-1945 United States.” Organized by historians Ellen Herman (Oregon) and Brian Balogh (IASC Faculty Fellow), the conference built upon a body of scholarship that has linked the rise of the therapeutic ethos to the spread of consumer capitalism. Rather than focusing on the therapeutic as a source of individual, personal transformation, the collective aim of this conference was to ask how therapeutic perspectives transformed public, private, and voluntary organizations throughout the postwar era.

A former Doctoral Fellow at IASC, Stephanie Muravchik, presented a paper on the positive influence of psychiatric education on mid-century Protestant clergy. An excerpt from her paper follows.

The powerful influence of psychology in American contemporary culture has been eloquently and frequently indicted in recent decades for depoliticizing and disciplining, secularizing and debauching, isolating and atomizing our citizens. Over the past few years, however, a handful of scholars have challenged some aspects of this depiction of psychology’s social impact. In particular, they deny that it invariably promoted individualism, obviated political action, and enervated spirituality.

Despite this, almost all writers on the subject continue to assume that the implications of psychology were negative for religion. Of course not all critics lament a diminished Christianity. Nevertheless, many fear its diminution weakens a civic force that has long nourished the vitality of America’s liberal democracy. Furthermore, as sociologist James Davison Hunter has recently argued, the increased cultural influence of a psychotherapeutic perspective is dangerous because it cannot bear the weight of our society’s “far-reaching moral commitments to benevolence and justice.”

But critics’ deathwatch over a morally and civically sustaining Christianity is premature. Nor can we indict psychology as a poisoner. To understand the way psychology has affected religion in this country...it is necessary also to look at the experiences of actual Christians and to assess how they understood, used, rejected, and transformed psychology in their own lives.... I argue that—contrary to expectation—psychiatric training generally strengthened mid-century clergymen’s competence and identity as Protestant ministers.

...Although Protestant ministers drew heavily on Carl Rogers, they neglected his emphasis on self-realization and amplified instead his idea of unconditional positive regard. Such regard was itself a secular restatement of the ideal of Christian love. Clergymen just translated it back to its historical source. Unlike secular therapists, they privileged fellowship over autonomy.

Finally, clergymen understood therapy far more broadly than secular practitioners ever did. Souls had to be healed along with psyches. Relationships to God and the mystical body of Christ were as important as those to one’s family and friends. Healing required an array of techniques beyond merely helping the troubled articulate and ventilate their feelings. ■

Nihilism

James Davison Hunter

Nihilism—from the Latin *nihil* or nothing—is an endlessly complicated subject. As a philosophy, it has a long and tangled history with roots as deep as the metaphysical ruminations of Parmenides in the 5th century BCE. Its relevance for today was made sharpest by Nietzsche who, when famously declaring that “God is dead,” was, in fact, recognizing that with modernity came the end of all metaphysics and thus the valuelessness of the highest values of human history. For Nietzsche, the substitutes for a dead God—whether Nature, Reason, Humanity, Man, Life, the Soul, Democracy, Freedom, or the like—were as lifeless as the God whose place they were taking. Nihilism, then, is the clearing or empty space brought about by the negation (or annihilation) of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

Ironically, the intellectual roots of nihilism arose, in part, out of the Enlightenment’s quest for certainty. Yet what was supposed to have been the pursuit of certainty turned out to be, as the late John Patrick Diggins noted, “the ability to question everything and the capacity to affirm nothing.” In other words, the quest for certainty has led us to the conclusion that there is only one necessary or essential truth, and it is that there is no such thing as essential

truth. Thus, confidence has dissolved into doubt, objectivity absorbed into subjectivity, and certainty into the spinning out of imaginative possibilities that are fueled not simply by the powers of reason but by the force of passion, will, and power.

Part of Nietzsche’s brilliance was to demonstrate that nihilism was not just an esoteric question for metaphysicians, but a multifaceted reality everyone in the modern age must confront.

As a moral psychology, for example, its central manifestation is autonomous desire and unfettered will legitimated by the ideology and practice of choice. I don’t want to be misunderstood here. The power of self-determination is, of course, our reigning definition of freedom, and such freedom can, indeed, be liberating. For many, not least the disadvantaged and oppressed minorities, such freedoms are rare and cherished, and one can only hope that they will expand. The problem is not with the freedom of will as such but rather its autonomy from any higher value.

The power of will becomes nihilistic at the point at which it becomes absolute, when it submits to no authority higher than itself—that is, when impulse and desire become their own moral gauge and when the will is guided

by no other ends than its own exercise. The very nature of pluralism, not to mention the social and economic structures of a market economy, creates conditions conducive to its flourishing. In America, nihilism of this kind tends to foster a culture of banality that is manifested as self-indulgence, acquisition for its own sake, and empty spectacle that makes so much of popular culture and consumer culture trivial.

One can make too much of nihilism in contemporary culture. Conservative jeremiads declaring the descent of Western civilization into the gaping abyss of nothingness are clearly overstated. But in resisting the overly dramatic, one can also underplay its wide-ranging and profound implications for the modern world, implications that deserve careful attention. ■

culture

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Announcement

Culture and *The Hedgehog Review* to Join Together

For ten years, the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture has published *Culture* (previously *InSight*) as a vehicle for important new research from the Institute's fellows, past and present. During the same period, we have produced an award-winning interdisciplinary journal, *The Hedgehog Review*. In 2010, we the editors are combining our efforts, bringing *Culture* within the pages of a newly positioned *Hedgehog Review*.

Drawing upon the strengths of each publication, we aim to achieve an even more interesting, intellectually substantive, and constructively critical voice for helping people make sense of our world. The key strengths of *The Hedgehog Review* have been its recognized track record of high quality academic thinking, the stature of its authors, and its intensive coverage of a single important theme. The best aspects of *Culture* have been its tight coupling to the Institute's research, the timeliness and practical import of the topics it addresses, and its reader-friendly length.

The enhanced *Hedgehog Review* will engage issues of everyday relevance and pressing importance. It will continue to be handsomely designed for readability and interest, and written in clear, jargon-free prose. Each issue will have only three or four essays on the theme, allowing room for other content (essays, reviews, and so on) on a wider range of timely subjects. For readability, essays will vary in length, from short pieces to longer articles. Art and poetry will be regular features.

We are confident that you'll like the results. Look for our first issue next spring.

—Joseph E. Davis and Jennifer L. Geddes, editors

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