

culture

FALL 2008 • ISSUE 2.2 • ISSN 1941-1812

GOOD & EVIL

The Evil of Thoughtlessness
Vigilance and Virtue



VALUE-FREE

IN THE UNIVERSITY, THE CONCEPTS OF GOOD AND EVIL HAVE LARGELY disappeared. This is not to say that scholars avoid normative issues; they don't. What they avoid is any reflection on what the good actually is. In many fields, for instance, people are depicted in terms of their "interests," an idea closely associated with narrow, instrumental understandings of rationality. Human goods, in these utilitarian approaches, are reduced to personal preferences or desires, making further discussion unnecessary. In evolutionary psychology, morality is linked to unconscious genetic dispositions, theoretically bypassing human freedom and responsibility altogether. Even a field like philosophy, which once concerned itself with the question of the good life, now generally steers clear of that topic.

There are normative pressures to adopt this ostensibly value-free stance. One pressure comes from a mistaken notion of objectivity. Objectivity, a complex concept, is still often understood in terms of the old positivism. In this view, the world of facts is neutral. Human values or goods are regarded as inherently subjective, as projections onto this neutral world. Objectivity, therefore, requires that such values or goods be banned from the reasoning process. Another pressure, as Talbot Brewer argues (see interview), comes from contemporary liberalism. Liberalism presents itself as a neutral framework with respect to any preferred conception of the good life. Fostering toleration is the virtue of the framework, but toleration is commonly affirmed through a subjective conception of the good—each person is an authoritative guide to what is good for her or him. In this view, knowledge claims can and should be made without taking a position on the good as such.

The problem with the value-free stance is that it doesn't eliminate value judgments; it simply hides them. Questions of the good life or the existence of evil remain. We need to address them head on.

—JED

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Culture is published twice yearly by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, PO Box 400816, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4816. Telephone: (434) 924-7705. Email: iasc@virginia.edu. Website: <http://www.virginia.edu/iasc/>. © 2008 by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the written consent of the Editor. The opinions expressed by the authors do not necessarily reflect those of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture.

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ESSAYS

2 **BLUEBERRIES, ACCORDIONS, AND AUSCHWITZ**
The evil of thoughtlessness

6 **VIGILANCE AND VIRTUE**
In search of practical wisdom

INTERVIEW

10 **FOR A UNIFIED CONCEPTION OF THE HUMAN GOOD**
An interview with IASC Faculty Fellow Talbot Brewer

REVIEW

13 **THE MEDICALIZATION OF SOCIETY**
By Peter Conrad

IN THE NEWS

15 **2008/9 POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS
E. J. DIONNE, JR.
FELLOWS IN PRINT**

THE LAST WORD

17 **INTERDISCIPLINARITY**

If you are not yet receiving the Institute's eNewsletter, sign up at <http://www.virginia.edu/iasc/>.





Nazi officers and female auxiliaries (Helferinnen) pose on a wooden bridge in Solahütte. The man on the right carries an accordion. Karl Hoecker is pictured in the center. The original caption reads "rain coming from a bright sky" (figuratively "something unexpected"). USHMM #34858.

Blueberries, Accordions, and Auschwitz

The evil of thoughtlessness

Jennifer L. Geddes

YOU WOULD THINK it was a series of photos from summer camp. The smiling faces look across a rustic wooden bridge towards the camera, react in mock surprise as the rain begins to fall, and finally run giddily towards the camera. One of them carries an accordion rather than the typical camp-song guitar, but the mood is one most of us remember fondly from summers gone by. They are obviously having a good time.

Only after a first glance, do you notice that the campers depicted are not teenagers in swimsuits, but adults in SS uniforms. The setting, it turns out, is not a summer camp but Solahütte, a retreat center for SS personnel near the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp complex in Poland. Trips to Solahütte were given to concentration camp employees as a reward for jobs well done.

Last year an American soldier anonymously donated a photo album he had found in an empty Frankfurt apartment after World War II to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. It depicts several such “summer camp” scenes, as well as photos of official ceremonies and prominent Nazi leaders such as Rudolf Hoess and Richard Baer, both commandants of Auschwitz, and the infamous Josef Mengele, who conducted brutal medical experiments on camp inmates. Less well known is the photo album’s original owner, Karl Hoecker, who was Baer’s adjutant, or chief assistant, at Auschwitz. The Hoecker album, containing 116 small photos, can be seen at the museum’s online exhibit and is accompanied by a useful history of the album that was consulted for this essay: <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/ssalbum/>.

There are relatively few other photos taken of Auschwitz during the time it was in operation. One significant additional collection is the Auschwitz album, which is now in Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum in Jerusalem. It was donated by a former camp prisoner, Lilly Jacob, who found it in the Dora-Mittelbau camp hospital in Germany while recovering from typhus after the war. The Auschwitz album shows the arrival of men, women, and children from Hungary, including a photo of Jacob’s two young brothers, who were gassed upon arrival at the camp. The Hoecker album’s photos of the camp and of the life of the SS personnel, thus, constitute a significant addition to the historical record, but they also raise some very important questions for us.

What are we to make of these photos? They were taken at a time when Auschwitz was working over capacity, gassing to death children and their mothers, elderly people, and anyone deemed unfit for heavy labor or medical experiments. How do we process what we see? The Solahütte photos were taken only 30 kilometers from the killing center, where over 430,000 Hungarian Jews were transported and then divided into those who would be immediately killed and those who would be worked to death. What might we learn from them today?

Contrasting the photos of the laughing, frolicking SS personnel with the photos of those who were sent to the gas chambers or to the work camps offers a terrifying illustration of “the banality of evil.” This is the often misunderstood (and maligned)

...those who do evil do not usually look like monsters, madmen, or sadists. They usually look just like you and me...

phrase used by Hannah Arendt to describe the fact that those who do evil do not usually look like monsters, madmen, or sadists. They usually look just like you and me, and often enjoy simple pleasures that we also enjoy, including good company, good food (such as fresh blueberries, as depicted in one series of photos), and festive gatherings (the album contains photos of Hoecker lighting a Christmas tree).

Arendt used the phrase “the banality of evil” to describe something that struck her when she went to Jerusalem for the *New Yorker* to cover the 1963 trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi leader in charge of organizing the transports of Jews to the camps. She expected Eichmann to be a calculating monster, but encountered a fool. She wondered how someone who spoke in clichés, contradicted himself, showed a surprising inability to see anything from anyone else’s perspective, and narrated his story to a Jewish police guard as if it were a hard luck story for which he expected to receive sympathy, could be responsible for such evil. There was, she stated in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, a “dilemma between the unspeakable horror of the deeds and the undeniable ludicrousness of the man who perpetrated them.”



Members of the SS Helferinnen (female auxiliaries) and SS officer Karl Hoecker sit on a fence railing in Solahütte eating bowls of blueberries. In the background is a man playing the accordion. The original caption reads "Blaubeeren" (there are blueberries here). USHMM #34767a.



Members of the SS Helferinnen (female auxiliaries) and SS officer Karl Hoecker invert their empty bowls to show they have eaten all their blueberries. The original caption reads "Blaubeeren" (there are blueberries here). USHMM #34769.

It is important to note that Arendt used the word “banality” to describe not the deeds—for what could be less “banal” than the brutal murders the Nazis committed—but rather the evil-doer himself. Eichmann was no evil genius, no sadistic monster—he was a thoughtless bureaucrat who was responsible for evil deeds beyond our imagining. It was this thoughtlessness, this lack of reflection about what he had done, that was so hard to grasp. Arendt came to the striking conclusion that thoughtlessness—that is, the failure to think reflectively about the world around us, our actions, and their possible consequences—can be a moral failing of the highest order.

According to Arendt, Eichmann was responsible for organizing the transportation of millions of Jewish men, women, and children to their deaths not because he hated Jews or had an evil essence. Rather, he was responsible for these evils because he never reflected on the moral character of his actions. We don’t usually consider thinking or reflection to be moral activities that we may be blameworthy for failing to do. Arendt, however, writes, “That such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man—that was, in fact, the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem...the strange interdependence of thoughtlessness and evil.”

In looking at the Hoecker album today, we are given a chilling vision of this “strange interdependence of thoughtlessness and evil,” of the ways in which these SS personnel refused to think about what they were doing, failed to be reflective about the evil in which they were thoroughly engaged, and were able to enjoy a good time together with bowls of fresh blueberries and accordion music, even as they took part in mass murder. Their example should give us pause, especially when we consider Arendt’s claim that thoughtlessness can be more destructive than all our evil instincts taken together.

Most of us are far removed from the evil perpetrated by the Nazis. However, moral failings, including acts that are cruel and harmful to others, come in many forms, most quite ordinary and everyday. The SS personnel were people like us: they were not born evil—no one is—but they were also not born immune from the capacity to commit evil. They became people who were responsible for evil through their habits of action and, as Arendt points out, their habits of thought (or, rather,

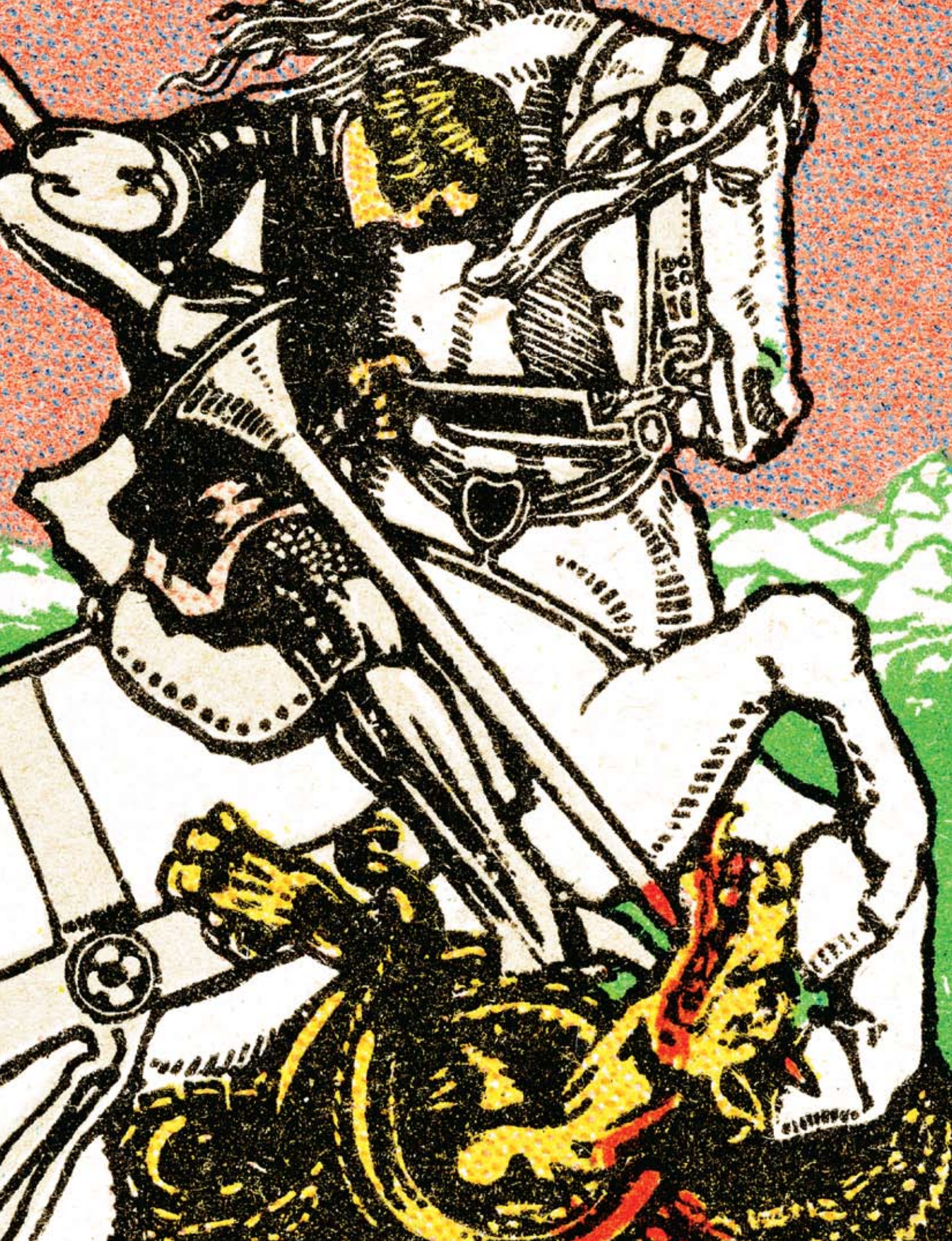
Arendt came to the striking conclusion that thoughtlessness—that is, the failure to think reflectively about the world around us, our actions, and their possible consequences—can be a moral failing of the highest order.

thoughtlessness). These habits shaped their decisions to participate in a system of mass murder. Their example, their failure to reflect carefully on their actions and the consequences of those actions for others, calls us to pay attention and think deeply about what we do, why we do it, and what effect our actions may have on those around us. ■

Images contained in this essay are courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). The views or opinions expressed in this essay, and the context in which the images are used, do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of, nor imply approval or endorsement by, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



SS officer Karl Hoecker lights a candle on a Christmas tree. USHMM #34598.



Vigilance and Virtue

In search of practical wisdom

Amy Gilbert

HANNAH ARENDT FAMOUSLY CLAIMED that what made Adolf Eichmann's evil so surprising was the utter banality of his person. He was "not Iago and not Macbeth," and nothing, Arendt reports in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, "would have been farther from his mind than to determine with Richard III 'to prove a villain.' Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all... He *merely*, to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing*." Eichmann's failure, then, was one of self-awareness—he lacked the imaginative capacity to grasp the import of his actions for other human beings. By blindly following orders, he executed the Final Solution with an odd mixture of cold precision and fragmented sentimentality, neither of which allowed him to appreciate the human significance of his deeds.

The example of Eichmann illustrates, in an extreme form, perhaps the most common way we fall into our own more mundane moral failings. Like Eichmann's, our own goals can imprison our understanding, thereby blinding us to just *what* it is we are doing, as seen from the perspective of the

other. And as Arendt notes, "such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together." Evil is not always fueled by hot hatred. It can also arise when we fail to see the meanings of our

Evil is not always fueled by hot hatred. It can also arise when we fail to see the meanings of our actions.

actions. In what follows, I want to briefly explore two related questions: First, what trends in our common ethical discourse contribute to this destructive inattention? And second, how might we resist such trends and cultivate moral attentiveness?

RESPONSES TO EVIL

French philosopher Chantal Delsol, in her penetrating book *Icarus Fallen*, points to two opposed trends in our responses to evil: unexamined indignation and *a priori* absolutism. The first is evident in the popular responses to events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks or the Rwanda genocide: we voice our

Practical wisdom is the success of the imagination—the full appreciation of the salient moral features of the particular situations we confront. Our awareness of these features enables us to respond properly to them.

outrage and disorientation in quick and sometimes indiscriminate blame, accompanied in the media by replaying images of the events over and over again. The repetition is necessary, for we quickly reach the limits of our ability to articulately express our moral intuitions and judgments. The second trend generally emerges in response to more everyday situations, though it sometimes follows blind indignation in our processing of horrific events. In this mode, we excuse wrongdoing by denying the responsibility of the perpetrators. We identify some deterministic factor—upbringing, genes, neurochemistry—as the real culprit behind the transgression. And so we transform vices into pathologies for which people cannot be answerable.

This *a priori* absolutism has a flip side. Just as vices are not blameworthy, so virtues are not commendable. Those who bravely risk their lives to save others, for instance, are not entitled to feel ennobled by their deeds—their neurochemistry determined their actions. And the rest of us need not feel guilty for our (likely) lack of action in similar circumstances. The “heroes” simply have better genes than we do. Or perhaps, from a different and truly disturbing perspective, they have worse ones. For they show themselves, in this view, to be deficiently rational for being so careless of their own self-preservation. Here we see the ideology, which sociologist Amitai Etzioni labels “individualism,” that undergirds both sides of the absolutism equation. Currently in vogue in psychology, philosophy, and evolutionary biology and traceable through Hobbes back to the ancient hedonists, this individualism maintains that our sole motivation, consciously or unconsciously, and even in our most seemingly selfless acts, is our own pleasure or satisfaction. Interestingly, if this is an accurate picture of human motivation, then Eichmann correctly identified his own key failing: his ineptitude at achieving his goals of self-advancement.

Both of these responses to evil are ultimately detrimental to our ability to remain attuned to the moral contours of our actions and lives. Blind indignation, by relying on gut reac-

tions, does not force us to understand the nature of what we morally oppose, and absolutism does not encourage us to strive for virtue. If we are reduced to equality before the gods of determinism, we undermine the grounds for moral judgment. We therefore have little reason to carefully attend to our lives as wholes for which we are responsible.

RETURNING TO VIRTUE

In order to combat the thoughtless evil we find evidenced acutely in Eichmann and more subtly in our own anemic moral responses, we need to resist both of these trends and find ways to re-train and fortify our ethical reasoning. An important and potentially effective place to begin is with the recovery of traditional virtue, as it speaks directly to what we need. In classical Aristotelian ethical theory the central virtue—the cause and measure of all other virtues—is the *intellectual* virtue of *phronesis*, translated most often as “practical wisdom” or “prudence.” Practical wisdom is the success of the imagination—the full appreciation of the salient moral features of the particular situations we confront. Our awareness of these features enables us to respond properly to them.

Like all virtues on the Aristotelian scheme, we can only acquire practical wisdom through habituation, through practice. We must repeatedly and purposefully take time to pay attention to the world around us, especially the parts of it which bear moral weight. Other virtues help us to identify these parts, as they direct us towards different morally salient aspects of reality. To understand this process, think of learning a new word: it strikes you in a passage and you look it up. Being newly aware of the word, you find that it now appears with surprising and pleasing frequency in other things you read, though in reality it was there all along. And each time you see the word it delights you and becomes further entrenched in your repertoire. Think also of the experience of falling in love. When we fall in love with someone we *notice* things about our beloved. How she plays with her pen. How he retreats into himself when he’s in pain. And if we are lucky enough to maintain a long and



Good and Evil: the Devil Tempting a Young Woman, 1788 (detail) by Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825).
© Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, France/Peter Willi/The Bridgeman Art Library

loving relationship with this person, we will learn to see him ever more clearly and deeply and respond to him well. We practice paying attention to him, and so we become better at it. The person of practical wisdom, Aristotle's *phronimos*, tries to universally cultivate this keen attentiveness. In the words of Josef Pieper, in *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, he exercises "reason perfected in the cognition of truth" that will "inwardly shape and imprint his volition and action."

Practical wisdom is vigilant—it keeps watch over the world. By doing so, it allows us to sound out the depths of our situations and imaginatively connect to the effects of our actions on

others. As Delsol claims, practical wisdom allows us "to steer a difficult course through the tortuous world of action. It is an alchemy that combines keen perception, experience in dealing with people, common sense, judgment based on memory, intuition of the unspoken, moral conscience, and knowledge of events." Such a perspective on the world cannot be captured, though perhaps it can be guarded, by concrete moral rules. It is too subtle to be summarized, as it encompasses an entire stance toward reality that opens us to it and allows us to perceive it aright. It is this stance that indignation oversimplifies and "individualism" denies. It is this stance of which Eichmann was incapable. ■

For a Unified Conception of the Human Good

An interview with IASC Faculty Fellow Talbot Brewer



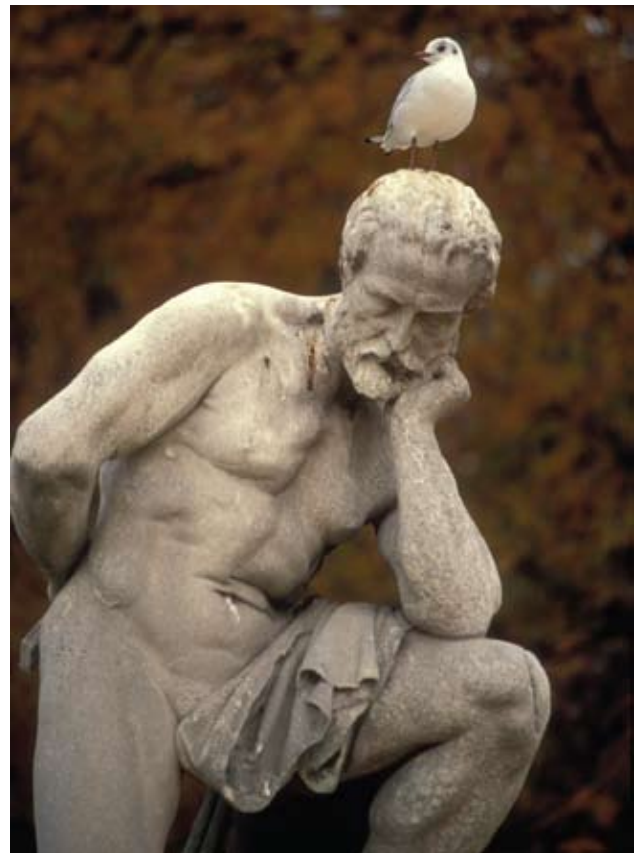
*Talbot Brewer teaches ethics and political philosophy at the University of Virginia and is a faculty fellow of the Institute. He is nearing completion of *The Retrieval of Ethics*, to be published by Oxford University Press, in which he critiques the understanding of human agency, practical thought, and action widely prevalent in contemporary Western thought. Drawing on the Ancients, he then offers the outlines of an ethics rooted in a different view of the self, its distinctive capacities, and its proper aspirations and concerns. Our questions here concern one widespread way of thinking about the human good and Brewer's thoughts on a possible alternative.*

There is a common view, both in everyday life and certainly in much of the social sciences, that virtually all human behavior can be understood as a matter of self-interested calculation. The small remainder—the actions driven not by personal interest but with the aim of helping others—is “altruism.” Altruism, in the words of anthropologist David Graeber writing in *Harper's*, “is considered a kind of puzzle,” and “everyone from economists to evolutionary biologists” is busy trying to “solve it.” What do you make of this view?

Modern moral philosophy has been obsessed with the idea that there is a fundamental conflict between self-interest and morality. In the typical picture, a distinction is drawn between two kinds of goodness: goodness that is relative to the particular people whose good it is—what we might call person-relative or subjective goodness—and impersonal or objective goodness, including moral goodness. The ancient Greeks, on this self-congratulatory picture, were innocent or unaware of this distinction and so they fell into error in their ethical writings. In the modern era, the story continues, we have brought into clearer view this crucial distinction and this has given us greater clarity about the tasks of moral theory and about the way that conceptions of the good figure in human action.

Across a wide swath of the contemporary academy and the wider culture, it's thought to be unproblematic that there are certain things, outcomes, or achievements that are good for me or good for you. And it's not generally thought that pursuing that which is good for me or good for you is guaranteed to be good in any objective sense. So, when we speak of the good in this subjective sense, we are not talking about a spe-

cies of a broader genus called “the good.” We're talking about something that can't be reduced to or derived from objective goodness. The existence of that irreducibly subjective sort of goodness is taken to be obvious. It's regarded as a puzzle how



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there might be such a thing as objective goodness and how, if there is such a thing, we might possibly be moved by it. I think that this conceptual distinction is, first, distinctively modern, and second, I think it's shot through with illusion and, on full inspection, turns out to be incoherent.

Why has this distinction, with its special stress on subjective or self-referential goodness, so come to grip our imagination?

I'm leery of pointing a finger at a particular modern institution or practice and saying, "Aha, that's the culprit." I can imagine a number of candidate culprits: the decline of religion; the rise of market economies; the way a consumer-intensive mode of life encourages one to think of one's desires and pleasures as infallible guides to action; a tendency to commodify our relations with other people and to view the goods derived from these relations as neatly divisible into goods assignable to each individual participant. But I distrust the impulse to finger a single cause on this incomplete list or any other.

I think something more specific can be said about why the dualistic conception is prevalent in the university. As an institution that serves a liberal public, the university is supposed to accommodate conflicting conceptions of the good. Hence there is pressure to insist that each person's good is a function of that person's own convictions or preferences or desires. We see this pattern across the contemporary academy. We see it in the law-and-economics movement in law schools, in welfare economics, in the "positive psychology" movement, and in the rise of cost-benefit analysis in public policy schools. This latter movement is an interesting case. The central idea is that trained public servants are to use their expertise to choose policies that will maximally satisfy the preferences of the populace. This can look like a commendable refusal to take a controversial stance on the human good, but on reflection it's not a neutral stance. One reason we think it sensible to deliberate with our fellow citizens about what to do together is that this might lead us to reconsider misguided preferences. But if the cost-benefit analyst inserts himself or herself into this process as the "neutral" expert and does a poll to determine what policy would maximally satisfy public preferences, there

is no moment at which deliberation becomes necessary. Policy decisions are tied to stated preferences and public deliberation is seen as irrelevant to the education and improvement of those preferences. So insisting upon a subjective conception does not avoid adopting a controversial conception of the good. It would be more honest for people within the academy to come clean about this.



Is there an alternative, non-dualistic view?

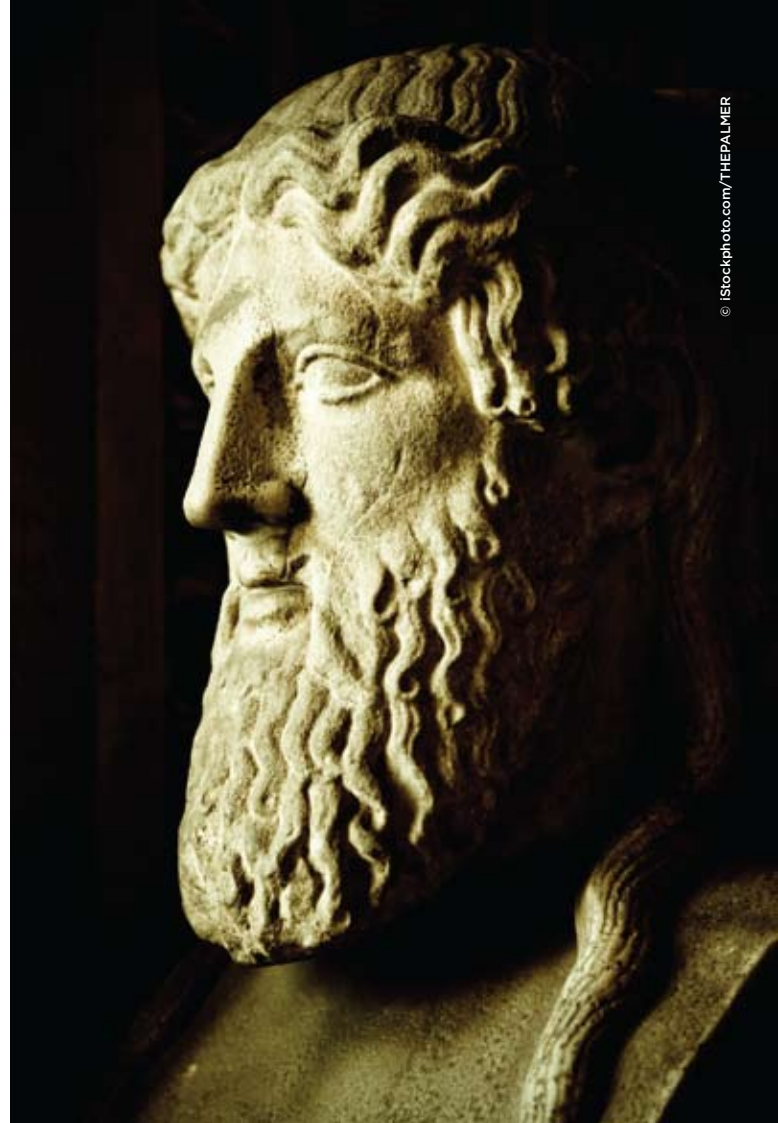
The Greeks didn't counterpose, as I read them, a subjective conception of the good to an objective conception. Plato, for instance, tries to show that the virtues are good for their possessors in a sense that simultaneously demonstrates their objective goodness. He tries to show that the virtues are good because of their connection with the kind of creature that human beings are. This sort of goodness is not associated with a particular or self-referential standpoint. Nor does this sort of goodness have the character of a detachable possession that could be transferred to others, or a zero-sum benefit that imposes tangible costs on others. On the contrary, those who are good are inclined by their love of the good to engage in exchanges with others that conduce to the good of others, and to avoid actions that will make others less good. What is good for a particular person, in other words, must also be good in an impersonal or objective sense. Once we see this, there is no need to affirm a deep distinction between subjective and objective goods. A single, unified conception of the human good becomes available.

It was the view of Aristotle and of Plato that we pull ourselves together maximally well, or fully answer to our telos as human beings, when our reason is fully in charge of our thoughts and actions. When our psyches are organized as they ought to be, our capacity for reasoning is fully actualized and is not lent out, so to speak, to our appetites or emotions. That idea goes hand-in-hand with another: insofar as our psyches are properly organized, we have a clearer view of how it is best for us to act. But this clearer view crystallizes what it is impersonally good for us to do with our lives, not what conduces to our own advantage.

Does this single, unified conception of the good presuppose some consensus about the good that is simply not available to us?

To admit the incoherence of the dualistic conception of the good is just a matter of coming clean about what we're doing when we take normative stances. That doesn't require that we sign on to any comprehensive answer to the question, "What in particular does the human good consist of?" nor does it even require that we think that there is only a single answer. It might be that the human good leaves us a whole lot of elbow room and that many kinds of lives are objectively good.

That, in fact, is how I think things are. But that's quite different from holding that the good is whatever satisfies one's desires. For insofar as one is living a life that falls within the



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ample elbow room of good human lives, one ought still to resist the thought that what makes that life good is simply that one desires it, because that's a posture one might conceivably have toward the most banal and spirit-numbing life. But if one came to desire a mind-numbingly trivial life, that would be a great misfortune and not a magical recipe for investing such a life with value. It's one thing to say that there are objective and impersonal facts about what lives are good and what lives are not, and that we cannot speak of the human good without taking a controversial stance on the question of what those facts are. It's quite another thing to say that we ought to impose our answers to that question on others. I think that the first claim is part of any reflectively stable picture of the human good, while the second is a recipe for intolerance and oppression. ■

Book Review

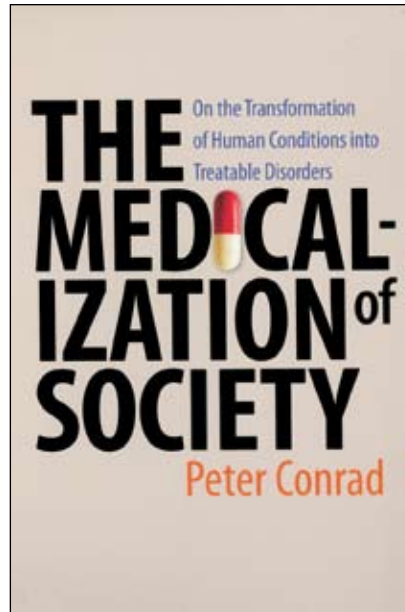
The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders

Peter Conrad

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. 224pp.

We have reached a point in American history when healthcare reform is a national priority. Not only has spending on healthcare increased dramatically in recent decades, but citizens are also increasingly concerned with unequal access and the vast numbers of uninsured. Along with the Iraq war and economic downturn, healthcare reform has been a dominant topic for both parties throughout the presidential campaign. In this context, sociologist Peter Conrad gives us his overview of the field of medicalization. In many respects this book is a summation of an intellectual project that Conrad has pursued for over thirty years. It is also his attempt to reconcile a personal concern with the darker side of medical social control to a somewhat contradictory public that is clamoring to secure affordable access to medical expertise, seemingly without regard for that darker side and the danger of “overmedicalization,” which can individualize and depoliticize social problems.

Conrad’s goal is not so much comprehensive as strategic, concentrating on the change that has occurred over the last three decades. During this period, he sees the primary drivers of medicalization as shifting from the medical



profession and social movements to consumers, biotechnology companies, and managed-care organizations. All of his case studies are American, and Conrad notes that medicalization appears to be more intensive in the United States than in other countries. Throughout the case studies, he discerns a strong link between medicalization and consumerism. Whether Conrad is writing about the medicalization of masculinity in the form of treating andropause, baldness, and erectile dysfunction, or the expansion of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) from children to adults, or the use of human growth hormone to enhance performance, he always refers back to the creation of medical markets, especially centered around demographic groups based on gender and age.

Conrad’s emphasis on markets and non-medical actors is consistent with his

broad definition of medicalization. He defines medicalization as a process by which “a problem is defined in medical terms, described using medical language, understood through the adoption of a medical framework, or treated with a medical intervention.” This definition encompasses the activities of everyday medical practice as well as problems that the medical profession may not regard as medical but which non-medical groups (such as twelve-step groups) do. This broad definition has been criticized. Joseph Davis, for instance, writing in the journal *Society*, argues that when medicalization loses its focus on the institution of medicine, which controls “official” medical language, it becomes incoherent and loses its edge as a tool of social criticism. In his words: “It encompasses too much and it stings too little.” Davis favors narrowing the definition of medicalization to a concern with medical jurisdiction, and analytically treating the activities of pharmaceutical manufacturers, biotechnology companies, and patient advocacy groups as separate from, although still influential for, the institution of medicine. However, under Conrad’s broad definition, most medicalization is uncontroversial, and so he often has to shift to a language of “overmedicalization” to pinpoint the real problem with which he is concerned: the social consequences.

At times Conrad targets policy as the cause of overmedicalization. He believes, for instance, that the rise of managed care may be partially responsible for the growth of the adult ADHD diagnosis. The rise of managed care has imposed strict limits on the amount

of psychotherapy allowed for individual patients. Adults who might previously have been seen by a psychiatrist now often receive a diagnosis from a primary care physician who is not trained to diagnose mental illnesses such as ADHD. Similarly, reimbursement practices favor drug treatment because medication management is faster and therefore cheaper than talk therapy. According to Conrad, once this treatment preference is established among primary care physicians, it sets the stage for expansion of the ADHD category.

Also relevant, I might add, is the structure of research funding. There are very few private sources of funding for studying the efficacy of talk therapies, while pharmaceutical companies sponsor their own drug trials in order to obtain FDA approval. The government also tends to treat science policy as a form of economic policy. There is a complex and fluid three-way relationship between government entities that fund biotechnology and pharmaceutical research, such as the National Institutes of Health, research universities, and for-profit corporations. University-based research that can be rapidly converted into marketable products is increasingly favored with federal funding. Thus, clinical, and even basic, science is becoming more commodified and increasingly justified in terms of potential economic payoff, such as new medications or new indications for existing medications.

I completely agree with Conrad that consumers, biotechnology firms, insurers, and managed-care organizations are playing new and important roles in expanding the terrain of medicine

worldwide. However, I think it is worth looking a bit more carefully at the ways in which cultural differences play a role in the variable distribution of medicalization. I suspect that differences in medicalization patterns between nations and within regions of nations may be more significant than Conrad's treatment would suggest. For example, in his study of birth practices in the Netherlands, *A*



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Pleasing Birth, Raymond De Vries argues that the low Dutch rate of Caesarean births, when compared with the very high rate in the United States, is attributable in part to cultural differences. He stresses different conceptions of family and different cultural orientations towards litigation, and by extension the doctor/patient relationship. If this is accurate, then, adopting Dutch health policy would not be expected to lower

rates of Caesarean births in the United States. Similarly, in my own research, I have argued that differences in local status systems and the meaning of community influence the regional willingness to embrace disability expertise, including the use of medicine to improve children's performance in school.

These qualifications aside, Conrad's accomplishment is significant. *The Medicalization of Society* is simply the most lucid treatise on the patterns and consequences of medicalization to date. It is also a much needed warning about the darker side of medicalization. In his final chapter, "Medicalization and Its Discontents," Conrad confesses that he is deeply concerned about the "over-medicalization of human conditions." He writes, "What I discuss here are issues that inhere in the medicalization of human problems independent of any potential 'benefits' from medicalization. Put another way, there are certain social consequences of medicalization irrespective of any attendant medical or social benefit." Among the consequences he discusses, I find most persuasive the idea that medicalization tends to reduce the individual to a body lacking any social context. This move distracts us from thinking about the social environment that contributes to alcohol abuse or the school system that deems a child troublesome. That environment, we know, heavily influences well-being. ■

—Regina Smardon

In the News

Four Postdoctoral Fellows Join IASC for 2008/9



David Franz studies the relationship of economic life to the broader culture, especially the often unnoticed interplay between business and conceptions of the good. His dissertation, titled “The Ethics of Incorporation,” examines the latent moral content of business management theory, exploring the influence of management theory on ideas of leadership, collective purpose, responsibility, and guilt. Dr. Franz has also written about the history of cubicles, intellectuals, and the role of religion in public life. His work has been featured in several print and online publications, including *Arts & Letters Daily*, the *Atlantic*, the *New Republic*, and the *Wilson Quarterly*.



Edward J. K. Gitre is a modern U.S. historian, with specialization in intellectual, cultural, and religious history. He holds a Ph.D. in history from Rutgers University, as well as two masters degrees, one in theology and the other in European cultural history. As a post-doctoral fellow, he will be revising his

Ph.D. dissertation for press publication. This project, titled “America Adjusted: Conformity, Boredom, and the Modern Self, c.1920–1980,” explores the problem of boredom as a social problem in postwar American culture. While the project focuses on the specific development of post-Darwinian social theory (“social adjustment”) and the relationship between social scientific knowledge and non-academic discourse, it seeks to illuminate the long-term effects of World War II and the Cold War militarization of American society.



Christopher McKnight Nichols specializes in American intellectual, cultural, and political history from the late nineteenth through the twentieth century, with a focus on the Progressive Era. He is revising for publication his Ph.D. dissertation, titled “From Empire to Isolation: Internationalism and Isolationism in American Thought,” which examines the dynamic interplay of international engagement, isolationist thought, and domestic reform from 1890 to 1940. Dr. Nichols has presented papers and published articles and opinion pieces in academic journals and newspapers on subjects including historical debates over the role of the U.S. in the world, transnationalism,

the Spanish-American War, race and segregation, the philosophy of history, deliberative democracy, and foreign policy. With Charles T. Mathewes, Dr. Nichols is co-editor of *Prophesies of Godlessness: Predictions of America's Imminent Secularization from the Puritans to the Present Day*, published by Oxford University Press.



Andrew Witmer's research and publications explore the intersection of religion, science, and racial thought in the nineteenth-century United States, with particular attention to competing understandings of the human person and efforts to deny full humanity to certain racial groups. He is currently at work on a book manuscript that examines the influence of nineteenth-century Protestant missionary work in sub-Saharan Africa on American conceptions of race and approaches to race relations. His publications include essays in *Prophesies of Godlessness*, *The North Star: A Journal of African-American Religious History*, and *Crucible of the American Civil War*, along with entries in *African American National Biography* and the *Encyclopedia of Missions and Missionaries*. ■



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E. J. Dionne, Jr.

On April 5, 2008, E. J. Dionne, Jr., syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post* and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, gave a lecture for the Institute on “American Culture and Contemporary Politics.”

Fellows in Print

Brissett, Wilson. “Edward Taylor’s Public Devotions,” *Early American Literature* 42.1 (2008).

Crawford, Matthew B. “The Limits of Neuro-Talk,” *The New Atlantis* 19 (Winter 2008).

Davis, Joseph E. “Culture and Relativism,” *Society* 45.3 (May/June 2008).

Franz, David. “The Moral Life of Cubicles,” *The New Atlantis* 19 (Winter 2008).

Geddes, Jennifer L. “Banal Evil and Useless Knowledge: Hannah Arendt and Charlotte Delbo on Evil after the Holocaust” in *Feminist Philosophy and the Problem of Evil*. Ed. Robin May Schott. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Kadlac, Adam. “Acceptance, Belief, and Descartes’s Provisional Morality,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 10.1 (2007).

Kumar, Krishan. “The Future of Revolution: Imitation or Innovation?” in *Revolution in the Making of the Modern World: Social Identities, Globalization and Modernity*. Ed. John Foran, David Lane, and Andreja Zivkovic. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Seidel, Kevin. “Beyond the Religious and the Secular in the History of the Novel,” *New Literary History* 38.4 (2007).

Smardon, Regina. “‘I’d Rather Not Take Prozac’: Stigma and Commodification in Antidepressant Consumer Narratives,” *Health* 12.1 (2008).

White, Stephen. “Uncertain Constellations: Dignity, Equality, Respect and...?” in *The New Pluralism: William Connolly and the Contemporary Global Condition*. Ed. David Campbell and Morton Schoolman. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

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Interdisciplinarity

Joseph E. Davis

The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture (IASC) is an interdisciplinary research center and “interdisciplinarity” is one of its core commitments. Often standing athwart academic trends, in this respect the Institute is anything but out of step. As a style of thought and a form of intellectual collaboration, interdisciplinarity currently has strong public appeal and is considered cutting-edge in the academy. As an article in *Science* observes: “Interdisciplinarity has become synonymous with all things progressive about research and education.”

Although the meaning of “interdisciplinarity” (and related terms such as “multidisciplinarity” and “cross-disciplinarity”) is somewhat indeterminate and covers many types of “boundary crossing,” I want to distinguish between two general models: the science or research-team model, and the humanities or conversational model. Since universities are organized by discipline-specific departments, the characteristic organizational structures for both models are institutes, programs, and projects. (Free-standing interdisciplinary institutions do exist, but are rare.)

In the science model, researchers from different areas of inquiry come together over an extended period to

address a complex problem, such as HIV/AIDS, or climate change, or mapping the human genome. A report on “bridging disciplines” published by the National Academy of Sciences in 2000 typifies this model. It defines interdisciplinary research as “a cooperative effort by a team of investigators, each expert in the use of different methods and concepts, who have joined in an organized program to attack a challenging problem.” The organizing principle is a division of labor, but true collaboration is also important: “Ongoing communication and reexamination of postulates among team members,” the report continues, “promote broadening of concepts and enrichment of understanding.” In this model, integrated efforts are necessary because the tools of any one discipline are inadequate for the problems under study.

The humanities model is quite different. Here like-minded scholars from various departments come together around specialized methods, theoretical approaches, or areas of common interest, such as feminist thought, or interpretive forms of explanation, or urban studies. The emphasis is on ideas, not technical problem-solving, and interdisciplinarity is expressed in meaningful and open-

ended conversation, not team research. The key forums for intellectual exchange include seminars, reading groups, and personal networks, and in some cases journals and conferences. In contrast with the science model, the motivation to collaborate arises from intellectual choices or personal commitments and (typically) dissatisfaction with disciplinary limitations, not the complexity of problems.

IASC offers a hybrid of these two models. On the one hand, we share some of the thought style and community forms of the humanities model, including the centrality of ideas, the seminar, and intellectual dialogue and debate. On the other hand, like the science model, our interdisciplinarity is driven by complex issues, and inquiry is organized along specific research fronts. The issues are not technical problems that can be “solved,” but deep cultural transformations that can be explored, historically and empirically; whose social implications can be examined; and whose underlying assumptions can be challenged and reconsidered. For this task no single discipline will suffice. ■

INSIDE

Essays

BLUEBERRIES, ACCORDIONS,
AND AUSCHWITZ

VIGILANCE AND VIRTUE

Interview

TALBOT BREWER

Review

THE MEDICALIZATION OF
SOCIETY

In the News

The Last Word:
Interdisciplinarity

culture

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Recent Books

Religion, Reform and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century

Robert G. Ingram

Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007. 336pp.



Eighteenth-century England is often thought to have witnessed the birth of the modern, secular world. In his study, Ingram shows that while England's political and economic fortunes changed dramatically during the era, its confessional state remained healthily intact, its worldview remained decidedly Christian, and its increasingly prominent place among nations was thought to be the result of God's special providence. What changed all this was not modernity, but war.

Robert G. Ingram is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Ohio University and a former postdoctoral fellow of the Center on Religion and Democracy at the Institute.

Just Politics: Human Rights and the Foreign Policy of Great Powers

C. William Walldorf, Jr.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press,
2008. 248 pp.



It is often assumed that policymakers in liberal democracies ignore humanitarian norms when these norms interfere with commercial and strategic interests.

In *Just Politics*, Walldorf challenges this conventional wisdom, arguing that human rights concerns have often led democratic great powers to sever vital strategic partnerships even when it has not been in their interest to do so. This history demonstrates that Western governments can and must integrate human rights into their foreign policies.

C. William Walldorf, Jr. is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Auburn University and a former postdoctoral fellow of the Institute.

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