



culture

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AMBIGUOUS DISTINCTIONS

Facebook Friends
Ambivalent Anti-Americanism

IDENTITY, AS A PROBLEM

THE TERM “IDENTITY” SEEMS TO HAVE BECOME INDISPENSABLE. TRY discussing immigration or ethnicity or religion or nationalism without using it, or, for that matter, any sort of question about the unsettling effects of a changing world on individuals or groups. We are awash in talk of identity—personal, cultural, national, sexual, you name it—and its constant and seemingly unavoidable use can lead us to assume that people have always spoken in this way. They haven’t. The term, as it is used in most contemporary contexts, only came into circulation in the 1950s.

Some years ago, the historian Philip Gleason, writing in the *Journal of American History*, identified Erik Erikson, the noted child psychologist, as the key figure in popularizing “identity” as a social science concept. Erikson, writing in the early 1950s, had a particular, psychoanalytically inspired idea in mind, but the term, once loosed, was not to be contained. It caught on quickly and was soon used by many social scientists. Some, like Erikson, characterized identity as part of the permanent psychic structure of the individual; others understood it as arising in social interaction and continuously renegotiated. For Gleason, the major reason why the term found such wide acceptance in the 1950s and 60s was because it “promised to elucidate a new kind of conceptual linkage” between the individual and society at a time when that relationship was being fundamentally re-examined.

Fueled by continuing institutional and cultural change, the uncertain relations of self and society remain. Both individualism and commitment are in flux. Individualism continues to find new expressions (see the Song article), and group identities—including ethnic, American, and anti-American—persist as sources of contention and debate (see the Anderson interview and Nolan article). While the animating concerns have shifted over the years, from conformity, to alienation, to relations of difference and ethnic consciousness, to fragmentation and fluidity, identity, as a problem, just doesn’t go away. No wonder we keep talking about it.

—JED

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Social Networking Sites

Mirrors of contemporary individualism

Felicia Wu Song





ANYONE PAYING ATTENTION to the lives of teenagers or college students knows that being on *MySpace* or *Facebook* is almost essential to their everyday experience. *MySpace* and *Facebook* are social-networking sites on the Internet that are part-yearbook, part-Rolodex, part-Little Black Book, and part-answering machine, with the advantage of being perpetually updated—by the second. They allow users to publicly develop and display their social connections and exchange messages within larger, overlapping, and intersecting networks. Many college students admit to being “addicted” to *Facebook* and leave the site permanently open on their computers. They check it right after they roll out of bed in the morning, while they study, and even in the middle of lectures on wireless campuses.

The sudden ubiquity of social-networking sites has left some parents of teenagers feeling worried and helpless. These virtual hangouts seem beyond parental control and adult surveillance. While the broader impact of social-networking sites is yet to be seen, it is possible that their significance will be short-lived. *Facebook* and *MySpace* could fizzle out and wind up as another of the “has-beens” among the short-term business failures of the Internet. However, there are good reasons to believe that social-networking sites are here to stay. They neatly “fit” key cultural realities of contemporary life in ways that few institutions do.

Consider the social-networking practice of “friending.” Users who join a social-networking site create personal profiles where they can express their interests and values. Users then browse the site, inviting others to their Friends list, and in the process gain access to their Friends’ networks of personal profiles as well. On a daily basis, users update their profiles, check for new information on their Friends’ profiles, and send messages to each other. Given the time involved in generating all this social information, it is not surprising that the most faithful and active users of social-networking sites are teenagers and college students.

While Friends lists often include actual friends from users’ lives, being a “Friend” in a social-networking site does not necessarily indicate a meaningful relationship. In fact, the value of a Friend connection is often merely symbolic and in many cases, relationally negligible. With a click of a button, one can just as easily add Hollywood celebrities, indie bands, or presidential candidates to one’s Friends list as one might

add a roommate, girlfriend, or cousin. While most observers marvel over the relational cornucopia that these sites create, what is more striking is the fact that celebrities, rock stars, and one's social intimates can exist side-by-side on a Friends list with little or no dissonance. A banality of friendship is designed into the functions of these sites. Its easy acceptance suggests that young Americans are both amenable to a "thinning out" of personal relationships and a "thickening" of ties to public figures conventionally encountered through the mass media. In this way, Friends lists publicly articulate and reinforce the contemporary experience of "pseudo-community," the illusion of relationship that media audiences feel with television talk-show hosts, movie stars, and other celebrities.

The success of social-networking sites also suggests that young Americans are comfortable approaching their personal relationships in the mode of consumer. *Facebook's* "News Feed" feature, for example, keeps users up-to-date on each of their Friends' online behaviors: who has posted on whose page, who has removed whom from their Friends list, and who has joined which group. Users can even keep track of the status of their Friends' changing romantic relationships. The options include "single," "in a relationship," "engaged," "married," or (my personal favorite) "it's complicated." With celebrities and close friends occupying the same social space, the daily practice of "keeping up" with one's Friends' profiles shares a disconcerting similarity with "keeping up" with the news on MSNBC or a Yahoo! page. As the maintenance of social relationships becomes primarily a form of information management, friendships easily shade into a form of consumption. Individuals, in turn, update their profiles and "produce" their identities online for the express purpose of being consumed in this fashion. As with many other contemporary social practices, where the private and public blur together, the value of intimacy declines and the consumer role is amplified.

Finally, social-networking sites may have lasting consequence because their very design articulates what sociologist Barry Wellman has long argued: the local community is no longer a meaningful category for many Americans. While we are clearly embodied beings, the salience of physical location has diminished in how contemporary Americans think about and function in their social lives. The best way to describe contemporary sociability is in terms of "networked individualism," overlapping networks of social ties that have individuals at the

The success of social-networking sites also suggests that young Americans are comfortable approaching their personal relationships in the mode of consumer.

core of each. People understand "community" in terms of multiple systems of friends, contacts, and acquaintances that span time and place—but are oriented around each independent self. Uses of other technologies, such as cell phones, reinforce this dynamic. People make more and more calls not to places or households, but to individuals, quite apart from their physical location.

In *Sources of the Self*, the philosopher Charles Taylor meticulously documents the transformation of personal identity in Western civilization over the past two hundred years. He argues that the sources of self-identity have shifted from external and transcendent referents to the internal and subjective experience of the individual. Other scholars, like Robert Putnam and Adam Seligman, make similar arguments about the decline of community as an orienting feature of people's lives. That many operate as though the sources of personal identity are within the individual self is strongly suggested by the popularity and easy adoption of social-networking sites. There, networks radiate out from the center—a center that is not a location, a cause, or a common identity, but simply the individual. Sites operate on the presupposition that users are comfortable orienting their social lives around themselves. And so, it seems, they are, as young Americans easily recast pre-existing relationships and practices of sociability according to site prerequisites. While the cultural changes that make this adaptability possible have been long in the making, it may be that as late-modern individuals, we have finally begun to create social institutions that reflect and reinforce basic dispositions towards networked individualism and consumption in the intimate sphere. What is so remarkable about social-networking sites is not, then, how much they change the landscape of contemporary social life, but rather how well they succeed in reflecting its essential dynamic. ■



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Ambivalent Anti-Americanism

The ironies of exported culture

James L. Nolan, Jr.

PROBLEM-SOLVING COURTS represent one of the most interesting and important innovations in the contemporary legal world. Over the past two decades, community courts, drug courts, mental health courts, domestic violence courts, and a range of other specialty, problem-oriented courts have been developed in the United States and exported internationally. These new specialty courts (of which there are now more than 1,600 in the U.S. alone) represent a significant departure from the adversarial model, which has long been the central and defining feature of common law criminal courts. Problem-solving courts are generally characterized (especially in the

United States) by the close and ongoing judicial monitoring of defendants, a multidisciplinary or team-oriented approach, a therapeutic or treatment orientation, the altering of traditional roles in the adjudication process, and an emphasis on solving the problems of individual offenders—hence, the umbrella term, “problem-solving,” that has emerged to describe this new breed of courts.

At a 1999 conference in Miami a group of individuals involved in the international development of problem-solving courts—including representatives from Canada, Scotland, Australia,

England, Ireland, and the United States—discussed, among other topics, concerns about “American cultural imperialism.” The Scottish representative, who had been promoting drug courts in Scotland for three years, offered the following anecdote to illustrate the anti-American attitudes that had sometimes frustrated his promotional efforts:

I was meeting with a director of social work, who has responsibility for the probation service and the second largest authority in Scotland. He says, “I’ll meet you in Starbucks down in Glasgow,” and he came in with these Nike trainers and his Levi’s jeans and the rest of the American designer gear, and he said to me, “Of course, American ideas just don’t work in Britain.”

The irony of the Scottish social worker denouncing American ideas while at the same time fully embracing American products is indicative of a larger social reality. That is, globally one finds a kind of ambivalent anti-Americanism, where citizens in other countries say they don’t like American ideas and the incessant infusion of American culture into their societies, yet they simultaneously admire and readily consume American technology and cultural products. British journalist Jonathan Freedland notes the “screaming contradiction” of attitudes toward the U.S. “We simultaneously disdain and covet American culture,” Freedland writes, “condemning it as junk food even as we reach for another helping—a kind of binge-and-puke social bulimia.”

One of the most interesting findings in the Global Attitudes Project conducted by the Pew Research Center reveals a similar sort of ambivalence toward the U.S. globally. The Project’s 2002 survey of citizens in over 40 countries around the world found that Americanization, or the spread of “American ideas and customs,” is overwhelmingly viewed as a negative development. Not surprisingly, this is particularly pronounced in the Middle East, where a majority in every Middle Eastern country says “it’s bad that American ideas and customs are spreading” to their country. Concerns about the processes of Americanization, however, are not limited to the Middle East. Even among America’s traditional allies in Western Europe and Canada, at least 50 percent of those surveyed in each national group viewed negatively the spread of American ideas and customs.

Since the 2002 survey, such concerns have only intensified. The 2007 Pew Global Attitudes survey reported that in 37 of

46 countries over half of those surveyed viewed the processes of Americanization as a bad thing. Negative views about the spread of American ideas and customs, for example, increased in Canada from 54 percent in 2002 to 67 percent in 2007 and in Britain from 50 to 67 percent. Survey findings reveal growing anti-Americanism on a range of other questions as well. The 2007 survey, for example, found that majorities in all but a handful of African countries believe that U.S. policies increase the gap between rich and poor countries. Majorities in most countries, moreover, dislike American ideas about democracy and believe that the U.S. promotes democracy to serve its own interests. Thus, it seems that many would agree with the perspective of the Scottish social worker that American ideas don’t work (or are not welcomed) in their country.

Also like the Scottish social worker, however, negative views about the spread of American ideas and customs do not necessarily translate into a rejection of American cultural products. The same surveys find that a majority of people in most countries around the world admire the United States for its advances in science and technology and like American popular culture. This is particularly the case in Canada and Western Europe. In the 2002 survey, for example, 77 percent of Canadian and 76 percent of British respondents said they “like American music, television, and movies”; and approximately the same percentages said they “admire the United States for its technological and scientific advances.” Thus, the survey report offers the following paradoxical conclusion: while “large proportions in most countries think it is bad that American ideas and customs are spreading to their countries,” there is also “near universal admiration for U.S. technology and a strong appetite for its cultural exports in most parts of the world.” In a number of interesting ways, importers of American problem-solving courts exhibit the same contradictory attitudes toward the United States. That is, they worry about American cultural imperialism, even while they import and embrace what is undeniably an American-grown legal innovation.

The primary way that importers of American problem-solving courts reconcile these seemingly incongruous attitudes is to emphasize the process of adaptation or indigenization. An Irish judge, who has himself been openly critical of the behavior of many American judges, puts it this way: “In the natural order of things, you tailor the program to what suits you best. Not because you think there’s anything wrong with the American system—but all you’re saying is, we’re three



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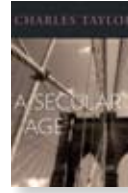
thousand miles away from you, we have a different culture, etc. And we've just got to tailor that, put up the cuffs, and make the suit fit us." Likewise, a pioneering Canadian judge, who is very conscious of anti-American sentiments in Canada, told an audience of mostly Americans: "We want to use what you've done well, ignore what you haven't done so well, and adapt the model into our own local use."

There is, then, the common belief that the American-grown legal product can be stripped of its unattractive American qualities and adapted to suit the needs of a local legal culture. If we understand law to be "a concentrated expression of the history, culture, social values and the general consciousness and perception of a given people," as do such legal comparativists as Mary Ann Glendon, then disentangling law from its cultural roots may not be as easy as importers of problem-solving courts seem to think. Peter Berger raises a related point when he argues that when "Mexicans eat *hamburguesas* they

are consuming whole chunks of American values 'in, with, and under' the American hamburgers." The same could be said of problem-solving courts. It is as naive to believe that a process of domestication will fully extricate Americanism from imported problem-solving courts as it is to think that placing a McDonald's restaurant in an old Tudor building will somehow negate the unseemly qualities of American fast food culture.

In both cases, importers of American products are arguably bringing on board more of American culture than they realize or would care to admit. A deeper appreciation of the cultural embeddedness of American-grown products, legal and otherwise, might help importers reduce the ambivalence in their attitudes toward the U.S.—urging them either to better resist the very things they say they so emphatically dislike or perhaps to admit that they dislike them less than they are usually willing to acknowledge. ■





Book reviewed in this essay:

Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age*.
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
Press, 2007.

MORAL CONSENSUS IN A SECULAR AGE

A judicious reading of secularity and religion

Slavica Jakelić

THE RETURN OF PUBLIC RELIGIONS was one of the most significant events of the late twentieth century. The potency and global character of religious revival was widely discussed, and compelled scholars and politicians traditionally dismissive of religion to start paying attention. Then, just when the collapse of communism portended the end of radical atheism and even the most fervent advocates of secularization theory were rethinking their position, secularism and atheism re-emerged on the public stage.

Over the past few years, books both critical of religion and explicitly antireligious have become overnight best-sellers, including Sam Harris's *The End of Faith*, Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell*, Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, and Christopher Hitchens's *God Is not Great*. Hitchens, particularly, contends that the popularity of everything secular happened because people got fed up with everything religious. The renaissance of secularism in an increasingly religious world, Hitchens, like many others, argues, is the result of a power struggle between religious and secular worldviews.

This argument is not without foundation. In the world of politics, secular elites from the U.S. to France, from Turkey to India, are in fact confronting the rise and sometimes hostile demands of public religions. A power struggle argument is also appealing because it is simple, cogent, and precise. But is it too simple? Must the relationship between religion and secularism be characterized by animosity and confrontation?

To address this question critically, we need non-ideological books that offer judicious readings of the meaning of secularity and its relationship to various forms of religion and modernity. Fortunately, these books exist and include Talal Asad's *The Formations of the Secular*, Jacques Berlinerblau's *The Secular Bible*, and Oliver Roy's *Secularism Confronts Islam*. Add to this list Charles Taylor's 800-page tour de force, *A Secular Age*. It is indispensable for appreciating the relationship between secularity and religion in the West.

At first glance, the book appears a reiteration of an old sociological story—how modernity enabled the very possibility of



unbelief and the pluralism of worldviews. Taylor asks: how did we, in the West, lose the enchanted world of our ancestors and arrive at a condition in which, even when we believe, we are “never, or only rarely, really sure, free of all doubt, untroubled by some objection”? Not much seems to be novel in this line of inquiry, especially to those acquainted with Peter Berger’s notion of the “heretical imperative.” But Taylor moves beyond the usual explanations of the path to secular society, which point to the effects of the scientific revolution, Renaissance humanism, the rise of the “police state,” or the Reformation. He is concerned to illuminate the moral sources of a secular age.

In his characteristically patient and charitable manner of narration, Taylor traces key philosophical, theological, sociological,

and historical developments in the rise of Western modernity and the growth of secularity. At the heart of both, he argues, is a “drive to Reform.” Contrary to what might be expected, Taylor does not see this drive beginning with the Protestant Reformation, though he does see the Reformation as the most radical religious expression of it. Rather, he locates the drive to Reform in the late medieval period, originating in a deep discontent “with the hierarchical equilibrium between lay life and the renunciative vocations.” In response to this discontent, the church translated the norms of religious life for application to lay believers in order to draw the laity closer to the life of religious elites.

Although profoundly embedded in the theological and historical developments of Western Christianity, the unintended and gradual consequences of the drive to Reform were radically secular. Shaping the view that what human beings owe to God is the achievement of their own good, the drive to Reform contributed to the fading of the sense of mystery. It inaugurated a vision of human agency as able to construct and reconstruct the world, a belief that each human being can work on herself to achieve a good life and collectively shape a good society. The drive to Reform was, one could say, a process of the democratization of virtue and, above all, it embodied confidence in the ability of human beings to create conditions of human flourishing: freedom, mutual welfare, and equality.

The drive to Reform fostered a gradual movement from transcendence to immanence. It created a “disenchanted world” wherein secular humanism was possible and religious faith, while still turned toward the transcendent, increasingly focused on the prosperity of human kind. The transformation Taylor documents is nicely captured in the change that occurred within the Roman Catholic Church between the papal documents *Syllabus of Errors* and *Rerum Novarum*. With these two documents, published in the span of four decades in the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church moved from condemning everything modern to encouraging the lay faithful to actively participate in the modern world.

In Taylor’s rich, multilayered, and sometimes too pedantic account of the moral origins of contemporary beliefs and unbeliefs, the novelty of his claims can be easily overlooked. He not only suggests that a secular age does not imply the death of God; he also says that it makes a wide range of beliefs and unbeliefs exist simultaneously without negating each other. He

does more than remind us that the origins of secular humanism are in Western Christendom; he also tells us that the only way to counter “the immense force of religion in human life” is to use “a modality of the most powerful ethical ideas, which this religion itself ha[s] helped to entrench.” Most importantly, Taylor shows that *both* modern Western Christianity and modern Western secularity were shaped by the same moral drive—the impulse to reform individuals so that they might apply themselves to creating a better world.

According to Taylor, the moral sources embodied in the drive to Reform continue to animate contemporary religious faiths and forms of secular humanism. To retrieve them, I would argue, is particularly pertinent for our world, in which the only *modus operandi* between secularisms and religions appears to many to be conflict. To be sure, the differences between secular humanism and religion are immense, especially in their view of the source of ultimate authority. For the secular humanists, authority is in each one of us; for religious people, it belongs in the realm of transcendence. To complicate things further, there

are various forms of secular humanism and they greatly differ among themselves. And, of course, religion comes in many modes and expressions.

The seriousness of these differences notwithstanding, the shared moral sources of secular humanism and religion in the West (and arguably beyond) must not be ignored. When attended to and drawn upon, they can have remarkable influence. Some leaders of the Catholic Church and the political Left in Poland seemed to have understood this in the last decades of the twentieth century, when they worked together against the communist regime and for democracy. Viewed within the framework of power relations, their agreement appears to be merely a pragmatic compromise to fight a common enemy. But, as the writings of Polish religious and secular elites show, theirs was also a moral consensus—about the dignity of the human person and the nature of a good society. *A Secular Age* sets the recent Polish experience in an even larger and deeper moral context. One may hope it does not remain an exception. ■



Rival Stories of America

An interview with IASC Fellow Shannon Anderson



Shannon Anderson's dissertation, titled Assimilation and the Meaning of America, 1915–2005, explores contested ideas about American national identity over the past century. Her investigation centers on three key moments when immigration was a prominent political issue. We live in one of those moments.

We are in the midst of another immigration crisis. Congress is debating “comprehensive immigration reform,” the candidates are talking about it, demonstrations are being held, and so on. Why now?

The crisis in which we find ourselves today is not an unfamiliar one in American history. Perhaps the most comparable period in the past century, in terms of heightened nativist rhetoric and public discourse about cultural diversity, was the period immediately preceding and following the First World War. In both moments, the United States found itself taking in huge numbers of immigrants during a time of rising and then fully consummated international instability. The common conditions, then and now, are high levels of immigration and involvement in a foreign war.

What I would suggest is that instead of accepting the language of public debate, we shift our thinking in such a way as to address what is really at stake. While there are certainly concrete economic and social issues to consider, including illegal immigration, when Americans express deep concerns about immigration, the more compelling matter is often quite different. Their concern is with the meaning of America itself. People—the man on the street, politicians, scholars, pundits—feel their sense of national selfhood to be in flux, or even threatened. This is not true of everyone, of course, but it is for many. What I would argue is that crises regarding immigration are usually crises of identity, and in the American story, these can perhaps be best understood as crises of assimilation.

Why is identity at stake under these circumstances?

Identity is most intensely a question when it is in confrontation with an “other.” So, for example, in the current immigration crisis, it is no surprise that many of the loudest and least sympathetic voices concerning new immigrants come from the southwestern states where the impact of the newcomers is most palpable. Americans living in the states that border Mexico—the country from which the largest number of immigrants arrive—see, feel, and are affected by immigration more directly than the rest of us. They often make stronger claims about what is distinctive in being an American because, in part, they see different cultural values and customs in operation that can challenge or appear to challenge the values and traditions they hold dear.

This challenge of the “other” is only heightened during a period of hostile engagement with other countries. The fervor of flag-flying and national emotion following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks was a concentrated expression of this dynamic. Our very way of life appears threatened; the response is a far more forceful assertion of who we are as Americans than is normally felt to be necessary. It should be emphasized, though, that there are competing imaginings of America, and so competing narratives of who “we” are.

What are the rival stories of America?

First, there is the story of an Anglo-Saxon America that draws upon the critical role that English ideas, customs, and people have had in the U.S. Those who see America in this way tend to emphasize the strength and success of this particular inheritance for American institutions and ideologies, and worry about its dilution through high levels of immigration. This story was told by early sociologists like E. A. Ross in the 1910s in response to the influx of Southern and Eastern Europeans, and is still told—though with a new emphasis on Latino, and

especially Mexican immigration—by scholars like Samuel Huntington today.

There are two additional and familiar stories of America that offer alternatives to the more insular Americanist one. The story of America as a melting pot, one of the more potent images in narratives of the nation, emphasizes the institutional power of the U.S. to embrace a vast diversity of newcomers and create something bigger, better, and stronger than before. Israel Zangwill, the British playwright who gave us this metaphor in his 1908 play, *The Melting Pot*, offered the most radical version of this story. He suggested that all Americans are part of and affected by the mixing, and would be culturally transformed into a “new race” as immigrants enter and change the blend. This is the most future-oriented of American stories, in that there is an implicit recognition of ongoing change. Cultural pluralism, and later multiculturalism, offers the third dominant story. In this imagining, first put forward by Horace Kallen in 1915, America is a unified political state but is culturally a nation of nations (or ethnicities); the entry of new cultures is to be celebrated and all ethnic groups who have or will immigrate here are to be recognized and valued, with no one group maintaining itself as dominant.

Do ordinary people sort themselves along the lines of one of these stories?

These stories are told by elites of various kinds and filter down into the textbooks, but it seems to me unlikely that most Americans consciously put themselves into one of these specific groups. Still, given the predominance of these three stories over at least the past century, they certainly influence the way peoples’ views on immigration break down. At the current moment, the degree of anxiety expressed by so many Americans about immigration suggests that people may be considering these issues more explicitly than is usual. There is a polarized way in which immigration is discussed on television and the internet media, and the effect may be to virtually exclude the idea of the melting pot. Americans are seemingly forced to choose either “conservative” anti-immigration rhetoric or “progressive” multicultural rhetoric. My sense of these things is that, as is the case regarding so many issues, vast numbers of Americans fall in the middle, which might look very much like Zangwill’s story, or like one of less antagonistic integration. ■



Book Review

The Culture of the New Capitalism

Richard Sennett

New Haven: Yale University Press,
2006. 214 pp.

In *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, Richard Sennett teases out the meaning of the new economy and its attendant ideals for ordinary men and women. He is not enamored of what he finds. Sennett, a public intellectual who splits his time between professorships in sociology at M.I.T. and the London School of Economics, is especially interested in how we can continue to find dignity, create a sense of self, and build an inclusive polity in the midst of an economic order that makes such pursuits exceedingly difficult.

At the heart of the book is the connection between two dominant economic models and the kinds of people and societies that these models demand. Though organizations run according to these models rarely employ a majority of any society's members, the models exert a profound moral and normative force because they are widely believed to be inaugurating the future.

Bismarck conceived the old industrial economic model in the late nineteenth century; businesses and governments throughout the industrial world implemented it in the twentieth. This "social capitalism" was built for stability and inclusion of the masses—to prevent revolution if for no more lofty goal. This was society as a pyramid, with lots of room at the base. If some workers found such a corporation to be a psychologically cramped "iron cage," as Max Weber put it, this cage had benefits. Principally,



this economic order made long-term planning and stability possible and so facilitated the creation of social relationships and life-narratives that ground the self in usefulness to others.

Economic changes in the 1970s, including the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system and the emergence of efficient automation, have gradually replaced this old culture with a new model. Impatient shareholders increasingly demand flexibility of corporations—the ability to change course in turbulent markets. Cutting-edge corporations, in turn, demand flexibility of their workers, not loyalty over the long term. Creativity and the ability to work well on short-term projects have become sought-after virtues in the new economy. These corporations trade in potential. With potential as a key ingredient of success, hard-won experience at a single job has become a liability, even a personal

failure. Without the old pyramid structure underpinning an inclusive social politics, a "spectre of uselessness" now hangs on those judged to be without talent. For Sennett, these are traumatic cultural shifts. Only a certain kind of person can thrive in such a culture, one who is willing to do without a sustained life-narrative, who privileges potential skills over past accomplishment, and who is willing to surrender experience in order to embrace an uncertain future. Such a person, as Sennett puts it, "is an unusual human being."

Sennett spends the last chapter offering values that might countervail this new and more flexible culture and its spectre of uselessness. Among other partial fixes, he recommends job sharing to eliminate insecurity and state assistance to those who care without pay for elderly relatives or children. Here, as in the rest of the text, Sennett is eloquent and persuasive, if more controversial. His deep research into the sociology of work grounds the argument and his prescriptive conclusions. At first look, one might complain that his description of the old economy takes too nostalgic a cast. After all, the old economic system Sennett describes is hardly a world that C. Wright Mills or other mid-century critics would have recognized. But this disjuncture more likely lies in the difference between 1951, when Mills called middle-class workers of the old order internally "fragmented," and the early twenty-first century, when in retrospect the self demanded by that white-collar world can seem relatively whole. ■

—Scott Nesbit

In the News



Virginia Festival of the Book Panel

Charles Mathewes, IASC Faculty Fellow and author of *A Theology of Public Life*, will moderate a panel at the Virginia Festival of the Book on “The Politics of God: The Faith Factor in American Public Life and Why We Can’t Stop Talking about Religion.” Authors Charles Marsh and Amy Sullivan will be discussing their new books on the topic. The festival runs March 26–30. Look for details in the IASC eNewsletter or online at www.vabook.org. ■

Fellows at Large

At Brown University in December, Institute Executive Director **James Davison Hunter** debated Morris Fiorina of Stanford on the question, “Is America in the midst of a culture war?” C-SPAN covered the event...Former Postdoctoral Fellow **Monica Black** has joined the Department of History at Furman University. Her dissertation, “The Meaning of Death and the Making of Three Berlins: A History, 1933–1961,” has received the Fritz Stern Prize, given annually by the German Historical Institute for the two best dissertations in the field of German history...Cambridge University Press published **Charles Mathewes’s** latest book, *A Theology of Public Life*, in September as part of the Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine series...Senior Fellow **Nicholas Wolterstorff** received an honorary doctorate from The Free University of Amsterdam on October 19, 2007...Faculty Fellow **Stephen White** received a Virginia Foundation for the Humanities Fellowship for Fall 2007 to finish his book, *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen*...In December, Director **Jennifer Geddes** completed her term as Co-Chair of the Arts, Literature, and Religion section of the American Academy of Religion. ■



The God of a Second Chance still

Institute-Sponsored Film Wins Award

The God of a Second Chance, the Institute-sponsored film directed by Paul Wagner, won the Best Feature Length Documentary award at the “Our City Film Festival” in Washington, D.C. on February 10, 2008. The festival is sponsored by Yachad, Inc., the Jewish Housing and Community Development Corporation of Greater Washington. ■

The cover of The Hedgehog Review journal features the title "THE HEDGEHOG REVIEW" and the subtitle "CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON CONTEMPORARY CULTURE". The central image shows a group of stylized hedgehogs in various colors (red, grey, black) gathered around a document. Below the cover, there is a dark red banner with white text.

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“Rethinking the ‘New Antisemitism’ in a Global Age”

A lecture by historian Jonathan Judaken, University of Memphis

3:00 p.m., Thursday, February 28, 2008 — Byrd/Morris Rooms, Harrison Institute, UVA

Co-sponsored by the Special Lectures Committee and the Jewish Studies Program

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The Working Group on Race and Human Flourishing

This year, a small group of fellows, staff, and directors of the Institute have been meeting monthly to discuss issues of race and human flourishing. The aim of the group is to consider one of the most important and vexing issues of the modern era—race—in its relation to some of the central questions of the Institute—concerning what it means to be human, the ordering of our communal and public life, and the conditions of contemporary life that inhibit or enhance the possibilities for a good life.

This year the group has invited:

On January 25th, **James Bryant** gave a lecture on “Human Flourishing in W. E. B. DuBois’ (Late) Sociological Imagination.” Dr. Bryant is Assistant



Professor of Sociology at the College of the Holy Cross. His lecture was co-sponsored by the Special

Lectures Committee and the Carter G. Woodson Institute for Afro-American and African Studies.

On February 28th, **Jonathan Judaken**, Associate Professor of History and Director of the Marcus W. Orr Center for the Humanities at the University of Memphis, will speak. ■

Allan Megill on Objectivity

The Institute’s Friday Seminar has been concerned with reductionism and scientism. On February 1, Allan Megill, Professor of History at UVa, led a seminar on the question of objectivity and the writing of history. Professor Megill is the author of Historical Knowledge, Historical Error (Chicago University Press, 2007) and has written extensively on objectivity. We asked him to reflect on a couple of the many issues at stake.

Some have worried that if we can’t have a pure or “absolute” objectivity, then we can’t have objectivity at all. Does that follow?

No, it doesn’t, because there are other forms of objectivity. For example, there is a procedural or methodological type of objectivity. Procedural objectivity involves following time-tested epistemological rules. Some rules are general, such as the rule that we ought to take account not just of evidence that supports our favored position, but also of evidence that contradicts it. This amounts to saying that we scholars ought to be judges, not prosecutors or defense attorneys or propagandists for a favored cause. Other rules are peculiar to specific types of inquiry. For example, two important rules in historical research are the rule that primary testimony is better than second-hand testimony, and the rule that testimony of either kind is more credible when it is supported by material evidence. Procedure is not a route to absolute truth; it does offer a way of arriving at a “good enough” truth, which may well be the most one can hope for at any given moment.

You have described one type of challenge to objectivity as “reduction to agenda.” What do you mean by that term?

By “reduction to agenda” I mean an unreflective tendency to promote one favored paradigm, or mode of research, in one’s field. For example, history has seen a competition in the last twenty years between the social history and the new cultural history paradigms, with the latter now dominant. But while the new cultural history has produced interesting work, it has also brought about some important exclusions. Too often the costs are not attended to. Potentially important work is pushed to the margins—or never written at all. Scholars need to learn to push against the dominant paradigms. They can only do this by cultivating a curiosity and range of learning that go beyond what “everyone knows” in their discipline. Often, “everyone” does not know.

Moral Order

Joseph E. Davis

Moral order is a central dimension of culture. Generally, the term refers to any system of obligations that defines and organizes the proper—good, right, virtuous—relations among individuals and groups in a community. Such systems derive from religions, traditions (Romantic individualism, natural law theory, etc.), or ideologies. They are expressed explicitly in institutional rules, laws, moral codes, and the like, as well as implicitly in the various roles, rites, and rituals of social life. Complex societies like the United States involve competing and amalgamated moral orders.

This understanding of moral order is useful as far as it goes, but it can also be somewhat misleading. It tends to draw our attention to moral rules and normative expectations and away from a more fundamental level on which features of the world are ordered and infused with moral significance. Moral order is also present in the very conceptualizing and structuring of reality. Illuminating moral order at this level was the life-long project of the British social anthropologist Mary Douglas. She conceived of order as how we assign and keep things in their “place,” and her work explored how we react when things get out of place.

Douglas’s work began with and extended the insights of Émile Durkheim,

the early French sociologist. Tribal societies, Durkheim showed, are held together by shared categories of thought and social demarcation. These societies provide the classification systems—including categories of time, space, and causality—and the metaphors that guide their members and make collective action possible. In modern societies, however, this common symbolic life is ruptured. Now, Durkheim argued, unity flows from an interdependence created by the complex division of labor, and some truths, especially those of science, are not social but “express the world as it is.” Mary Douglas rejected this sharp distinction between primitive and modern societies, and its social exemption of modern intellectual achievements. “It is easier to see that tribesmen project the moral order upon their universe,” she wrote in *Implicit Meanings*, “than to recognize the same process working among ourselves.” For Douglas, shared classifications constitute a central and inescapable dimension of order in all human societies. Making distinctions through socially provided categories, kinds, and definitions is how we transform unorganized needs and experience into meaningful forms. It is how we know, for instance, what it is permissible to eat, where, at what times, and with whom.

Our classifications, however, are not arbitrary nor are they merely questions of “the world as it is.” Accepted classifications, Douglas emphasized, draw the lines of the world; they define what is real, what is natural, what is right and just. Things have a place and they *belong* in that place. The moral dimension to this sorting and boundary drawing is most evident when objects, behaviors, or ideas are out of place—when they “blur, smudge, contradict, or otherwise confuse accepted classifications.” Some (not all) of this “out of place” is dirt, defilement, deviance: our response is to condemn it and to enact rituals—as simple as washing one’s hands—that re-establish the proper order.

Douglas’s conception of moral order, then, goes deeper than beliefs about mutual obligation. And it contradicts the commonplace classification of domains of life into those that are value-laden (religion, family life, poetry) and those that are “neutral” or value-free (the liberal state, science, the capitalist market). She shows us that we too project a moral order upon our universe and actively work to defend and uphold it.

Dame Mary Douglas died in May 2007. She was 86. ■

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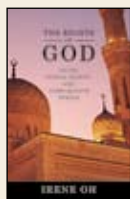
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Recent Books

The Rights of God: Islam, Human Rights, and Comparative Ethics

Irene Oh

Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007. 160pp.



Promoting Islam as a defender of human rights is laden with difficulties. Advocates of human rights will readily point out numerous humanitarian failures carried out in the name of Islam. Professor Oh examines human rights and Islam as a religious issue rather than a political or legal one and draws on three revered Islamic scholars to offer a broad range of perspectives that challenge our assumptions about the role of religion in human rights.

Irene Oh is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami and a former dissertation fellow of the Center on Religion and Democracy at the Institute.

The Politics of Secularism in International Relations

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 264pp.



Conflicts involving religion have returned to the forefront of international relations, yet scholars have continued to assume that religion has long been privatized in the West. Professor Hurd argues that secularist divisions between religion and politics are not fixed, but socially and historically constructed. She develops a new approach to religion and international relations that challenges the presiding assumptions in this field.

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University and a former postdoctoral fellow of the Center on Religion and Democracy at the Institute.

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