

Another excellent contribution is that of Dominic Manganiello, whose essay on the fiction of Michael D. O'Brien is among the most thoughtful and original in the collection. Focusing on O'Brien's *Father Elijah: An Apocalypse* and *Strangers and Sojourners: A Novel*, Manganiello demonstrates the central place of cultural renewal in O'Brien's fiction and essays. Much influenced by Maritain's discussion of the *imago Dei*, "lost when Adam fell and restored to the original unity of image and likeness with Christ's redemption," O'Brien views the restoration of Christian orthodoxy as the last remaining bulwark against the apocalyptic force of contemporary nihilism. In O'Brien's Bunyanesque narratives, his protagonists confront head-on a modern culture that appears to be rapidly descending into a "seemingly benign totalitarianism," as O'Brien writes in *The Family and the New Totalitarianism*.

It is a mode of fiction that, as Manganiello notes, occupies an important place within Catholic literary tradition. Stretching back to Robert Hugh Benson's *Lord of the World* and to Chesterton's Father Brown novels, the genre was revived more recently by Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy. Like O'Connor, O'Brien is an "artist of hope" who unflinchingly identifies and assails the faithless cynicism pervading the general culture and who at the same time asserts the never-ending possibility of redemption through grace.

Between Human and Divine: The Catholic Vision in Contemporary Literature is an impressive collection of essays, carefully edited with an informative introduction and useful bibliography of primary and secondary sources. The collection offers a wide-ranging discussion of the changing role of the church and of Catholic identity in recent decades. Readable and well-informed, its individual

contributions provide detailed studies of the works of a significant number of contemporary Catholic writers. Expansive in its contents and varied in its approaches and perspectives, *Between Human and Divine* is a valuable contribution to our understanding of recent Catholic literature.

THE DEMISE OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY?

Paul H. Lewis

Political Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Authors and Arguments, edited by Catherine H. Zuckert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

Are political theorists becoming an endangered species? Pierre Manent, a French philosopher and frequent contributor to *Modern Age* and other ISI publications, thinks that "the twentieth century has witnessed the disappearance, or withering away, of political philosophy." In this volume Professor Zuckert has put together a collection of essays about eighteen thinkers "to demonstrate the richness and vitality of philosophical reflection on political issues in the twentieth century in response to the many observations of its weakness, if not death." Each essay summarizes a political philosopher's career and discusses his principal works.

The volume is divided into four parts. Part 1 is intended to provide examples of the

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“three basic alternatives in the early twentieth century.” John Dewey represents liberal democracy; Carl Schmitt, a Nazi, represents fascism; and Antonio Gramsci is perhaps the most notable Marxist theorist of that time. So far, so good; but why only three basic alternatives? Conservatism also had its defenders in the early twentieth century. Vilfredo Pareto, Hilaire Belloc, and José Ortega y Gasset come immediately to mind, yet not one of them makes an appearance in this collection.

Part 2 is called “Émigré Responses to World War II” and covers four continental European philosophers who fled to America or Britain to escape communism and Nazism: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, Yves Simon, and Hannah Arendt. Of these four, Arendt became the best known through her path-breaking work on totalitarianism, which outraged the Left by arguing that Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia were essentially alike. Voegelin came to much the same conclusion, although he used the more confusing term *Gnosticism* instead of totalitarianism. Indeed, much of Voegelin’s writing is incomprehensible. Here is an example from *The New Science of Politics*: “The attempt at constructing an *eidos* of history will lead into the fallacious immanentization of the Christian eschaton.” Translation: the totalitarians’ goal of constructing an earthly utopia is a corruption of the Christian belief in heaven. Strauss, in contrast to Arendt and Voegelin, reacted against the totalitarians’ ideological propaganda by retreating into philosophical detachment and skepticism. For him, ideology seeks to move the masses, while philosophy is only for the rational few. Simon was a liberal French Catholic who refused to live under the Vichy regime. Though undoubtedly a worthy figure, I don’t think that he was as important as Raymond Aron, who ought to have been included in this section.

Part 3, on “the revival of liberal political philosophy,” serves to illustrate how easily abused the term *liberal* is in modern America. In its classical sense, which is still used in Europe and Latin America, it meant essentially limited government and free enterprise. That is how Friedrich Hayek and Michael Oakeshott used the term, and what Isaiah Berlin meant by “negative liberty” (freedom from coercion). “Positive liberty,” for Berlin, meant securing the means to do what one wishes. He opposed this because he thought it would easily degenerate into collectivism and social engineering, which is more or less what “progressive liberals” like H. L. A. Hart, John Rawls, and Richard Rorty advocate. Hart, a legal theorist, rejected traditional morality based on Christianity in the name of liberating the individual to pursue his personal desires. Rawls sought to revive seventeenth-century social contract theory to justify income redistribution. Rorty attacks the Enlightenment belief in universally valid natural rights based on reason as being bourgeois and out of date, especially property rights. For him, what is right depends on the historical context, which is to say that “justice” is whatever contemporary “progressives” say it is.

Part 5, “Critiques of Liberalism,” carries the attacks on bourgeois society and capitalism far beyond the progressives into the wastelands of nihilism, Stalinism, and Catholic communitarianism. Jean-Paul Sartre first gained fame as an exponent of existentialism, which encouraged individuals to preserve their humanity by rejecting the values of corrupt bourgeois society. Unfortunately, his experience with the Nazi occupation of France also converted him to communism. For most of his adult life, he tried to reconcile these contradictory beliefs by refusing to recognize that Stalin’s Russia was dedicated to stamping out any sign of individuality.

He never succeeded in squaring this circle but always insisted that communism would end individual alienation by creating a just society.

Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas offer a post-Marxist, New Left approach to replacing the bourgeois order. Like Gramsci, they see its downfall coming most likely through a displacement of the old culture rather than an economic collapse. Foucault saw capitalist society as permeated at all levels with power hierarchies but thought they could be overthrown by a countercultural offensive. It is unfortunate that this collection of essays does not include any neo-Machiavellians such as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, or Roberto Michels as an antidote to such utopian pleading. The reader would learn that all politics is essentially a struggle for power in which success depends on organization, that organization means hierarchy, and therefore that all revolutions result in the rise of a new ruling elite. That is certainly more realistic than what Foucault proposed.

Habermas looks to the new professional, educational, and managerial classes created by modern communications and information systems to gradually overcome capitalism. These new classes are more cosmopolitan in their outlook and allegiances. They reject traditional values in favor of global standards of ethics and, Habermas thinks, will eventually create a world government that will impose those more humane standards. Readers who have been following the current turmoil in the European Union may have some doubts about these predictions.

Lastly, there are the Catholic communitarians, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre. Both are practicing Roman Catholics and both reject the individualistic, materialistic outlook of Enlightenment liberalism. Both were attracted to Marxism in their youth

and still identify with the “humanistic” Left. MacIntyre has a more developed concept of communitarianism, although he rejects the label as applied to himself. Opposing modern capitalism and its appetitive consumer society, he wants people to revert to small local communities that would opt out of the nation-state and the market economy. Taylor, who does call himself a communitarian, would presumably agree. For non-communitarians, in which party I include myself, this sounds like a reactionary arcadia reminiscent of the early medieval hamlet—you know: before the obnoxious bourgeoisie appeared with their deplorable secularism, tawdry commerce, and vulgar tastes.

So, is political philosophy withering away? Professor Zuckert admits in her Introduction that the natural sciences’ prestige has made social scientists want to imitate them. Normative questions—the meat and drink of philosophy—are ruled out in favor of topics that lend themselves to empirical analysis and quantification. The philosophers discussed in this collection insist that, because human beings can choose how to act, or not act, they can’t be studied like rocks, molecules, or planets. What is more, the social scientist himself has opinions and values, so he cannot be completely objective about his research. So far those arguments have failed to reverse the positivist trend. Most social scientists would reply that the standards of the “hard sciences” are the correct ones, even if the “soft sciences” can only approximate them. The alternative is to write polemics and promote some ideology, which is what many of the political philosophers in this volume have done. That’s unobjectionable if your goal is to change the world, and who would deny that Gramsci, Hayek, and Foucault have influenced politics in the West? But, as Leo Strauss reminds us, ideology and philosophy are very different things.

Perhaps, as he argued, political philosophy is suitable only for a few skeptical intellectuals. In that case we can say that it isn't dying out; it's just settling down to its natural, restricted constituency.

TAKING RIGHTS SERIOUSLY

Mark Shiffman

The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History
by Samuel Moyn (Cambridge, MA:
Harvard University Press, 2010)

Columbia University jurist Louis Henkin has been called "the father of human rights law." Samuel Moyn points out the revealing fact that, whereas in 1974 Henkin was arguing, as he had been for at least a decade, that human rights had become an incoherent concept in which proponents of international law should place no hope, by 1978 he had founded Columbia's Center for the Study of Human Rights and penned *The Rights of Man Today*, propounding a convenient myth of the steady rise of human rights from American principles to international norms.

The observation strikingly illustrates Moyn's central thesis: human rights conceived as a viable international standard is a recent and nearly unprecedented historical

novelty. The era of human rights dates almost precisely from 1977, a year that began with President Carter's invocation of human rights as a foreign policy principle and ended with a Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Amnesty International, and in which the *New York Times* used the phrase "human rights" five times as often as in any previous year.

Moyn's history pursues three aims: to debunk the myths of inevitability surrounding human rights, to reconstruct an accurate tale of the developments and events that brought them to worldwide prominence, and thus to provide grounds for a sober assessment of the promise and pitfalls of the international human rights movement. In order to clarify the phenomenon, Moyn draws upon Hannah Arendt's sharp distinction between "contemporary human rights as a set of global political norms providing the creed of a transnational social movement" and the older nation-based natural rights "to be achieved through the construction of spaces of citizenship in which rights were accorded and protected." Hence Moyn contends that the "true key to the broken history of rights . . . is the move from the politics of the state to the morality of the globe, which now defines contemporary aspirations."

While Moyn thus sounds a theme familiar to readers of Pierre Manent (whom he never cites), his treatment of the theme differs from Manent's in two crucial respects. First, Moyn sees no continuity between modern natural rights and contemporary human rights: the latter emerges as an accidental and opportunistic linguistic appropriation responding to a distinct set of historical and political circumstances. Second, while Manent worries about the weakening of the political framework in which rights can be effectively embodied and adjudicated, Moyn's concern is rather for the fate of the human rights movement.

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