

The Man Who Sold America: The Amazing (But True!) Story of Albert D. Lasker and the Creation of the Advertising Century
 By Jeffrey L. Cruikshank and Arthur W. Schultz
 Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2010.
 382 pages. \$27.95 US (hardcover) (ISBN 978-1591393085)

Reviewed by Martin Morse Wooster

If you were to compile a list of the most dynamic philanthropists of the twentieth century, Mary Woodard Lasker (1900-1994) would have to be included. Lasker's single-minded mission, for which she used the resources of the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation for more than forty years, was to dramatically increase taxpayer funding for federal government medical research on heart disease, cancer, and stroke.

Lasker was brilliantly successful in her efforts. Her relentless lobbying, climaxing in the Nixon Administration's "War on Cancer," resulted in the National Institutes of Health being transformed from a tiny agency with a budget of \$5 million in 1949 to a vast operation with a multibillion dollar budget in the 1970s. But her effort was based on a spectacularly faulty premise: that if the federal government spent enough money, "a cure for cancer" would somehow be found. She consistently held this view throughout her long career. In 1986, forty years after she began her one-woman lobbying effort, a reporter from *Business Week* asked Lasker whether the notion that a cure for cancer could be found if government funding were increased was unrealistic. She said, "Nobody knows the full picture about any of these diseases, so how does anyone know what's an unrealistic expectation and what's not?"¹

The money Lasker used to fund her campaign came from a fortune created by her second husband, Albert D. Lasker. When he died in 1952, he willed \$6 million to Mary and an additional \$6 million to the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation. But Mary said that she was simply continuing her husband's ideas. Was her claim true?

Until now, historians have had a limited amount of materials to work with. The only biography of Albert Lasker, John Gunther's *Taken at the Flood*, published in 1960, was an authorized biography over which his wife and children had editorial control. *The Man Who Sold America* is just the second Lasker biography. Its authors, Cruikshank, an experienced business historian, and Schultz, former CEO of Foote, Cone, and Belding, state in a postscript that Gunther's book was "closely edited" by Albert D. Lasker's widow and his children, and "we have

reinstated details that the Lasker family removed from Gunther's manuscript" (381). In addition, Cruikshank and Schultz had two sources not available to Gunther: an oral history, ultimately amounting to more than 2,000 pages, that Mary Lasker gave to Columbia University beginning in 1962, and numerous transcripts of interviews that Boyden Sparkes conducted with Lasker and his associates in the late 1930s for a biography that was never published. (Columbia University Libraries has since posted the Mary Lasker interviews on the web.)

Cruikshank and Schultz are good writers, and *The Man Who Sold America* adds substantially to our knowledge of Albert Lasker's business achievements. Their chapters on his philanthropic career are less enlightening, but they do add some details to the limited information we have about Lasker's philanthropic goals.

Albert D. Lasker was one of the greatest advertising executives of the twentieth century. He was born in Galveston, Texas, in 1880. In 1896, Lasker graduated from high school and, as an aspiring journalist, acquired a scoop by convincing the prominent socialist Eugene V. Debs, in Galveston to resolve a union dispute, to give a brief but exclusive interview.

Lasker's talents were not in journalism but in advertising. In 1898 he went to Chicago and joined the advertising firm of Lord and Thomas as an apprentice. Lasker rose to become president of the firm and stayed with the company until it was liquidated in 1942. (Many of Lord and Thomas' employees and accounts were transferred to a successor firm: Foote, Cone, and Belding.)

Under Lasker's leadership, Lord and Thomas became one of America's largest advertising companies. Lasker and his employees convinced Americans to eat Sunkist oranges and Sun-Maid raisins, use Whirlpool washing machines, and smoke Lucky Strike cigarettes. As Lasker's career progressed, he often took stock as partial payment for Lord and Thomas advertisements; Lasker's holdings in these companies, including Pepsodent and Kimberly-Clark, substantially increased his fortune.

Lasker's influence on American society was not limited to advertising. He was majority owner of the Chicago Cubs for a decade, and had he not allowed his friend William Wrigley to claim the naming rights, the Cubs today could be playing in Lasker Field. Lasker also played a key role in the effort to clean up baseball after the White Sox gambling scandal of 1919.

In the 1930s, Lord and Thomas were among the first national advertisers to buy time on radio. Their efforts helped to create "Amos 'n Andy," the first radio comedy, and "The Story of Mary Marlin," one of the first soap operas. In 1938,

Lord and Thomas decided to end its sponsorship of “Amos ‘n Andy.” The authors argue that Lord and Thomas’ radio department, headed by Lasker’s son Edward, then discovered Bob Hope and created the platform that enabled him to become a national star.

Albert Lasker had long been involved in philanthropy in a limited way. In 1928 he created the Lasker Foundation for Medical Research with a \$1 million grant. The foundation lay dormant for nearly a decade, making no grants, until in 1939 Lasker declared that the University of Chicago could use the funds for general operating support. Lasker made another gift to the University of Chicago in 1940, giving the university Mill Road Farm, his estate in Lake Forest, Illinois. In 1947 the university sold the land to developers who turned the property into postwar housing.

Mary Lasker transformed her husband in a variety of ways. Politically, Albert was initially an ardent Republican who was one of Warren Harding’s key advisers. According to Harding biographer Francis Russell, in the summer of 1920 Lasker personally delivered a \$20,000 payoff to Harding’s mistress, Carrie Phillips, along with the gift of a round-the-world cruise that kept Phillips out of the country until well after the election. In the 1930s, Lasker supervised Lord and Thomas’ successful efforts in California that caused Socialist Upton Sinclair to lose his 1934 campaign for governor. Two years later, Lord and Thomas successfully defeated a California initiative that would have imposed punitive taxes on chain stores because they could sell products more cheaply than independent stores could.

Under Mary’s influence, Albert gave up baseball and golf and embraced psychoanalysis and art collecting. Although he never formally switched parties, Albert endorsed Franklin Roosevelt in 1944 and Harry S. Truman in 1948. And in philanthropy, he followed his wife’s lead.

One early cause was birth control. In the 1920s, Lasker’s two sisters had used a bequest from their mother to “help women” by giving it to Margaret Sanger to promote birth control. In a 1950 speech accepting an award from the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation, Sanger said that this gift from Lasker’s sisters enabled “our cause in those early days ... to go out into the field and be heard.”² In 1939, Lasker authorized a Lord and Thomas corporate grant to promote birth control in Georgia.

With Mary’s encouragement, the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation gave much more to the movement for birth control. “The Birth Control movement is something far beyond the implications of its name,” Albert wrote to Sanger in 1940 (343). Mary claimed that her husband coined the name “Planned Parenthood,” saying he decided on it because “it sounded more constructive and would meet

with less public opposition” than the organization’s previous name, the Birth Control Association of America (343).

Fighting cancer was the Laskers’ second chief philanthropic interest. In 1922 and 1923, Lasker gave two donations totaling \$25,000 to the American Society for the Control of Cancer, in memory of his brother Harry, who had died from cancer in 1922. “The two gifts,” the authors say, “represented almost the entire endowment of the Society in its first decade of operations” (352).

The society remained small until 1944, when the Laskers and their allies took over the organization, renamed it the American Cancer Society, and launched a national fundraising drive that transformed it from a tiny organization that distributed pamphlets into one of the nation’s largest nonprofits. Lasker was personally responsible for a 1945 campaign where, for the first time, such popular radio shows as “Fibber McGee and Molly” discussed cancer as a disease that shouldn’t be hidden but instead confronted and treated.

But there’s little evidence that Albert Lasker was interested in his wife’s crusade to devote billions of dollars in federal taxpayer money to anti-cancer efforts. The only evidence that he supported Mary’s efforts in that regard was a statement she made in 1962 that when she said her primary philanthropic energies were devoted to lobbying for national health insurance and increased research for cancer and tuberculosis, Albert allegedly said, “For that, you don’t need my kind of money. You need federal money, and I will tell you how to get it.”³ Cruikshank and Schultz offer no other evidence that Albert Lasker supported a massive increase in federal funding for research or was active in the American Cancer Society after 1946.

The Man Who Sold America is an important and engaging biography, but it fails to answer many lingering questions about Albert Lasker’s motives as a philanthropist.

MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER is a senior fellow at the Capital Research Center and a contributing editor to *Philanthropy*.

NOTES

- ¹ Martin Morse Wooster, *Great Philanthropic Mistakes* (Washington, D.C: Hudson Institute, 2010), p. 67, quoting Sara Siwolop, “The Fairy Godmother of Medical Research,” *Business Week*, July 14, 1986.
- ² *The Public Writings and Speeches of Margaret Sanger*, “Lasker Award Address,” October 25, 1950, www.nyu.edu/projects/sanger/webedition/app/documents.
- ³ Martin Morse Wooster, *Great Philanthropic Mistakes* (Washington, D.C: Hudson Institute, 2010), p. 44.



The Two Narratives of Political Economy

By Nicholas Capaldi and Gordon Lloyd, eds.

Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Scrivener, 2011.

506 pages. \$49.95 US (hardcover) (ISBN 978-0470948293)

Reviewed by Art Carden

*“The two competing narratives are the **Lockean (liberty)** narrative (but made canonical by Smith) and the **Rousseauian (equality)** narrative (but made canonical by Marx)” (xxxii).*

In *The Two Narratives of Political Economy*, Nicholas Capaldi and Gordon Lloyd bring together a selection of readings on the two most important themes in political economy dating back to John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau: liberty and equality. They have assembled what will be a very useful reader for courses in the history of economic thought, political theory, and social theory writ large. They also frame the debate in terms that should influence scholars who study the development of economic, political, and social institutions. To select, modify, and in some cases translate passages representing some of the central themes in the discussion as it proceeded over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries represents a significant editorial contribution.

Capaldi and Lloyd divide the book into three parts: “The Emergence of Political Economy,” “The Arrival of Political Economy,” and “The Maturation of Political Economy.” An uncollected fourth section—indeed how I think about this review—might have been called “The Completion of Political Economy” or “The Close of Political Economy,” or perhaps, more self-consciously provocative (and hyperbolic),

“The End of Political Economy.” I will say more on this missing section below.

The starting point for the editors’ analysis is the emergence of political economy out of the domain of “household management” and into social analysis, a move that was effected in part through the writings of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. With Locke and Rousseau and their successors the unit of analysis of political economy shifted from the individual acting within the confines of a household economy and to the “nation” acting in the context of a broader global economy.

From Locke and Rousseau, Capaldi and Lloyd take us through contributions from Smith, Tocqueville, Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, Friedrich List, Proudhon, J.S. Mill, Marx, Engels, and some of the documents surrounding the American and French Revolutions (the American Declaration of Independence, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the French constitutions of 1791, 1793, and 1795, and other documents). Scholars who are interested in the causes and consequences of institutions—specifically in the sense in which they are defined by Douglass C. North as the formal rules, informal norms, and enforcement characteristics that define the “rules of the game”—will find the juxtaposition of the American state papers with the French Revolutionary documents illuminating. This is particularly so in light of the discussions from Locke, Rousseau, Smith, and Tocqueville that precede them. I can see a very interesting classroom discussion beginning with the principles expounded by Locke and Rousseau, the specific text of some of the documents presented, and an evaluation of the kinds of incentives inherent in those documents.

The introductory essays—including the general introduction and the introductions to each section—helpfully prepare the reader for what he will encounter. I learned much from them. The editors begin by discussing “the Technological Project,” which they call “the most important historical development in the last four hundred years” (xiii), and what accompanied it: the free market economy, limited government, rule of law, and a culture of personal autonomy (they note that the latter is not a libertine “culture of self-indulgence”). One of the seismic shifts, according to the editors, was the view that all men (and eventually, women) are equal in the eyes of God and the law and that to erect “legal barriers in the economic realm was tantamount to thwarting God’s plan” (xvi). From all this emerged “a new persona—the entrepreneur.”

Unfortunately, and hence my wish for that missing fourth section of the book, they do not carry their discussion of the entrepreneur through the contributions of late nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars, particularly those working in

the neoclassical and Austrian traditions. The editors assume up front that people have easy access to the twentieth and twenty-first century versions of the narratives, and thus the book ends with Friedrich Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. This choice of stopping place weakens the volume as a whole, as the marginalists and especially those who followed in the tradition of Carl Menger (most specifically Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek) provided concrete answers to some of the questions raised by the two narratives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most specifically, the contributions of Mises and Hayek to the socialist calculation debate show that a socialist society cannot function as an *economic* system. The impossibility of economic calculation under socialism has important implications for how we evaluate alleged tradeoffs between liberty and equality.

William Stanley Jevons, Leon Walras, and Carl Menger independently contributed marginal analysis to the science of political economy even before Engels published *Socialism* in 1880. Marginal analysis enabled future generations of scholars to develop complete theories of money and prices that were absent from the work of the classical economists and unrefuted by Marxists. Reading through the book, I found myself frustrated by the fact that there are a lot of questions raised by the authors assembled in this volume that are answered by scholars such as Mises, Ronald Coase, Hayek, and others, who are not included in the volume. A section containing some of these contributions with an introductory essay like those that bring the reader into the other sections would have made for a more complete discussion.

Nonetheless, the book is impressive for its topical breadth. One particularly useful inclusion is John Locke's "A Letter Concerning Toleration." The letter is especially interesting in that it recognizes, as Hayek would later, that the animating contest of liberty is a search process whereby the institutions that work are discovered through trial and error. This passage from Locke is instructive as one considers the difference between pure religion (with an internal focus) and impure religion (with an external focus): "No way whatsoever that I shall walk in against the dictates of my conscience will ever bring me to the mansions of the blessed; I may grow rich by an art that I take not delight in; I may be cured of some disease by remedies that I have not faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust and by a worship that I abhor. ... In vain, therefore, do princes compel their subjects to come into their Church communion, under pretence of saving their souls. If they believe, they will come of their own accord, if they believe not, their coming will nothing avail them" (39). Intriguingly,

Rousseau argues in a different vein (foreshadowed by Hobbes) that the separation of church and state is disadvantageous because no man can serve two masters: in this case, the state and the church.

In the end, *The Two Narratives of Political Economy* helps us understand the major themes that have shaped the history and ongoing development of political economy. Presumably, modern nation-states were instituted among men in order to secure the blessings of liberty; their general historical failure to do this suggests that we might want to turn our attention to other social institutions to understand how liberty and equality are best secured. The twenty-first century version of the Lockean narrative, particularly as it is being developed by economists at George Mason University and elsewhere, is turning scholars' attention toward the mechanisms by which governance emerges from voluntary cooperation. In this light, I'll be very interested in seeing what an updated edition of this volume might look like in another decade or two.

ART CARDEN is Assistant Professor of Economics at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama and a Research Fellow with the Independent Institute. Previously, he was Assistant Professor of Economics at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. His research has appeared in journals like the *Journal of Urban Economics*, *Public Choice*, and *Contemporary Economic Policy*, and he is a regular contributor to *Forbes.com* and the *Washington Examiner*.



Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child

By Anthony Esolen

Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010.

256 pages. \$26.95 US (hardcover) (ISBN 978-1935191889)

Reviewed by Tony Woodlief

In a recent survey of teenage girls which asked them to name their ideal careers, nearly 40 percent selected something in the arts and entertainment fields. When asked if they thought they would actually get their dream jobs, two-thirds said either that they “think so” or that they were “certain.”

As another piece of evidence about the dream world which is modern adolescence, I offer what happened when I was asked to speak to high-school

students about how to pursue a successful career. In the course of my remarks, I said something that seemed imminently sensible, but which evoked immediate rejection from a majority of my listeners, namely, that none of us can do anything he wants.

“You can,” said a student in the back, rising as if with great effort from his slouch, “if you want it badly enough.”

“I’d really like,” I told him, “to play professional basketball. But I can’t shoot, nor can I dribble, nor do I have the reaction time of the average player on a losing college team. No matter how much I’d like to be a point guard for the Chicago Bulls, it’s not something I can do.”

“Then you must not want it bad enough,” my challenger retorted. He returned to his slouch, fortified by the approving nods of his classmates.

The imagination of young people, it would seem, is in no danger of going away; if anything, one might be forgiven for thinking it could stand a good backhand. Many adolescents, in fact, live in a world of fantasy that encourages stupid choices and, eventually, crushed expectations.

Anthony Esolen’s *Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child*, then, seems a welcome tonic. It appears we need to do some imagination destroying, and to replace what we level with common sense.

But wait—Esolen offers his book Screwtape-style, with an authorial voice that encourages readers to truncate the dangerous imaginations of their young charges, lest they grow up to be independent adults. What emerges from Esolen’s ironic treatment is a clarification that the baseless dreaming of the sort one often encounters among young people, as it turns out, is not imagination run amok, but a narcissistic self-absorption that crowds out genuine imagination, which Esolen might define as man’s inherent tendency to understand his place in creation, to grapple for truth, and to craft beauty within the context of being himself a created being.

The modern daydreaming impulse is not a natural extension of this, but rather the Mr. Hyde to genuine imagination’s Dr. Jekyll. It is a toxic consequence, in part, of immediate, pushbutton, mental masturbation. With a few keystrokes today’s teenager can blow up alien cities, watch the copulation of actors bearing outsized body parts, and tell any number of people on the receiving end of his texts how much he loves or hates them, all before he finishes the bag of potato chips at his elbow. And all the while, so long as his test scores are adequate, we tell him he’s bright and encourage him to reach for the stars. “We can do a fine job curdling the imagination by stressing ‘creativity,’ for the creative child is encouraged to think of himself as a little god, with all his bright ideas coming from within. The older

tradition has the poet as hearer before he is a crafter of verses. The Muse comes to him” (200).

What patience can exist, then, for the labor of true creation? What intimacy can be forged where passion comes so cheaply? What humility has been cultivated that might activate the poet’s “receptivity,” as Esolen calls it, to a world filled with mystery, with a grandeur that encompasses us, yet does not originate with us?

The artifacts of our current culture—and the shoddy, corporatized educational systems in which they are embedded—invite us to turn inward. “Self-expression,” Esolen writes, “is the finest antidote for a perky imagination ever invented” (88).

This book is much more, then, than an assessment of what saps the genuine imagination of children. It is a lament for what we have lost and are losing: honor, humility, non-eroticized love, truth, and faith.

Esolen is a Christian—in an older sense of that word, before the modern apostates and know-nothings and sentimentalists got a stranglehold on it—and so he has a Tolkienesque sense of hope even (especially!) in the darkest hour, and of fighting the enemy with an eye not toward self-righteousness, but toward victory. This means thinking strategically about exactly how Mordor might be laid low.

And the Mordor of our time, one gathers from Esolen, is a utilitarian educational culture administered by small-minded bureaucrats in thrall to materialism, scientism, and social conformity. Whereas traditional conservative critiques of education tend to be of public schools—and these for being populated by government employees who fail to impart a sufficient level of “core knowledge” to their charges—Esolen reviles all the attributes of mass-production schooling that is equal parts Henry Ford and John Dewey: age-segmentation, undifferentiated treatment, chockablock schedules that afford no time for individual exploration, and obsession with facts (“How long is the Mississippi?”) over knowing (“What was it like to navigate the Mississippi?”).

It’s tedious work, Esolen notes in Screwtape style, of blunting the properly imaginative impulse, but the tedium has a purpose. It’s all part of a process for churning out citizens who make things difficult neither for their educators nor their rulers, and who set themselves to the task of enhancing the national GDP, both as producers and consumers. Writes Esolen: “...everything you do as a child must be geared—I use the word ‘geared’ deliberately—towards that resumé which will gain you admission to Higher Blunting, followed by Prestigious Work, followed by retirement and death” (54).

An additional result of modern education practices, ironically (or purposefully, according to Esolen's authorial voice), is that it makes students understand less, even as they learn more. Worse still, it makes them care very little about any of it. The recipe is eerily familiar to anyone acquainted with middle-school science projects: "Demand drudgery, but not drudgery that has as its end the mastery of facts, or of an intellectual structure within which to retain and interpret the facts, or of a great work of imagination for which the facts of grammar or arithmetic or whatever are the doorkeepers. Keep them busy *and* idle at the same time. Put them in groups, to pull down the intelligent. Have them make posters full of unrelated data" (25).

This is a dangerous critique, because it applies not only to the underperforming, overspending, government-run holding pen posing as a school down the street, but to a good many private and charter schools as well. When Esolen writes that factories aren't "...popular destinations for school field trips, because they'd involve going to an infernally hot foundry or a noisy machine shop, or to a factory where People Who Have Failed in Life are working" (83), the chuckle fades in the throat of the good conservative. *Wait a minute—this guy isn't just criticizing Cesar E. Chavez Middle School, he's going after Friedrich A. Hayek Academy!*

There is in most schools, in Esolen's estimation, far too much obsession with what Nobel Prize-winning economist Vernon Smith derides as "knowing what versus knowing how." There is, further, a dangerous concession to materialists who believe science is only, in the words of Walker Percy, "the isolation of secondary causes in natural phenomena," rather than the original—and religiously sympathetic—aim of "discovery and knowing."

The net—and ironic—effect is that greater exposure to the machinery of the modern school yields diminished knowing, albeit hidden, in many cases, by a heightened command of disconnected and de-contextualized facts. Today's best students know the dates of more wars than their ancestors, but they can no more give an intellectual and moral defense for (or a case against) war than they can run a farm or build a river raft.

And this knowing *how* of moral questions is of a piece with the knowing *how* of mechanical questions. Acquiring either requires interaction with the world that moves beyond (but not in the absence of) theorizing—an experience modern schools, families, and churches are increasingly ill-prepared to impart.

It's an interesting question, whether the models currently popular among education reformers—most of whom are conservative and libertarian—namely charter schools, private schools following some version of a classical education philosophy, and home schools actually avoid the pitfalls Esolen traces in his book.

It helps, in considering this question, to separate his critique into pedagogy and content. In the former category we find Esolen attacking the acquisition of facts, the test-driven *knowing what* at the expense of *knowing how*—how to do things, how to experience the world, how to grapple with moral questions. We find as well the hour-stacked-upon-hour indoor confinement of schools, the relentless scheduling and adult supervision of every activity, the relegation of mechanics, work, and vocational training to a lesser track for dumb kids.

It's the rare private or charter school, it's safe to say, that isn't vulnerable to criticism on all these fronts. Home schools can be somewhat better, insofar as many of them are more rural, and in the context of large families, yielding at least the opportunity for self-direction, along with outdoor play and work.

Schools favored by reformers may fare better on content, but here Esolen identifies as additional enemies of imagination: the politicization of stories, the diminution of the heroic and patriotic, and the elevation of sex equality to a religious impulse. He adds to these the elimination—by dint of mockery, suspicion, and ignorance—of *philia* and *agape*, so that *eros* reigns supreme.

Set alongside all this the destruction of reverence for God (and forget theological education that can stand more than a rudimentary examination), and the modern, public-school educated youngster too often emerges with his world having been flattened and faded gray, his passion reduced to sexuality, and his curiosity transmogrified into occupational hoop-jumping.

There are expensive private schools that manage to achieve these same destructive ends, of course, and a great many elite universities actually revel in doing so. Even a modest focus on great books, one takes from Esolen, can have an ameliorating effect, if only because grappling with *The Odyssey*, for example, forces one to deal with a complexity of emotion and motivation (not to mention the full panoply of Greek loves) that undermines the two-dimensional political correctness enshrined in textbooks and lesser literature.

In their embrace of great books, then, and classical education, and their devotion to religious instruction, advocates of education reform have within their sights a set of remedies for half the problem identified by Esolen. But what to do about pedagogy? Might it be the case, as in many revolutions, that the reformers still carry within themselves the wrong worldviews of those they seek to depose? This might be a fertile question for everyone involved in the strategy and philanthropy of education reform, and one could find a worse starting point than Esolen's book.

Indeed, it might be best to start with Esolen himself because, besides a passion

that occasionally comes to the surface so fully that his Screwtape conceit is undermined (a small and admirable failing), the greatest shortcoming of this book (insofar as leaving readers hungry for more may fairly be called a shortcoming) is its absence of pedagogical prescription. Avoiding political correctness, godlessness, and sneering nihilism goes without saying, but what to do with the incessant drive toward greater and greater knowing *what*, at the expense of *how*? Here this reader, at least, wants to hear more from Esolen. And perhaps we will.

TONY WOODLIEF is a writer who lives in Arlington, Virginia.



Adam Smith's Marketplace of Life

By James R. Otteson

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

338 pages. \$41.00 US (paperback) (ISBN 978-0521016568)

Reviewed by Samuel Gregg

While Adam Smith is well-known as the founder of modern economics, rather fewer are especially familiar with his work as a moral philosopher—an activity that preceded and postdated his book *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Moreover, just as many modern economists will privately confess that they have never read *The Wealth of Nations* (after all, it contains no long mathematical equations, so why bother?); among professional philosophers knowledge of Smith's philosophical writings, most notably Smith's book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), may well be even sparser. This absence of knowledge may help to explain why Smith's economic thought is often caricatured as that of a Randian *laissez-faire* economist, while his philosophical contributions are sometimes portrayed as essentially that of applied Humean ethics with relatively little originality on Smith's part.

Close study of the corpus of Smith's work soon shatters these misconceptions, especially once we begin to compare Smith's economic and philosophical ideas. In recent years, one of the best books to engage in precisely this form of intellectual inquiry is James R. Otteson's *Adam Smith's Marketplace of Life*. Published ten years ago, it marked the beginning of Otteson's emergence as one of the best of a new generation of Adam Smith scholars.

The key to the persuasive power of Otteson's book is the way that he explores

Smith's conception of morality and then shows how it relates to Smith's thinking about the nature of the modern commercial society then emerging in the West. Otteson also underscores the parallels between Smith's conception of the development of morality and the growth of market-oriented societies.

Consisting of an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion, Otteson begins by summarizing the then-existing state of the Smith scholarship, particularly concerning the issue of what is commonly called *Das Adam Smith Problem*. This is the view, especially as articulated by nineteenth-century German scholars, that there were fundamental tensions between *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*: the former with its attention to human sympathy was seen as difficult to reconcile with the self-interested being that apparently inhabited the world of the latter.

Otteson then proceeds to outline what he considers to be the essence of Smith's moral theory, especially his concepts of sympathy, the impartial spectator procedure, conscience, and human nature (Chapters 1 and 2). This is followed by a discussion of how Smith believed people become moral beings and develop the capacity to identify moral standards and make moral judgments (Chapter 3). At this point, Otteson presents what he calls a "market model" as the "underlying conceptual structure of Smith's account" (9).

Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to *Das Adam Smith Problem*. Otteson makes the argument that many contemporary scholars may have been too quick to say that there is no problem. Otteson suggests that the picture of human motivation that emerges in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*—most notably Smith's attention to the virtues of justice, prudence, benevolence, and self-command and Smith's pointed criticisms of Bernard Mandeville's decidedly egocentric vision of the way the moral world "really" works—does seem rather different from the portrait of human motivation outlined in *The Wealth of Nations*. Reading *The Wealth of Nations* as a stand-alone book, Otteson notes, would give even attentive readers little-if-any indication that its author had written *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Otteson goes into some detail to explain why he regards many contemporary efforts to resolve the apparent tension as unsatisfactory.

Otteson then provides his own resolution of the two books, based upon his conception of Smith's moral theory as detailed in chapters 1-4. To this end, Otteson suggests that "a single conceptual model for understanding the growth and maintenance of human institutions underlies both books" (171). The model, put simply, is one of a market in which free exchanges in pursuit of each actor's

own interests (broadly defined) give rise to an unintended system of order. A second factor permitting reconciliation between the two texts is what Otteson calls “the familiarity principle,” which unifies the two pictures of human motivation operative in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*. These sections of Otteson’s book repay close reading. This is especially true of Otteson’s treatment of Smith’s understanding of the origins and nature of government and its particular responsibilities concerning justice (177-181).

In this regard, a key phrase employed by Otteson to describe Smith’s view of morality and markets is that of “unintended order.” This is important, not least because it seems to ascribe a larger role for human choice and action in the development of social, political, and economic arrangements than is suggested by, for example, the phrase “spontaneous order” much popularized by Friedrich Hayek. To this extent, “unintended order” lends itself to two things. First, it allows greater recognition of the power of human agency in consciously shaping our immediate world, something often difficult to detect in the neo-evolutionist tendencies that seem to serve as a reductionist explanatory tool for everything in the minds of many contemporary classical liberals and free-marketers. Second, it does not make the mistake of denying that the unintended side-effects of human choice and action can contribute to shaping society in beneficial ways that seem beyond the comprehension of many modern liberals and those with a penchant for extensive government economic planning.

In chapter 6, Otteson’s attention shifts somewhat to the issue of whether Smith’s approach to morality is essentially descriptive or whether it also has strong normative elements. Different parts of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations* can lead readers to believe that Smith thinks that what matters are the “facts” rather than what might be called “non-empirical realities.” Again, the tendency is often to view Smith as seeing morality as a question of contingency in the sense of relative efficiency (the implication being that those aspects of morality that are no longer “efficient” can be dispensed with). Otteson’s analysis articulates a careful challenge of that view. Without denying the strongly descriptive element of Smith’s thought, Otteson sides with those scholars who maintain that Smith’s ethical framework also had a strong normative dimension.

When discussing this issue, Otteson does not skirt or dismiss the “God-issue.” He maintains that Smith believes that “the oughts” of morality arise, ultimately, from God’s benevolent design. Heuristic devices such as the impartial spectator operate in the marketplace of morality to produce a state of affairs that Smith

regards as the true human happiness that God intends for everyone. “The core virtues of morality are not only common to all ages and cultures, but Smith,” Otteson states, “wants to argue that it is no accident that they are such: God planned it that way” (255). To understand this position, Otteson maintains, we need to understand the ultimate meaning of the impartial spectator device. For Smith, Otteson holds, it “represents the fruition of the system of morality that God wants us to develop; the impartial spectator is thus the manifestation of God’s will in us, the partial manifestation, even of God himself in us” (256).

Herein we find, Otteson goes on, perhaps the biggest difference between Smith and Hume’s respective conceptions of unintended order. Hume’s would appear to not include, entail, “or perhaps even allow a grand design by God” (256). Though there is certainly an element of rule-utilitarianism in Smith, Otteson maintains that, for Smith, learning and following the system of morality is also a matter of obedience to God’s will.

Otteson turns in chapter 7 to providing further evidence that the market model does permeate Smith’s corpus of writings. In his conclusion, Otteson illustrates how Smith’s moral theory which, at least in *The Wealth of Nations*, permits people to follow their self-interest (within the bounds of Smith’s conception of justice) in the market, can facilitate the development of affection for and benevolence towards others in ways not so obvious in non-market economic settings. He also, however, advances the claim that Smith’s theory fails to adequately address the issue of moral deviancy, and then tries to build an explanation for such choices and actions that conforms to Smith’s view of the nature and ends of morality.

But perhaps one of the most interesting side-effects of Otteson’s book is what his study of Smith tells us about the Scottish Enlightenment. While the Scottish Enlightenment is invariably and correctly presented as helping to usher in the dawn of the modern social sciences, *Adam Smith’s Marketplace of Life* demonstrates that one of its most important figures—like many others of the Scottish School—did not think that being descriptive and analytical meant believing that the normative dimension of human life was somehow “not real,” or that morality had to be dismissed as hopelessly subjective.

Integrating the positive and normative aspects of human reality is not of course an easy exercise—especially when we are ceaselessly told by many contemporary social scientists and philosophers that the two have little to do with each other. Nor are attempts at integration always achieved in the most coherent

manner. Adam Smith and much of the Scottish Enlightenment, however, do provide us with some ways to undertake such an enterprise, of which James Otteson's book is a very readable and intellectually coherent example.

SAMUEL GREGG is Director of Research at the Acton Institute and author, most recently, of *Becoming Europe: Economic Decline, Culture, and How America Can Avoid a European Future* (2013).



Philanthropy in America: A History

By Olivier Zunz

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

396 pages. \$29.95 US (hardcover) (ISBN 978-0691128368)

Reviewed by George McCully

Olivier Zunz' new history, *Philanthropy in America*, is a major contribution to philanthropic studies—thoroughly researched and documented, clearly narrated and argued, and illuminating a main theme in the history of twentieth-century American philanthropy: its development in civil society. Within the limits Professor Zunz has chosen, he has rendered a great service to the entire professional philanthropic community, both academic and practical, for which we should all be grateful.

That said, a full appreciation of this substantial study requires knowledge of both its content and its context—both the mountain of information and scholarship it so admirably synthesizes, and its chosen limits. Within those limits, this will be recognized as the standard, authoritative account for some time to come. Beyond those, however—contextually—is where the greater, more profound and influential history will ultimately be discovered.

The reason for this remarkable situation is that while this book was being researched, written, and published, its subject was being transformed. American philanthropy itself was—and still is—undergoing a classic paradigm shift. What this book describes so well is the period of the twentieth-century paradigm—now increasingly considered the “Old Paradigm,” and being superseded by an as-yet inchoate New Paradigm, outside Zunz' purview. The book captures, in short, a kind of bubble within a longer and deeper “history” of “philanthropy in America.”

Within the bubble, the book is excellent; in the larger context it is still very good, but increasingly *passé*, as philanthropy moves on into the future. The history of American philanthropy is turning out to have more numerous, more powerful, and more profound themes than the development of the twentieth-century academic, social-scientific constructs of an alleged “third sector” and “civil society.”

Space here does not allow a detailed account of the many subjects Zunz covers so well; this summary will focus therefore on the broad themes and structure of the bubble itself—the narrative framework.

Summarizing his “Conclusions,” Zunz writes: “As this history has shown, philanthropy in the United States is not simply the consequence of a universal altruistic impulse; it is also a product of the large organizational revolution that American managerial and financial capitalism orchestrated in the last century and a half” (294). Here he cites his own previous work, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920* (1990), along with the well-known works of Alfred Chandler (*The Visible Hand*, 1977) and Naomi Lamoreaux (*The Great Merger Movement*, 1985). For the “universal altruistic impulse” he cites only Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and elsewhere Tocqueville—i.e., no Americans. “Americans...have turned a universal desire to do good into a distinct brand of philanthropy. They have learned to turn market profits and market methods into a philanthropic engine powerful enough to influence the course of their own history” (294). They “have come to think of philanthropy not as a gift only, but also as an investment...to openly combine ideas of managing the market and [charitable] giving in a single mechanism geared for social progress...providing for their own future” (295). As Tocqueville had noted, American generosity was “self-interest properly understood” (296).

He begins to unfold this story in the first chapter, “For the Improvement of Mankind,” which opens with a striking fact: that in two decades following the 1870s in America, “more people made more money more rapidly than ever before in history, and made very large gifts to society” (8). In the seventies there were 100 millionaires; in 1892, 4,047; by 1916, over 40,000, of whom at least two—John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford—were billionaires. With too much money to spend personally or to contribute to traditional local welfare charities, the “new rich” created a “genuine American invention,” the “general purpose foundation” (22), involving “long-term alliances” with Progressive reformers trained in the social sciences to devise strategic investments in new institutions and programs aimed not at temporary symptomatic relief of social problems but long-term, fundamental, solutions to the root causes of those problems. Because these new

institutions were intended to be permanent and to invest in research, new discoveries, and social engineering, they needed unspecified, strategic, general humanitarian mission statements. This required legal reform, to recognize and protect “open-ended” charitable bequests (e.g., “to the improvement of mankind”) as legitimate “charitable uses.”

In Chapter Two, “The Coming of Mass Philanthropy,” Zunz describes how systems also arose to mobilize huge numbers of small gifts by ordinary Americans, initially for the fight against tuberculosis, later for the World War I effort and its recovery, then for community improvement and poor relief during the Great Depression. Giving through churches, workplaces, and federated giving programs of community chests and community foundations encouraged American families to budget for charitable giving, a kind of “public thrift” which “gave philanthropy its democratic imprint in America” (295). Charitable giving had become “a routine part of American life” (75).

The new foundations and “mass philanthropy” created, together and in partnership with government, a new and powerful system of civil society, whose conspicuous potency evoked federal government interest in defining the proper relationship of private philanthropy to public politics and government—a recurrent theme throughout the book, and “a distinctive feature of American society” (297). The work of civil society called upon a broad range of technical and managerial skills and led to an increasing professionalization of philanthropy. The dialectic between professional philanthropists and government regulators consolidated an increasingly influential “third sector”—neither government nor business, tax-exempt, and privileged to raise tax-deductible donations and grants. Zunz posits tax exemption as the essential core of the third sector:

Tax exemption has not only nurtured philanthropy in society, it has entrenched it. Equally important, it encourages an otherwise very diverse group of institutions that have dispersed and/or solicited private funds for the public good to work together, in essence fostering a nonprofit sector of groups with similar interests and privileges.

The nonprofit sector is the outcome of this unique encounter between philanthropy and the state. It is a hybrid capitalist creation that operates tax-free so long as profits are reinvested in the common good....[R]evenues are designated for the support of beneficiaries rather than for the profit of stockholders (4).

Zunz asserts that the nonprofit sector has thus “become a distinct and pervasive part of the American political economy” (4). Moreover, he posits that twentieth-century philanthropy “should be understood as part of the American Progressive tradition,” mobilizing enormous energy across all social classes and resulting in a “network of foundations and community institutions [which] has enlarged American democracy” (7). This view summarizes what some today regard as the “myth” of the nonprofit sector, about which more below.

The next five chapters tell the story of how the new system and the federal government, through decades of war, economic depression, natural disasters, and international recovery from war, struggled to define the role of private initiatives in testing experimental approaches and providing technical assistance to governments in social problem-solving. “By the middle of the twentieth century,” Zunz observes, “Americans had created a large philanthropic enterprise that was part of the fabric of their daily lives....The nonprofit sector as a whole provided a medium through which Americans channeled their excess income to help the poor, to enhance children’s education, to promote cultural activities, to fund science, and to initiate agricultural reform in poor countries, all in partnership with government” (169).

The two last climactic chapters describe the full flowering of the “nonprofit sector” and its purported institutionalization in Independent Sector in 1980. “Most Americans acknowledged the existence of a ‘nonprofit sector’” (232). Liberals “promoted a sector balancing public and private sources of support....their fear was that the third sector might otherwise be absorbed into government” (233). Conservatives believed the federal government ought to leave social problem-solving entirely to philanthropy and state and local governments. “For thirty years [they] fought to make their idea of the nonprofit sector the accepted view of civil society. The nonprofit sector as we know it today emerged slowly from this confrontation” (233). “The nonprofit sector has come of age.” Supreme Court decisions “have made the nonprofit sector the institutional voice of American civil society....Conservatives and liberals, individually and collectively, made nonprofits worthy substitutes for the associations Tocqueville had heralded as engines of American liberty” (262-263).

The final chapter, “American Philanthropy and the World’s Communities” purports to show how American civil society has become a global force promoting democracy by working around governments and through NGOs, by defining development as improvement in quality of life rather than simply economic

metrics (e.g., Amartya Sen), by mobilizing mass philanthropy techniques, and by promoting itself as a model for the rest of the world. The Internet is finally mentioned in the last seven pages (292-299), where Zunz acknowledges that “[i]ronically, the Internet and related high-speed communications, which are the most impersonal of means [!], have brought personal financial participation in the global associational revolution within reach of practically everybody.”

Zunz’ narrative, then, describes an onward-and-upward trajectory leading to global success. This is a case, however, in which the Devil is not in the details, which are admirable as far as they go, but in the over-all conceptualization and rhetorical structure, which are in turn a function of Zunz’ training as an American economic and business historian. He naturally sees twentieth-century American philanthropy in the context of his field and previous work, and within its own terms there is considerable merit and appropriateness in this orientation—which is why the book is as good as it is. Nonetheless, problems remain.

The main problems are: that the history of distinctively American philanthropy does not begin with the amassing of unprecedented wealth and the emergence of the social sciences at the end of the nineteenth century; that before then it was not confined to “universal altruistic impulse”; that recent and current empirical research has raised questions suggesting that the so-called “third” or “nonprofit sector” is not and never has been a coherent objective historical entity or phenomenon, much less “whose profits are reinvested for the common good,” but an artifact of the tax code and related state laws of incorporation; that scholars have not bothered to examine the data on which this concept is based; and that when the data is examined, “philanthropy” turns out to be only a small part of, and not at all coextensive with, “nonprofits” or an alleged “third” sector.

To begin with, Professor Zunz is certainly to be excused for not knowing—because very few American historians have noticed it either—that the *locus classicus* for adequately understanding distinctively American philanthropy is to be found on page one, paragraph one, of the first *Federalist Paper*, in which Alexander Hamilton launched the Founders’ argument for ratification of our Constitution, saying, “It is commonly remarked” that Americans were at a new place in history; that whereas previously governments had been the products of accident and force, Americans had the unique opportunity of choosing their own government. “This,” Hamilton wrote, “adds the inducements of philanthropy to those of patriotism.” He was not talking about rich people helping poor people, nor about a “universal altruistic impulse” of generosity, but about an educational

and cultural tradition going back *via* the Enlightenment, the Renaissance, and Republican Rome, to Periclean Athens. He was saying that the United States of America was intended and designed to be a philanthropic nation, a gift to humanity, promoting democracy and freedom to be sure, but beyond even those, helping to make the world more fully humane in every sense of that word. An adequate “history” of “philanthropy in America” would therefore explore how Hamilton and the Founders got the idea of “the inducements of philanthropy” from the American and especially Scottish Enlightenments, and how they modeled the new government on the “voluntary associations” that Tocqueville would later observe had characterized Colonial culture, which were (in John Gardner’s words) “private initiatives for...public good,” which is to say the practical philanthropy of voluntarism and collaboration.

Armed with this knowledge, historians might apply it to the IRS Master Data File of so-called “third sector” and “nonprofit” institutions, where they would immediately find that very few have anything to do with “philanthropy.” In Massachusetts the *Catalogue for Philanthropy* did this research and found that 75 percent of tax-exempt entities are primarily self-serving (supported by, and providing benefits for, their own members), only about 10 percent are indisputably “private initiatives, for public good, focusing on quality of life, and engaged in public fund-raising (the philanthropic marketplace),” and the remaining 15 percent are “para-philanthropic”—between the two. Current research, in other words, is calling into question, on the basis of evidence, the fundamental assumptions or controlling “myth” of Zunz’ book cited above (4,7): that “philanthropy” and “nonprofits” are roughly the same, that there is a “nonprofit sector” which is beneficial for public good and supported by grants and donations, and that the history of philanthropy in America is about the political economy of that sector in relation to government in the twentieth century.

Discontent with the Old Paradigm had certainly been expressed during its rise and dominance, perhaps most eminently by Richard Cornuelle’s *Reclaiming the American Dream* (1965). But by the end of the century a profound structural and strategic change was first heralded within the profession by two articles in *Foundation News*.¹ Paradigm shifts are total transformations of the governing models of mature fields of endeavor. While Zunz’ book presents an excellent history of the rise of the paradigm which governed twentieth-century philanthropy, it is oblivious to the fallacies which have contributed to its current unraveling by the Internet, the globalization of the American high-tech economy,

new demographics of wealth, social networking, and other factors. The twentieth-century vocabulary, conceptualization, rhetoric, technology, infrastructure, and modes of operation which have governed American philanthropy are all being transformed—superseded by new models which have not yet coalesced in a new paradigm, though that is inevitable.

Even taken on its own terms, the portrayal of philanthropy in this book is notably impersonal and bloodless—a matter of political economy academically considered, driven by large systems from the top down, focused on the interplay of national government with the so-called “third sector.” The wonderful world of myriad smaller charities, struggling creatively, intelligently, and compassionately at the grassroots level, with meager resources to improve Americans’ quality of life in the face of persistent and emergent public problems, is not Zunz’ subject and does not inform the perspective from which this history is written.

We must be enormously grateful to Professor Zunz for his major contribution to our scholarly literature because, within its own frame of reference, it is excellent. It does not detract in the slightest from this book to suggest that other histories are also needed.

GEORGE MCCULLY served for twenty years as professor of European intellectual and cultural history, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, and for twenty-five years as a professional philanthropist—fundraiser, strategic planner, executive director, trustee, and advisor to charities, foundations, families and individual donors. In 1997 he created the highly respected and influential Massachusetts Catalogue for Philanthropy, to promote charitable giving and strengthen the culture of philanthropy through donor education. His book, *Philanthropy Reconsidered* (2008), presents a comprehensive overview of the “vocabulary, conceptualization, and rhetoric” of philanthropy from the ancient coinage of the term in *Prometheus Bound*, to its essential role informing the American Revolution and Constitution, to the paradigm-shift transforming philanthropy today. His latest work is the *Massachusetts Philanthropic Directory*—an on-line, systematically taxonomized, analytical directory to all the philanthropic charities of (initially) Massachusetts, which comprise only 1/7th of the state’s “nonprofits”. This dramatically innovative Directory system will be extended nationwide over the next two years. He is also a contributing editor to *Conversations on Philanthropy*.

NOTE

- ¹ George McCully, "Is This a Paradigm-Shift?" *Foundation News and Commentary* (March-April, 2000) 41 (2): 20-22 and "Are Foundations Being Marginalized? Further Notes on the Paradigm-Shift," Council on Foundations, Washington, DC (September-October, 2000) 41 (5): 30-31.



The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood

By James Gleick

London: Vintage, Random House, Inc., 2011

544 pages. \$15.95 US (paperback) (ISBN 978-1400096237)

Reviewed by Heather Wood Ion

James Gleick writes in his Prologue: "We can see now that information is what our world runs on: the blood and the fuel, the vital principle." He has undertaken his task of writing the natural history of information with an audacious sense of adventure. For many chapters, the reader shares the excitement of discovery, of suddenly coming up over a hill to view a new horizon.

Initially we move from African drums to literacy and how writing changed our thinking to dictionaries and taxonomies of all kinds. These chapters raise some of the essential issues: how are messages transmitted with accuracy? Does writing change the way we think? How does language structure experience? Yet within these chapters the central dilemma of Gleick's work rumbles like thunder in the background: *information is not knowledge*.

Admirably, Gleick distills huge swaths of intellectual history to serve his theme, and he is witty as well as thorough as he does so. For the first third of the book: from drums and cave paintings to the use of the telegraph, each of the tools used to transmit information is examined both in its function and as an abstraction, or expression of a theoretical approach to information. Dictionaries and logarithmic tables become fascinating illustrations of human ingenuity. What we take, according to the author, is a journey from things to words, from words to categories, and from categories to metaphor and logic. Gleick treats this journey as inevitable linear progression, the goal of which is to unite logic and mathematics (39).

The premise is now clear, and the reader knows that Gleick is not telling the natural history of an idea, rather, he is showing where the technology and theories

we use today have come from. He is looking back from the perspective of the successful tools of an information technology to examine the evolution of such tools. The early chapters of reflection on messaging and categorization move into heroic biography: Gleick is fascinated by the individuals who invented the tools.

One of the most moving of the stories he tells is that of Ada Byron King, Countess of Lovelace, who worked with Charles Babbage. Together they sought to ‘abstract information away from its physical substrate’ (109) in the quest to develop an analytic machine. The frenzy of activity of these nineteenth-century thinkers even astounds Gleick, but he is impatient to reach the real focus of the book, and that impatience shows in the discussion of the telegraph and its impacts on society.

Picture the pioneering and homesteading communities of Western America: with the introduction of the telegraph both the time horizons and the real horizons of those communities changed. Gleick concentrates his discussion of this stage in the story on the development of codes and of the compacting of information. The reader senses a much greater tale waiting to be told about the human aspects of this new capacity to share rapidly and at a distance. For Gleick, this is a story of Morse, and then of Boole, and of the advantages of abstraction.

With chapter 6, *New Wires, New Logic*, Gleick has reached the core of his book, a biography of Claude Shannon and the impact of his work at Bell Labs on the creation of our current state of information technology. Parts of the early biography are charming, and we come to care deeply about Claude Shannon. At times this reader wished that this biography was itself a book, not the central core embedded in a more ambitious, and less successful, text.

Often Gleick refers to the failure of imagination in the face of new technologies, and he illustrates well that the first evaluations—such as the telephone would primarily be of use to musicians—are both ignorant and confined to what is already familiar, not evocative of what can be. The author is particularly convincing as he recounts how quickly amusement turned to business possibility as *the users* of the telephone began to explore its efficiencies. The italics are mine, as it is important to understand that it is the users of technology who take the new technologies forward, not the initial inventors or theorists.

Within the several chapters on Shannon, Turing, Weaver, and others there are numerous stories of how mathematicians work, how abstraction can be explained, and why the evolution of abstractions of signal processing into binary logic revolutionized the transmission of information. For many readers this will be the most important and engaging aspect of Gleick’s book. It requires a considerable

amount of mathematical training to follow the logic which created the field of cybernetics. Even without that training it is intriguing to learn where the vocabulary we now take for granted—feedback, machine learning, and digitization—comes from, as well as what these thinkers anticipated.

The chapters on genetics, memes and quantum physics are far less engaging than the biographical chapters, and to this reader it seemed as if Gleick needs the engagement with a heroic figure like Shannon in order to become passionate about a subject. Certainly the reader understands that the whimsicality of quantum physics is less satisfying for a writer engaged in the translation of abstraction for a lay audience. However, by the conclusion of chapter 13, and the admission that there is no clear definition of ‘bit’ and therefore of what we now understand as information, the writer (as well as the reader) is exhausted.

On page 403 Gleick dedicates a few paragraphs to the issue of information overload, and equally briefly mentions that the key to this sense of overload must lie in the separation between information and knowledge. For the remaining few pages of the text, Gleick’s hero is the fabulist Jorge Luis Borges and his fictional “Library of Babel.” It is both strange and sad that after this very lengthy history, the author turns away from his theme of the logic of information to the dark fantasy created by Borges. Gleick reflects briefly that the technology now makes facts ‘cheap’ but wisdom and learning remain as rare as they have ever been. The audacious adventure comes to an end like a hiker returned from a mountain trek: the burdens of laundry and exhaustion seem far more important than any exalted experience just gained. There are another hundred pages of detailed notes, and an extensive bibliography.

James Gleick has accomplished a hugely difficult task in this book. He has written the history of the tools we use in our everyday lives, knowing that for most of us, the abstractions on which those tools depend are irrelevant to the ways we apply them. It is the abstractions and the scientists who conceived them which intrigue Gleick. But the rest of the story: how information becomes knowledge, and how we humans discover meaning, has yet to be written.

HEATHER WOOD ION *is a chief executive and cultural anthropologist who holds dual degrees from Oxford University and specializes in turning around troubled organizations. She currently serves with Athena Charitable Trust, is Founder of the nonprofit Epidemic of Health and is a contributing editor to Conversations on Philanthropy.*

Bad Students, Not Bad Schools**By Robert Weissberg****Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010.****303 pages. \$39.95 US (hardcover) (ISBN 978-1412813457)***Reviewed by George Leef*

Political science professor Robert Weissberg has been writing iconoclastic books that challenge the conventional (i.e., predominately progressive) wisdom on social issues for many years, and with this book he focuses his attention for the first time on America's woeful public education system. He dares to say what many writers fear to—our educational beliefs and policies are for the most part delusional nonsense. That nonsense serves wonderfully the interests of the education establishment—teachers, administrators, non-teaching staffers, union officials, professors of education, program officers, our grant-making foundations, and so on—but it leaves students stuck in schools that just go through the motions of education. But to a large degree (and here is where the book reaches the pinnacle of iconoclasm), that suits the students fine because many couldn't care less about learning.

As the book's title implies, our schools do a bad job mainly because the students themselves are bad. Many are not the least bit interested in learning. They dislike reading (and are not good at it), disdain rigorous thought, and see no point in developing beneficial traits through discipline and work. While Weissberg may seem to relish the "liberal" sin of blaming the victim, his purpose is to expose the folly of just about everything called "education reform," including both progressive and conservative notions about how to "save" or at least improve our schools.

The essential problem is that those ideas share the false premise that all students can learn and want to. Great numbers of young Americans, especially those from "underrepresented minority groups," however, grow up in homes where education is not prized and among peer groups that not only ridicule studiousness but reward those who are best at "acting out." Adolescents like that can't be turned into even moderately successful students no matter how much money is spent on the schools, personnel, and programs meant to make learning seem more relevant and fun.

But this isn't only a "minority" problem. White youth culture is also quite inimical toward academic effort. Studying just isn't "cool." Weissberg writes, "An extremely high proportion of students fail to take school seriously—they spend

countless hours ‘goofing off’ with friends, often cheat on tests or rely on the homework of others. For many, attending classes is just a nuisance—between a third and 40 percent admit they are not paying attention or not trying hard. Teachers routinely report having classes where half the students seem ‘checked out’” (37-38).

Weissberg buttresses his argument that student attitudes matter far more than the schools they attend by pointing to the facts that a) many Asian students who come from lower-class families and attend public schools with bad performance records on the whole manage to excel academically and b) many black students from prosperous families who live in nice suburbs with “good” schools (e.g., Shaker Heights, Ohio) still do poorly on standardized tests. Having a positive attitude toward school and a family that supports learning appears to be both a necessary and a sufficient condition for academic success. The schools themselves are at most a marginal influence.

Nevertheless, education “experts” keep advancing panaceas for fixing the schools. The only idea they won’t tolerate is that of encouraging indifferent and disruptive kids to leave so that the remaining students will have a much better learning environment. That idea is taboo, especially with President Obama telling us that it’s vital for an increasing percentage of Americans to graduate from college. All the experts insist that we must devote more and more resources to student retention—that is, keeping disinterested and disengaged students in school with any gimmicks the educators can think of.

Perhaps the most infamous of the many “let’s give poor kids great schools and they’ll make progress” programs was the Kansas City, MO experiment begun in 1985 when a federal judge told school reform zealots to “dream big.” They came up with a long and expensive list of improvements to inner-city schools so that the racial achievement gap (a *bête noire* that recurs again and again in the book) could be closed. The reformers drew up plans for Taj Mahal schools equipped with everything from Olympic-sized swimming pools to a model United Nations assembly complete with simultaneous language translations. (The judge ordered that taxes be increased to pay for this utopian vision of “good schools.”) And the results? No improvements whatsoever in student achievement. If good—in this case, gold-plated—schools mattered, we’d have seen wonderful progress in Kansas City, but we didn’t.

Weissberg makes a compelling case that bad students are the main reason why the country has such a low level of academic prowess. (The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (2003), for example, found that less than a third of

college graduates were “proficient” in prose literacy.) We spend lavishly on “education” and get pathetic results. Weissberg doesn’t lay the fault entirely on students; he also shows that many of our schools are also bad, with teachers who are indifferent or incompetent (but can’t be fired thanks to union rules), materials and curricula that have been dumbed-down, programs that ignore gifted students but lavish attention on the weakest ones, and are susceptible to educational fads emanating from our “colleges of education.”

Those topics take up most of the middle of the book. Weissberg, retired from the University of Illinois, now lives in New York City and writes with relish about the innumerable follies of public school reform in New York. The politicians, from Mayor Bloomberg on down, have to pretend that they’re doing something to improve the schools—every politician needs to be able to say that he’s “pro-education.” In New York (and most other cities), elaborate deceptions surround school performance so that heavily publicized plans appear to be working. Of course, they don’t work because nothing really changes. The students are still mostly uneducable, the teachers are still unmotivated and/or incompetent, and the system still encourages that students be passed even if they have learned nothing. The way the once rigorous New York Regents Exam has been watered down is emblematic of the problems that plague public education across the nation.

One of the author’s prime targets is misguided philanthropy. Ever since the Ford Foundation decided that fixing public education would be one of its goals back in the early 1960s, foundations have been pouring money into education. The problem here is that supposed experts often convince foundation officials (who tend to be utopians, easily led into supporting “progressive” theories) to back their visions. For example, Weissberg notes that a lot of foundation (and business) money has gone into programs intended to increase the number of “minority” students in math, science, and engineering. If American businesses really need more home-grown talent (many positions requiring such expertise are currently filled with foreign workers), it would make far more sense to try recruiting them from populations where students are more likely to have the aptitude and interest that is necessary. But political considerations demand programs that aim at ironing out group inequalities, so we spend tons trying to make math and science appealing to black and Hispanic kids, few of whom have thus far shown much interest or ability.

Foundations could, Weissberg argues, do considerable good if they targeted their grants toward school programs to help our best students advance faster, but

that won't happen because of the firmly entrenched egalitarianism at most of them. Many donors would rather bask in the glory of publicity for programs that sound good even though they are just flushing away money on ideas that have already failed.

As I mentioned above, Weissberg is not a fan of "conservative" school reform ideas either. He does not think that Milton Friedman's idea of expanding parental choice through vouchers will accomplish much good. That is because most parents already have a range of choices other than "their" public school. Even in the inner cities, parents who want their children to receive true education as opposed to the vapid *faux*-education given away in the public schools have choices. There are fairly low-cost private schools and tutoring services that could make up for the deficiencies of the government schools. Only a small number of parents spend the time and money to avail themselves of such choices. Weissberg comments, "Put bluntly, many poor parents must choose between extra academic help for junior versus cable TV or a cell phone, so to insist that they 'lack choice' only flatters their disdain for education" (210).

The book concludes with perhaps the author's most provocative argument of all, namely that our public education system has evolved into a branch of the welfare state. "Bloated, unproductive school payrolls," Weissberg writes, "exist as a form of socially-acceptable bribery for those otherwise incapable of achieving a decent middle-class life. Watered-down diplomas similarly provide the happy illusion of 'education' to youngsters who might otherwise be driven by mayhem" (262).

That, I think, is a very useful insight. In real markets, where people exchange money for value and can take their money elsewhere if they don't get it, scams and frauds can't long survive. Once we put politics into them, it's inevitable that savvy interest groups will attach themselves like lampreys and begin to parasitically feed off the flow of tax money. Americans have long had a hard time saying "no" to anything that is labeled "education" and have come in the past century to say "yes" to almost anything that promises "social justice." What might be admirable values when pursued through private institutions turn the public treasury into a lush field for grazing by our education establishment. And the worse its results, the more money it can demand, as long as it blames our culture of injustice rather than acknowledges its own failures to attract and engage students and help them attain a serious education.

After such a strong indictment of American education, it would be incongruous for Weissberg to end on an upbeat note. He doesn't. The book ends

with a resigned shrug. Our education system has been wrecked—for the majority of students, at least—and the combination of interest group politics and the anti-education mentality that goes with welfare dependency will prevent any beneficial change. That is a depressing but realistic assessment.

Despite editing that leaves much to be desired, *Bad Students, Not Bad Schools* is an excellent book that counter-balances the profusion of happy-face books and reports saying that our education is good and only needs more funding to get better. It isn't good and we should stop throwing away money on political fixes.

GEORGE LEEF is the Director of Research at the John W. Pope Center for Higher Education Policy. He holds a BA from Carroll University in Wisconsin and a JD from Duke University. He was on the faculty of Northwood University in Midland, Michigan from 1980 through 1989 teaching economics, business law, and logic and is the author of *Free Choice for Workers: A History of the Right to Work Movement* (2005).



**Western Culture at the American Crossroads:
Conflicts Over the Nature of Science and Reason**
By Arthur Pontynen and Rod Miller
Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2011.
412 pages. \$34.95 US (hardcover) (ISBN 978-1935191742)

Reviewed by Troy Camplin

Philanthropy or, in Frederick Turner's (2005) terminology, the gift economy, is based on the love of the good, the true, and the beautiful. As such, the gift economy itself can be understood as constituting the moral order, the scientific order, and the artistic order(s), each of which have their own institutions, including those which conduct what we commonly think of as philanthropy proper. All true philanthropy thus arises out of love, whether it be the love of virtue, love of knowledge, or love of art. All of these are part of philanthropy itself—the love of mankind.

As such, Arthur Pontynen and Rod Miller's book, *Western Culture at the American Crossroads: Conflicts Over the Nature of Science and Reason* does in fact deal with the underlying concerns of philanthropy itself in the authors' discussion of the slow destruction of the West's ideas of the good, the true, and the beautiful,

culminating in their explicit rejection by postmodern thought. The book is a densely philosophical, high-level discussion of art theory which argues against the hegemonic modernist/postmodernist paradigm we are now living under. Overall, a book that covers ontology, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of science, math and geometry, reason, truth, beauty, culture, history, theology, metaphysics, and art theory and history is necessarily difficult to summarize—even for an interdisciplinarian like myself. Yet at the same time, the authors’ message is simple: we need to return to having a culture of wisdom. Being Augustinians, their preference is a Trinitarian culture, but they do acknowledge Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, etc. as wisdom cultures the world would be impoverished to lose, suggesting they are open to a more global classical-theological culture that is still, nevertheless pre-Modernist/Postmodernist.

In wisdom cultures there is concern with Being, a belief in an objective world to understand, and thus a belief in the actual existence of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Pontynen and Miller argue that modernist/postmodernist culture believes in only subjectivity and becoming and, thus, rejects wisdom, Being, objectivity, goodness, truth, and beauty. Insofar as this does in fact sum up postmodern culture, and insofar as we are living in a postmodern culture, this certainly has to have a negative effect on philanthropy.

Indeed, if we look to Europe (indeed, Pontynen and Miller discuss “European exceptionalism,” which they identify with postmodernism, comparing it with “American exceptionalism,” which they identify with the classical-Judeo-Christian Anglosphere), we see far less philanthropy and far more government involvement in morals, science, and the arts than we do in the United States. Yet the influence of modernism/postmodernism is moving the United States more towards Europe—something which Pontynen and Miller see as a problem—one which will lead to violent destruction. It would seem that they are right insofar as the more the United States moves toward postmodern culture, the weaker we see private philanthropy become and the stronger and more pervasive we see government become.

However, the values subjectivist may come away from this book thinking the authors are anything but their friends, especially when they say we should engage in “a willful dedication to the pursuit of objective truth and goodness” (148). Does this deny values subjectivism? Not at all. It may be that there are in fact a set of human values that are true and good—but that different people rank them different ways. Thus would values subjectivism be retained in the way it was always meant, recognizing the possibility of ordinal variety, without having to

assert complete relativism. It would still be improper to assert your value rankings over others, even as some set of values is agreed to be proper, another improper. I doubt even the strongest relativist would agree that someone who values oppressing women, molesting children, killing people who look and believe differently than he does, and robbing people is but an example of the rich tapestry of humanity which we should therefore tolerate if not defend. The fact that such a person's values would not be defended suggests even the supposed relativist believes in some level of objective goodness and truth. We need to stop pretending otherwise. On this they are right that postmodernism is incoherent.

Pontynen and Miller further argue that postmodernists view everything as power relations, as Master-Slave relations (Hegel, Marx). Insofar as this kind of interaction is the kind found in the political economy, postmodernists view everything as necessarily political. As a result, everything becomes subsumed under the government. However, Turner identifies four human economies—the political economy, the gift economy, the market economy, and the divine economy—and each of these economies have their own kinds of interactions appropriate to those economies: value-creating market exchange in the market economy, reputation-creating love exchange in the gift economy, sacrificial exchange in the divine economy, and of course, power-creating master-slave relations in the political economy. As such, postmodern culture is in fact destructive of a wide diversity of human interactions, reducing complex human behaviors and interactions to the simplest, most destructive kind.

Thus, Pontynen and Miller lament the loss of Medieval conceptions of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty to Modernism and Postmodernism, which have reduced everything to a nihilistic, violence-promoting will to power. If one were to just read their book (and watch the news), ignorant of the recent work by Steven Pinker (2012) and Matt Ridley (2011), one would think we have grown increasingly violent since the collapse of the Medieval worldview. However, we have seen quite the opposite trend taking place: as we have moved from Renaissance to Modernism to Postmodernism, the world has become less and less violent. Whether this move is a result of changing culture, expanding free markets, or increasing population density making being polite a rational survival mechanism—or something else—the authors' claims about the violence inherent in the modernist/postmodernist system seem to show the tensions between systems that promote uniformity of values, as do some wisdom cultures, and those that allow for greater diversity. It may be true that a culture that values Truth,

Goodness, and Beauty is less violent than the one we have now—but such a claim could only be true if our world’s loss of violence is due to the expansion of free markets, in spite of culture. It may also be that the pluralism, perspectivism, multiculturalism, and relativism of postmodernism have had a positive influence as well. A person 100 percent certain he has the Truth and that what he does is the Good can be much more easily convinced to harm others who endanger those values than can one who is never certain he has the truth or that he has a monopoly on the good. However, one who outright rejects truth and the good can equally be convinced to support just about any movement. And if all is but power relations, isn’t it better for you to be in power than someone else? Certainty gave us the Inquisition; nihilistic political romanticism (that is, postmodernism broadly understood) gave us the French Revolution, Nazism, and the Russian Revolution/Stalinism.

The Romantic philosophy of Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, et al. (the line to postmodernism) gives rise to a Romantic politics realized in the French Revolution, the communist revolutions, and, in its explicitly racist, irrationalist version, Nazism. In this sense, Pontynen and Miller are correct that the modernist/postmodernist world view can lead to the worst kinds of violence, insofar as it leads to political romanticism married to bureaucratic efficiency (Milan Kundera, at least, agrees that communism is a version of political romanticism). Though the periods between eruptions of romantic politics have been relatively peaceful, I think they do make strong their implicit argument—and history has proven them on this—that Romantic politics is necessarily violent, brutal, and barbaric. Pontynen and Miller go so far as to equate Romanticism with sociopathy; in politics (in which they include progressivism as political Romanticism), at least, given the above examples, there is little question the equation is correct. Which should make one suspect the Romantic philosophers, the philosophers of will, as well. When you replace love with will, the world degenerates into violence.

“Will” is one of the central ideas Pontynen and Miller attack. Whether it be the will to power, the will of the people, the will of any given person, or, in what they see as a mistake made by Christianity itself, the will of God. For them, God does not do things because He wills it, but because God is the embodiment of Truth, Good, and Beauty. God thus does things out of love, not will. The universe exists not because God willed it, but because God is Love. They reject the notion of will because with will, one does not need reason, truth, goodness, love, or

beauty as guides for one's actions. If one has enough force and power, one can impose one's will on others. Insofar as the gift economy promotes the good, true, and beautiful, their idea of will is in fact in opposition of the very idea of philanthropy. Indeed, if one combines will with, say, the good, you can see yourself as justified in imposing your idea of the good on others—an idea that suggests using the force and power of government rather than the voluntary nature of true philanthropy. Will, and thus modernism/postmodernism, thus destroys culture. This point bears greater contemplation in the context of discussions about the virtue of donor intent.

For Pontynen and Miller, the ideal culture is one that is classical, Judeo-Christian, and Anglosphere in its conception of tradition-informed cultural change. Those familiar with the work of Hayek on spontaneous orders will recognize what is meant by the latter. Common law, free markets, and even language are examples of this kind of tradition-informed cultural change historically promoted most explicitly in the Anglosphere. Indeed, I would argue that Hayek's spontaneous order is a more detailed explanation of Adam Smith's "Invisible Hand", and its explanatory power can be expanded to include social as well as market orders. What is typically thought of as the double-stranded DNA of Western culture—the classical and Judeo-Christian traditions—is improved with their addition of a third strand, the Anglosphere. They do warn us, though, that "Should the Anglosphere shift from the classical-Judeo-Christian to modernism-postmodernism, then the traditionalism of English culture, previously understood as the bearer of wisdom, is transformed into the bearer of willful preference. Government based on willful preference—of the few or the many—destroys human rights for all" (143). If Pontynen and Miller are not in fact calling for a retreat to Medieval thinking, it is only because they acknowledge the importance of the Anglosphere to the maintenance of culture. It is thus a shame, then, that though they mention the Anglosphere, they hardly deal with this strand of cultural DNA at all. As a result, one is mostly left with the impression that everything has been going downhill since the writings of Aquinas, and things would be best if we were all Augustinians. Why must we go back? Is there not a way forward?

Frederick Turner has frequently observed (1986, 2006, 2007) that sometimes, in order to create the future, you have to break with the past, and sometimes in order to create the future, you have to break with the present and look to the past. Modernism/postmodernism is an example of the former; we are in a time requiring the latter. However, there is a difference between looking to the past to

retreat from the present, and looking to the past to build the future from the present. Pontynen and Miller can help us understand what we might want to recover from the past, but their message is one of retreat. As Turner has shown in works ranging from *Natural Classicism* (1986) to *Natural Religion* (2006), we do not have to retreat; rather, we can take these insights and build a new future with a new culture—one that accepts all our cultural insights, from past to present, and across cultures.

REFERENCES

- Pinker, Steven. 2012. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. New York: Viking.
- Pontynen, Arthur and Rod Miller. 2011. *Western Culture at the American Crossroads: Conflicts Over the Nature of Science and Reason*. Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute.
- Ridley, Matt. 2011. *The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Turner, Frederick. 1986. *Natural Classicism*. VA: University of Virginia Press.
- _____. 2005. "Creating a Culture of Gift." *Conversations on Philanthropy II*: 27-58. ©2005 DonorsTrust.
- _____. 2006. *Natural Religion*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- _____. 2007. *The Culture of Hope*. New York: The Free Press.

TROY CAMPLIN is an interdisciplinary scholar, the author of *Diaphysics*, and an adjunct professor at the University of North Texas at Dallas. He currently lives in Richardson, TX.