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The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture is a research center at the University of Virginia that investigates the logic and meaning of contemporary cultural change and its implications for our understanding of the human person and the ordering of public life.

The Center on Religion and Democracy, an initiative of the Institute, explores the complex questions arising at the intersection of religion and democratic culture.

www.virginia.edu/iasc
www.religionanddemocracy.org

The Fate of the Arts

Spring 2004 Symposium

On April 2–3, 2004, the Institute will bring scholars and artists to the University of Virginia to discuss the future of artistic creativity in a society increasingly devoted to the digital, the material, and the political. “The Fate of the Arts” will involve conference-style presentations, panel discussions, and a poetry reading as the Institute’s annual spring colloquium series shifts to a symposium format for the first time.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, art was often put forward as a form of redemptive activity that could replace the fallen metanarratives of Christianity and socialism. Romantics in both centuries saw in art a realm of expression and influence that was fundamentally different from the coercion of political force and the perceived narrowness of religious devotion.

As we begin the twenty-first century, however, much of this optimism has faded. Art seems powerless to effect social change; artists and academics make smaller and smaller claims for what art can do to promote the vitality of a liberal society. Audiences, meanwhile, are disenchanted by the increasing abstraction of art, and artists often either distance themselves further from their audiences or surrender their art to becoming simply another form of capitalist enterprise.

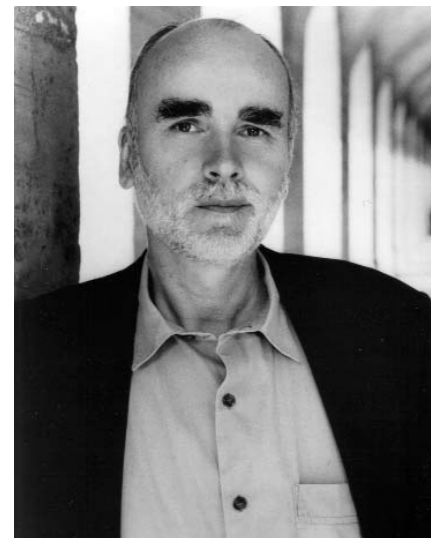
The symposium will approach the state of the arts from a multiplicity of angles: art and politics, art and theology, and art in market capitalism, to name a few. Six leading theorists and practition-

ers will gather to consider why the arts have lost so much cultural capital of late and how they might play a significant role in liberal society in the future.

Terry Eagleton is professor of cultural theory and John Rylands Fellow at the University of Manchester, and one of the foremost literary critics and theorists in the world. He is author of many books, including *Literary Theory*, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*, and most recently, *After Theory*.

Suzi Gablik is a painter and art critic, who trained with Robert Motherwell and wrote a book that introduced Magritte to the art establishment. Her books include *Has Modernism Failed?* and *The Reenchantment of Art*.

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Poet Adam Zagajewski



Suzi Gablik



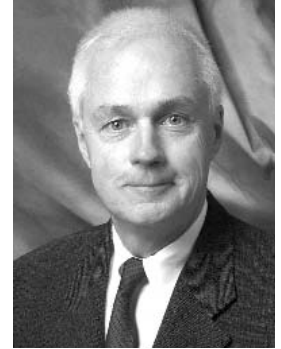
Krzysztof Ziarek



Nicholas Wolterstorff



Terry Eagleton



Bill Ivey

“Fate” continued

Bill Ivey is founder and past president of the Country Music Association and former chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. He is now Harvie Branscomb Distinguished Visiting Scholar and director of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University.

Nicholas Wolterstorff is Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale University. He has published many books on philosophical

topics, including *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* and *Works and Worlds of Art*.

Adam Zagajewski is a Polish poet, essayist, and novelist. He has been awarded the Kurt Tucholsky Prize and a Guggenheim Fellowship, and is a member of the American Academy of Poets.

Krzysztof Ziarek is professor of comparative literature at the State University of New York at Buffalo. His books include *The Historicity of Experience*.

He is currently engaged in studying art, technology, and globalization.

The symposium will be held in the Dome Room of the Rotunda, but will include a poetry reading by Adam Zagajewski in the University of Virginia Art Museum. All events are free and open to the public. For further event details, please see the schedule on the back page of this issue and visit the Institute’s website, www.virginia.edu/iasc. ■

Center Holds Annual Fellows Workshop

In September 2003 the Center held its annual Fellows Workshop, in which four of the Center’s Postdoctoral Fellows presented portions of their work to an audience of graduate students, Center personnel, and University faculty. Taking place under the auspices of the Center’s regular Friday workshop for residential fellows, the Fellows Workshop is an intensive one-day discussion with more than 50 participants about the various ways religion and public life intersect.

In the morning session, Postdoctoral Fellow Slava Jakelic presented a paper on religion and identity in Eastern Europe, focusing on the role of

Catholicism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia. Distinguishing between collective identity and national identity, she suggested that the presence or absence of Catholicism in the shaping of collective identities in each region might offer some clues as to why national ideologies have not marginalized religion in the public square. Jakelic, a Croatian national, received her doctorate from Boston University in 2003.

Fellow Shylashri Shankar, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Texas at Austin, discussed the tension between religious liberty and political equality in India, focusing

particularly on the mediatory role of the judiciary. For Shankar, one of the most pressing issues that contemporary liberal democracies face is how democratic institutions can balance the demands of religious liberty with formal equality and substantive justice in multi-religious polities.

In the afternoon session Postdoctoral Fellow Erik Anderson, an assistant professor of philosophy at Furman University, argued that in a pluralistic society it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a neutral, secular language for public life that will not be offensive or threatening to certain groups. The “paradox of public secular-

Exploring Public Views of Biotechnology

Over the years, the Institute and the Center have conducted a series of nationally representative surveys that explore the normative frameworks—ideas, beliefs, values—informing key areas of American culture. We are currently in the planning stages for the next survey, which will deal with Americans' views of biotechnologies, their human significance, and their consequences. As part of the survey preparation, we will conduct several focus groups in cities around the United States this spring. The perspectives expressed in these groups will in turn help inform the design of the larger survey questionnaire.

Given the rapid developments in genomics and pharmacology, and the public debates that have emerged over stem cell research, cloning, mood and behavior-altering drugs, genetically modified food, and so on, many surveys have been done to assess public awareness and acceptance of the use of

various biotechnologies. These surveys find that Americans (1) have considerable interest in matters of science and technology but low levels of specific knowledge; (2) generally see important benefits from new developments in science and medicine but also definite risks; and (3) have strong reservations about the moral acceptability of certain biotechnology applications.

At the same time, the existing surveys have some important limitations. They don't give us any sense for the extra-medical context (life pressures, hopes and fears) that people see as relevant to decision-making about controversial technologies. Analysis is typically restricted to testing the apparent influence of the standard demographic variables (age, sex, education, region, income, religion) to explain non-acceptance. This method gives little insight into diversity of opinions, their substance, or their grounding. It doesn't consider the



influence of factors such as lifestyle and beliefs about human nature, procreation, obligations to children and the elderly, the meaning of suffering, the environment, science and technology, and so on.

Our aim, then, is to probe deeper, to gain a more substantive picture of the public perceptions and ambient cultural beliefs that in part shape the demand for and objections to new medical biotechnologies. ■



Slava Jakelic discusses Catholicism and identity in Eastern Europe.

ism" is that it always excludes some groups and so it is not truly public. Anderson concluded by calling for a renewed engagement with deeper metaphysical, theological, and epistemological issues in American public life.

Finishing out the workshop, Postdoctoral Fellow and Emory University assistant professor Judd Owen argued that Americans today embrace a conception of religious liberty that differs significantly from that of our country's founders, both those like Jefferson who embraced Enlightenment skepticism, and those who based religious liberty in devout faith. According to Owen, religious freedom today has become bound up with "apatheism," i.e. a disinclination to take religious questions seriously at all. Owen suggested that this outcome was part of the Enlightenment's aim, but he appealed to Tocqueville to argue that

religious apathy carries grave risks for liberal democracy.

While collegial and friendly, the Fellows Workshop is designed to provoke a lively and informed discussion on specific topics and foster a larger dialogue about the contribution religion makes to modern political life. With original papers by the Fellows and responses by sociologist Katya Makarova, politics professors John Echeverri-Gent and Colin Bird, and philosophy professor Tal Brewer, the Fellows Workshop proved yet again to be one of the Center's most popular and productive events. ■

Is Religion the Problem?

The 2003 Levinson Lectures on "Religion, Justice, and Violence"



KIRSTEN HUNTER

René Girard discusses "scapegoating" and the Christian tradition.

On November 7, the Center held its 2nd Annual Levinson Lectures on Religion, Culture, and Social Theory, examining the complex interrelationships between religion, justice and violence in the world today. The four speakers represented an international perspective: Dr. Danièle Hervieu-Léger is a prominent sociologist of European secularism; Dr. René Girard is the Hammond Professor Emeritus of French Language, Literature and Civilization at Stanford; Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl is a professor of law at UCLA and an expert on Islamic law; and Dr. Mark Juergensmeyer is Director of Global and International Studies at UC Santa Barbara. Each of these scholars addressed the question of whether religion is a source or solution to violence. Not surprisingly, each gave a different—though not necessarily conflicting—answer, revealing the complex role of religion in the contemporary world.

The morning's first speaker, Dr. Juergensmeyer, argued that the primary problem throughout the world is not religion itself but a perceived failure of the

secular state. In places where this is most acutely experienced, such as India and the Islamic Middle East, people have come to feel like strangers in their own society. For these citizens, religious visions of "cosmic warfare" between good and evil provide a justification, and sometimes the institutional means, for violent rebellion. Still, Juergensmeyer concluded, religion can also prevent violent conflict by renewing the moral order of society and alleviating alienation.

Dr. Hervieu-Léger emphasized the weakening of traditional religious institutions as a key factor in the rise of new forms of conflict. She explained that in modern society individuals increasingly create their own individualized faith systems by freely borrowing symbols and ideas from multiple faith traditions. This individualism is a relatively weak source of identity and religious certainty, leading some believers to gravitate towards small, impermeable, fundamentalist, and often aggressive communities. Despite this shift, Hervieu-Léger argued, traditional, institutional religion can play a significant role in preventing violence by cultivating communal memory and more inclusive visions of the good life.

Dr. Abou El Fadl began the afternoon session with a discussion of how fundamentalist interpretations of the Koran have led Muslims to embrace violence. Listening to taped interviews of Al-Qaeda suspects after 9/11, Abou El Fadl noticed that while these Muslims uniformly expressed pity for the Americans who died, they still emphasized that Americans had to die to cleanse the flagrant sins of American leaders. For Abou El Fadl, fundamentalist readings elevate what is historically contingent in the Islamic tradition—the struggles of the early years—over its transcendent values, which reject torture and retaliation and highlight the normative, the good, and the just.

Dr. Girard argued that historically, communities have sought "catharsis" or resolution of violent crises through the sacrifice of human "scapegoats." The Christian gospels, he contended, represent a radical departure from this ancient practice by defending innocent victims and unmasking the violence of the sacrificial ritual. But this comes at a cost, for in exposing the violence behind sacrifice, Christianity rendered obsolete and unacceptable the practice that cultures have used historically to prevent the escalation of violence. Still, we must continue to reject scapegoating, Girard insisted, through the establishment of strong institutions for the maintenance of societal peace and order.

All in all, the 2003 Levinson Lectures offered a provocative and fruitful reflection on the complex interrelationship of religion, justice, and violence in the contemporary world. The papers will be published in the Spring 2004 issue of *The Hedgehog Review*. ■



KIRSTEN HUNTER

Khaled Abou El Fadl addresses the problem of Islamic fundamentalism.

Culture Wars Revisited

By James Davison Hunter

*In 1991, James Davison Hunter, Director of the Institute, published *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, in which he argued that American society had undergone a profound realignment in its public culture. The net effect of this was a widening conflict at the deepest levels of moral cosmology and the structures in which these normative systems are embedded. In the ensuing debate, many questioned the validity of this argument, pointing to surveys that showed that the majority of Americans were not so divided but politically and socially moderate. By the late 1990s, much of the professional establishment in academic sociology had rejected the hypothesis of a “culture war.” Much of this criticism, however, missed the central point of Hunter’s argument—that is, that the “culture war” is not a matter of popular opinion but rather of deeper normative systems manifested within and defended by powerful cultural institutions and the elites who represent them. At a conference sponsored by the Ethics and Public Policy Center in December, Hunter revisited his controversial hypothesis, addressing criticisms and reaffirming the deeper and enduring nature of cultural conflict. What follows is an excerpt from his address.*

Whether intended or not, the subtext of much of the anti-culture wars perspective is the view that all is well; whatever conflict exists, we need not take it too seriously.

The irony is that contemporary sociology was profoundly influenced by the counter-cultural commitments of the New Left in its hostility to the status quo and the middle class Establishment’s reinforcement of the status quo. But now, those who once made conflict the heart

of social theory and analysis have become oblivious to the conflict unfolding in front of them and to the historical meaning of that conflict. And perhaps most ironic, among those who in their politics and scholarship champion “difference” is now manifest a denial of difference, particularly difference of the deepest (i.e. moral and religious) kind.

I will grant that some of the reaction against the notion of a culture war seems to be prompted by the metaphor of war itself. The word “war” seemed to go too far. Even so, the instincts of an earlier generation of sociologists about the inherently conflictual nature of social life and of culture were closer to the mark than the complacent natterings about the present tranquility of American public life.

Culture is reflected in attitudes, of course, but it is much more than the sum total of those attitudes. Because culture is made up of various systems of actors and institutions competing in fields of social life for position, resources and symbolic capital, culture is, *by its very constitution*, contested. Where there is culture, there is struggle. As Philip Rieff has put it, “culture is the continuation of war by other means,” “the form of fighting before the fighting begins.”

Consciously or not, then, various actors within our public culture employ strategies and tactics to preserve or expand their ability to shape their field of influence. The stakes are not, at least first, material but rather symbolic: the power of culture is the power to name things, to define reality, to create and shape worlds of meaning. At its most extensive reach, it is the power to project one’s vision of the world as the dominant, if not *the only* vision of the world, such that it becomes commonsensical to people. At this depth of culture, dissent is



not possible because it is not imaginable.

And so culture is, by its very nature, contested—always and everywhere, even when it appears most homogeneous. In a society as pluralistic as ours, cultural conflict is inevitably intensified, because it entails a diversity of elites and institutions that possess the power of world-making. This is so, even if it is not always reflected in public opinion.

It is helpful to consider law in this light. Law and its institutions are, of course, inseparable from the culture within which they are found. Its prescriptions are never merely a set of rules and procedures to be observed but reflect and are constituted by larger cultural narratives that locate those prescriptions and give them meaning. A legal system, in other words, presupposes a civilization and it will inevitably reflect the historical processes unfolding within that civilization, including processes of fragmentation, conflict, and polarization.

If law (as culture more broadly) is inherently contested terrain, then so are

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“Culture Wars” continued

the sources of authority that underwrite law, that give law its sanction and legitimacy. Competing legal positions, as with competing visions of the good society, inevitably trace down to the means by which people know them to be good in the first place.

In the last decade or so there have been a number of controversies played out in the world of law that have brought into relief deeper differences and contests in culture and in the moral authorities that give them sanction—from the Clinton scandals and the legal dispute over Florida voting in the 2000 election, to biotechnology, the interminable abortion controversy and a host of garden-variety church-state disputes. Yet nothing has been more interesting and, I think, more culturally significant than the recent gay rights disputes.

What is going on here? A great deal, of course, but permit me to focus on the play of cultural authority that underlies these competing legal positions.

Despite the dominance over the last century of a legal positivism that separates law from transcendent sources of moral obligation, it is the loud echoes of natural law that animate one side of the legal dispute over gay rights and gay marriage in particular. The natural law tradition claims that law necessarily includes the commands of a higher moral law—in Cicero’s formulation, “true law is right reason in agreement with nature.” Though Stoic in origin, it was appropriated by and elaborated within the Christian tradition in ways that had a powerful influence in Western legal thought. In America, natural law jurisprudence reached the height of its importance just before the Revolution but it continued to be influential throughout the nineteenth century.

It is important to note that even in the eighteenth century, the natural law of Grotius, Pufendorf, Rutherford and Blackstone, was not studied so much as a source for rules of decision but as a

source for the larger principles which underwrote the rules of legal practice. Natural law was literally “foundational,” in the sense that citizens had no obligation to obey any law that was contrary to natural law.

*Competing legal positions,
as with competing visions
of the good society,
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the first place.*

On the question of homosexuality, there was no serious debate. Pufendorf spoke of it in *The Law of Nature and Nations* (1717) as “the most detestable sinfulness of those pollutions which we so justly call *Unnatural*.”

Thomas Rutherford wrote in *The Institutes of Natural Law* (1832): “There are other breaches of chastity which the law of nature forbids, because they frustrate that end for which the desire of the sexes towards each other was implanted by nature.”

William Blackstone perhaps went furthest. In his 1803 *Commentaries* he speaks of homosexuality as “the infamous *crime against nature* [italics in original], an offence of so dark a nature” that it is “not fit to be named; *peccatum illud horribile, inter christianos non nominandum*.”

However one stands on this contemporary issue, this kind of consistency

points to a depth and stability of *habitus* within which such prohibitions made sense to people. That *habitus* remains intact for many and is, as I mentioned earlier, a source not so much of legal reasoning but of cultural authority in the opposition to gay rights and gay marriage in particular.

And so, while shock is commonly expressed at how antiquated anti-sodomy laws have remained on the books, what is more interesting from the perspective of cultural sociology is the timing, manner and speed by which such dispositions and the laws that reflect them have loosened their credibility in public culture.

Whether or not normative conflict over gay rights or any other issue erupts into *open* hostilities, it remains embedded in the warring conceptions of moral authority that underwrite different and competing conceptions of the self, of community, of truth, justice and the nature and meaning of a good life and a good society.

In all of this, neutrality is a pose for the simple reason that the state itself cannot be neutral in matters pertaining to the public good. This is what the activists on opposing sides of the cultural divide understand well: across a wide swath of social life, the state makes binding decisions affecting the whole of society, in the name of society itself. To formulate law and policy, then, is to create and sustain a normative universe that draws distinctions, discriminates, judges, excludes as well as includes—it is, in short, to take sides on the matter of the public good.

At the same time, democratic processes are not particularly good at mediating or adjudicating differences as deep as these to reach compromise. The logic of litigation and of special interest politics nearly always lead to zero-sum, winner-take-all outcomes. These are outcomes that nearly guarantee a continuation of the culture war for the foreseeable future. ■

Irene Oh on Islam, Human Rights, and the Limits of Liberalism

Tell us about your project.

My study examines the extent to which liberal, pluralistic societies can accommodate Islamic views on human rights.

In order to present a range of views in Islamic scholarship, I selected three prominent thinkers who are diverse in thought, interpretive method, and geography. Sayyid Qutb from Egypt and Abul A'la Maududi from Pakistan tend towards more literal interpretations of the Qur'an, sayings of the Prophet, and Shari'a or Islamic law, and avoid depending upon intellectual resources external to Islam. 'Abdolkarim Soroush, a Shi'ite scholar from Iran, relies less upon literal interpretation and incorporates non-traditional and Western resources into his work. These scholars offer different perspectives on human rights and liberal values.

I begin with a history of Islamic participation in the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Drawn up after the atrocities of World War II and involving the input of over 50 countries, the Universal Declaration lays out, using the language of rights, specific entitlements that people—simply by virtue of their humanity and not based upon their political or economic status—can claim from governments. Because contemporary Muslim thinkers have adopted the language of rights, an investigation into the participation of Muslim representatives during the genesis of the Universal Declaration provides the background for the rest of my argument.

Following this history I discuss the issues of democracy and equality, toleration, and freedom of conscience, analyzing the views of each Islamic thinker on the given themes and providing a comparative analysis of the issues that emerge, including attitudes towards

the West and the legitimacy of Western sources of knowledge.

I conclude with an examination of the possibility of incorporating these Islamic views into a liberal, pluralistic society. I question in particular the concept of “comprehensive beliefs” as defined by the political philosopher John Rawls in his book *Political Liberalism*. Comprehensive beliefs, which, according to Rawls, are ultimately separable from political beliefs, presuppose that citizens can and will separate their religious views from their political views when making decisions concerning the public good. This is a doubtful premise.

How did you become interested in this topic?

I think that I've always been interested in comparative religion, having grown up with a Protestant mother and a Buddhist father! The decision to study Islam when I started graduate school was almost purely intellectual—I was interested in studying two religious traditions that engaged with the political world, and Christianity and Islam seemed like natural choices. I wanted to do a project that reflected my interest in religious ethics, comparative religion, and politics. The project initially involved a comparison of Christian liberation theologians and contemporary Muslim thinkers. Theologies of liberation have a natural affinity with human rights scholarship because both concern attempts to improve the plight of the victims of injustice. That shared intellectual and spiritual goal was very tempting to pursue in the dissertation, but in order to make the project more manageable, I decided to focus just on the Muslim thinkers—though Christian thought does make an appearance in the last chapter.



Irene Oh is a Doctoral Fellow at the Center on Religion and Democracy. She will defend her dissertation, “Reason, Resistance, Rights: Islam and the Limits of Liberalism,” this spring.

What do you see as the most important contribution of your project?

My dissertation provides a way of understanding Islam that goes beyond the assumptions people make as a result of media coverage of September 11th, Afghanistan, the war in Iraq, etc. I try to show the complexity, the breadth, and the depth of the Islamic religious tradition in relation to specific issues that concern not only Muslims, but also people of different religious traditions. Because my study is more than a biography of influential Muslim thinkers, but describes and analyzes the issues that are of importance to them, it reveals com-

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“Interview” continued

mon concerns that Muslims share with each other and with non-Muslims. I also show the diversity, at times extreme, of thought among Muslim thinkers. My project is not an apology, but a critical beginning to examining how a religiously diverse world might think about how to survive peaceably and justly.

You mentioned earlier the themes of equality, toleration, and freedom of conscience. Why is a comparative understanding of these issues important?

These themes are important for comparative understanding because both Christian and Islamic thinkers use them, though at times in radically different ways. I wanted to find themes that Islamic thinkers themselves brought up in their writings, rather than try to find themes in Christian thought and then force myself to find resonance in Islamic scholarship. I didn't want to create similarities where none existed. That Islamic thinkers were thinking about issues of democracy and equality, toleration, and freedom of conscience long before the current administration in Washington is essential to figuring out a way to reha-

bilitate governments with large Muslim populations, particularly in the Middle East, without adopting a “one size fits all” approach to international relations.

What will you be working on next?

There is a divide between influential liberal thinkers like John Rawls and religious thinkers. Rawls assumes that humans are capable of separating political and religious interests. This assumption of a “separable” human nature is central to liberal political theories because universal principles of justice are not supposed to be based upon individual preferences, such as religious belief. From the perspective of “traditionalist” Islamic scholars, as well as other religious thinkers, including liberation and feminist theologians, however, religious beliefs cannot and should not be divorced from political life. Political liberalism, I want to argue, must consider the possibility of a religious liberalism that can accommodate religious pluralism without sacrificing its basic principles. My dissertation serves as the beginning of this larger project, which I hope will demonstrate how comparative

religious ethics might inform and improve upon liberal theory.

Can you give any hints of what a “religious liberalism” might look like?

What religious liberalism looks like would depend on where the religious liberalism emerged. History, political and religious circumstance, and legal precedent would all affect the ways in which a government determines the role of religion in the public square. A religious liberalism in Iraq, for example, would look different from one in the United States. One thing that would likely appear in any religiously liberal society would be formal acknowledgment of the role of religious belief in political decisions. In Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, Islamic language and belief will most likely play a role in guiding public policy. But religiously liberal societies will also need to draw a line somewhere that separates the public from the private. The privacy of the individual, including but certainly not limited to a person's religious beliefs and conscience, would be off limits in any liberal government. ■

New Publication



Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids: American Teenagers, Schools, and the Culture of Consumption

Murray Milner, Jr.—
New York:
Routledge, 2004.
298 pp.

An absorbing journey into a time that stirs up a mixture of nostalgia and dismay, *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids* argues that the typical teenage behaviors that annoy adults do not arise from “hor-

mones,” bad parenting, poor teaching, or “the media,” but from adolescents' lack of power over the central features of their lives: they must attend school; they have no control over the curriculum; they can't choose who their classmates are. What teenagers do have is the power to create their own status systems and symbols, and these not only exasperate adults but also impede learning and maturing.

Sociologist Murray Milner shows how high school distills the worst features of American consumer society and shapes the destructive ways that individ-

uals relate to neighbors, partners, and coworkers. Drawing on the theory of status relations from his book *Status and Sacredness*, which won the American Sociological Association's Distinguished Publication Award, Milner provides a systematic explanation of why teenagers behave the way that they do, and makes new proposals about how our schools and the lives of teenagers might be transformed.

Murray Milner, Jr., is Senior Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. ■

Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture

Christian Smith—Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 164 pp.

Sociology was born as a reflection on modernity, an attempt to name and make intelligible the overwhelming forces of a new world—capitalism, bureaucracy, and the division of labor. Since then, sociologists have often been tempted to think of themselves as experts on the impersonal movements of these forces, considering perspectives on the human person to be all but irrelevant.

All social theory, however, necessarily implies a set of assumptions about the kind of beings that humans are and what motivates them. In *Moral, Believing Animals*, Christian Smith argues that when these assumptions are made explicit, they often strike us as false precisely because of their failure to account for human motivation. In an effort to build a better foundation, Smith develops an account of humans as naturally moral, believing animals. This is an ambitious task, especially in 158 pages of text, but as Smith readily acknowledges, he is not breaking new ground. He is gathering together and applying to social theory arguments from a variety of disciplines, borrowing especially from recent moral philosophy.

Humans are moral because they inevitably make judgments about right and

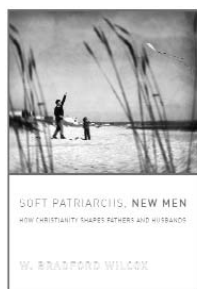
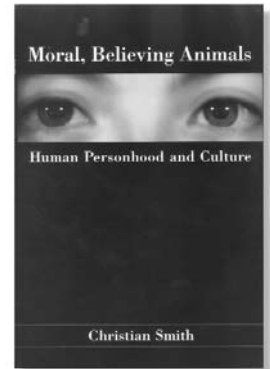
wrong, good and bad, worthy and unworthy, just and unjust, and they do so believing that these judgments are not mere arbitrary preferences. This belief that morality exists outside of the self, Smith argues, is not a mistake. Morality takes on reality in social institutions oriented toward promoting, explicitly or implicitly, standards of what is right, good, worthy, and just, and discouraging their opposites. These institutions, in turn, enact larger narratives. School science projects, the National Science Foundation, and the United States Census, for instance, are all morally charged enactments of “The Scientific Enlightenment Narrative,” the story of how scientific enquiry, unfettered by tradition, is the source of happiness and hope for the future. Therapy groups, car commercials, and management seminars, to give another example, retell “The Expressive Romantic Narrative,” about the unique and creative self forcefully pressed into an unnatural mold and in need of liberation.

For Smith, social life is composed of the “liturgical” enactment of stories. Even when explicitly secular, these stories tend to draw heavily on religion.

This is so, he argues, because humans naturally long for “superempirically referenced wellsprings of moral order.”

Yet the most pressing question is how we square this conception of human nature with widespread secularization. How do we, on this account, make sense of a society whose animating narratives describe the choosing individual as unconstrained by social morality and its public institutions as ordered by secular, “value-neutral” reason? Smith but touches on this in the book’s final pages. If modern societies are so thoroughly moral, he maintains, then they are so despite themselves.

Well written and clearly argued, *Moral Believing Animals* is both a searching critique of recent social theory and an important first step toward the articulation of a richer model of human personhood, motivation, and culture. We can only hope it gets a wide reading. ■
David Franz is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Virginia and an Associate Fellow of the Institute.



Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands

W. Bradford
Wilcox—Chicago:
The University of
Chicago Press,
2004. 288 pp.

How have evangelical and mainline Protestant churches influenced the husbands and fathers that fill their pews? Brad Wilcox finds that fundamental differences in the family ideologies of these churches do not translate into large differences in behavior. Mainline Protestant men, he contends, are “new men” who are more egalitarian than their conservative peers and more involved in parenting than men with no religious affiliation. Evangelical

men, meanwhile, are “soft patriarchs”—not as authoritarian as some would expect, and more emotional and dedicated to their families than their mainline and secular counterparts. Thus, the book concludes, religion domesticates men in ways that make them more responsive to the aspirations and needs of their immediate families.

W. Bradford Wilcox is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia and a Faculty Fellow of the Center. ■

New Publication

Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness

The President's Council on Bioethics, 2003. 328 pp. www.bioethics.gov

Today, we moderns have at our disposal more means of improving and prolonging life than ever before. A booming pharmaceutical industry offers us a pill for almost every conceivable malady. We can detect genetic disorders in embryos, improve concentration in children, stimulate growth in adolescents, transplant organs and brighten mood at any age—all by means of biotechnology developed in the last fifty years. With the completion of the Human Genome Project, our biotechnological powers will only continue to grow.

As our capacity to improve human life has expanded, however, our clarity about the nature of human life and the purpose of medicine has become clouded. Medicine and biotechnology are increasingly used not only to heal diseases but also to enhance human traits. While humans have always hoped and dreamed of transcending our natural limits, biotechnology today offers us—at least on the face of it—the unique opportunity to translate this vision into reality. Prozac, Paxil, Botox, Viagra, steroids, and muscle enhancers are on the market. Gene therapies, harvested organs, and new life extension technologies are just around the corner.

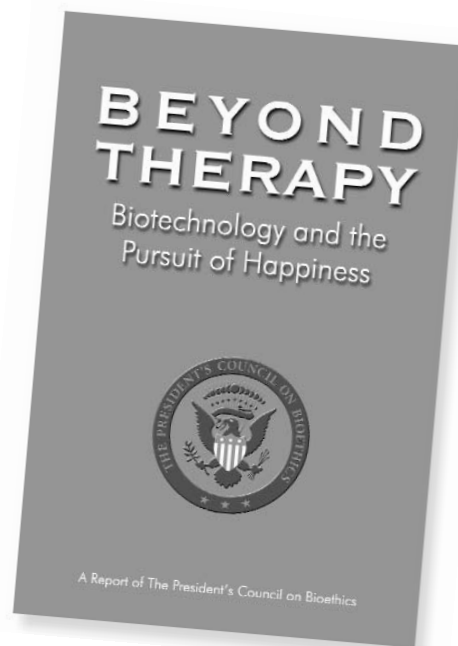
This progress has been met with both excitement and apprehension. Some announce an imminent leap forward in the evolution of humanity. Others warn that we are “playing God.” Still others sample the benefits of biotechnology while experiencing deep yet inarticulate unease about such prospects as human cloning and “designer babies.”

In this context of uncertainty, the most recent report of the President's Council on Bioethics represents a

remarkable injection of clear and profoundly humane thinking. *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness* is a rich reflection on the meaning and purpose of human existence and the ways that biotechnology promotes, but also endangers, the goods that we seek. Stepping back from the volatile arguments over cloning or stem cell research that too often polarize public discussion in America, *Beyond Therapy* inquires into the meaning of the very human desires that spur us to seek better children, superior performance, ageless bodies, and happy souls through technological intervention. Instead of focusing primarily on the controversial means or techniques now at our disposal, this report probes the nature and meaning of human ends in order to ask whether biotechnologies will enhance or threaten human flourishing.

So, in the case of age-extending technologies, while acknowledging that humanity has always sought immortality, *Beyond Therapy* notes that many of the greatest goods of human life are grounded in the reality and inescapability of death. For example, our cherished maxim, “Carpe diem,” makes little sense in a world where days and years no longer flee from us. Children make little sense in such a world. And human innovation would stagnate if older generations refused to give way to new and more youthful leaders. Thus, our desire for immortality often obscures the costs that such a bargain would entail.

As the President's Council concludes, “a flourishing human life is not a life lived with an ageless body or an untroubled soul, but rather a life lived in rhythm with time, mindful of time's limits, appreciative of each season and filled



first of all with those intimate human relations that are our ours only because we are born, age, replace ourselves, decline, and die—and know it.” As many have noted, these are sobering words and an unusual addition to such a report, and yet they provide a clarity too often absent from public discussion about these issues. Do we *really* want to live forever? Do we *really* want to use drugs to forget our bad memories or to feel happy all the time? Do we *really* want to choose our children like we choose our cars?

In asking these questions and offering provisional conclusions, *Beyond Therapy* helps us to understand the meaning of our deepest desires and to envision what it might look like to flourish—as human beings—together. ■

Patrick LaRochelle is a Research Associate at the Center on Religion and Democracy.

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Schedule of Events

■ Spring 2004 Colloquium

Friday, April 2

Dome Room, The Rotunda

Terry Eagleton, Literary Critic, 10 a.m.

Krzysztof Ziarek, Literary Theorist, 11 a.m.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, Philosopher, 2 p.m.

Poetry Reading by Adam Zagajewski, 4 p.m.

*University of Virginia Art Museum with Reception to Follow.**

Saturday, April 3

Dome Room, The Rotunda

Bill Ivey, Former Chair, NEA, 10 a.m.

Suzi Gablik, Painter, Art Critic, 11 a.m.

Adam Zagajewski, Poet, 1 p.m.

Panel Discussion with all six speakers and UVA Professors

Michael Levenson (English) and Howard Singerman (Art) as Respondents, 2 p.m.

*Co-sponsored by *Virginia Quarterly Review* and *The Hedgehog Review*

The Fate of the Arts

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