



BIG QUESTIONS

Welcome!

Thank you for agreeing to join us on May 10-11 for the Cardus Big Questions Conference. I am looking forward to a stimulating conversation that I hope will benefit all of the participants in their own vocations as well as assist Cardus in our strategic planning process.

The objective for the meeting is to better understand what might be the **most strategic cultural questions** that deserve Cardus' attention in the next decade. The 33 who are expected to attend (complete list attached) are comprised of:

- Thirteen thought leaders from Canada and the US from whose insights we are eager to learn
- Six members of the Cardus board who are leaders with insights in their own right but are also responsible for stewarding the Cardus mission; and
- Thirteen Cardus "insiders" (our management team, Program Directors and editors) who have day-to-day responsibility for implementing Cardus' vision.

We want the process to be as deliberative as possible and so we are structuring the agenda to minimize the "talking head" portion of the program and to maximize time for discussion. You will find background readings but they are intended to provide a launching pad or reference point for conversations and to help you prepare for the event. They will not be dealt with individually at the event. Rather, I foresee a process that unfolds in the following manner.

1. All participants receive this package on April 19 that includes the list below of **eight possible themes** that we will consider.
2. By May 1st, all participants are asked to respond via SurveyMonkey to indicate a preliminary ranking (1-8) of the themes, prioritizing those that they meet the following criteria:

"If Cardus were to organize its work around answering key cultural questions, which of the following themes would be the most strategic to prioritize in order to maximize Cardus' cultural impact over the next decade."

- **Pluralism** - How can we live together in difference?
- **Cultivating Virtue** - Which are the institutions/ processes that will cultivate the requisite virtue in our society that can contribute to social flourishing?
- **Social Isolation** - With thinner and fewer relationships, how do autonomous individuals survive/ thrive? Which are the institutions best positioned to help address this question?
- **Common good** - How do we cultivate a shared sense of what is the common good and social flourishing in our present context? Why does it matter?
- **Identity** - If public debate is shaped by identity, or dominated by identity politics, how can we best influence the future formation of culture and society? To what degree do we make religion our identity?
- **Freedom and Equality** - What is the balance between liberty and justice? And individual and institutional rights and responsibilities?
- **Institutions** - Are there some institutions that are absolutely essential? Are there some that we can or should give up on or remake?
- **Technology** - What are the ethical and common good concerns raised by our emerging technological future?

If there is a key theme that a participant would like to propose that is not on the list, there will be an opportunity to add it for our consideration.

Participants will also be asked to indicate which of the themes hold the most personal or professional interest for them. The bulk of our time together will be spent in working groups, and each participant will be assigned an individual theme.

3. The opening session on May 10th will provide a framing session and then we will divide into four working groups to work through each theme and its implications. Each participant will have the opportunity to participate in two groups dealing with separate themes.
4. The final session on May 11th will be a plenary session in which each of the groups will present their findings and insights.

The aim of these sessions is neither to confirm existing presuppositions nor to focus on filling in templates. Rather, this is a deliberative exercise to help inform Cardus' strategic planning process. *If we continue as a \$5 million/yr organization, the question is how can we leverage the expertise and organizational heft that \$50 million will buy over a decade in order to maximize our cultural impact for the renewal of social architecture based on 2,000 years of Christian social thought.*

We recognize that there are many more worthwhile things that might be done than we can possibly take on. We hope that we will all leave the conference with a better understanding of our particular cultural moment. Through your participation and insights, I also hope that we as Cardus will gain greater clarity to inform our choices concerning how best to prioritize and dedicate our resources, and how to discern what worthwhile projects may come our way, but which we should respectfully decline to pursue to focus instead on our own particular mission.

We are truly thrilled with the caliber and range of participants who have agreed to join us. We trust that our time together will also serve to bless and inspire all of us to grow in our own vocations. We are also confident that the interaction with people whom you may not regularly have the opportunity to meet will be encouraging. We have reserved the Thursday evening for a reception and dinner to get better acquainted and learn from each other, confident that those informal discussions and building of relationships will also contribute to our shared mission and witness.

If you have questions, please do let us know. Event Manager Mary Anne VanSlingerland is ready to assist with any logistical needs and can be reached at mvanslingerland@cardus.ca or 905-528-8866 ext.132. Research Manager Stephen Lazarus can help with any content-oriented questions and can be reached at slazarus@cardus.ca or 905-528-8866 ext. 138.

Wishing you safe travels and looking forward to seeing you soon at Hockley Valley Resort on May 10th.

Sincerely,

Ray Pennings
CARDUS CO-FOUNDER/ EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT



AGENDA

Wednesday, May 9, 2018

Guest arrival to Pearson International from West and Overseas
Transfer to Hotels

Thursday, May 10, 2018

Guest arrival flying in to Pearson International
Shuttle Pick up from Airport and Airport Hotels and
transfer to Hockley Valley Resort

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|-------------------|--|
| 11:30AM - 12:30PM | Guest arrival at Hockley Valley Resort
Registration in Main Lobby |
| 12:00 - 1:15PM | Lunch at 85 Restaurant |
| 1:30PM - 2:30PM | Big Questions Conference commences
Montclair AB

Opening and Welcome

Introductions

Review of Meeting Objectives |
| 2:30 - 3:00PM | Break |
| 3:00 - 5:00PM | Working Groups Session I
Montclair AB & Twin Hearth A & B |
| 6:00PM - 7:30PM | Dinner at 85 Restaurant |
| 7:30PM - 11:00PM | Informal Meeting & Hospitality Suite
Executive Loft - 3rd Floor |

Friday, May 11, 2018

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 7:00 - 8:30AM | Breakfast - 85 Restaurant |
| 8:30 - 10:30AM | Working Groups Session II - Montclair AB &
Twin Hearth A & B |
| 10:30 - 11:00AM | Coffee Break |
| 11:00AM - 2:00PM | Plenary Session - Montclair AB
Presentation from Each Working Group |
| 12:00 - 12:30PM | Working Lunch - Montclair AB |
| 2:00PM | Event Concludes - Guest Departure |



We've been busy here at Cardus for the last several months making preparations for the Big Questions Conference and are looking forward to seeing you in a few weeks' time. Below are the event logistics for the Big Questions Conference.

1. EVENT VENUE

Cardus Big Questions Conference will take place at [Hockley Valley Resort](#) located in beautiful Mono just an hour north of Toronto.

793522 Mono 3rd Line, Mono, ON L9W 5X7

Phone: (519) 942-0754

2. OVERNIGHT STAY

Cardus has booked a hotel room for all Big Questions attendees for the evening of May 10th. Cardus will be looking after the room & tax for your stay as well as all meals throughout your stay from May 10th – 11th. Although room and tax will be charged to the master account, your credit card must be presented at the time of check in for incidentals.

3. TRAVEL

By Air - Flights & Transfers

For those of you travelling by air, as you are aware your arrangements have already been made and communicated to you directly. If you have any questions or require any support regarding your flights, please contact Mary-Anne Van Slingerland, Cardus Events Manager at mvaslingerland@cardus.ca or 905-528-8866 ext. 132. In the case of flight itinerary errors or complications, please contact Angela Taosanis, Travel Manager at Corporate Traveller at angela.taousanis@corporatetraveller.ca or +1-416-595-5256 | Toll Free: +1-855-392-1343

All guests travelling by air will be transferred from Pearson International Airport to Hockley Valley and returned to the airport post event. You will receive a personal email from me in the next week outlining your personalized arrangements and pick up times & locations and contact person. Those travelling to Toronto on May 9th from the west and overseas will receive a reminder in this email as well regarding their accommodation for the evening of May 9th.

By Car

For those of you driving to our event, roundtrip mileage will be reimbursed for your travel at a rate of \$0.50 per kilometre. Please submit your mileage claim on the attached reimbursement form following the event. Reimbursement forms can be sent by email to the attention of Almut Sweet, Controller by email to asweet@cardus.ca or by mail to 185 Young Street, Hamilton, Ontario, L8N 1V9.

4. PARKING

For those of you driving to the event, Hockley Valley offers ample free parking onsite.

5. DRESS

Dress for the duration of the Conference is business casual.

6. DIETARY NEEDS

If you have any dietary needs or food allergies and have not yet advised us, please contact us as soon as possible to advise.

Should you have any questions or require any support at all, please feel free to reach out to me and I would be pleased to assist you.

Below are my contact details:

Email: mvanlslingerland@cardus.ca

Office: 905-528-8866 ext. 132

Mobile: 905-849-2459

I look forward to meeting you on May 10th.

Warm regards,

Mary-Anne Van Slingerland

EVENTS MANAGER, CARDUS



AGENDA FOR GROUPS

A chair has been designated for each of these sessions as well as a note-taker (who is a Cardus staffer). The aim of our session is to take the thematic question and dig deeply, seeing whether the group might be able to identify a sketch outline of how this theme might constructively be addressed by a think-tank like Cardus over the course of the next decade.

The ideal themes that around which Cardus might organize our work would:

- Be attractive and easily communicated to a North American public;
- Be questions whose answers leverage the wisdom of 2,000 years of Christian social thought;
- Be capable of being helped by a series of tangible research products/outcomes that contribute to a continued discussion and greater understanding of the issues;
- Contribute to outcomes and behaviours that are tangible and might make a meaningful impact for the common good.

The ideal report back to the plenary regarding each theme will make clear:

- What is the impact of this theme and practical ways it impacts the lives of ordinary North Americans?
- What aspects of this are not adequately researched or understood? Who else is playing in this space? What is the missing piece that Cardus is best positioned to champion?
- If there was a better understanding of this issue, who would need to do what in order to help change the front-line reality in a measurable manner?
- What sort of expertise is required to deliver this?
- Who might be partners on this? Who would be those most likely to be negative towards this?

As noted, our aim is not so much to fill in any template as to use the occasion to explore possibilities, obtain a clear sense of the challenges that we are presently facing, and occasion insights regarding the most impact-oriented and creative manner in which Cardus might be called to serve the common good at this cultural moment.

CARDUS “BIG QUESTIONS” PARTICIPANTS:

EXTERNAL (last name alphabetical)

- **Kristina Arriaga**—Vice Chairwoman, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)
- **Rev. Paul Bates**—Assistant Professor of Leadership, McMaster Divinity College
- **Dr. Ashley Berner**—Deputy Director, John Hopkins Institute for Education Policy
- **Dr. Stanley Carlson-Thies**—Founder & Senior Director, Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance (IRFA), division of the Center for Public Justice
- **Dr. Jonathan Chaplin**—Director, Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics (KLICE), Tyndale House
- **Dr. David J. Goa**—Founding Director, Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life at the University of Alberta (Emeritus)
- **Joe Gorra**—Fieldstead & Co.
- **Cherie Harder**—President, The Trinity Forum
- **Mark Rodgers**—President, The Wedgewood Circle, LLC
- **Peter Roebbelen**—President, Charis Foundation
- **Anne Snyder**—Director, The Character Initiative at Philanthropy Roundtable and Fellow at the Center for Opportunity Urbanism
- **Dr. Deani Van Pelt**—Senior Fellow, Cardus
- **Daryl Wilson**—CEO, Hydrogenics
- **Nigel Wright**—Managing Director, Onex Corporation

INTERNAL (last name alphabetical)

- **Lori Caltagirone**—Cardus Board, and President at Sunesis Consulting, Inc.
- **Mark Cameron**—Cardus Board, and Executive Director at Canadians for Clean Prosperity
- **Geoff Cowper**—Cardus Board, and Partner at Fasken Martineau
- **David Jennings**—Cardus Board, and Senior Member at Irwin, White & Jennings
- **Derek Rogusky**—Cardus Board, Consultant, and Former Senior Vice-President of Family Media, Creative & Strategic Services at Focus on the Family Canada
- **Rob Wildeboer**—Cardus Board, and Executive Chairman at Martinrea International Inc.

Cardus Staff:

- **Rev. Dr. Andrew Bennett**—Program Director, Cardus Law
- **Brian Dijkema**—Program Director, Cardus Work & Economics
- **Milton Friesen**—Program Director, Cardus Social Cities
- **Dr. Beth Green**—Program Director, Cardus Education
- **Brian Harskamp**—Senior Director, Philanthropy and Finance, Cardus
- **Stephen Lazarus**—Research Manager, Cardus
- **Andrea Mrozek**—Program Director, Cardus Family
- **Ray Pennings**—Executive Vice President, Cardus
- **Dan Postma**—Director of Operations, Cardus
- **Dr. James K.A. Smith**—Editor-in-Chief, *Comment*
- **Peter Stockland**—Publisher, *Convivium*, and Senior Writer, Cardus
- **Fr. Raymond J. de Souza**—Editor-in-Chief, *Convivium*
- **Michael Van Pelt**—President and CEO, Cardus



PLURALISM, DIFFERENCE AND THE DYNAMICS OF TRUST

What's the likelihood of living together if we can't even trust our neighbours?

Appears in Spring 2017 Issue: Trust: Reweaving Our Social Fabric

by John Inazu with James K.A. Smith 

March 1st, 2017

In his much-discussed book *Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving Through Deep Difference*, law professor John Inazu asks a timely, pressing question: How can we live together? Given the realities of polarization, even demonization, that characterize our public discourse—from Parliament Hill to our Facebook feeds—what are the prospects for forging life in common? What does the future of democracy look like if we retreat into enclaves and echo chambers? What's the likelihood of living together if we

can't even trust our neighbours? Editor Jamie Smith sat down with Inazu for a ranging conversation about trust, hope, and the future prospects for faith in our democracy.

JAMES K.A. SMITH: At the end of *Confident Pluralism* you ask a crucial question: "How, in the midst of so much difference, do we secure agreement about the need for confident pluralism itself?" Then, right after you raise this question, you turn to Robert Putnam's critique of what he calls the rather "optimistic thesis" that if we could just increase our contact with diversity that would improve trust. It's interesting to me that right at the point where you ask the upshot question of your project, it turns to a question of trust. And it seems like what would be the most obvious hope for building trust—living with those who are different, increasing our "contact" with others—doesn't seem to work, because trust can actually be undermined by this sort of unmitigated contact. So I'm wondering: To what extent do you see trust as pivotal for your project? If that's the case, if trust is really eroding, as it seems, how much is the project of a confident pluralism jeopardized?

JOHN INAZU: I think trust is an essential part of what this is about. Trust and hope and confidence, to me, are in some ways synonymous. What does it mean to have any of those in another person, or in a political possibility, or in God? We only know what we know, and tomorrow could turn out differently. As with any relationship— whether marriage or friendship or a person worshipping God—trust is as good as today and that's all we have.

JS: In significant ways, confident pluralism depends on trusting my neighbours that we are invested in a common project. Putnam seems to suggest that that's what has changed—a shift in our ability to be confident in what we could expect of our neighbours. Do you worry about the prospects of confident pluralism given that it seems like there's more and more mistrust?

JI: Absolutely. That's a real problem for the kind of political vision I'm suggesting; it's also a problem for any plausible alternatives that I could imagine. I think trust functions in two ways, which map to the two sections of my book on law and civic practices. It functions insofar as we trust our neighbours to have mutually possible civic practices and dialogue. But it's also a collective trust that we all have in the law itself, that the law is real, that it's not just power politics, that law fills a role in society that is preferable to the alternative. If enough practitioners and judges and people lose trust in the law, then we have a really ugly alternative.

JS: This highlights how law is a crucial part of the ecology of trust for society. You're saying: to the extent that people's confidence, their trust in law, is eroded, that's obviously going to have an impact on the possibility of our living in common. In that sense, do you think that mistrust of law is warranted? In other words, what do you think is the status of the rule of law in US society?

JJ: It's maybe easier thinking about this on an institutional level. The institution of the Supreme Court is always fighting for its own legitimacy. The more it seems to respond to political whims, the less trust people are going to have in it as something other than just a political body. There's this constant concern for legitimacy. To a large degree, I think—much more than ideologues in both directions give it credit for—the court does a fairly good job of working toward legitimacy. And I think there are justices on both sides of the ideological spectrum that recognize the seriousness of this need. On the other hand, there are real arguments that the court is on a path-dependent trajectory that is eroding trust in its authority.

JS: But do you think citizens on the ground often feel like the Supreme Court would be an expression of the rule of law that feels quite distant and abstract? Would there be other institutions that feel "closer" as expressions of the rule of law that, as citizens on the ground so to speak, we would experience more immediately? What would be the health and state of those institutions in either contributing to or detracting from trust, do you think?

JJ: That's a really important question, and it underscores the fact that most of us experience most of our lives not thinking about the Supreme Court. In our day-to-day life and the municipalities and cities in which we live, are there legal and governmental institutions that act more or less in accordance with legitimacy and trust? I think absolutely that's the case, and maybe the first thing that comes to my mind, given current events and my own location in St. Louis, are the municipal courts in Ferguson. To the extent those courts became fundraising mechanisms for the municipality and drove decisions—including decisions that led to people's incarceration—that fundamentally erodes trust in the system. Once you lose trust in something as central to your own life as the people who can put you in jail, who live a couple of miles away from you, it's hard to know what's left to trust about the system.

JS: If there's some erosion in trust, some of this distrust been earned, right? So we can't just blame this on, say, generational dynamics or something like that. On the other hand, have you seen any generational dynamics to this? For example, Pew reports talk a lot about millennial distrust in institutions. In a way, teaching at a law school is a very interesting little case study,

because who comes to law school? Why? What sort of hope and confidence do they express? Do you see much movement on that?

JJ: I think that's a complicated question to answer because of the variations of law schools. A law school like mine is going to attract a certain kind of student who's interested in certain kinds of things, and the public law school that offers night courses in Michigan is going to have a very different kind of student, which plays out in very different ways.

On the generational question, though, I think there's been a lot of writing about millennial distrust in institutions and also the related idea of always wanting to start something new. Someone gets an idea or is excited about social justice or changing the world, and instead of trying to figure out who's already doing this well and how they can be mentored, there's this entrepreneurial sense of how they're going to do this better and new and in a fresh way. That has, I think, long-term effects that can erode collective trust in institutions. The other thing that comes to mind here is that we have to have a kind of civics class writ large for each generation. We can't assume that basic understandings of why we do things the way we do or hard-earned consensus views about something like the First Amendment are just going to stay with us.

There's a recent Pew study reporting that 40 percent of millennials are willing to ban offensive speech, which cuts directly at the core of some of our First Amendment beliefs and doctrines that exist because of some really bad things that happened in the 1920s. If today's eighteen-year-old doesn't understand the history or the reasons that we came to where we are, it'd be very easy to say, as a political preference, "I don't want to hear your kind of speech. I find it offensive. I think it comes with tremendous cost, and it would be better to ban it." If we've really reached that point, then we've lost collective trust in a longstanding part of our national ethos. Our norms won't be there in perpetuity unless we can continue to remind people about them.

JS: It's such an intriguing parallel to the church in some ways. I often talk about "liturgical catechesis" as helping people understand why we do what we do when we worship. If you don't inculcate that in people, then it's just a superstition. We do this because Grandma did, or whatever. Then eventually, you're like, well, why are we doing this? Then: let's not do it. You're saying there has to be a kind of citizenship catechesis where we reinvest people in the story. Did that used to happen more intentionally or robustly than it does now, and if so, what changed?

JJ: I think it did. I don't have enough expertise in something like public school curricula, but my hunch is that in public schools a generation ago there was a thicker sense of what it meant to be a citizen. One way I think this plays out is with the kind of civic republican or civic religious links between Protestant Christianity and the American self-understanding of its own history. I think, in large part, there were some real costs to that link, as you and I both know. In some ways, it's very good that civic religion has diminished, but we also lose something when that influence is gone, which is the thick self-understanding that ties us together into something. When you remove Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the USA" from the Fourth of July, when you remove the pledge before a ball game or something like that, the question is, what replaces it? What continues to call people in a quasi-liturgical sense to being part of something greater? The answer can't just be a purely individual, autonomous self-understanding of our place in the world. It can't be a completely secularized and purposeless state because as we know from history that leads to really bad things. So what's left? I don't know that we have a collective answer to that question yet.

JS: In the current context in which we find ourselves, I hear a lot of Christians saying to the broader—and what they perceive to be an increasingly secularized—public: "Why don't you trust us?" Have we lost their trust for good reason? Let me rephrase that. Have Christians to a degree lost the trust and confidence of their neighbours for good reason? If so, what might we do to rebuild that trust or restore it?

JJ: I think there are two ways to answer that question. First, since the rise of the Religious Right we have lost trust for well-deserved reasons, including many Christians who have acted in self-interest and for their own self-preservation, putting their own personal and institutional interests before others. Then, when those interests aren't met, some Christian voices reflect a fear and uncertainty that seems to have no place in the gospel narrative.

That's the root of it. And then it manifests in all kinds of ways today in the fear of Islam, in the fear of engaging on contested social questions, whether about race or about standing up for something as what I would think as uncontroversial as campaigns against LGBT bullying. Even that act of finding common ground is too much for some Christians. So there does seem to be an earned lack of trust. People seem to be saying, if you're really just in it for your own interest, then why should I consider you a fellow citizen with shared interests, let alone care about your own rights that might be in some ways antithetical to mine? I think that does a lot of the work.

On the other hand, I do think there's an effort to stigmatize from some on the secular Left that contributes to this loss of trust. Here I'm thinking of the work of Erving

Goffman, whom I learned of through James Davison Hunter. Goffman explains how people who were otherwise part of a trusted community can be stigmatized to the point of being essentially non-members of that community. In this complicated reality, there's some push-and-pull, but part of the push is an effort, sometimes intentional, sometimes just not very thoughtful, to stigmatize and create distance between the common citizenship and neighbourliness of Christians and non-Christians.

JS: What have you learned since your book has come out? Would you already do something differently based on how it's been received, whether by religious or non-religious audiences?

JJ: What's particularly true of millennial audiences, whether religious or secular, is that, as a descriptive matter, the reality of pluralism is already well-ingrained in their lives. This is their existence, so it's not surprising to them that we have deep differences and we encounter people who are quite unlike us, because that's how most of them have lived their lives. That's less true with older generations.

Where I've seen the most resistance from the religious side of things is with a concern about getting too close to people who don't share our values. That has always struck me as odd because the gospel example here is Jesus going into very messy spaces and being the light in those spaces.

Here's one way it plays out. Someone will say, "Well, I love this vision of pluralism and everything you said, but what happens when sharia law comes to my city?" The fear of Islam, in ways that I don't quite understand, is driving a lot of resistance here. I think the political question of whether American Muslims will successfully integrate Islam into the American story as did American Catholics and American Jews before them is an open and contingent question, and we will have to see how that unfolds. As I usually tell these audiences, "Let's not presume the answer to that question. Let's, in good faith, work toward the values we espouse about religious freedom and religious pluralism."

In terms of resistance from non-religious audiences, some secular progressives have said, or at least hinted, that while there might have been a willingness to engage in something aspirational like confident pluralism before the election and in a presumed Clinton administration, given where things are now, that's no longer on the table and there's no interest in it. It's now just resistance and difference and factionalism and power plays, and that's a pretty bleak vision to me. On the other hand, there are some people whom I think now are reminded of the ways in which political winds can shift very quickly. Hopefully these people can recognize that arguments against the overreach of power, regardless of who is in power, are arguments that benefit us all. Hopefully they

can see that this is a good time to be making bipartisan and nonideological efforts to recover the significance of these ideas for all of us and to lay the groundwork for how this might look going forward irrespective of who is in power.

JS: In our post-election environment, do you see some real openings? For example, are there religious voices who could argue for the goods of classic liberalism that would be valued as a bulwark against authoritarianism? Do you think there's a new opportunity to find allies across what would have been a divide otherwise?

JJ: I think there could be an opportunity, but religious voices that are interested in this question have to think very seriously about what those partnerships look like. Part of that may mean following rather than leading. Particularly when we think about established white evangelical leaders, most of them are, in practice, interested only when they can call the shots and they can take the leadership role. I think increasingly it's going to take people who are very competent and have a great deal of moral authority who are willing to take the second seat and let other people drive the narrative. In other words, they need to figure out what it means to partner from a relative place of weakness, or at least an assumed weakness.

JS: In the last part of *Confident Pluralism*, you lay out the civic aspirations of tolerance, humility, and patience. I would love to hear how you think trust would fit into that mix. Is trust another one alongside or is there a sense in which actually those three aspirations themselves are based on trust? Have you thought much about that?

JJ: Your question reminds me of a conversation that you and I have had about the differences between aspirations and virtues. I think in some ways aspirations can exist without trust, because they are forward-looking and in some sense unrealized. But you can't have virtues and practices without institutions and people in shared endeavours to sustain those virtues, and you can't have those institutions or those shared endeavours without trust. In other words, trust is absolutely essential to the long-term plausibility of something like confident pluralism. In the short term, I think the challenge is how to move toward the possibility of trust in a time when you might not have much of it.

JS: Right. It seems like it would be crucial to actually hope, but also have an account of why different kinds of institutions and even institutions animated by quite different worldviews, if you want to call it, could all be engendering trust. In other words, there doesn't have to be a monocultural account of the generation of trust for a pluralistic society. You could have an equally

pluralistic hope that multiple communities or institutions—even ones that ultimately disagree—could nonetheless all generate a common trust. Does that make sense?

JJ: It does make sense. On the one hand, I tend to think about this and frame it in the language of common ground, so there are ways, in a very modest sense without thick virtues or even thick institutions, to discover what our common ground is. That's quite different from reaching agreement about a common good or even the ability to see a shared good, but it means in the practical day-to-day that we can negotiate, especially on the local level, what the common ground is that might benefit us and our neighbours. On the other hand, I think even the possibility of finding common ground requires something of a shared trust.

An example that comes to mind, relevant to much of the recent news, is that the possibility of trust requires a minimal amount of shared discourse. We can worry about and argue about the contours of that discourse and what's acceptable and what's not acceptable, but we have to agree at least on a basic level of reality. Increasingly, alt-left and alt-right media accounts, but particularly alt-right, are assuming facts on the ground, understandings of reality, and a shaping of discourse that are not compatible with other kinds of discourses. Once we lose the ability even to talk to one another, I don't know how we recover or move toward something like aspirations or virtues.

JS: Yeah. That just strikes me as a parallel to what we talked about earlier in terms of the institutions of law, the rule of law. You actually need a degree of background confidence in the common environmental situations of our life together for this to work. If we don't have confidence in the rule of law, that undermines almost everything else we'd want to do. In the same way, this undermining of confidence in rational discourse and truth-seeking erodes trust. In light of that, what are your hopes that the university could be an institution that builds confidence and trust?

JJ: I think the university is a possible place for this engagement, although I'm not sure it will realize its potential. In its ideal sense, the purpose of a university education is to challenge and unsettle unreflective presumptions and to learn how to dialogue with one another with the space that allows for conversations and misunderstandings and opportunities for forgiveness and reconciliation in the midst of an ongoing community. All of those are possibilities. I don't think those possibilities are being lived out well at many universities today, and so we have to do some serious thinking about how to get there. The most important question, which I think actually some universities are better positioned to think about than others, is the question of purpose. Why are we here? Why are you paying money to be here? Why am I devoting my professional life to being here?

What are we, whoever "we" is, trying to produce out of this experience of your four years here? Unless we can name and defend a coherent purpose against competing interests, like semi-professional sports, big government dollars, and market pressures, then I'm not very optimistic about the university. If we can get there, then I think there are some real possibilities.

JS: Do you think the church has a role to play here? We can sort of think of that on the macro-level, but can you imagine congregations even having a role to play in building up the seedbed for what you're looking for?

JJ: I certainly hope so, for a couple of reasons. First, I think Christians, of all people, because of the confidence in our own beliefs and the story we understand ourselves to be a part of, have to be in these spaces. We have to be, for the love of God and neighbour, finding these places of common ground and engaging across difference with confidence and with tolerance, patience, and humility. That just seems like Gospel 101, although it's amazing how hard in practice it is to convey that message to some Christian audiences.

I also think churches at their best play a role in facilitating the necessary components of confident pluralism. Here I'm thinking of Putnam's categories of "bridging" and "bonding" capital. Churches can be among the best institutions to create the sense of bonding capital where you grow in trust with those around you. In a place that is protected, you can be more vulnerable and you can grow more as a person in your ideas. Then, churches at their best are also some of the best bridging institutions where a cohesive group of people and ideas and resources can engage across difference to other institutions. The best example here, I think, is in the charitable sector, where religious organizations are clearly leading the way, both domestically and internationally, in helping people in need and making this world a better place for a lot of people who are deeply in need. To the extent some of those efforts are threatened politically or otherwise, that's going to be a net loss for all of us, but regardless of what happens, churches institutionally can continue in that outward-facing, bridging direction, and I think aspirationally that's where we should be.

Topics: [Work](#) [Wisdom](#) [Trust](#) [Social Architecture](#) [Secularism](#) [Pluralism](#) [Religion](#)
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 BIO



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 BIO 

Falling Apart



George Monbiot - <http://www.monbiot.com/2014/10/14/falling-apart/>
October 14, 2014

Competition and individualism are forcing us into a devastating Age of Loneliness

By George Monbiot, published in the Guardian 15th October 2014

What do we call this time? It's not the information age: the collapse of popular education movements left a void now filled by marketing and conspiracy theories(1). Like the stone age, iron age and space age, the digital age says plenty about our artefacts but little about society. The anthropocene, in which humans exert a major impact on the biosphere, fails to distinguish this century from the previous twenty. What clear social change marks out our time from those that precede it? To me it's obvious. This is the Age of Loneliness.

When Thomas Hobbes claimed that in the state of nature, before authority arose to keep us in check, we were engaged in a war "of every man against every man"(2), he could not have been more wrong. We were social creatures from the start, mammalian bees, who depended entirely on each other. The hominids of East Africa could not have survived one night alone. We are shaped, to a greater extent than almost any other species, by contact with others. The age we are entering, in which we exist apart, is unlike any that has gone before.

Three months ago we read that loneliness has become an epidemic among young adults(3). Now we learn that it is just as great an affliction of older people. A study by Independent Age shows that severe loneliness in England blights the lives of 700,000 men and 1.1m women over 50(4), and is rising with astonishing speed.

Ebola is unlikely ever to kill as many people as this disease strikes down. Social isolation is as potent a cause of early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day(5); loneliness, research suggests, is twice as deadly as obesity(6). Dementia, high blood pressure, alcoholism and accidents – all these, like depression, paranoia, anxiety and suicide, become more prevalent when connections are cut(7,8). We cannot cope alone.

Yes, factories have closed, people travel by car instead of buses, use YouTube rather than the cinema. But these shifts alone fail to explain the speed of our social collapse. These structural changes have been accompanied by a life-denying ideology, which enforces and celebrates our social isolation. The war of every man against every man – competition and individualism in other words – is the religion of our time,

justified by a mythology of lone rangers, sole traders, self-starters, self-made men and women, going it alone. For the most social of creatures, who cannot prosper without love, there is now no such thing as society, only heroic individualism. What counts is to win. The rest is collateral damage.

British children no longer aspire to be train drivers or nurses, more than a fifth now say they “just want to be rich”: wealth and fame are the sole ambitions of 40% of those surveyed(9). A government study in June revealed that Britain is the loneliness capital of Europe(10). We are less likely than other Europeans to have close friends or to know our neighbours. Who can be surprised, when everywhere we are urged to fight like stray dogs over a dustbin?

We have changed our language to reflect this shift. Our most cutting insult is loser. We no longer talk about people. Now we call them individuals. So pervasive has this alienating, atomising term become that even the charities fighting loneliness use it to describe the bipedal entities formerly known as human beings(11). We can scarcely complete a sentence without getting personal. Personally speaking (to distinguish myself from a ventriloquist’s dummy), I prefer personal friends to the impersonal variety and personal belongings to the kind that don’t belong to me. Though that’s just my personal preference, otherwise known as my preference.

One of the tragic outcomes of loneliness is that people turn to their televisions for consolation: two-fifths of older people now report that the one-eyed god is their principal company(12). This self-medication enhances the disease. Research by economists at the University of Milan suggests that television helps to drive competitive aspiration(13). It strongly reinforces the income-happiness paradox: the fact that, as national incomes rise, happiness does not rise with them.

Aspiration, which increases with income, ensures that the point of arrival, of sustained satisfaction, retreats before us. The researchers found that those who watch a lot of television derive less satisfaction from a given level of income than those who watch only a little. Television speeds up the hedonic treadmill, forcing us to strive even harder to sustain the same level of satisfaction. You have only to think of the wall-to-wall auctions on daytime TV, Dragon’s Den, the Apprentice and the myriad forms of career-making competition the medium celebrates, the generalised obsession with fame and wealth, the pervasive sense, in watching it, that life is somewhere other than where you are, to see why this might be.

So what’s the point? What do we gain from this war of all against all? Competition drives growth, but growth no longer makes us wealthier. Figures published this week show that while the income of company directors has risen by more than a fifth, wages for the workforce as a whole have fallen in real terms over the past year (14). The bosses now earn – sorry, I mean take – 120 times more than the average full-time worker. (In 2000, it was 47 times). And even if competition did make us richer, it would make us no happier, as the satisfaction derived from a rise in income would be undermined by the aspirational impacts of competition.

The top 1% now own 48% of global wealth(15), but even they aren't happy. A survey by Boston College of people with an average net worth of \$78m found that they too are assailed by anxiety, dissatisfaction and loneliness(16). Many of them reported feeling financially insecure: to reach safe ground, they believed, they would need, on average, about 25% more money. (And if they got it? They'd doubtless need another 25%). One respondent said he wouldn't get there until he had \$1 billion in the bank.

For this we have ripped the natural world apart, degraded our conditions of life, surrendered our freedoms and prospects of contentment to a compulsive, atomising, joyless hedonism, in which, having consumed all else, we start to prey upon ourselves. For this we have destroyed the essence of humanity: our connectedness.

Yes, there are palliatives, clever and delightful schemes like Men in Sheds and Walking Football developed by charities for isolated older people(17). But if we are to break this cycle and come together once more, we must confront the world-eating, flesh-eating system into which we have been forced.

Hobbes's pre-social condition was a myth. But we are now entering a post-social condition our ancestors would have believed impossible. Our lives are becoming nasty, brutish and long.

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COMMENTARY 6 DAYS AGO

Hyperindividualism and radical diversity are leaving Americans very lonely



Michael Hendrix, Contributor

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He held his phone close, eyes searching for privacy. The man scarcely noticed the subway riders around him, nor the 90-year-old artist sketching his hunched frame from across the train.

In the seven decades since Alex Katz first drew the outlines of commuters on New York City's early-morning trains, the chattering riders and newspapers had all but gone. In their places were people who rode alone together, the light in their eyes reflecting the glow of their phones. In his cover art for *New York* magazine, Katz hints at a profound change drawn across America over the course of his life, one that has profound implications for us, our communities and our politics.

America is increasingly a lonely nation. The number of American adults who say they are lonely has increased from 20 percent to 40 percent since the 1980s. Roughly 43 million people over the age of 45 are estimated to suffer from chronic loneliness. The unmarried and the uncommitted to community report higher rates of loneliness, with the cause likely being a two-way street.

ADVERTISING

Prosperity has afforded our independence from neighbors and networks, as the Social Capital Project of Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, found, but the relational and emotional collateral damage has fallen hardest on those least able to afford it. An isolation of affluence is indelibly marking modern society.

Photo Gallery

1/2



(2017 File Photo/Staff)



Consider that just three decades ago, the typical American had a little more than three close friends. Today, it's likely a single confidant. Often someone's closest companion is staring at him in the mirror. It is surely no coincidence that the average household is growing smaller and older. In fact, over a quarter of Americans now live alone, up from 13 percent in 1960 and increasing especially after the Great Recession.

Friend groups are smaller and narrower. When Americans do confide in someone else, they are likely to look to kin rather than outward to community. Social networks are increasingly folding in on the nuclear family. Yet marriage and family formation are

couples stay together or have children is increasingly a function of income. As family formation becomes a luxury, isolation is more likely to be a province of the poor.



Teens check their smartphones outside the Natural History Museum in Washington on April 8, 2015. A Pew Research Center survey released found that 92 percent of US teens go online daily. The survey of teens between the ages of 13 and 17 found that 73 percent had a smartphone and 30 percent had at least a basic cellphone. (Nicholas Kamm/AFP/Getty Images)

This tide of autonomy is washing over the shoals of society. Those who shrug at faith -- especially middle-aged Mainliners and unaffiliated millennials, as Pew found -- are simply going their own way rather than gathering in a community. Modern religious life, as with nearly every social institution in America today, is increasingly subsumed by an ethic of expressive individualism. And this autonomy is manifested and reinforced in myriad ways -- whether it be the three-fourths of Americans commuting alone in their cars or the personalized worlds of smartphones, social media and video games.

Loneliness is an emotional response to a rending of the fabric of American society. Why the isolation? The reasons are complex, but the story they weave is simple: The ties that bind us have come unwound in the face of enormous change. The movement from agrarian life to industry coincided with a shift away from the family and toward the individual as the basic unit of society and the economy. Our politics were downstream of these changes and embedded a healthy tension: between a liberal individualism and a moral communitarianism, both oriented toward liberty. Now we appear to be entering a disorienting new era of hyper-individualism and radical diversity.

Today we live Spotify lives, full of options that cater to our every whim. We have liberated our desires from want of choice and given voice to our own identities. Just a glance at our phones instantly widens the horizon of our selves. Yet this freedom has

dense social networks and deep wells of social capital to draw on. The result, as Yuval Levin articulates in *The Fractured Republic*, is that "we have set loose a scourge of loneliness and isolation that we are still afraid to acknowledge as the distinct social dysfunction of our age of individualism."



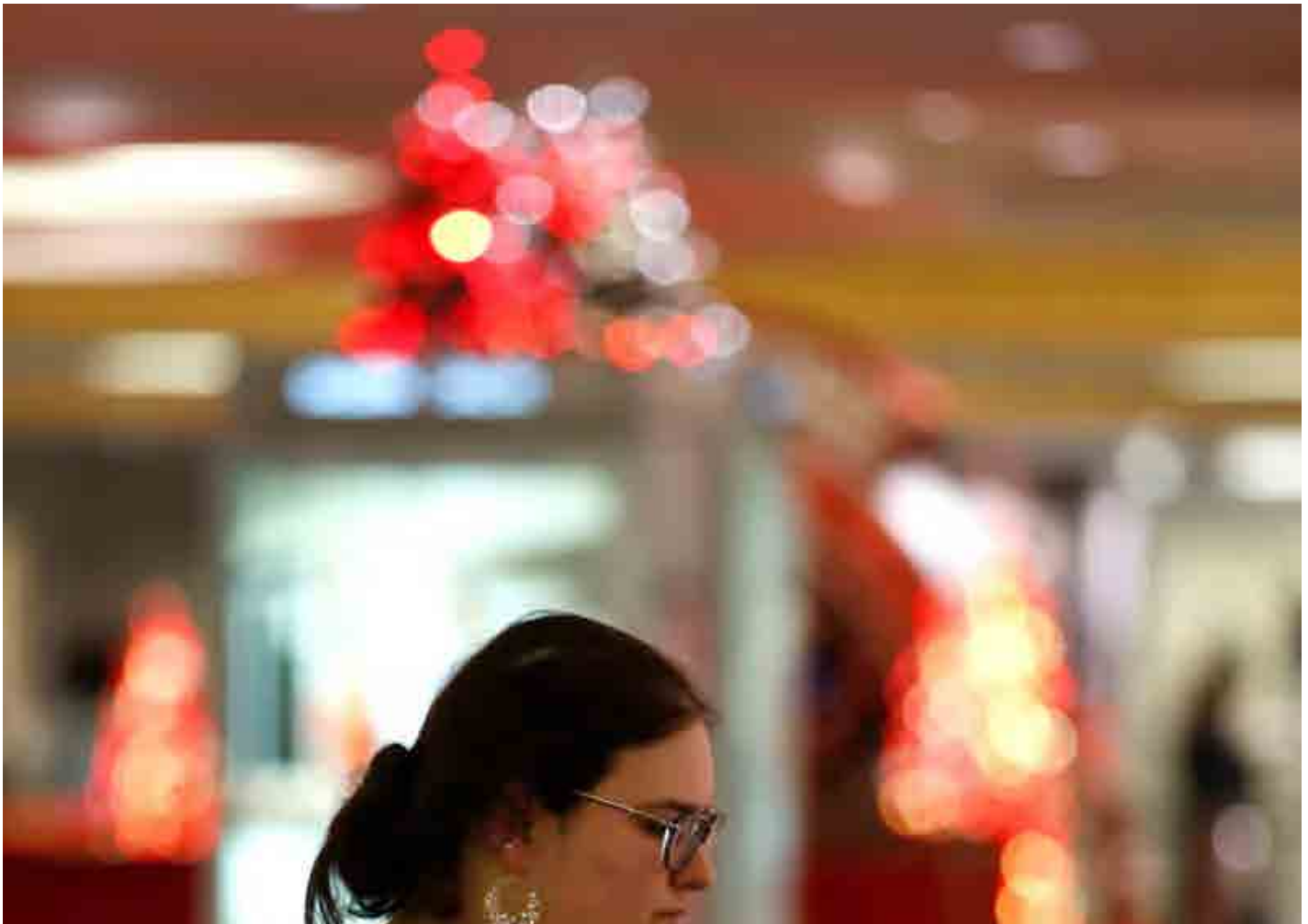
Lone Star High School student Brooke-Nicole Peshorn, 16, checks her phone as she and her classmates celebrate their district football title at Whataburger #1020 on Nov. 3, 2017. (Ashley Landis/Staff Photographer)

As conservatives ponder their future, they would do well to consider America's crisis of attachment as an orienting challenge of our time. What it suggests is that the individualism that has marked the right and the left is insufficient at best and destructive at worst to the citizen's role in the American project. A community-oriented conservatism is best placed to speak to our ills as well as to our better angels.

ADVERTISING

The liberal individualism adopted nearly whole-cloth by the right in recent decades places us above society and the institutions that give us meaning, rather than deeply enmeshing us in them. As Patrick Deneen has pointed out, the libertarianism and internationalism of the Reagan era were "in orientation profoundly opposite to the original Burkean, traditionalist, communitarian form of conservatism."

Modern conservatives are often, at best, half-hearted individualists, always fighting a battle of retreat against progressivism. Today, this essentially democratic ethos is expressed through a nostalgic populism and an introverted nationalism centered in Washington. As the middle ground between man and state withers, it becomes far too easy for our political life to slouch into narcissism and nihilism.





Brandi Bellanger checks her cell phone while shopping at Galleria Dallas in Dallas, Nov. 15, 2017. (Jae S. Lee/The Dallas Morning News)

Traditional conservatism stands athwart an unwinding social order. It sees man as a social animal -- relationally oriented and networked to community. This sort of interdependence rightly orders our civil freedom toward sustaining virtue through the things we have in common: habits, traditions and institutions. Rather than simply freeing us from the shackles of government or social constructs, this bonds us to faith, family and community in such a way as to give meaning and purpose to our freedom. In turn, it is on these social networks, capital and institutions that we build truly flourishing markets that work for the common good, particularly for "the least of these."

The notion that our politics could serve as a binding agent is not new. There is a rich vein of thought from Saint Augustine to Alexis de Tocqueville and Edmund Burke that conservatism has mined since its founding. More recently, everyone from the writers in *National Affairs* to the architects of Lee's Social Capital Project have kept these ideas alive. It is at this moment in American history, a time when we the people are coming apart, that we need a conservatism that seeks to weave us into our social fabric.

Restoring a more traditionalist, communitarian conservatism must begin by acknowledging the limits of policy. There is no bill in Congress that can satisfy the longings of the human heart for fellowship. Government cannot bind us together. Nevertheless, America's diversity can be the source of its solutions for the 21st century. We can start by bringing political power closer to our communities and elevating our shared institutions. People who are empowered together are likelier to work together. Ideas should necessarily emanate upward from America's towns, cities and states rather than downward from Washington. An urban conservatism, for instance, would be well-placed to tackle the barriers in housing, entrepreneurship and governance that prevent



Rob Riggles checks his phone in the second half as the University of Kansas takes on Villanova University during an NCAA Tournament national semifinal on March 31, 2018, at the Alamodome in San Antonio. (Allison Long/Kansas City Star)

America's emerging startup hubs suggest the shape of thriving communities in the 21st century. A place such as Salt Lake City, Utah, is at once hyper-local and hyper-global, spawning micro-multinationals that reflect the unique character of the place from which they come. Localism is at home with mobility, and nationalism is more of a neighborhood project. Moreover, we see that dense social networks flush with social capital lie at the heart of Utah's innovative dynamism. Prosperity flows from a healthy community, just as poverty lingers in broken relationships. These are truths that conservatives should voice.

Loneliness will not disappear at the stroke of a pen.

Nevertheless, conservatism should start from the basic human desire for relationship. From there, it should seek to strengthen our bonds as Americans in the context of our local communities. We may still fear being alone, but we should not fear that our politics does not care.

Michael Hendrix is the director of state and local policy at the Manhattan Institute and a contributor to the American Project at the Pepperdine School of Public Policy. This column was first published in The National Review.

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FIRST THINGS

TAKING THE LONG WAY

DISCIPLINES OF THE SOUL ARE THE BASIS OF A LIBERAL SOCIETY

by
Yuval Levin
October 2014

And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them through the land of the Philistines, even though it was nearer.

—Exodus 13:17

For many decades now, America's political life has been divided between people who call themselves "conservatives" and people who call themselves "liberals" or "progressives." This suggests that Americans are moved to conserve the good we have and to champion liberty and progress, which might make us better still. These are noble aspirations. But unfortunately, the left and right alike seem confused about what liberty and progress really mean and require. Our conservative party is confused about what it should conserve and our liberal or progressive party is confused about what it should advance. The two are not misguided in exactly the same way, but both tend toward radically deficient visions of the life of a liberal society.

Their confusions stem from a shallow and emaciated notion of the human person, albeit one that masquerades as a moral ideal. This diminished idea of man tempts us to an exaggerated idea of politics and fuels our "culture wars." It is likely now the greatest threat to liberty and progress in American life, and therefore also to what we should all seek to conserve.

The left's flawed idea of liberty has gained ground on the right's, and indeed tends to drag the right around by the nose. It begins from the straightforward premise that liberty consists of the individual's freedom from coercion and constraint—in essence, the freedom to shape one's life

as one chooses. There will always be limits to that freedom, of course. But in this view most limits are artificial and unjust barriers rather than natural and necessary constraints. Therefore, the proper mission of a liberal society is to remove as many of them as possible.

Some limits are material or economic. The simple fact of scarcity constrains what we can do. But this constraint does not apply equally to all. Some are rich and have ample resources to exercise their liberty, while others are poor and have few options. What is more, the efforts required to meet our material needs—work—often amount to constraints on our freedom as well. This is especially true for the less well-off. They're more likely to work at jobs they don't like for the sake of a paycheck. The liberal society tries to alleviate these constraints by redistributing wealth to some degree. A key goal of progressive taxation and the modern welfare state is to increase significantly the liberty of the poor at a relatively minimal cost to the liberty of the rich.

There are also social or traditional limits. Our society's established ways of doing things—especially in the sensitive realms of family, sexuality, and culture—unavoidably inhibit the freedom of people who would rather do otherwise. Here again the liberal society seeks to loosen or remove constraints, this time by enforcing an ethic of pluralism. Different moral and lifestyle choices are to be respected, provided they are freely made and do not come at the expense of other people's safety or freedom to choose. This ethic of pluralism gets reinforced by a soft relativism and non-judgmentalism. We're not to press our own views too vigorously for fear of compromising the freedom of others to make up their own minds about what's right and wrong. We do, of course, harshly censure racism, and in some contexts elaborate taboos develop that critics deride as "political correctness." But these actually serve the same end, and the ideal is straightforward. Our society is more just to the degree that individuals are free from what are deemed artificial social constraints. It's for this reason that some liberals see "political correctness" as ministering to a greater freedom.

Still other limits are political. These often combine the other two. Liberals suspect that our laws too often answer to powerful interests that seek their own benefit by abusing the weak or strive

to enforce their own moral views upon dissenters. Therefore, we should limit such abuses of power and protect people's freedom. In essence, our society should be arranged to ensure that as many as possible of our binding obligations are individually chosen, and that our lives are, to the extent possible, our own to shape. Getting to that point will sometimes require coercive actions by the state, especially to limit the power of those who would coerce or constrain the choices of others. Restrictions on campaign contributions provide one example, prohibitions against hate speech another. The liberal vision of freedom deems these limitations legitimate if they are aimed at expanding the realm and reach of individual autonomy overall. Thus the paradox of liberalism: expanded government for the sake of freedom.

The choosing individual is the foundation of this progressive vision of liberty, and all of society is to be constructed around that essential unit. It is by now cliché to cite Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy's opinion in the 1992 abortion case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, but that's because it captures this vision so well. "At the heart of liberty," Kennedy wrote, "is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." All is to be made subject to the choosing individual, including the most profound of our human relations and obligations to others. All the world is "concepts," and to each his own.

When conservatives object to this idea of the liberal society, it is often on the ground that the range of government coercion it permits is too broad. But many conservatives (and all the more so libertarians) root their complaints in the same radical individualism as the progressives they oppose. They don't object to the liberal view of liberty. Instead, they see liberalism as betraying it. They insist, for instance, that public redistribution of wealth is a greater constraint on free choice than the economic want it is meant to address. The same goes for campaign finance laws and many other liberal efforts to limit liberty for the sake of greater liberty. They deem the paradox of liberalism a fatal contradiction.

Their individualism leads them to this view in part because the American conservative idea of liberty is often mediated by the concept of rights, and especially property rights. The fact of

economic want is not a violation of these rights. Poverty in this sense does not necessarily involve injustice. By contrast, government redistribution of property can directly impinge on our rights of ownership, and thus can easily be seen as unjust. Conservatives therefore assert that an idea of liberty grounded in individual rights is superior to the liberal approach that seeks an overall increase in individual autonomy. Rights, especially property rights, impose meaningful limits on the power of the state, which is uniquely positioned to constrain our liberty.

This conservative idea of liberty, then, is less concerned with giving different people equal power to make their choices matter, but more concerned with letting every individual do what he wishes with what he has—provided he does not take from others. This is an ethic of protection rather than provision. A society cannot overlook the well-being of the poor, of course, and most conservatives acknowledge the need to use the power of government to make sure people's basic needs are met. But they regard doing so as part of our general obligation to keep our fellow citizens from deprivation. It has nothing to do with liberty, and so is not fundamental to what makes a free society free.

Both left and right, then, generally articulate their understandings of liberty in terms of enabling free individuals to make choices as they wish. The progressive sees freedom as a power to act while the conservative sees freedom as an absence of restraint. This is a real difference—a great deal of our political debate turns on it—but it can too easily obscure a deeper agreement. Both views equate greater human liberty with progress, as any good liberal would, and both believe that such progress is achievable by arranging our laws and institutions so as to best enable people's freedom to choose.

As a consequence, both seem to believe that advancing human progress is a matter of shaping society in a certain way, rather than of shaping the human soul in a certain way. They take the human person largely for granted. The goal of public life and the sign of a good and just society is progress toward an ever greater liberation of that person from artificial constraints so that his world can be, to the extent possible, what he wants it to be.

This doesn't mean that these progressives and conservatives are simply naive about human failings. But they believe that the institutions of the liberal society, if properly arranged, can enable people who are thus liberated to live together peacefully and productively. Our political tradition, understood a certain way, seems to support this hope. James Madison suggests, in one particularly Machiavellian passage of *Federalist 51*, that the framers of our Constitution thought a "policy of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives" could be sufficient to sustain a free society. And of course it's a central tenet of free-market economics that free and fair exchange coordinates our individual choices in a particularly efficient and productive way.

This view of the common good as balanced or coordinated self-interest was facilitated by modern political philosophy's lowering of the goals of social life. Modern thinkers since Machiavelli and Hobbes have tended to assert that the purpose of society is simply to meet our basic needs for security in our person and property and our desire for liberty in all other things. This minimal view allows us to hope that an arrangement of institutions, incentives, and interests that keeps us out of each other's hair will be enough. The market economy, too, is premised on the notion that if all we want is prosperity and comfort, then we should be able to achieve those in spades without having to argue about moral premises too much.

In reality, however, such hopes are possible because we presuppose the existence of a human being and citizen capable of handling a remarkably high degree of freedom and responsibility. We do not often enough reflect on how extraordinary it is that our society actually contains such people. A population of citizens generally capable of using their freedom well, not the American Constitution or the market system, is the greatest modern achievement of our civilization. That achievement is the prerequisite for liberalism, whether progressive or conservative, not only at its origin but in every generation. Thus the dangerous impoverishment of our political culture today: The idea of liberty that both progressives and conservatives generally articulate takes the person capable of freedom for granted without pausing to wonder where he might come from.

An idea of liberty is an essential part of the answer to that crucial unasked question. But it is not the libertarian freedom generally voiced by today's left and right. Surely liberation from coercion alone does not prepare us for the practice of liberal freedom. To liberate us purely to pursue our wants and wishes is to liberate our appetites and passions. But a person in the grip of appetite or passion can't be our model of the free human being. Such a person is not someone we would trust with the exercise of great political and economic freedom.

The liberty we can truly recognize as liberty is achieved by the emancipation of the individual not just from coercion by others but also from the tyranny of his unrestrained desire. This is hardly a novel insight, of course. Socrates helped Thrasymachus to see it in the fifth century B.C. Well before that, on Mount Sinai, it was revealed to a nation of slaves freed from Pharaoh's dominion. But it is a truth our high self-esteem sometimes makes us forget.

This older idea of liberty requires not only that people be free to choose but also that they be able to choose well. This liberty arises when we want to do more or less what we ought to do, so that the moral law, the civil law, and our own will are largely in alignment, and choice and obligation point in the same direction. To be capable of freedom, and capable of being liberal citizens, we need to be capable of that challenging combination. And to become capable of it, we need more than the liberation of the individual from coercion. We need a certain sort of moral formation.

The liberation of the individual from outside coercion is the short way to liberty—and the way that most progressives and conservatives today seem to have in mind. The formation of the individual for freedom is the long way to liberty—and the way that our liberal society plainly requires. The long way is a prerequisite for what the short way promises; it is a necessary preparation. But our political instincts now incline us to seek shortcuts. We're tempted to pursue individual liberation without preparation.

This leads to an increasingly dangerous failure of self-knowledge. A liberal society depends on the long way of moral formation, yet it does not understand itself as engaged in such formation. Its commitment to pluralism makes its politics neutral regarding the souls of its citizens, or rather commits it to shaping those souls for neutrality—forming people only to live and let live. That is how we are taught to think of what our society does.

But we are wrong, of course. Our society is not as shallow in practice as we say it is. Our bipartisan, individualist language of liberty keeps us from seeing that the liberty that liberalism offers exists in large part to foster precisely the moral formation we need and the institutions that engage in it. Religious freedom, freedom of association, freedom of the press—these are liberties designed to protect our traditions of moral formation, and they do just that.

That we are often blind to this, and so are as a nation better than we think, has always been a peculiar problem in our politics. But that problem is now increasingly debilitating, and demands to be addressed. Addressing it, and so coming to know ourselves better, will require us to think anew about the theory and practice of American liberty.

The theory and practice of American liberty have always been remarkably different from one another. Our theories have tended to be stark, abstract, individualistic, and fairly radical. Our practice has been elaborate, practical, communitarian, and fairly conservative. Our theories present our sort of liberal society as the product of a new discovery of the Enlightenment—a sharp break from what came before. Our practice reveals our liberal society to be a great achievement of Western civilization—an extension of our political, religious, cultural, and moral traditions evolved over a great span of time.

This puzzling duality is evident even in our national charter, the Declaration of Independence. The declaration opens with a bald assertion of profound theoretical principles—and then proceeds into a concrete listing of practical grievances, almost all of which describe long-standing practices disrupted and long-standing privileges denied. Pretty soon, King George III

stands accused of “taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments.” This is certainly an unusual justification for a revolution.

We can find the chasm between theory and practice even deeper in our political tradition. To put the matter all too simply, the liberal political theory we claim as our birthright emerged in Britain after an era of nightmarish religious wars, in part to justify an already existing society in terms other than the contentious religious and political ones on which it had originally, gradually, come to be. This involved the formulation of an alternative creation story (man in the state of nature), alternative laws of nature, and alternative ideas of the purpose of politics and the character of human thriving.

Liberal political thought could be made compatible with British liberty as it had taken shape over a half-millennium and surely helped direct that tradition’s development toward even greater freedom and prosperity. But these alternative theories came to be understood as something like the actual foundations of the liberal order and therefore as guides for the future development of liberal societies. When asked to play these roles, their profound inadequacy became apparent.

In essence, our liberal theories offer us truths wrapped in falsehoods—the truth that we are all created equal wrapped in the falsehood of a society built by independent individuals choosing to unite; the truth that we all deserve to be free wrapped in the falsehood that freedom is the absence of restraint. The truths may add up to a case for the long way to liberty, but the falsehoods can easily be taken as a case for the short way: the liberation of the individual from outside constraints to pursue his wants as he wills.

The great philosophers of liberalism and their great interpreters among our statesmen and teachers have always been able to see through the wrapping, and to show us the truths at the core of our liberty. Many such teachers, although surely not enough, are at work today charting the long way to liberty for generations of students. But it is not hard to see why many are drawn

instead to the short way. They can all too easily see themselves justified by the principles of American liberty as we know them.

Our theories of liberalism appear to recommend a different, thinner kind of liberty than the one we often practice. Far from reveling in unlimited choice, in practice we often affirm and even celebrate ennobling constraints. The enduring appeal of marriage provides an obvious example. But we are unsettled. We have gradually been losing the language in which to justify our practice of liberty against the demands of our coarsened theories, and at nearly every point of intersection between them we now find a heated conflict.

The elements of the long way to liberty are coming under assault one after another. The very foundations of our way of life are subjects of unending controversy; not just marriage and family, but academic standards, religious institutions, and other social forms animated by traditional modes and orders. In these controversies, the progressives confidently employ a liberal vocabulary of arguments in favor of ever-greater empowerment, while many of the defenders of our traditional ways of life are left struggling not to sound like they speak a foreign language, or are compelled to translate their rich moralism into the coarsest utilitarianism.

The long way to liberty begins unavoidably with marriage and the family, and the case for the short way begins as a case against their necessity. The family is above all the nursery of the next generation, which enters the world incapable of exercising liberty and plainly in need of both protection and moral formation. The family is proof against the notion that all human relations can be turned into matters of choice.

When we ignore the limits of choice and the need for preparation for liberty, however, the traditional family can come to seem instead like a constraining social form justified, at best, as a reliable way to meet some basic material needs. This is exactly what's implied in many of the defenses of the traditional family mounted in our public debates; the family's utility in protecting individuals from poverty is held up as proof against its detractors.

The evidence is strong, to be sure, but this way of arguing concedes too much to its critics, challenging them only on the ground of material utility. It ignores the deeper truth that the family, more than any other human institution, forms us morally. To live as a father and husband, wife and mother, child and sibling, is to live lives shaped by duties and obligations that sometimes grate but often bring joy. This is why the family is best suited to creating individuals freely discharging their responsibilities, the very foundation of any liberal vision of society. Indeed, the family helps us see that freedom ultimately is impossible without responsibility. We can hardly be surprised, therefore, that so many of our culture wars are focused on the family.

Work is another crucial element of the long way to liberty. Like the family, it, too, has an obvious economic utility, enabling us to support ourselves and our families financially. But work also buttresses dignity, inculcates responsibility, encourages energy and industry, and rewards reliability. It can help form us into better human beings and better liberal citizens. To see only its material utility is to imagine that work, like family, could be replaced by more efficient forms of distribution. If work is nothing more than a means to material support, nothing is lost if we provide for the needs of those with meager means in ways that do not require them to enter the workforce.

Recent efforts to weaken work requirements in state and federal welfare programs have reflected this narrow view of work. Progressive economic policy at least since John Maynard Keynes has appealed to a sense that the ideal economy would be less focused on work. But this view ignores the formative potential of work beyond its utilitarian value. We have every reason to weave a social safety net, but we must beware the shortcuts of a shallow notion of liberty that deny us the long way to a fuller freedom.

An excessively utilitarian understanding of the human good also inclines us toward a thin, unedifying notion of education. Even (or perhaps especially) in higher education, we are increasingly squeezing out liberal learning to make room for more skills training and STEM

(science, technology, engineering, mathematics) degrees. We surely need technical education, but that cannot be all that education means.

Liberal learning is out of step with our times because it offers us not vocational skills but the shaping of habits of thought and practice. It forms our souls through exposure to beauty, to truth, and to the power of the sublime that we can only glimpse through the mediation of rare artistic genius. It is, in this sense, closer to an aristocratic idea of leisure than to the modern idea of training. It is decidedly not utilitarian. It is no short way to liberation. And it is therefore under fierce assault precisely in the academic institutions that should be havens for liberal formation.

If a non-utilitarian notion of learning is far removed from our experience, then surely an older idea of leisure itself is utterly foreign. Here there is not even much controversy. We have almost all agreed that leisure is an opportunity for entertainment and unmediated pleasures. It would not be easy now to make the case for a different understanding of leisure as an opportunity to build habits of virtue, although some people do of course continue the practice of such edifying leisure.

But democratic citizens have another opportunity for building orderly habits, which might substitute for some of the advantages of civilizing leisure if we let it. Alexis de Tocqueville was keenly aware of the need to inculcate the habits of freedom in people living in democratic times. And he thought that civic life itself could advance this cause through both the private associations of civil society and the public institutions of an active democracy.

He stressed the importance of local government. “Local institutions are to liberty,” he tells us, “what primary schools are to science; they put it within the people’s reach; they teach people to appreciate its peaceful enjoyment and accustom them to make use of it. Without local institutions, a nation may give itself a free government, but it has not got the spirit of liberty.” This doesn’t mean that local government necessarily makes for very good government. It often

doesn't, as Tocqueville also noted. By a utilitarian measure of administrative efficiency, it could easily seem inferior. But in terms of preparing us for the burdens of liberty, it can be invaluable. It is useful for progressing down the long way, but not the short way, to liberty. And so we find that the partisans of the short way are often also partisans of administrative centralization, while our traditional practice of liberty points toward subsidiarity.

But if the long way to liberty is truly to lead us to a freedom that is more than license, it must draw as well upon an ideal of human emancipation that is more than political. The ultimate soul-forming institutions of the liberal age, as of every age, are religious institutions, and the ultimate preparation for liberty is the practice of faithful obedience. Religion in this sense offers a direct challenge to the ethic of the liberal society, and an explicit correction of its excesses. It is therefore not surprising that among the most heated debates in our culture wars lately have been arguments about the standing and protection—the space—granted to the practice of religion in America.

Religious institutions are not just counterbalances but foundations of the liberal order. They command us to a mixture of responsibility, sympathy, lawfulness, and righteousness that align our wants with our duties. They help form us to be free. And what is true of religion in particular is true more generally of the institutions of the long way to liberty: They are foundational to liberalism not so much because they counteract its vices as because they prepare human beings to handle the burdens and responsibilities of being free.

The long way to liberty has always been part of our liberal society, and indeed has been the bulk of what our society actually does, even if it is not how our society often understands itself. But it is now a subject of unending, heated controversy as our society turns against its own foundations. In our time, a commitment to the long way requires us to defend against a corrosive pseudo-liberalism. Championed by some progressives, but too often enabled by conservatives, it encourages precisely philistinism—a form of freedom that is but license for the morally unfree, and actively disparages every form of nobility, refinement, dignity, order, and transcendence.

In this view, the problems created by radical autonomy at the level of the individual can be addressed by technocratic management at the level of society, while the costs of technocratic management can then be offset by the pleasures of radical autonomy. But this circular logic leaves out—and compels many liberals actively to reject—the most critical ingredient in any free society: the human being formed for freedom. The formation of the person is replaced by a transformation of society.

What happens on the long way to liberty is so offensive to today's progressives because the authority of our traditional institutions stands in the way of the social transformation they desire. And here, finally, we return to the question of progress—the great aim of modern politics. The progress that progressives dream of involves remaking the social order so that it becomes friendlier to an idea of liberty as the emancipation of the will—remaking society so that it becomes finally worthy of the liberated, autonomous individual.

But this has things backwards. Real progress very rarely looks like social transformation. It more frequently looks like personal transformation. Each of us alone is weak and corrupt, but through profound moral exertion, and moral formation, we can rise above the dirt and make ourselves a little more noble, more responsible, more decent, more sympathetic, more loving, more free.

The idea that the measure of progress is social transformation, so that the forces of good and evil can be understood as forces of change and reaction, holds out the promise of liberating us from the need for personal transformation. The impersonal historical process, the journey society takes, can substitute for a personal moral process, making men moral by default.

This hope is rarely stated as explicitly now as by the radicals of the last two centuries. But it is implicit in any vision of society as an engine of social transformation that advances the progressive liberation of the individual from unchosen obligations. It was the theme, for instance, of President Obama's second inaugural address. The substitution of social progress for personal progress is the ultimate shortcut.

When the Book of Exodus tells us that God did not take his liberated people to their promised land through the land of the Philistines but opted instead for a longer way through the desert, it also tells us why: “for God said, if they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.” Untutored and unformed, confronted too quickly with the costs and burdens of liberty, they might choose slavery.

For us, too, bearing the duties and responsibilities of freedom without being prepared for them poses great dangers, especially the danger of abandoning our liberty in return for security or the passing pleasures and distractions of our abundant age. This danger is avoidable only if we take the long way to liberty, the way that prepares us through the practice of responsibility and through the formation and refinement of our souls.

This is no easy task, of course. Not everyone has the good fortune of a flourishing family, or the opportunity for rewarding work, or a liberal education, or a humbling faith, let alone all of these at once. But some combination of these soul-forming institutions is within the reach of most, and the work of reinforcing them, sustaining the space for them, and putting them within the reach of as many of our fellow citizens as possible is among our highest and most pressing civic callings. That calling, rather than a hyper-individualist liberationism, should be the organizing principle of our political life, helping us see what to conserve and how to advance.

It is a calling that requires us to think about our choices in more than crass terms of utility. And ultimately, it is a calling that requires us to choose, and to help others choose, the path of family, faith, work, learning, and community, and to avoid the path of philistinism—even though it is nearer.

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THE ESSENTIAL STORY

From what stance can we call others to virtue if our vision of virtue is based on our own self-chosen Story? When someone asks, "Why should I listen to you?" or, in the language of a two-year-old, "Who made you the boss of me?" what can we say?

by Graham Scharf

September 10th, 2012

This week as I sat on the children's couch at our public library reading to my three-year-old daughter, I observed a mother of four young children—all under the age of six—enter the children's section. She told the oldest three where they could go and how many books they could choose, and took her youngest daughter with her to select books. During their

library visit, I observed this mother correct her children. She didn't raise her voice, and she didn't nag; she spoke once, and her children responded. Even though I had never met this family before, it was clear that the hard work of character formation was already bearing fruit in these young children.

Character is significantly formed well before children reach school age and will influence every facet of their lives from family life to future health, education, and civic contribution. As I have shown in [The Apprenticeship of Being Human: Why Early Childhood Parenting Matters to Everyone](#), a child's early, repeated experiences establish for them what is normal and what is normative. For the children I observed in the library, it was normal to err, to be corrected once, and to repent. It was equally clear that parental authority and prompt obedience are normative in their family. The same principles operate in families that do not intentionally nurture character. On countless occasions I have witnessed empty threats on the playground: "If you do that one more time, we're leaving!" The child repeats the action, the parent repeats the threat, and the only people leaving the playground are those fleeing from the undisciplined child.

A child's early, repeated experiences are as critical for brain development as they are for character formation. The two are inseparable, for character formation is one facet of the breathtakingly rapid and sensitive brain growth in early childhood. A child's brain grows from twenty-five percent to eighty percent of its adult volume between birth and age three ([Zero to Three](#)). If babies' bodies grew at the same rate as their brains, they would weigh 170 pounds by one month of age ([Early Childhood Colorado](#)). Brain development at this age is activity dependent, meaning that a child's repeated experiences shape not only the sense of normal and normative, but the physical structure of his or her brain.

Stories take centre stage in early childhood brain development: both the small-s stories that we read and the capital-S Stories that guide us in choosing which small-s stories to read and tell. The number and tone of words spoken in the home, and the narrative arc of the stories told furnish a child with a posture toward the world and the tools with which to navigate it. If words are few, the tone negative, and the Story tragic, then children naturally act out a social tragedy. Or, if parents encourage their children to pursue success at all costs, the children will ignore or trample others in the pursuit of their own "success." In contrast to both of these, parents who celebrate goodness, truth, and beauty in stories don't merely tell their children to sit up and be quiet. They show them honour and respect in well-crafted stories, filled with great heroes. For better or worse, whether thoughtfully or carelessly, children are shaped—quite literally—by Stories.

Of all the dimensions of human development that parents influence in the early years, none is more important than the cultivation of virtue, because virtue energizes and

guides the cultivation of every other skill. Consider the virtue of patience. Learning to delay gratification is a key part of the toddler years. Young children who learn patience through stories, modelling, and practice are primed for a life of learning. They form healthier relationships with others; they acquire other secondary skills and virtues by patient perseverance; and they enjoy the delight of learning. For toddlers (and most of us bigger folks) lectures can't compare to literature in portraying and forming character. Gladys Hunt [writes](#), "Good literature teaches more than we know. Example always speaks louder than precept, and books can do more to inspire honor and tenacity of purpose than all the chiding and exhortations in the world."

Stories, virtue formation, and neuroscience are intertwined. Empirical research shows emphatically that character (what social scientists sometimes call "[non-cognitive skills](#)") matters tremendously for individual brain development and for flourishing societies. Furthermore, research reveals the unparalleled influence that parents have in nurturing human development. But scientific research, by its very nature, cannot tell us what is good and true and beautiful. Anthropological research can tell us what overlap there is among the values and virtues of diverse cultures. But it cannot tell us whether this reflects the way things really ought to be; it can only describe the way things are.

Thus the interrelationship among early nurture, virtue formation, Stories, and neuroscience creates a problem: the Virtue Problem. This is perhaps the most pressing problem of our time, for it will shape whether we and our children and grandchildren live in just, flourishing societies or in oppressive, toxic societies. In our globalizing, pluralist age we are commanded to choose our own Story and select our own values. From what stance can we call others (to say nothing of our own children!) to virtue if our vision of virtue is based on our own self-chosen Story? When someone asks, "Why should I listen to you?" or, in the language of a two-year-old, "Who made you the boss of me?" what can we say?

The answer is the Story, the Gospel Story, because it is a new starting place. It is not a self-chosen Story. It is the Story in which we are chosen and of which we become active characters. To offer any other answer is to capitulate to other Stories that make ultimate claims. We believe that God created this good and beautiful world, and humanity in his image to enjoy a full and fulfilling relationship with him, with one another, and with the created world—that we might individually and communally glorify him by reflecting his image. This beautiful world was plunged into futility, pain, and death through our own fault. We broke faith and relationship with our loving Creator by disobedience, and were thereby estranged from him, from one another, and from the created world. Our dignity as his image-bearers was disfigured. Into this beautiful but tragically broken world, the Lord Jesus came to reconcile us to the Father through the cross, and to dwell in and with us by the Spirit. He came to restore us to one another across ethnic, religious, and social lines—even across time; he came to renew us in the wise stewardship of his beautiful yet

broken creation; and he came to redeem us by enabling us to bear his image in a new way—the likeness of the Son, who is the image of the invisible God. He accomplished this in stunning reversal by becoming sin for the sinful on the stage of human history, and by imputing virtue to the vile. In Samuel Crossman's beautiful words, it is "love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be." We, the reconciled, restored, renewed, redeemed community, are the foretaste of the new creation, and are entrusted with the message of reconciliation as we look forward to the End of the Story, the new heavens and the new earth.

In confessing "we believe," we are committing ourselves to the truth of a Story that cannot be demonstrated on the principles of any other Story, and which will be only fully manifest at the end of history. This is The Virtue Story into which we initiate our children in the [liturgies of life](#)—that the virtues which we pursue and into which we grow are imputed to us by grace, and are cultivated in us through the obedience of faith. Therefore we must be very humble, and very bold. Our confidence that the Gospel Story is true, not merely for those who have already received grace, but for all people, constrains us to tell it to all.

We must tell this Story in the context of virtue formation in early childhood, but not merely because "certain non-cognitive skills produce desirable individual and societal outcomes," for then we have made the Gospel the servant of another Story. It is not that we simply want kids to walk quietly in the library and not throw sand at the playground. Our hope is infinitely larger than that. We are bound to tell the Gospel Story because it is true. It preserves us from despair in our persistent failures, and from the illusion that we have any virtues apart from grace. The Gospel calls us to patiently love, work with, and respect those who don't accept this Story precisely because of our confidence that it is through no merit or achievement of our own we have received grace and authority "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations" (Romans 1:5). We can boldly offer this hope to young children and their parents alike—just as the Saviour called the little children to come to Him and continually pursued the disfigured, sinful, and outcast in glorious redeeming love.

The public recognition of the centrality of character and the sensitivity of early brain development provides a golden opportunity: to learn to publicly and humbly tell the glorious Gospel story of virtue.

Topics: [Parenting](#) [Education](#)



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 BIO

Nick Spencer



The Common Good has become a well-used phrase, but it is often misapplied and misunderstood - and while this is the case its potential to transform cannot be fully realised. The great institutions are vital to building the Common Good, not least the Anglican Church - but how might a better understanding help the Church apply the idea more effectively?

The opinion piece below is an amalgam of two lectures, given by Nick Spencer, Director of Research for Theos, as part of the Bishop of Winchester's Lent Lectures for 2018. Nick was commissioned by Bishop Tim Dakin to excavate the idea of the Common Good and examine how it might fit into the tradition of Anglican Social Thought, and suggest what it might look like in practice today.

A much used phrase

Together for the Common Good describes the Common Good as “an idea whose time has come”. They’re right.

Over 20 years ago, the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales published a substantial report entitled *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching*. Five years later, its 2001 election publication was called *Vote for the Common Good*, which was followed by *The European Common Good* in 2004 and *Choosing the Common Good* in 2010.

The last of Professor Michael Sandel's 2009 BBC Reith Lectures was entitled ‘A New Politics of the Common Good’. In July 2017, the Church of England's York Synod called for “values-based politics based on the common good”. The Green Party entitled its 2015 election manifesto *For the Common Good*. I have a Hansard alert set up for the phrase “common good”, which comes up at least once or twice a week in Parliament.

Everyone, it seems, is using it. The problem is not everyone is using it in the same way. With popularity has come imprecision. At best, the Common Good means community, caring and cuddles. At worst, it is simply a way of virtue signalling who you are against.

But what does the Common Good mean?

To my mind, the best definition of the phrase is that found in Catholic Social Teaching, first articulated in The Second Vatican Council, namely that the Common Good is:

“the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily”

This is a careful definition, and avoids falling into the error of confusing Common Good with a single vision to which an entire nation, and especially the government of that nation must subscribe and work towards.

In this understanding The Common Good does not replace other more local goods but acts as a facilitator to them. By this reading, in Oliver O'Donovan words:

“political authority has no special mandate to pursue a public goal, “the common good” conceived as a giant Millennium Dome. Mankind in his and her native social existence, to the extent that that is not impeded and hindered by sin, serves the common good simply by being *societas humana* [human society]. Government's task is to respond to threats to the common good, repelling whatever obstructs our acting freely together.” [*Ways of Judgment*, 67]

Not only is this understanding of the Common Good the most precise and realistic - crucially, it plays right to Anglicanism's strengths.

But before I point out why, and how Anglicans and contribute to this vision, I want briefly to explore Common Good ideas within Anglicanism itself.

Anglican understandings of the Common Good

It is fair to say that there is not much of a tradition of talking about the Common Good in Anglican social theology.

That said, there is a mainstream strand of Anglican social thought, starting with Frederick Denison Maurice in the mid-19th century, which places an emphasis on themes and motifs that correspond closely with the Common Good.

Maurice rejected the individualism of much political economy and much theology of his time, and emphasised in its place social fraternity and fellowship, communion and co-operation. He began with the infinite goodness of Christ rather than corrupting sin of Adam as the foundation for human nature. For him, the human tendency towards moral failure remained strong, but it was no longer primary. Maurice's Christ was not simply the object of worship but also “the elder Brother of the race and the head of it.”

Maurice emphasised Christ's incarnation as a counterbalance to the evangelical focus on his atonement. The incarnation was the centrepiece of history, in which God dwelt among and shared the sufferings of his creation, thereby sanctifying it and granting it a spiritual significance that a concentration on atonement, judgement and other-worldly salvation lost.

He also placed a singular focus on the Kingdom of God. Maurice tried to straddle the gap that had threatened to swallow so many Christian radicals in the early nineteenth century. On the one side, which he rejected, was the Kingdom of God as entirely other, restricted to the hereafter, simply to be anticipated with patience and perseverance. On the other side, which he also rejected, was the secular radical cry that all theology was humbug, and a distraction from the proper human task of building heaven on earth, here and now. For Maurice, Christ had inaugurated his kingdom and the job of Christians was to recognise this and participate in it.

In various different guises these thoughts, which may not seem radical now but were far more so in the mid-19th century, have been played out in different social, political and economic theologies through the last 150 years. Our good is to be sought in relationship – in being with and for the other – and the role of government, to use O'Donovan again, is to “respond to threats to that common good, repelling whatever obstructs our acting freely together.”

In their different ways, and to different degrees, Octavia Hill, Brooke Foss Westcott, Henry Scott Holland, the Christian Social Union, William Temple and the tradition in his name, and Rowan Williams have held this line, although that does not mean they have spoken with a single voice about what exactly the state should do. To be fair, there is a pretty broad range of views on that question among Catholics too, even with a much better structured magisterium. We shouldn't set the bar of unity too high!

There is, therefore, a live strand of Anglican Social Thought that echoes the concerns and ideas of the Common Good, even if it doesn't always use the same language. However, my argument is that a distinct Anglican *contribution* to the common good comes less from Anglican *theology*, and more from Anglican structure and geography.

A distinct contribution rooted in structure and geography

The Anglican Church is a global communion with 39 Member Churches, in around 165 countries with over 80 million adherents. The Church of England is the established church, with 2 provinces, 2 Archbishops, and 106 diocesan and suffragan bishops, 26 of whom sit in the House of Lords. This established church has what it calls “a regional presence”, with 42 dioceses and cathedrals, each serving as the mother church of an area, and very often as a *de facto* regional centre of identity and pride. It is also, of course, an emphatically local church, with 16,000 churches in 12,500 parishes, covering every inch of the country, boasting a living Christian presence in every community.

I've left out many other important levels, such as deaneries, chaplaincies or schools. The point is that Anglicanism itself isn't just “the Church of England” but exists in lots of different geographical formulations. And this makes talking about the Anglican contribution to the common *goods* that lies at the heart of *The Common Good* eminently appropriate. It means we can legitimately ask about the common good of which the Communion is most conscious and suited, and that of the established church, and the diocese, and the parish. Let me take each of these four in turn.

The Communion

When we think about global common goods we need to be careful not to slip back into the vague usages of the term with which we started. Global common goods are those which are *intrinsically* shared – ones that it is impossible or at least very difficult for me to enjoy if you don't. And they are also – going back to our definition above – the kinds of goods that enable the flourishing of more localised common goods.

The obvious global common good here is environmental care. Climate stability is self-evidently a global and an irreducibly common good. For all that the rich feel they are able to insure and protect ourselves

against its consequences, ultimately – whether directly through extreme weather conditions, or indirectly through crop failures, food prices, or large-scale environmental migration or resource wars – we can't. We are all in the environment together.

Mention of war highlights a second global good which is identifiably common, namely peace, stability and security. Much as some global leaders rhetorically favour building walls, pulling up drawbridges and reversing into what it feels like a giant private housing estate, the reality is that in the world today more than ever before, the violence and insecurity of one region, or even one country, is the risk of violence and insecurity of all. The Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War taught Europe that. These are the kinds of global common goods to which the Anglican Communion does and should contribute. I want to give a couple of examples of this.

First: the environment. It is telling that one of 'The Five Marks of Mission' is to “strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.” As part of this endeavour, the Anglican Communion Environmental Network was established as a response to the 1998 Lambeth Conference and its desire that such issues be given greater visibility and better coordination across the Anglican Communion. The ACEN is mainly a forum for information exchange and focus for pledges, but it did issue its own vision statement, under the chair of Archbishop Thabo Makgoba in 2015, in the same year as *Laudato Si'*, although with somewhat less global attention.^[i]

In one regard, the Anglican Communion is as helpless as everyone else when it comes to safeguarding the global environmental commons. However, the very fact that the Communion is a global forum in which different voices can speak in palpable solidarity about this issue, and to bring moral force to bear on global institutions, is not to be sniffed at.

Second: reconciliation. Reconciliation is a particular focus of Justin Welby. In his words,

“In a world plagued by conflict, division and indifference, the Church has a crucial role to play as a community of reconcilers. Jesus calls every one of us to love God, our neighbours, ourselves and our enemies – a challenging command, with nobody left out.”

One example of this is the Anglican Communion's Indaba project. This involves people from different dioceses across the world visiting each other to learn about life and mission in their contexts as a precursor to conversations about the similarities and differences they have encountered. Theologians from Tanzania to India, Kenya to Canada have developed a range of theological papers and resources, to reflect on conflict transformation from around the world and offer guides to enable people to implement reconciliation programmes and events in their church and community.

Third: diplomacy. Diplomacy might easily be subsumed under a category of reconciliation, but I thought it was worth pulling it out separately. As noted, Justin Welby has made Reconciliation a particular focus of his archiepiscopacy and in his position as head of the Communion he is one of 18 global leaders asked by UN Secretary-General António Guterres to form a new High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, and to provide advice on mediation initiatives as part of the UN's “surge in diplomacy for peace”.

At a more bilateral level, Justin Welby, partly as head of the Established Church but also as head of the Communion, has been active in bridge building with the Russian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Kirill made his first visit to Britain as head of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2016, a visit that included time with the Queen which further underlies the Church's soft power. A year later, Archbishop Welby made a return visit Moscow for talks, primarily about the persecution of middle eastern Christians but also about relations between Britain and Russia. *Prospect* magazine discussed this relationship in its January 2018 edition, going as far as to say that:

“Official state-to-state connections between London and Moscow are in tatters, as icy as during parts of the Cold War. But when it comes to communication between the countries’ religious leaders, a definite rapprochement is underway... When it comes to healing schisms, perhaps religious leaders have something to teach their political counterparts.”

The place of the Anglican Communion in fostering these global common goods is inevitably different from what it was. Now that we have more or less instant global communication and see more images from abroad in a day than people a century ago would have seen in a lifetime, the place of a global network is more limited.

But visibility is not the same as solidarity, and a network is not a Communion. The Anglican Communion can have a purchase on global common goods of peace, security, diplomacy, and environmental conditions and resources that is not attainable at more local levels.

The Established Church

Moving from a global level to a national one seems easy, if only because most of us here will naturally think nationally. We are far more familiar with a national political infrastructure than we are with European or global institutions, and I guess we recognise Anglicanism first and foremost in its established English incarnation.

That said, national *common* goods are not that straightforward. On the one hand, some common goods, like a stable climate, are self-evidently global. On the other, some common goods are really *public* goods, amenable to political supervision and co-ordination but not really to any action of an established church.

National defence, education, transportation infrastructure, public safety, sanitation, utilities, rule of law and functioning legal systems are all public goods but it is hard to see what role, if any, the Church of England has in securing them.

There is, however, another way of looking at this. The debate over whether and how human societies progress is a live one. Increasingly, historians and political scientists argue that it is the presence of 'inclusive institutions' – as opposed to 'extractive' institutions – that determine the peace, affluence and relational health of a society.

'Inclusive institutions' are those that:

“allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in [political and] economic activities that make best use of their talents and skills and that enable individuals to make the choices they wish”

'Extractive institutions', by contrast, serve the personal goods of leaders, elites and cliques, and/or exclude minorities (and even majorities) from the common life of a nation.

Human nature being what it is, we are constantly having to safeguard against slippage. Particularly in times of financial, political or social uncertainty, there is a real pressure, even in long-lived polities like our own, to slide away from those institutions that safeguard social wellbeing.

I would argue that, at its best, this is precisely what the Church of England has fortified in the past. In the mystical thing of which we hear so much – the national conversation – the established Church has, through having one foot both at the centre of power and one at the grass roots level across the country, managed to integrate voices and perspectives into a conversation.

The person who has best phrased this over recent years was the Queen herself who remarked during her

2012 Jubilee:

"The concept of our established Church is occasionally misunderstood and, I believe, commonly under-appreciated. Its role is not to defend Anglicanism to the exclusion of other religions. Instead, the Church has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country."

One might conceivably make the same point about Rowan Williams' Sharia lecture, except for the fact that the incomprehension and furore surrounding it ended up having a more destabilising than stabilising effect. You could also make the same argument for the way in which bishops in the Lords bring to heart of that national conversation voices from dioceses and parishes that might not otherwise be heard. Supremely, you could make this point about the function the church plays within our constitutional set up in the first place. In the words of John Milbank and Adrian Pabst:

"establishment means that the Church qualifies the authority of the state as less than final and absolute. The role of the established church is neither to sanctify the state nor to supplant the government but rather to transform public institutions in the direction of both individual virtue and public honour."

A number of years ago, Theos conducted a research project into the question of who actually now wants a Christian coronation, given that the next one, whenever it is, will be in a country radically different from that of 1953. The answer, it seems, was the British people, and not only those who considered themselves Christian. We should not underestimate the significance and power of this event, nor the sense of stability and inclusion it has generated.

What the established church can do, at its best, is to facilitate that common conversation, incorporating new voices – especially those from faith groups otherwise alienated by the creeds of liberalism, secularism and consumerism – and grounding the debate in an ethical framework that is humanistic, in the true sense of that word.

Now, there is an important caveat here. None of this is *essential* to the church, or rather none of it should be. There are political mechanisms of representation for minorities. The media can – or at least should be able to – facilitate a national conversation. And the church could be disestablished tomorrow which destroying the fabric of the constitution. A Catholic colleague of mine was less than impressed by our coronation project and there is a real danger of such data being used to shore up a self-serving agenda and fortify the "effortless superiority" that allegedly accompanies establishment. I for one would not go to the stake over establishment.

However, being where we are and when we are, I do think that the Anglican Church in its established format today can and does serve a national common good by framing and grounding our shared life in humanistic commitments that make life better for all of us.

The Diocese

When one moves to a diocesan level, it becomes a little more difficult to imagine what kind of common good we are talking about. After all, beyond the church, people don't naturally think in dioceses, and even regions have only an attenuated grasp on our national imagination. That said, I don't think it's an entirely irrelevant level when we are thinking about common goods.

A few years ago, Theos, in partnership with The Grubb Institute, conducted a project for the Association of English Cathedrals, looking at the present and future of English cathedrals. A number of things emerged from this study, but the one I want to highlight in this context was the ways in which cathedrals stood for the identity of the region in which they were. The vast majority of people surveyed agreed that "this cathedral reaches out beyond the Church of England", or that it was "a 'hub' to engage the life of the wider

community”.

Cathedrals were icons of local identity. They were authentic places, simultaneously conveying the history and tradition both of Christianity and of the area that they inhabit. This was not limited to believers: over 90% of the ‘non religious’ group (generally the most hostile) said they felt connected with history and tradition in the cathedral. Nor did it come at the cost of being Christian. Well over a half (59%) of church non-attenders within the local survey sample agreed that, “the cathedral gives me a greater sense of the sacred than I get elsewhere”.

It would be easy to sniff at such factors, or to point out that the Cathedral is not the same as the diocese. However, in an age of relentless cultural and geographical homogenisation we might briefly dwell on this fact. Most people want to live somewhere, rather than anywhere or nowhere. In an age of commodification, authenticity is prized and cathedrals offer their locales precisely that kind of authenticity.

Put another way, the common good that is on offer here is pride, a shared sense of respected identity, a sense of commitment to a place that has its own character, significance and worth, that is not replicable or tradeable. If people like and feel connected to whether they live, they tend to make an effort to maintain, protect, preserve and improve it; if they don’t, they don’t. It’s the difference between buying and renting.

In a small but significant way, cathedrals could do that for their towns and diocese. The extent to which they did naturally varied, not least according to the history of the diocese in question. But the way in which ex-mining communities in Durham refer to the Cathedral as “wor cathedral”, and use it, for example, in the traditional Miners’ Gala, and are now joined now by communities that were never part of the industry but have their new banners as an expression of their pride, and all of which ends with a service in the Cathedral, celebrating and blessing what the banners represent – none of this should be ignored. This is a sense of regional pride that is a deep and intangible common good for which the Cathedral can play a crucial role.

The Parish

The level of Anglicanism with which I imagine we are most familiar and comfortable is the parish.

Of course, as units of geography go, parishes are almost completely irrelevant to the vast majority of people in England, including churchgoers. Most parishes will not have beaten their bounds for quite a few years.

I think that in itself is an irrelevance, however. If we don’t understand the idea of the *parish* readily, we do not get the idea of the local and for all intents and purposes they are exchangeable. The word parish, after all, derives (ultimately) from the Greek work *paroikos*, coming from *para* meaning near and *oikos* meaning house.

The employment structure and strapline of the Church of England – if I can use such terms – emphasise this: a living Christian presence in every community. Even if not every parish, let alone every parish church, has its ordained minister - the comprehensive organisation of the church around local communities and commitments is what makes the established church what it is.

The common goods that can be served here are, I think, clearer than at other levels. Because, we can – without stretching the imagination too far – envisage the parish as *the level about which we can have a meaningful, embodied and committed conversation*.

At a prosaic but not unimportant level, you see this in the way in which churches and church halls facilitate

hustings every five or so years. It's one of those things that is, again, easy to sniff at but given how Western democracy has at least one of its roots in congregational worship in the 17th century, and how today the bigger forums for this kind of political debate are characterised by bad faith and controlled communication, these local forms of democratic assessment are also important forms of local solidarity.

One might say that any place can do this, and that is half true. There is no problem in holding hustings in schools or... well, to be honest, it's usually schools. But this fact then points to a second fuller contribution to local common goods at the parish level.

A number of years ago Theos tried but failed to get off the ground a project, in partnership with the National Churches Trust about churches building communities. The National Churches Trust is interested in buildings but between us we recognised that there is an important and symbiotic connection between buildings, congregations and community.

'Community' is, of course, the watchword of the day: everyone is for community, no one is against it. However, the term is used with such elasticity that it is easy to assume that community just happens. Where two or three people are gathered together, there is a community. The reality is more complex and more challenging. Community, in the fuller sense of the word, doesn't just happen but needs certain things.

If people are going to gather together they need space – ideally sheltered, heated, well-maintained, clean, and accessible space – to do so. If they are going to drink, they need facilities. If they are going to eat, they need a kitchen (and tables, chairs, etc.). If they are going to engage in activities, they need equipment. And all of this requires investment, maintenance and on-going funding.

Alongside this essential physical infrastructure, community also needs people: staff and volunteers who can organise and manage. Moreover, true community needs an *ethic of hospitality*, a mindset that welcomes, hosts and affirms other people. After all, most towns are packed with the kind of places in which people can congregate and commune. They're called cafés, or restaurants, or pubs. There is something significantly different about those places whose doors are open on a non-commercial and non-contractual basis. For community to be community, physical, human, and moral capital are all necessary.

I will return to the last of these factors in a minute but it should be reasonably clear that this is the kind of local common good that churches do day in day out across the country.

Over and above Sunday services and weddings, funerals and baptisms, the research we have done shows that they are used by:

- those with particular social needs (e.g. foodbanks, addiction support, depression, counselling, debt advice, credit unions, crime prevention, healthy living);
- those in need of pastoral and relationship support (e.g. marriage preparation and guidance, separation and divorce support, befriending and bereavement services);
- those with young families (mums and toddlers, dads and lads groups);
- those with older children and young adults (e.g. breakfast, after-school, holiday clubs, youth work, parenting support);
- and those in the evening of their lives (coffee mornings, lunch clubs, outings).

They are used, as we have seen, for democratic processes (e.g. hustings, polling stations) and for cultural events (arts, music, theatre, film, dance). They provide an unparalleled breadth of opportunities for

volunteering; for meeting, feeding, befriending others; in short for building community.

A survey we commissioned from ComRes when working with the Church Urban Fund a few years ago showed that around half the adult population in England had used what might be loosely called a ‘social service’ at some point in the last 12 months and half of those did so via a church (though, note, not necessarily an Anglican church; the distinction is irrelevant to most people ‘out there’). ResPublica’s report *Holistic Mission: Social Action and the Church of England* which spoke enthusiastically of the church’s hyper-localism made a similar point.

Moreover, research commissioned by Ecclesiastical insurers last year showed that this social role of churches is invisible, with three quarters of the public not aware of church activities outside of religious services.

Now there are a few important caveats to get in here. First, as noted: neither of these surveys was about Anglican churches alone. Second: there is nothing in principle which says that this kind of community building activity can *only* be done by the established church, or by Christians, or by faith groups. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Jesus did not come commanding his followers to hold coffee mornings and hustings. He did not even come heralding the common good.

Isn’t this vision of what the parish can contribute to the local common good rather selling the Kingdom of God short?

Well, I think it’s here that we might return to pick up some of the theology we talked about briefly earlier, as it helps us understand why these open doors and this spirit of hospitality are integral, not only to local common goods, but also to the gospel.

Places of Love

The Christian view of the human – of which Anglican theologians like Maurice, Temple and Williams wrote cogently, albeit in different registers – is of the human person, a material *being* who through relationship and communication is also a *person*.

“The self is not a substance one unearths by peeling away layers until one gets to the core”, Rowan Williams has observed. Rather it is something sculpted by relationships, by love. In such exchanges, we discover “the distinction between that mysterious, relational, conversational, environment-building activity that we call ‘the person’, and the individual as simply one example of a certain kind of thing.” [Theos, 2012]

Put another way, it is no accident that there are these buildings called churches and these things called congregations that stand at the heart of virtually every settlement to which we give the name “community”, across the country.

If the second greatest command is to love your neighbour, and if your neighbour like you, is a frail material being, then your shared good, your local common good, is served by arenas of un-coerced and non-contractual communication. Or, less pretentiously, places of love. The parish serves the local common good by being a place for that kind of gathering and mutual service.

But it only does so, by imitating and drawing sustenance from Christ, as the model of a life of relationship, a life of gift, a life of true communication. The physical infrastructure of the building and the “human capital” of the congregation are only animated by the spirit of generosity and hospitality. Communities of this nature are only sustained by love and love only avoids being exhausted by remaining in Christ. Loving neighbour in this way comes after, and as a result of, the love of God.

“The deeper I go into the attempt to understand myself, who and what I am, the more I find that I am already grasped, addressed, engaged with,” observed Rowan Williams in 2012’s annual Theos lecture. “Before anything else happens I am in relation to a non-worldly, non-historical everlasting attention and love, which is God.” [Theos 2012]

This being so, we need to guard against the very proper and important local common good served at the parish level from becoming another social service provision. To be clear: it’d be better for churches to be like this than to be a club for like-minded believers or worse. But for it to serve the local common good, it needs to be cognisant of the heart that fuels such service. In other words, in trying to be and reflect Christ in local communities, we should also not neglect speaking about and introducing others to him.

We are familiar with the Christian Social Action in which congregations serve local common goods. But, as I have called it elsewhere, we need to shift the lens here towards 'Christian Social Liturgy', action that carries the visible signature of the love of God.

Conclusion

Let me conclude.

Writing on the role of the Church of England in fostering the common good, John Milbank and Adrian Pabst have said:

“As the established church with its unique parochial system, the Church of England is exceptionally well positioned to offer courageous leadership and translate perennial principles into transformative practices.

Far from being a mere ‘super-NGO’ or the poster-institution and moral conscience of civil society, the Church of England is a polity in her own right that co-constitutes together with Parliament the shared public realm under the aegis of the monarchy.

In this manner, the established church has a particular duty to promote a sense of individual virtue and public honour on which a society governed by reciprocity or gift-exchange depends. The Church of England is indispensable to a new politics of the common good beyond the liberalism of both left and right that underpins the global ‘market-state’.”

This isn’t a bad summary of what I’ve been talking about here.

We sell the Common Good short if we only talk about *the* Common Good. It is better understood, to paraphrase its definition in the encyclical *Gaudium et Spes*, as:

“the total of those social, political, legal and cultural conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to recognise, seek and achieve their own various more local common goods”

Looking at it this way avoids subsuming local goods into some overarching national good, a "Millennium Dome of Common Good" as in O’Donovan’s phrase.

And it opens the door for a realistic contribution from Anglicanism that, for all its theological breadth, not only has a live tradition of social thought that is consistent with Common Good thinking but also, crucially, has a structure and geographical identity allows it to serve the common good.

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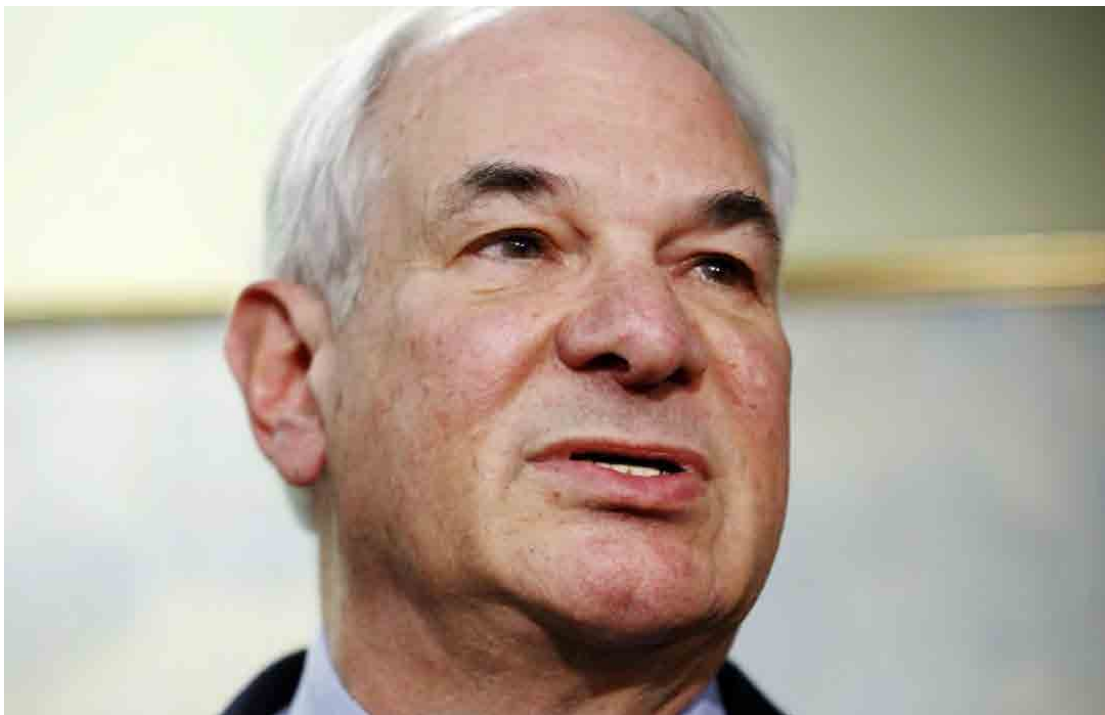
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Proposed Christian law school should be denied accreditation, Clayton Ruby says

B.C.'s Trinity Western University is hoping to become the first Christian law school, but lawyers say the move would be fundamentally inconsistent with Canadian law.



Lawyer Clayton Ruby says that a proposed law school at Trinity Western University, a Christian school in British Columbia, should not be accredited. He says the school's policies discriminate against homosexuality. (MARK BLINCH / REUTERS FILE PHOTO)

By **JEFF GREEN** Staff Reporter
Fri., March 1, 2013

A proposed Christian law school would be fundamentally inconsistent with Canadian law and should be denied accreditation, prominent lawyer Clayton Ruby says.

In a letter addressed to the Federation of Law Societies of Canada, he and three other lawyers, including a professor of law at the University of Ottawa, are asking the federation to block the accreditation of a Christian law school at British Columbia's [Trinity Western University](#) (TWU), claiming the school's policies discriminate against homosexuality.

"It is just wrong to have a law school approve discrimination in its own structure," Ruby said Friday. "That kind of discrimination, which denies some people the right to equality, is fundamentally inconsistent with law and democracy."

TWU requires students to sign the [Community In Covenant](#), a contract requiring students to accept "the Bible as the divinely inspired, authoritative guide for personal and community life." Included in that would be to abstain from same-sex intimacy. Violators to the contract risk discipline, including expulsion.

In 2012, the school applied for accreditation to make it the first Christian law school in Canada. Ruby argues that TWU policy that blocks homosexuality in its halls is discriminatory.

"This alone makes it incompetent to deliver legal education in the public interest," Ruby wrote in the letter dated Feb. 28.

The federation would not comment on the school's application, citing confidentiality.

In late January, deans from law schools across the country wrote a similar letter opposing the school.

"In our view, this is a covenant that clearly contemplates discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation," Bill Flanagan, president of the Canadian Council of Law Deans and Dean of Law at Queen's University, said in January.

In response, Flanagan said the federation said it doesn't have the jurisdiction to consider who gets into the program, and can only examine the program itself.

TWU has been down this road before. In 2001, the British Columbia College of Teachers refused to accredit TWU because it felt such accreditation would violate its own discrimination policy. The case went to the [Supreme Court of Canada](#).

"The court said that what they're doing is discrimination against the human rights code of B.C., in that case," Ruby said. Because of a religious exemption in B.C. law, the school was accredited.

Janet Epp Buckingham, an associate professor TWU, interprets the decision in a different way.

"I would argue what the court said was that TWU, as a Christian university, had the right to have Christian principles as a foundation for the university," Epp Buckingham said. She said she would see no conflict in Canadian law with Christian values, even as a barrier to taking law at TWU.

"We do not exclude gays and lesbians from our campus; we are not violating Canadian law," Epp Buckingham said.

The New York Times

A Renaissance on the Right



By David Brooks
Opinion Columnist

April 12, 2018

What's bad for the gavel is good for the pen. The Republican Party is in the midst of a cataclysmic transformation. But all the political turmoil is creating a burst of intellectual creativity on the right.

Young, fresh writers are bursting on the scene: Sohrab Ahmari, Helen Andrews, Charles Cooke, Mollie Hemingway, Jason Willick, Michael Brendan Dougherty, Gracy Olmstead, James Poulos, Oren Cass, Matthew Schmitz and many others.

Suddenly fundamental issues, like the values of the liberal democratic order itself, are up for debate. Some conservatives are laying down comprehensive critiques of the way our society is organized. Modern liberal capitalism is too soulless, they say, too atomizing, too destructive of basic institutions like family, faith and village that give life meaning. Liberal individualism doesn't produce the sort of virtuous, self-restrained people that are required to sustain it.

Other conservatives are rising to defend that order, including National Review's Jonah Goldberg, who later this month comes out with his epic and debate-shifting book, "Suicide of the West."

Goldberg points out that for eons human beings were semi-hairless upright apes clumped in tribes and fighting for food. But about 300 years ago something that he calls "the Miracle" happened. It was a shift in attitude. For thousands of years, societies divided people into permanent categories of race or caste. But, Goldberg writes, "the Miracle ushered in a philosophy that says each person is to be judged and respected on account of their own merits, not the class or caste of their ancestors."

That belief, championed by John Locke, or a story we tell about Locke, paved the way for human equality, pluralism, democracy, capitalism and the idea that a person can have a plurality of identities and a society can contain a plurality of moral creeds.

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It also proved to be the goose that laid the golden egg. Economic growth exploded. The American founding asserted that Lockean ideas are universal. And nothing had ever succeeded like America. Between 1860 and 1900 alone, America's population doubled and its wealth grew fivefold.

But we have stopped teaching about the Miracle, Goldberg says, and stopped feeling grateful for it.

Tribalism was always there, lurking under the surface. It returns now as identity politics, which is reactionary reversion to the pre-modern world. Identity politics takes individual merit out of the moral center of our system and asserts that group is, Goldberg says, "an immutable category, a permanent tribe." Identity politics warriors claim they are fighting for social justice, but really it's just the same old thing, Goldberg argues, a mass mobilization to gain power for the tribe.

Earlier movements wanted America to live up to its ideals. Today's identitarians doubt the liberal project itself.

Identity politics gained traction on the left, but now the Trumpian right has decided to fight fire with fire. Populism is a form of identity politics because it's based on in-group/out-group distinctions. It says anybody who doesn't think or look like us is not a true American.

This tribal mentality is tearing the civic fabric and creates a war of what Goldberg thinks of as "ecstatic schadenfreude" — the exaltation people feel when tribal foes are brought down.

I love the way Goldberg provocatively tells his story, but I partially disagree with it. The central tension in his book is between Locke, who emerges as a rational, calm, pipe-smoking economist, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who emerges as a wild-haired, passionately resentful rock star. The liberal order emerges from the individualism of Locke and is threatened by group consciousness and romantic resentments of Rousseau.

But America is both rational and romantic, both Locke and Rousseau. We have a rationalist constitution, but we have a shared national faith and are an emotional community, rooted in our land, inspired by our history, warmed by the hope of our common future.

The core problem today is not tribalism. It's excessive individualism, which has eaten away at our uniting faith and damaged our relationships with one another. Excessive individualism has left us distrustful and alone — naked Lockeans. When people are naked and alone they revert to tribe. Tribalism is the end product of excessive individualism.

Goldberg is suspicious of nationalism and has a tendency to think that any effort to build a national community puts you on the express lanes on the road to serfdom.

His conservatism is missing the bonding sentiments of Edmund Burke, and the idea that the little platoon of the family is nestled in the emotional platoon of the neighborhood and the emotional platoon of the nation. Tribalism is not the only way to form a group; there's also the redeeming and forgiving love of community, and a shared national faith. Goldberg misses the way Hamilton, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt built a national community that didn't crush local communities but rather reinforced them.

Goldberg is right to fight tribalism on the left and the right. But you can't reweave a fragmented nation by appealing just to Lockean individualism. Gratitude is too weak a glue to hold a diverse nation together. Renewal will come through the communitarians on the right and the left, who seek ways to improve relationships on a household, local and national level.

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A version of this article appears in print on April 13, 2018, on Page A27 of the New York edition with the headline: A Renaissance On the Right



SPHERE SOVEREIGNTY 101

We participate in a vast array of social structures, yet their roles, privileges, and obligations are not addressed in the social contract.

Appears in Fall 2005 Issue: The best of Comment

by Ray Pennings  and James Brink

August 1st, 2005

Be prepared. The old Boy Scout motto rings true in the boardroom as well as it does on the camp site. It's not that I wasn't prepared for the question; in a sense, I've been preparing my whole life for this sort of question. Still, one's language and examples must be appropriate to the situation. My pointer paused while my mind raced.

A moment before, I had been walking through my recent report bearing the hefty title *Competitively Working in Tomorrow's Construction*, explaining to the suits arranged around the table what the organization of work would look like in the construction sector of the future. Construction is a tough pool to stay afloat in, given the up-and-down nature of the industry. In fact, investors use construction as an indicator: where it goes, the rest of the economy is sure to follow. Market uncertainty is not the only variable. Safety regulations, labour laws, union interests, and the price of raw materials can run a company into the ground if it isn't fast on its feet. The men around the table in front of me were leaders in this industry. They were used to playing hardball.

One man had been idly leafing through some of the Work Research Foundation's promotional material while I talked. He seemed interested, yet his expression was quizzical. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him raise an inquiring finger. I stopped, and he leaned his capable bulk forward in the chair.

"Your materials here say that your think tank's mission includes influencing people to a 'Christian view of work'. What does that have to do with this?" He thumped his finger on the construction industry report.

Back to thinking fast. I'd given the speech before, but it wasn't the one I had prepared for this group. But the premise driving our think tank is that core assumptions do shape practical policy. I fumbled for a dry-erase marker.

"What does a Christian view of work have to do with the construction industry? A lot, I'd say. But let me show you what I mean."

I stepped to the whiteboard and started scribbling out an array of lines and circles in black ink. "Let's start with the dominant view of politics, work, and society today. While there are a few nuances that political theorists and historians would want to add, most would agree that we operate in essentially a rights-based model of society. You can use the trilogy of inalienable rights in the American Declaration of Independence—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; others might prefer the list found in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which include certain democratic, mobility, legal, equality, and language rights; still others will reference a decision of some court that provides a newly defined right, such as the right to be protected from my own lack of common sense, meaning that McDonalds is supposed to warn me that the coffee I order is hot.

"The idea that every individual possesses irrevocable rights has led to magnificent changes in how the disadvantaged members of society are treated. It led to emancipation and civil rights for black slaves in the United States, women's suffrage, the virtual elimination of child labour, and humane working conditions for the rest of us. Yet, like an over-exercised muscle that constricts the body's normal movement, rights talk has begun to unbalance the public conversation."

I drew a bunch of small circles on the board. "Most public policy thinking occurs in a framework where we view society as a group of individuals with rights who happen to live in a common area of geography.

"So how do individuals deal with each other and sort out issues when their rights conflict? Put over simply, we count noses and let the majority decide. Now since it's too tedious and time-consuming to do this on every issue, we invented democratic processes to elect representative governments to sort through this stuff for us. But does this mean that government can pass any law it wants? Can it tell you how to run your business?"

Wrong question for this audience. The construction industry needs to contend with extensive environmental, employment, bidding, building code, training, investment, and other regulations. In the course of the conversation, someone asked for an update on one contractor's court challenge to a particular tribunal decision. Not surprisingly, there were more than a few opinions about which regulations needed to be changed or scrapped.

"The fact that we have the right to challenge government decisions through the courts is evidence that a rights-society is not the same as majoritarianism. Our systems are rooted in social contract theory, which has its roots in the ideas of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In a nutshell, this theory says that we are born with all kinds of rights, but through our citizenship, we contract away certain of these rights to the government in order for our own safety and comfort. But the contract has limits. Only items contained in the contract are areas that the government can limit our freedom.

"Now I know we are meeting today to talk about construction regulations, not political theory, but bear with me for a few more minutes and I will try to connect this to everyday practice. There are two key assumptions that guide most thinking about public policy today. First, legitimate authority in the public realm rests only with individuals and with government. Second, every dispute ultimately comes down to some rights-based deal.

"That's why we end up with so many tribunals, courts, contracts, and lawyers. Labour relations becomes a process of negotiating and enforcing contracts. Gender relations becomes avoiding sexual harassment charges and complying with employment and pay equity requirements. Running a local baseball team becomes a process of obtaining criminal checks for coaches, ensuring liability insurance is in place, and ensuring that every child receives exactly the same amount of playing time."

I paused a moment for dramatic effect, went to the board, and drew a thick diagonal line across.

"At the Work Research Foundation, we operate with a very different paradigm. It's labelled 'Christian' because of its history. Those who developed this framework worked from an explicitly religious framework. They believed that the rights-framework I just described reduces human relationships to a single dimension and does not do justice to the full humanity with which people are created. But before we quibble about labels, let me outline what this framework looks like."

I drew another bunch of small circles at the bottom of the board, indicating that these were the same rights-bearing individuals we just talked about on the other side. Above them, I drew a series of boxes. I turned to the gentlemen seated closest to me.

"Got kids?"

"Three teenagers," he replied.

"And I suppose that when you have a disagreement with them, the rights model we just described is what you have in mind to sort through this disagreement?"

The nervous laugh in the room betrayed the tension that the question evoked. I filled in the silence. "I too have a teenager, and while in most cases we sort our disagreements out as two rational people, there are situations that arise where I have said, 'Sorry, but this isn't a democracy. I know you want to do X, but I love you, and I know X isn't good for you, and because I am the parent and get to set the rules around here, X isn't going to happen even though you think you should be able to do it.'"

I went to the board and labelled the first box "Family" and asked, "Would you not agree that when it comes to family relationships, it is love rather than rights that ought to be

the standard by which we define our relationships?"

While at the board, I labelled the second box "Business." "I don't think that either love or rights provide the defining standard for business relationships," I started. They were catching on and completed the sentence without prompting. "Without profits there is no business."

"But is that true of all business relationships?" I asked. "What about this group? You are meeting here as an industry association. Is profit what defines your involvement in this group?" The executive director squirmed, evidently not welcoming a visitor raising a subject too closely linked to organizational finances, so I answered the question myself before the conversation could veer too far off topic.

"Industry associations exist to share information, build networks, and provide a voice for the industry. Of course, having revenues meet expenditures is part of the equation for an industry association—like it is for a family, a church, or any other institution for that matter—a more appropriate measurement standard is stewardship. The task of an industry association is to take care of, or steward, the infrastructure of an industry on behalf of its members."

I went back to the board and labelled several more boxes. "There are service and community groups who define their relationships by solidarity or helping each other. Churches define relationships by their understanding of truth and faith. Government has a box of its own; here rights—although I prefer the broader notion of justice, but let's not make an issue of it here—are the defining standard."

I stepped back from the board so that they all could see as I contrasted the rights-model with the alternative model I was outlining. "In the rights model, there is only one public norm to which we can appeal in our relationships with each other, namely rights. But as we know from our everyday existence, the world doesn't work that way. The rights framework has a validity in the public sphere, but it isn't the only valid public standard. And when we use the rights framework to sort out difficulties in other spheres, we end up using a square peg to fill round holes: the only way it fits is to shave the corners off the peg and lose something.

"Back to the examples I gave earlier, we know that good labour relations is more than having a good contract; that good gender relations is not measured by merely avoiding sexual harassment or keeping up with pay equity; and that a good baseball program is

not measured by keeping the checklist of legal obligations filled out. We know that in different spheres of life we behave and evaluate behaviour by different standards.

"A stark emphasis on rights simply doesn't give us enough options to resolve issues such as privatization in health care and energy, the direction of education, or the jurisdiction of municipalities—and these are all the hottest topics in politics today! Neither social contract theory nor the broader project of modern liberalism tells us anything about society in the big space between the walls of the legislature and the skin of the individual. We participate in a vast array of social structures: families, businesses, unions, churches, schools. Yet despite the immense influence that these institutions wield, their roles, privileges, and obligations are not addressed in the social contract."

I went to the board and drew lines from a circle to each of the boxes. "You see, I am not only a father and husband in my family, I am also in the business world, belong to an industry association, belong to a church, have a child in school. . . . Now let me draw some lines from each of these other individuals, and we begin see a diagram of the world as it is: a complex weave of relationships. This gives us a much richer picture of reality.

"How do these theoretical observations from 30,000 feet up in the air connect to the everyday world of policy on the ground? Let me use the simple example of a screwdriver. Understanding the purpose of the screwdriver is helpful to getting a job done properly. You can use a screwdriver as a wedge or a chisel, sometimes even with successful results. But in the long run, we would all agree that knowing the purpose of the tool and using the proper tool for the appropriate task will get the job done best.

"Rights are like that screwdriver. We've been using the rights tool to sort through problems of business and working with a two-dimensional public-private framework. The real world is multi-dimensional."

As far back as the sixteenth century, the legal theorist Johannes Althusius was arguing that the government, through its powers, "creates a legal and policy framework in which private associations can actualize their rights and acknowledge their responsibilities." The emphasis here is on the associational nature of society. Government is limited, not only by the rights of the lonely individual, but by public and private associations with their own responsibilities and spheres of authority.

In the late nineteenth century, Althusius's idea that the institutions of society have distinct realms of influence and authority was picked up by Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch prime minister at the time. Kuyper was adamant that every social institution is "sovereign in its own sphere." To a large extent, his idea of sphere sovereignty was rooted in his theology. As a strong Calvinist, Kuyper could not attribute to any human institution an absolute authority—not even an absolute temporal authority. To do so would be idolatrous. Thus, placing limitations on the power of government was a simple acknowledgement that only God has the right to absolute sovereign rule.

The timeless truth of God's rule was balanced by the organic, unfolding nature of human society. Kuyper thought that human social structures are latent in creation. As a culture develops, its people discover organizational principles and structures to meet developing needs. These structures are not artificial creations. They reflect something about what it means to be human and in society. Each also has a unique purpose, a mission distinct from that of every other social structure.

In a series of guest lectures he gave at Princeton in 1898, Kuyper argued what we are to understand by this idea of sphere sovereignty:

“

that the family, the business, science, art and so forth are all social spheres, which do not owe their existence to the State, and which do not derive the law of their life from the superiority of the State, but obey a high authority within their own bosom; an authority which rules, by the grace of God, just as the sovereignty of the State does.

The spheres of society are not subsidiaries of the state. Within the bounds of their purposes, they have no other authority than God above them. Kuyper has received criticism on this point. Later thinkers have accused him of advocating sphere autonomy. The criticism is not unwarranted, given such remarks as, "the State . . . has nothing to command in their domain."

However, here domain refers to the unique purposes of the institutions, not the broad scope of their influence. What we need to remember is that while the structures of society are diverse in their purposes they hold many things in common (for example, their members) and often operate in relation to one another. Thus, the state does have an interest in seeing that justice is maintained within and between the different institutions. Kuyper wanted to prevent a hierarchical model of society. His model was horizontal, where each institution assumed authority over its particular function.

Unfortunately, Kuyper's fear of a hierarchical society caused him to see a rift between his social thinking and Catholic social thought, which advocated the notion of subsidiarity. Kuyper's rejection of subsidiarity was based on an obsolete top-down understanding of subsidiarity. In his time, subsidiarity was being interpreted as a bottom-up, decentralized approach. The functions of society, in this new interpretation, are to be performed by the lowest or, rather, the most local community possible.

In some ways, sphere sovereignty and subsidiarity overlap: one leads to a decentralization of role and the other to a decentralization of responsibility. In other words, the institution that picks up responsibility for a task will have the most authority to speak on a particular issue, and it will have the closest proximity to the concerns about, potential solutions to, and results leading from any actions taken.

While there are many discussions that have and will take place between promoters of sphere sovereignty and subsidiarity, on the essential point, we are co-workers: the structures of society, the multitudes of non-governmental institutions, are of key importance in the building of a participatory civil society.

As I explained to my construction industry friends, the mission of the Work Research Foundation is not simply to cultivate a Christian view of work but to do so within the context of sphere sovereignty as part of a framework for thinking about the renewal of the economic sphere and public life.

We have the beginnings of a strategy that will take the idea of sphere sovereignty, originating with Althusius and further developed by Kuyper in the nineteenth century, and translate it into the North American context. Here in Canada, we have been torn between the so-called right and left, not realizing that these were simply two sides of the same coin. We at the WRF want to change the coinage of public conversation. The really interesting debate is not between libertarians and social democrats. The real problem is that of forging a true political and social pluralism.

The institutions of business, family, education, and religion are not simply social clubs or lobby groups. They have unique roles and wield real authority in their respective spheres. It's about time we gave them some respect.

Topics: Religion Culture



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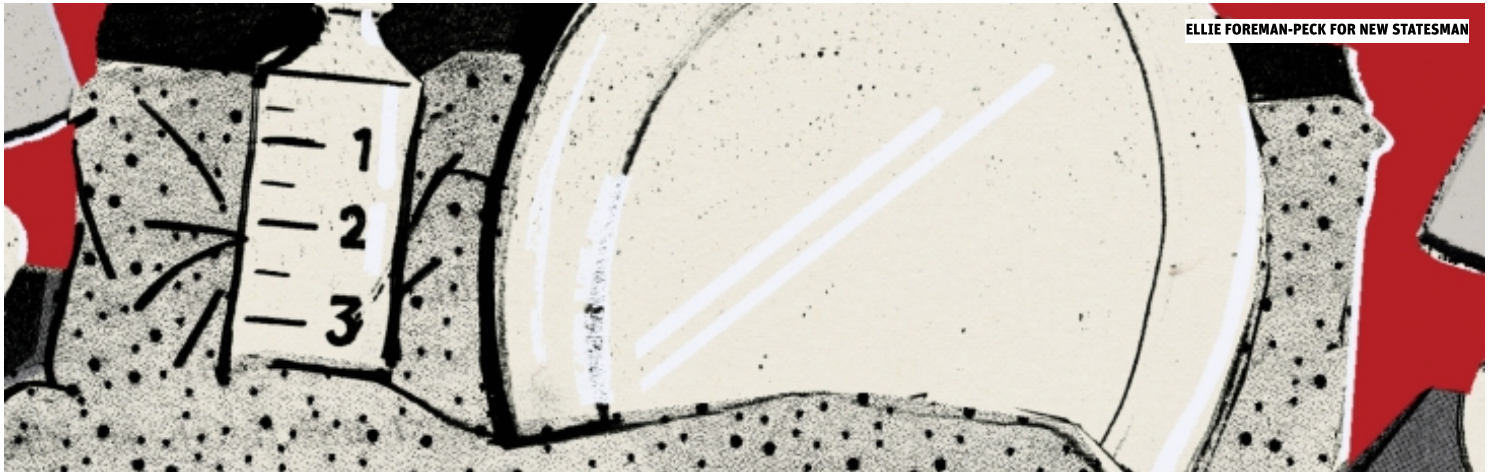
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Is this the end of sex?

A baby grown from a flake of skin or from the genes of three parents – the future of reproduction is mind-boggling.

SUBMIT

By Philip Ball

Is it time to give up sex? Oh, it has plenty to recommend it; but as a way of making babies it leaves an awful lot to chance. I mean, you might have some pretty good genes, but – let's face it – some of them aren't so great. Male pattern baldness, phenylketonuria, enhanced risk of breast cancer: I'm not sure you really want those genetic conditions passed on in the haphazard shuffling of chromosomes after sperm meets egg.

It is already possible to avoid more than 250 grave genetic conditions by genetic screening of few-days-old embryos during *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF), so that embryos free from the genetic mutation responsible can be identified for implantation. But that usually works solely for diseases stemming from a single gene – of which there are many, though most are rare. The procedure is

called pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), and it is generally used only by couples at risk of passing on a particularly nasty genetic disease. Otherwise, why go to all that discomfort, and possibly that expense, when the old-fashioned way of making babies is so simple and (on the whole) fun?

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In *The End of Sex*, Henry Greely, a law professor and bioethicist at Stanford University, argues that this will change. Thanks to advances in reproductive and genetic technologies, he predicts that PGD will become the standard method of conception in a matter of several decades. (Recreational sex might nonetheless persist.)

If that doesn't sound alarming enough, there will be all manner of other seemingly bizarre and alarming options on the menu for making children: using eggs and sperm both made from a single adult (the "uniparent"), or chromosomes tailor-made by chemistry, or IVF between siblings or pensioners, or IVF with the stolen biological detritus of celebrities.

Whether or not you buy Greely's main contention (I don't), *The End of Sex* is eye-opening about the prospects created by biomedical technology. Regardless of how we end up applying it, biotech has already transformed our view of what it means to be(come) human.

Greely does a superb job in his book of explaining the science, as well as the law and politics (at least in the US context), that will make these things possible. At the root is the realisation that human tissue is far more malleable and protean than we had imagined. Every cell in your body – a flake of skin, say – could be a source not just of most or all other tissue types, but of other beings.

Central to these scenarios is the culturing and manipulation of stem cells, the ur-cells from which all others develop. The most versatile are human embryonic stem cells. Because these are "pluripotent" – able to grow into any tissue type – they might be used for regeneration of damaged tissues such as nerves, heart muscle and bone.

But it was first shown in 2014 that they can also be used to generate "gametes": eggs and sperm. So far, such "artificial sperm" consists of immature "spermatids", which lack tails for swimming. That is no obstacle, however. Using methods developed for IVF, the cells can be injected directly into eggs to produce apparently healthy offspring – in mice, at least. If we want to make babies this

way, we'll generally want them to have the parental genes. It is possible to create embryonic stem cells containing the genes of an adult by using methods involved in cloning Dolly the sheep, in which genetic material is transferred from an adult body (somatic) cell into an egg that has had its own chromosomes removed. The egg can then be used to grow an embryo – a clone – from which stem cells can be cultured. When will that happen? Two years ago.



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What's more, in 2007 Japanese researchers reported that a cocktail of biochemical ingredients will convert body (somatic) cells like skin cells directly back into a pluripotent state like that of embryonic stem cells. It's not yet clear if such "induced pluripotent stem cells" can be safely used to grow gametes and embryos. If they can, though, they could provide the most convenient route.

The point is that there are already several possible ways of making gametes starting from ordinary adult cells such as skin. And they will work for either sex. We can, in principle, make sperm from female tissue (which could only produce girls, as there is no Y chromosome) and eggs with a male's genes. The techniques raise the prospect of a new, "easy" form of IVF, without the unpleasant procedure involved in harvesting eggs from the mother: a course of hormones to stimulate egg production, followed by painful invasive surgery to extract them. (Reimplanting the fertilised eggs is much less traumatic.) Instead of all that, eggs – and sperm, if you like – will simply be manufactured from somatic cells. It might be that all you have to do is spit into a bottle.

The other strand of Greely's argument is the burgeoning of genetic testing and genome analysis. PGD was first performed as early as 1989, but at great cost and yielding very limited genetic information. But as gene sequencing continues its rapid advance, we might be able before long to obtain a full genetic readout of an embryo in a day or so, for just a few hundred dollars.

Combine easy IVF with fast, comprehensive and cheap genetic screening, and you have "Easy PGD". Hundreds, even thousands of embryos could be made and screened to find the "best" ones

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for implantation. The only limit on the choice is cost, but Greely is probably right that this will continue to fall precipitously.

He believes that, with the worst inconveniences of IVF banished, ever more parents will stump up a thousand dollars or so for the opportunity to choose the most promising child. These aren't designer babies in the normal sense – their genomes aren't edited cut-and-paste-style, although with the new precision gene-editing technique called CRISPR-Cas9, that might become possible. (It has already been done in human embryos but not for reproduction: the safety issues haven't yet been resolved.) Rather, the embryos for Easy PGD are merely selected from what is available.

The catch is in choosing the best. Greely offers examples of the kind of embryo profile a couple might be given: female, dark eyes and hair, lower-than-average risk of schizophrenia and of breast cancer, higher-than-average risk of colon cancer, 55 per cent chance of top half in SAT tests, lower chance than average of being an athlete . . .

And there lies the problem. How do you weigh up those pros and cons and balance them against analogous outcomes for another ten, or hundred, embryos? You can't.

There is another difficulty: it is not clear how much meaningful detail a genetic diagnosis will provide. Although, as Greely notes, it is already possible to determine characteristics such as eye and skin colour from the genome, personality traits are far more elusive. Intelligence – obviously likely to be high on parents' priority list – exemplifies the problem. It is highly heritable: up to 60 per cent or so of the variations in intelligence in the population can be accounted for by genetic influences. But this doesn't mean it is highly *in*heritable, because the genes responsible seem to be widely dispersed throughout the genome, and almost certainly have other functions, too. Intelligence runs in families, but there is no guarantee you'll get a good dose. While putative "intelligence genes" have been sought for years, so far all we have found is a handful of genes that collectively account for less than two IQ points. Greely thinks this will improve as we get more adept at gene-hunting. I am not so sure.

Prospective new technologies fly only if they find a killer app. Aside from the desire to avoid certain serious but rare illnesses with a very tightly defined genetic component, I'm not convinced that Easy PGD will find one. The "choice" it will offer will be simultaneously overwhelming and ambiguous: no appreciable improvement over the alternative – which, after all, is free, private and rather pleasant.

Yet the important question that Greely's book raises is not so much whether his vision of near-universal "sex-free conception" will come to pass, but how we will cope with what current biological technologies make (literally) conceivable. On two occasions he confesses that, despite having studied this field for many years, he was caught unawares by suggestions of how the technologies might be used. One is "uniparenting", whereby a person (either male or female) has both eggs and sperm made from their somatic cells and used to create a child – who would, because of the recombination of chromosomes during conception, not then be a clone in the strict sense. "The other is "multiplex parenting", in which two people make an embryo which then in effect conceives a child through IVF with another embryo, by mixing their gametes. It would, says Greely, allow a couple to have their "child" mate with someone else without even first being born, let alone reaching puberty." Such ideas, he concludes, are "evidence of just how wide-ranging and non-intuitive the implications of new biological technologies may be for human reproduction". Even the experts concede that their imagination is boggled by the possibilities.

I imagine most people will find these scenarios grotesque. But, safety issues aside, the ethical questions are not straightforward, not least because no philosopher has yet resolved the rights and wrongs of bringing anyone into existence versus their not existing at all. (How are a person's rights respected by denying them existence?) It seems unlikely that ethics committees will be required to rule on such cases in the foreseeable future, but there will surely be other, comparable conundrums we don't yet anticipate. It is not going to be enough to follow the lead of the conservative bioethicist Leon Kass, the prime architect of the ban on federal funding for stem-cell research in the US under the George W Bush administration. Kass advocates what he calls the "wisdom of repugnance", which is a fancy way of saying that we should be guided by gut instinct. Greely sets aside his otherwise cordial and considered demeanour to excoriate this position, and rightly so.

Kass was a master of the slippery-slope argument: had "uniparents" occurred to him, he would certainly have paraded them as evidence of where it all might lead the moment we start being permissive about research. The irony is – and this of course is fully consistent with the conservative position – that the stifling of stem-cell research in the US went hand in hand with an essentially unregulated, shockingly laissez-faire approach to the IVF business. By contrast, the liberal yet strict regulatory environment of the UK, administered by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), has made ours a widely envied model of how to foster a productive and responsible research climate that can supply valuable benefits for human health.

Yet how would an organisation such as the HFEA even begin to navigate the ethics of "uniparents"? One thing seems clear: attempts to reach absolute judgements about rights and

wrongs will probably just hamper serious debate while being outstripped by scientific advances anyway. The guiding question should be not “what?” but “why?” – with the welfare of a child born this way always paramount.

Greely’s book offers a balanced, informed and calm analysis of the legal, ethical and social frameworks within which we must resolve these dilemmas. It is a work neither of advocacy nor of outrage, but is humble and humane – a model of what good bioethics can be. It shows us how to think rather than telling us what to think.

The one factor that I could imagine, with great trepidation, helping techniques such as Greely’s Easy PGD to take off is one that the author doesn’t make much of: peer pressure. Goaded by the distorted agendas of our present education policies, we are encouraged to regard childrearing as a horse race, in which we are made to feel irresponsible if we don’t seize every advantage. If you’ll pay thousands on school fees, or to move to the right catchment area, why not a grand or so more for a spot of genetic tailoring at the outset, even if the benefits are small at best? The bullying by gene analysis companies has already begun. “Genetic testing is a responsibility if you’re having children,” says Anne Wojcicki, chief executive of the US-based 23andMe. And in 2008 the research director of another US firm warned: “If you had the chance to decrease your child’s risk of a disease like diabetes and you didn’t, society would blame you.”

Fear of “society’s blame” will make parents jump through hoops even if they know deep down that it won’t necessarily make their children any healthier, happier or brighter. And however unfair it may seem, it is hard to find compelling arguments for prohibiting the gaming of children’s opportunities by genetic selection. Greely anticipates the kind of sloganeering that will seek to capitalise on these pressures: “You want the best for your child; why not have the best child you can?” If we want to avoid this, we had better renegotiate, rather urgently, the priorities of childrearing, so that parents cease to feel a duty (whether they like it or not) to wring every presumed ounce of potential from their offspring.

If we do not, as Greely points out, a false promise of perfection could drive such expectations to pathological extremes. What if the child genetically selected for athletic ability or artistic talent fails to deliver? (“Do you know what that treatment cost?”) Beyond the valuable ability to avoid certain severely debilitating illnesses, genetic selection of embryos for a “better child” is no more likely to deliver than is the fantasy that cloning will somehow make us immortal. But what it would do is distract from the value of love and nurture, and of making the most of what you have, in

favour of crude biological determinism. Which is why I hope that, in the end, most folks will look at themselves and think: “Well, sex never did me much harm.”

The End of Sex and the Future of Reproduction by Henry T Greely is newly published by Harvard University Press

Philip Ball is most recently the author of *Invisible: The History of the Unseen from Plato to Particle Physics* (Vintage)



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