

Wall Street firm had merged under.

Auletta's account, as I say, reads like a good novel. And he manages this without relying on some of the more dubious tricks of the New Journalism, such as the working of people's thoughts into the narrative as if the writer had access to a cortical printout. How many current novelists could invent Glucksman's explanation of how he got to the top, shouted at a friend across a crowded party: "You know how I do it, Michael? I always keep my back to the wall of the latrine." Or the scene where Peterson, newly arrived at Lehman, is advised to meet with a senior partner, Joe Thomas, the man who put together Litton Industries, "a rugged individualist who thought the *New York Times* was a left-wing newspaper and only read the *New York Daily News* and the *Daily Racing Form*." Peterson is told that he can find Thomas in the firm's gymnasium:

Entering the gym that morning he saw only a man stretched out naked on a massage table, clear plastic tubes connecting his nostrils to an oxygen tank. In one hand the naked man held a lit cigar and in the other a glass of vodka. A *Daily Racing Form* rested on his ample stomach. A television set was blaring.... The masseur was on the phone with a bookie placing the man's bets.... Peterson wandered back downstairs and said, "I didn't see anyone up there except a guy with two oxygen tubes, a cigar and a martini."

Dickens and Balzac would obviously have had no complaints writing about Lehman Brothers.

What lessons do we learn from Auletta's interesting tale? Well, that organizations, like people, are far queerer on the inside than they seem on the outside. That correct intuition about other people's psychologies is far more valuable in a corporate leader than technical brilliance. And that individuals who rise to the top of their calling may well remain emotionally glued in adolescence. (Henry James after meeting Winston Churchill: "It brought home to me very forcibly—very vividly—the limitations by which men of genius obtain their ascendancy over mankind.")

Finally, we see that investment bankers are in the same moral predicament as other professionals in our society. Just as the exponential growth in litigation is a boon to lawyers, but not to the rest of us, so a lot of what goes on on Wall Street in the way of leveraged buy-outs and greenmail swells the pockets of the direct players but probably impoverishes society as a whole. Bankers, like lawyers, answer that they have no choice, that they are responding to forces larger than themselves. They may be right, but one still regrets the passing of the old order. □

MARRIAGE AND MORALS AMONG THE VICTORIANS

Gertrude Himmelfarb/Alfred A. Knopf/\$19.95

Joseph Shattan

Some years ago, I was privileged to take part in a seminar on nineteenth-century English thought conducted by Professor Gertrude Himmelfarb. I was young and callow back then, and I'm afraid that of the actual subject matter of the seminar I can recall very little today. But what has remained with me through the years is the image of Professor Himmelfarb as a kind of intellectual conjurer, someone who would invariably prove to us that the book we had just read meant exactly the opposite of what we all thought it meant.

Something of my earlier sense of bedazzlement returned as I read Professor Himmelfarb's latest book, *Marriage and Morals Among the Victorians*. The book's title is somewhat misleading, suggesting as it does a study in social history. In fact, Professor Himmelfarb's collection of essays has far more to do with intellectual than with social history. But it is intellectual history of a very special kind, since it deals not with the formal ideas and philosophies of Victorian thinkers, but rather with underlying, only half-articulated premises, with attitudes, states-of-mind, temperaments, and dispositions. Or as Professor Himmelfarb herself puts it, her concern is to delineate the "moral imagination" of the Victorians, "an imagination that penetrates all aspects of life—mind, literature, politics, social affairs, and, of course, personal conduct."

What is so remarkable about Professor Himmelfarb's study is not only that she can actually discern an underlying ethos in an age as complicated and filled with change as the Victorian era, but also that the ethos, or "moral imagination," which she brings to life is quite different from anything we might have expected. When most of us think about Victorian morality, adjectives like "conventional," "proper," "complacent," "hypocritical," and "prudish" immediately spring to mind. According to Professor Himmelfarb, however, the Victorian ethos was not at all conventional or complacent. On the contrary,

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it was "a culture living on sheer nerve and will, the nerve to know the worst and to will the best"; a culture, moreover, "that was all the more admirable, perhaps, because it tried to maintain itself without the sanctions and consolations of religion...."

This singular image of Victorian culture is so much at variance with the standard view that one's initial reaction is to dismiss it out of hand. But slowly and deliberately, in essay after essay, Professor Himmelfarb unfolds her thesis, until one is finally convinced that this is the way it must have been, after all.

Professor Himmelfarb starts off by reminding us that the Victorian era really dates from before Queen Victoria's reign. It begins with John Wesley, who in the eighteenth century inaugurated an evangelical reform movement within the Church of England known as Wesleyanism, or Methodism. His movement sought to recapture the vitality and scriptural faith of early Christianity, and emphasized such virtues as reverence, sobriety, and prudence. Its phenomenal success, which cut across class lines, led to a largely successful moral reformation, and laid the groundwork for the eventual democratization of English political life.

Although by the middle of the nineteenth century the theology underlying evangelicalism had lost its hold on many of England's most gifted minds, the evangelical spirit, the concern for morality and social reform, remained compelling. "I now believe in nothing," confessed the distinguished Victorian intellectual, Leslie Stephen, "but I do not the less believe in morality.... I mean to live and die like a gentleman if possible." Similarly, the novelist George Eliot concluded that belief in God was "inconceivable," immortality was "unbelievable," but moral duty was "peremptory and absolute." And, of course, there was Charles Darwin, who when asked about the implications of his theory for religion and morality, replied that the idea of God was "beyond the scope of man's intellect," but that a man's moral obligation re-

mained what it always had been: to "do his duty."

For Professor Himmelfarb, this transition from a living and sustaining faith in God to a belief in "nothing" is the clue which illuminates the "moral imagination" of the Victorians, and explains their obsession with morality:

Feeling guilty about the loss of their religious faith, suspecting that that loss might expose them to the temptations of immorality and the perils of nihilism, anticipating the Nietzschean dictum that if God does not exist everything is permitted, they were determined to make of morality a substitute for religion—to make of it, indeed, a form of religion.... The duty to be moral, they believed (or wanted desperately to believe), was not God-given but man-made, and it was all the more "peremptory and absolute" for that.

This, then, was the ethos of Victorian civilization during its high tide—a well-nigh fanatical devotion to Christian morality coupled with a stark rejection of Christian theology. It was a rather difficult and demanding act to carry off, and Professor Himmelfarb is right in calling it an admirable attempt. She is also correct, however, in pointing out that it was "too impoverished, too far removed from its original inspiration, to transmit itself to the next generation." And it is with the next generation that the trouble sets in. For the next generation, it turns out, was Bloomsbury.

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essa, Virginia, and Adrian Stephen, Clive Bell, Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, Duncan Grant, Desmond MacCarthy, Roger Fry, Saxon Sydney-Turner, and Leonard Woolf) and its circle of "fellow-travellers" (E. M. Forster, James Strachey, R. C. Trevelyan, and others who drifted in and out)—Professor Himmelfarb is a less than sympathetic guide. She is repelled by the group's snobbery, its self-absorption, its contempt for both the masses and the bourgeoisie, its rejection of traditional morality, its elitism, and, not least, its highly irregular sexual mores. Yet over and above these failings, what seems to bother Professor Himmelfarb most deeply about the "Bloomsberries" is their irreverence, their belief, as Keynes once put it, that "we were the forerunners of a new heaven on a new earth." Here Professor Himmelfarb's indictment coincides with that of D. H. Lawrence, who after meeting a group of Bloomsberries declared, "To hear these

young people talk really fills me with black fury: They talk endlessly, but endlessly—and never, never a good thing said. . . . There is never for one second any outgoing of feeling and no reverence, not a crumb or grain of reverence. I cannot stand it—I had rather be alone."

At first blush, the emphasis on Bloomsbury's irreverence is puzzling. Bloomsbury had so many glaring faults that it seems arbitrary to single any one of them out for especial censure. But what makes irreverence so objectionable to Professor Himmelfarb is its connection with rationalism and utopianism. To be sure, nowhere in her book does she actually spell out this relation. Yet it is clear that, in her view, irreverence leads almost inevitably to a contempt for what Burke called "all the decent drapery of life . . . all the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to

cover the defects of our own naked shivering nature." Irreverence, in other words, leads to the rationalistic assumption that all of society's traditions are no more than a collection of taboos and superstitions which the happy and enlightened few can safely dispense with. And when the happy and enlightened few enjoy political power, irreverence leads to utopianism, defined by Professor Himmelfarb as the attempt to achieve "a total transformation of reality—of society, the polity, the economy, above all, of human nature."

Nowhere, I repeat, does Professor Himmelfarb explicitly draw a connection between irreverence, rationalism, and utopianism. Nonetheless, it can hardly be a coincidence that the figures she most clearly detests—the Bloomsberries, Jeremy Bentham, Beatrice and Sidney Webb—are all irreverent, rationalistic, and utopian. Nor can it be coincidental that the figures she most clearly admires—Edmund Burke, Thomas B. Macaulay, George Eliot, Benjamin Disraeli, and Michael Oakeshott—are all respecters of tradition and anti-rationalistic in outlook.

Her treatment of the Webbs is particularly illuminating. I had always supposed that Sidney and Beatrice Webb were liberal reformers, gradualists and social democrats at heart. As is her wont, however, Professor Himmelfarb demonstrates that exactly the opposite was the case. In a remarkable document prepared during the 1920s and entitled *Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*, the Webbs called for the nationalization of industry, the elimination of privately owned newspapers and journals, the centralized direction and allocation of labor, the discouragement of permanent political parties, the abolition of the House of Lords, and the establishment of two independent and co-equal parliaments. As Professor Himmelfarb dryly notes, "This was no mere 'reform.'"

Nor were the Webbs all that committed to democracy. On the contrary, they favored a strategy called "permeation," which bears a distinct resemblance to the Leninist idea of "boring from within." As Professor Himmelfarb explains it, "permeation" meant that socialism would be brought about "not by the direct action of the working class but by a small group of knowledgeable, capable, well-placed people who would permeate the institutions that were the source of power and who would initiate the necessary reforms." The Webbs' ideal (again not unlike the Leninist ideal) was government in the name of the people, but by the experts.

But although the Webbs were committed to the remaking of society along

"scientific" lines, Beatrice Webb's diary reveals that she maintained a secret affinity for religious mysticism, a powerful but unrequited longing to belong to a church. Eventually she resolved her personal problems by becoming a passionate defender of the Soviet Union. In her view, the Soviet Communist party overcame the contradiction between science and religion, since it was a "religious order" complete with "strict disciplines" and "vows of obedience and poverty" which nevertheless presided over a program of revolutionary social change not unlike the plan she and her husband had outlined in their *Constitution*.

If the Webbs represent an almost perfect case study of the relationship between political rationalism, on the one hand, and the "totalitarian temptation," on the other, then the thought of the distinguished conservative philosopher, Michael Oakeshott, constitutes one of the most persuasive attacks against rationalism mounted in this century. (Oakeshott, of course, is no Victorian, but Professor Himmelfarb justifies the inclusion of her essay on him on the grounds that his "mode of thought . . . recalls an earlier, more spacious and civilized time.") According to Professor Himmelfarb, "For Oakeshott, Rationalism is the great heresy of modern times. The Rationalist, taking 'reason' as his only authority, is necessarily hostile to any other authority: tradition, habit, custom, prejudice, common sense. . . . The Rationalist has no respect for the seemingly irrational vestiges of the past, and little patience with the transitory arrangements of the present. He has only an overwhelming yearning for a future in which all will be made orderly, reasonable, of maximum utility and efficiency. And he would like this future to be realized as soon as possible." Unfortunately, "the conjunction of dreaming [about the future] and ruling generates tyranny."

But while Oakeshott's attack against rationalism (which he insists on capitalizing) is quite effective, the alternative he offers—a kind of generalized skepticism towards all ideas and principles, even nominally "conservative" ideas and principles—seems insufficient to Professor Himmelfarb:

Skepticism is innocent enough, even attractive, in an age suffering from a surfeit of principles and enjoying a plenitude of good habits. One can then rely happily enough on those habits without inquiring into their source, their substance, or the reason for their perpetuation. But when those habits become insecure or fall into disuse, the conservative must look elsewhere for the civilized values he has come to enjoy.

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Where, then, does Professor Himmelfarb look for the defense of civilized values? Perhaps it is not being overly presumptuous to suggest that it is to the memory of a culture that lived "on sheer nerve and will." True, she herself demonstrates that the Victorian attempt to make a religion of morality ultimately proved untenable.

At the same time, however, it is Professor Himmelfarb's hope that the recollection of that heroic and noble failure "may fortify us as we persist in our quest for some new synthesis that will herald some brave—or not so brave—new world." In which case, of course, the Victorian ethos will prove not to have been such an irrevocable failure, after all. □

SEXUAL DESIRE: A MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE EROTIC

Roger Scruton/The Free Press/\$25.00

Shirley Robin Letwin

A good test of how someone regards individuality is his attitude to love and sexuality. But this is a peculiarly uncomfortable test for individualists who are opposed to the current permissiveness. They find it difficult to answer the libertarian argument that a proper respect for individuality requires complete freedom for each individual to express and fulfill himself as he wishes. And they are uncomfortable about finding themselves allied with the long-faced enemies of earthly pleasures, as well as with paternalists longing to increase collective regulation of private lives.

There is no help to be had from the traditional discussions of erotic love, either for defending individuality or for resisting permissiveness. The pattern for all these discussions was set long ago by Plato's *Symposium*, where Diotima tells Socrates that the proper pursuit of love consists in freeing the divinity in each lover from the adulterating human vessel. Love is truly consummated by unifying the souls, not the bodies, of lovers; and the most perfect expression of love is the willingness to give up the world for it, since in death the soul becomes wholly free of the body. But in a soul ruled by passion instead of reason, the lover will crave for bodily union which is an illusory kind of wholeness. Such a lover will be in constant turmoil, pursuing one object after another because, being an illusion, none can satisfy him.

Plato's diseased soul became the hero of the romantic ideal of love, of

which the classic account is Stendhal's *De l'Amour*. Here love is described as a "crystallization," which is a "collection of strange fancies which we weave round our idea of the loved one." These fancies with all their attendant pleasures are produced by the beloved's ability to stimulate the lover's imagination, much as the grit in the oyster irritates it into producing a pearl. Love is accordingly an illusion that has to be maintained by continuous stimulation to the imagination. The pain of fear is essential to this love because pain is an important ingredient of erotic pleasure. If the loved one, Stendhal warns, should fall into "the enormous error of killing fear by the eagerness of her transports, the illusion of love will cease." Beyond that and above all else, love is threatened by the intrusion of reality, especially in the shape of respect for moral considerations.

Both Stendhal and Plato regard such lovers as indifferent to each other's personality; they only enjoy and exploit the separateness of their bodies. But whereas Plato describes such love as a disease, Stendhal praises it for being an illusion, thus explicitly opposing the satisfaction of desire to the requirements of morality. Whereas Plato urges man to choose divinity, Stendhal urges him to employ his superior cunning so as to enjoy his brutishness. But neither holds out any hope of a relationship between beings who are separate and unique and take an erotic interest in each other which embraces their personalities and is not at war with standards of civilized conduct.

The individualist looking for a more satisfactory account of erotic love might hope to find it in Roger Scruton's *Sexual Desire*, since the publisher claims that "the author upholds traditional morality but in terms that will prove shocking to many of his practitioners." Certainly Scruton explicitly addresses himself to overcoming the divorce between sexuality and morality. The way to moralize sexuality, he argues, is to recognize that its proper object is a person, and that the conventional moral restraints are designed to enforce the pursuit of this object. Scruton thus promises to provide an answer to permissiveness in the name of a proper regard for individuality.

How far he has been successful depends on what he means by a "person." Its meaning is well buried in dense prose purporting to give a professional philosophical analysis of concepts such as "intentionality," or else offering a description in titillating detail of the nature of sexual arousal. Nevertheless, the persevering reader is

left in no doubt that Scruton considers individuality to be an illusion. He firmly rejects any suggestion that people are "quintessential individuals." He speaks of an individual as a "first-person spectre" and describes our belief that we are possessed of "quintessential individuality" as a "point of view" due to our inability to "describe the world objectively from no point of view within it." If such objectivity were possible, Scruton assures us that "the 'self' and all its mysteries would vanish." Our lack of such objectivity, however, does explain why the illusion of individuality is "well-founded."

This "well-founded illusion," and not any real person, is the object of sexual desire. Scruton accordingly explains that in our efforts to satisfy sexual desire, "we are attempting to unite our bodies with a non-existent 'owner' who is unable to possess the individuality for which he craves but sustains the illusion of his own existence as a reflection in the glass of another's eye." In other words, the object of desire acquires its semblance of a person from the lover's "individuating thoughts." The personality of the beloved is therefore described by Scruton as "the great metaphysical illusion of love." It is an "intellectual lapse" just like the "fallacy" that leads us to believe, wrongly, that works of art are "peculiarly unified objects": "It is erroneously supposed that the work of art possesses, as a peculiar metaphysical property, the individuality with which our attitude endows it." Here Scruton adopts the fashionable aesthetic theory that the unity of an aesthetic object is not created by the artist but imposed by the observer. Though we may see a mosque "as possessing an individuality," in reality it is, Scruton teaches, only a "heap of stones," just as the animal body is the only reality behind the illusion of love.

The one difference between the two illusions is that the lover's is more vulnerable to attack by reality. The illusion of a mosque's individuality remains even though "I know that it is a heap of stones which bears no more unity than I am able to impose upon it": but "every love stands to be jeopardized by the new knowledge that will destroy the vital belief." And the results of this knowledge "may be catastrophic" because it turns love into "a systematic disappointment."

Although Scruton mentions Stendhal just in passing, his conception of erotic love is fundamentally the same. Only the possessiveness that Scruton ascribes to the lover is more blatantly brutal and indifferent to the beloved's personality. Scruton's lover wants to "overcome the other" so as to compel



Shirley Robin Letwin is the author of *Modern Philosophies of Law*, *The Pursuit of Certainty*, and *The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct*. Her essay, "Romantic Love and Christianity," was recently published in *Philosophy*.