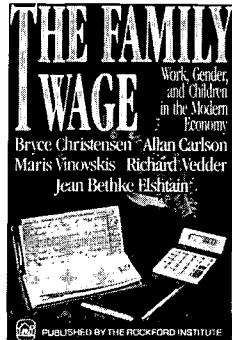


enthusiastic reception of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a work that utterly captivated an international audience mired in despair. Second, into this malaise flew Charles Lindbergh, the solitary American hero who was treated as a god in Europe. He was seen as the new technological messiah, his flight symbolic of the idea that "Man has been set loose. Freedom was no longer a matter of being at liberty to do what is morally right and ethically responsible. Freedom had become a personal matter, a responsibility above all to oneself."



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Irrationalism, despair, technology—add kitsch and the stage is set for the Nazi version of the dance of death. At the outset of *Rites of Spring*, Eksteins intimates that "Nazi kitsch may bear a blood relationship to the highbrow religion of art proclaimed by many moderns." Later, he makes the connection explicit: "Nazism was a popular variant of many of the impulses of the avant-garde. It expressed on a more popular level many of the same tendencies and posited many of the same solutions that the avant-garde did on the level of 'high art.' Above all, it, like the moderns it claimed to despise, tried to marry subjectivism and technicism." Certainly the futuristic emphasis—which assumes a repudiation of conventions, values, and ultimately history—of the avant-garde was shared by the Nazis. Eksteins rejects the view of Nazism as reactionary or conservative. "Contrary to many interpretations of Nazism," as he observes,

which tend to view it as a reactionary movement . . . the general thrust of the movement, despite archaisms, was futuristic. Nazism was a headlong plunge into the future, toward a "brave new world." Of course it used to full advantage residual conservative and utopian longings, paid its respects to these romantic visions . . . but its goals were, by its own lights, distinctly progressive. . . . The intention of the movement was to create a new type of human being from whom would spring a new morality, a new social system, and eventually a new international order.

In Nazism, that is, the ideals of the avant-garde had found a home, as they had settled in Germany prior to the Great War. Hitler, of course, was at the eye of the storm, and Eksteins sees him as "The ultimate kitsch artist, he filled the abyss with symbols of beauty. The victim he turned into the hero, hell into heaven, death into transfiguration." When the end came for Hitler, he was in his bunker, surrounded by the destruction he had unleashed, and in the canteen of the chancellery a dance began and continued even after word had been sent from the bunker to quiet down. Eksteins' terse final sentence is

arresting: "A popular German song in 1945 was entitled "Es ist ein Frühling ohne Ende!" ("It Is Spring Without End!").

But for all of Eksteins' sophisticated cultural and social insights, he surprisingly neglects any extended treatment of Christianity—or, rather, the absence of Christianity—in this entire tragedy. After all, as Paul Johnson argues in *Modern Times*, it is "the decline and ultimate collapse of the religious impulse" and the ascent of moral relativism that is largely responsible for the terrifying fragmentation of our century. Also, the modernist movement is more diverse than Eksteins suggests. Continental modernists may have diabolically reveled in the dissolution that they helped engender, but the Anglo-American version of modernism—one thinks of Eliot, Faulkner, and David Jones—sought a way back to the center. Still, "The Great War," as he says, "was to be the axis on which the modern world turned," and its cultural causes and consequences are comprehensively and, at times, brilliantly examined in *Rites of Spring*. I had not thought death had undone so many.

Gregory J. Sullivan writes from Trenton, New Jersey.

Learning to Behave

by Joseph Baldacchino

The Fatal Conceit:
The Errors of Socialism
by F.A. Hayek
Chicago: University of Chicago Press;
180 pp., \$24.95

When I heard on the radio one morning in 1974 that Friedrich Hayek had won the Nobel Prize in economics, my first thought was, "Not our Friedrich Hayek?" A few hours later, upon meeting a libertarian acquaintance of some prominence, I asked, "Did you hear about Hayek?" The reply was: "No. Did he die?"

I offer these vignettes because they illustrate how dramatically the assessment of Hayek, even among his most ardent admirers, has changed over the last decade and a half. It is hard to

recall, now that a small army of free-market theorists has followed Hayek to Stockholm, what an unexpected sea change in the world's approach to economics was heralded by his receipt of the Nobel. Or how unlikely it seemed in 1974 that Hayek, who at 75 years of age had produced an unusually voluminous but uniformly profound body of scholarly writing on a wide range of subjects, was nearer to the midpoint of his distinguished career than to its end.

Far from resting on his laurels, Hayek has pursued his scholarly mission with undiminished vigor and acuity. His latest book, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, is being published by the University of Chicago Press as Volume I of a new collection of Hayek's work, a series that is projected to comprise 22 volumes. The book takes its title from what Hayek, after many years of study, has concluded is man's most dangerous folly: undue pride of intellect, the indulgence in an unreasonable form of "reason" that does not know its own limitations. This "fatal conceit" manifests itself in several forms. In one aspect, it is the notion, which has been a central pillar of socialism, that man, through his reason, "is able to shape the world around him according to his wishes," not marginally or in a limited manner but to the *nth* degree. Another manifestation is the self-satisfied belief that man has no obligation to obey or respect rules the purposes of which are not fully transparent to his momentary intellect. Yet another variation is the belief that unless a civilized order can be shown to be the product of a comprehensive, rational, man-made design, it has no value or right to exist.

Like his teacher, Ludwig von Mises, Hayek sees institutions such as private property and the price system as indispensable to human welfare. These institutions, Hayek notes, make it possible for millions of individuals—each acting independently with the widely diverse knowledge and ability available to him—to satisfy human needs and desires far more efficiently than any central planning agency could accomplish. But, unlike Mises, who tended to view free-market institutions as the products of conscious choice based on abstract reason, Hayek is sensitive to the high degree to which these institu-

tions are dependent for their existence on traditions, customs, and rules developed over millennia whose full value man only dimly perceives.

"Learning how to behave is more the source than the *result* of insight, reason, and understanding," Hayek writes. "Man is not born wise, rational and good, but has to be taught to become so. It is not our intellect that created our morals; rather, human interactions governed by our morals make possible the growth of reason and those capabilities associated with it. Man became intelligent because there was *tradition* . . . for him to learn. This tradition, in turn, originated not from a capacity rationally to interpret observed facts but from habits of responding. It told man primarily what he ought or ought not to do under certain conditions rather than what he must expect to happen."

Hayek attributes the strong emotional appeal of socialism to its flattery of "genetically inherited instincts" of solidarity and altruism that are anachronistic—throwbacks to a time long ago when men lived in "small roving bands or troops." Such instincts were highly useful to a primitive order in which all of the members were known personally to each other and "were guided by concrete, commonly perceived aims," Hayek argues. But they are largely unsuited—hence inimical—to life in our present, highly complex order, which enables millions upon millions of individuals to serve the needs of people about whose existence they are unaware and in turn to have their own needs served by these multitudes of unknown others.

Though emphasizing that he does "not claim that the results of group selection of traditions are necessarily 'good,'" Hayek adds:

I do claim that, whether we like it or not, without the particular traditions I have mentioned, the extended order of civilization could not continue to exist . . . ; and that if we discard these traditions, out of ill-considered notions . . . of what it is to be reasonable, we shall doom a large part of mankind to poverty and death. . . .

While facts alone can never determine what is right,

ill-considered notions of what is reasonable, right and good may change the facts and the circumstances in which we live; they may destroy, perhaps forever, not only developed individuals and buildings and art and cities (which we have long known to be vulnerable to the destructive powers of moralities and ideologies of various sorts), but also traditions, institutions, and interrelations without which such creations could hardly have come into being or ever be recreated.

If there is any weakness in Hayek's treatment of these issues, it is a tendency to equate morality with procreation and survival. In so doing, he blurs the distinction between economics and ethics: categories that, while overlapping, are not identical. Though Hayek points convincingly to Aristotle's static conception of human affairs as a philosophical weakness that was to have substantial adverse repercussions on Western thought for the next two thousand years, Hayek's own line of thinking might benefit from Aristotle's dictum that man's goal should not be a mere life but the good life. Moreover, because Hayek identifies morality with rules that change in response to historical circumstances, he concludes that, "reluctant as we may be to accept this, no universally valid system of ethics can ever be known to us." Yet it is a relatively short distance from Hayek's position to the "value-centered historicism" outlined by Claes G. Ryn in his *Will, Imagination and Reason*, which demonstrates that ethical universality is not incompatible with change and diversity. Specifically, by identifying man's higher purpose with a special quality of will rather than with abstract rationality, value-centered historicism shows how universality is capable of being synthesized with ever-new circumstances.

But these criticisms, though pertaining to a central issue, are limited reservations about a body of work that merits the highest respect and is well-represented by this volume. It is noteworthy that Hayek, like very few of his contemporaries, has persistently asked the right questions about extremely complex matters and, with impressive

frequency, has thought his way to penetrating answers.

Joseph Baldacchino, author of Economics and the Moral Order, is associate editor of Human Events and president of the National Humanities Institute.

The Terrestrial God

by Thomas Molnar

Sacralizing the Secular: The Renaissance Origins of Modernity
by Stephen A. McKnight
Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press; 131 pp., \$25.00

It all depends on what we mean by "sacralizing" and "sacred," and to a lesser extent by "secular." The fact that Professor McKnight is a student of Eric Voegelin should not be left unmentioned in this regard, because for the recently deceased great scholar, "sa-

cred" remained an elusive term. The word certainly referred to a dimension of man that differed from the secular and the profane, but it is not necessarily synonymous with what the monotheistic religions mean by it. To Voegelin, Eliade, Jung, Campbell, Rudolf Otto, and others, sacred meant the territory of awe, of numinous intervention, of participation in the cosmos and its forces.

In other words, for these scholars (and McKnight), the sacred is a tremendous worldview perfectly compatible with paganism, and to which Christianity has added a *sui generis* dimension but by no means annexed. We should keep these things in mind as we read McKnight's book.

Through his analyses of important Renaissance figures, McKnight tries to show why the Renaissance is falsely credited with the intention of secularizing the Middle Ages, when in fact it had tried to resacralize the just opening secular world and worldview. Not surprisingly, questions arise immediately. First, what was *secular* in the course of the Renaissance? The Humanists (Petrarch, Erasmus) formed only a modest corner, enlarged only in retrospect by today's modernists. Almost any Renaissance figure that scholars like Charles Nauert and Francis Yates studied was at least tainted by esoteric and occult interests and practices, whether Albrecht Dürer at one end or Francis Bacon at the other. Yates even brings Shakespeare in, and D.P. Walker of the Warburg Institute augments the list with many more names. In short, the line of demarcation between "secularizers" and "sacralizers" is becoming blurred.

But let us grant that the Renaissance was by and large a secular movement. In what sense did the men studied by McKnight *sacralize* it? True, they referred to an enormous ancient tradition of a basic wisdom, a *prisca theologia*, of a religion whose teachers were supposed to have taught Plato as well as Moses; their documents were obviously later fabrications, but accepted in good faith; their content was Pythagorean geometry, the Jewish Cabala, the Gnostic systems, and much more. The main objective was to redefine man, from Christian to magus, ultimately a terrestrial god in whose hands knowledge and power are equated. This much McKnight readily acknowledges

and illustrates with appropriate quotations and discussion.

My question is: where is the sacralizing process in all this? Would it not be easier to set up another thesis? It could be briefly formulated. All those whom the author mentions were either loyal to the Christian religion or harboring other beliefs. A Marsilio Ficino and a Dürer fall in the first category, most of the rest in the second. The latter's objective was to demonstrate its incompatibility with the imminently dominant worldview ruled by science (and power). In order to pursue this design they had very little at their disposal, and certainly not the conceptual edifice by which they could have promoted it. Hence they resorted to an ancient, half-mythical occult practice inimical to conceptualization. But what counts is their intention, which (I repeat) was purely secular.

By the 17th century, they had arrived at their goal. Science was born carrying an overload of secularistic philosophy. Our history books are correct: the great initiators were Bacon and Descartes; both (especially the latter) made *tabula rasa* of the old Aristotelian/Scholastic concepts and formulated an entirely new conceptual reference system. Had Francisco Giorgi, the early 16th-century Venetian monk, possessed the algebraic language that Descartes elaborated a century later, we would celebrate him today instead of Father Mersenne's friend. The conclusion is that McKnight's "sacralizers" did not intend to sacralize the secular. They were groping for a science, a secular one (if words have a meaning), for which they had neither a terminology nor instruments; and with Descartes and Galileo, or rather their successors, they entered into the possession of both.

McKnight renders himself even more vulnerable when he brings Comte and Marx into the debate as more modern sacralizers of the secular. It may be argued that a process of sacralization or resacralization has been going on, with Voegelin and McKnight as its chroniclers. But it is no mere pedantry, I think, to point out that the process can be subsumed under the category of *secularization*. Leszek Kolakowski pointed out in a 1973 essay that all the profane mani-

LIBERAL ARTS



AT LEAST IT AINT MAPPLETHORPE

An ant farm with thousands of residents will be installed at Austin's Robert Mueller Municipal Airport as part of a public art program.

Texas leaf cutter ants will live in the glass-contained farm, the \$48,000-plus centerpiece of a \$200,000 Art in Public Places program by Minneapolis artist Richard Posner.

During last week's city council meeting, the farm's lone council critic, Mayor Lee Cooke, fiddled with a beautifully rendered, tiny black plastic ant.

Cooke squeezed his palm around the critter and mused, "I don't like the art."

—from the Houston Chronicle,
August 13, 1989