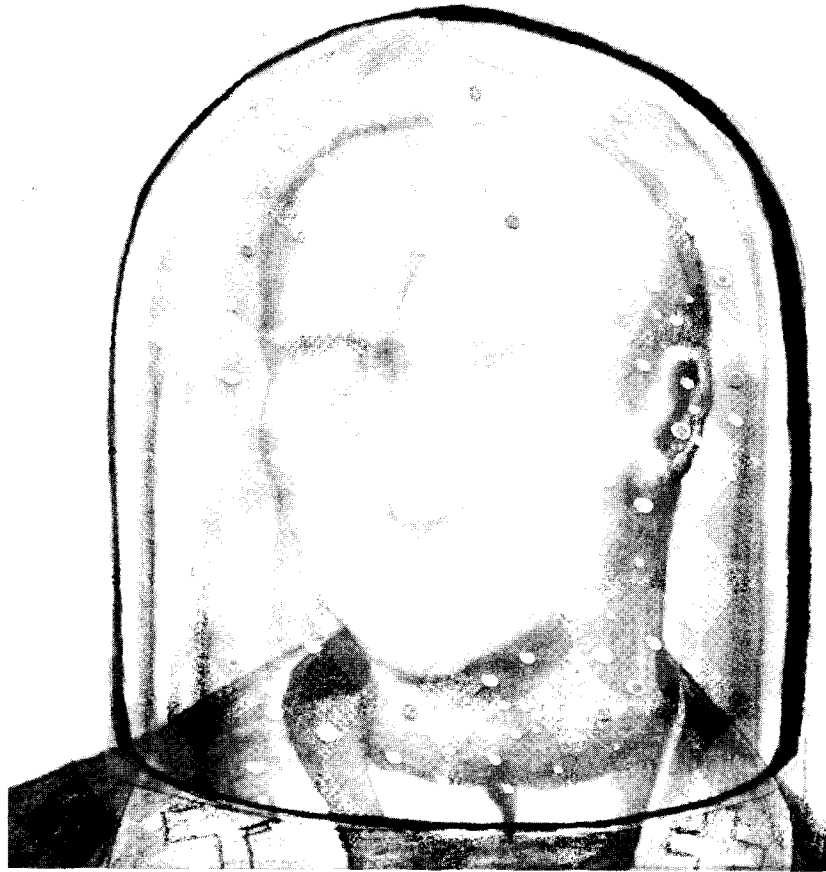


# Doing Well; Done Better

by Llewellyn H. Rockwell, Jr.

*“These monstrous views, . . . these venomous teachings.”*  
—Pope Leo XIII on socialism



Anna Micek-Wodrecki

**Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist**  
by Richard John Neuhaus  
New York: Doubleday;  
312 pp., \$22.00



According to the jacket copy of *Doing Well and Doing Good*, Richard John Neuhaus is “one of the most prominent religious intellectuals” of our time (which helps explain our time). Neuhaus argues that while “Christianity has had nothing to say” to businessmen, now “the spirit” is calling on them “to make a buck.” That is why he—a Lutheran minister who became a Catholic priest—decided to write about

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the “spirituality of economic enterprise” in a book based on John Paul II’s encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. The idea might have made an interesting work, but, despite the breezy blasphemy, this isn’t it. Much of *Doing Well and Doing Good* consists of a truncated version of the widely available encyclical and a pedestrian, if largely unobjectionable, commentary on it. In the introductory and concluding chapters, however, Neuhaus proclaims the good news of the democratic welfare state and of its avatar, Martin Luther King, Jr.

“It was a grace of my life,” says Neuhaus, “to work personally with Dr. King for several years as a liaison between his Southern Christian Leadership Conference and other social movements of the time.” What social movements those were, Neuhaus having been an open leftist in those days, or why King keeps his ill-gotten doctor-

ate in death, Neuhaus doesn’t say. Instead, we are asked to believe that King was “above all a Christian minister” whose “I Have a Dream Speech” was “a powerful and almost perfect articulation of the Puritan-Lockean Synthesis.”

This is nonsense, Neuhaus counting on his readers being unfamiliar with the literature which demonstrates that King: one, stole virtually every word he “wrote,” from high school to his last sermon; two, rejected the central claims of Christianity in graduate school and never returned to them; three, had a sex life worthy of Magic Johnson; four, advocated racial redistributionism; five, called himself a Marxist in private; and six, coordinated his schedule, finances, speeches, publications, and strategy with members of the American Communist Party. Far from right-wing revisionism, this is standard history as found, for example, in David Garrow’s Pulitzer Prize-

winning *Bearing the Cross* and Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters*. (The expert on King's plagiarism is, of course, Theodore Pappas of *Chronicles*.)

As to the "Puritan-Lockean Synthesis." King's dream (when it wasn't of other men's wives or of socialism) was of cash. At the welfare rally in Washington, D. C., where he gave his famous speech, King said that America had "given the Negro people a bad check," returned "marked 'insufficient funds.'" But in our country's "great vaults," there was plenty of money to recompense blacks for slavery and discrimination, and he was there to claim it. So when King talked about justice rolling down like a "mighty stream," he meant a stream of income. Yet he represented something more pernicious than redistributionism. His cultural impact was to help secularize, and finally to supplant, Christianity, so that today King's birthday gets more attention in the public square than Christ's. Neuhaus knows all this, and yet he writes: "Like Martin Luther King, Jr., John Paul has a dream": "democratic capitalism." But democratic capitalism—neoconese for social democracy—is never mentioned by the Pope.

Just how capitalistic, by the way, is democratic capitalism? The "business economy," Neuhaus writes, does not "appeal to the moral imagination" in the way socialism does. "Profit seeking" is "neither pretty nor edifying." But Trotskyite communism? Now there was a great vision: "Irving Howe spoke also for many Christians," says Neuhaus, "when he declared, 'Socialism is the name of our dream.' No one in his right mind dreams about capitalism." Oh? Many Americans dream about having their own businesses, while few of us long for the liquidation of the kulaks.

More broadly, the capitalist dream is of secure private property, free capital and labor markets, minimal taxes, small government, and sound money. This is a just economic system, without the thievery of special interests or the tyranny of the state. But to Neuhaus, four "eminent Americans" have "in this century" helped us think through "the ideas that can sustain a free society": John Dewey, Walter Lippmann, John Rawls, and Richard Rorty. So our guides are supposed to be: a social engineer who wrecked American education, a pro-gressivist pamphleteer who got us into

World War I, an egalitarian who measures all societies by the happiness of their bums, and a popularizer of anti-Western deconstructionism.

It is just not respectable, says Neuhaus, to be against "big government," and he denounces "libertarians" who advocate a "free and unfettered market," equating them with the "radical capitalists" the Pope criticizes. Neuhaus seems to have no knowledge of the Late Scholastic theologians, whose vision inspired the economic core of this papal document. (Not that the Pope's "radical capitalists" are straw men; left-libertarians like federal appeals judge Richard Posner vainly seek to link free markets and free sex.)

Neuhaus reserves special derision for palcolibertarianism, a "confused mingling of market economics and what is today called 'paleoconservatism.'" Confused? This was the hallmark of the pre-neocon modern right, the prewar Old Right, 19th-century conservatives like Tocqueville, and most of the Founding Fathers, all of whom advocated economic freedom and traditional social institutions.

Unlike the author of the encyclical he claims to endorse, Neuhaus offers no fundamental critique of Washington's planning and redistributionist schemes. He thinks it just fine that ever since Lincoln, American politics has exalted an antisubsidiarity principle: state aggression against every institution of society. These days, not even the smallest mom-and-pop grocery store in rural Wyoming is immune from the dictates of a dozen federal agencies. The Pope, on the other hand, insists on subsidiarity: the idea that the state may not interfere with the authority of community, family, business, and church. And he criticizes the neocons' beloved welfare state for causing a "loss of human energies," an "inordinate increase of public agencies," "bureaucratic ways of thinking," and "an enormous increase in spending."

The Pope does not suggest, as Neuhaus says he does, "that the democratic idea is integral to a theologically and historically informed understanding of human nature." Democracy has its uses for the Pope, but it is not in itself a high moral principle. In fact, says John Paul II: "Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered unreliable from a democratic point of view, since they do not accept that truth is determined

by the majority." The Pope is indicting those who elevate democracy over religion. But Neuhaus claims the Pope is "here throwing down the gauntlet to those who claim that religion poses a danger to democracy," as if the latter were more important than the former.

Neuhaus says he believes in the "Social Gospel," identifying it with "the Christian project in history." In "the Christian scheme of things," he claims, "we enter the Kingdom of God by the permission of the poor." Ridiculous: we enter the Kingdom of God through grace, and because we have kept the faith and lived it. We have duties to the poor, of course, but they are hardly the sum and substance of Christianity. For Neuhaus, however, "our most clementary duty of love" is "for our neighbor." So much for the Gospel and its injunction that we are first to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and strength.

Neuhaus pays little attention to the fact that the encyclical, although it treats political economy, is a religious document. As such, it is full of pastoral advice for the businessman in the pew. The Pope defends the free market against socialist attacks, but he warns businessmen that they are responsible to more than the price system. Consumers may demand abortions, rap records, or sex books by Madonna, but no decent entrepreneur may seek to fill that demand. Capitalism flourishes only within a moral order. That does not mean, *pace* Neuhaus, that we need the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but rather that businessmen should keep an eye on eternity while meeting their earthly needs. That is the challenge to the Christian capitalist—not making MLK a cultural icon.

Neuhaus misses most of this, yet he never passes up a chance to denounce anyone to his right, including those who sympathize with the Church of the time before Vatican II. He defines "modernity" as a virtue and "holding out against modernity" (which he ascribes to the Council of Trent) as an evil. This is a most un-Catholic position. Perhaps he adopts it because neoconservatism is a modern phenomenon. It is understandable that he should want to assure neoconservatives that their well-paid missionary, Richard John Neuhaus, is doing well. Whether he is doing good is another matter.

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## Rehabilitating Poe

by Gregory McNamee

Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy

by Jeffrey Meyers

New York: Charles Scribner's;

348 pp., \$30.00



Edgar Allan Poe was the finest American writer to be transformed into a “personality” in his own lifetime and, like François Villon, to be known less for his work than for his person. As is so often the case with figures of public celebrity, the facts of Poe’s life have been obscured by layers of legend, many of them perpetuated in the learned literature by scholars who should know better. Jeffrey Meyers, a California professor who has given us sturdy biographies of Ernest Hemingway and Joseph Conrad, makes a valuable contribution to Poe studies with his new life of the writer, particularly by distinguishing fact from long-standing fiction. He had an unenviable task, given the many Parson Weemses who have inserted their agenda into the biographical record.

Poe, as is well known, lived a miserable life. He was born on January 19, 1809, in Boston (the same year, Meyers points out, as Mendelssohn, Darwin,

Gladstone, Lincoln, and Tennyson, all of whom outlived Poe) to an alcoholic actor, David Poe, and an unstable actress, Eliza, who died in a state of semilunacy and deep poverty after David deserted the family. Young Edgar was adopted by a family friend, John Allan, a mean-spirited Scottish immigrant who gave the boy an admirable education but little else. The Allan family lived in the English village of Stoke Newington during Poe’s childhood, and there he attended the school whose halls Daniel Defoe had graced two centuries before. He acquired a classical education that rivaled any university instruction in the United States, and as a student at the University of Virginia Poe easily earned the highest honors in classical and modern languages.

He also earned the wrath of a number of creditors, for Poe borrowed heavily to finance an already evident pattern of drunkenness and gambling. A school friend recalled him as “very excitable & restless, at times wayward, melancholic & morose, but again—in his better moods frolicsome, full of fun & a most attractive and agreeable companion. To calm and quiet the excessive nervous excitability under which he labored, he would too often put himself under the influence of that ‘Invisible Spirit of Wine.’” John Allan had not given Edgar enough money to pay for his room and board, much less his extracurricular excesses, and the young man would never be out of debt again.

Poe joined the army under the name of Edgar A. Perry in May 1827, as an enlisted man. Assigned to the commissariat, he kept records and correspondence for his officers, among whom he became a favorite and a model soldier. In only 19 months he attained the highest enlisted grade, regimental sergeant major. For reasons that are not entirely clear, however, Poe cajoled his way out of the enlisted ranks and would thereafter never admit to his years in the service, no matter how exemplary they might have been: when called on to account for his whereabouts in 1827 and 1828, Poe would variously hint that he had been off fighting with Byron in the Greek Rebellion or intriguing in St. Petersburg with enemies of the czar. Meyers carefully unveils Poe’s time in mili-

tary service, and if he cannot help us decipher Poe’s shunning of the responsibilities that come with outstanding achievement, he at least does not resort to the psychobabble of so many modern biographies.

Poe was appointed to West Point in 1829, earned top grades, and became very popular among his classmates for his acerbic verses on cadet life. (His fellow plebes paid for the publication of his first book of poems but were disappointed to note that his West Point-specific doggerel had given way to serious verse.) Once again Poe, having succeeded at some chosen task, decided to chuck it all, breaking general orders 13 times in an effort to be expelled. For his trouble he was court-martialed for “gross neglect of duties” and dishonorably discharged from the army in 1830. Again, Poe would not own up to these dark episodes in his résumé, and Meyers’ reconstruction is an important merit of his book.

Earlier biographers have shown Poe as dissolute from the start, but Meyers dates his decline from his expulsion from the academy. Although immensely wealthy by the standards of his time, John Allan now refused to give his adopted son any support whatever, and he eventually wrote Edgar out of his will. Poe turned to journalism and descended permanently into poverty; he sank into chronic alcoholism as well, prompting the owner of his first employer, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, to write him this note: “No man is safe who drinks before breakfast! No man can do so, and attend to business properly.” A liquid diet condemned Poe both to failures of his own making and to a marked inability to deal with failures beyond his control; he was all but paralyzed, for instance, when his sole novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), did not find the large market he felt certain it deserved.

In a neat bit of detective work, Meyers retraces Poe’s next (and hitherto unknown) career move: he anonymously wrote a textbook of malacology, plagiarizing most of it from a Scottish primer published the year before. (Meyers notes that this was the only of Poe’s books to go into a second printing in his lifetime.) Poe’s binge drinking also helped

### LIBERAL ARTS



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“We wanted to make sure that we chose a cross section of people and performers that would, to the extent possible, represent every sector of society.”

—Sally Aman, spokeswoman for the presidential inaugural parade committee, on why the event will include Elvis impersonators and a precision lawn chair marching team.”

—from the January 3  
Chicago Tribune.