

Educating for Virtue

by John Chamberlain

People who talk about educating for virtue are prone to be didactic and preachy. One distrusts them as being Holier Than Thou. Fortunately, Joseph Baldacchino in his *Economics and the Moral Order* (National Humanities Institute, 426 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002, 43 pp., \$4.00) and the contributors he has assembled for another book, *Educating for Virtue* (National Humanities Institute, 114 pp., \$5.00) are wary of pitfalls.

Russell Kirk sets the tone in his introduction to the Baldacchino book and in the separate essay he has done for *Educating for Virtue*. He is humorous about it all. He is not an enemy of economics, but he doesn't think economics is everything. We need a moral setting for a free market system. Kirk would call Ludwig von Mises a giant of free market theory, but he thinks Mises must be supplemented by a look at Wilhelm Roepke of Geneva. He tells the story of the Mises visit to Roepke after World War II. Roepke showed his visitor the garden plots that citizens of Geneva had planted as a food supplement both in the war and after. Mises shook his head. "A very inefficient way of producing foodstuffs," he said. "But," so Roepke replied, "perhaps a very efficient way of producing human happiness."

Economic productivity is made for man, says Kirk. A free and prosperous economy is the by-product, so to speak, of a society influenced by sound moral principles and accustomed to good moral habits. The Ten Commandments

are important, no matter what the individual may think about Biblical revelation. When societies cease to honor their forebears and engage in falsehoods and adultery, decadence sets in. One does not have to be preachy about that. The common sense attitude expressed by Willi Schlamm, who said he believed in the Ten Commandments and Mozart, is enough.

Some of the essays in *Educating for Virtue* tend to be ponderous with high level abstractions. I could do without hearing about epistemology, which always sends me to the dictionary. But two essays, Peter Stanlis's "The Humanities in Secondary Education" and Solveig Eggerz's "Permanence and the History Curriculum," are blessedly concrete. So are the paragraphs on Secretary of Education William Bennett in Russell Kirk's essay. Bennett, says Kirk, "is sufficiently bold to recommend that young people learn about traits of character by acquaintance with the literature of the Bible; he mentions 'Ruth's loyalty to Naomi, Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers, Jonathan's friendship with David, the Good Samaritan's kindness toward a stranger. . . .'"

Peter Stanlis takes as "an archetypal model" the freshman survey of English literature taught at Middlebury College in Vermont during the 1940s. He thinks the Middlebury course could be adapted for limited high school use. The Middlebury survey began with selective essential literature from Beowulf through Thomas Hardy. There were three plays by Shakespeare,



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Joseph and his brothers

a history, a tragedy, and a comedy. For biography the Middlebury students read Boswell on Samuel Johnson. For fiction there was Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* for the eighteenth century, Dicken's *Great Expectations* for the nineteenth, and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* for the twentieth.

Tales that Teach

Stanlis thinks that students who begin with imaginative literature in grade school, starting with Mother Goose and Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, with a follow-up of Grimm's fairy tales and Aesop's fables, are sufficiently well-prepared to handle more demanding literature in their junior year in high school. He suggests cross-fertilization courses in English and European history. The survey course in English literature should not be in literary history, but in literary criticism of assigned plays, poems, and fiction.

The exposure of students to the whole range of literature must contribute to virtue simply because the examples in stories make their own points. Lady Macbeth and her husband came to no good end.

The setting for the humanities must be history. Solveig Eggerz laments that history has not only lost its place in the schools but "has been cannibalized by social studies." Since social studies can be anything an individual teacher might be interested in pushing (psychology, sociology, anthropology, or whatnot) there is no compulsion for students to learn about significant dates. They can and do emerge from school with no valuable frame of historical reference. "In the name of relevance," Eggerz says, "students immerse themselves not in the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire, or in the ideas that inspired the Renaissance, or in the build up to and the consequences of the French Revolution, but in energy education, gun-control education, urban studies. You name it. Social studies has got it—or can order it for you."

One book in common use dismisses the Age of Exploration with a few perfunctory words about the use of the compass. "One can only lament, says Eggerz, "The absence of . . . exciting stories on Ferdinand Magellan, Francis Drake . . . the Spanish Armada."

Clearly, much needs to be done to bring education back to schooling. □

COMPASSION VERSUS GUILT AND OTHER ESSAYS

by Thomas Sowell

William Morrow and Co., Inc., 105 Madison Ave., New York,
N.Y. 10016 • 1987 • 246 pages • \$15.95 cloth

Reviewed by David M. Stewart

“**W**hen a political crusade is on, there is no time to wait and see if anybody knows what they are talking about.” To anyone who has followed only Thomas Sowell’s scholarly writings over the last decade, such a bald and sardonic comment may seem a bit out of character in tone, though not at all in content. With meticulous scholarship, Sowell’s works of the 1980s, beginning with the brilliant and seminal *Knowledge and Decisions*, have unraveled the verbal veils in which activists, academics, and politicians have clothed so many factually shallow and logically absurd theories and policies.

But Sowell’s latest book is a collection of powerful broadsides, originally published as newspaper columns. The language here is blunter, the arguments terse and less courteous, the overall effect more scathing—and very emotionally satisfying.

Most of the essays in *Compassion versus Guilt* are, in effect, popular treatments of the philosophical themes set out in Sowell’s previous book, *A Conflict of Visions*. In that work he posited a dichotomy between “constrained” and “unconstrained” visions of man’s moral and mental natures and capacities. The constrained vision holds social change as something to be approached cautiously because of the intractable limitations of human morality and knowledge. The unconstrained view holds social change as directly manageable, at least by a selfless and enlightened few.

In this book, Sowell takes a side—the constrained side. The most frequent target of his barbs are “deep thinkers,” people whose credo has such items as: by eliminating high standards we can eliminate failure; people are entitled to welfare in preference to “menial” work; only political and bureaucratic jobs are noble and valuable; sex education is the solution to

the teen pregnancy problem; affirmative action is good despite the opposition of its supposed beneficiaries; and so on. Sowell is at his polemical best when he shows the contortions his opponents must perform to sustain these views in the face of their absurd or disastrous implications and results.

Thomas Sowell’s works provide lovers of liberty with a vast store of careful logic and illuminating facts that can help us change minds and even policies. But most of us must make our arguments for liberty in situations that demand brevity—letters to editors, private conversations, local meetings, and the like. These essays show that issues can be dealt with briefly yet trenchantly, with respect for facts and with explosive effect on statist arguments. □

Mr. Stewart is an advertising copywriter and a free-lance writer in Rochester Hills, Michigan.

LUDWIG VON MISES: SCHOLAR, CREATOR, HERO

by Murray N. Rothbard

The Ludwig von Mises Institute, Auburn University, Auburn,
Alabama 36849 • 1988 • 87 pp., \$8.00 paperback. Also available
from The Foundation for Economic Education.

Reviewed by Bettina Bien Greaves

The great Austrian economist, Ludwig von Mises, died in 1973. A generation of young students has come of age since then. These new students know Mises only by name and through his reputation as an advocate of free markets. Although they could not know Mises personally, they are fortunate in having available a growing volume of literature about him and the economic theories he expounded.

Several books have been written about Mises’ life—for instance, his own *Notes and Recollections* (published posthumously in 1978) and his widow’s *My Years with Ludwig von Mises* (1976 and 1984). *The Essential von Mises* (1973) by Professor Murray N. Rothbard, reprinted in the 4th edition of Mises’ *Planning for Freedom* (1980), gives a brief introduction to the man and his work. But now



Ludwig von Mises
(1881–1973)

this new booklet, also by Professor Rothbard, gives an excellent, slightly longer, overview of the high points in Professor Mises' life and of his major contributions to economics.

For several years, when Rothbard was working for his doctorate at Columbia University, he was an active participant in Mises' graduate seminar at New York University. He knew Mises well. And he understands the economics Mises taught as few others do.

In this booklet, Rothbard tells of Mises' early life in Austria and of his career as a teacher and as an economic adviser to the Austrian government. He describes two of Mises' major books published during those years—*The Theory of Money and Credit* (1912) and *Socialism* (1922). Rothbard tells about Mises' private seminar, attended by such notables as F. A. Hayek, and he discusses Mises' struggles in Vienna against inflationists, socialists, and communists.

When Mises realized that the situation in Austria was hopeless, he left his native country for Switzerland. There he spent several years

(1934–1940) teaching and writing. Among other works, he wrote a weighty and important economic treatise, *Nationalökonómie*, which was published in 1940. Hitler was then riding high in Europe. Few readers of German were in a position to study the economic theory of free markets at that time, so the sales of Mises' books were disappointing.

To escape the catastrophe in Europe, Mises left Switzerland. He arrived in the United States in 1940 with his wife and immediately began to carve out a new career for himself, lecturing and writing in English. In the remaining three decades of his life, he wrote six books, including his magnum opus, *Human Action*, a complete rewrite in English of his ill-fated *Nationalökonómie*. He also wrote several monographs and many articles.

In this booklet, Rothbard briefly explains Mises' epistemology—the fundamental principles from which Mises reasoned. Rothbard also summarizes Mises' most important contributions to the theory of money and banking, the causes of the business "cycle," and the reasons why economic calculation is impossible under socialism.

Mises' understanding of the consequences of government intervention made him a pessimist for most of his life. Yet he never gave up. He met every danger, Rothbard writes, with "magnificent courage . . . no matter how desperate the circumstance." Whether he was battling inflation, socialism, government intervention, or Nazism, "Ludwig von Mises carried the fight forward, and deepened and expanded his great contributions to economics and to all the disciplines of human action."

Rothbard gives the reader a good, if abbreviated, introduction to Ludwig von Mises, his life, his character, and his work. This booklet will interest both the novice and the serious scholar. □

Mrs. Greaves is a member of the senior staff of The Foundation for Economic Education. From 1951 to 1969 she was a regular participant in Ludwig von Mises' graduate seminar in economic theory at New York University.

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—Leonard E. Read

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