

erty of others. On this subject they are gaining daily in the opinion of nations, and hopeful advances are making towards their re-establishment on equal footing with the other colors of the human family....<sup>6</sup>

Jefferson wrote the charter of equal rights extended to all races and peoples of different cultures, and he should not be disowned as a national hero of a pluralist nation.

O'Brien has failed to such an extent that I find *The Long Affair* a bad book. If there were a prize for the worst book on Jefferson, I should be happy to second the nomination for that distinction. And yet *The Long Affair* has the merit of turning us back to Jefferson himself, and also recalls for us the fine tribute to his moderation found in the conclusion of A. J. Nock's book on Jefferson:

A dominant sense of form and order, a commanding instinct for measure, harmony and balance, unfailingly maintained for fourscore years towards the primary facts of human life—towards discipline and training, towards love, parenthood, domesticity, art, science, religion, find its final triumph and vindication when confronting the great fact of death....<sup>7</sup>

1. *Speech on Making His Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies*, March 22, 1775, in Peter J. Stanlis, *The Best of Burke* (Washington, D.C., 1963), 220. 2. Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York, n.d.), 103-22. 3. J. R. Freer, ed., *Selected Essays of Lord Acton* (Indianapolis, 1985), Vol. III, 588. 4. "Opportunity Always Comes Accompanied by Obligations," July 4, 1995, in *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, "Perspective," October 19, 1997, 1. 5. Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, 393-415. 6. *Ibid.*, 1202. 7. *Jefferson* (New York, 1926), 329.

## ***Minding Our Manners***

MATTHEW M. DAVIS

**Gentility Recalled: "Mere" Manners and the Making of the Social Order**, edited by Digby Anderson, London: *The Social Affairs Unit and The Acton Institute*, 1996. 206 pp. \$19.95.

MANNERS HAVE BEEN taking a nasty beating for much of the twentieth century. They have been ridiculed as leftovers from a bygone age of gentility and attacked as dangerous constraints on individuality and self-expression. Feminists have seen them as instruments and visible signs of patriarchy, and Marxists have identified them as weapons in the class struggle—as tools used to keep the lower classes meek and tractable. The eleven contributors to this volume, however, take a much more positive view of manners. They argue that manners not only improve the quality of daily life but also help to preserve a free society.

What do manners have to do with preserving a free society? Edmund Burke spotted the connection many years ago when he wrote that "Men are qualified for civil liberty, in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites.... Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without." Manners are, of course, one kind of "controlling power"

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that we may place “upon will and appetite.” If Burke’s premise is correct, it follows that a society in which most people mind their manners and control their urges and appetites will generally need less external restraint and will therefore have a better chance of securing and preserving individual liberties. On the other hand, a society where manners are neglected or repudiated is more likely to need a large, expensive, and intrusive police force.

The contributors to this volume all have a Burkean sense of the importance of manners, but they approach the subject from a variety of angles. Caroline Moore asks what it means to be a gentleman, while Rachel Trickett tries to pin down what it means to be a lady. Michael Aeschliman praises the family as the seedbed of manners. He agrees with Charles Péguy that “the real heroes of the late twentieth century [are] the parents of decent families.” Meanwhile John Shelton Reed takes his stand in defense of Southern manners. Reed follows W. J. Cash in arguing that Southern manners are not phony, as many in the North tend to assume.

Robert Grant and Bruce Charlton ponder the role of manners in the workplace. Grant argues that academics need to believe in the possibility of determining objective truth but also need to use good manners in haggling over which scholarly theses most closely approximate the truth. Unfortunately many modern academics do not do a particularly good job in either department. They tend to assume that there is no such thing as objective truth, and that all “truths” are socially constructed, but woe to the scholar who questions the truth of those assumptions! Charlton maintains that modern doctors ought to make an effort to preserve some of the formal manners of their predecessors. He argues that calling unfamiliar patients by their first names is an example of bad

faith and false intimacy.

Anthony O’Hear stands up for the increasingly unpopular idea that “there is a right way to behave according to one’s age and position.” O’Hear has a certain amount of sympathy for the rising generation:

The young are, of course, easily attracted to the thought that naked feelings and naked bodies are somehow more authentically human than the manners which disguise feeling and the clothes which cover our nakedness. They forget that clothes and institutions and social structures, and the manners which go with these things, are actually the very things which make us human.

O’Hear is much tougher on older people who refuse to act their age. He thinks that the “Vice-Chancellor with an earring” and “the trendy vicar on his motor-bike” are much worse than the teenagers whom they foolishly imitate.

Simon Green has a detailed essay on cricket. Green argues that cricket has traditionally exerted a strong and overwhelmingly positive influence on the manners of those who play or watch the game. Although cricket is “only a game,” if properly organized and played, “it can stand for something more than gamesmanship. It can create a nation of gentlemen.” Green even draws a Burkean connection between cricket-playing and civic freedom: “If Stalin had learned to play cricket, the world might be a better place to live in.”

This meditation on British sports leads one to think about the influence of sports in America. Until recently one could say with confidence that sports were powerful agents of civilization in America as well. Today there are still a number of exemplary athletes, but the trash-talking, spit-hurling, head-butting, elbow-throwing thug seems to be in the ascendancy in many American sports. Athletes still shake hands before and after games, but a great deal of what happens

between the two handshakes in a modern basketball or football game would hardly qualify as "cricket."

George Martin gives a thumbnail sketch of the importance of manners in literature. He begins with Homer, whose characters take violations of hospitality very seriously, and he goes on to give a brief overview of English literature. About English literature a great deal more might be said, had we but world enough and time, for a concern with manners characterizes many of our language's greatest literary works. Sir Gawain tests his manners in his run-ins with the Green Knight, and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* insists on the importance of manners for the Elizabethan gentleman: "The gentle mind by gentle deeds is known. / For a man by nothing is so well bewrayed, / As by his manners." Manners are crucial in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, in the novels of Jane Austen, and in Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. Indeed, the opening lines of Pope's poem would have made a good epigraph for this collection: "What dire offense from amorous causes springs! / What mighty contests rise from trivial things!"

Unfortunately, the English literati do not always agree on what constitutes good manners. In his famous letters Lord Chesterfield reminded his son that "Manners must adorn knowledge, and smooth its way through the world." Samuel Johnson, however, questioned his Lordship's approach to manners. Chesterfield's letters, Johnson once complained, "teach the morals of a whore, and the manners of a dancing master." Johnson's famous biographer, James Boswell, evidently wondered whether Johnson had a right to pass judgment on other peoples' manners. Boswell's description of Johnson's table manners is notorious:

When at table, he was totally absorbed in the business of the moment; his looks

seemed rivetted to his plate; nor would he...say one word, or even pay the least attention to what was said by others, till he had satisfied his appetite, which was so fierce, and indulged with such intense-ness, that while in the act of eating, the veins of his forehead swelled and generally a strong perspiration was visible. To those whose sensations were delicate, this could not but be disgusting.

But once again the corrector was corrected: when Boswell published his *Life of Johnson*, several critics complained that it was bad manners for him to show Johnson in such an unflattering light. What this little history shows, and what only a few of the essayists in this volume bother to mention, is that it is generally easier to get people to agree that good manners are important than it is to get them to agree on what good manners are.

Collections of essays are almost always uneven, and this collection is no exception to the rule. A few essays are disappointing or superficial. The editor has also adopted the annoying tactic of dividing each essay into sub-sections and prefacing each sub-section with a summary phrase, such as "Nineteenth century ideals of the lady diminished by modern lack of interest in moral character" or "Manners, in constructing artificial restraints, check brutal animality of unfettered nature." These summary phrases are intended to help the reader follow the argument, but they are often more distracting than helpful. Some are wordy. Others are unnecessary. Worst of all are the summaries that interfere with the flow of an author's prose. For example, John Shelton Reed writes, "Americans still think that Southern manners are different from the American norm. And of course they are different." The first sentence flows smoothly into the second—or rather it *would have flowed smoothly*, if the editor had not inserted the confusing summary "Man-

ners as friendliness: feigned or genuine but noticeable" between Reed's two sentences. John Shelton Reed is a fine stylist, and I am afraid it was bad manners for the editor to interrupt him in mid-thought. But the book without faults has yet to be written, and, when all is said and done, *Gentility Recalled* has more strengths than weaknesses. It deserves a wider audience than it is likely to attract in our increasingly ill-mannered age.

## ***Beyond the Liberal Myth***

BRIAN S. BROWN

**The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought**, by Barry Alan Shain, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. 394 pp.

OF THE TWO DOMINANT interpretations of the political philosophy behind the American Revolution, liberalism and republicanism, liberalism has remained the most widespread—and enduring. Our high school students (those who still read of such obscurities as the connection between ideas and events) perennially hear the story of wild-eyed Revolutionaries throwing off the yoke of English tyranny on the road to individual freedom and autonomy. By implication, the American Revolution becomes the vindication of Enlightenment notions of natural rights, individual freedom, and autonomy; a *novus ordo saeculorum* was born and man was finally free. For much of America's history some form of this story held sway, and only in the early 1960s did one

group of scholars mount a serious, lasting challenge. What came to be termed "the Republican synthesis" pointed to the paeans of the founders to the Roman Republic, their concern for civic virtue, and the influence of such thinkers as James Harrington and Algernon Sidney as evidence of a conception of the good *polis* quite contrary to that of liberalism. Republicanism argued that Americans were not born "rich, free, and modern"; nor was their political philosophy. Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967) set the republican ball in motion. Bailyn argued that, far from seeking individual autonomy, most of America's founders looked to the example of ancient Rome, through the eyes of seventeenth century Whig "ideology"; and sought to give themselves up to the civic life of the new nation. A powerful attempt to refute liberalism, republicanism nevertheless suffered from a concentration on political elites and an unrealistic emphasis on the constraining and forming powers of "ideology," consequently, it left liberalism shaken, but still standing.

In *The Myth of American Individualism*, Barry Alan Shain, Professor of Political Science at Colgate University, takes such revisionism one step further: to Shain, both liberalism and republicanism fail as interpretations of the political philosophy of the Revolutionary period. By concentrating on members of rural communities in the late eighteenth century, a wholly different view emerges. Reformed Protestant, communal, and localist, Shain's colonists had little interest in either an interfering federal civic social order or Enlightenment notions of individual autonomy. They imbibed their political philosophy from the Good Book as expounded in fiery political sermons on the Sabbath; Enlightenment rationalism, even of the milder sort, left little imprint on their political makeup.

Through a massive amount of pri-

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