



liberalism to set up a self-regulating market system. ...Leaving the fate of soil and people to the market would be tantamount to annihilating them." That theme is an old one, of course, echoed by greens and reds down the decades since 1848. But Polanyi put it well, giving three generations of English-speaking intellectuals a story to warrant the welfare state.

In other words, you have to give the book its intellectual due. Most fields of history have gone through a (Karl) Polanyi Period, in which the master's notion that the market is new and nasty has been applied afresh. Someone in African history or Mesopotamian history or American colonial history or (I am not making this up) Viking history runs across Polanyi's book, from which he discovers that he does not have to learn economics to sneer at markets. Eventually a reaction sets in, when the historians realize that the market is forever. The cycle takes about 20 years. New fields keep falling into it, 50 years on.

The book has never gone out of print. Professors still assign it. Intellectuals who want to learn about economics, but are afraid to ask, still pick it up and devour it. No book on the half century past has had more influence on social thinking.

The antidote? Any of the books by Karl's smarter brother, Michael. Michael was a famous chemist before turning to philosophy and public policy and therefore knew that proving something about the world is tough. He was not a consistent libertarian and even on occasion sounds like Congressman Kelly of Florida: "The free enterprise system is absolutely too important to be left to the voluntary action of the marketplace." But by the standard of the time, and certainly by the standard of the Polanyi family, he was a veritable Hayek.

Like his brother, he wrote well in his adopted language. Find his book *Personal Knowledge* (1958), an exploration of how, really, we know. Or, directly after sipping Karl's book, take a long drink from Michael's *The Logic of Liberty* (1951). In *The Logic* he argues, for example, "there exists no fundamental alternative to the system of money-making and profit-seeking" and "the social management of polycentric tasks requires a set of free institutions." Michael's response to the 20th century was to think of government as the problem and the market as the solution. Neither brother so much as mentions the other in his writings. It's no wonder. Karl was the poison and Michael the cure.

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## William H. Mellor III

John Wesley Powell's exploration of the Grand Canyon in 1869 required mental and physical heroism of Randian proportions. The one-armed Civil War veteran led expeditions down the uncharted Green and Colorado rivers, overcoming torrential rapids, near starvation, and hostile Indians. In the process, he mapped thousands of miles of unexplored territory and gained

dramatic insights into the challenges confronting the Western United States, challenges that remain today. Sadly, one of the best American writers of this century, Wallace Stegner, uses Powell's exploits as the foil to showcase his radiant defense of

Progressive Era policies as the way to meet these challenges.

The first half of *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West* (Penguin, 1954) is devoted to the gripping account of Powell's two trips through the beautiful canyon country. Stegner chronicles the action and natural grandeur to potent effect. The excitement builds as one appreciates how the explorers confront disaster and death countless times. Yet Powell, with his quiet resolution to advance scientific understanding of the West, never wavers in the face of staggering adversity.

As a result, one begins the second half of the book with great admiration for Powell and his vision of the West. Stegner carefully plays on this to draw the reader into sympathetic agreement with Powell as he turns his vast energy into forming one of our first Progressive Era bureaucracies, the U.S. Geological Survey. Powell envisioned an agency run by well-informed, scientifically trained elites who would ensure that the fragile ecology of the West would be managed to provide the greatest public good for his and future generations. The USGS served as the model for many later government agencies and the training ground for countless bureaucrats who staffed these new agencies. Powell, "both the bureaucrat and the idealist knew that private interests, whether they dealt in cattle or sheep, oil, mineral, coal, timber, water, or land itself, could not be trusted or expected to take care of the land or conserve its resources for the use of future generations. They could be trusted or expected to protect neither the monetary nor the nonmonetary values of the land."

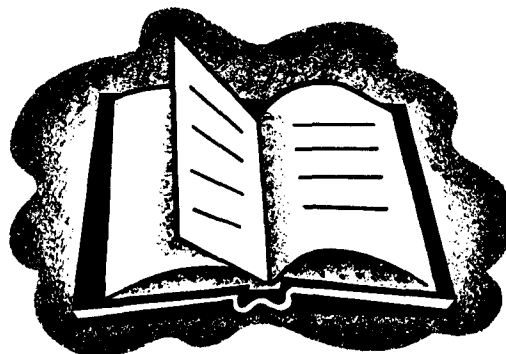
This book should be read by anyone concerned with liberty or the American West. Stegner writes with authority and sensitivity about real problems that to this day plague the West: water allocation, political control over resources that leads to exploitation or misuse, and the myths and realities of economic existence in this arid region. Though the book was written in 1954, it offers a persuasive case for why Powell's vision should still be pursued. Stegner subtly validates the basic premises of enlightened rule by scientific experts, premises all too popular in Washington today.

This book is an excellent example of how the case for activist government can be successfully advanced using romance, history, adventure, and human interest. Until classical liberals are able to bring similar forces to bear in support of our arguments, we will lose more often than we will win. With respect to the West, a good start has been made in *Free Market Environmentalism*, by Terry Anderson and Don Leal, and *Visions upon the Land*, by Karl Hess Jr. But the ultimate refutation of Stegner is yet to be written. ■

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# Special Book Section



## Sense and Sensibilities

Knowing right from wrong

By Loren E. Lomasky

**The Moral Sense**, by James Q. Wilson, New York: Macmillan, 313 pages, \$22.95

**T**hough perhaps not always presenting the loveliest visage nor the most edifying, the image that perpetually fascinates is the one that greets us when we gaze into the mirror. Both that which individuates oneself from other human beings and that by virtue of which we are alike captures and retains our attention as few other things can. Whether as eavesdroppers, voyeurs, Joyce Brothers groupies, or occasional readers of *People* magazine, nearly all of us offer implicit assent to Pope's dictum that "the proper study of mankind is man."

Perhaps never before in the history of the sport of people watching, though, have amateurs and professionals played the game so differently. The amateur version is laced through and through with moral characterizations. We view both intimate acquaintances and distant celebrities through a prism of virtues and vices. "She's never had a thought in her life for anyone but herself," or "That man simply can't be trusted," we say—and thereby not only describe but evaluate.

The marriage of a royal couple breaks down, or one Balkan people with unpronounceable names sets about slaughtering its equally unpronounceable neighbors, and we bestir ourselves not only to get the facts about who may have done what to whom and why, but then also to sympathize with one party and blame the other. Even when these doings have no perceptible effect on our own welfare, we do not sit on the sidelines as dispassionate

observers. Instead we react emotionally to other people's displays of loyalty, treachery, steadfastness, compassion, bravery, duplicity, or whatever—and in our more introspective moments we are cheered or dismayed to view such qualities in ourselves.

But this sort of folk moral psychologizing has increasingly been called into question during the past couple centuries by scholars of human behavior. Economists look at people buying and selling, working and investing, and see various clones of a one-dimensional fellow named *Homo economicus* who, with single-minded determination, rationally acts to advance his own narrowly materialistic self-interest. He is, in the parlance of the profession, a "utility maximizer," and the utility that moves him is uniquely his own.

Nor does *Homo economicus* confine himself to the market. The work of path-breaking recent Nobel Prize winners such as James Buchanan and Gary Becker shows him equally at home while running for political office, dressing according to the latest fashion trends, marrying and raising children. Evolutionary biologists tell a complementary story. We are the descendants of generations that won a share of the survival game through assiduously enhancing their fitness potential. Those disposed to sacrifice their own prospects for the sake of their fellows returned their bones and chromosomes to the primeval ooze whence they came, while more consistently "selfish genes" left progeny that eventually generated you and me.